

# Newsletter #1— Dec 2022

## Editorial

Dear readers, we are extremely pleased to share the first newsletter of the FoodSAMSA project, which brings together African and German collaborators to conduct research for evidence to inform policy and practice related to the double burden of malnutrition in South Africa and the wider region. This three-year project consists of three pillars — addressing policy, community and interpersonal determinants of dietary behaviour — and three cross-cutting components — complex systems maps, integrated knowledge translation, and network and capacity building. Across these pillars and components, the work is divided into eight work packages (WPs), which are briefly described in the following sections, including an update of their respective activities and milestones reached so far.

We are highly appreciative of the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) for funding this work and of the invaluable support received from our partners from LMU Munich. The partners in South Africa include the UWC School of Public Health, South African Medical Research Council and Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa at UCT, which demonstrates the true potential of North-South cooperation, illustrating the benefit of true reciprocity and knowledge co-creation. Despite the initial setback of administrative delays and institutional arrangements on the tail of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are hence pleased to announce that we are on track with most milestones and excited to continue pursuing project objectives in the years to come.

With this newsletter we want to keep you informed about the journey travelled so far, including a few landmark events with many memorable moments, as well as the issues faced in the pursuit of our activities and the ambitions laid out for the next few years. Each newsletter will feature a spotlight on researchers, including Masters' and PhD students, without whom this vast body of work would not be possible, and on any output and results that have been disseminated so far. We wish you a nice and pleasant reading and appreciate any feedback and comments.

Kind regards,



A/Prof Peter Delobelle  
Chronic Diseases Initiative for Africa  
Co-PI FoodSAMSA



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## About us

FoodSAMSA is a three-year project that addresses the double burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, obesity) by assessing its determinants and by exploring interventions at the macro (policy), meso (community) and micro (interpersonal) level.

The project includes the adaptation of existing approaches for assessing and improving food environments to countries facing a double burden of malnutrition; implementation of these adapted approaches in South Africa; strengthening capacity and expanding regional networks to support food environment and systems research and action across sub-Saharan Africa.

The project is conducted by three partner institutions in South Africa (SAMRC, University of the Western Cape School of Public Health and Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa) and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) in Munich, Germany.

# FoodSAMSA Official launch

The FoodSAMSA project was formally launched through a hybrid event at the University of Cape Town Sports Science Institute on 29 March 2022 and introduced by Prof V Lambert, Director of the UCT Research Centre for Health through Physical Activity, Lifestyle & Sport. The launch featured a description of partners and a keynote presentation by Prof Amos Laar (University of Ghana; PI MEALS4NCDs Project) and Dr Claire Johnson (UNICEF), who highlighted the role of the food environment in diet behaviour and the steps needed to transform the food system in Eastern / Southern Africa. A Q&A session followed, emphasizing the need for synergy among partners working in the field and research on social media marketing which could help promote healthy food choices among adolescents.

The different WPs were described in detail by A/Profs P Delobelle and Z Mchiza, and a panel discussion followed on the relevance of nutrition-related research on policy and practice and the role and function of stakeholders (Prof R Swart); the need for regulating informal food businesses around schools and how to incentivize infor-

