

Alternative Perspectives on the Future of Obesity Solutions

A global food system perspective

Jess Fanzo

Professor of Climate and Food

Director of the Food for Humanity Initiative

Columbia University's Climate School

Food systems have an important role to play in mitigating obesity

VIEWPOINT

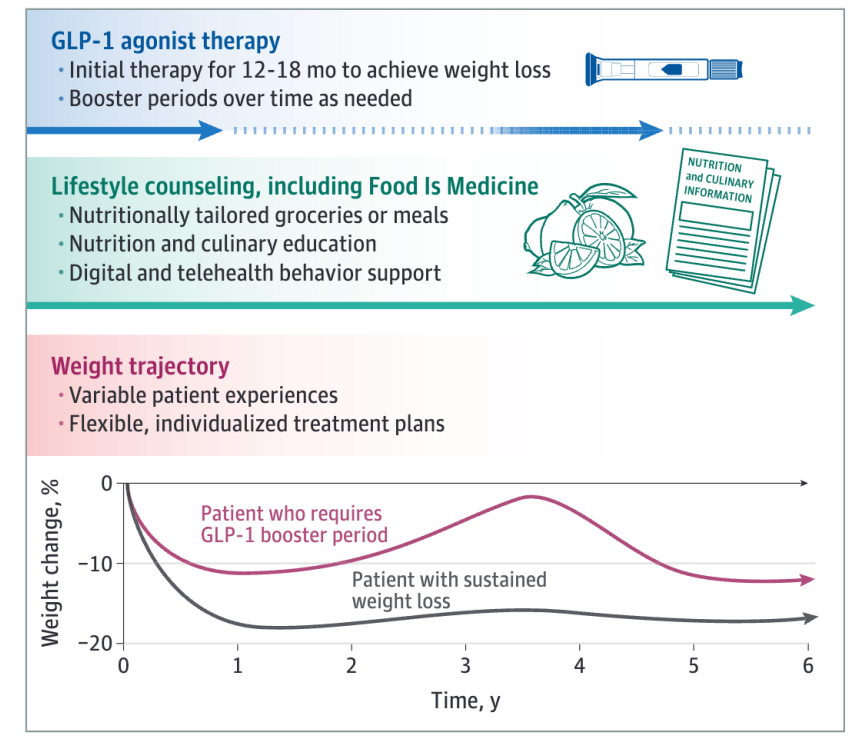
Dariusz Mozaffarian, MD, DrPH
Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts; and Division of Cardiology, Tufts Medical Center and Tufts University School

GLP-1 Agonists for Obesity—A New Recipe for Success?

