



FOOD SCIENCE AND NUTRITION CASES

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Empowering Communities Through Democratisation and Decolonisation of Food Systems: Insights from the NNEdPro Pre-Summit Workshop

The NNEdPro pre-summit workshop for the 10th International Summit on Food, Nutrition and Health explored democratising and decolonising food and nutrition systems. Global delegates engaged in dialogue to reinstate ownership to communities, address injustices, and integrate cultural practices. The workshop explored various themes, highlighting the need for inclusive, community-driven approaches.

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Abstract

The workshop underscored the interlinked concepts of democratisation and decolonisation within food systems, emphasising the need to redistribute power and acknowledge colonial legacies. Through discussions in breakout sessions, key themes emerged: transforming food policies into dynamic, culturally respectful frameworks; addressing global nutrition inequities with inclusive programs; and ensuring public health and clinical nutrition guidelines are flexible and culturally sensitive. The workshop called for a collaborative approach that integrates local knowledge and practices to develop actionable solutions for the complex challenges of malnutrition and food inequity. These insights aim to bridge the gap between science and society, contributing to a more equitable and culturally attuned global food system.

Learning Outcomes

1. Gain an understanding of the concepts of democratisation and decolonisation in food systems, including their implications for power dynamics and community empowerment.
2. Learn the importance of crafting and implementing food policies that are not only adaptable and responsive to change but also culturally sensitive and inclusive. Understand how these policies can address both global challenges and specific local needs.

3. Recognise the significance of incorporating traditional diets and culturally sensitive practices into global nutrition guidelines. Discover effective strategies for designing nutrition interventions that are inclusive and respect diverse cultural practices.
4. Understand the importance of involving local communities in nutrition research, policy development, and educational initiatives. Gain insights into how collaborative approaches can enhance the relevance and impact of nutrition programs and policies.

Which Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Does the Case Support?

- **Goal 1:** No poverty: By addressing food inequities and advocating for inclusive nutrition programs, the workshop supports efforts to reduce poverty and improve access to essential resources for marginalised communities.
- **Goal 2:** Zero hunger: The emphasis on democratising food systems and integrating diverse cultural practices aims to improve global food security and nutrition, directly supporting the goal of ending hunger.
- **Goal 3:** Good health and well-being: Developing culturally relevant and inclusive nutrition guidelines contributes to better health outcomes and addresses malnutrition, supporting the overall goal of promoting good health and well-being.
- **Goal 4:** Quality education: Traditional food system practices are dependent on knowledge adaptation to local context by food producers and other actors within agrifood systems. This relies on the distribution of practical skills through peer-to-peer systems, enhancing the value of local knowledge. This, when compounded with a strong scientific base is a very powerful educational tool.
- **Goal 10:** Reduced inequalities: By focusing on equity and the decolonisation of food systems, the workshop aligns with efforts to reduce inequalities in food access and nutrition education.
- **Goal 12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns: The application of agroecology as a key approach to democratising food systems, promotes the diversification of sustainable and healthy diets while improving food and nutrition security. Across several local contexts, agroecological food systems have demonstrated their ability to deliver both nutritious food and promote local food traditions and knowledge. Furthermore, streamlining the supply chain can help reduce food losses and waste.
- **Goal 16:** Peace, justice, and strong institutions: The call for collaborative and community-centred policy development supports the goal of building inclusive institutions and promoting justice in food systems.
- **Goal 17:** Partnerships for the goals: Emphasising the importance of collaboration and community engagement supports the goal of strengthening global partnerships to achieve sustainable development goals.

Background and Context

The NNEdPro pre-summit workshop and roundtable discussion for the 10th International Summit on Food, Nutrition and Health explored the topic of '*Democratising and Decolonising Food and Nutrition: From Science to Society*'. This hybrid event engaged delegates from across the globe to share their insights on advocacy and initiatives for democratising and decolonising food systems.

