

Food environment improvement policies, regulations and interventions in Vietnam

Truong Tuyet Mai, Asc.Prof.MD
National Institute of Nutrition, Vietnam

Overview of current policies, regulations and interventions implemented for both modern and traditional food environments in Vietnam.

Number of policy documents tackling indicators pertaining to food environment in Vietnam

Food product properties	162
Food outlet properties	29
Food marketing	28
Food desirability	30
Food prices and affordability	21
Food availability and accessibility	16

Food environment-related policies into six domains

Globalization, economic growth, agricultural productivity, and urbanization, associated with changing lifestyles and increasing incomes, driving a demand for more convenient and diverse food options.

What are the Vietnamese policies and regulations influencing food environments?

How does the food environment policy landscape contribute to the adoption of healthy diets?

Food product properties: Food safety

Food laws and regulations have been established for ensuring food safety	Vietnam is equipped with a modern food safety law and technical regulations encompassing production, handling, storage, and preparation of food. Food safety standards and guidelines have been established. The roles and responsibilities of the relevant authorities involved in ensuring food safety are clear. The documents related to technical regulations (cf. FS database), focusing on food safety assurance conditions for food production and trading, food safety assurance conditions for import and export, as well as standards settings.
A food control management system has been established for ensuring food safety	Beyond the assignment of responsibilities for state management of food safety, documents related to food safety control management, such as food safety inspection, food safety examination and supervision, food sampling, testing, and analysis, integrated risk management, prevention and remedy of food safety incidents, traceability, recall and disposal of unsafe foods, and regulations on penalties for food safety violations. However, specialized food safety inspection regulations have only been developed at the provincial or city levels and are not yet developed for lower levels. The pilot program at the district and ward level has ended and is not maintained.
A strategy and plan have been developed for information, education, communication, and training on food safety	Many existing policies contain communication programs and plans on food safety. There are also specific regulations on objectives, implementation plans, and specific assignment of responsibility for communication on food safety to relevant agencies. Yet, there is no specific guidance on education and especially training on food safety for food system stakeholders.

Food nutritional quality

Food composition targets/standards/restrictions have been established in industrially processed foods - **SALT**

The issue of high salt content in processed food is acknowledged. There are targets set to reduce salt consumption and to have 30% of businesses implement salt reduction measures. However, there are no standards specifying the maximum salt content of processed food, and there is no clarity regarding who is controlling salt content in processed food.

The maximum salt threshold indicated in Circular 23/2012/TT-BYT is twice as high as the WHO recommendation; also, the circular has not taken into account the updated WHO nutritional profile model on sugar, salt, and fat ingredients.

In meals sold from food service outlets: Standards for salt content have been established in school meals. However, these standards are mainly guidance documents and are not mandatory.

Food composition targets/standards/restrictions have been established in industrially processed foods - **SUGAR**

The issue of high sugar content in processed food is acknowledged; however, there are no specific targets, standards, or restrictions for limiting sugar content in processed food.

In meals sold from food service outlets: Standards are set for students' sugar consumption. However, there are no standards in terms of sugar content in meals served in educational institutions and other food service outlets. No clear targets and restrictions either.

Food composition targets/standards/restrictions have been established in industrially processed foods – **TRANS FAT**

The issue of fat content in processed food is acknowledged; however, there are no specific targets, standards, or restrictions for limiting trans-fat content in processed food.

In meals sold from food service outlets: The issue of trans-fat content in meals sold from food service outlets is not recognized as a concern in any of the policy documents.

Food outlet properties

Standards have been established to define and identify healthy/unhealthy food retailers	No policies found. The existing policy documents do not recognize the significance and necessity of establishing standards to define and identify healthy and unhealthy food retailers
Policies to support the development and modernization of healthy food retailers (i.e., retail channels that provide affordable fresh food, such as traditional channels like wet markets).	No policies found. Overall, the limited support (and restrictions) put on some of the traditional retail channels does not favor the development of healthy food outlets. Policies typically foster the process of modernization in the retail sectors; yet inadequate attention is paid to the availability of healthy food in these retail outlets.
Policies to restrict the development of unhealthy food retailers (i.e. retail channels that provide food rich in nutrients of concern, such as fast-food chains).	Experts stated that these modern retail channels are necessary in a modern society. Policies only recommend diverse food items sold on these channels, including fresh fruits. There are no specific guidelines considering the healthy or unhealthy aspects of these retail types.