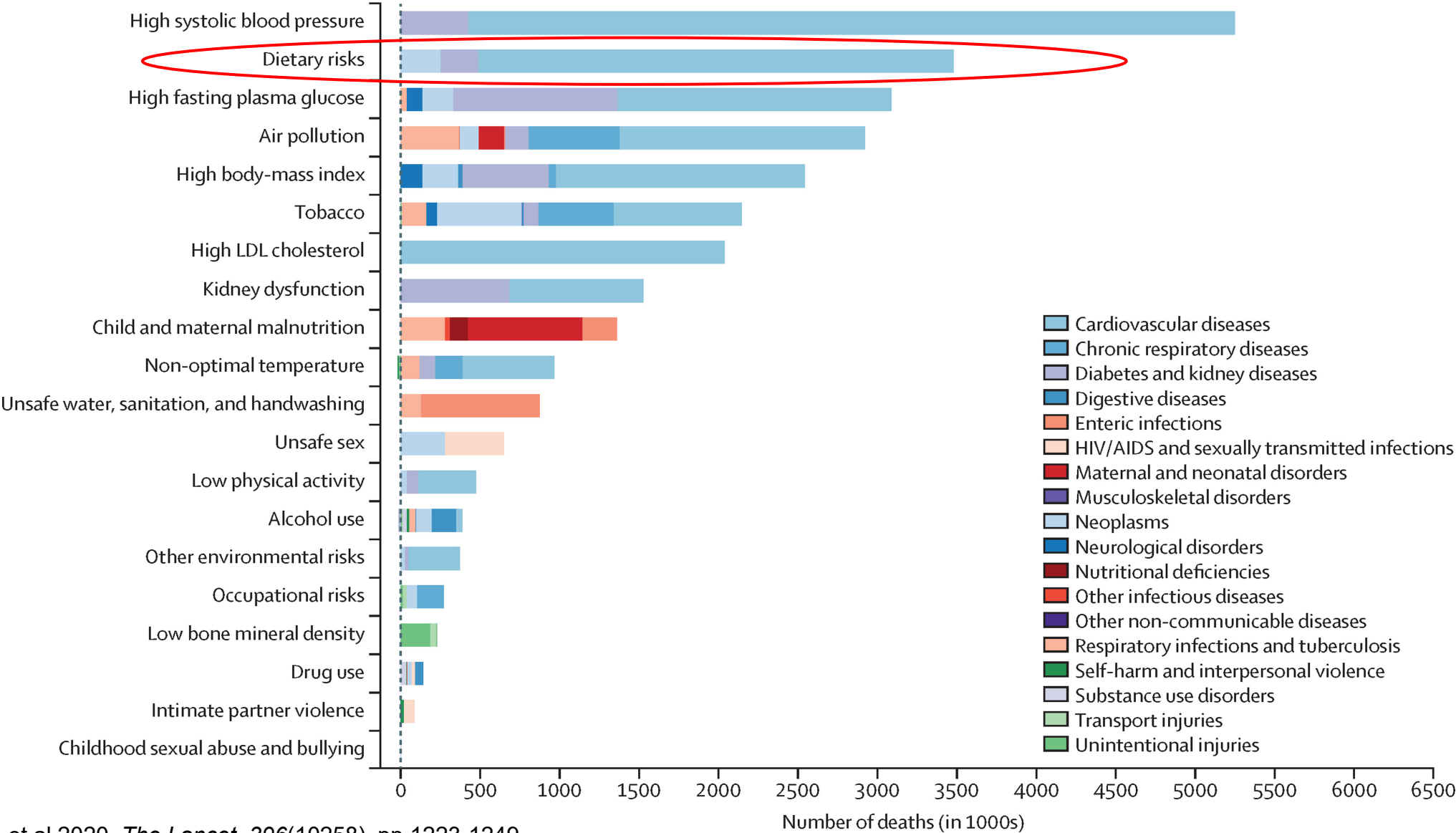
With ever-rising global adiposity, glucagon-like peptide 1 (GLP-1) agonists are shifting the treatment landscape. In trials, GLP-1 agonists produce placebo-adjusted weight loss of 12% to 18%—exceeding any prior pharmacologic therapy and generating enormous attention and utilization. From 2021-2023, the stock price of 2 manufacturers, Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly, more than tripled, with a combined valuation now greater than \$1 trillion.

expensive weight-loss drugs (such as phentermine/topiramate or bupropion/naltrexone, which produce placebo-adjusted weight loss of 4%-5%⁴) with dietary coaching, given the foundational role of nutrition. Such programs reduce costs but may underdeliver. Older drugs produce small effects on weight, and coaching alone often produces only modest dietary change, especially when structural barriers are present like inadequate finances, lim-

