

# Expert Assessment and Recommendations for Healthy Food Environment Policies to Address the Double Burden of Malnutrition in South Africa: Food-Epi 2024



The FoodSAMSA consortium (<https://foodsamsa.samrc.ac.za/>)

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## The problem

### South Africa faces a Double Burden of Malnutrition (DBM)

Co-existence and interaction of high rates of **undernutrition** (stunting, wasting, underweight, micronutrient deficiencies) with high rates of **overweight, obesity, and diet-related noncommunicable diseases**, at the **population, household and/or individual level**.

**27%**

of children  
<5 years are stunted

**31%**

of women  
>15 years are anemic

**2/3**

of adult women and 1/3 adult men  
are overweight or obese

**1 in 9**

adults live with  
type-2 diabetes

## The question

**1**

What is the extent of implementation of healthy food environment related policies in South Africa and how do they compare to international best practices?

**2**

What progress has been made on policy implementation since Food-EPI 2016?

**3**

What priority actions should government take to address the DBM and improve food environments?

## The results

**70%**

of indicators were rated very low to low levels of implementation

**8/12**

DBM indicators were rated very low to low levels of implementation

Improvement of mean level of implementation since 2016

Taxes on unhealthy foods rated medium

Food fortification rated highly

Food Labeling domain had most highly rated indicators

Evidence use in the development of policies rated highly

## The method

**Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)**  
by the International Network for Food and Obesity/NCDs Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS)

**1.**

Adapt tool to South African context

**2.**

Review evidence of food environment and nutrition public policy in South Africa

**3.**

Validate evidence with key South African stakeholders

**4.**

Identify international best practice examples

**5.**

Benchmarking workshop with stakeholders to assess extent of policy implementation

**6.**

Identify policy actions for future implementation

**7.**

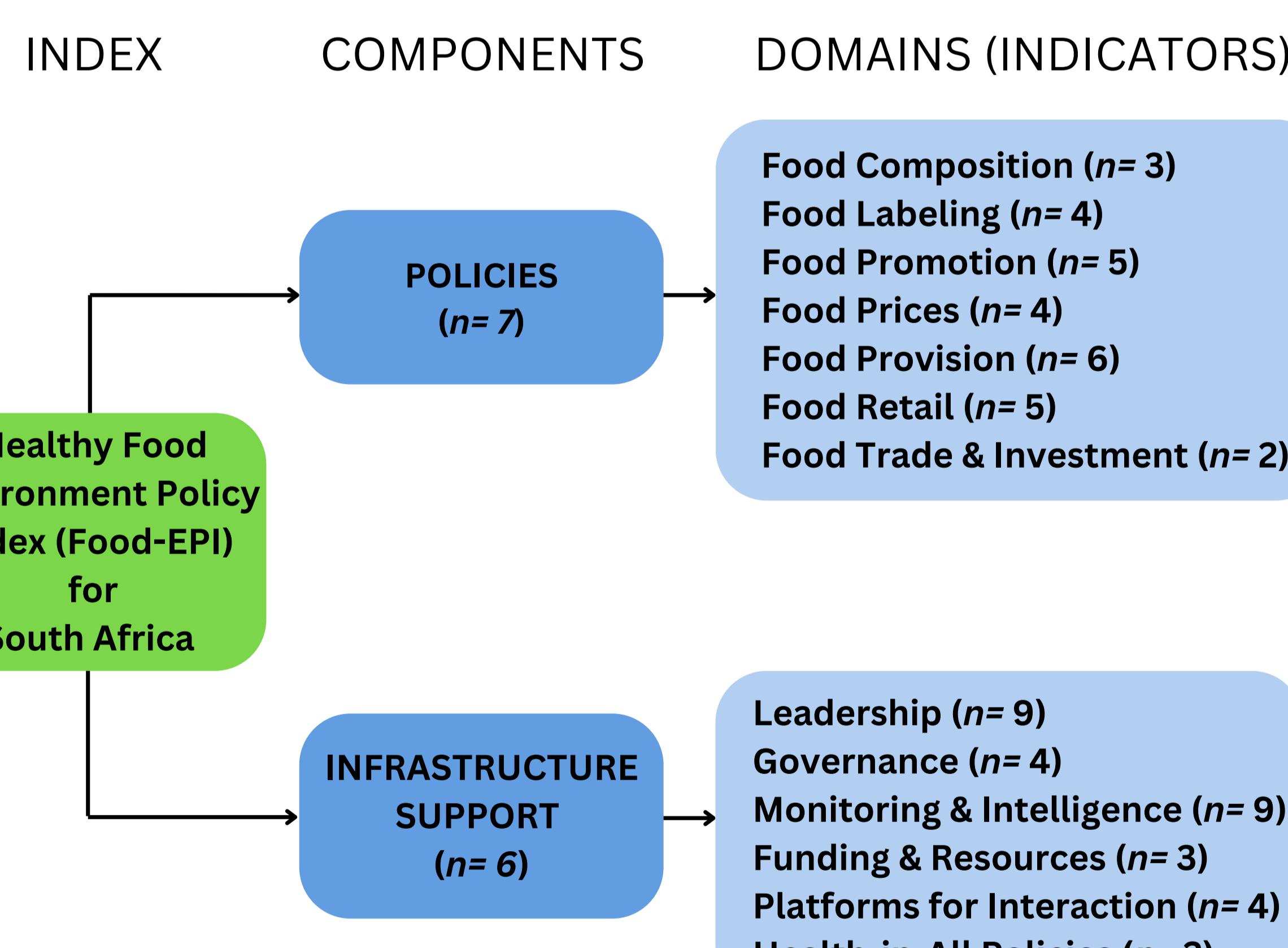
Priority setting workshop to review and edit recommended policy actions

**8.**

Online rating to develop final list of priority recommended policy actions

Source: Own illustration

## The Food-EPI framework for South Africa



Source: Own illustration, adapted from Swinburn et al., 2013

Compiled 60 good practice indicators (with 12 indicators on DBM) and evidence document of relevant SA policies

**13**

experts attended benchmarking workshop to assess extent of implementation and rate them compared to international practices

**17**

experts attended priority setting workshop

**10**

experts completed online ranking of priority actions based on importance and achievability

## The next steps

### 10 priority actions for the South African government:



Regulate unhealthy food marketing to children in schools and child gathering places



Regulate unhealthy food marketing to children in print, online/social media



Increase affordability of healthy foods, particularly for vulnerable populations



Increase taxes on unhealthy foods



Income support for healthy food



Regulate influence of commercial industry on government



Funding for population nutrition budget and research



Evaluation of population nutrition policies in timorous way



Transparent platforms for interaction with civil society and commercial industry



Strengthen cross-sectoral platforms for nutrition policies

## References

\* WHO. The double burden of malnutrition: policy brief. Geneva, Switzerland; 2017.

\*\* FAO, European Union, CIRAD and DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE-FS). Food Systems Profile – South Africa. Rome, Italy; Brussels, Belgium; Montpellier, France; Belville, South Africa; 2022.

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