

Shaping Food Futures Through Food Environment Transformations

FETE Project Partners Gather in Malaysia to Drive Change

By Nurul 'Ain Azizan and Melissa Kam Yit Yee

In the bustling city of Kuala Lumpur, researchers and students from across three continents convened from 18 to 20 August 2025 for the Food Environments in Transitioning Economies (FETE) project annual workshop. The event was hosted by the University of Nottingham Malaysia (UNM) at the Grand Millennium Hotel, bringing together around 33 participants from the project's partner institutions. These included the Science, Technology and Policy Research Institute, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR-STEPRI) (Ghana), University of Nottingham Malaysia (Malaysia), University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), and Sokoine University of Agriculture (Tanzania), along with the coordinating team from the Thünen Institute of Market Analysis (Germany).



Photo 1: The team behind the FETE project

This year's workshop distinguished itself not only for its productive sessions, but also for the vibrant energy and shared purpose among participants. Eleven postgraduate students, who had previously participated in the project's Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) programme, played a central role in the workshop. They shared emerging findings, and offered reflections on the DTP, emphasising how the experience enhanced their critical analysis and communication skills.



Photo 2: Professor Festo Massawe from UNM, lead of the Malaysian consortium partner, shares his insights on the project’s progress and direction



Photo 3: Zodidi Cebiso, a postgraduate student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, reflects on her experience taking part in the DTP programme

Throughout the three-day gathering, teams from each country provided updates on their ongoing fieldwork, data collection efforts, and preliminary insights, facilitating a rich cross-country dialogue. The discussions were open and constructive, with participants exchanging ideas on various topics, including methodological tools and fieldwork challenges. This collaborative approach laid the foundation for more coherent and comparable research outputs within the FETE network.



Photo 4: One of the many brainstorming moments during the FETE Project Annual Workshop 2025

A notable achievement of the workshop was the collaborative effort to align methodologies and refining analytical frameworks. These conversations were key to ensuring that research findings from different contexts can be meaningfully compared and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of food environments in transitioning economies. Topics such as dietary patterns, consumer choices, and market dynamics sparked particularly insightful exchanges.

Adding excitement to the week's activities, the University of KwaZulu-Natal team announced that the next International Symposium on Food Environments (ISFE) will be held in Pretoria, South Africa, in August 2026. The symposium will provide a global platform for disseminating findings from the FETE research project and engaging with broader audience of academics, policymakers, and practitioners involved in food systems and nutrition.

To conclude the workshop on a cultural note, participants embarked on a journey to a cultural and historical city of Malacca, a UNESCO World Heritage city celebrated for its historical significance and culinary diversity. The guided tour was more than a sightseeing excursion, it provided an opportunity for informal interactions, reflection on local food environments, and firsthand experience of the cultural nuances that shape everyday food choices in Malaysia.



Photo 5: Group photo at the Christ Church, a landmark of Malacca’s colonial history

Looking back, the FETE Project Annual Workshop 2025 not only served as a space for sharing research progress, reflection and strategic planning but also celebrated collaboration, learning, and shared commitment. With clearer pathways forward and strengthened partnerships among stakeholders, the project is well-positioned to translate research into real-world impact in its final phase.

Photo credit: Sayed Mohammadhossein Modaresi/University of Nottingham Malaysia