Figure. Combined, Staged GLP-1/FIM Approach to Obesity Treatment

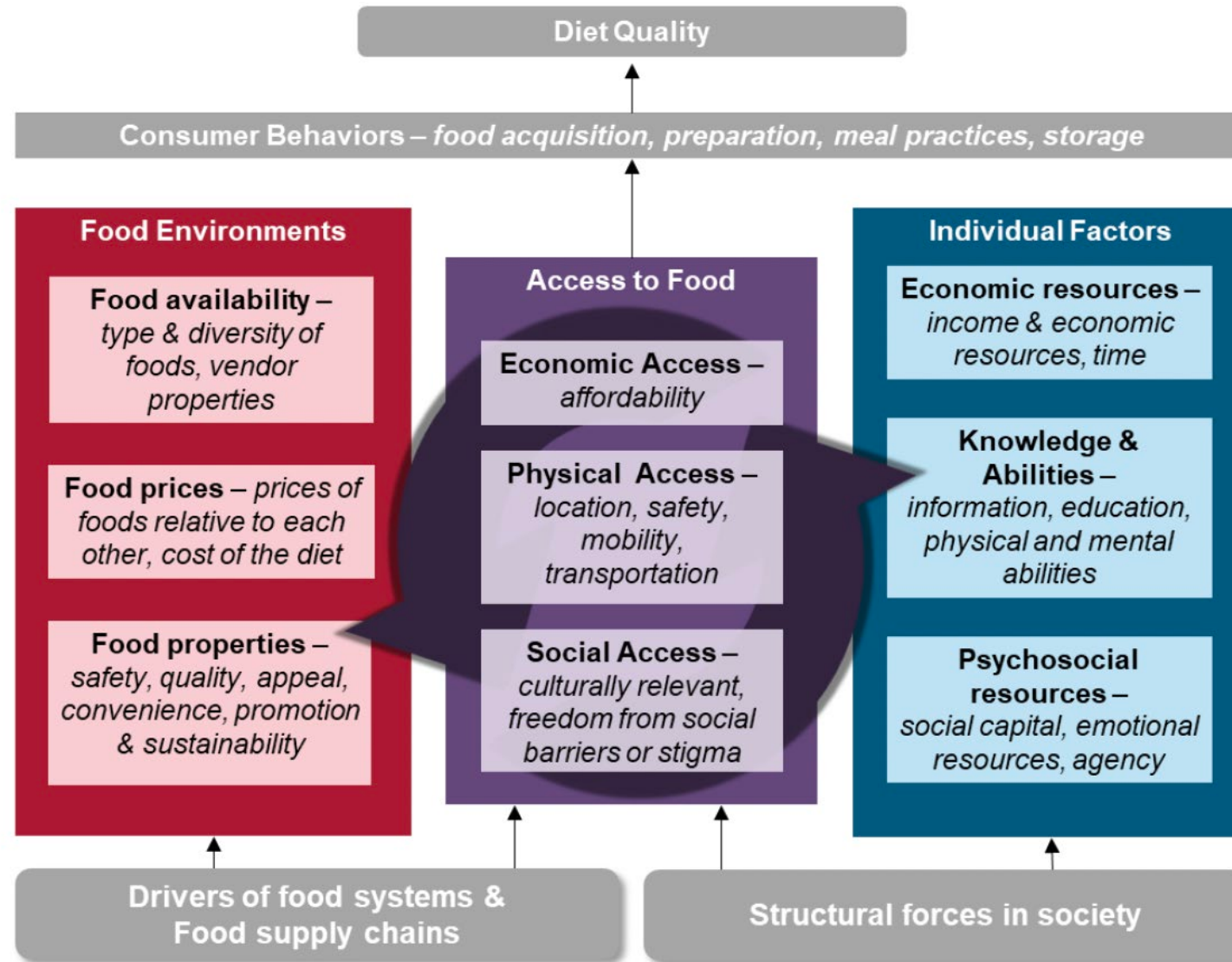


Diets are a major risk