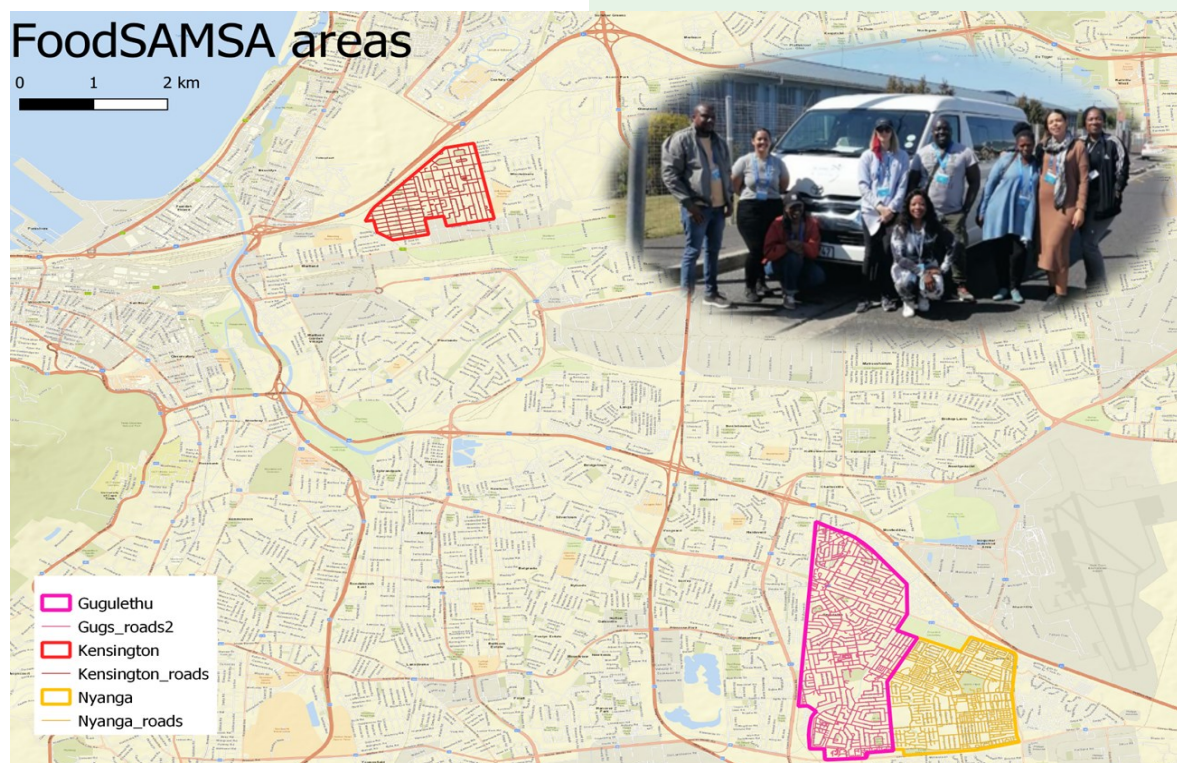
mal traders to offer healthy foods (Prof A Erzse); the impact of food marketing on vulnerable populations through outdoor advertising (Dr P Kruger); the role of community health workers and the need for more training in food literacy (Prof T Puoane); the lack of policy coherence in public and private sector policies on population-level nutrition and the need to consider supply and demand side issues (Prof E Wentzel-Viljoen); the interface between the informal food system and urban planning initiatives (Ms T Faragher); opportunities to connect researchers in the field; and, the need for the regulation of digital marketing for children (Dr M Tatlow-Golden).

A lively discussion followed on how to influence demand and supply side issues, e.g. through incentivizing the sale of healthy foods; advocacy and empowerment; reducing competing demands; creating enabling environments; and advocating for policy coherence. The session was closed by Prof Lambert who summarized the main points. The event was a success and well attended by delegates from academia, civil society and government working in the field of food and nutrition related policy and practice.

**WP1** work on complex systems mapping of the double-burden of malnutrition (DBM) started in early 2022. First, available evidence and literature on the drivers and levers of the DBM in South Africa were assessed and mapped to identify current research gaps. Based on this, the research team agreed to focus activities on the micro (individual/household) and meso-level (community). Interactions with the macro (policy) level will be considered but will not represent the main focus of this WP. At present, an interview topic guide is developed for key informant interviews that will take place in the different study sites. This will help to identify seed variables, which will be used and expanded in two group model building exercises and result in the production of complex systems maps – the main outcome of WP1.

**WP2** work officially started in July 2022. The first task consisted of a scoping review on the role of the formal food industry in addressing the DBM to identify and map recommendations and best practices. The review protocol is nearing completion and title and abstract screening is planned for Feb 2023. The next task will be the adaptation of the [BIA-Obesity](#) (Business Impact Assessment on Obesity and Population-level Nutrition) tool developed by the [INFORMAS](#) Network for countries facing a DBM. The tool consists of a range of indicators covering six action areas and includes an assessment of public commitments and transparency of commitments, supplemented with additional information through engagement with selected companies. The adapted tool will ultimately be piloted, implemented and evaluated in South Africa.

