

# OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Thursday, 17 June 2021 14:00 GMT +02:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Healthy cities, healthy children – a dialogue on lessons from Dutch cities' systems approaches to prevent childhood obesity globally
CONVENED BY	Netherlands Working Group on international Nutrition (NWGN); Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and 'JOGG' (Healthy youth, Healthy future)
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	<a href="https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/20038/">https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/20038/</a>
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	No borders

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

# 1. PARTICIPATION

## TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

63

## PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0	0-18	12	19-30	41	31-50	9	51-65	1	66-80		80+
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## PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

21	Male	41	Female	1	Prefer not to say or Other
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## NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

9	Agriculture/crops	8	Education	6	Health care
0	Fish and aquaculture	0	Communication	24	Nutrition
0	Livestock	0	Food processing	6	National or local government
0	Agro-forestry	2	Food retail, markets	0	Utilities
1	Environment and ecology	1	Food industry	0	Industrial
0	Trade and commerce	0	Financial Services	7	Other

## NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

1	Small/medium enterprise/artisan	0	Workers and trade union
0	Large national business	0	Member of Parliament
2	Multi-national corporation	1	Local authority
0	Small-scale farmer	5	Government and national institution
0	Medium-scale farmer	0	Regional economic community
0	Large-scale farmer	3	United Nations
7	Local Non-Governmental Organization	0	International financial institution
18	International Non-Governmental Organization	2	Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance
0	Indigenous People	0	Consumer group
16	Science and academia	8	Other

## 2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

### HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

We organized a keynote discussion with two high-level speakers to establish a sense of urgency with which we must come to solutions and actions for healthier urban environments. The curator elaborated on the goal and principles of the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) and further emphasized the need to collaborate respectfully to reach constructive ideas which could be incorporated in the Summit. A diverse group of participants representing different backgrounds, as well as different geographic regions, was invited and participated in the dialogue. The diverse group of participants were then encouraged to explore experiences which were both consistent or contradictory to fully acknowledge the level of complexity that food systems transformation entails, and to further acknowledge the various stakeholders required for a systems approach. Facilitators were especially prepared to encourage such discussions within the breakout groups while fostering mutual respect and trust in the conversations.

### HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Since our Independent Dialogue specifically set out to explore lessons to implement systems approaches for childhood obesity prevention, the participants and facilitators fostered a constructive conversation which acknowledged the multi-disciplinarity of food systems transformation. Hence, participants from different stakeholder backgrounds were able to adequately discuss an issue or topic from various perspectives and still reach constructive action points. Further, since the Dialogue also intended to facilitate cross-country learnings, participants from different geographical backgrounds were able to share their own experiences and moreover, contribute to an understanding of differences and similarities between various contexts.

### DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

Apart from the details recorded by the registration form, information about participants' geographical work background should also be recorded to ensure voices from all over the world can contribute to the Dialogue, where applicable for No Border events. Further, facilitators' abilities to foster respectful and constructive discussion proved important, due to which adequate time should be given to ensure facilitators are comfortable doing so.

# 3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

☒

Yes

☐

No

# 4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

## MAJOR FOCUS

This Independent Dialogue sought to explore Dutch lessons in employing urban systems approaches to combat childhood obesity. Starting with the lessons from a systematic analysis of Dutch municipal approaches to combating childhood obesity, we aimed to explore how the Dutch lessons can be used in other contexts. Further, we invited city networks and other local governments and communities worldwide to share their insights on such urban systems approaches. In doing so, this dialogue aimed to compile successful lessons in transforming urban food systems to create a healthier youth in cities worldwide. Hence, it aligns with UNFSS's Action Track 1: 'ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all' with a specific focus on childhood obesity in youth.

The Dialogue was commenced by a key-note discussion between two high-level speakers to establish the concept of a systems approach and the major international, national, and local implications of implementing such an approach. Following this, findings from the systems approaches in the Netherlands were shared from the 'Urban Learnings project' – the research project which carried out the analysis based on experiences from Dutch municipalities employing a systems approach for childhood obesity prevention. Researchers presented the five major themes which were identified for the successful implementation of such an approach, namely: i) municipal organization and political support, ii) collaboration with civil society, academia, and private parties, iii) activities on prevention and care, iv) communication, and v) monitoring and evaluation.

