

Accelerating private sector action for improved nutrition: a compendium of case studies



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About SBN

Since 2010, the SUN Movement has inspired a new way of working collaboratively to end malnutrition, in all its forms. With the governments of 63 SUN Countries in the lead, it unites people – from civil society, the United Nations, donors, businesses and researchers – in a collective effort to improve nutrition. Established in 2013, the SUN Business Network (SBN) is the private sector branch of the SUN Movement and aims to support businesses in growing the role they play in improving nutrition and to support SUN countries in developing national business engagement strategies. SBN is co-convened by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

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SBN case study series

The SBN Case Study Series highlights SBN initiatives and partners that are making valuable inputs towards improving the consumption of nutritious, safe food for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

Rue de Varembe 7,
1202 Geneva Switzerland

T: (+41) 22 749 18 50

E: info@gainhealth.org

www.gainhealth.org

United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)

Via C. G. Viola 68, Parco dei Medici,
00148 Rome, Italy

Tel: (+39) 345 177 1531

E: info@wfp.org

www.wfp.org



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Executive summary

The nutrition crisis is a worldwide concern: according to the [2020 Global Nutrition Report](#), not one country is on track to reach all 10 of the global nutrition targets set for 2025. In fact, nutrition-related concerns – from micro-nutrient deficiencies to obesity – are as prevalent as ever, so taking action to tackle these remains critical. The food and agriculture industries are a primary area of focus through which to drive positive change, as by providing people with access to affordable, nutrition-rich foods, we can ultimately help prevent said issues from even occurring.

The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Business Network (SBN) is taking steps to transform food systems and contribute to improved nutrition by convening the private sector around nutrition in [SUN countries](#). Established in 2010, SBN is co-convened by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), with an overall purpose to reduce malnutrition in all its forms by mobilising the private sector to commit to and invest in improved business practices that contribute to national nutrition priorities.

SBN currently convenes over 1,000 members across more than 20 national networks in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and provides opportunities for partnerships to form and flourish between members and partners in support of improved private sector engagement in nutrition.

The case studies in this document highlight just some of the SBN members and initiatives that have made valuable contributions towards enhanced nutrition outcomes. To tackle malnutrition, SBN members are engaging in a variety of approaches – each of which has been grouped into the following ‘thematic’ areas:

- **Gender:** Women are helping lead the charge to improve nutrition, yet many face an array of barriers in achieving

success. This chapter unpacks how SBN is supporting the improvement of gender equity in food systems whilst highlighting women entrepreneurs in its networks, their challenges, and journeys to success.

- **Innovation:** The development and adoption of novel approaches is critical in addressing the complex issue of malnutrition. This chapter documents how SBN initiatives are fostering the innovation ecosystem for SMEs in food systems, and showcases entrepreneurs within its networks that are taking the leap to innovate in everything from food fortification to cold storage solutions.
- **Resilience:** From climate shocks, political instability, and changes in consumer habits, to COVID-19, actors throughout the food chain must evolve and adapt to succeed. In addition to ways in which SBN is helping its members develop greater resilience, these case studies document just some of the obstacles SMEs have faced and the steps they have taken to overcome them.
- **Partnerships:** Brokering strategic partnership across food systems actors is instrumental in driving collective action, investment, resources, and commitment to addressing national nutrition priorities. The case studies in this chapter highlight a few of the strategic partnerships SBN has helped facilitate.

In addition to providing examples of success, we hope the case studies act as valuable learning resources – demonstrating how to engage and support the private sector and the benefits of doing so. A well-rounded approach is key for long-term success and, with commitment and contributions from actors throughout the food chain, we can achieve better nutrition outcomes for all.

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Gender

Operating a business in the agriculture and food sector in low- to middle-income countries (LMICs) can be difficult, especially for women who are disproportionately affected by challenges faced by entrepreneurs in starting and running a business in these sectors¹. As such, in many countries, there are fewer women entrepreneurs – in India, Africa, and the Middle East, the number of women-owned businesses is [lower than 15%](#) – and their businesses tend to experience slower growth.

Women entrepreneurs face a number of challenges. Time is a key hurdle – women have disproportionately higher burdens of unpaid work, including household chores and childcare. After these tasks have been completed, there may not be enough time to initiate or operate a business.

They also face issues obtaining start-up capital. This can sometimes be due to a lack of awareness around how to access finance, but often results from not being able to fulfil eligibility criteria set by lenders and investors including having collateral. Those not fortunate enough to have such access – such as BabyGrubz, in Nigeria, and Sanavita, in Tanzania – are often forced to use their own savings and loans from family and friends.

Girls and women continue to receive less formal education than boys and men. Without the basic skills and knowledge gained during this time – such as literacy and numeracy – they remain at a disadvantage when launching and running a business. Mobility also poses a challenge, with risk of violence, costly transport services, and strict societal rules all preventing women from venturing further afield to network and sell products.

Finally, laws and policies upheld by certain countries also act as barriers – with factors

such as restrictive rights and identification cards preventing women from exploring their workplace potential.

Yet, despite these hurdles, there are strong examples of thriving women-led businesses in food systems. Feed Me, for instance, initially offered a healthy meal service in Bangladesh, serving over 1,200 clients, before launching a range of nutritious snack bars.

Some successful women-led SMEs are going full-circle – focusing on improving working conditions and opportunities for women in employment, and creating products to ensure the nutritional needs of this gender are successfully met. NutriZaza, in Madagascar, has created roles for female ‘sales agents’ to distribute nutritious foods for infants and their mothers, while, in Tanzania, Sanavita has been partnering with women farmers and creating roles for women within communities to act as ‘nutrition ambassadors’.

On a larger scale, SBN Laos and the National Nutrition Centre developed the workforce nutrition initiative. This is a set of guidelines designed for employers in a variety of sectors, with the aim of ensuring women employees are able to access and obtain optimum nutrition and feeding support in the workplace.

To develop transformative approaches, both men and women must work to address the stereotypes and biases that exist around women with regards to their roles in business, the division of labour inside and outside the home, and interactions with the opposite gender. By providing support – through means such as training, mentoring, networking, finance opportunities, and encouraging more equitable policies – we can help them achieve this and obtain lasting change.

Feeding the next generation:

*stamping out malnutrition
in women and children*



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



© Nutri’Zaza

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.



For more information contact:
Thierry Nohasariavelo,
SBN Madagascar Coordinator
thierry.nohasariavelo@wfp.org

Jolenta's big dream:

*tackling malnutrition in Tanzania
using biofortified foods*



A rise in malnutrition cases among children in rural Tanzania, combined with poor market access for farmers, inspired Jolenta Joseph to launch her nutrition-related enterprise in 2017. [Sanavita](#), a Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Tanzania member, started out selling orange-fleshed sweet potatoes (OFSP) to consumers, but has evolved to add value to OFSP, beans and maize.

Across Tanzania, micronutrient deficiencies represent a significant threat to public health. Iron deficiency, for example, affects up to 58% of children below five years of age, and 45% of women aged 15-49 years. Similarly, 33% of children aged six months to five years are deficient in vitamin A, making Tanzania one of the most nutrition-insecure nations in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Sanavita, a women-led small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME), is working to address this by collaborating with smallholder farmers to provide nutritious food products for the community. Sanavita partners with more than 2,000 farmers to produce highly nutritious biofortified crops, including OFSP, soybeans, pro-Vitamin A maize, and high-iron and -zinc beans, which are then processed into OFSP flour, biscuits and purees, bread, soya flour, and pro-vitamin A flour. Sanavita sells its products in local shops, supermarkets and markets, targeting women of

"We are proud to be working with women to address their nutritional needs and promote dietary diversification, while economically empowering them by giving them a ready market."

Jolenta Joseph, Founder, Sanavita

childbearing age, lactating mothers and school-age children, who have significant nutritional needs and are most at risk of developing micronutrient deficiencies.

Scaling up with added value

While working on a nutrition awareness programme as part of her university studies, Jolenta was concerned by the growing cases of malnutrition among children in rural Tanzania. At the same time, the International Potato Center introduced OFSP as an alternative to maize. Uptake by farmers was so successful that markets quickly became saturated, and making a profit became increasingly difficult.

"I noticed the large swathes of land being used for OFSP production and the farmers' struggle in getting their produce to market," she says. "That became my light bulb moment." She approached 10 farmers in Morogoro who agreed to supply her with OFSP, on the condition that she would provide a consistent and ready market. With a steady supply, Sanavita became an officially-registered enterprise in 2019.

After gaining approval from the Tanzania Food and Drug Authority to begin processing OFSP flour, Jolenta was admitted to the Sokoine University Graduate Entrepreneurs Cooperative (SUGECO), an agriculture incubator that gives Sanavita access to milling and solar drying machines and laboratory services at a subsidised rate. In 2020, Sanavita also received support from SBN, after winning the GAIN Food Technology Innovation Prize at the 2020 Global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Pitch Competition, which enabled Jolenta to purchase new equipment, increase volumes and product ranges, and boost the company's customer base. An electric chopping machine allows Sanavita to more than triple the amount of OFSP cut per hour, whilst a bag-sealing machine has doubled

"We are really delighted for what Sanavita has accomplished by setting examples to nutritious food businesses, particularly to other female entrepreneurs."

Haika Maleko,
SBN Tanzania Coordinator

the amount of flour sales per month, as the company is able to package different quantities of flour for a wider range of customers, including wholesalers, local markets and shops.

Women and children are the company's primary target consumers, and Sanavita also supports women in the wider community. The company has 18 employees, 13 of whom are women, and 40% of the farmers who supply Sanavita are women. To support women farmers, Sanavita holds training sessions on the importance of feeding their families with OFSP in order to boost household nutrition. The SME also provides the farmers with a guaranteed market in a bid to support women-led agribusinesses and, through schools and health centres, Sanavita has been helping women become nutrition ambassadors within their local communities.

Small business, big impact

To convey the importance of biofortified foods, Sanavita runs nutrition awareness campaigns on local radio and TV stations, social media platforms, and at public gatherings. These campaigns are complemented by nutrition education and cooking demonstrations in schools and, so far, the company has reached 20,000 people.

To expand its markets and impact on nutrition, Sanavita issues all products with barcodes and



is in the process of acquiring Tanzania Bureau of Standards marks of quality, which will enable their products to reach more large retail stores and export markets. From an initial 1,500 customers in Morogoro when the SME started in 2009, Sanavita's reach grew to 5,000 in 2020, and by early 2021 it stood at an estimated 10,000 across Tanzania.

Rising to challenges

Despite Sanavita's success, its journey has not been without some challenges. The SME has struggled with insufficient supply of raw materials to match growing demand for its products. To counter this, Sanavita has been recruiting more farmers under a contract

farming system, while giving them competitive market rates for their produce.

Financial institutions can often be less supportive of women-led businesses, which Jolenta experienced when she tried to access credit facilities. From prohibitive interest rates to a request for collateral that she didn't have, it was an uphill task to secure financial support. She initially relied on her own savings, before using SUGECO's milling machines and laboratory services at a subsidised rate. This helped her grow the business until she was able to access formal financing.

When the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic first struck Tanzania, Sanavita lost wholesale buyers and schools, which were some of its largest customers. To insulate the business from the effects of the pandemic, the company began targeting customers on social media platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and making deliveries to local shops and homes.

A bright future

- Moving forward, Sanavita aims to strengthen its partnerships with actors in Tanzania who are implementing different nutrition programmes, among them Save the Children and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).

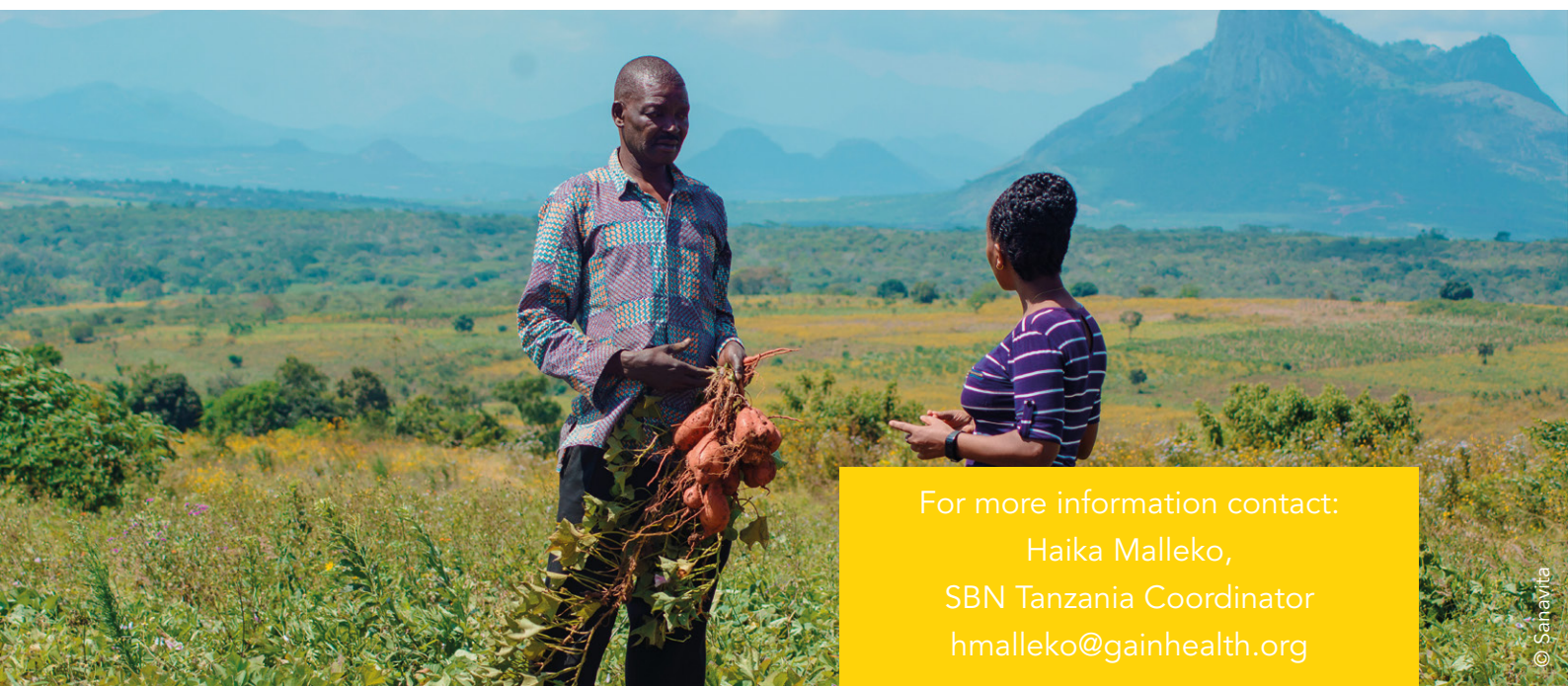
- Due to growing demand, Jolenta hopes that Sanavita will soon be able to expand operations to other major towns in Tanzania, including Arusha, Tanga and Kilimanjaro, and increase the range of biofortified foods it produces. Ultimately, the company is looking to venture into regional and export markets.