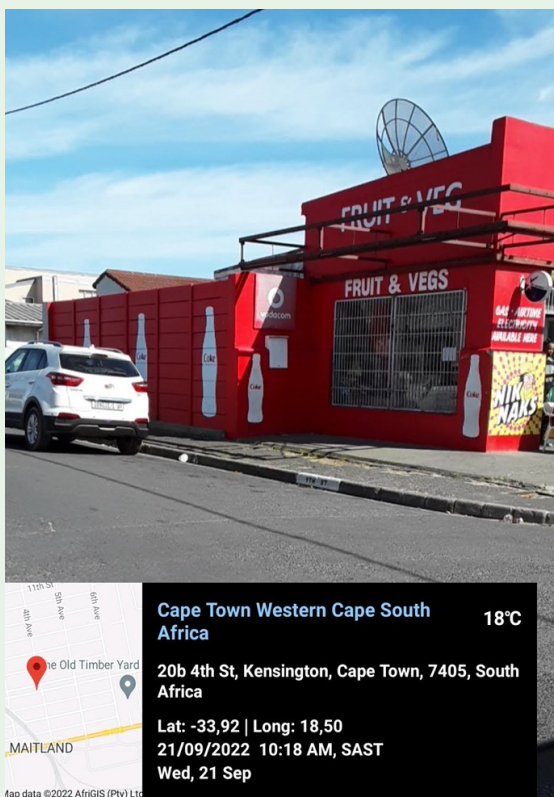




**WP3** aims to assess healthy food environment policies in South Africa using the [Food-EPI](#) tool (Healthy Food Environment Policy Index) developed by INFORMAS, which has recently been updated to include indicators on the DBM. The initial step in this process was to conduct an online review of all guidelines and policies related to food systems in South Africa, which was collated into an evidence document with the Food-EPI policy indicators, including the new indicators on the DBM. The next step in the process is to engage with nutrition, health, and policy experts in South Africa to review and validate this evidence document. We expect this review to be completed by the end of February 2023, at which point we will move forward with our next step: rating the implementation of policies against international best practices.

**WP4** recruited three field coordinators and three students to assist with data collection and analysis. The team started to conduct geospatial mapping of food vendors and food and beverage (F&B) marketing in Nyanga, Gugulethu and Kensington townships using the Quantum Geographic Information System (QGIS). Pilot data were collected in Kensington and completed by geo-mapping of F&B advertisements and location of food vendors using smart devices and a geo-mapping photo app. Coordinates were added to the demarcation maps and meetings were held with community representatives and policing forums in Gugulethu and Nyanga to raise awareness and improve field worker safety. Mapping of advertisements in Kensington was discussed as well as the pros and cons of the system (geo-tagging pictures and manually plotting coordinates on QGIS). F&B advertisement pictures were analysed to inform survey questions. The survey was piloted and the tool further amended with the assistance of Dr M Eichinger.





**WP5** focuses on leveraging informal food business to improve the community food environment, by conducting a business analysis of informal food outlets and elucidating the food and business environment in which they operate in the townships targeted by WP4 and 6. The mapping of spaza shops and street food vendors is conducted in tandem with WP4 mapping and informed by the tool that was updated for WP4. A questionnaire for informal food traders and consumers has also been finalized. Secondary analysis of previously collected data is ongoing and the survey of spaza shop owners and street food vendors should be completed in early 2023, together with the informal outlet consumer survey.

**WP6** In October 2022 the WP6 team visited the St John's Project Manager, who oversees the Community Health Workers (CHWs) in the three townships where the FoodSAMSA project is operating. During the visit, the FoodSAMSA project was introduced and interest expressed in working with St John's and their CHWs in Gugulethu, Kensington and Nyanga. The FoodSAMSA consortium team then visited the CHWs from Gugulethu and Nyanga and the St John's Manager at the Zolani Centre in Nyanga to formally introduce the project. A week later the WP6 team visited the Kensington CHWs at the Wesley Kensington Methodist church to introduce FoodSAMSA.