Food Marketing: food promotion and food labelling

Policies to restrict exposure and power of promotion of unhealthy foods through broadcast media (TV, radio) and online/social media.

Minimum regulations to regulate, control, and limit the promotion and transparently inform consumers whether products are healthy or unhealthy have been mentioned. However, restricting the promotion of unhealthy foods in mass media and online/social networks has not been specifically mentioned and has clear regulations.

There are minimal regulations regarding restrictions on advertising of unhealthy foods to children. There are no specific regulations to limit advertising of unhealthy foods to children in mass media and online/social networks.

Policies to ensure that unhealthy foods are not commercially promoted to children and adolescents in settings where children gather (e.g. preschools, schools, sport, and cultural events).

Restrictions on advertising of unhealthy foods in and around schools have been recognized in the documents. However, the new regulations only stop at incentives without specific policies and sanctions.

The need to restrict promotion of unhealthy food to children on food packages is not acknowledged in existing policy documents

Restrict marketing of breast milk substitutes. These policies prohibit aggressive marketing practices, misleading advertising, and promotional activities that undermine breastfeeding.

Policies to ensure that ingredient lists and nutrient declarations in line with NIN/WHO recommendations are present on the labels of all packaged foods.

Experts stated that these modern retail channels are necessary in a modern society. Policies only recommend diverse food items sold on these channels, including fresh fruits. There are no specific guidelines considering the healthy or unhealthy aspects of these retail types. Policies to ensure that evidence-informed front-of-pack supplementary nutrition information system, which allow consumers to assess a product's healthiness, is applied to all packaged foods.

Food Desirability

Existence of clear and evidenced-informed, food-based dietary guidelines supporting nutrition information and communication.

Nutrition related policies are well established for the target groups such as infants, young children, and pregnant mothers. There are also nutritional regulations on meals for crew members and laborers, ensuring food hygiene and food safety for collective kitchens. Nutrition related policies should also pay more attention to remote areas.

Policies supporting the establishment of national communication campaign and nutrition awareness activities.

Policies are not mandatory. They mostly provide recommendations. There remains a lack of policies to assist consumers in reading and understanding nutrition contents on food labels and gaining general understanding about nutrition.

Food prices and affordability

Taxes on healthy foods are minimized to encourage healthy food choices (e.g. low or no sales tax, value-added or import duties on fruit and vegetables).

There are exemption policies on VAT for locally produced products. VAT and import tax exemptions are applied for fresh fruit and vegetables and meats imported to Vietnam as a result of a trade agreement to encourage availability and consumption of healthy products

Excise taxes on unhealthy foods (e.g. sugar-sweetened beverages, foods high in nutrients of concern) are in place and increase the retail prices of these foods to discourage unhealthy food choices.

The issue is acknowledged, with a few policy documents mentioning the need to impose a special tax on sugary drinks and unhealthy foods, but no clear regulations were found.

The intent of existing subsidies on foods is to favor healthy rather than unhealthy foods

The issue is not acknowledged. Current subsidies do not have a specific focus on promoting the consumption of nutritious and healthy foods. In fact, some price stabilization measures have been observed to apply to products that are generally considered unhealthy, such as salt and sugar (among the nutrients of concern).

Food availability and accessibility

Existence of policies to encourage food stores to promote the in-store availability of healthy foods and to limit the in-store availability of unhealthy foods.

The issue of encouraging food stores to promote in-store availability of healthy food is not acknowledged. No specific policies were found that directly encourage food stores to promote in-store availability of healthy foods.

Existence of policies to encourage the promotion and availability of healthy foods in food service outlets and to discourage the promotion and availability of unhealthy foods in food service outlets.

