

Drivers of Food Choice Program Impact on Knowledge, Engagement, and Capacity



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Global commitment to achieve sustainable healthy diets through policy and program action has substantial momentum. Food systems in our interconnected world must prepare for frequent disruptions and shocks from climate, social, and health crises. Building resilient food systems that promote sustainable healthy diets requires comprehensive understanding of individuals' food choice decisions in changing and varied food environments, i.e., why and how individuals acquire, store, prepare, distribute, and consume what foods and beverages. Since 2015, the Drivers of Food Choice (DFC) program has generated, synthesized, and disseminated knowledge to provide a deep understanding of the drivers of food choice among the poor in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The DFC program has had an impact on knowledge, engagement, and capacity in six ways:

Knowledge

1. Advancing knowledge about how and why households and individuals choose foods in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in Africa and Asia.

DFC research provides evidence on drivers of food choice in different low- and middle-income country (LMIC) settings and food environments using mixed methods and multiple disciplinary perspectives.¹ DFC is contributing to a growing body of peer-reviewed literature, conference presentations, research briefs, and open access data² on a) food environments which individuals make decisions about food acquisition, preparation, and consumption; b) food safety experiences and perspectives that drive food choices across varied LMIC settings; c) social and cultural drivers that are central to value negotiations for food choices; and d) changing livelihoods that affect food choice in LMIC.³

KNOWLEDGE GENERATION & DISSEMINATION



- 15 grants awarded
 - from 683 concept memos
- 28 press releases, news reports & blog posts
- 31 peer-reviewed publications
- 43 research webinars & seminars
- 70 conference presentations
- 1,812+ webinar series video views

2. Providing a foundation of knowledge about food choice to guide future action.

Synthesis of findings from the DFC portfolio and collaboration with other research teams provide a foundation from which innovative interventions, programs, and policies can be created and evaluated to identify promising, effective, and scalable actions that countries can take to promote sustainable healthy diets. The DFC program elaborates a science of food choice for framing knowledge and situating food choice evidence.⁴ Multiple interactive webinars have been delivered, including a four-part series in collaboration with the Agriculture, Nutrition and Health (ANH) Academy that synthesized evidence and engaged DFC-funded researchers and webinar participants about the implications for promotion of sustainable healthy diets.⁵

Engagement

3. Catalyzing engagement of scholars with and uptake of evidence by stakeholders in these countries.

DFC-funded researchers developed and implemented diverse strategies to catalyze stakeholder engagement that varied by extent of collaboration sought and goals of engagement.⁴ Engagement has been and continues to be achieved through mechanisms appropriate for each target audience of local community leaders, practitioners, researchers, or policy makers. For example, extensive effort by project leads in Ghana has led to greater engagement with policy makers in Ghana and Kenya.⁶ Techniques to catalyze engagement include workshops, policy briefs, community engagement meetings, photovoice exhibitions, or documentary showings.

4. Garnering attention to the importance of understanding food choice in LMIC to promote sustainable healthy diets, complementing current global attention to improving food systems and food environments.

The DFC program is achieving impact through professional engagement on social media, dissemination of research, participation in global and regional meetings,⁷ presentation of webinars, involvement with ANH Academy Week, and delivery of learning labs. The DFC Twitter account has garnered significant attention to food choice research with thousands of profile visits each month and tweet interactions reaching over 30,000.⁸ DFC-funded documentaries, including one on retail diversity in Vietnam and another on local diet change in Indonesia,⁹ have over 2000+ YouTube views.

Capacity

5. Building a sustainable community of both in-country and out-of-country scholars who are advancing knowledge about food choice in LMIC.

The DFC program funded projects that could strengthen country leadership in food choice and foster a global community of food-choice researchers. DFC-funded researchers enthusiastically engage in synthesis working groups, years after the completion of their 2-year projects. Ongoing engagement of scholars, including many from LMIC, through collaborative working groups, synthesis analyses, conferences, and webinars has yielded new collaborations and research on food choice in LMIC. For example, DFC-funded research in Uganda was leveraged for a regional training workshop in February 2020 with 15 participants from universities, NGOs, research institutes, and development organizations from Uganda and Kenya, building capacity of nutrition planners to assess nutrient gaps and intervention opportunities within local food environments.

6. Fostering alliances with global and country organizations and individuals to contribute to building a global community of collaborating partners committed to the promotion of sustainable healthy diets.

The DFC program has established a network of research partnerships through which we share insights from the DFC program to inform global efforts to promote sustainable healthy diets. We have contributed to multiple initiatives to share evidence, clarify concepts, and establish priorities for action. Organizations that have collaborated or established formal relationships with the DFC program include Agriculture for Nutrition and Health, Wageningen University, Innovative Measure and Metrics for Agriculture and Nutrition Action, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the African Food Environments Research Network, and the Nutrition for Growth Food Systems working group.

ENGAGEMENT & ATTENTION



- 4 DFC learning labs & workshops
- 8 policy briefs
- 10 new funded projects & initiatives building on DFC results
- 73 stakeholder engagement & research uptake events

CAPACITY BUILDING



- 17 DFC investigator convening meetings & webinars
- 38 collaborating institutions
 - 21 LMIC institutions
- 1,674+ social media followers
 - spanning 45 countries

References

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7. <https://driversoffoodchoice.org/resources/posters-and-presentations/>
8. https://twitter.com/DFC_Program
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Funding Statement

This research has been funded by the Drivers of Food Choice Competitive Grants Programs, which is funded by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and managed by the University of South Carolina, Arnold School of Public Health, USA; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.