Jolenta's tips for success

Jolenta encourages entrepreneurs in the food sector to shape their businesses to respond to market needs, but also to change lives. She also advises investing to ensure products are of a high quality.

"Identify your niche, own your products, and find mentors who will support you in achieving your dreams," she says. "Having a mentor who works in your line of work is equally important, as they are able to guide you through the toughest hurdles, chief among them access to finance."

Jolenta believes in the power of numbers and encourages female entrepreneurs to form the networks that are pivotal in increasing access to finance. "Gaining exposure, through participating in various forums and interacting with other business people, especially entrepreneurs, can also help you learn how and where to access funding," she says.



For more information contact:
Haika Malleko,
SBN Tanzania Coordinator
hmalleko@gainhealth.org

Zarin's passion for nutrition:

*making healthy food an easier choice
in Bangladesh*



Struck by the high rates of malnutrition among female ready-made garment (RMG) industry workers, entrepreneur Zarin Rashid was inspired to set up Feed Me. The enterprise, and member of the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Bangladesh, has developed low-cost nutritious snacks to make tasty, nutritious food more accessible.

In Bangladesh, nutritious and safe foods are considered to be expensive and unavailable; hence for most of the low-income population they are seen as a luxury. This lack of access to nutritious food is one of the key factors behind Bangladesh's rising levels of non-communicable diseases and struggle in reaching the under-nutrition targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. National rates of anaemia in women are also high, at almost 40% of women under 49, but in the RMG industry, which is dominated by low-paid women, 77% suffer from anaemia due to their poor diets. Rates of anaemia for adolescents are also high, affecting almost half of girls aged between 15 and 19.

With a passion for health and fitness, and experience of working in her family's RMG factory, Zarin was struck by the rates of malnutrition among female RMG workers and their children. "I had the idea of making nutritious food as accessible as possible for everyone, and to teach people that nutrition

shouldn't be a luxury," she reveals. [Feed Me](#) started in 2019 as a 'passion project' for Zarin, after she moved back to Bangladesh from Canada. Initially, the company began by offering a meal preparation service that delivered healthy and nutritious meals to people in the capital, Dhaka. By the start of 2021, Feed Me had served meals to over 1,200 clients.

A year later, Zarin had developed a low-cost nutritious bar and drink, specifically targeting RMG workers. "I come from a background of manufacturing," Zarin explains. "My family's RMG factory employs 5,000 people, so I have an in-depth knowledge of the main target group. I was able to trial my products with the employees and, by improving the nutrition of workers, the factory has seen a direct impact on productivity."

Feed Me's NutriBar and NutriMix are carefully prepared with local, environmentally sustainable, and nutrient-dense ingredients, including brown wheat, lentils, bran, nuts, and dates. The products are rich in healthy fats (Omega-3 and Omega-6), antioxidants, vitamin B, and plant-based proteins and minerals, which are essential for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. "NutriBar and NutriMix are very affordable, convenient, and calorie-packed products everyone can enjoy," Zarin explains. Eight factories, employing over 40,000 workers, have already shown a keen interest in purchasing these products.

Utilising partnerships

"The RMG sector employs about 4.5 million people in Bangladesh; more than 43% are undernourished, and 76% are women," Zarin reveals. "This is a really important group of people to focus on, and improving their nutrition will only be possible through cross-sector collaboration." Winning Bangladesh's NutriStar Innovation Challenge in 2020 gave Feed Me access to a number of partners, who are helping

"The most exciting part of my work is feeling like I am making a difference for women, and getting the chance to actually see how their lives are getting better."

Zarin Rashid, Founder, Feed Me

increase the company's impact and reach. Organised by SBN Bangladesh, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the competition brought together 400 small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As a top 10 finalist, Feed Me received training on food safety and nutrition experts, business development, financial management, investor readiness, and communication skills.

Feed Me was crowned the overall winner, and received a cash prize of approximately USD 3,000, but has also continued to receive support from SBN Bangladesh. "There were times when I wanted to give up," Zarin reveals, "but SBN gave me hope that my idea could succeed, and they created a bridge to other organisations that have supported me." Welt Hunger Hilfe (a German non-governmental organisation, NGO) and the Bangladesh Institute of Research and Training on Applied Nutrition (BIRTAN), for example, have been working to assess the nutrition and flavour profiles of the products. The aim is to maximise the nutritional potential of each product and reduce the price to make the NutriBar and NutriMix as affordable as possible, so even those on a low wage can afford them. "The Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) is also helping to formulate the product using locally-grown, nutritious, and affordable ingredients, and increase shelf-life," Zarin explains. She hopes that the newly-formulated bar and drink will be available in early 2022.

Conquering hurdles

In addition to shutting down the meal preparation service for seven months, COVID-19 also created unexpected challenges in rolling out the NutriBar and NutriMix in RMG factories and through schools. Bangladesh has been severely affected by COVID-19, and many RMG factories



© SBN Bangladesh

have been hurt economically due to labour and supply chain disruptions. At a time when many of these companies are worried about their businesses staying afloat, it has been difficult to convince the management to make additional investments in nutritious bars and drinks. "Even though healthy workers mean a healthy business, many difficult decisions and cutbacks have delayed our plans to roll out," Zarin explains. "But we are using this time wisely – and part of that has been working with BAU to find a price point that works for customers but is also viable for our business operations."

Another serious challenge has been consumer education: helping customers, workers, and RMG managers to understand the connection

between food and health, and health and productivity. “There is such a misunderstanding of what nutrition means,” Zarin adds. “Nutrition isn’t being highlighted as it should be, so getting people to understand that nutrition is necessary for everything is a key hurdle to reducing malnutrition across the country.” To improve access to information about nutrition, Feed Me is working with GAIN, SBN Bangladesh and BIRTAN to develop information about the importance of nutrition that can be circulated to RMG employees.

A positive future

Looking to the future, Feed Me has been boosted by an endorsement from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. The governing body of Bangladesh’s RMG factories has offered its support in educating factory owners about the benefits of NutriBar and NutriMix. “We

are currently targeting 8-10 factories but hope we can expand this to every factory in the country,” Zarin enthuses. “With the reformulated NutriBar and NutriMix products, which should be available by 2022, I want to be able to reach every RMG worker and adolescent.” Several NGOs have already shown a keen interest in the products for the adolescent market, and discussions are underway with two which are interested in distributing the NutriBar in schools.

To further expand its operations, Feed Me is seeking investment from the government and international investors, to develop its factory and production infrastructure. Modern machinery that will automate production, will enable the company to maximise efficiency and scale, and thereby reduce the unit prices of the products. Investment is also being sought for marketing purposes to educate the target groups about the importance of nutrition and the nutritional benefits of the products.



For more information contact:
Mahmudul Hasan,
SBN Bangladesh Coordinator
shasan@gainhealth.org

Working hard for women's nutrition:

improving the workplace menu in Laos



To address high rates of anaemia and child stunting, the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is focusing on improving workforce nutrition, particularly among women, by working with support from the government, the private sector, and various United Nations agencies.

Lao PDR is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Asia, but also has one of the fastest growing economies in the region. Although the proportion of people who are hungry has been falling, the *Global Nutrition Report* reveals that 39.7% of women and girls aged 15 to 49 years are anaemic, and 33% of children under five are affected by stunting. Health and nutrition indicators also vary considerably across the 49 ethnic groups and tend to be worse for non-Lao-Thai groups, who are twice as likely to live in poverty according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"The strength of the workforce nutrition programme is its ability to join together the public and private sectors, as well development partners, in their efforts to improve nutrition in Laos. By reaching vulnerable people, we can offer everyone an equal opportunity to provide good nutrition for themselves and their families, be it through exclusive breastfeeding or better dietary practices."

Manilay Vanphavong,
SBN Lao PDR Country Coordinator

Women constitute 59% of internal migrants in Lao PDR, and poverty drives many of them to migrate to the capital, Vientiane, in search of work in the garment sector. This sector is a major industrial employer of women, particularly ethnic women, who are at an increased risk of malnutrition and are more likely to be affected by discriminatory cultural food practices around pregnancy and young child feeding.

To improve nutrition and address specific Lao health needs, Lao PDR joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in 2011. By 2016, the government had begun working to mobilise support to liaise with the private sector and, in 2018, with support from the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), SBN Lao PDR was formed.

Through four key strategic areas – healthy food at work, nutrition education, health checks, and breastfeeding support – SBN Lao PDR is supporting the National Nutrition Center to encourage companies in the garment, food and beverage, and hydro power industries to implement workforce nutrition programmes. The programmes target women and men of reproductive age and pregnant and lactating women, to create a comprehensive understanding of nutrition and counteract gendered assumptions about the burden of care. Five district hospitals, 13 small food and beverage factories, and 30 garment factories are currently involved.

Working for better nutrition

A set of 'Nutrition at Work' guidelines, modelled on a handbook developed by the Global Alliance for Improve Nutrition (GAIN), are SBN Lao PDR's primary strategy for improving workforce nutrition. They are widely applicable to a variety of work environments, including those that provide employment opportunities to ethnic women. For example, ensuring healthy food

availability at work is one of SBN Lao PDR's four priority areas, but achieving this goal is much more complex than simply introducing nutritious food products into workplaces.

Canteen food must cater to the tastes and requirements of all the workforce, which is no easy feat; particularly as factory employees come from all 49 ethnic groups living in Lao PDR, each with different nutritional challenges and cultural practices. Consequently, some employers have opted to offer cash, which is typically used to buy cheap, unbalanced meals to retain excess money for families, whilst others provide only one meal option. Currently, only one employer provides a varied menu.

The network's guidelines provide six options to help ensure healthy food at work, including a combination of cash and nutrition education to encourage employees to make good health decisions, as well as company-subsidised healthy snacks. "This programme has been adapted and designed in the Lao context, with various choices for employers to implement,"

explains Manilay Vanphavong, SBN Lao PDR Country Coordinator.

Enhancing workplace wellbeing

SBN Lao PDR also provides support to factories in the implementation of education and nutrition improvement initiatives within the workplace. This includes the provision of training, advocacy materials, and a specially-developed check-up toolbox for factory nurses and district hospitals, which combine to form a comprehensive workforce nutrition programme.

Furthermore, SBN Lao PDR is working to incorporate nutritional aspects in the annual health check of garment factory workers, which is required by Lao labour law. They are adding basic nutritional checks such as body mass index (BMI), a basic nutrition checklist, and nutrition consultation guidelines, which consider the specific needs of pregnant and lactating women. Business owners cover the cost of



the checks and partner with public hospitals providing the services.

While many United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations promote breastfeeding and infant and young child nutrition in rural areas, SBN has also identified a gap in services for urban migrants. As such, it is actively promoting breastfeeding through maternity leave, and developing guidelines for the setup of appropriate breastfeeding spaces at work and general guidelines and tips for pregnant and lactating women.

Strategy for success

Involving multiple sectors is critical to improving nutrition, as these industries – from government agencies to garment factories – employ large numbers of individuals. “Workforce nutrition has been implemented in many countries with positive evidence that both the employer and employee benefit, thanks to increased productivity and reduced sick leave,” Manilay enthuses.

In February 2021, SBN Lao PDR took a big step in the development and implementation of the workforce nutrition guidelines, holding an event gathering private sector corporations, such as garment factories, and public sector organisations, including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Hosted in collaboration with the European Chamber of Commerce and Industry, this was critical to SBN Lao PDR’s efforts to address workforce nutrition.

Increasing the private sector’s understanding of the importance of improved workplace nutrition was a key aim for the event, to enable companies to share good business practices on improved nutrition, encourage participation in the workplace nutrition programme, and further develop guidelines to be more practical and easier to implement in factory settings.

Partnering for bright prospects

By engaging multi-sectoral stakeholders in their workforce nutrition programme, SBN Lao PDR is making strides in identifying feasible strategies to implement all aspects of its initiative. The Association of Lao Garment Industry (ALGI) has requested another event to further discuss guidelines and goals, and the network continues to make plans and facilitate discussions to work towards a more nutritious future for Laos. According to Phimmasone Aminthalath, ALGI Vice President, the long-term goal is for all of their members to “eat well, be healthy, increase productivity, and enjoy a long life.”

The guidelines target both women and men to address discriminatory gender assumptions on the burden of care – including the family’s nutrition being a woman’s responsibility. However, to promote a holistic approach to household wellbeing and reduce women’s workloads, SBN would like to further incorporate men into nutrition education. With the cooperation of experienced actors, such as CARE International and the United Nations Population Fund, SBN also aims to include actions on gender-based violence and workplace harassment, which can have a significant impact on wellbeing.



For more information contact:
Maree Bouterakos,
Head of Nutrition, WFP Laos
maree.bouterakos@wfp.org

Pauline's purpose:

*feeding Kenyan school children
with nutritious yoghurts*



Milk and dairy products are affordable sources of key nutrients for the vulnerable and can help solve Kenya's nutritional needs, especially those of the country's children. To encourage greater consumption of these products, Pauline Njine Mugendi founded dairy-based brand LactoLife. The Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Kenya member has been targeting schoolchildren with nutritious, flavoured yoghurts to address the critical nutrition situation among Kenyan children.

Despite being ranked 34th globally in milk production, with an annual capacity of 5.2 billion litres, an estimated 85% of Kenya's milk is sold raw and unpasteurised through informal market channels. Research shows this kind of milk is 150 times more likely to make consumers sick than pasteurised dairy products. Poor quality, lack of compliance with dairy sector standards, and low farmgate prices have given rise to unhealthy market practices, including milk hawking, the informal selling of raw milk from home to home.

Nevertheless, milk and dairy products are seen as affordable sources of nutrients for the vulnerable, including children, with one study indicating that schools in Nairobi County that offer milk to schoolchildren have seen an increase in enrolment rates of 55%.

Focusing on fortification

Inspired by the need to streamline milk distribution, processing, and value addition to meet the needs of school children, Pauline set up LactoLife Dairy Limited in 2017. The company's primary focus is the production of fortified dairy products through its flagship initiative, the Yoghurt-4-School Programme. This initiative provides children aged three to 14 years with nutrient-enhanced yoghurts and tackles milk surplus by buying directly from farmers and cooperatives.