Break-out rooms were created based on these five themes to explore the experiences from different contexts and reach constructive strategies for implementing such urban systems approaches worldwide. Each discussion group was initiated with an introductory contribution on the theme by a city network. The participants in break-out rooms were designed to have equal representation from different stakeholder backgrounds but also geographical backgrounds. This allowed for multi-stakeholder perspectives to be voiced and for experiences from different cities to be shared. In this way, the Dialogue firstly aimed to gain insights into translating findings of the research onto a broader context. Further, it aimed to foster knowledge exchange between cities so that urban areas can transform for lower childhood obesity prevalence, and in overall, healthier youth by 2030.

### ACTION TRACKS

✓	Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
	Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
	Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
	Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

### KEYWORDS

	Finance	✓	Policy
	Innovation	✓	Data & Evidence
	Human rights	✓	Governance
	Women & Youth Empowerment		Trade-offs
			Environment and Climate

## MAIN FINDINGS

From the presentations and discussion groups in this Independent Dialogue, we were able to arrive at several constructive points for the successful implementation of urban systems approaches targeting childhood obesity. Derived from the discussion group outcomes below, the key lessons and considerations highlight the importance of the following:

**Strong leadership:** An important enabler of a systems approach against childhood obesity is inculcating leadership and willingness at all levels, ranging from mayors to families and from local, national, and international level. Leadership is also needed to scale the program if successful or derive lessons from it if unsuccessful. It is not just one political leader that is important, but their ability in working collectively across policy domains.

**Working in multi-stakeholder partnerships:** Cities are advised to establish a partnership network in which a wide range of stakeholders, such as academia, grassroot organizations and services are included. This facilitates thinking of childhood obesity or malnutrition from various perspectives and tackling the behavioral determinants from different angles. The findings from the research in the Dutch context suggested that a steering committee should be setup to guide and govern a multistakeholder partnership. In the dialogue, this was seen as a good suggestion. However, one needs to realize that not all sectors are equally strong as may be the case in the Netherlands.

**Implementing activities in schools:** schools are important avenues globally to reach the target population for better nutrition, physical activity, as well as education for the same. Apart from schools, other routes need to be explored based on country contexts to reach children from multiple avenues.

**Community engagement:** for the purposes of designing successful interventions, it is important to engage the community and stakeholders from the early stages of the program. This also requires that the target population such as children and families are reached out to. Doing so would allow for interventions to be developed more appropriately and better align with the needs of the population. Further, it would allow for context-appropriate interventions to be devised based on how the burden of childhood obesity falls and which groups are disproportionately affected. Lastly, communication between cities was also considered important so that different urban areas can share their experiences and create a wider pool of knowledge from each other.

**Simple monitoring and evaluation tools:** while monitoring and evaluation is crucial for constantly adapting an integrated approach, organizations are often not well-equipped to develop a monitoring and evaluation system in terms of capacity and funding. Therefore, it would be useful to devise simple tools and guidelines for organizations to utilize. Assistance can be given from public health services, or academia partners and research institutes. Further, a systems approach means that we should also be able to look at the whole picture when monitoring progress. Hence, monitoring of quantitative indicators should be supplemented with qualitative research as well.

In this way, the Dialogue allowed for representatives of both high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries to come together and share experiences for childhood obesity prevention using systems approaches. While outcomes indicate initial thoughts on this, there is still a need to devote more time and resources to make further progress in this exchange of lessons. Moreover, the enthusiasm of participants from diverse backgrounds, city network representatives, and high-level presenters indicates the scope and willingness to further develop this commitment towards Action Track 1 for a healthier youth.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/7

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE:** outcomes in this and the following section represent outcomes from the plenary session of the Dialogue, namely: i) conversation between high-level speakers, and ii) main research findings from the Urban Learnings project on Dutch lessons for childhood obesity prevention using systems approaches. **\*\***

i) Plenary: Conversation between high-level speakers:

High-level speakers discussed the scope of urban systems approaches against childhood obesity from a local, national, and international perspective to initiate discussion in the Dialogue. They mentioned that an important enabler of such a systems approach against childhood obesity is inculcating leadership and willingness at all levels, ranging from mayors to families. Leadership is also needed to scale the program if successful, or to derive lessons from it if unsuccessful. Further, speakers elaborated that a crucial aspect of implementing a systems approach is firstly ensuring nutrition is on the political agenda. For this, it is important to elect mayors or political leaders that have a clear agenda for a healthy and vibrant city, where everyone can make a decent living, and a city which is well-connected to the surrounding rural areas. A need to properly incorporate the rural and urban areas was emphasized so that there are better connections within the food chain and the people working in it. In this way, urban areas can take the lead in scaling such systems approaches, and moreover, in working towards the sustainable development goals and UNFSS Action Track 1.

