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Online course on Food Environments for Healthy Sustainable Diets

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Background/Objectives: In 2021, 77% of the global disease burden for non-communicable diseases is found in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)⁽¹⁾. As shifts in the food system from more traditional models to modern models occur, the need for healthy, sustainable diets is increasing⁽²⁾. Within the food system, the food environment can act as a lever to support healthy sustainable diets⁽³⁾. However, research and knowledge on food environments in LMICs is limited.

Up-to-date tools, capacity building and platforms for exchange are needed to encourage researchers and policymakers to have a better understanding of the role they can play in improving food environments to support positive nutrition and health outcomes.

Methods: We designed a self-paced online course based on current research methods to promote knowledge and applications of the food environment concept to support healthy sustainable diets in LMICs. We also compiled a list of research publications and experts working on the food environment to build relevant content. Discussions and consultations led us to select current conceptualizations and research projects to include in five modules. Course content includes: definitions, typologies and transitions, challenges and tradeoffs, and case studies from Nigeria and Vietnam.

Discussion forums and a questionnaire were included to assess participants' increased understanding and satisfaction with the course.

Results: The course has three sessions: October, November and December 2021. 884 participants enrolled in the October session. In the first fifteen days of the course, 229 participants accessed the course, from 44 countries (30 LMICs) and 57 participants have earned participation certificates.

Discussion / Conclusion: The course showed that the concept of the food environment is new to many researchers and health professionals. The high rate of inscription, diversity of participants in terms of professional expertise and geographic location and participant engagement/completing the course suggests widespread interest in this topic. By presenting up-to-date research on food environments in LMICs in an easily accessible platform, learners around the world can use this knowledge and apply it to current and future programs in their home countries.

References

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Disclosure of Interest

None Declared