"We are constantly looking at new and innovative ways of fortifying our yoghurts to meet consumer demand."

Pauline Njine Mugendi,
Founder, LactoLife Dairy Limited

While working with agricultural cooperatives as a management consultant, Pauline was inspired to start her company after noticing numerous problems in the collection of milk from farmers and other cooperative suppliers and processors. Despite the huge demand for processed milk, poor infrastructure and systems resulted in delays in collection and payments.

Pauline saw an opportunity and decided to seize it. Starting small, she would collect milk from suppliers, take it to processors for pasteurisation (as she did not have the processing machines), and then distribute it locally by targeting operators of milk dispensing machines, known as 'Milk ATMs', which are common in many Nairobi suburbs and retail stores.

On days when she could not sell all the processed milk, she had to take it home as she was unable to send it back to the processors due to their lack of storage. This inspired her to explore ways to add value to the milk through processing. Pauline invested in a freezer and a modest yoghurt maker that produced 50 litres a day, then approached a neighbouring school and sold them the idea of supplying yoghurt for the children.

Measuring success

In 2019, LactoLife moved into full-time yoghurt making, supplying different varieties to 3,000 school-aged children at eight primary schools. The company has scaled operations to employ

seven staff – five men and two women – and invested in modern equipment, including machines that process 1,000 litres of yoghurt per day. Pauline attributes the success of the business to finding a niche in nutrient-enriched yoghurts and cultivating partnerships.

The same year, LactoLife began exploring ways of boosting the nutrient content of the yoghurt. It received technical support from SBN Kenya partner, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), which reviewed the yoghurt's ingredients and evaluated the production processes to identify gaps and recommend areas of improvement through the support of a Kenyan food specialist. GAIN connected the company to an international manufacturer of nutrition products, Royal DSM, which supplied yoghurt recipes and vitamin premix to enable the fortification of the yoghurt with micronutrients. As a result, in 2020, LactoLife was able to launch the YooMix NUTRI yoghurt range, which includes vitamin- and mineral-enriched yoghurts, probiotic yoghurts, and fruit yoghurts.

The YooMix NUTRI vitamin- and mineral-enriched yoghurt contains vitamins, iron, and zinc, which are vital for growth and development and therefore critical for the target market – children. The probiotic yoghurts also contain a blend of probiotic strains that are beneficial for the immune system, digestion, and gut health, while YooMix NUTRI fruit yoghurts contain real fruit and come in mango, pineapple, and tropical fruit mix flavours.

Lactolife has also received training on business planning and market development strategy from GAIN, which enabled the company to draft a five-year business plan focusing on scaling through increasing the number of pasteurising and processing machines and targeting more markets.

“The partnership [with GAIN] pointed us to a unique business strategy of adding value to our yoghurt and introducing more niche products



to our target market of schools. As a result of having different varieties and types of yoghurt, we have seen orders from schools grow as children now have numerous choices, which has translated into more sales. We are also constantly looking at new and innovative ways of fortifying our yoghurts to meet consumer demand,” Pauline adds.

The resilience journey

However, the development of the business has not all been smooth sailing. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 and the subsequent closure of schools, LactoLife had to cease production. Pauline recalls that these closures happened days before they could deliver huge orders that had been placed.

Having started the business with her savings, Pauline has also struggled to access additional finance, and prohibitive requirements by financial institutions, such as collateral and having an established profitable business, put the brakes on her expansion plans. To overcome this, she is looking at other funding sources, including the government-sponsored Women Enterprise Fund and investors.

Pauline also cites compliance with government requirements, such as taxation and sector regulations, as a major challenge, with requirements from numerous regulatory bodies – including the Kenya Bureau of Standards, Kenya Dairy Board, Kenya Revenue Authority, and the County Government – taking a toll on her business. This challenge exists for many start-ups due to the long processes and financing involved in achieving compliance. Although small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya constitute over 90% of all registered businesses, create 80% of total employment, and contribute 30% of the country's GDP, they continue to face numerous challenges – including lack of credit, poor infrastructure and markets, and punitive policies. These difficult conditions contribute to the closure of 46% of small businesses within the first year of launching.

Pauline highlights the power of networks as a resource she has come to value in overcoming these odds. She belongs to many member organisations, including SBN Kenya, the Kenya Association of Manufacturers, and the Kenya Private Sector Alliance, which she says have exposed her to important lessons and information on running her business – such as alternative ways of accessing financing through loans from women's groups and saving schemes that do not have strict credit requirements.

"I believe in the power of creating relationships, something I have learnt in the business. When

COVID struck and we had to halt operations, I reached out to networks I had built and learned from them on how to move forward. The invaluable lessons I have learnt, like diversifying my products, inspired me to rethink my business strategy and increase my clientele base while expanding my business offerings. I have also learnt to connect to regulators, and they have been helpful in guiding my business on compliance," adds Pauline.

She advises other female entrepreneurs to work on understanding their businesses, remaining true to their customers, and learning to adapt to challenging times while remaining resilient and assertive, especially in male-dominated industries.

Striding into the future

With the school programme having recovered well after the pandemic-induced decline, Pauline wants to scale the project to other schools across the country. She also intends to introduce her safe, affordable, and nutritious yoghurts to low-income populations that remain underserved with nutritious foods.

As demand for milk processing services from traders and small cooperatives grows due to the lack of processing equipment, LactoLife is also set to start offering the service on a contractual basis and has already begun a pilot project with three cooperatives.



For more information contact:
Charles Opiyo,
SBN Kenya Coordinator
copiyo@gainhealth.org

Oluwaseun's opportunity:

putting women at the heart of nourishing Nigeria



In 2013, Nigerian agri-entrepreneur, Oluwaseun Sangoleye, founded [BabyGrubz](#). The Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Nigeria member is a food company that manufactures a variety of affordable, dried homemade cereals, grains, fruits, vegetables and condiments that serve as a base for delicious, nutritious and fast meals for infants. To further support mothers and their children, the company's inclusive business model also works with women to distribute BabyGrubz products and provides mentoring on nutrition and breastfeeding.

Malnutrition persists at unacceptably high levels in Nigeria, with an estimated 2 million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. According to the [Global Nutrition Report](#), 36.8% of infants in the country are stunted, and 6.8% are wasted. The issue of malnutrition is personal for Oluwaseun, whose son developed rickets (which is often caused by vitamin D and/or calcium deficiency) as a child. She harnessed this experience to develop her now-thriving business, producing natural cereal from locally-sourced ingredients.

Oluwaseun founded BabyGrubz in 2013, targeting low- and middle-income women with children aged six months to three years. At the heart of the enterprise is a desire to fight child malnutrition in West Africa. "No one shared the 'secrets' of a balanced diet or dietary diversity with me, so I resolved to help other children like mine whose mothers needed nutritious foods but couldn't get them on the store shelves," she explains.

Women empowering women

Prior to becoming the Founder and 'Mum-In-Chief' of BabyGrubz, Oluwaseun noticed that most imported complementary foods are made from rice and wheat and do not contain the dietary richness of traditional

"Scaling might seem daunting, but I encourage entrepreneurs to break down the steps and tackle them in small [and] calculated but deliberate steps."

Oluwaseun Sangoleye,
Founder, BabyGrubz

Nigerian ingredients, such as beans, nuts, sweet potatoes and moringa. In response, she developed a variety of affordable, nutritious, and locally-produced variants of baby foods with African flavours. These cater to both the cultural values of Nigerian mothers and their children, along with their nutritional concerns, including vitamin A deficiency and protein-energy malnutrition. The business currently employs 15 staff, 12 of whom are women, and sells 6,500-7000 units of product per month in Nigeria. About 1,000 additional units of product are sold each month in a Ghanaian outlet, which opened in 2018.

As women are the key to this enterprise's design, BabyGrubz's products are sold through a women-only business model that works with over 100,000 mothers; a deliberate approach for gender inclusion and empowerment. The women receive an income for their role as exclusive distributors of the company's complementary food, which enables them to earn a livelihood and support their families. "I decided to put 'Made in Nigeria' complementary foods on the shelves and help mothers like me make a living whilst doing it," emphasises Oluwaseun. As well as selling and distributing BabyGrubz products, the women provide peer-to-peer mentoring on the benefits of nutritious foods and breastfeeding – with a focus on exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a baby's life.

Going global

In 2020, BabyGrubz won the 2020 Global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Pitch Competition and received a cash prize of USD 20,000. With these funds, the company purchased a grain dryer that will increase their drying capacity by almost 1,000%.

During the competition, Oluwaseun was also provided with business training and mentorship from the [Base of Pyramid Innovation Centre](#) (Bopinc) in the Netherlands, and Cathy AgriProjects Management Limited in Kenya. The training included core modules around investment readiness and strengthening the nutritional impact of businesses. “My biggest take-away was clarity on the next steps for my business and how to get there. Micro-franchising [the development of replicable business plans to scale up the impact of small enterprises] was mentioned briefly during the training, and

I wanted to find out more on the topic,” says Oluwaseun. “My coach was really helpful, and we have begun to look into this to help us impact children and women on a larger scale.” She explains that micro-franchising does not require a large financial investment or years of experience, and therefore empowers individuals to become business owners more easily and with fewer risks.

The company also won a USD 10,000 grant from the African Development Bank in the 2020 Agri Pitch Competition, which will allow Oluwaseun and her team to continue improving the affordability of these nutritious products in underserved communities.

This includes BabyGrubz’s new range of complementary food products, aimed at the ‘base of the pyramid’ market. The products have been developed in collaboration with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)



and the Technical University of Denmark and will be more affordable and nutritious compared to those currently available. Consumers gave positive feedback during testing, so the company will soon be seeking regulatory approval before making the range available on the market.

Change to fight challenge

Despite the enormous success of BabyGrubz now, Oluwaseun had to be resourceful when starting her business. Like many women (and men) in Nigeria, she faced challenges accessing finance, so built the business using her own money and capital raised from family and friends to help propel its initial growth.

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reduced the purchasing power of BabyGrubz's target market, leading to a drop in sales, so Oluwaseun repositioned the business and adapted products to create greater demand.

BabyGrubz was able to meet customer demands during lockdown periods after developing a robust digital mechanism for processing orders and deliveries. Digitisation was the main focus of the hands-on training she received from Bopinc's digital specialists. Following this, a digital marketing plan was developed for BabyGrubz, and Oluwaseun attended coaching sessions to learn how to best implement this in her business.

Oluwaseun is grateful for the training – and continues to refer back to the notes. She has since observed impressive results, such as increased engagement on social media. "I particularly commend the support I received from Bopinc. The training was specific to my needs as an entrepreneur, and the instructors took time to respond to my questions that were out of the scope of the modules."

Baby steps to a bold future

Looking ahead, Oluwaseun's aim is to claim 10% of the Nigerian complementary food market share by 2026 and unveil new ready-to-eat products. With a presence in Ghana and Togo as well as Nigeria, BabyGrubz is looking to further expand in the West African market. In November 2020, BabyGrubz took another step towards this goal by undertaking internal restructuring to meet ISO and HACCP standards, and it has applied for the accompanying certifications through the Standards Organization of Nigeria. The company has also acquired a building that is currently being converted into a fit-for-purpose factory space.

"Our focus is to continuously develop and deliver low-cost, optimally-nutritious complementary food products that address nutritional challenges in children in Nigeria," Oluwaseun reveals. "We will continue to produce, promote, educate and empower mothers on the best nutrition for their little ones."



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For more information contact:
Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator
sbnnigeria@gainhealth.org

2

Innovation

One of the leading drivers behind global environmental degradation and poor health is the food system – and, as a result, this urgently needs reforming. To succeed, it is critical that actors throughout the food chain begin thinking and acting in new ways – so that growing populations are provided access to nutritious, safe, and affordable diets, and the environment can be restored and safeguarded for current and future generations.

Change is already underway. Throughout Africa and Asia, actors across the food value chain are devising innovative approaches to help fight concerns such as nutrition – with incidences of malnutrition, anaemia, obesity, and diabetes prevalent in a high number of countries. However, with a huge number of entrepreneurs looking to make their mark, it is important to recognise those which offer the most viable and lasting solutions, and provide support to these small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as a priority.

There are already some promising innovations that are being developed and adopted widely – including low-cost solar drying, mobile market brokerage services, modular factories, and cooperative processing and packaging – and it's thought all have the potential to make their mark within the next five years¹.

Technology- and business-led innovations offer scope for positive change in a variety of areas. Improving access to nutritious food to help enhance the health of local communities is, quite rightly, a primary focus for many, including SMEs. But it doesn't end there. SMEs are making promising in-roads in the production and distribution of locally-produced, nutritious, affordable, and sustainable foods

that have immense potential to generate environmental benefits. For example, devising cold storage solutions enables producers and distributors to retain products for longer and avoid unnecessary waste, while processing and packaging improvements allow for greater food safety and reduced amounts of refuse.

However, SMEs that are innovating to drive change in the food sector continually face a myriad of challenges. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has proven the biggest disruptor, with lockdowns, changes in consumer spending and socialising habits, and supply chain issues all creating difficulties. But, even before this, hurdles were abound. SMEs such as Mealimeter, in Nigeria, found themselves unable to access the funding required to scale up their productions. Meanwhile, companies like Danish Care Foods (DCF), in Cambodia, noted that inadequate manpower and infrastructure meant they were initially unable to keep up with unanticipated demand.

As the following chapter reveals, with the right support and guidance, partnerships are vital in supporting SMEs to address hurdles as they innovate. These partnerships are not only limited to between SMEs themselves, but can occur on a much larger scale with governments, research institutions, investors, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – all of whom can offer the crucial skills, knowledge, connections, and technical and financial support that SMEs require to take their innovations to the next level.

¹ <https://www.gainhealth.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/weathering-the-pandemic-to-build-back-better-options-for-supporting-agri-food-smes-in-low-and-middle-income-countries.pdf>

Khadija's innovative idea:

*embracing tech for last-mile
food delivery in Kenya*



Most urban Kenyans in low-income areas rely on nutritionally poor-quality food that they access from food vendors. To tackle this problem, Khadija Mohamed-Churchill's enterprise, a Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Kenya member, has been working with farmers and food vendors since 2018 to support the delivery and preparation of nutritious and affordable foods.

In Kenya, the urban poor spend [60% of their income](#) on food, yet most of it is poor quality. More than 40% of households in low-income areas consume street food; on average, [79% of foods](#) vendors sell are carbohydrate-based and use unhealthy trans fats in their preparation, which highlights the unbalanced, poor-quality diets that the urban poor consume on a daily basis. Animal-based protein sources like red meat, chicken, and fish are out of reach for those who survive on USD 2 or less a day.