Democratisation and decolonisation are inextricably linked concepts, focused on highlighting and addressing the underlying causes of inequity across global agrifood systems. Food systems literature, particularly Lang's concept of food democracy, has served as an analytical tool to better understand and navigate counterpressure strategies responding to the dominant, imbalanced concentrations of power within agrifood systems (Lang *et al.*, 1999; De Schutter, 2017). This shift in control from corporate stakeholders to the individual requires engagement across all levels of the agrifood system, with an emphasis on community participation in the collective shaping of actions that impact public health (Behringer and Feindt, 2024).

The call to democratise food and nutrition also requires acknowledgement of colonial legacies and the ongoing impacts experienced by communities. Through recognition and valorisation of local indigenous food traditions and practices, we can challenge the notion of overt 'food control' and reinstate power to communities and individuals.

The discussions and talks on the topic of democratisation and decolonisation have been, and continue to be, pivotal in forming evidence-based, actionable solutions to address the complex burden of malnutrition in all its forms. Through various breakout rooms, we have helped to emerge the themes that will guide the 4-day summit in Kolkata, bridging the gap between science and society.

Emerging Themes in Democratising and Decolonising Food and Nutrition

In recent discussions across various breakout rooms, we explored a range of ideas and solutions surrounding the themes of democratising and decolonising food and nutrition. These discussions focused on policy, global nutrition, public health, and clinical nutrition, offering important insights and practical steps to help marginalised communities and the global population.

Policy and innovation in food systems

A key theme from the policy breakout session was the need to view recipes and food systems as dynamic tools for democratisation rather than static entities. This shift highlights how global challenges have altered traditional recipes, potentially erasing their cultural authenticity. The conversation outlined the importance of developing a global framework that respects cultural diversity while addressing nutrition needs. This framework should facilitate the translation of social innovations into tangible benefits for communities, especially those marginalised by current policies. A recurring point was the gap between innovative ideas and their practical implementation. The discussion also emphasised the need for bottom-up approaches in policy making. Traditional policies often adopt a top-down approach, which can alienate those most in need of support. Moving forward, the emphasis should be on engaging local communities in the policy development process to ensure that nutrition policies are inclusive and effective.

Global nutrition and equity

Nutrition education and access disparities emerged as a prominent theme in this discussion. The discussions underscored the issue of coverage gaps, such as those seen in the UK school meal programs where economic brackets exclude many families from accessing necessary nutritional support. Also noted was that cultural and ethnic factors significantly influence food choices and access. Drawing inspiration from India's Midday Meal Scheme, there is a push for more inclusive programs that ensure all children have access to nutritious food, irrespective of their economic status. The discussion also stressed the importance of culturally sensitive nutrition education. Traditional diets, often overlooked in mainstream nutrition databases, should be acknowledged and integrated into global nutritional guidelines. This involves a co-development approach, where collaboration with local communities helps build comprehensive databases that reflect diverse dietary practices. Therefore, these discussions emphasised the importance of designing nutrition guidelines and educational materials that are culturally sensitive and inclusive. There was a strong call for involving local communities, particularly indigenous and tribal populations, in the creation of nutritional guidelines and interventions. Engaging these communities in the development process helps ensure that the guidelines are relevant and accurately reflect traditional diets and practices. The emphasis was on collaborative efforts that integrate local knowledge and practices into nutritional research and policy development.

Public health nutrition: Flexibility and inclusivity

In public health nutrition, the focus was on developing guidelines that are culturally relevant and adaptable. Participants stressed the importance of a food systems approach that includes flexibility, partnerships, and community involvement. They highlighted the need for collaborative research and data collection to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered and that interventions are well-informed. The discussion also touched on educational inequalities, calling for more engaging and sensory-rich educational materials. Additionally, the commercialisation of plant-based diets was noted as a barrier to access, emphasising the need for nutritional recommendations that are both sustainable and accessible.