factor of global mortality



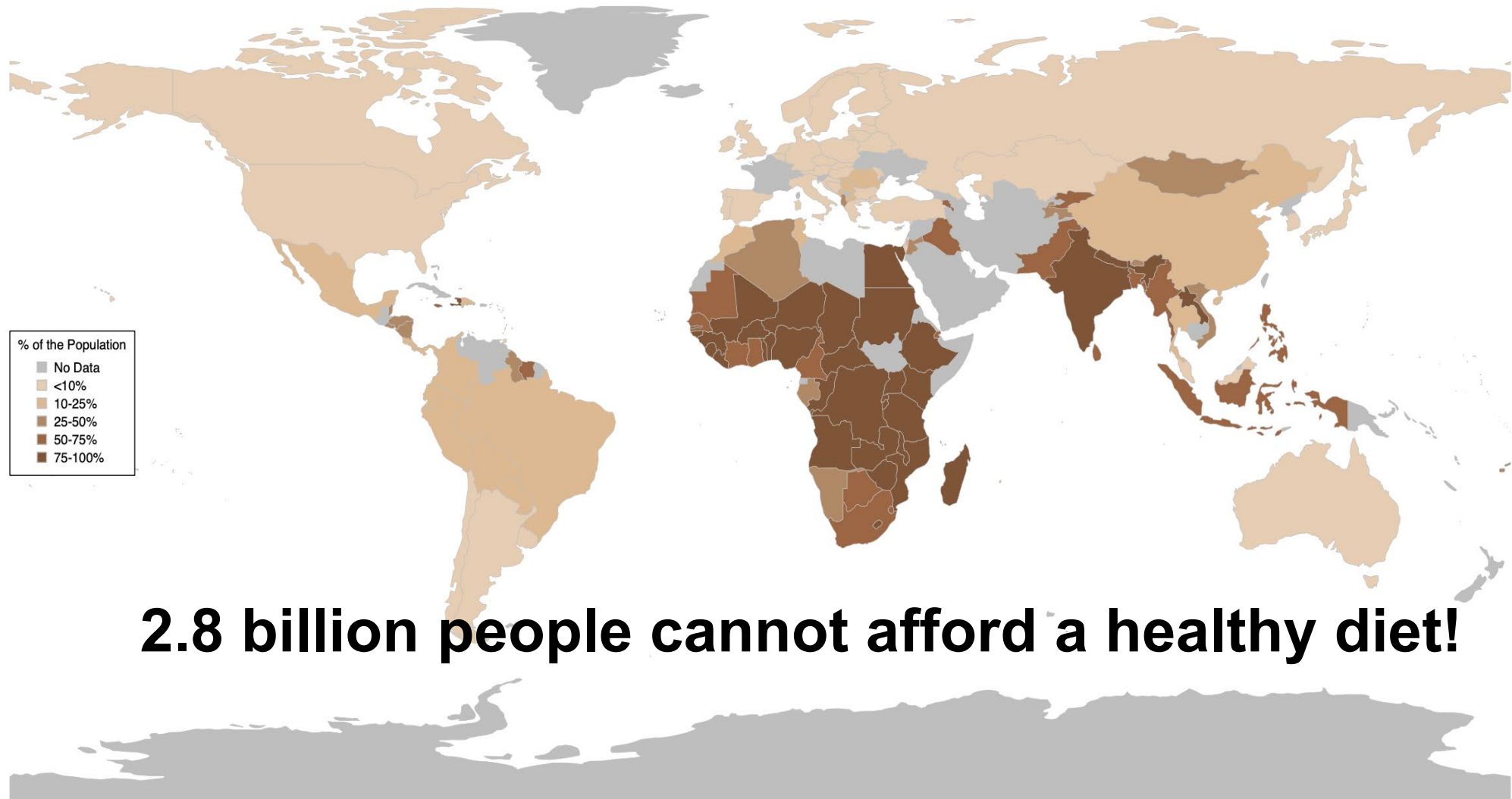
Murray, C.J., et al 2020. *The Lancet*, 396(10258), pp.1223-1249.