Preparing street food is also a laborious process and requires a lot of energy to cook: food vendors have traditionally relied on wood and charcoal, which are not only expensive but are also non-renewable energy sources, and expose them to smoke-related diseases. As a result, the government has introduced a ban on using wood and charcoal for cooking, but vendors are struggling to comply given limited accessibility

"Make sure you have a lot of support from partners and networks like SBN. Discuss with people who are going through the same journey like you, lean on them, and learn from them."

Khadija Mohamed-Churchill,
Founder, Kwanza Tukule Foods

to and affordability of alternative energy sources, such as gas.

Tracking the journey

To address the combined challenge of a lack of nutritious, affordable food in low-income areas of Nairobi, and the prohibitive time and cost of preparing food, Khadija's [Kwanza Tukule Foods Limited](#) (Swahili for 'first let us eat') works with farmers and food vendors in delivery and preparation of such foods, like pulses.

Khadija lived in the United Kingdom for 10 years to study and work and, returning to Kenya on holiday, she noticed how slum dwellers struggled to access food due to its high cost and unavailability. When she moved back permanently and started working with grassroots non-governmental organisations, she saw the nutrition challenges these households face first-hand. Tracking the entire food supply chain to identify gaps, Khadija was inspired to address inconsistencies by ensuring that low-cost nutritious foods, including plant-based proteins, could be easily accessible for these households.

Green grams, yellow beans, and lentils are bought from farmers across the country, which Kwanza Tukule then pre-cooks and sells to vendors in low-income areas of Nairobi. The company now has 25 permanent employees and a fleet of 14 vehicles used for distribution.

The tech transformation

Embracing clean energy, the food is pre-cooked using biogas before being packed and distributed to over 300 food vendors and kiosks. Company sales representatives, who also live in low-income areas, approach food vendors for partnerships. The vendors place orders in the evening and receive the produce the next morning, after which they undertake the final

cooking stage before selling the hot food to their consumers. Kwanza Tukule also collects food waste from the vendors to power its biogas digesters, in an innovative circular approach.

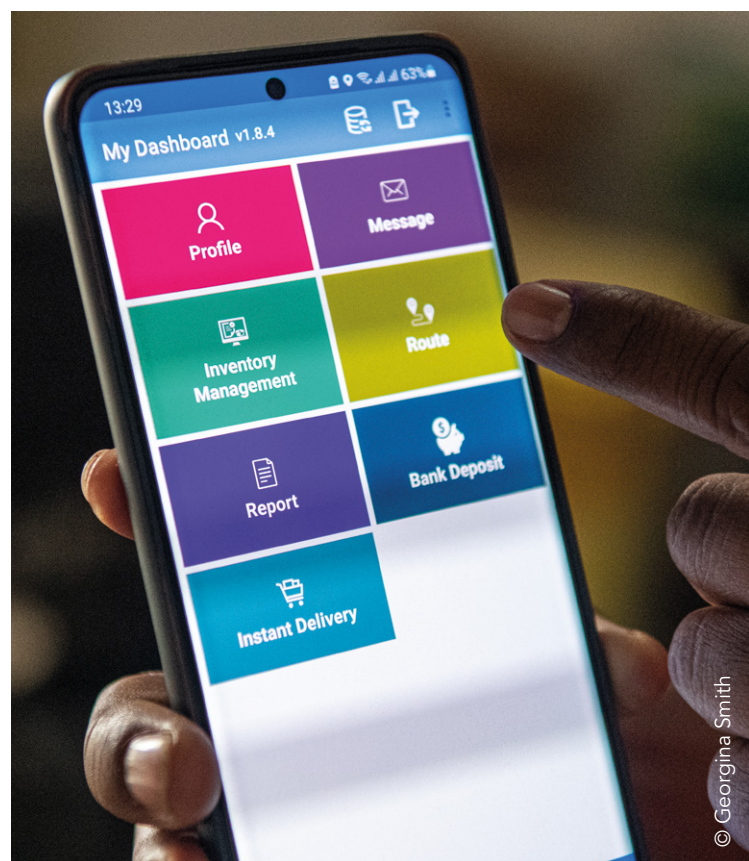
To enhance its efficiency, the company has automated its processes by adopting an app developed by technology company Dukaree, which allows customers to place orders, check prices of available products, track deliveries, and make payments through mobile money platforms like MPESA. To manage stock and cash flow, the company also uses SAP, a software that helps control stock and streamline and automate its operations, from procurement to finance. An additional piece of software enables the company to manage its sales processes more efficiently.

“We have been able to harmonise the supply chain by shortening the processes involved between farmers and consumers,” Khadija reveals. “By pre-cooking and preparing the pulses in bulk, we ensure that vendors get food at the right time and at an affordable rate, which reduces their costs; while we also enjoy economies of scale for buying in bulk. We have maintained over a 90% customer loyalty rate because we have been able to provide that personal connection as our sales representatives are people the vendors know,” says Khadija.

The power of partnerships

Through membership in SBN Kenya, the company has also benefited from mentorship, training, and exposure that has raised its profile to potential investors and partners.

Khadija attributes the success of the business to partnerships forged with various actors, including farmers, manufacturers, and millers in becoming last-mile distributors of their products. The business has also received support from



the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), an SBN partner, on market research and business planning. A grant from GAIN has also enabled the business to expand and distribute nutritious foods, including yellow beans that are bio-fortified with zinc, iron, and vitamin A, which reach 150,000 consumers every day.

Responding to challenges, embracing opportunities

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic took a huge toll on SMEs in Kenya. Food joints were closed and Kwanza Tukule struggled to supply food vendors. Travel restrictions, inter-county lockdowns, and curfews meant that the company could not source pulses from farmers who mostly lived in areas outside of Nairobi. To cope with these challenges, the company diversified into direct sales of nutritious products, including fortified flour, oil, and salt,

to homes and local shops. It is a model that the company will maintain.

“The first months of the COVID-19 pandemic were the most devastating for our business,” Khadija notes. “But it also showed us the resilience and sustainability of the business, because we have been able to pivot to new products which are still enjoying a great reception among customers.”

The company has also contended with challenges in access to finance resulting from the stringent requirements of financial institutions to qualify for credit. As such, Khadija has had to rely on savings to support her business. Being able to afford to hire people with the right skills at a senior management level has been another challenge, as the enterprise is competing for talent with established businesses.

As the company forays into the food-tech space, Khadija notes the vital lesson she has learnt is that the customer’s perception of the product should be every entrepreneur’s focus. Market research, coupled with customers’ feedback, she adds, guides the business and determines the future of the company.

Understanding that the entrepreneur’s journey is a tough one, which requires patience, constant self-evaluation, and evolution in-line with market needs, are other key pointers she has learnt along her entrepreneurial journey.

Future focus

To cement its place in the Kenyan and African food space, Kwanza Tukule is putting in place the right systems and processes to guide its operations moving forward as it seeks to reduce time and resource wastage. The company aims to achieve this through automation of all processes and investing in hiring an experienced and committed team. “To be profitable and impactful, we need the right team,” Khadija recognises.

The company also hopes to expand its business to other towns in Kenya, and East Africa. To assist with these plans, Kwanza Tukule is looking at exploring alternative financing options – such as angel investors and venture capitalists – in order to scale up the business and grow its impact on nutrition by reaching other target groups and increasing its product portfolio.



For more information contact:
Charles Opiyo,
SBN Kenya Coordinator
copiyo@gainhealth.org

SMEs with big innovations:

striving for improved nutrition



As the largest providers of food in Africa and Asia, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are critical in shaping local food systems and providing good food for all. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Business Network (SBN) is working to support these businesses to scale their nutritional impact by providing mentoring and training through the Global SUN Pitch Competition initiative.

Despite their critical role in food systems worldwide, agri-food SMEs are highly constrained by a lack of access to financial and technical support. As a result, they remain largely untapped for developing and scaling-up market-based solutions that could improve the consumption of safe and nutritious food in global markets. Recognised as a critical issue by SBN, the Global SUN Pitch Competition was designed to leverage the potential that exists among agri-food SMEs for delivering accessible, affordable, healthy food to vulnerable populations across Africa and Asia, by connecting those enterprises in emerging markets with technical assistance and investors. Since the launch of the first Global SUN Pitch Competition in 2018, over 1,000 SMEs from 24 countries have applied, with 42 entrepreneurs competing in the final global event.

Ahead of each Global SUN Pitch Competition, National SUN Pitch Competitions are organised to select the most innovative and scalable

"The Global SUN Pitch Competition highlights the SMEs having a meaningful impact that we might not have otherwise recognised."

Nicolette Louw,
Bopinc Project Manager

enterprises operating in a single country, who compete to win cash and technical assistance prizes and investment opportunities from local partners. The winners of these national competitions are then offered the opportunity to participate in the global finals. Participation in the Global SUN Pitch Competition provides entrepreneurs with greater opportunities to connect with their peers and potential investors across the globe, and to receive critical training to support them in scaling up and broadening the impact of their business.

The 21 finalists of the 2019-2020 Global SUN Pitch Competition participated in a global acceleration programme run by Bopinc and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), which included a series of investor readiness and nutrition awareness training sessions. Through these sessions, the SMEs gained expertise in preparing and presenting business plans and pitch decks, in addition to developing strategies that could strengthen the nutritional impact of their businesses. The primary goal is to strengthen the capacity of entrepreneurs to successfully engage investors and understand what they look for, how to develop a target market, and how to present the financial aspects of a business.

Another aspect of the training focuses on 'soft skills', such as communication, to help entrepreneurs deliver a confident and effective pitch. "That is a really valuable exercise because, even after the competition, the entrepreneurs will be able to engage more investors for themselves," enthuses Nicolette Louw, Bopinc Project Manager and a finalist mentor.

Award-winning approaches

In addition to the overall value, training, and support garnered by participating, the entrepreneurs who claimed titles during the



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Global SUN Pitch Competition final received cash prizes, investment connections, and further mentoring opportunities. All three elements support the winners in scaling up their business operations. For example, Ope Olanrewaju, Founder of [Kennie-O Cold Chain Logistics](#) and the 2018 Global SUN Pitch Competition winner, won the technical assistance and mentorship prize and connected with an investor through the competition. “From the training we received in the Netherlands, we have been able to increase our customer base and our revenue, and the company started receiving offers of investment,” enthuses Ope.

In the 2020 Global SUN Pitch Competition, [BabyGrubz](#) from Nigeria emerged as the overall winner and received a cash prize of USD 20,000 for the most innovative solution for improving availability of nutritious foods. This woman-owned SME develops nutritious complementary foods for infants using locally-

sourced ingredients. “I feel really grateful that our contributions towards improved family livelihoods and child survival are recognised and rewarded. This is a welcome pat on the back for us at BabyGrubz,” adds Oluwaseun Sangoleye, BabyGrubz Founder. Oluwaseun also received further mentoring from Bopinc on how to digitise her business, a critical skill to ensure resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

A Cambodian enterprise, Danish Care Foods, was awarded USD 10,000 as the first runner-up of the 2020 competition. The company makes ready-to-use therapeutic and supplementary food products, including wafer snacks, to treat malnutrition in children. The second runner-up prize of USD 7,000 was presented to [Mealimeter](#), a Nigerian SME which links hospitals, offices, and schools with nutritious meals by providing food vending machines. It also connects customers with the country’s best nutrition-focused chefs and small businesses through a mobile app.

Partnering for progress

Strategic partnerships were critical to the competition's success and its impact on participants. By engaging other organisations and private sector entities, the competition organisers were able to offer better technical assistance, financial support, and future opportunities for growth. For example, event sponsors and partners including [Royal DSM](#), [Cargill](#), and GAIN offered their own prizes and awards to businesses they selected as being especially innovative – namely [Limpho Produtos Alimentares](#) from Mozambique, [Poulta Inc](#) from Pakistan, and [Sanavita](#) from Tanzania, respectively. Other event partners, such as Philippines-based agribusiness [AGREA](#), offered a mentorship prize, through which Sanavita's founder, Jolenta Joseph, was able to work closely with AGREA's Founder, Cherrie Atilano. "Having a mentor who works in your line of work is important, as they are able to guide you through the toughest hurdles, chief among them access to finance," emphasises Jolenta.

Championing resilience

SBN continuously seeks opportunities to enhance the support provided to SUN Pitch Competition finalists in overcoming operational challenges. For instance, the 2020 Global SUN Pitch Competition finalists were adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as

movement restrictions hindered sales and the purchasing power of vulnerable communities plummeted further. For Poulta Inc, which works in Pakistan's poultry value chain, these restrictions were significant, as reductions in demand for chicken and challenges in sourcing manufacturing materials from overseas required drastic changes in operations. Similarly, Sanavita experienced a considerable drop in customers as markets and schools closed during the pandemic. The Global SUN Pitch Competition event organisers are now looking to incorporate resilience training modules in future events, which include key topics around digitisation and strategies for managing production and demand changes.

The Global SUN Pitch Competition initiative is an exciting opportunity for SMEs to showcase their innovations but, more importantly, the event provides crucial support for enterprises aiming to improve the food and nutrition security of their communities. These individuals are well-positioned to make real change in their respective communities, especially for vulnerable populations.

Participation, Nicolette notes, is similar to everything else in life, in that "you get out of it what you are willing to put in." The finalists who worked hard on their pitches, engaged with the training, and valued the opportunity, were able to gain the most benefit from the experience.



For more information contact:
Ritta Sabbas Shine,
SBN Global Coordinator
rshine@gainhealth.org

A fishy tale:

*creating better snacks to support
Cambodia's future*



Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Cambodia member Danish Care Foods (DCF) specialises in making fish-based ready-to-use therapeutic and supplementary food products to treat child malnutrition. As the first runner-up in the 2020 Global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Pitch Competition, DCF was awarded USD 10,000 for its innovative 'Nutrix' bar – recognised by the Cambodian government as one of the world's first ready-to-use therapeutic products using local fish species.

Cambodia has one of the worst levels of child stunting (32%) and wasting (9%) in the region, and child undernutrition remains a serious public health concern. In addition, 48% of women of reproductive age are malnourished, and the Government of Cambodia spends USD 250-400 million annually to combat malnutrition in vulnerable groups.

Approximately 2.6% of Cambodian children are diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition. To treat them, ready-to-use therapeutic foods are prescribed – without which many children may need to be hospitalised. However, [research](#) shows there is low up-take of the products currently available within Cambodian health facilities due to their lack of appeal.