The issue of encouraging food service outlets to promote in-store availability of healthy food is not acknowledged. No relevant content was found in the existing policy documents about this topic. However, there are some policy measures that might indirectly contribute to it.

Zoning laws and policies to place limits on the density or placement of quick serve restaurants or other outlets selling mainly unhealthy foods in communities and/or access to these outlets (e.g. opening hours).

The issue is not acknowledged. No relevant content found in the existing policy documents.

The issue of encouraging the development of outlets selling fresh fruit and vegetables or increasing their accessibility has not been acknowledged. There is only a policy on planning and developing a network of wholesale markets for agricultural products to ensure the supply of outlets selling fresh fruit and vegetables.

Summary of food environment assessment tools, including data collection methods, assessment tools and metrics

Motivation and Purpose

National Nutrition Surveillance (NNS)

Nutrition status, 24h dietary intake, micronutrient, KAP, food safety, food security

1994: Nutritional status indicators 63 provinces (Underweight, Stunting, Wasting): *30 cluster PPP*

In 2009, applied new WHO child growth standards in NSS

In 2000, 2010, 2020: **National Nutrition Survey**

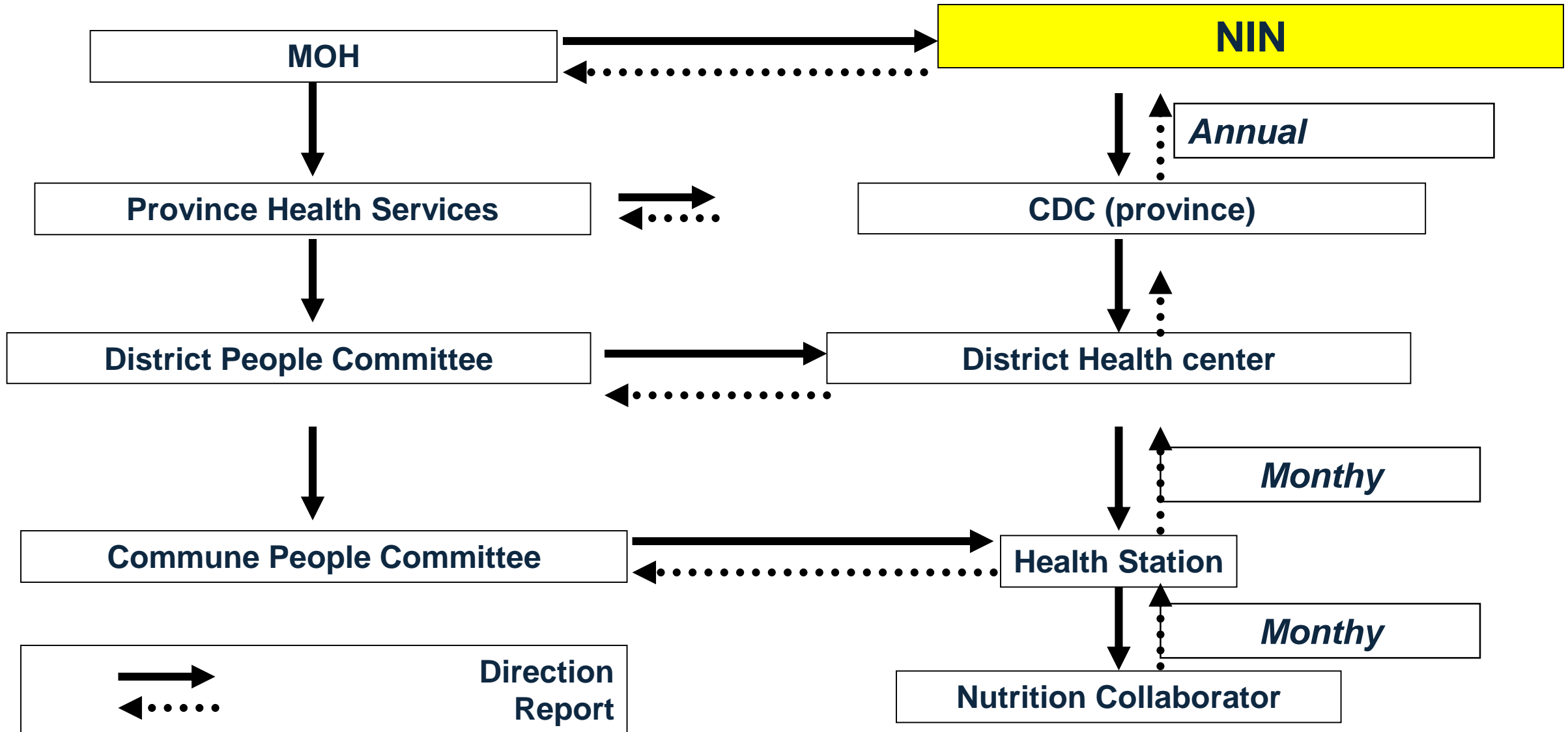
Launched in 1994 as one of Vietnam's National Target Programs to improve the nutritional status of children U5