Access to healthy diets is a challenge for many



Accessing diets is less equitable

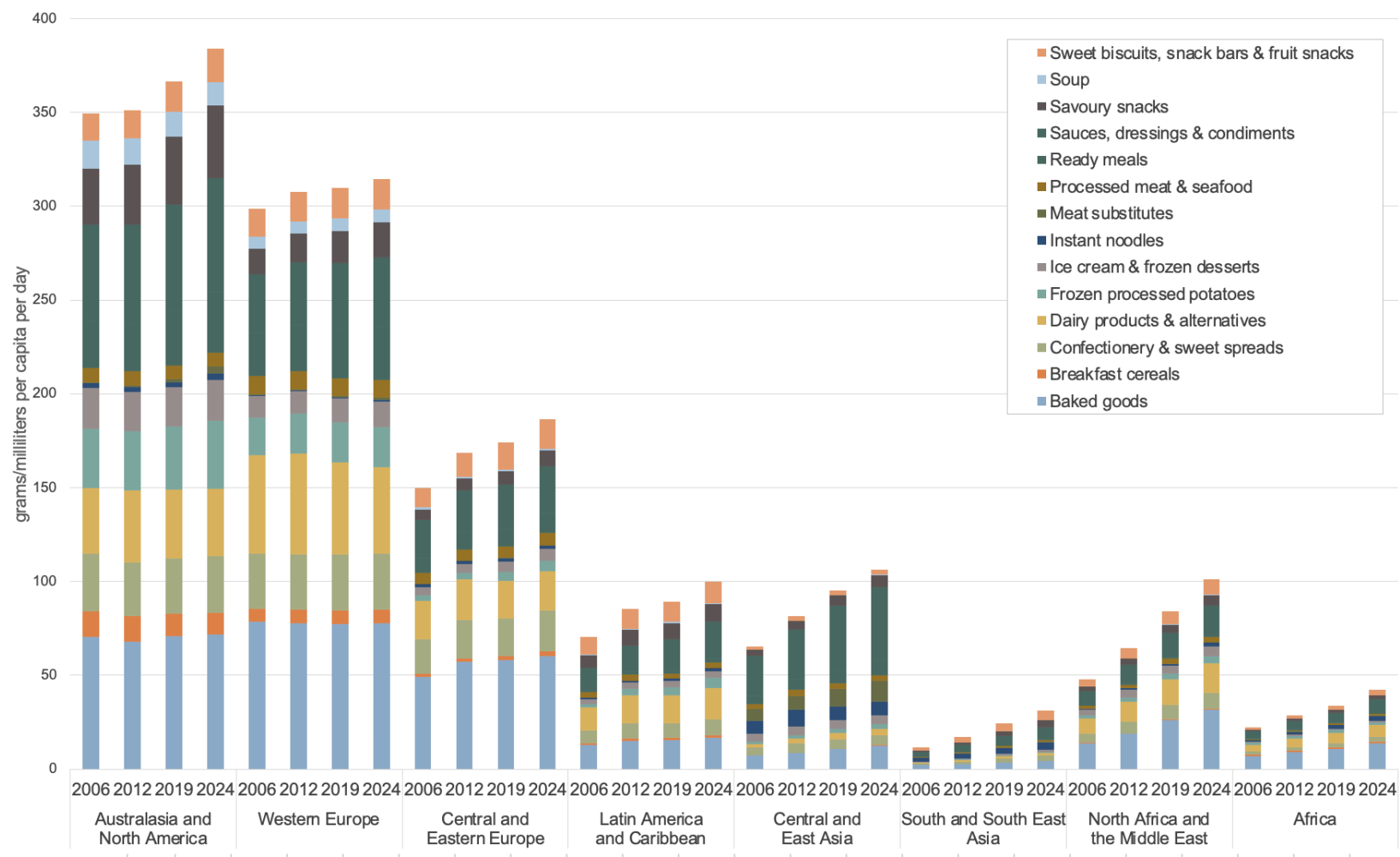
% of the population who cannot afford a healthy diet