To tackle this, Cambodian entrepreneur Lyndon Paul, and Danish investor Christian Philip Unmack, joined forces with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development, and Copenhagen University, in collaboration with the Royal Government of Cambodia, to make more appealing products using locally-available nutritious ingredients.

Ingredients such as Siamese mud carp fish, mung, soy beans, and rice are incorporated into DCF's ready-to-use therapeutic and supplementary food products, which include

"Nutrition has become key, especially for children in Cambodia, as a result of the pandemic. We want to help feed the future and give the next generation the best chance to have a nutritious life."

Lyndon Paul, Co-founder,
Danish Care Foods

wafer snacks, snack bars, and fortified powder to help improve nutritional health and wellbeing. The company's Nutrix bar is 20% cheaper than imported peanut and dairy-based therapeutic foods, and has been officially recognised by the Cambodian government – making it the one of the world's first ready-to-use, therapeutic foods using local fish species.

A winning formula

"Malnutrition effects are seen in rural and urban communities alike," says Lyndon, DCF's Managing Director. He explains that the company's products are high in energy and provide the required levels of protein and micronutrients as stipulated by the World Health Organization's [standard](#) for treating moderate acute malnutrition.

As an affordable, snack-like, therapeutic food, the Cambodian government can provide Nutrix through local health facilities to treat severe acute malnutrition in children under the age of five in remote and poor communities. It is estimated between 60,000 to 90,000 children in Cambodia need specialised medical treatment annually, which includes therapeutic food. "Even six-month-old children can hold the product, eat it, and get the benefits," Lyndon emphasises.



© DCF Foods

The consumer response has also been overwhelmingly positive: “Our customers are very happy, and there are good results on nutrition and acceptability. Currently, we are serving about 100,000 customers and targeting to reach half a million in the next two years,” enthuses Lyndon.

Since gaining recognition in the Global SUN Pitch Competition in July 2020, DCF reports an increase in orders. “With the current COVID-19 pandemic and the increased awareness about the need for good nutrition, this has really benefited us; particularly as the award was picked up by the local media. Plus, we have had referrals from many other organisations now the SBN has launched here in Cambodia, which has also led to new clients,” Lyndon adds.

According to Lyndon, distribution of DCF’s Nutrix bar has also contributed to a reduction of therapeutic food imports in the last six months. “We have supplied more than 15,000 kg of supplementary products, and still have 40,000 packs [each containing six wafers and weighing 85g] worth of orders on the waiting list. I think that is enough proof of the impact created by our products,” he says.

In addition to increased recognition, the win has also provided DCF with mentoring, training, and a much-welcomed cash prize. The first portion of the money was used to buy a generator for the factory – particularly important as ingredients for the fortified snacks have to be extruded using a machine at high temperatures, which the national grid cannot support. The second tranche of money bought micro-nutrients for testing a new product – a fortified snack to address nutrition deficiency and compete with the unhealthy snacks in the market – and to get a license for selling therapeutic/supplementary products in the free market.

Tackling challenges posed by success

Although positive overall, the government’s recognition of DCF’s products has increased demand so much as to create some challenges in terms of producing adequate supply of the snack bars. As such, Lyndon’s aim is to scale up production so they can also meet requirements from individual customers, who may want to buy only a few packs and purchase other supplements over the counter. “The need

for food supplements and fortified products has dramatically increased with the focus on good nutrition for children, as well as women of reproductive age. This is particularly true for developing countries and is something that really has to be understood by every food manufacturer," states Lyndon.

Despite the company's growth and success, the pandemic has resulted in significant challenges: reduced staff numbers) and delayed imports of raw materials, particularly the edible oils that provide essential energy in DCF's fortified products. To meet the increase in orders, the enterprise has had to reorganise work shifts and operating hours. Still, stresses Lyndon, the company has been fortunate compared to so many during this time.

Transport limitations have also been an issue. The fish is sourced from three communities who have been trained in dried fish production, but movement restrictions have led to limited supplies in 2021. The product's other primary ingredients – rice and mung bean – are not yet sourced directly from farmers and are currently bought from wholesalers.

Visions for the future

To make the product more widely available to those in need, Lyndon aims to supply the product to pharmaceutical companies and hospitals across Cambodia. However, ethical concerns over potential misuse must be overcome before this can be realised. "As producers, we are responsible for what we produce and the effect it has on people. Currently, there is a lack of understanding about taking therapeutic/supplementary products which must be addressed," he says.

His advice to other entrepreneurs echoes this diligent approach. "When it comes to nutrition, you should not gamble. Take your time to understand the consumer and develop a sustainable product that can really make an impact."

Despite the challenges faced during the pandemic, the future is looking bright for DCF – with a rising number of orders and staff returning to work. And, to capitalise on its vision and meet increasing local demand, DCF is seeking further investment to introduce a new fortified snack and open a food-grade, fish-meal production factory.



For more information contact:
Sok Chea Hak,
SBN Cambodia Coordinator
sokchea.hak@wfp.org

Innovative small businesses:

striving to improve workforce nutrition



Building on research into the roles and needs of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food system, Bangladesh's Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) is mobilising government agencies, the private sector, and development partners to support entrepreneurs in providing critical nutrition products and services. Through technical support, capacity building, and policy advocacy, SBN Bangladesh is harnessing the innovation of SMEs to bring nutritious, affordable, and safe food to workers in the ready-made garment industry.

Healthier diets boost the immune system and overall wellbeing of individuals, but access to nutritious food is also [good for business](#), in raising morale, productivity, and efficiency. For the ready-made garment (RMG) industry, where [77% of workers suffer from anaemia](#) due to their poor diets, improving nutrition is a win-win solution to support workers and reduce sickness and absenteeism. SMEs can play a central role in increasing the production, distribution, and marketing of nutritious and affordable food items, but there is a lack of evidence on the most effective strategies to mobilise them.

By filling these knowledge gaps, SBN Bangladesh has been able to build a coordinated strategy on how it can work with a wide range of partners to scale up workforce nutrition in Bangladesh, including ways to leverage SMEs to improve access to safe and nutritious food for RMG workers. "Through a first-of-its-kind market systems study, we have carefully assessed the entry points for nutritious food in RMG factories, and tried to understand the behaviour, price point, and product characteristics to ensure that food solutions developed are convenient, affordable, and cater to the taste and preferences of RMG workers," explains SBN Bangladesh's Coordinator, Syed Muntasir Ridwan. "On the back of this data, we have co-designed products and services with SMEs to

"Strong brands, low price positioning, convenience, and accessibility are key to integrating nutrition-sensitive product or service solutions for RMG workers."

Syed Muntasir Ridwan,
SBN Bangladesh Coordinator

ensure that there is product and choice fit. We have also catalysed innovation in the sector by providing infrastructure and technical support to SMEs to enable them to produce and market their products."

Catalysing innovation

The market systems study revealed that most RMG workers purchase their food from small shops operating beside the factories – highlighting the importance of SMEs in promoting access to nutritious and affordable food for RMG workers and their families. Yet, for small businesses to contribute to these outcomes, they must have the capacity and resources to build sustainable and profitable business models. The study, therefore, assessed the challenges and business needs of SMEs, and recommended various kinds of technical support that SBN Bangladesh could provide to allow SMEs to scale up their nutrition-sensitive business ventures.

To identify SMEs with the potential to develop scalable and adaptable products and services for RMG workers, SBN Bangladesh partnered with 10 SMEs to overcome challenges RMG workers face in accessing nutritious, affordable, and safe food. For example, a lack of refrigeration, and its impact on the shelf-life of fresh and nutritious

"Fish is one of the most abundant and nutritious foods in Bangladesh, but its lack of affordability and the inconvenience of processing it stopped most RMG workers from consuming it. Support from SBN, however, has helped us to set up an efficient process where we can offer low-cost fish fillets to RMG workers."

Abu Darda, Founder, Parmeeda.com

food, is one serious constraint for RMG workers. So, to increase the supply of affordable nutritious items to RMG factories, SBN provided one SME – Parmeeda.com – with a refrigerated truck, a freezer, and a fish cutting machine.

Furthermore, most bakery items consumed by RMG workers have high levels of salt, sugar, and trans fats, so SBN Bangladesh supported Super Tasty Food in disrupting this market. With an automatic grinder, a freezer, and a packaging machine, Super Tasty Food has been able to introduce competitively-priced bakery items made out of vitamin A-rich orange-fleshed sweet potato.

In addition, most RMG workers use loose, unpackaged sunflower oil which poses a food safety threat to them as there is no traceability or testability to ensure this product is safe for consumers. However, foreign brands of healthy sunflower oils are extremely expensive and therefore inaccessible for the workers. To provide RMG workers with an affordable source of fortified locally-produced sunflower oil, SBN helped Coastal Agro Services increase the scale of its operations with an advanced oil



pressing machine. SBN Bangladesh has also been supporting the establishment of nutrition-sensitive 'fair price shops' in RMG factories to increase the visibility and accessibility of nutritious products.

Increasing awareness

A lack of knowledge about basic food standards is one challenge holding back SMEs which operate near RMG factories. To overcome this, SBN Bangladesh, in partnership with the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) and the Global Alliance for Improved

Nutrition (GAIN), is developing food safety guidelines which have been specifically tailored to the needs of SMEs. SBN is also training BFSa food safety officers to enable them to provide better regulatory monitoring and technical support to SMEs.

Another key challenge is that the demand for nutritious and safe food is still at a nascent stage. “RMG workers are generally not aware of the benefits of consuming a healthy diet, and their hectic lifestyles and limited incomes reduce their choice of food,” Syed explains. There is also stiff competition from large-scale manufacturers which produce cheap processed foods that are often high in trans-fat, sugar, and salt. “It is difficult for SMEs to design products that cater to the needs of resource-constrained RMG workers, but SBN has been working hard to help SMEs overcome these challenges and develop innovative products and services that are nutritious, attractive, and affordable,” Syed adds.

To further support SMEs located near RMG factories, SBN Bangladesh and GAIN carried out policy advocacy events in partnership with key government ministries. One event, hosted in

collaboration with the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, was carried out to strengthen the capacity of their inspectors to build the abilities of factory management in integrating nutrition-sensitive knowledge and facilities for workers.

In partnership with the Institute of Public Health Nutrition, SBN Bangladesh and GAIN have developed a guideline for factory managers, canteen managers, catering service providers, and peer educators on ensuring best nutrition practices in the factories. SBN Bangladesh also has plans to work with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, to create rewards and recognition for factories that adopt best practices on nutrition.

SBN is also aiming to work with the government and other partners, including GAIN, to establish fair price shops in all RMG factories, so that there is a large captive market for affordable, nutritious, and safe food. “These actions will catalyse the development of a viable market for nutritious and safe products,” Syed enthuses.



For more information contact:
Mahmudul Hasan,
SBN Bangladesh Coordinator
shasan@gainhealth.org

Ali's 'out of the box' idea:

*revolutionising the poultry industry
in Pakistan and beyond*



Pakistani enterprise and member of the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Bangladesh [Poulta Inc.](#), has designed an innovative system to modernise the poultry industry – enabling farmers to detect, predict and prevent potential production problems early on.

In Pakistan, there is an urgent need to improve the nutrition status of many sectors of the population, specifically the protein intake and nutrition security of vulnerable populations such as women of reproductive age and children. Two forms of malnutrition, in particular, are being experienced at levels high enough to warrant a public health problem: anaemia and stunting. The national prevalence of under-five stunting is 37.6% and, among the adult population, 52.1% of women of reproductive age are anaemic.

Inefficient farming practices are leading to shortages of chicken meat and eggs which, in turn, is driving up prices and making these nutritious sources of dietary protein unaffordable for many. "A friend lost 70,000 birds in a single day and it took him three days to discover that poor quality water had been the cause. I discovered that, globally, farmers are losing USD 100 billion every year due to poultry health issues, which is negatively impacting accessibility, availability and affordability of important protein sources," says Ali Murtaza Solangi, Founder and CEO of Poulta, a small enterprise operating in Pakistan to integrate data-driven systems into the poultry industry. "A sustainable farming technique was required to overcome these hurdles to benefit our nation and other countries around the world. That idea gave birth to our innovation in 2019 that is empowering farmers and lowering prices for consumers."

All systems go

Targeting a clear need in the market, Poulta developed an end-to-end data-driven system

"As an entrepreneur, always look for out-of-the-box ideas that are repeatable, scalable and global. But, most importantly, make sure your idea will be highly impactful for people, profit and planet."

Ali Murtaza Solangi, Founder, Poulta

that helps poultry farmers of all sizes with early detection, prediction, and prevention of losses across their poultry farm. Real-time, integrated data – on air and water quality, mortality rates, feed consumption, and other productivity factors – provides farmers with actionable insights. Farmers are also able to monitor multiple farms at once with this equipment, meaning they can use their time more effectively and streamline operations. Poulta has also developed one of the world's first traceability technologies for eggs and chickens, from farm-to-fork. This demonstrates when and where eggs and chickens are grown, how they reach the consumer, and assures products are hygienic and free of diseases.

This dynamic software system has the potential to improve the productivity of the global poultry sector and provide adequate protein to those in need – but first it needed to be tested. To ensure the system was robust, Poulta initially targeted four medium and large poultry companies in Pakistan which each tested their proof of concept. Since then, Poulta's digitally-powered solutions have been successfully deployed in 150 controlled poultry sheds, resulting in a 1% reduction in mortality, 10-15% reduction in medicine costs, 15% reduction in energy consumption, and a 5-8% increase in production; which has collectively helped farmers increase their profitability.

Accessing regional and global opportunities has been another strategy for success. In



© Poulta

2020, Poulta was awarded a Global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Pitch Competition cash prize of USD 10,000 sponsored by Cargill, for improving accessibility to healthier foods. The funds from the Cargill Innovation Prize have been used by the company in a variety of ways, such as to further improve product deployments to farmers, enhance their research and development (R&D) capacity, streamline device manufacturing, and cover operational expenses.

Poulta's proof-of-concept has proved so successful that the company has already begun to target European poultry producers. In the Netherlands, it is collaborating with food-based 'accelerators' and funders to establish itself in the country and provide fully-traceable eggs and chicks throughout the EU. Poulta is also working closely with universities and other academic institutes – in Pakistan, Europe, and the US – to help them keep pace with changes in technology and produce resources fit for next-generation smart poultry farming. Through these partnerships, Poulta has helped develop a global certification programme which will provide the poultry industry with certified skilled workers.

Innovating to overcome challenges

Accessing finance has been Poulta's biggest hurdle, particularly as a small business working to develop an innovative technology. The initial R&D phase, which required skilled and talented personnel, was difficult. "Developing vertically-integrated poultry farming features, and over 35 sensors, was not easy to achieve with our pre-seed money," Ali reveals. "In just one quarter, however, we have made sales of USD 200,000. This is an excellent achievement, but if we had more funds we could scale more quickly." The company has also been able to expand its talented team, which now comprises 50 people.

