

'EAT-Lancet diet too costly for 1.58 billion people'

Researchers say that at \$2.84 per day, meal expenses would exceed daily per capita income in many low-income nations

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A diet meant to improve both human and planetary health would be unaffordable for at least 1.58 billion people, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, estimates a new study from researchers at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University in the U.S.

Earlier this year, the EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health published recommendations for a universal diet that addresses both human and planetary health. The Commission suggested that adherence to this diet could ensure that our future food systems can sustainably and nutritiously feed the estimated population of 10 billion people in 2050.

The new study, titled 'Affordability of the EAT-Lancet reference diet: a global analysis' and published on Thursday in *The Lancet Global Health*, sought to address what many felt was one of the main components lacking in the creation of the recommended diet, namely affordability.

"When formulating this pioneering benchmark diet



A diet of mostly fruits, vegetables and nuts can be unaffordable, says study. • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

— addressing individual health outcomes as well as the health of the planet — the Commission deliberately did not take its cost into account," said senior author William Masters, an economist at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at the Tufts University.

The research team also found that the EAT-Lancet diet was 64% more costly than the lowest-cost combination of foods that would provide a balanced mix of 20 essential nutrients. The EAT-Lancet diet has higher quantities of animal-source foods

and fruits and vegetables than the minimum required for nutrient adequacy, and much higher quantities than are now consumed in low-income countries.

"We found that the global median of the proposed diet would cost \$2.84 per day (₹200). In low-income countries, that amounts to 89.1% of a household's daily per capita income, which is more than what people can actually spend on food. In high-income countries, we found that the EAT-Lancet reference diet would cost 6.1% of per-capita income, which

is often less than what people now spend on food," said Kalle Hirvonen, lead author and development economist in Ethiopia at the International Food Policy Research Institute.

In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 57% of people earn less than the local cost of the EAT-Lancet diet, in South Asia that figure is 38.4%, in West Asia and North Africa 19.4%, in East Asia and the Pacific 15%, in Latin America and the Caribbean 11.6%, in Europe and Central Asia 1.7% and in North America 1.2%.

The EAT-Lancet Commis-

sion diet consists of a large amount of vegetables, fruits, whole grain, legumes, nuts and unsaturated oils, some seafood and poultry. It has little to no red meat, processed meat, added sugar, refined grains and starchy vegetables.

Varying prices

Fruits, vegetables and animal-source foods are often the most expensive components of a healthy diet, but prices vary widely around the world, report the researchers.

To compute the affordability of an EAT-Lancet diet in each country, the researchers drew on retail prices for standardised items obtained through the International Comparison Program, a collaboration between the World Bank and country statistical agencies. They used prices for 744 food items in 159 countries, from which they could identify the lowest-cost combination of items in each country to meet EAT-Lancet criteria. They then did the same for nutrient requirements and compared the cost of food in each country to survey data on household expenditure and income per capita from

the World Bank's PovcalNet system.

"Though 1.58 billion is a lot of people, it is actually a conservative lower limit on the total number who cannot afford the diet recommended by the EAT-Lancet Commission. The cost of food preparation and of non-food necessities ensure that an even larger number of people cannot afford that kind of healthy diet," said Mr. Masters.

"Even if many poor consumers were to aspire to consume healthier and more environmentally sustainable foods, income and price constraints frequently render this diet unaffordable. Increased earnings and safety-net transfers, as well as systemic changes to lower food prices, are needed to bring healthy and sustainable diets within the reach of the world's poor," said Mr. Hirvonen.

Limitations to the study include the aspect that the models count only the least expensive items in each country, so other research would be needed to address the additional costs and barriers to food use imposed by time constraints, tastes and preferences.

Eminent Bengali writer Nabanita Deb Sen is dead

She was also a beloved teacher

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Award-winning poet, writer and acclaimed teacher Nabanita Deb Sen passed away in her south Kolkata residence on Thursday night after prolonged illness. She was 81.

A Sahitya Akademi and Padma Shri awardee, Ms. Deb Sen will be best remembered for her feminist take on the *Ramayana*, which she has analysed from the perspective of Sita. Her book, *Sitayana*, was translated into many languages and read across the world, establishing her as a formidable feminist writer.

Her parents, both poets, were associated with Rabindranath Tagore and thus Ms. Deb Sen often said she knew that "one of the signatures of growing up is to write poetry". Her first collection of poems came out in 1959, the year she was married to economist Amartya Sen. The couple had two daughters and separated later.

She taught for many years in the Comparative Literature department of the Jadavpur University and was a favourite among students.



Nabanita Deb Sen

Her travelogue, *Truckbhone McMahan* (*On a Truck Alone to McMohan*), provides an entertaining and delicate description of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. Ms. Deb Sen, in her early twenties, hitchhiked up to Tawang in an Army truck to write the all-time bestseller of Bengali literature.

Condolences pour in

Lamenting her demise, writer Shirshendu Mukherjee said Ms. Deb Sen had a "huge pool of material" which could not be used due to her ill health. "Besides losing a friend, I would say I will be missing her writings," Mr. Mukherjee said. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said "her absence will be felt by her myriad students and well-wishers".

China cracks down on gaming

Those under 18 cannot play online from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China has imposed a curfew to limit the time spent by children playing games online, in the latest part of a government crackdown on youth gaming addiction.

The regulations will mean those under 18 cannot play games online between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m., and for only

90 minutes at a time during the daytime.

In addition, the guidelines will reduce the amount of money minors can spend online playing games to 200 RMB (\$28) per month, rising to 400 RMB for those between 16 and 18 years old.

The new rules will also require all gamers to use a real-name registration and

details such as a WeChat account, phone number or ID number to sign up.

The government also calls for games producers to "modify the game content, functions or rules" to avoid causing addiction in young players. A hashtag about the new rules was one of the most discussed on Weibo on Thursday.