Setting up a Fruit and Vegetable Promotion Initiative in a Developing Country

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Setting up a F&V promotion initiative in a developing country

• What is the feasibility?

• Who would be the partners, the setting(s)?

• What constraints could be expected in setting up a program promoting fruit and vegetable consumption?
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• What is the feasibility?
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Positive points at the demand side:

• F&V are usually well appreciated by most populations - perhaps this is more universal for fruits and actions to promote the culinary valorization of vegetables may apply.

• F&V are already seen by most populations as healthy foods - again this is perhaps clearer for fruits and actions to promote the nutritional properties of vegetables may also apply. In sum, F&V constitute a fertile terrain for promotion.
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Positive points at the supply side:

• Most developing countries are situated in tropical and semi-tropical areas where a variety of F&V are easily produced all year round.

• F&V in the developing countries are usually produced by small farmers in a very competitive economy (an important positive side effect of a F&V promotion initiative is the better income distribution that it can generate in the society)
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Negative point at the demand side:

F&V are relatively expense (the cost per calorie may be much higher than for other foods) and the marginal price reduction obtained with a higher demand due to the promotion initiative may be not sufficient to increase consumption among lower income groups. Actions involving technical support to the production and distribution of F&V and/or tax exemptions may be necessary.
COST PER CALORIE OF SELECTED FOOD GROUPS FOR THE FIRST INCOME DECILE.
Brazil 1997

Source: Monteiro 2003
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**Negative points at the supply side:**

- Vegetables usually require **abundant water supply** (this has to be considered in dry regions when selecting appropriate varieties to promote).

- F&V are **perishable commodities** that require adequate distribution and commercialization systems to reduce waste (improving d&c systems and research on new less perishable varieties are key areas for public investments).

- Some F&V may require **intensive use of pesticides** (this is an area for public regulations).
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• Who would be the partners, the setting(s)?
The partners for a F&V promotion initiative:

- **Public sector**: federal, province and municipal agencies in the health, agriculture and education sectors.

- **Private sector**: F&V producers associations, retailers associations, Health Insurance and Marketing companies

- **NGOs**: Professionals associations, consumers associations.
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• What constraints could be expected?
Constraints for F&V promotion initiatives in the developing world

✓ High cost of F&V.

✓ Inefficient distribution and commercialization systems.

✓ High demand for water and use of pesticides.

✓ Misleading “junk food” advertisement and false health claims in processed foods.

✓ An out-of-date view of malnutrition in low-middle and high-middle income countries.
Two aspects of F&V promotion initiatives relevant for the developing world (and possibly for the developed world too)

- Integration into national intersectoral food and nutrition policies.
- Consistency with the predominant stage of the nutrition transition in each country.
Aspects of f&v promotion initiatives relevant for the developing world

- A F&V promotion initiative in a developing country has to be an integrated component of the national intersectoral food and nutrition policy (and, in particular, of the national strategy on diet, physical activity and health):
  - to be sustainable;
  - to reach all social classes;
  - to be consistent with and take advantage of other public actions and programs.
Aspects of f&v promotion initiatives relevant for the developing world

- The short term goals and the design of messages of F&V promotion initiatives should be tailored to the stage of the nutrition transition faced by each country.
Most low income developing countries are societies situated between the “famine” stage (scarce, monotonous, low energy-dense, cereal-based diets) and the “receding famine” stage (less scarce, less monotonous, but still low energy-dense, minimally processed, cereal-based diets) where under-nutrition disorders prevail.

For these countries the simple diet message “Eat more F&V” can be adequate (although not sufficient, of course).
However, most **low-middle** and probably all **high-middle income countries** are leaving the “receding famine” stage and entering quickly the “westernized, mass consumption” stage of the nutrition transition where **low fiber, high energy-dense, fatty, salty, sugary diets**, with increasing undesirable content of **animal products**, are aggressively marketed. These diets, coupled with increasing sedentary life-styles, determine escalating rates of **obesity, diabetes, CVDs and several types of cancer**.
For these low-middle and high-middle income developing countries, the more adequate diet message should be something like:

“*Increase the consumption of F&V to displace part of animal products and processed foods from your diet*”,

rather than simply:

“*Eat more F&V*”
or more understandable messages as:
Have a grilled seasoned eggplant as your main course instead of a steak.

Have your pasta with squash and dried tomatoes instead a creamy sauce or fried meat balls.

Have a salad instead of French fries.

Change your creamy dessert for a fresh tasty fruit.

Drink a fresh fruit juice instead of a soft drink.

Have a dry fruit snack instead of salty, fatty snacks.