As cases of COVID-19 spread in 2020, city lockdowns and mass social distancing orders came into effect across Pakistan. These restrictions proved to be significant for Poulta. In the country, chicken is typically served at large gatherings such as weddings and other functions, and these events comprise a significant proportion of demand in the poultry industry. Consequently, when gatherings were

banned by the government, requirements fell, negatively impacting poultry farmers' sales – leading to a decline in purchases of Pouлта's software and equipment. Furthermore, travel restrictions and border closures meant Pouлта was unable to source devices and manufacturing materials from overseas, namely China.

Despite the significant challenges Pouлта faced as a result of the pandemic, the small enterprise managed to retain all employees and continue with manufacturing and R&D operations throughout 2020. For this, the employees credit Ali's adaptability. His ability to find ways to carry on with normal business operations, despite the restrictions, demonstrated both his and the company's resilience, while continued investment into R&D enabled the enterprise to improve products to support them moving forward. Moreover, Pouлта has developed improved versions of the monitoring hardware and software, which will aid them in scaling activities in the near future.

Pouлта emphasises the significance of the Cargill prize money in assisting these activities, as well as the networking and mentorship opportunities provided as part of the Global SUN Pitch Competition, which allowed the company to expand their network and clientele via a global

platform, and call on this wider support during particularly challenging times.

Aiming for the big leagues

For the months and years ahead, Pouлта has big plans. In 2021, the enterprise began paid deployments of their solution, as many of their clients from prior to the Global SUN Pitch Competition were being used to demonstrate the potential of the equipment and thus not paying for the service. The results from these trials have successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of the services that Pouлта provides in improving production, reducing losses, and improving traceability in the poultry value chain and, as a result, 70% of the companies that were testing the solution have begun to pay for it. Scaling up is also key to Pouлта's plans for the future, and the company has its sights set on expanding into markets regionally, but also in Europe, the US, and beyond.

Pouлта is on a mission to support farmers, improve nutrition, and provide, for the first time, an end-to-end digitised system for complete traceability of poultry products right up to the consumer's plate, for a healthier and safer final product.



For more information contact:
Shadab Fariduddin,
SBN Pakistan Coordinator
sokhan@gainhealth.org

Kunle's innovation:

*developing technology to
improve workforce nutrition*



In combining technology-enabled kiosks and a ghost kitchen system, Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Nigeria member [Mealimeter](#) is addressing poor nutrition among young professionals, while also collecting previously unavailable food consumption data to improve decision-making and provide an efficient supply of nutritious food.

In 2014, Kunle Jinadu, Founder of Mealimeter, noticed a gap in Nigeria's nutrition sector. Despite a rise in start-ups offering healthy meals, drinks, and snacks, no one was efficiently reaching customers at scale and providing young working professionals with access to nutritious foods.

So Kunle developed an innovative enterprise to provide the infrastructure for this through a unique, three-point model that combines technology-enabled kiosks; computer terminals which provide access to information and allow for communication, commerce, and more; and a ghost kitchen system set-up for the preparation of delivery-only meals.

Mealimeter has combined a smart food vending machine with a unique model through which enterprises have access to shared kitchen space to produce food for delivery. These vending machines are deployed to offices across Lagos (with plans to expand further in Nigeria and across Africa), and link over 20 nutrition businesses to new markets. In doing so, the company effectively uses innovation to tap into Nigeria's workplace

"As much as you can, focus more on the customer and less on investors."

Kunle Jinadu, Founder, Mealimeter

catering industry – worth over USD 5 billion each year – while improving consumers' access to healthy, affordable meal options.

Playing the numbers game

To change people's behaviour, Kunle and his team needed to make nutritious meals easier and faster to access. To start, they dropped the delivery cost per item, as multiple food products are delivered to central locations – eliminating the transaction cost associated with delivering single products to multiple destinations.

"The logistics of food means you can't store it for extended periods. However, [by] using a ghost kitchen model and kiosks, we attempted to make it easier to have multiple vendors serve each office location – almost like bringing nutritious 'food courts' as you'd have in malls, to offices," Kunle adds. This approach ensures improved variety for customers.

The smart vending machines deployed at local offices also provide Mealimeter with access to food consumption data that was previously unavailable in Nigeria, through sensor data and built-in artificial intelligence. This allows the company and its partners to remotely track shipments to vending machines, collect consumer data from machines to monitor usage for accurate resupply, and also track sales trends by location and time of year. The data is critical to understanding what foods are consumed and when, thereby facilitating more informed decision-making and an efficient supply of nutritious food.

Validation in victory

Mealimeter's innovative concept enabled the company to participate in the 2019 Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) National Pitch Competition in Nigeria, NutriPitch. The NutriPitch competition

provides a platform for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria's nutrition sector to showcase their innovations, receive technical assistance and training, and compete for cash prizes. "Thanks to the facilitators and mentors, we gained a better understanding of the nutrition ecosystem – including the challenges, new customers, and vendors. We learned lots about product marketing, business strategy, investment readiness, and how to deliver a winning pitch," Kunle enthuses. "Apart from the excitement and very welcome good news, the prize is a validation of our work and the call for more innovation from our team. It is time to take this next step forward."

In addition to this competition, the team emerged as the second-runner up in the 2020 Global SUN Pitch Competition. At this competition, Mealimeter was named a winner and received a cash prize of USD 7,000, which is being utilised to build their vending tech for bigger locations and outdoor use.

Overcoming obstacles

Like many start-ups, Mealimeter experienced barriers accessing finance – especially once the

pandemic took hold. "Initially, I invested my savings to build our first three machines and cover sales costs to sign up our first set of offices," explains Kunle. "When we were ready to raise funds to service the locations who had signed up, COVID-19 struck, offices shut down, and that effectively ended all ongoing conversations. We've stayed alive using savings and taking up software consulting projects, but plan to reopen investment conversations once we get confirmation of resumption from our top customers."

The pandemic also highlighted another concern: the enterprise's reliance on its primary users, who are workers within office spaces. In 2020, Mealimeter deployed two of its smart vending machines as a pilot but, when COVID-19 struck, professionals began working from home. Kunle explains that "most offices are either operating at about 20% capacity or are totally shut down," and having to adapt to social distancing measures and government restrictions. As a result, the enterprise has refrained from deploying further machines but is constantly thinking of other innovative ways to reach a wider customer base.

The company continues to face pandemic-related challenges head-on and views them



as opportunities to adapt. Through their initial launches within Nigeria, they received requests to upscale; and the team has maintained communication with these businesses in the hope of making an even greater impact when corporate customers return to workplaces.

As the country progressively relaxes COVID restrictions, Mealimeter will also leverage its innovative technology to help businesses make their cafeterias safer by eliminating the need for cash, physical contact, and crowds. Customers can download the Mealimeter mobile application to see what food is available in the nearest vending machine and pay. They can then approach the machine and scan a QR code using their phone to collect their food quickly and without human interaction.

"I think technology innovation in nutrition is just beginning to catch on," Kunle explains. "Generally though, it is pretty tough, and we have only stayed alive because of personal sacrifices of [the] Founders and support from the Global Alliance for Integrated Nutrition (GAIN), for example."

Visions for the future

The team hopes to achieve two goals to address the increasing levels of malnutrition in Africa. Firstly, "we want to scale our model to Kenya and aim to pilot a system for access to nutrition for work-from-home professionals [including research and development on recipe development]," Kunle explains. The second is to design "a different way to provide nutrition education so that people choose nutritious food before it becomes an urgent health need. I did a quick check with contacts in Nairobi and found that there isn't a solution similar to ours yet [as of 2020]. There's a massive adoption of mobile phones in the city and an increased consciousness to eat healthy. A combination

of these factors offers a good opportunity for Mealimeter."

Kunle shares three important recommendations for entrepreneurs:

- "It is important to have multiple customer groups, so income sources are diversified. We focused primarily on offices and, once COVID-19 shut them down, that affected our revenue."
- "Sell. Sometimes, selling and marketing skills are more important than the quality of your product. It is absolutely important to sell and that's probably the top function of the CEO."
- "As much as you can, focus more on the customer and less on investors."



For more information contact:
Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator
sbnigeria@gainhealth.org

Nurturing SMEs:

strengthening Tanzania's innovation ecosystem



Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Tanzania often struggle to scale their operations, access markets, and attract funding and investors due to limited business knowledge and lack of mentorship. The [Lishe Accelerator](#) programme is helping these SMEs to overcome such challenges by offering them training, mentorship, and links to investors.

In Tanzania, as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, SMEs power economies and provide healthy and safe food to many households. It is estimated that, in Africa, up to 90% of food is purchased from SMEs, including small shops, groceries, street food vendors, and hawkers. However, the majority of these businesses struggle to expand their businesses due to the challenges of attracting funding, and having limited business knowledge and support.

Stimulating engagement

Since 2017, Tanzania's Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN), and Sahara Ventures, an institution working to cultivate a strong innovation and technology entrepreneurship ecosystem in Africa, have collaborated to support nutrition-sensitive SMEs in Tanzania in scaling their impact.

A flagship initiative of the partnership has been the Lishe Accelerator programme, to fast-track SME growth and attract investor interest. Since launching in 2018, the key focus has been developing activities, including training and mentorship, which ultimately link SMEs to investors and technical assistance providers, by leveraging local and global strategic partnerships through SBN.

"The collaboration between SBN Tanzania and Sahara Ventures is a strategic partnership which ensures a win-win situation for both sides. For SBN Tanzania, it is about being able to

"This partnership has nurtured nutrition-sensitive SMEs and food-tech ecosystems in Tanzania by working consistently and sustainably with different players – including civil society organisations, researchers, technologists, academia, government, development partners, corporate players, and investors."

Haika Maleko,
SBN Tanzania Coordinator

create the intended impact on nutrition; while Sahara Ventures seeks to attain investor-ready businesses for its Africa-wide venture-backed accelerator programme that supports start-ups," says Abbas Sykes, Lishe Accelerator Project Manager.

The accelerator programme starts with a call for applications that is announced across traditional and social media and in partnership with local governments and community-based organisations. Successful entrepreneurs are then chosen to participate in a training 'boot camp'.

The boot camp training aims to ensure the SMEs understand their business models, adopt innovative growth approaches and strategies, complete due-diligence processes, and participate in investor pitching sessions. It is run by experts who are drawn from various disciplines including legal, marketing, investment, sales, leadership, nutrition, and branding.

The training ends with a 'pitch day', also known as a demo day. The event is the highlight of the accelerator programme, during which the

finalists pitch their businesses to investors, including financial institutions, incubation centre managers, and a panel of judges drawn from finance, business development, and nutrition sectors.

The winners undergo further mentorship from Sahara Ventures, as they prepare to compete in regional Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Pitch competitions. “Beyond basic business training, we want to equip the SMEs to create lasting impacts and inspire other entrepreneurs through their innovations, because that will be key in tackling malnutrition,” adds Abbas.

Recipe for success

The five winners of the third cohort (which ran from December 2020 to April 2021) of the Lishe Accelerator programme included BioNutra, which creates a range of natural supplements from local ingredients for local and export markets. Winning SME, Alohado, partners with smallholder farmers to manufacture organic spices – including curry powder, coriander, and cardamom.

The other three Lishe Accelerator winners included: Luke Tanzania Ltd., whose flagship product is an organic beetroot paste; Sai Dairy, a Zanzibar dairy start-up that produces milk and yoghurts; and Adeck Juice, which processes fresh and healthy smoothies and desserts.

To improve the training and participant experience for each Lishe Accelerator cohort, Sahara Venture, SBN Tanzania, and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) co-organised an Accelerator Reflection Session with SMEs and judges at the end of every competition. Feedback has included the need to extend the programme duration and include more peer-to-peer learning opportunities with business across various supply chains. As a result, the number of training days was increased in the



© Lishe Accelerator

third accelerator from 10 to 14, and the number of those qualifying for training doubled from 10 to 20.

Out of 20 businesses that participated in the second cohort in December 2019, nine have entered into partnerships with other organisations to scale their operations, and six have accessed follow-on funding. The SMEs have also indicated that the programme has impacted how they conduct their business, including engaging with their customers, preparing themselves to meet investors, and developing their business models.

One previous winner, Jolenta Joseph, has built a successful business, Sanavita. The SME provides more than 2,000 farmers with a ready market for their nutritious biofortified crops, including orange-fleshed sweet potato, which is then processed into a variety of products including flour and biscuits. Jolenta went on to win the [GAIN Food Technology Innovation Prize](#) at the 2020 Global SUN Pitch Competition.

Other successful Lishe SMEs include Healthy Maisha, which produces cold-pressed juices

from local fruits and vegetables for hospitals, schools, and government offices; and Mamaland Mushroom Farms, which produces exotic mushrooms and mushroom spawn.

Monitoring gaps, drawing lessons

In the wake of COVID-19, Sahara Ventures and SBN Tanzania are also looking to revise the training modules to enable SMEs to adopt new approaches to build their resilience post-pandemic. Abbas says that more training and mentorship is needed to support SMEs at the growth stage, since most struggle to spot opportunities to scale. He believes the project should therefore look into launching an incubation programme to support start-ups, as most are not developed enough to qualify for the investment-readiness programme. He also notes that, to make the competition inclusive and have a national outlook, training and demo days should be held in other parts of Tanzania on a rotational basis. This way, they would attract more rural-based entrepreneurs that need exposure. The project is already seeking to work

with partners such as The Sokoine University Graduate Entrepreneurs Cooperative, agriculture incubators, and Small Industries Development Organization regional offices in selected zones, to offer field support to small businesses across the country.

Priorities for the future

As the accelerator programme gains momentum and attracts more investors, partners, and applicants, GAIN and Sahara Ventures are looking to increase Accelerator Reflection Sessions to get more inputs from as many participants as possible, following the success of the previous sessions.

To further grow the list of partners for the project – from government and the private sector (including banks and microfinance institutions), to development partners and SMEs – SBN Tanzania and Sahara Ventures are looking to introduce more events, including networking and mentorship clinics. The partners are also actively working to deepen collaborations with the government at the national and local level.



For more information contact:
Haika Malleko,
SBN Tanzania Coordinator
hmalleko@gainhealth.org

Power in partnership:

SMEs innovating to improve nutrition in Nigeria



A collaboration between the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Nigeria, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and the [FATE Foundation](#) gave birth to NutriPitch, an SME-focused Pitch Competition that is bringing Nigerian innovation to the forefront of food system transformation in the country. Focusing on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the entrepreneurs behind them, the competition brings training, investment opportunities, and a well-deserved spotlight to these businesses.

