

Introducing the Minimum Dietary Diversity – Women (MDD-W) Global Dietary Diversity Indicator for Women

Washington, DC, July 15–16, 2014

A New Indicator for Global Assessment

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA) convened a consensus meeting in July 2014, to select a simple proxy indicator for global use in assessing the micronutrient adequacy of women’s diets. Meeting participants¹ from academia, international research institutes, and UN and donor agencies unanimously endorsed and support the use of the new indicator, called Minimum Dietary Diversity – Women (MDD-W).² The new indicator reflects consumption of at least five of ten food groups (see the chart on the next page), and can be generated from surveys. It provides a new tool for assessment, target-setting, and advocacy.



Motivation and Overview for the Women’s Dietary Diversity Project I and II

The Women’s Dietary Diversity Project (WDDP) was designed to respond to the need for simple yet valid indicators of women’s diet quality, with a specific focus on micronutrient adequacy.

In the decades preceding the Project, there were many calls for attention to women’s diet quality and nutrition but little programmatic action. A lack of platforms for reaching adolescent girls and women of reproductive age outside of prenatal care was—and remains—a major impediment. Lack of indicators to allow for assessment, advocacy, and accountability has been another constraint.

The WDDP responded with a collaborative research project analyzing simple proxy indicators derived from high-quality dietary data sets from a range of settings in Africa and Asia. The WDDP used a common analytic protocol and harmonized definitions for a wide range of “candidate” indicators.

The first phase of the Project (WDDP-I, 2005–2010) ended with a partial solution to the “indicators gap” and the proposal of several dietary diversity scores for possible use.³ The second phase (WDDP-II, 2012–present) used more data and conducted additional analyses with the objective of identifying and proposing a dichotomous indicator for global use.⁴ The WDDP-II aimed to stimulate progress both through new analytic work and through engaging a broader range of experts for consideration of results and next steps.

Rising Demand for and Use of Diet Diversity Indicators for Women

Recent developments—including dramatically increased attention and funding for nutrition-sensitive interventions, notably in agriculture—have increased demand for indicators of food consumption and diet quality. Several organizations (e.g., FAO and USAID) currently use a 9-point food group score, which was among the indicators identified by WDDP-I. This WDD score is also identified as one of six outcome level indicators in the USAID 10-year multi-sectoral nutrition strategy.⁵ Several organizations have also proposed use of WDD indicators in the “Post-2015 Framework,”⁶ and one noted the need for a validated dichotomous indicator.⁷



Key Points from WDDP Work

- “Candidate” indicators with more food groups were more strongly associated with micronutrient adequacy for women.⁸
- Indicators were strongest when consumption of trivial amounts (<15 g) of a food group did not count in dietary diversity scores.
- WDDP-II researchers identified two candidate indicators for consideration during the consensus meeting: a dichotomous indicator based on the 9-point food group score currently in use by FAO and USAID and a dichotomous indicator based on a 10-point food group score.
- WDDP-II researchers recommended to meeting participants that one of the two dichotomous indicators be selected for global use in assessment, for setting targets, and for advocacy.

Meeting Accomplishments

WDDP-II researchers asked meeting participants first to assess whether the evidence was strong enough to support recommendation of a dichotomous indicator, and if so to select one of the two candidate indicators. Meeting participants reached a unanimous decision to recommend adoption of a dichotomous indicator with a threshold of at least **five food groups out of ten**. Women consuming foods from five or more food groups have a greater likelihood of meeting their micronutrient needs than women consuming foods from fewer food groups.

MDD-W food groups

1. All starchy staple foods	6. Eggs
2. Beans and peas	7. Vitamin A-rich dark green leafy vegetables
3. Nuts and seeds	8. Other vitamin A-rich vegetables and fruits
4. Dairy	9. Other vegetables
5. Flesh foods	10. Other fruits

Next Steps

Meeting participants will disseminate and promote use of the new indicator through communicating to relevant communities of practice, developing user manuals, and seeking opportunities to collect the data, in particular in large-scale surveys. Where it is relevant and would add value, participants will advocate for inclusion of the indicator in global monitoring frameworks.

¹ Meeting agenda available at: <http://www.fantaproject.org/monitoring-and-evaluation/wddp-meeting-2014>.

² This indicator complements the “Minimum Dietary Diversity” (MDD) indicator previously defined for infants and young children; see: WHO. 2008. *Indicators for assessing infant and young child feeding practices: Part 1 Definitions*. Available at: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596664_eng.pdf.

³ Arimond et al. 2010. “Simple food group diversity indicators predict micronutrient adequacy of women’s diets in 5 diverse, resource-poor settings.” *Journal of Nutrition*, 140(11):2059S–69S.

⁴ FAO and IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement). 2014. *Defining a Standard Operational Indicator of Women’s Dietary Diversity: The Women’s Dietary Diversity Follow-up Project*. Contributors: Y. Martin-Prével, P. Allemand, D. Wiesmann, M. Arimond, T.J. Ballard, M. Deitchler, M.C. Dop, G. Kennedy, W.T.K. Lee, and M. Moursi. Rome and Montpellier: FAO and IRD.

⁵ USAID. 2014. *Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy: 2014–2025*.

⁶ Road to Rio Global Nutrition Advocacy Working Group. “Proposed Nutrition Goals, Targets & Indicators for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.” Available at: <http://thousanddays.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Nutrition-in-the-Post-2015-Agenda-Technical-Brief.pdf>.

⁷ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. 2014. “Sustainable Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition in the Post-2015 Framework: Discussion Paper.” p. 8.

⁸ The 7-group indicator used for infants and young children (WHO, op. cit.) was tested but was not sufficient for use as a proxy for micronutrient adequacy for women of reproductive age.