Added 2 pages with **IYCF** indicators with A&T support

In 2010-2012, added food frequency questions

In 2015, include Iodized salt related module and tested in 20 provinces

Nutrition reporting system



Data Collection

1. Quantitative 24-hour recall:

- Complicated dishes, cannot accurately determine the weight of each ingredient
- Currently, there are about 400 standard menus, but Vietnam with 54 ethnic groups does not have enough standard menus => need to continue to build new standard menus to complete the representation of Vietnam.
- Same dish, but different cooking methods have different ingredients and do not ensure a standard menu.- Eating out, cannot remember everything when asked, not accurate.
- Portion Size: limited, not enough, not systematized leading to errors
- Insufficient ingredient list; mixed raw and cooked
- The survey software has not been officially standardized;
- When conducting a survey: due to the long questioning time, it takes 30-60 minutes/person. So the subjects do not like it.
- Wasteful in terms of human resources and time.

Data Collection

2. Food frequency questionnaire:

- Depends on the specific list of each survey, there is no standard set of questions for each research objective.
- It takes time to prepare and edit the questionnaire.
- Because it is asked for a long time (96 months), it is prone to errors and omissions.
- Currently, there is no document guiding the analysis of FFQ
- There is no survey software.
- Less costly in terms of human resources and time.

3. GDQSAp / DQQ

- currently using 24-hour ration data; the difficulty is converting food groups;
- Not widely applied.
- How to classify international foods with the Vietnamese Food Composition Table
- Using APP to ask directly has not been done

Data analysis

Healthy Diet Metrics and Indicators

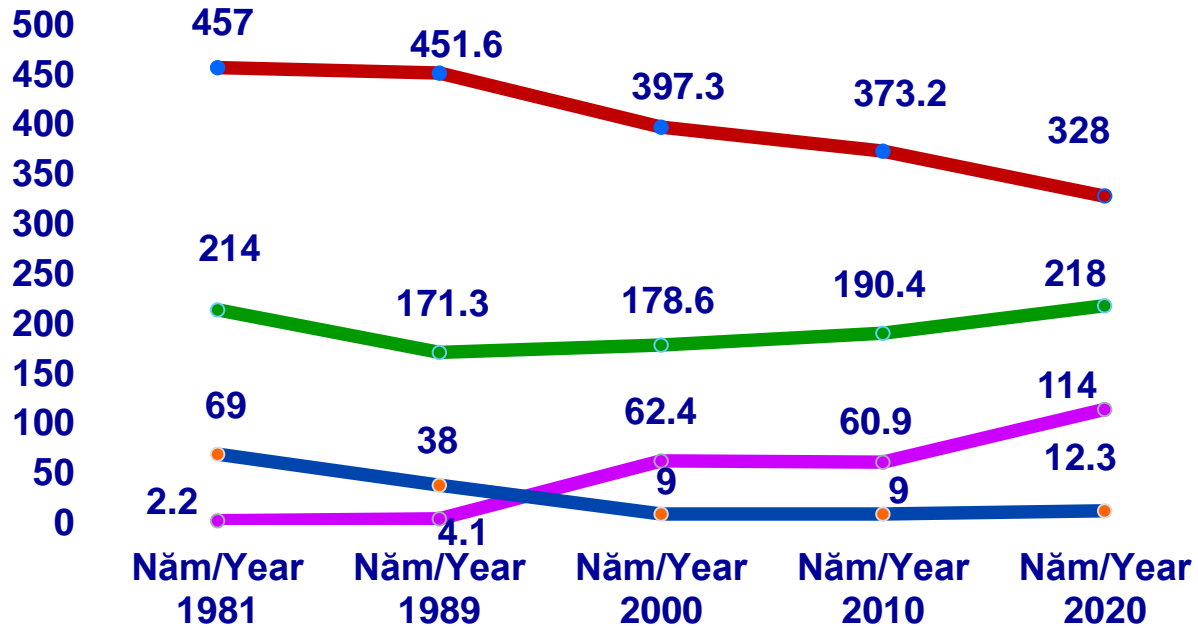
1. Diversity index for older children MDD-W : 8 food groups
2. WHO vegetable quantity: 400 grams; or food pyramid or both
3. Sugar intake: free sugars <5% E; <25 gram Adults; <12 gram children <5
4. Salt intake: <5 gram (8,1gr/capita/day)

