

Food Prices, Diet Quality & Nutrition in South Asia

Dr. Felipe Dizon,
World Bank, U. S.

The high cost of nutritious foods can worsen poor diets and nutrition outcomes, especially among low-income households. Yet little is known about the patterns of the cost of nutritious diets in South Asia. We calculate the cost of meeting food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. FBDGs are designed not only to provide adequate nutrients but also to prevent diet-related non-communicable diseases in the context of a culturally-acceptable diet. We find that the cost of nutritious diets (meeting FBDGs) is more prohibitive than the cost of meeting only calorie-based food needs. The cost of nutritious diets varies largely within a country. Extending this work in Bangladesh, we explore in more detail the link between food prices and diet quality, and between diet quality and nutrition. We calculate an alternative measure of diet quality, the deviation of actual food consumption from optimal consumption based on FBDGs. We compare this measure of diet quality to existing measures of diet quality, explore its determinants, and investigate its links to the nutrition outcomes of children, adolescents, and adults.