In late October 2022, the WP6 team returned to Nyanga and Kensington to conduct focus group discussions (FGDs) with selected CHWs (3 x 10 St John's CHWs from the three communities). In the FGDs, CHWs were asked about their experience with, and feed back on the existing multimedia entertainment education (MM-EE) materials used in a 2020 intervention. During these FGDs, CHWs were also asked about factors that influence their food choices and food behaviour. St John's CHWs who participated in these FGDs were engaging and provided great insights, and transcription and translation of the recordings is currently underway.



**WP7** focuses on network building and capacity development, and several activities have been conducted in 2022. Ongoing liaison with the Food Environment Research Network ([FERN](#)) in Ghana resulted in the sharing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Ghana and University of Cape Town and formal collaboration in FERN2023 as part of the Local Organizing Committee. The FERN listserv has been shared and mapping will be done by the WP7 team. Networking activities were also undertaken with partners from the DSI/NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security; the Western Cape Food Forum; Southern Africa Food Lab; and other research groups (CO-CREATE, ImpENSA); Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy; African-German Centre for Sustainable & Resilient Food Systems / Applied Agricultural & Food Data Science; and INFORMAS. Three to four capacity building webinars are planned for 2023-2024, including topics of interest to FERN stakeholders such as group model building, geospatial mapping, scoping review, and mixed methods research.

**WP8** cuts across other WPs as a transversal theme and focuses on integrated knowledge translation (IKT). Several initiatives have been conducted in year one, including organizing the official kick-off meeting of FoodSAMSA in March whereby the project was introduced to local stakeholders; an IKT workshop in June, and development of WP specific stakeholder engagement strategies driven by WP specific focal points. Previously, the project was introduced during the 2<sup>nd</sup> FERN meeting in Nov 2021 ([Video](#)). Two FoodSAMSA researchers attended an introductory course on IKT at Stellenbosch University and led the stakeholder mapping, which is continually being updated as new stakeholders are identified. To support IKT, a FoodSAMSA [website](#) has also been developed, featuring updates with links to partner websites. A general and WP specific briefs have been developed to introduce the project to the main stakeholders.

## FoodSAMSA Consortium Meeting

The FoodSAMSA first in-person meeting was hosted in Cape Town, South Africa, on 10-14 October 2022. The week was attended by researchers, students, and field coordinators from all four partner institutions, including CDIA and HPALS; University of the Western Cape School of Public Health; the South Africa Medical Research Council NCD Research Unit (NCDRU), and the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU Munich) Chair of Public Health and Health Services Research.

The consortium was welcomed by the Co-PIs Zandile Mchiza and Peter Delobelle at the UCT Sports Science Institute of South Africa (SSISA) on 10 October 2022. During the welcome, the purpose of FoodSAMSA was reiterated as Prof Mchiza highlighted the stark socioeconomic inequalities in South Africa. WP representatives then gave an update on their respective progress,

and to end the day, the consortium visited Eagles' Nest Wine Estate for some team building .



*FoodSAMSA at the UCT Sports Science Institute*

## FoodSAMSA Consortium Meeting (cont'd)

On 11 October, the WP4 team led an exercise on how GIS software can be used to geo-map the food environment. Dr Michelle Eichinger, expert advisor in the field, gave a demonstration on spatial analysis using GIS software. The WP4 and 6 team members then prepared for the community field visit, after which plenary meetings for WP1 and 4 were held. A/Prof P Delobelle then ended off the academic events for the day with a WP7 presentation focusing on strategic partnerships for FoodSAMSA and the online seminar series to be planned. A networking dinner was held at Marco's African place, which serves a range of South African food and caters for entertainment with live music.