+) Healthy index: not yet

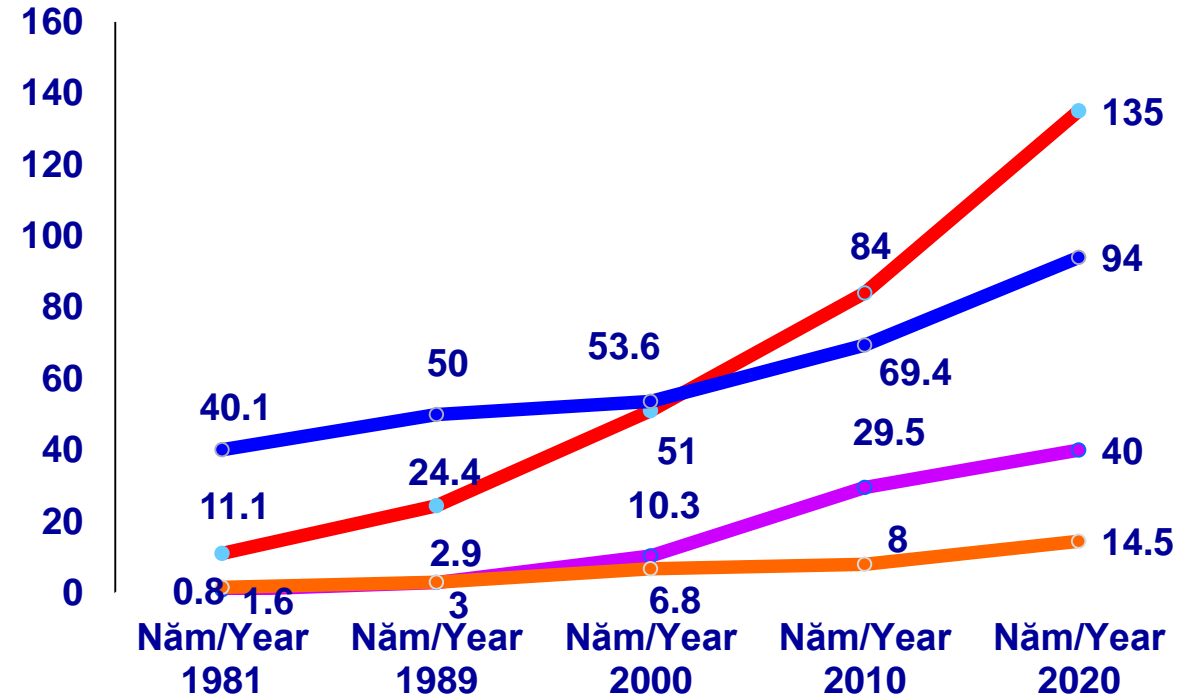
+ Food choices: not yet

Impact

Trend in the food consumption (g/capital/day)