As part of a systems approach, establishing public-private partnerships was described as a challenging aspect of a systems approach. It is important to create healthier environments for children, such as by regulating marketing towards children, and the choices presented to children and families. A proposed strategy was the “naming and faming” of companies that are genuinely interested in investing in future generations, whereas “naming and shaming” of companies which are avoiding the same. Further, a systems approach is considered appropriate in acknowledging that food choices extend beyond individual decision-making. The environment is crucial because we as individuals cannot constantly refrain from eating unhealthy foods when they are available to us. Specifically, lower income families are constantly challenged by the food environment. Hence, the key element from the city perspective is to improve the food environment.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/7

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE:** outcomes in this section represent outcomes from the plenary session of the Dialogue\*\*

ii) Plenary: Main research findings from the Urban Learnings project (executive summary available as a link at the end of the Feedback Form, once published)

Acknowledging that childhood obesity is a wicked problem with complex determinants and causes, several Dutch municipalities have implemented a systems approach called JOGG (Dutch acronym for Healthy Youth, Healthy Future). The aim of the Urban Learnings project was to compile and analyze the lessons learnt from these Dutch municipalities, so that these lessons can be shared with other contexts. For this, a mixed-method approach was used, which included a literature review and qualitative analysis. After the desk research, an interview framework was created based on five themes of JOGG: i) municipal organization and political support, ii) collaboration with civil society, academia, and private parties, iii) activities on prevention and care, iv) communication, and v) monitoring and evaluation.

Findings followed these five themes to identify main learnings which can potentially be translated to other contexts. Firstly, municipal organization and political support entails the political commitment, organization structure, collaboration within municipalities, and budget-related matters. Secondly, collaborations entail building networks and engaging with all stakeholders involved. Collaboration with civil society, academia, and private parties was especially highlighted for a systems approach. Next, implementation of both prevention and care activities are required for childhood obesity prevention, as well as findings effective avenues for implementation to reach the target population. Further, communication is required to keep all parties involved. This includes both external communication towards the target population, as well as internal communication within the stakeholders organizing the approach. The last theme, monitoring and evaluation, covers the need for data to create urgency at the municipal level, and constantly adapt the approach based on lessons learnt.

In the Dialogue, discussion groups followed the five themes that arose from the research to exchange lessons, and thus arrive at concrete recommendations towards Action Track 1 for a healthier youth.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/7

### Discussion group 1: Municipal organization & political support

For a successful systems approach, there is a need to establish childhood obesity as a system-wide priority that links to municipal priorities. Participants elaborated that it is important to have a strong local political leader who works with other council members (or equivalent in other political contexts) across various policy domains. Further, it is also important for political leaders to be passionate about actively engaging with the community and have strong political will to be able to implement the intervention combatting childhood obesity. Successful political leadership was described as one that invested in creating a wide partnership network with a range of stakeholders, such as academia, grassroot organizations and services. Doing so facilitates thinking of childhood obesity or malnutrition from various perspectives and tackling the behavioral determinants from different angles. Hence, strong political leadership is considered important for several reasons in adopting a systems approach.

While these lessons were important for some European cities, an important consideration for translation of learnings worldwide is that political settings may differ across different contexts. Based on this, participants elaborated that decision-making powers may lie at the national or city level in certain contexts, and this would affect how transferrable the above-mentioned learnings are with regards to urban systems approaches. This may be especially relevant for low- and middle-income country contexts, where health and nutrition policy may be determined at the national level.

Regardless of the context, participants also stated the importance of different levels of governments working together to create a system of policies converging in the same direction. Even for contexts where systems approaches can be executed at the municipality level, national governments are important to provide an overarching national roadmap for implementation of an integrated approach. Hence, participants emphasized the need for municipalities to work together with national governments to create national policies for urban food system transformation.