Jillian Hill arranged a tour of the Cape Town Market on the morning of the next day. The general manager received the consortium with coffee, an insightful history of the market, and a summary of its daily operations. The consortium was led on an extensive tour of the market grounds, including the main trading hall, people's market, the cooling and ripening rooms, and the truck stop. After the tour, the consortium was received by the market CEO, who detailed their plans for improving market turnover, its sustainability, and physical environment, while promoting the unique cultures observed in Cape Town. The market visit illustrated that healthy food options are available, but not always accessible. After this excellent tour, the consortium headed back to SSISA for plenary meetings for WP 2, 3, 5 and 6. Prof Delobelle concluded the academic events for the day with discussions around FoodSAMSA

stakeholders. Hloliso organised a lovely sunset picnic on Signal Hill to conclude the day's activities.



On 13 October the consortium visited

community health workers (CHWs) of St John's at the Zolani Centre in Nyanga. The managers detailed the daily operations of the organisation, after which CHWs offered valuable insights into their lived experiences in the community and the barriers they faced. This clearly affirmed the value of undertaking an ambitious and potentially impactful project such as FoodSAMSA. Consortium members were also given a tour of the Zolani centre, Nyanga community health centre, and the Nyanga People's Garden Centre. During the afternoon events, the LMU colleagues excellently presented LMU, the Pettenkofer School of Public Health, and FoodSAMSA to SAMRC NCDRU staff at their weekly research meeting.

The final day of the first in-person meeting started with an exhilarating walk in the Newlands Forest. After this, the consortium had the opportunity to present FoodSAMSA at the HPALS research meeting at SSISA. A final wrap-up of the work done throughout the week was presented by respective WP members. Gratitude was echoed by all consortium members, and final words were spoken by Zandile Mchiza, Peter von Philipsborn, and Peter Delobelle, thereby concluding the week.

Our gratitude goes to Vicki Lambert for organising delicious lunches at SSISA. A special thanks to the LMU team - Eva Rehfuess, Peter von Philipsborn, Karin Geffert, and Carmen Klinger - for making the trip to South Africa. And thanks to the international FoodSAMSA members who attended the meetings virtually.

# Spotlight on Researcher

## **Name: Elochukwu Christopher Okanmelu**

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany  
MSc Epidemiology, Year 2  
WP2: Adaptation of the BIA-Obesity framework for countries facing a double burden of malnutrition and implementation in South Africa

I am a student research assistant with the FoodSAMSa team at LMU. I received my medical degree from the University of Nigeria Nsukka, where I became enthralled by public health towards the end of my study in 2013. As a budding clinician and academic I spent several years trying to garner an encompassing knowledge and experience in health and nutrition. To this end, I ventured into general medicine before obtaining a master's degree in Health Economics at Bayero University Kano. My interest in public health nutrition, however, was amplified during the time I spent with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in their nutritional stabilization and emergency pediatric outposts in the conflict region of northeastern Nigeria. In the years I spent there I was progressively imbued with the importance of



research and evidence-based public health in the furtherance of medical knowledge and practice. In the FoodSAMSa project I support WP2 activities, which aims to assess the impact of the food industry in tackling the double bur-

den of malnutrition within the design of private food sector policies and commitments and adapt the existing BIA-Obesity framework for countries facing a double burden of malnutrition. While I have a diverse array of interests, public health nutrition, and infectious disease epidemiology take precedence. I thus intend to further my training and activities up to a doctorate level to ensure a profound understanding of the principles and methods needed to tackle the burden of NCDs and Infectious diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Name: Karin Geffert**

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany  
WP3: Update of the Food-EPI for South Africa in the context of a double burden of malnutrition

Since my medical studies I have been fascinated by the impact of social determinants of health on individuals and populations. As a researcher at the Pettenkofer School of Public Health, LMU Munich, I have been focusing my work on healthy food environments (for example in the implementation of the Food-EPI in Germany as part of the Policy Evaluation Network (PEN) and now in WP3 in South Africa) and sustainability considerations of public health services (with a focus on climate mitigation measures for heat waves and flooding). I studied medicine and



public health in Germany and England and conducted a medical doctoral thesis in Tanzania and South Africa. Next to my work at the university, I worked for non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations on different continents,

including WHO/Europe on implementation research for NCDs and WASH in health care facilities. FoodSAMSa is for me a unique opportunity to learn from our colleagues in the Western Cape and their long-standing experience on healthy food environments on different levels.