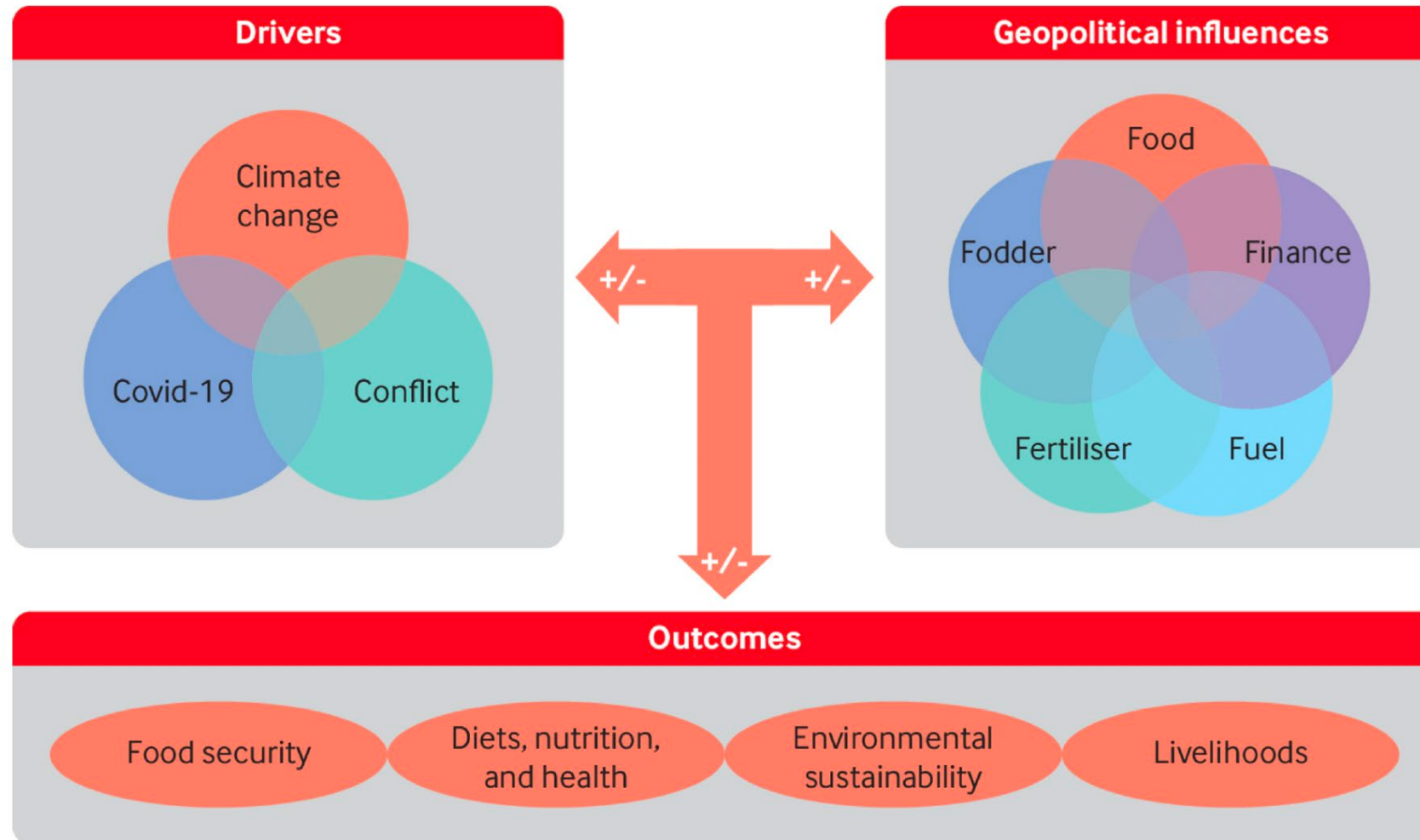
2.8 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet!