Food choices are shaped by food systems, whereby the private sector is the main player and investor. In Africa, the food environment is dominated by smaller companies, especially in retail and distribution. SMEs serving as input suppliers, off-takers, processors, and distributors along the food value chain are key drivers of job creation and regional economic growth.

To support these nutrition and food safety-focused businesses in Nigeria, SBN and GAIN forged a partnership with the FATE Foundation to host a Pitch Competition. Their aim was to create a programme that provided dedicated and targeted support to growth-stage enterprises that can impact access to nutrition, with potential for investment. This would be achieved through entrepreneurship education, growth coaching, and mentorship, to enable the business owners to scale and be investment-ready.

Competing to nourish Nigeria

The result was the NutriPitch competition, also known as the Nourish Nigeria Challenge – a programme dedicated to scaling up nutrition and food safety-focused businesses that are innovatively promoting healthy

"Partnerships stretch your capacity for impact. They provide the opportunity to harness skillsets that may be the strength of one partner but not the other. Partnerships also present opportunities for layering to build off the work that one partner may have started, ensuring continuity and potential for continued improvement."

Uduak Igbeka,
Africa Regional Lead, SBN Global

diets in Nigeria. The FATE Foundation, an organisation committed to fostering sustainable entrepreneurship in Nigeria, was chosen as the ideal partner for this competition given its extensive track record of working with SMEs and organising successful incubator programmes. "FATE brought the opportunity to interact with a broader network of SMEs who they had been engaging with over an 18-year period," explains Uduak Igbeka, Africa Regional Lead of SBN Global.

The programme was scheduled to be executed in two parts: the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) National Pitch Competition, NutriPitch, and the Global SUN Pitch Competition event. NutriPitch aimed to select 10 innovative, high potential, high-impact businesses working in nutrition or food safety, and position them for investment readiness and scale. From here, judges would then select the top three businesses to participate at the Global SUN Pitch Competition final in July 2020.



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Boot camp for building business capacity

Of the 44 business that applied, 10 finalists were inducted and enrolled in the one-week accelerator boot camp, where they attended workshops on topics ranging from accessing finance and food safety to compliance and business expansion strategies. All sessions, facilitated by leading entrepreneurs and subject matter experts, were geared towards assessing the entrepreneurs' current business levels and expanding their horizons around available opportunities in the nutrition sector.

An advisory session was also held, in which the entrepreneurs had one-on-one meetings with FATE Foundation advisors to review and refine their three-to-five-year growth plans. These sessions covered critical business topics, such as Business and Operating Models, Funding and Investment Readiness, Product/

Service Development, and Sustainability, and each entrepreneur received feedback and recommendations on possible steps to advance their businesses in key growth areas. After the boot camp sessions, the NutriPitch final event provided entrepreneurs an opportunity to pitch their businesses to investors as a possible funding and investment opportunity.

Rewarding recognition

Seun Sangoleye of BabyGrubz Nigeria was crowned as the overall winner of the NutriPitch event, with Mealimeter and efarms each being named as runners-up. All three SMEs went on to represent Nigeria at the Global SUN Pitch Competition. At the final ceremony, which took place virtually in July 2020, BabyGrubz was awarded the first place at the Global Competition, and Mealimeter also won a prize. "I feel really grateful that our contributions towards improved family livelihoods and child

survival were recognised and rewarded. This was a welcome pat on the back for us at BabyGrubz,” Seun enthuses.

BabyGrubz is a multiple award-winning social enterprise working to address malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies among Nigerian children by providing affordable nutrition through a range of food products that are exclusively distributed by women – a deliberate empowerment approach for financial inclusion to tackle poverty. Of the support she received throughout the competition process, Seun says: “My biggest takeaway was clarity on the next steps for my business and how to get there. Micro-franchising was mentioned briefly during the training, and I wanted to find out more on the topic. My coach was really helpful and we have begun to look into this to help us impact children and women on a larger scale.”

Partnership potentials

The partnership with the FATE Foundation meant working with an organisation that was not focused on nutrition. To ensure nutrition remained central in the delivery of the National Pitch Competition, GAIN provided strong technical input throughout the shortlisting, boot camp, and winner selection processes. The Basic Nutrition and Food Safety sessions supported by GAIN also provided a much-needed nutrition focus on the business support service provided by the FATE Foundation.

The SBN Nigeria team maintains an on-going relationship with the FATE Foundation, especially in the area of knowledge sharing, and looks forward to sustained engagement and generation of ideas where further collaboration could be possible.



For more information contact:
Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator
sbnnigeria@gainhealth.org

3

Resilience

In an ever-changing world, businesses have to be more adaptable and resilient than ever – to stand strong in the face of adversity and find novel solutions around challenges in order to retain their place in the market and continue scaling up.

Everything from climate-based shocks and stresses, political and civil instability, changes in consumer habits, difficulty accessing finance, a lack of skills and knowledge, and poor nutrition awareness has long created hurdles for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in food systems, and prevented them from supplying local communities with safe and nutritious food options.

Yet, with the support of the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) and partners, many entrepreneurs have been provided opportunities to access support and guidance from government, private sector actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and industry peers. These partnerships have helped them build their resilience and be able to better overcome difficulties.

However, the first few months of 2020 brought about a significant trial that nobody foresaw: the COVID-19 pandemic. To help minimise the spread of the disease, governments introduced public health measures which, while effective in reducing transmission, had a critical impact on businesses and the economy.

Companies including Soupah, in Nigeria, found themselves burdened with vast amounts of product as consumers opted to purchase long-life staples. Elsewhere, SMEs such as Limpho, in Mozambique, experienced processing and production delays as suppliers across the food chain ran out of stock or temporarily closed.

Even as lockdowns ease and life gets back to 'normal', the outlook remains tough for SMEs

in the food chain. Rising unemployment means consumers are cutting back on spending and opting for cheaper, often less nutritious foods. Caring for sick family members means businesses are finding themselves short-staffed and unable to hit targets. Social distancing measures mean fewer people are heading to markets and less often, leading to reduced revenue. Budgets are being further stretched as employers also have to factor in costs of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other safeguarding measures. And these are just a few of the difficulties faced.

Instead of being defeated, many entrepreneurs viewed these challenges as opportunities – highlighting areas in which they could learn and improve, or as opening up new pathways for growth. For example, Mealimeter, in Nigeria, is utilising the hands-free aspect of its smart vending machines to pull in new clients in the wake of enhanced cleanliness.

SBN and its partners are playing a crucial role in helping SMEs build resilience and get back on their feet following COVID-19. A number of supporting approaches have been identified as being particularly beneficial – offering online training courses to enhance and pivot skill sets, supporting the digitisation of businesses as they explore new distribution models, aiding with marketing to enhance product awareness, and helping businesses develop products with longer shelf lives.

By supporting SMEs to strengthen their resilience, we can effectively and efficiently aid their recovery and help ensure food systems 'build back better'. Looking to the future, food systems continue to run the risk of being impacted by increased demographic, climate, and market pressures. As the largest producers and distributors of food globally, there is a vested interest in ensuring we enhance the preparedness of SMEs to weather future shocks.

Ifeoluwa's passion for problem solving:

adapting to COVID-19 nutrition challenges in Nigeria



The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far-reaching and devastating for all sectors of society, worldwide. Soupah, a Nigerian woman-led small business and member of the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Nigeria, exemplifies the ways the pandemic has impacted enterprises, but is also an inspiring example of how innovation can be harnessed to overcome challenges and emerge more resilient.

[Soupah Limited](#), a food processing company located in the heart of Oyo State, Nigeria, was founded by Ifeoluwa Olatayo as a student in 2016. What started as a simple delivery system, transporting fresh produce to university students on a bicycle, has progressed into a thriving technology-driven social enterprise. Soupah Limited improves farmers' access to market which, in turn, allows produce to be priced affordably for customers.

The venture works with local farmers, processing their fresh fruits and vegetables into soup spices which provide for the nutritional needs of families in Ifeoluwa's community. The spices are supplied to various supermarkets and Soupah's own five retail stores, where the company sells packaged soup ingredients and other nutritional foods. "These products help cater for the nutritional needs of every socio-economic class," enthuses Ifeoluwa, who heralds her passion and willingness to problem-

"Entrepreneurs need to innovate. Your ability to change and be flexible is a key characteristic needed to drive your SME and overcome the challenges."

Ifeoluwa Olatayo,
Founder, Soupah Limited

solve as the most critical contributors to her success.

Soupah Limited currently employs 12 full-time and four part-time workers serving more than 2,000 customers and producing six major product lines. The company has received several awards for its social and environmental impact across the value chain, from farm to fork. In addition to being a finalist in the [2018 Global Scaling Up Nutrition \(SUN\) Pitch Competition](#), awards include the EcoBank New Venture Fellowship, Indi-Africa Fellowship, 2018 Food Connection Challenge by Netherlands Government in Nigeria, Overall Winner of the 2019 MSME Award by the Office of the Vice President of Nigeria, and the prestigious 2019 Bourlag-Adesina Fellowship for African Entrepreneurs.

Ifeoluwa's journey demonstrates she is no stranger to challenges. "Being a teenager when I started, I had to learn as I went along. I had no funding – I wrote business proposals to some banks, but no one was going to bet on a teenager still in university," she laughs. "Most people suggested I focus on my educational pursuits. However, as the business matured in terms of sales, brand awareness, and innovation, things began to ease out – and we have grown to a stage where the business is more stable and blooming."

Powering through the pandemic

However, Ifeoluwa's determination was put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Since people were low on cash, and unsure how long the lockdown would last, many Nigerians opted for staples such as rice, beans, and garri (a popular African dish made from cassava), while other nutritious foods like spices, vegetables, and fruits, went largely unsold." Unfortunately,



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Soupah's processed products were not amongst the products most consumers wanted to stock up on, so sales plummeted. Similarly, the lockdown led to a low supply of perishables which culminated in higher prices.

In March and April 2020, the business experienced a 34% loss, which increased to 53% in the subsequent two months. As a result, Ifeoluwa furloughed some staff and ran a skeletal operation; just enough to ensure non-furloughed staff were paid.

However, while the pandemic's impact on the business was severe, Ifeoluwa saw the potential to pivot into other markets and develop the use of digital solutions as a means to survive. Refusing to wait for sales to fall further, the team started delivering fresh products like tomatoes and peppers at affordable prices to customers in need. "We were able to do this as a result of bulk purchase directly from local farmers, and processing and storing the produce in ways that increases its shelf life and

reduces the pressure to sell immediately, or hike prices to make up for a shortfall incurred on spoilt product," Ifeoluwa reveals.

Building resilience through innovation

Ifeoluwa also identified the need to better connect to customers, so she procured USSD codes (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data codes, widely used in some countries to initiate transactions via mobile phones) to drive sales. The use of USSD codes allows Soupah to deliver fresh and/or processed fruit and vegetable produce to their customers anywhere within Ibadan, Oyo State. The codes are sent to Soupah using mobile phones, but do not require internet access to work. "So far, we have seen positive changes. We are receiving an average of 25 orders each day via USSD," Ifeoluwa states. "We have increased our product lines by 20% and sales have increased by 41.8% as a result of the increase in sales of fresh produce, and we hope it gets better from there."

While the lockdown may be over, many agribusinesses are still overcoming pandemic-related challenges. "For us, sales have improved remarkably from the pandemic onset, but the challenges of running an agribusiness in an emerging economy like ours persist," she explains. "For example, storage and logistic challenges mean transporting the produce from the farm to the city is difficult, and the movement and social gathering restrictions mean in-person events, like trade shows, are no longer physically possible. Due to this, marketing and branding are more virtual, hence awareness around our new product lines and new technology requires increased budgets and modified approaches."

Game plans for a bold future

Soupah exemplifies resilience, but Ifeoluwa does not take this for granted. "Entrepreneurship is not a walk in the park, it can get challenging! However, when you do

it for the right reasons, it makes the journey worth it," she enthuses. "The pandemic helped us recognise our shortfalls as a company, especially in the area of technology – and we responded adequately, highlighting our resilience and flexibility. Seeing the impacts of our business on the farmers and people able to purchase our affordable products, and seeing the smiles on the faces of customers able to purchase 1 kg of tomato products from us for as low as USD 0.10, instead of USD 1 in other markets, makes it all worth it."

For Ifeoluwa, the coming years hold ambitious expansion plans. "Beyond the pandemic, we want to create another corporate solution that enables our model to scale globally," she reveals. "I aspire for my company to be technology-driven and to harness its potential across the fruit and vegetable value chains. We hope for technical support and funding that enables us to try a variety of innovations across the storage and logistics areas of our business."



For more information contact:
Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator
sbnnigeria@gainhealth.org

Lote's journey:

*the engineer-turned-farmer
who weathered the storm*



When Lote Muchanga graduated as a mechanical engineer, he decided to use his skills to bring protein-rich eggs and chicken to the market, making them affordable for low-income families. However, his business, Quinta do Bom Ovo, a member of the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Mozambique, has had to weather the challenges of the climate as well as the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the [United Nations Children's Fund](#) (UNICEF), chronic malnutrition impacts approximately one in every two children under the age of five in Mozambique – and this concern has been exacerbated by several unforeseen disasters that have afflicted the country in recent years.

The first of these disasters arrived on 14 March 2019, when Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique, affecting 64 districts and 19 counties. Just five weeks later, on 25 April 2019, Cyclone Kenneth struck the north of the country, damaging more than 55,400 hectares of crops according to the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA). These natural disasters impacted infrastructure among local producers and enterprises of all sizes, in turn affecting the supply of nutritious food, especially for low-income families who cannot afford imported goods. Then, just a year later, the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

SBN, co-facilitated by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), is working to support businesses in receiving technical assistance and access to funding in the wake of such crises. One programme through which this support is implemented is the Recovering Food Systems project, which supports and strengthens food systems in the aftermath of the cyclones. This initiative works

"The training from SBN helped provide a management-oriented approach towards growing the business, with our consumers as a guide for the development and improvement of our produce."

Lote Muchanga,
Founder, Quinta do Bom Ovo

with 15 enterprises producing nutritious foods – including eggs, fortified maize flour, iodised salt, broilers, and vegetables – and builds on the success of GAIN's Scaling Up Markets for Nutritious Foods initiative. One SBN member to receive assistance through the project was Quinta do Bom Ovo, an enterprise working to scale-up egg consumption in Mozambique.

