

Collaboration in Kenya:

a common voice for the private sector and civil society in nutrition



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Kenya is relying on partnerships between government, the private sector, and civil society to scale up nutrition-sensitive interventions and address the triple burden of malnutrition: undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity. Through collaboration between the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement's Business Network and Civil Society Alliance, the country is making huge strides towards improving nutrition for its population.

Of Kenya's 7.22 million children under five years old, nearly [1.8 million are stunted](#) and 794,200 are overweight. In addition to the health crisis this poses, undernutrition will cost the country an estimated [USD 38.3 billion](#) in gross domestic product losses by 2030.

The Kenyan government has identified collaborations with nutrition-sensitive businesses as a strategy to address the nutrition crisis and ensure provision of affordable, safe, and nutritious foods. The SUN Movement has been key to this, and SUN Kenya's private sector-led network, the SUN Business Network (SBN), is especially crucial. With 106 members, the majority of them small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in value chains including dairy, cereals, and horticulture, SBN Kenya helps businesses supply safe and nutritious foods to consumers, especially the most vulnerable, to help reduce malnutrition.

"We have a common goal in terms of what we want to achieve to reduce malnutrition, which allows for seamless working. We know what we want and we believe we can only achieve it when we work together."

Charles Opiyo, SBN Kenya Coordinator

One of SBN Kenya's critical partnerships is with the [SUN Civil Society Alliance](#) (SUN CSA) Kenya, which works with civil society organisations and local communities to influence and advocate for improved nutrition. The partnership encourages investment in nutrition by national and county governments, and promotes information sharing to enhance collaboration and links between SUN CSA, SBN Kenya, and other actors in the nutrition field.

Aligning agendas

To harmonise nutrition interventions and ensure they form strong advocacy networks, the two networks devised positions for each other's representation in their respective Executive Secretariats, the advisory groups which provide strategic guidance.

SUN CSA was also actively involved in drafting the SBN Kenya Strategy 2019-2023, which recognises the role of the private sector in making safe and nutritious food available and affordable. "We share information, advice, and ideas, with the goal of fast-tracking our nutrition agenda, which is such an important area to be left to one institution alone," says Edgar Okoth, SUN CSA Kenya National Coordinator.

Collaborating on advocacy initiatives

To strengthen political engagement and broaden accountability among the political class, SBN Kenya and SUN CSA engaged in advocacy activities. These have led to the establishment of a parliamentary caucus on food and nutrition security in the national assembly and senate, through which they engage lawmakers on commitments in resource allocation to the nutrition sector. The same approach has been championed on a county level through engagement and, as a result, high

representatives in parliament have connected with nutrition actors, including SMEs, to understand their needs.

To support the government, SBN Kenya and SUN CSA have been actively involved in drafting policy documents as well as sitting on various technical national nutrition and food security committees. “These kinds of engagements give us opportunities to influence the national level advocacy initiatives,” says Charles Opiyo, SBN Kenya National Coordinator. The organisations have also assisted in developing, implementing, and launching nutrition action plans at the local level that have been adopted by both national and county governments.

Driving forward nutrition-led initiatives

Working with the Ministry of Finance, SBN Kenya and SUN CSA helped prepare the 2019 Cost of Hunger Study. This is an African Union-led initiative that seeks to estimate the economic and social impacts of child undernutrition, while highlighting gaps in nutrition financing. As a result of the report’s recommendations and the organisations’ advocacy, over Ksh 300 million (USD 2,782,931) has been mobilised for nutrition programmes from government investment and external aid.

SBN Kenya and SUN CSA have also been working with the Ministry of Agriculture to develop ‘One Million Kitchen Gardens’. This initiative involves drafting kitchen garden manuals targeted at individuals and institutions, the establishment of a kitchen garden training site to demonstrate the various technologies involved, and supporting the establishment of one million gardens across Kenya.

“The initiative seeks to make the production of nutritious food easy and hassle-free. At a time



when food prices remain volatile and farming land is becoming limited, we want to encourage more people to embrace new technologies that optimise land use, while ensuring they are able to grow the right kind of food and diversify their diets,” explains Edgar. SBN Kenya provided technical assistance, including materials and text for drafting the manuals, and shared expertise and skills in establishing the kitchen gardens. Meanwhile, SUN CSA has been involved in building awareness of the kitchen gardens concept among communities across various counties.

In a strategic move to engage communities, the organisations are working with 48 local community media stations and four national outlets to disseminate various nutrition-related messages, including the value of kitchen gardens in boosting household nutrition and income through reduced expenses on food.

Supporting communities during COVID-19

As is often the case, limited financing has posed a barrier and led to the scaling down of many interventions the two organisations were keen to pursue. With growing demand for nutrition at county level, Edgar says it becomes difficult to decide where to prioritise. However, they have mobilised resources through their individual network members to cover the financing deficits, and are working with regional economic blocs formed by bordering counties to easily and effectively reach more people.

To assist their members and the community in the wake of the pandemic, SBN Kenya and SUN CSA have been running a COVID-19 response initiative. This has included supporting the training of community health volunteers, and purchasing and distributing personal protective equipment that has been used by 4,000 health

workers. COVID-19 and nutrition messages, such as the importance of good nutrition in boosting immunity, have also been translated into 10 different local languages and distributed to various regions; while similar messages have been disseminated through radio and television to 14 million people.

Growth for the future

SBN Kenya and SUN CSA are working on a proposal which seeks to converge their objectives under one framework and accelerate their vision of upscaling nutrition in the country. This will also make it easier to seek funding on the initiatives they pursue.

Plus, the organisations are developing joint campaigns to push for the uptake of 'One Million Kitchen Gardens' to promote diet diversification, which had been hindered by COVID-19.

The two networks are also involved in a couple of upcoming events crucial to food systems and nutrition: the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) and the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit. Each is assuming various roles in the preparations for each of these events, to ensure they are as effective as possible.



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