The types of foods available are not optimal

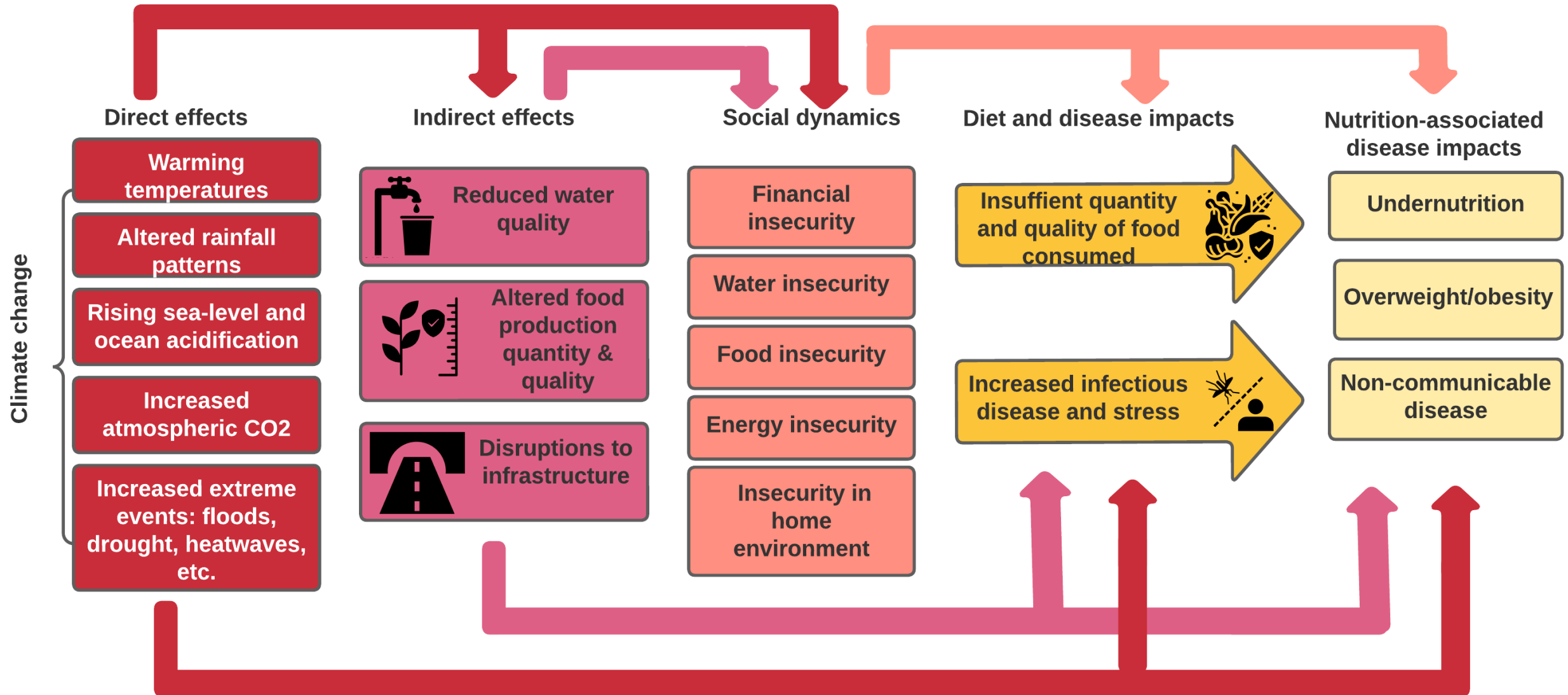
Sales of ultra-processed food (kg/capita, 2006-2024)