Clinical nutrition

In clinical nutrition, the theme of cultural sensitivity and precision nutrition was prominent. The discussion underscored the necessity of understanding the historical context of nutrition practices and the evolution of dietary guidelines. There was an emphasis on overcoming intrinsic biases and aligning clinical practices with the diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of patients. Precision nutrition was highlighted as a key area for development, not only in terms of genetics but also considering environmental, lifestyle, and cultural factors. Discussions also noted inconsistencies in nutritional guidelines across different regions, suggesting a need for standardised, yet culturally adaptable, guidelines to ensure consistency and relevance in clinical practice. This approach calls for a nuanced understanding of dietary needs and the implementation of personalised interventions that are sensitive to individual and cultural differences.

Summit Theme Rankings

To sharpen the focus of the upcoming Summit in India and to better understand the priorities of our diverse group of theme leaders, we asked them to rank the key themes. The results capture the collective insights and priorities of our leaders, offering a clear roadmap for the event's focus areas.

1. Ranked number 1 (Joint):

- Policy and innovation in food systems
- Public health nutrition: Flexibility and inclusivity

These themes emerged as the top priorities, highlighting the critical importance of developing innovative policies that address global food systems and ensuring that public health nutrition strategies are adaptable and inclusive.

2. Ranked number 2:

- Global nutrition and equity

This theme emphasises the ongoing need to address disparities in nutrition across different populations, ensuring that equity remains at the forefront of global nutrition efforts.

3. Ranked number 3:

- Clinical nutrition

While clinical nutrition is crucial, it was ranked slightly lower, reflecting the broader focus on systemic and inclusive approaches to food and nutrition challenges.

Conclusions

A recurring theme across all breakout sessions was the need for integration and collaboration. Whether in policy making, global nutrition, public health, or clinical settings, the emphasis is on moving away from isolated efforts towards more cohesive, community-centred approaches. There is a clear call for policies and practices that not only respect but also incorporate the rich diversity of global dietary practices.

As discussions move forward, the integration of cultural sensitivity into nutrition education, policy, and clinical practice remains paramount. By fostering collaboration, embracing flexibility, and prioritising inclusivity, the goal is to create a more equitable and culturally attuned food and nutrition landscape that benefits all communities.

Exercises/Group Discussion Questions

1. How can food systems policies be designed to better integrate cultural diversity while addressing global nutrition needs?

- Implementing multi-level policy making frameworks that hold a common purpose, while allowing for centralised decision making. Decentralisation of such a model can be enacted through government and multistakeholder involvement to evaluate the impact, outcomes and further democratise community-based inputs. These should be reviewed alongside current national and local food laws.

- Establishing local policy hubs integrates with urban kitchen models can address key challenges and develop actionable solutions. Through fostering collaboration with local industry experts, local cuisines and incorporating democratised information of food preparation and cooking techniques, such a platform can decolonise globally adapted recipes into more authentic and culturally accurate recipes.
2. What strategies can be employed to address educational inequalities in nutrition?
 - System changes to redesign funding models, address all aspects of inequality which may be unaccounted for and consider the curricula and methods of local, national, and international education systems.
 - Understand where the gaps lie in food and nutrition illiteracy and address the underlying drivers e.g. poor socio-economic background, familial and cultural barriers, staffing, language barriers).
 - Integrate local knowledge and teaching methods, such as the employment of cultural consultants to advise think-tanks, governments and educational providers on the most culturally appropriate techniques for accurate knowledge dissemination.
 - Within school systems, consideration of both public and private sectors is essential. Catering for the diaspora of nutritional literacy and access to resources should also be accounted for when aligning strategies.
 - Learning through the promotion of good practice. Demonstrative and interactive approaches may yield more effective results when overcoming inequalities in literacy levels.
 3. How can different sectors (policy, education, clinical practice) collaborate more effectively to support the democratisation and decolonisation of food systems?
 - The concomitant existence of both centralised and decentralised platforms to translate scientific knowledge to local society can help achieve actionable solutions.
 4. How can we ensure that cultural sensitivity and inclusivity are prioritised in all aspects of food and nutrition guidelines, policies and practices?
 - The employment of cultural advisors may be key in regulating cultural sensitivity in data collection, across resources and the promotion of diversity and inclusion.
 - Courses can be provided for those working across different industries to better understand the need for inclusion and cultural sensitivity

Conflict of interest

The authors declare having no conflicts of interests.

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