The role of local and regional governments in food systems was highlighted as creating democratic access to nutritious food to tackle hunger and obesity. Additionally, an urban systems approach was also envisioned as one adopting a territorial approach such that governments consider urban-rural linkages and emissions throughout the food system and implementation of the systems approach.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/7

Discussion group 2: Collaboration with civil society, academia, and private partners

Fostering the concept of ‘food citizenship’ requires creating networks across spheres of government, as well as civil society associations, indigenous communities, farmers, and relevant stakeholders. Participants mentioned that this is needed to develop transparent and inclusive food systems at city levels. Further, academia was considered important in setting better and clearer standards on what healthy food is so that it is clear what should be promoted in an integrated approach for healthier youth. Working with private parties may also be fruitful to create healthier food environments.

Participants elaborated that the main challenges for collaborating with multiple parties are differing visions and differing timelines for expectations; for example, private parties may have shorter term expectations while academia may be used to longer-term visions. To overcome this challenge, there should be clear understandings of the vision and timelines from the start of the project. It was stated that meaningful public-private partnership especially requires a common goal to be established. A steering committee was discussed to be beneficial as it involves people at different levels in a multidisciplinary manner.

Additionally, an important consideration mentioned was that local governments and institutions need to be strong to be able to drive a common agenda and create adequate public-private partnerships. Hence, this can be a potential barrier in some contexts and may change how appropriate this collaboration model is for implementing a systems approach.

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KEYWORDS

- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Finance                   | ✓ Policy                |
| Innovation                | ✓ Data & Evidence       |
| Human rights              | ✓ Governance            |
| Women & Youth Empowerment | Trade-offs              |
|                           | Environment and Climate |

## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 5/7

### Discussion group 3: Implementation of activities

To design appropriate childhood obesity interventions within a systems approach, the need for community engagement was emphasized by participants. This entails engaging the target population, such as children and families, in the early stages of a program.

Schools were mentioned as an important avenue to implement prevention and care activities through. This was a shared experience from several cities that participated in the Dialogue, from high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries, thus making schools an effective avenue to deliver interventions to children and youth. Integrating healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle into the school curriculum can support knowledge and awareness on a healthy diet among children and their parents. However, despite the general success of interventions at schools, participants also mentioned the need to find alternative avenues for when schools are closed, such as online initiatives. Finding other avenues for activity implementation may also be helpful for contexts where schools may not have low attendance, as also observed by participants during lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To adequately improve the environments of children and facilitate healthier lifestyles, attention should also be given to urban planning and creating green spaces. By creating better parks, cycling routes, and spaces for playing and physical activity, public spaces can be transformed to promote active mobility. This was considered especially important in and around schools as well as in community neighborhoods. Moreover, participants suggested school yards can be made publicly accessible outside of school hours to create extra places for children to be active. This would allow for children to be exposed to healthy amounts of physical activity, which is important in addition to healthier diets for the prevention of childhood obesity.

Further, participants mentioned that engaging parents for the lifestyle change of their children is vital. Parents can be engaged by inviting them into the playground and involving them with messages around healthier food consumption, increasing physical activity, and lifestyle modification. Lastly, participants elaborated that different countries experience the issue of childhood obesity differently. For some countries, childhood obesity largely affects lower socioeconomic households, while in others, it is an issue affecting higher socioeconomic households. Moreover, there may be different minorities and ethnic groups that are disproportionately affected. Hence, it was considered important to take this into account when designing interventions and policy, and when learning experiences from other countries.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 6/7

### Group 4: Communication

Within a systems approach, communication was considered important both internally and externally. Internal communication entails coordinating activities within the approach, collaborating with multiple stakeholders. On the other hand, external communication entails reaching out to the target population, such as children and families, to whom the approach is directed towards.

For the purposes of internal communication, participants mentioned the need for a dedicated interdepartmental board to work with multiple stakeholders and ensure everyone is working towards the same direction and vision. This interdepartmental board was described as important because of its ability to implement 'cross-cutting communication', i.e., communication that goes beyond departmental boundaries and involves all stakeholders to successfully implement a systems approach. According to participants, communication activities should be aimed at the target groups and the corporate level to keep a healthy lifestyle and a healthy environment on the agenda of politicians, social partners, business, policy, and the media. Additionally, importance was placed on communication across multiple stakeholders and departments for the integration of health actions in a variety of programs and policies.