- Rau các loại/Vegetable
- Quả chín/Fruit
- Gạo/Rice
- Khoai củ/Starchy root, tuber



- Thịt (Meat)
- Trứng/sữa (Egg and milk)
- Cá và thủy sản (Fish and shellfish)
- Dầu/mỡ (Oil/fat)

Source: General nutrition survey (1981; 1989; 2000; 2010; 2020) – NIN, Viet nam

(*)RDA for Vietnamese people-(NIN-MOH:2016)

- Increased the rate of eating out
- Street food: diverse, difficult to control food safety and origin not clear
- Food safety issues



Triple burden of nutrition in Vietnam



Stunting

Micronutrient
deficiencies

Overweight

Obesity

NCDs

SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

Food/Nutrition Label

Thông tin Dinh dưỡng

Kích cỡ khẩu phần: 114 g
Khẩu phần/gói: 4

Hàm lượng trong mỗi gói
Calo: 90 Calo trong chất béo: 30

% Giá trị Dinh dưỡng Hằng ngày

Chất béo	3g	5%
Chất béo bão hòa	0g	0%
Chất béo chuyển hóa	0g	
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Natri	300mg	13%
Cacbonhydrat	11g	4%
Chất xơ	3g	12%
Đường	3g	
Protein	3g	
Vitamin A		80%
Vitamin C		60%
Canxi		4%
Sắt		4%

Food Pyramid



Proper nutrition advices

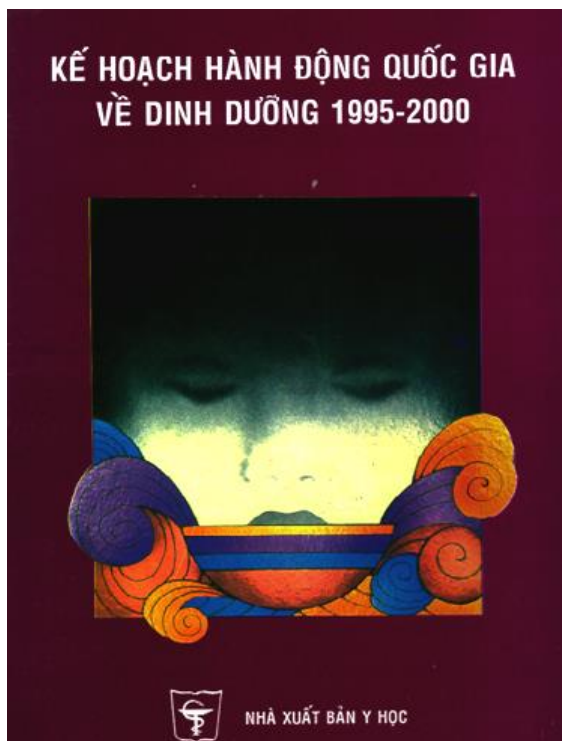
10 lời khuyên dinh dưỡng hợp lý

Nhằm thực hiện Chiến lược quốc gia về dinh dưỡng giai đoạn 2011-2020, tầm nhìn đến năm 2030, Bộ Y tế đã ban hành 10 lời khuyên dinh dưỡng hợp lý đến năm 2020.

