

# Merging the private sector and civil society: *nourishing Tanzania's schoolchildren*



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*As Tanzania looks for strategies to tackle hunger and nutrition challenges, it is betting on public-private partnerships as a key approach. One such collaboration is being championed by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Business and Civil Society Networks in Tanzania through the provision of fortified school meals in two areas that have some of the highest malnutrition rates in the country.*

An estimated 32% of children under five years of age in Tanzania suffer from chronic malnutrition, while 29% of women between 15 and 49 years are anaemic. Furthermore, the country remains unable to realise its economic potential due to poor nutrition, to the amount of an [estimated USD 20 billion](#).

To address this challenge and drive the national nutrition agenda, Tanzania's SUN Business Network (SBN) has joined with the [Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania](#) (PANITA), a coalition of over 300 local and international civil society organisations that have raised the profile of nutrition in both national and regional governments, among members of their networks, and throughout the Tanzanian population. PANITA was a natural choice for this collaboration following past successful initiatives and programmes of the two organisations.

## **Promoting the school feeding initiative**

SBN Tanzania, PANITA, and ONA Enterprise, a private sector institution that runs nutrition awareness campaigns, have been implementing nutrition interventions following generous grant support from the [SUN Movement Pooled Fund](#).

These initiatives started in March 2020 and target local governments, school children, teachers, parents, and local communities with the objective of improving nutrition in Kagera

*"The success of this project stems from our collaboration and shared vision with PANITA to inspire a nutrition revolution across all corners of Tanzania and ensure we leave no one behind."*

Haika Maleko,  
SBN Tanzania Coordinator

and Tanga, regions of Tanzania that have some of the highest malnutrition cases in the country, with stunting rates among children under five years of age at 31.8% and 49% respectively.

To drive success of the project, the collaboration has leveraged on each partner's strengths and comparative advantages. For example, PANITA specialises in working with government authorities and affecting policy agendas through awareness-generating activities, while ONA boasts a certain expertise in youth, gender and community engagement, and school sensitisation campaigns. Meanwhile, SBN Tanzania works primarily to mobilise the private sector in supporting the national nutrition agenda, and thus is able to build on this experience to harness private sector engagement in this initiative.

## **Accelerating nutrition commitments**

SBN Tanzania provided schools with fortified maize and other food products rich in vitamins A, B12, and iron, by training 18 millers and food vendors to fortify their products. Connecting them to nutritionists provided further training and facilitated the provision of their fortified maize directly to the schools. The initiative also carried out a series of activities in schools,



including cooking demonstrations, the planting of vegetable gardens, and food clubs, and engaged with school administrations and local governments. By December 2020, the initiative had supplied 12,000 children in 30 schools with healthy school meals.

PANITA's experience in working with Local Government Authorities (LGAs) in Tanga and Kagera ensured the project was inclusive and widely adopted in these regions and could be continued and replicated. Specifically, PANITA worked with LGAs to raise their understanding of nutrition and encourage them to prioritise nutrition in government plans and budgets at council level. The organisation did this through conducting sensitisation workshops on the importance of child and adolescent nutrition, and the use of fortified foods, such as salt, wheat flour, and maize flour. These foods provide crucial additional amounts of iron, zinc, and vitamins A and B12 to the diets of school-going children. These meetings, hosted in partnership with SBN Tanzania, also aimed to generate political interest and commitments to nutrition, and engaged over 100 local government officials including the Regional Medical Officer, Regional Nutrition Officer, Regional Education Officer, Regional Health Officer, and school heads.

Meanwhile, ONA drove the nutrition agenda in schools by meeting with authorities and school committees to introduce the concept of improved nutrition by including fortified foods and fresh vegetables in school meals, and educating and advocating for child nutrition. The project provided training – run by the Lishe Yangu Initiative, one of ONA's flagship programmes – on basic nutrition skills and food safety for staff and students. Meanwhile, students were taught how to plant various vegetables in their school gardens, which were then used to supplement the nutritious school feeding programmes. Furthermore, sensitisation



meetings and cooking demonstrations were hosted to create awareness on the correct preparation of nutritious food among teachers, parents, and local authority representatives.

PANITA and ONA then developed advocacy materials, including a guide highlighting specific project interventions and how the activities were implemented, which are being used in other nutrition campaigns targeting schools and other regions of Tanzania.

## Cementing success

Although the initiative has ended, the school gardens are still being implemented, and the school meal programmes, which now have a stronger focus on diet diversification and continue to include fortified flour, remain in place. "School gardens are a game changer. They ensure that schools are able to reduce the cost of buying food for students while guaranteeing diet diversification and quality of food," said Jane Msagati, Programme Coordinator at PANITA.

A key factor in successful implementation was the involvement of the government at both the national and grassroots level. This ensured governments felt they were part of the project from its planning to its execution, and gave policymakers a chance to establish commitments in their zones to ensure access to nutrition for all. Involving all players, including children, their parents, schools, and food suppliers, has also created ripple effects beyond the initiative, as they are able to spread the nutrition message in their communities, and the suppliers have now embraced fortification in their other ventures.

## Tackling challenges

COVID-19 posed serious obstacles during the project's early stages, particularly as the implementation phase coincided with the identification of the first cases of COVID-19 in Tanzania and the subsequent closure of schools and postponement of gatherings. The roll out also coincided with political campaigns for the presidential elections, so some local community members associated the project with the political parties and were hesitant to

embrace it. To overcome these perceptions, community representatives were used to counter misinformation and raise awareness.

## Strategies for success

While Tanga and Kagera regions were chosen to pilot the initiative, SBN, PANITA, and ONA believe that, to achieve a more significant country-wide impact, increased funding is critical. With this in mind, SBN Tanzania and PANITA held follow-up meetings with regional governments to discuss how the programme can be scaled in other areas, which was met with enthusiasm. Additional support would also help to sustain the established food clubs, school gardens, and feeding programmes.

“Our hope, ultimately, is to see the seeds we planted in Tanga and Kagera replicated in other regions of Tanzania, and to bring everyone on board to cultivate affordable and innovative practices that will improve the health of our children, create opportunities for our people, and ensure the wellbeing of our nation,” states Jane.



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