

Researchers call for urgent shift in food research to address world's 'rising nutrition crisis'

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Credit: City University London

Researchers have proposed a new global approach to tackling the world's mounting nutrition and food production crisis.

Writing in the journal *Nature*, leading food policy experts argue there must be an urgent change in direction for research and have

recommended ten priorities.

The authors, who include Professor Corinna Hawkes, Director of the Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London, warn health and economic problems are set to deteriorate significantly in the next few decades.

They call on governments, research funders and academics to concentrate on nourishing people, instead of simply increasing the volume of food that is produced.

According to their paper, around 44 per cent of 129 countries in the world today are struggling with both undernutrition and obesity simultaneously, one in three people suffer from malnutrition and two billion people are overweight or obese.

The paper, A new global research agenda for food, states: "Poor quality diets have become the most significant driver of sickness in the world – collectively responsible for more of the global burden of sickness than unsafe sex, drugs, alcohol and tobacco combined. This rising nutrition crisis now affects every nation.

"In the next few decades, food systems will be subject to major stresses arising from population and income growth, urbanisation, globalisation, climate change, and increasingly scarce natural resources, making the situation worse—unless something is done."

The authors' ten priorities for research:

1. Identify points in the food production process where research is most needed.
2. Make more data on diets widely available and establish open access data portals.

3. Characterise what makes a healthy diet in all countries.
4. Analyse how to tackle the coexistence of different forms of malnutrition.
5. Understand effective combinations of local and long-distance supply chains.
6. Analyse incentives for businesses to improve diets.
7. Shape healthy diets while considering environmental impact.
8. Study the impact of supply and demand of different foods.
9. Identify the appropriate economic levers of change.
10. Fix measurement of each food's impact on health, climate and other issues.

The paper follows the publication of a report for the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, of which Professor Hawkes was an author.

The report concludes that efforts from the international community must be on an "unprecedented scale" and require scientists, governments and donors to create a new research agenda for global diets.

Professor Corinna Hawkes said: "Solving malnutrition requires fixing the food system. It's not just about growing more food or education, it's about feeding people well from a healthy and sustainable [food system](#). If we don't diagnose our [food](#) system correctly, we won't fix it. And if we don't fix it soon, the world's health and [economic problems](#) of the future will be so much greater than they are today."

More information: Lawrence Haddad et al. A new global research agenda for food, *Nature* (2016). [DOI: 10.1038/540030a](https://doi.org/10.1038/540030a)

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