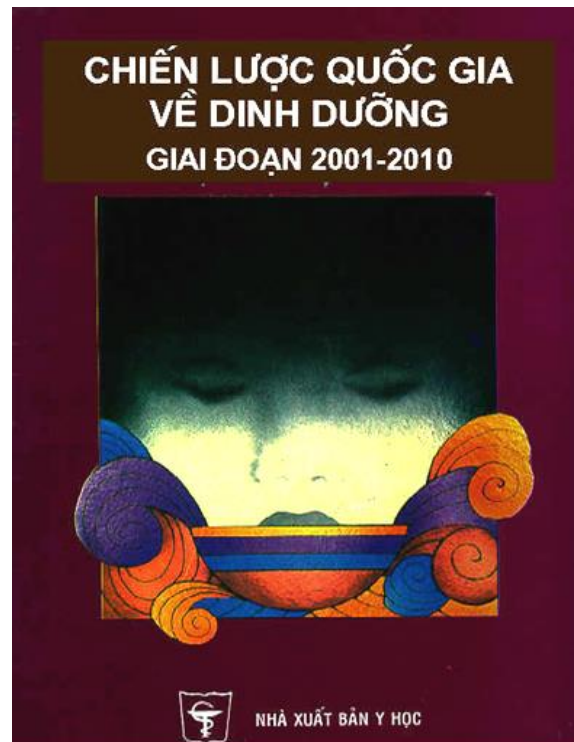


Figure 9.6

National Nutrition Strategy in Vietnam



NPAN 1995 – 2000



NNS 2001 – 2010



NNS 2011 - 2020



NNS 2021 - 2030

National Action Plan on Food System Transformation in Viet Nam towards Transparency, Responsibility, and Sustainability by 2030 (No 300/QD-TTg, 28/3/2023)

There are five potential Action Tracks for transforming to responsible, sustainable and transparent food systems. These also contribute to the 17 SDGs and the 2030 Agenda



- Ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all
- Shifting to sustainable consumption patterns
- Promoting sustainable food production at scale
- Develop competitive, inclusive and equitable food value chains
- Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress



What are some levers for change? - collective action and multi-stakeholder partnerships; innovation, science and technology; finance and insurance; gender equality and social inclusion; and governance, policies and institutions

Source: Scientific Group for the UN Food Systems Summit

What are the opportunities and critical areas for food system action?

**Challenges and opportunities in
implementing/advocating for healthy food
environment policies Street food**

Limitation:

1. There is no updated Vietnamese food nutritional composition table. The nutritional composition content has changed in new foods. Vietnamese foods are diverse.
2. There is no professional Vietnamese APP investigation software. Currently, INDDEX has made the software, but it still needs to be updated, because there are only nearly 400 standard dishes. Vietnam needs a copyright to use it for free (because all of it is Vietnamese standard menu data), currently when using this APP software, Vietnam has to pay a fee.
3. There needs to be in-depth experts to build the software, guide and analyze the data. Take advantage of data sources for analysis.
4. The capacity of investigation staff to ensure accuracy is still limited.
5. Funding for investigation is limited.

General recommendations for policy and intervention

- Support research to monitor, evaluate and assess the effect of the policies on food environments and on diets; in particular develop standardized tools and metrics for assessing the impact of policies on public health, economic factors, and societal well-being.
- Encourage interdisciplinary research and cooperation between health, agriculture, education, and other relevant sectors to address complex food environment issues.
- Promote ongoing dialogues and consultations with various stakeholders — including government agencies, health experts, industry representatives, and civil society — to gather diverse perspectives and ensure policy relevance.
- Create mechanisms for citizens, businesses, and organizations to provide feedback on policy effectiveness and suggest improvements.
- Collaborate with international organizations and other countries to share best practices and align policies with global health and nutrition guidelines.
- Support knowledge transfer and capacity building between research and policy making processes.
- Develop policies with a long-term perspective, and with built-in flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, emerging trends, and new scientific findings.
- Consider the potential effects of policies on different socioeconomic groups and strive to reduce health disparities.

NUTRITION FOR TODAY AND THE FUTURE



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NUTRITION

Address: 48B-Tang Bat Ho-Ha Noi
Phone: + 84-4-3971 7090
Fax: + 84-4-3971 7885
Email: ninvietnam@viendinhduong.vn
Website: <http://viendinhduong.vn>



Source: NIEC- National Institute of Nutrition and VNExpress

THANK YOU for listening



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NUTRITION

Address: 48B-Tang Bat Ho-Ha Noi
Phone: + 84-4-3971 7090
Fax: + 84-4-3971 7885
Email: ninvietnam@viendinhduong.vn
Website: <http://viendinhduong.vn>



CONTACT:

TRUONG TUYET MAI, M.D., Ph.D., Assoc. Prof.,
Vice-Director of National Institute of Nutrition

Mobile: 094 9911777/0946777176

Email: truongmai1976@gmail.com, truongtuyetmai.nin@gmail.com