With regards to external communication, participants suggested communicating with the target population from early stages of the program. This was considered important to be able to design effective interventions, but to also make intervention design a collaborative process by taking into account the needs of the people. Further, raising awareness on interventions to combat childhood obesity through marketing and branding was considered beneficial.

Lastly, participants mentioned that communication between cities is very important. Through city-city cooperation, cities can share their experiences and create a wider pool of knowledge from each other. Such communication should focus not only on what has been effective in some contexts, but also on what has been ineffective so that newer approaches can be devised accordingly. Particularly, participants mentioned that exchange of experiences between high-income countries (HICs) and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) can be fruitful since the former has been working on childhood obesity prevention for longer and may have more experience. Such experiences can be adapted and utilized for LMICs after taking into account the double burden of malnutrition (coexisting undernutrition and overweight). A potential strategy highlighted here was 'leap-frogging', which entails that LMICs can avoid following the same trajectory of the nutrition transition that is evident in HICs. To do this, participants suggested returning to optimized traditional diets may be better for both human and planetary health, and can help LMICs to avoid moving towards higher prevalence of childhood obesity but instead, treating all forms of malnutrition.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 7/7

### Group 5: Monitoring and evaluation

Since childhood obesity is a wicked problem with complex determinants and causes, its prevention may also entail complex methods and analyses. However, participants stressed the need to create simple tools and guidelines to measure the food environment and its determinants. This is especially important for organizations implementing a systems approach who may not have in-depth knowledge or resources on how to conduct monitoring and evaluation. Thus, according to participants, academia and public health officials should collaborate to create simple tools, trainings, and guidelines for non-research organizations to be able to conduct appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

Further, to measure the prevalence of childhood obesity, participants discussed the need for indicators other than body mass index (BMI), which can offer a limited picture. However, it was expressed that since a systems approach is adopted, it may not be necessary to overcomplicate matters by trying to find perfect indicators and effects. A systems approach means that we should also be able to look at the whole picture when monitoring progress. Due to this, participants mentioned that qualitative data is important for adapting systems approaches, in addition to quantitative data. Qualitative data may help overcome the shortfalls in quantitative research, such as that of limited indicators and causal effects. Further, participants suggested it may be especially relevant to create an overall assessment of the program's success by acknowledging the systems approach instead of isolating particular indicators. Lastly, qualitative data may also facilitate involvement of communities and target populations to lend their own voices. Participants stated that this engagement of communities acknowledges that evaluation is more than just collecting data but also gives community members the opportunity to be involved.

Lastly, for the purposes of translation of learnings between cities worldwide, context-specific data was considered crucial to detect the differences between countries. This requires working closely with health officials that are working in monitoring and evaluation to see what works and what does not. Participants indicated that research is needed specifically to learn differences in determinants of malnutrition in various contexts so that experiences from cities can be translated and transferred worldwide.

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# AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

There was only one significant area of divergence within the groups, since most of the nuance of conversation arose from differences in city and country contexts. This nuance was intended as part of the ‘translation of lessons and experiences’ dimension of the Dialogue and adhered to in a respectful and constructive conversation.

The only significant area of divergence was within the communications group (breakout room 3). There was a discussion about how LMICs should return to traditional diets to avoid the trajectory of increasing childhood obesity that HICs underwent, since traditional diets may be healthier for both humans and the planet. This was, however, contested by one of the participants who elaborated that not all traditional diets are healthy, and that people in urban areas increasingly want foods that are convenient, apart from being affordable. Hence, they mentioned the need to work with the target population and ensure that interventions match the needs of the people. In response to returning to traditional diets, another participant from an LMIC mentioned that this may not be entirely possible since many traditional crops are not grown due to lacking commercial and research interest.

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# ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

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## RELEVANT LINKS

- **Urban Learnings: A systematic analysis of Dutch Municipal approaches to combatting youth overweight and obesity – NWGN (the-nwgn.org)**  
<https://the-nwgn.org/information/urban-learnings-a-systematic-analysis-of-dutch-municipal-approaches-to-combatting-youth-overweight-and-obesity/>