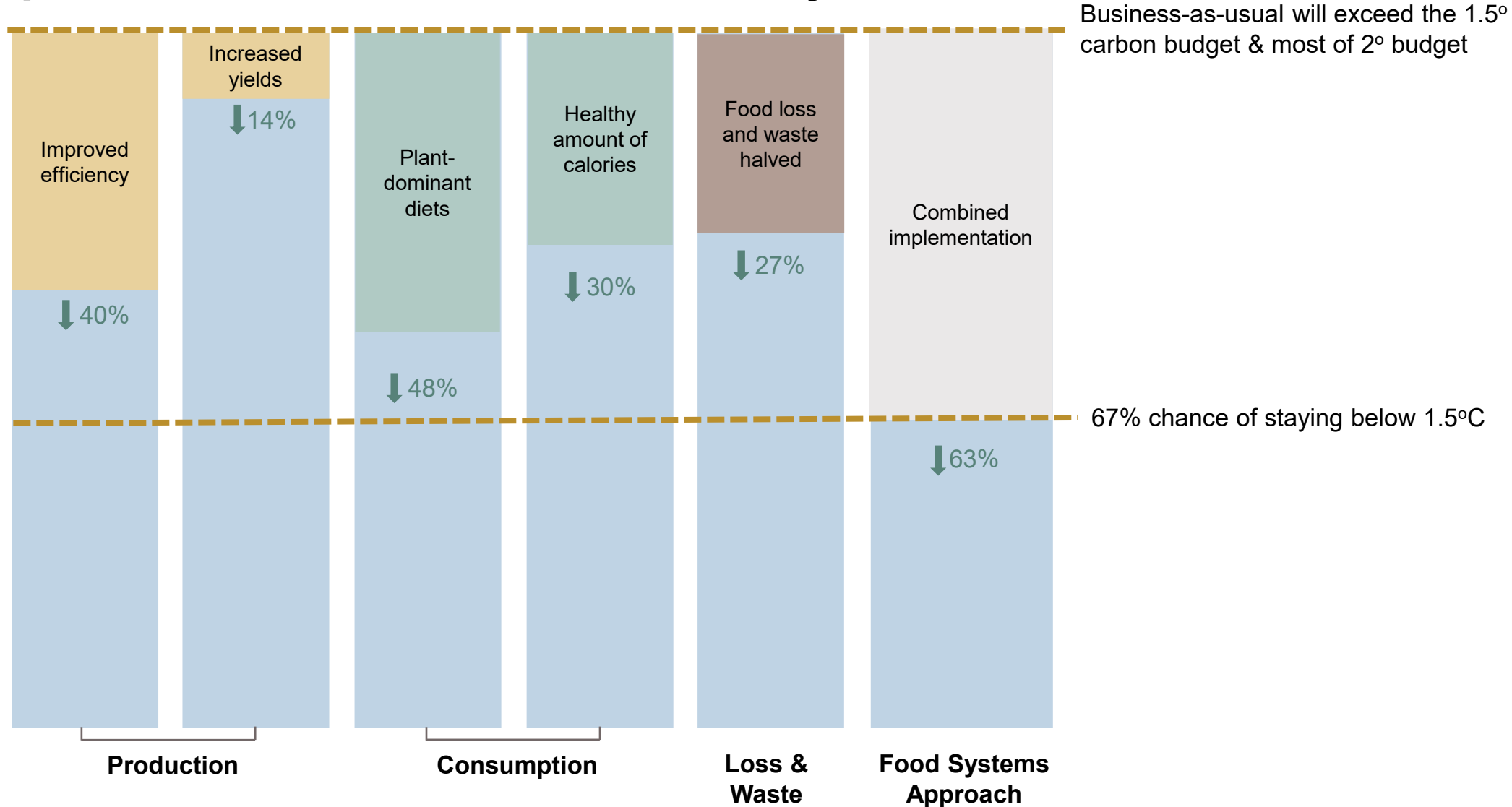
Yet, for food systems to deliver healthy diets, we need to recognize & unlock their constraints



Climate change is & will continue to be a significant stress on food systems, diet quality and nutrition outcomes



Achieving the Paris climate change targets requires multi-level food systems action



How anti-fatness crept into the environmental sustainability movement



📷 A growing body of research seeks to connect people's weight to their environmental impact Illustration: Blake Cale

As more literature and scientific studies link obesity to environmental harms, it becomes yet another way people are stigmatized due to body size

Most viewed

Need to implement a host of policies and actions

Agricultural production



- **Diversification** - Incentives for horticulture and crop diversification
- **Adaptation** - Crop insurance and access to credit
- **Technology** - Investment in R&D and technology
- **Subsidies** - Policies that promote nutritious crops

Processing & Transport



- **Reformulation** - healthier ingredients in food processing
- **Standards** – setting standards in food (salt, fat quantity in meat)
- **Fortification** - adding nutrients to staple foods
- **Processing** - fermenting, preserving, processing to enhance the nutritional content of foods
- **Cold chain storage and transport** – ensuring perishable foods do not rot and are safe for sale to avoid loss

Food environments



- **Economic incentives** – taxing unhealthy foods and subsidizing healthy foods
- **Access innovations** – remove barriers and facilitate to access (e.g. junk food free check-outs), zoning laws
- **Reaching youth** - Farm-to-school programs, school meal programs, school gardens
- **Community cohesion** - Community gardens and farms

Labeling and Promotion



- **Labels** - Improved labeling (leads to product reformulation)
- **Advertising** - Restrictions on food marketing
- **Messages** - Mass media campaigns

Thank you!

j.fanzo@columbia.edu

JESSICA FANZO

Can Fixing Dinner Fix the Planet?



JOHNS HOPKINS
WAVELENGTHS