

## Center for Dietary Intake Assessment: Overview March 2017

### Background

The United Nations estimates that 795 million people do not have enough food to eat<sup>1</sup>. This means that more than 10% of the world's population is likely to experience hunger, with an even greater percentage unable to access or consume a high-quality diet. The problem is particularly egregious for the poor, who spend as much as 80% of their income on food<sup>2</sup> and are vulnerable to any sudden increase in food prices. As a result of these factors, a significant proportion of the world's population is at risk for malnutrition, one or more micronutrient deficiencies, and a range of non-communicable diseases. Among those at most risk are children and women of reproductive age in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

The Sustainable Development Goals for 2015-2030 include a commitment to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.<sup>3</sup> These goals cannot be achieved without reliable information on what people eat. Unfortunately, this information is rarely available. Quantitative 24-hr dietary recall surveys—the gold standard survey method for collecting data on what people eat—are expensive, time consuming, and require specialized technical expertise to conduct. Few countries can invest the necessary financial and human resources to obtain such data, which, in turn, limits the extent to which the dietary practices of individuals can be reliably known. Fewer countries can afford to collect quantitative dietary data sufficiently frequently to monitor change and inform adjustments to policies and programs. The newly created Center for Dietary Intake Assessment at FHI 360 is intended to help address these gaps.

### Objectives

The Center for Dietary Intake Assessment aims to strengthen policies and programs to improve nutritional status by increasing the availability and use of reliable dietary intake data in LMICs through three main streams of work:

- 1) *Provision of technical assistance to governments, survey implementers, and civil society organizations (CSOs)*

To advance the appropriate collection, analysis, and use of reliable dietary intake data in LMICs, the Center offers technical assistance services to countries, survey implementers, and CSOs for all aspects of survey work related to dietary intake assessment. This includes support on survey planning, sampling, formative research, questionnaire design and adaptation (including tools for portion size estimation), data analysis, and data use to inform nutrition and agriculture policy and program design. In addition, the Center has the capacity to provide web-based and in-country trainings for local institutions related to the collection and analysis of dietary intake data. The Center's technical assistance focuses primarily on the following survey vehicles: quantitative 24-hr dietary recall surveys, food frequency surveys, and simple food group surveys.

---

<sup>1</sup> FAO, IFAD and WFP. 2015. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015. Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress*. Rome, FAO. (The data cited are provisional estimates for FAO's undernourishment indicator for 2014-2016. This indicator is an estimate of the number of people who do not meet their kilocalorie requirement, derived from country food balance sheets).

<sup>2</sup> Brinkman HJ, de Pee S, Sanogo I, Subran L, and Bloem MW. High food prices and the global financial crisis have reduced access to nutritious food and worsened nutritional status and health. *J Nutr.* 2010; 140 (1): 153S-161S.

<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goal #2, <http://una-gp.org/the-sustainable-development-goals-2015-2030/>, accessed March 13, 2017.

2) *Development of an overall composite indicator of diet quality as well as individual indicators to assess different domains of diet quality*

There are currently few available indicators that are appropriate for use in LMICs to summarize the quality of the diet consumed. Moreover, in the context of globalization and increasing urbanization, diet patterns are rapidly changing. In many countries, the consumption of foods high in fat and sugar is increasing among some segments of the population while the intake of fruits and vegetables remains inadequate. To help respond to the need for additional simple indicators to assess the quality of a population's dietary intake, the Center plans to develop and validate at least two new indicators of diet quality for non-pregnant, non-lactating women of reproductive age that are appropriate for use in LMICs. The individual diet quality indicators to be developed by the Center will aim to assess if general, well-accepted principles of diet quality are being met. In addition, the Center plans to develop an overall composite indicator of diet quality for non-pregnant, non-lactating women of reproductive age that reliably captures multiple dimensions of diet quality.

3) *Development of a set of indicators to assess and track the cost and affordability of a nutrient-adequate diet*

Recognizing that food prices and affordability are key determinants of what people eat, the Center is also working to develop a set of standardized indicators related to the cost and affordability of a nutrient-adequate diet for use in LMICs. These indicators will take into account both local dietary practices and considerations related to seasonality, and will be developed to allow data to be tabulated with regular frequency. It is anticipated that addressing this information gap will help not only to inform the development of appropriate policies and programs, but will provide essential tools for countries to monitor the price and affordability of a nutrient-adequate diet over time.

## **Way of Working**

To ensure that the Center's work is relevant, timely, and demand-driven, the Center operates from the premise that the global community should help orient and guide the Center's work. As such, the involvement of countries, donors, and UN agencies will be actively sought at strategic stages of the Center's work, through the establishment of stakeholder groups and the convening of global meetings. In addition, the Center aims to establish collaborative partnerships with researchers and organizations working on dietary intake assessment methods, and to liaise closely with other global dietary data initiatives underway, seeking opportunities for collaboration, synergies, and ensuring that the Center's work is complementary and not duplicative of other efforts.

## **Funding**

The Center is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The current funding period is November 2016-January 2021.

## **For more information about the Center, please contact:**

**Megan Deitchler, PhD, MPH**  
Center Director  
FHI 360  
[mdeitchler@fhi360.org](mailto:mdeitchler@fhi360.org)

**Mary Arimond, MS**  
Senior Technical Advisor  
FHI 360  
[marimond@fhi360.org](mailto:marimond@fhi360.org)