FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND DIETARY PATTERNS AMONG HOUSEHOLDS IN ACCRA: SOCIAL NORMS AND CULTURAL PREFERENCES UNDERPINING FOOD CHOICE.

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ABSTRACT

The nutritional context of low-income and middle-income urban poor populations needs to be understood in relation to social, cultural and environmental contexts. In this context, this research explores how social norms and cultural practices impact dietary practices and food choices in urban poor households in Accra's urban poor communities. The research objectives include the extent to which local food environments can be mapped, the extent to which culture and social dynamics can explain food preferences, the presence and relative affordability of food outlets, and whether existing policies regarding food marketing have an impact on food choices.

This study integrates sociocultural aspects and meanings into the spatial practices of food price, availability and inequality using a particular mixed methods perspective. Geographic Information System (GIS) technologies will enable gaining a spatial understanding of food prices and food outlets across the communities to explain the phenomenon of spatial food access inequalities. In this regard, this methodology allows considering the issue of nutrition from a decolonized approach by emphasizing local socio-cultural factors that are usually masked by the one-size-fits-all all nutrition models. In addition, this perspective is important as it allows for understanding the power dimensions of nutrition.

Moreover, such perspectives are important as they seek to fill the gap on how nutrition challenges are being addressed through existing policies. Findings from this study aim to inform policymakers on strategies for improving dietary health and food security among vulnerable populations in Accra, contributing to a framework for sustainable urban nutrition policy in Ghana.

Keywords: food environment, dietary patterns, social norms, cultural preferences and food choice