

Feeding the next generation:

stamping out malnutrition in women and children



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To help tackle the significant concerns around malnutrition and stunting in children and infants in Madagascar, five local and French organisations formed the social enterprise Nutri'Zaza. This Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Madagascar member provides nutrient-dense, accessible, and affordable foods for mothers and children in poor, disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, whilst also tackling the lack of economic opportunities for these communities.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), stunting is a major problem in Madagascar. It is the fifth most affected country in the world, with an estimated [47% of children under the age of five](#) – around two million – impacted. The effects of undernutrition, stunting, and malnutrition are the most devastating during the first 1,000 days of life. Irreversible damage during this period lasts into adulthood, with consequences including physical and mental disabilities.

Preventing malnutrition is therefore a priority, especially among mothers, women of childbearing age, and children aged between six and 24 months old. With the drivers of malnutrition including a lack of economic opportunities and access to affordable and nutritious foods, Produits TAF Madagascar, APEM, Solidarité Internationale pour le Développement et l'Investissement, Investisseurs & Partenaires, and GRET founded Nutri'Zaza in 2013 to address this social and nutritional problem.

Their aim was to provide employment and income to vulnerable communities in urban areas, while simultaneously filling a gap in the market for fortified, highly-nutritious cereals and foods for young children and infants. Eight years on, the enterprise now develops and distributes its fortified foods throughout the country.

"The smile on the face of your customers is the best indicator of your success. When you get that smile, you know you are on the right path."

Mandresy Randriamiharisoa,
CEO, Nutri'Zaza

Supporting mothers to create positive change

To reach mothers and children in poor urban areas and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, Nutri'Zaza took a novel approach: setting up 34 'baby' restaurants. Known as 'Hotelin-jazakely', mothers can seek advice and buy fortified food and ready-made porridge for children under the age of five, including Nutri'Zaza's flagship product, Koba Aina. This was specifically designed to be an affordable, enhanced baby food to complement breast milk, intended for children over six months.

"We constantly listen to remarks from mothers related to the quality and taste of Koba Aina. We also rely on their advice about where to establish new restaurants," explains Mandresy Randriamiharisoa, Nutri'Zaza's CEO.

Made from rice, soya, maize, and spinach, Koba Aina is high in energy, and includes strawberry, banana, and mineral salts, including iodised salt, calcium, and vitamins A, B3, B12, B9, C, D and E. The product is made using local raw materials, and production is compliant with international standards. It is also the first fortified infant flour certified by the National Food Fortification Agency and the National Office of Nutrition in Madagascar.

In addition to being sold in the baby restaurants, Koba Aina is distributed in individual packs to stores. “The product is as cheap as it can be. We take the least commercial margin possible, being a social enterprise,” explains Mandresy. “Our pricing strategy aims to reach families with the lowest income. Nonetheless, sales cover all the costs needed to sustain the business. This low price is really part of the business model.”

As their products are targeted at women, Mandresy reveals that one of Nutri’Zaza’s main strategies is to only employ women in the restaurants and as sales agents. Since the start of 2021, the company has created 100 new jobs, with 70% of these for women.

Furthermore, she adds, “We are the only firm in the market to sell cooked products directly to consumers. Our sales agents are trained to comply with strict safety and hygiene rules, and we also control problems related to the safety of the water used to cook Koba Aina.”

Making a big impact

The company aims to be the largest distributor of good quality foods for infants, and works in collaboration with the Urban Municipality of the country’s capital city, Antananarivo, to support distribution of its products (along with soap) to vulnerable communities. Currently, the business can produce 10 million fortified meals and 600 tonnes of fortified foods per year. Since 2015, more than 9 million units of Koba Aina have been distributed across 33 municipalities in Antananarivo.

Nutri’Zaza supplies Koba Aina to 8,200 local stores, and regular information campaigns targeted towards young mothers are conducted through a neighbourhood tour approach. “Our advice to other entrepreneurs is to understand what customers value and then build trust in your



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product. It was not easy at the start, but now we have built trust among our customers which has helped increase sales,” explains Mandresy.

Growth in the face of challenges

“When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Madagascar in 2020, we could work only half of the day, because of the movement restrictions put in place,” recalls Mandresy. “This affected our sales, but we got funds from a partner which allowed us to subsidise the food and cut its cost by one third, allowing people to buy it as

a staple. This helped raise product awareness, and people were able to consume it every day.” Sales have since increased by 20% per month.

Another challenge is market competition from other brands which sell similar but less nutritious products, and helping customers appreciate the value of fortified and enriched foods. “Many people don’t understand what a fortified product is,” notes Mandresy. Their solution is to conduct information campaigns through their one-on-one sales representatives to increase awareness.

Thinking ahead with new tech additions

Being an SBN member has strengthened the group’s position as a social enterprise. And, as a finalist of the Global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Pitch Competition, the team were supported in strengthening their capacity to develop expansion strategies; with upcoming plans including investments in ICTs,

transportation, and GPS technology to track tangible assets and progress. This investment will help improve logistics across the company, allowing them to gather data and build more efficient distribution models.

“The women selling our product are now going out of restaurants and down narrow back streets where our clients live; and these areas are hard for us to track,” explains Mandresy. “With the right technology, we want to track where our clients are and the number of products they have bought, to understand potentially how many children have been reached and map our impact.”

In the future, Nutri’Zaza aims to attract further investment to improve its logistics, and eventually reach 12,000 children per day in 45 districts and 200 urban districts of major Madagascan cities. Their ultimate target is to distribute 18 million fortified meals annually to children under five years of age.



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