## **Name: Martina Lembani**

University of the Western Cape, School of Public Health, Cape Town, South Africa  
WP6: Refinement, implementation and evaluation of the multimedia entertainment-education (MM-EE) intervention to improve food and nutrition literacy and food choices

I am a Senior Lecturer at the School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape (UWC). I hold a PhD in International Development obtained at Ruhr University of Bochum in Germany. My background is in community development with a strong focus on monitoring and evaluation. After obtaining my PhD in 2013 I became very interested in health policy and systems, in which I currently specialise in the use of system dynamics modelling using Group Model Building and other innovative methodologies to analyse complex systems. I have worked on health systems resilience and responsiveness projects in South Africa and other sub-Saharan Africa countries aimed at analysing complex health systems to improve their performance in times of crises. I have a strong



passion and commitment to building capacity among researchers, practitioners and policy makers on the use and application of complex systems analysis tools and methodologies, which I teach at UWC and have taught at the University of Cape Town and Free State University as invited guest. Recently I have developed a keen

interest in the area of migration and health research in addition to maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, adolescent health and their intersection with mental health. In FoodSAMSa I lead WP 6 which aims to refine, implement and evaluate a multi-media entertainment-education (MM-EE) intervention for improved food and nutrition literacy and food choices among community members.



**Name: Hloliso Nonkeneza**

University of the Western  
Cape, School of Public  
Health, Cape Town, South  
Africa

WP6: Refinement, imple-  
mentation and evaluation  
of the multimedia enter-  
tainment-education (MM-  
EE) intervention to improve  
food and nutrition literacy  
and food choices

## Spotlight on Researcher

I am a research assistant  
with FoodSAMSA at the  
University of the Western  
Cape (UWC). I received  
my BSc in medical biosci-  
ence from UWC in 2020  
and had the opportunity  
to work as a field coordi-  
nator at the UWC School



of Public Health (SOPH) on a project aimed at  
developing and presenting a multimedia enter-  
tainment-education (MM-EE) intervention on  
food and nutrition literacy to community  
health workers (CHWs) in three townships in  
Cape Town. The project opened my eyes to  
other approaches to address health in addition  
to the biomedical approach taught before. In  
2021 I enrolled for the postgraduate diploma in  
public health at the UWC SOPH, which further  
cemented my interest in this field. After com-

pleting the programme  
Prof Zandile Mchiza asked  
me to work as a research  
assistant on FoodSAMSA  
which allowed me to  
make use of what I had  
learned in the postgradu-  
ate diploma. Working on  
FoodSAMSA so far has

also allowed me to work with great researchers  
within the consortium and I am learning a lot  
from them when it comes to public health and  
nutrition. In the project, I support WP6 activi-  
ties to refine, implement and evaluate the  
multi-media entertainment-education (MM-EE)  
intervention for improved food and nutrition  
literacy and food choices among community  
members. I also support WP4 & 5 data collec-  
tion activities.

## FoodSAMSA Consortium members

### Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa (UCT)

A/Prof Dr Peter Delobelle (Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa)

Prof Dr Vicki Lambert (Health through Physical Activity, Lifestyle and Sport)

Dr Olufunke Alaba (Health through Physical Activity, Lifestyle and Sport)

Dr Mulenga Mukanu (Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa)

### South Africa Medical Research Council (SAMRC) / University of the Western Cape (UWC)

A/Prof Dr Zandile J Mchiza (Non-Communicable Diseases Research Unit, SAMRC)

Dr Jillian Hill (Non-Communicable Diseases Research Unit, SAMRC)

Dr Martina Lembani (UWC School of Public Health)

Annalie Wentzel, MSc (UWC School of Public Health)

Holi Nonkeneza, MSc (UWC School of Public Health)

Laurentia-Joan Opperman, BSc (UWC School of Public Health)

### Pettenkofer School of Public Health (LMU)

Prof Dr Eva Rehfuss

Dr Peter von Philipsborn

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Niki Holliday, MSc

Anna Leibinger, BSc



For more information visit: <https://foodsamsa.samrc.ac.za/>