Building strength in local food systems

The Sofala province is home to Lote Muchanga – a mechanical engineering graduate who, before the cyclones, was already concerned by the country's high rates of malnutrition. Lote was aware of the nutritional value of chicken and eggs, as they contain high levels of protein and fatty acids, important for pregnant women, and good amounts of vitamin B12 and choline, which aid metabolic activities in young children. Despite these nutritional benefits though, he noticed that Mozambicans eat only 10 to 12 eggs a year, while in neighbouring countries, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, this number is above 40. Furthermore, only 40% of eggs on sale in Mozambique are locally produced.

Lote founded Quinta do Bom Ovo ('The Good Egg Farm') in 2015 and, in 2018, the business

received its first grant from GAIN to support the scaling-up of its egg production from 5,000 per day to an expected 20,000 eggs per day by 2020. Lote's aim was to position eggs as the cheapest source of high-quality animal protein in the market, and supply this nutritious product to low-income populations.

When Quinta do Bom Ovo was established, Lote kept 400 lay hens in a simple structure. By 2018, the business had become a major poultry producer in Sofala province and, "by January 2019, we had purchased more point-of-lay chickens and were expecting to produce close to 9,000 eggs per day," he says.

"We believed our eggs would be on most tables in Sofala. We sought help and invested all our savings. When we thought we had attained our goals, the unexpected happened," Lote explains. The province of Sofala registered some of the highest losses resulting from the tropical cyclones, with more than 20% of the total value in agribusiness destroyed. The disasters destroyed 80% of Quinta do Bom Ovo's infrastructure, including killing some of their flock. After closing for more than a year, the company secured another GAIN grant to support the rapid restoration of local food systems, and was provided with capital investment of USD 100,000 to rebuild stronger, more disaster-resilient infrastructure.

Resilience in the face of adversity

The company was able to rebuild its stock of lay birds, replace battery cages, and hire technical staff. It also used its own funds to build stronger, more resilient layer houses, while waiting for the battery cages and point-of-lay chicks to arrive. Furthermore, they received technical assistance in business development and marketing resilience strategy from SBN.



It was a good restart. However, just as Quinta do Bom Ovo started to get back on its feet, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Movement restrictions resulted in an increase in raw material costs, such as feed, and they also experienced delays in supplies and a lack of laying hens on the market. However, despite the challenges posed, Lote was determined to see his business bounce back.

Today, Quinta do Bom Ovo is building new infrastructure using weather-resilient materials and solar power, and exploring sourcing materials from local suppliers. The company has also signed partnerships with local raw material suppliers of soya, maize, and day-old-chicks – building resilience within the economy by supporting local supply chains – and is boosting its own resources.

The importance of support networks

Quinta do Bom Ovo's competitive advantage lies in its proximity to the market compared to competitors, and consistent supply chains. Since the cyclones, the enterprise has utilised advice provided by GAIN to become more efficient, maximise egg production, and minimise losses, to ensure it sustains a reliable and secure supply to markets.

The company's strategy of acquiring large investments, support, and grants from the local Ministry of Trade and GAIN, has also been crucial. These have allowed Quinta do Bom Ovo to expand its egg production, build cages, and buy feed. "The training from SBN helped provide a management-oriented approach towards growing the business, with our consumers as a guide for the development and improvement of our produce," adds Lote.

Laying plans for the future

Today, the company has regained its prominence and is almost at its pre-cyclone capacity, with 7,500 chickens supplying eggs for the local market. "I thought it was the end of my business, but we managed to get back on track," says Lote. Looking ahead, Quinta do Bom Ovo intends to become a nationally-recognised company in the production of table eggs and laying hens, with a 40% or above market share throughout the Sofala province.

"The last two years have shown us that the business must be resilient. Quinta do Bom Ovo was hit twice, but we are still standing and taking our place in the food system. It was not easy, but the help we had from GAIN and SBN in Mozambique encouraged us to continue the good work to improve the national food system," says Lote with a smile.



For more information contact:
Abel Jorge Dabula,
SBN Mozambique Coordinator
ajdabula@gainhealth.org

Making the most of challenges:

the development of SBN Yemen



Despite political instability and an unstable environment, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in Yemen is working hard to tackle malnutrition. By engaging donors, forming relationships with the private sector, and generating awareness of Yemen's nutrition crisis, this team is transforming challenges into opportunities for the sake of their country's health.

The conflict in Yemen has been dubbed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, with the escalation of the current situation leaving 24 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile, nearly 2.3 million children under the age of five in the country are projected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2021. Amid these critical circumstances, the resilience of the people has become central to the survival and recovery of the nation and its population.

This has been demonstrated through the determination of the country's SUN Secretariat to harness opportunities to engage the private sector in addressing the critical nutrition situation through the establishment of a SUN Business Network (SBN). It was clear from the beginning that this project would be characterised by determination and enthusiasm as, despite initial hesitancy among donors to establish an SBN in such a fragile context, members of SUN Yemen saw an abundance of opportunity.

Seizing new opportunities

Two years after the escalation of the conflict in Yemen in 2015, the country transitioned from the initial 'shock' phase – when the population was firmly entrenched in 'survival' mode – to the 'resilience' phase, in which people began looking to recovery and thinking about long-term solutions. This phase saw many people start their own small businesses as existing

"Most challenges can be converted into opportunities."

Karima Ahmed Al-Hada'a,
SUN Yemen's Planning and
Liaison Specialist

employment opportunities diminished, and the sector to which most of these budding entrepreneurs turned was nutrition and food production. As Karima Ahmed Al-Hada'a, SUN Yemen's Planning and Liaison Specialist explains, "in conflict, the only thing that people cannot stop doing is eating."

However, despite the increased quantity of food being produced and sold by these enterprises, the nutritional quality was often inadequate: they were produced with poor food safety practices, and contained an abundance of additives and chemicals. The SUN Yemen team saw this as an opportunity for the SUN Movement to target these small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and support them in making their products healthier for the public; in turn improving the nutrition of surrounding communities. The ambition to develop SBN Yemen was more of a response to the flourishing SME and start-up sector than a goal to create one and, as such, the Secretariat had the chance to support individuals already passionate about contributing to food and nutrition security in the country and transfer knowledge from outside Yemen into this arena.

In addition to the burgeoning business sector, Yemen is filled with development agencies willing and able to invest in the country's recovery. Organisations such as the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank were already present and working on resilience programmes such as employment



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enhancement, farmer support initiatives, women and youth empowerment, and the provision of training, materials and brands to small businesses in the food industry. However, these programmes lacked emphasis on good nutrition, food safety and hygiene. This confirmed to SUN Yemen that it was important to create an SBN while SMEs were flourishing, people were trying to work in the food sector, and donors were present and willing to invest.

Partnering for power

Expanding on their existing relationship with UNICEF, SUN Yemen partnered with the organisation to initiate the establishment phase of Yemen's SBN. During this phase, a task force was formed from different ministries, sectors and stakeholders to ensure that a wide variety of perspectives and priorities were considered. Meetings and workshops were held with government ministries, stakeholders, the Chamber of Commerce and the business sector, which fuelled engagement and excitement among each of these sectors. Business owners especially found the presentations enlightening and interesting, having been unaware of the staggering extent to which malnutrition and stunting affects the Yemeni population.

The establishment phase generated significant momentum within the business community, especially amongst female business owners, and the response was heartening. It was clear that, despite the risks of the conflict-affected environment, business owners are present and committed and require support and training.

Strength in the face of adversity

Throughout its development, SBN Yemen has faced a number of significant challenges – above those inherent to the hostile, conflict-affected environment in which it exists. The major problem is the nation's fragmented government: a lack of legitimacy to its new structure means that governmental departments and agencies do not yield the same power as they once did. This was a primary reason behind the initial hesitancy and lack of enthusiasm among donors to invest, which hindered the SUN team's efforts in establishing the network and even resulted in members working without designated salaries.

A lack of technical capacity in the country was another significant issue, as Karima and her colleagues searched for food and nutrition experts who could provide support

and knowledge in areas such as labelling and food safety that the network could pass onto enterprises. It was discovered that this expertise simply did not exist in the country, so the technical assistance the team hoped to obtain from the onset was not possible.

Lastly, although no less devastating, was the impact of COVID-19 on the initiative. Meetings and workshops could not take place as governmental and UN-implemented restrictions meant no more than 15 people could gather, while previously overlooked and underdeveloped hygiene procedures became more crucial than ever as efforts to contain the virus escalated.

Prosperity in ever-changing landscapes

The secret to SBN Yemen's success is the adaptability of the people behind it, and their perspective on the challenges they face. Karima

whole-heartedly emphasises the importance of this resilient mindset, insisting that "most challenges can be converted into opportunities." Examples of this are abundant in the case of SBN Yemen: the country's lack of technical knowledge presented an opportunity to develop this capacity; the impacts of COVID-19 gave the team a chance to teach enterprises how to adapt to the new conditions; and the lack of nutrition-related initiatives being implemented by the fragmented government was perceived as a vital gap ready to be filled.

As a nation, Yemen is no stranger to challenging conditions, and the SUN Yemen team embodies the spirit of resilience in the face of these. It is with this attitude of perseverance that the team will move forward, as they now hope to partner with WFP to support the growing number of SMEs in the food system and improve the nutrition of their nation as a whole.



For more information contact:
Karima Al-Hada'a, SUN Yemen
Planning & Liaison Specialist
karima.mopic@gmail.com

Octavio's aspiration:

*building a resilient business
for a nutritious future*



Wanting to build resilience in the food market and also make use of a waste product, Octavio Muchanga founded Limpho Productos Alimentare, to produce cashew nut butter from broken cashews. After identifying another opportunity to use broken rice, the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Mozambique member is expanding its range to further reduce food waste, provide nutrient-rich flour and rice biscuits to low-income families, and provide farmers with additional income.

According to the 2020 [Global Nutrition Report](#), one in every nine people in the world is hungry, and one in three is overweight or obese. In Mozambique, extremely high levels of chronic malnutrition at 43%, according to the [United Nations Children's Fund](#) (UNICEF), affect almost one in every two children under the age of five. Chronic malnutrition contributes to infant deaths and perpetuates the cycle of poverty, negatively impacting school performance and household income and affecting the ability of children to reach their potential physical and mental growth. Causes include inadequate nutrient intake and poor diets, driven by a lack of economic opportunity.

To assist urban and rural families unable to afford basic and diverse foods, Octavio established Limpho Productos Alimentares. This family-run business in Mozambique aims to provide diverse, affordable, and nutritious foods for low-income families, in place of unhealthy convenience foods or imported and expensive ingredients.

Turning waste into winners

The company initially produced peanut butter sourced from local nuts, but soon identified an opportunity to turn broken cashews, that would otherwise go to waste, into butter as well. "We followed the innovative idea of reducing post-harvest loss of raw cashew nuts,

"When we started peanut butter production we had no experience. We just had the idea, we took the risk and implemented it, and gained experience over time. The main ingredient for any entrepreneur who has a business idea is to believe in their dream, take a chance, and continuously design and improve their business concept."

Octavio Muchanga,
Founder, Limpho Productos Alimentare



using broken cashew nuts that cannot be sold,” explains Octavio. “We did not need to install new machinery to produce cashew butter, because our peanut butter machinery can also process cashew and other types of nuts, such as almond and macadamia. So, as we explore our market, and depending on demand, we see a future where we expand our lines of products using other nuts that we have in abundance in Mozambique.”

The business is currently diversifying its portfolio further to include rice flour made from broken rice, having noticed it being discarded at market. The long-term aim is to use the flour to make biscuits, pasta, and a range of other products. “We had a brainstorming session with our distributor and discussed potential markets that have not yet been explored,” reveals Octavio, noting that rice flour contains essential nutrients, including fibre, carbohydrates, vitamin B1 (Thiamine), vitamin B2 (Riboflavin), vitamin B3 (Niacin), vitamin B6, iron, and zinc. The enterprise’s research has established that almost all biscuits currently in Mozambique’s market are imported from South Africa and Portugal which, although high quality, are expensive. While there are some local companies making biscuits, their quality and nutritious value is considerably lower.

By innovatively turning raw waste products, such as cashew nuts and rice, into new product lines, the enterprise is strengthening its resilience in two important ways. First, through diversifying into new income streams, and second, by utilising waste products to cost-effectively produce sustainable and nutritious products. Now, the company has four products with another in progress: peanut butter made from local nuts, with sugar-free options; cashew nut butter, made with cashew nut and coconut oil; snacks made from roasted nuts; *Chikki*, a mix of roasted peanuts and cassava flour; and the rice flour under development.

Taking small steps to overcome big challenges

When COVID-19 hit Mozambique, with movement restricted and incomes hit through job losses, the enterprise experienced a considerable decrease in demand for its products and subsequent revenue. This challenge was exacerbated by border closures, which affected importation of the company’s packaging from South Africa, and disrupted local supplies of raw ingredients, which delayed production of the nut butters, rice flour, and other products.



With fewer staff able to work due to movement restrictions and reduced hours at the production facility, the enterprise scaled down its supply. However, it made sure to keep at least one distributor to guarantee that their products were still available on the market. The group also focused on building better linkages between local farmers, food producers, and consumers. For example, by creating cooperatives, better links have been forged between farmers and buyers, building resilience in the agricultural sector and providing additional income and job opportunities locally, instead of relying on imports from other areas of the country.

To build a more resilient future, the first step has been to identify and sign agreements with new suppliers of raw materials, and keep up-to-date with the latest news on border movements to replenish stocks. With the re-opening of borders and increased commercial transactions, Limpho Productos Alimentares is beginning to increase production volumes, already reaching 5,000 kg per month of peanut butter, and 500 kg per month of cashew nut butter. In the near future, they are optimistic of increasing production to 2 tonnes per month across their products, and are exploring potential export markets in South Africa.

To further diversify its portfolio, the group has also been exploring chicken breeding to produce eggs. The main aim of this venture is to increase the availability of nutritious food and support women in producing nutritious foods for themselves. "Our focus is to be able to assist women who do not have enough skills to produce food for the family," clarifies Octavio. "We saw the need to contribute to the increase of egg production in Mozambique. So far it has been a success because the cooperative is now formalised, and we are looking for financial means to help the cooperative."

The cooperative currently has 2,000 women members, who are also being taught vegetable garden techniques to help diversify diets. The vegetables can also be a source of extra family income and, with increasing populations leading to smaller pieces of land being available, it's more important than ever that families utilise their land efficiently. "Generally, these families have about 70% of free space in their backyards, and this space can and must be used for the production of vegetables," Octavio emphasises. "We have participated in meetings to develop new strategies with women, and we will be monitoring everything from the mobilisation of women to the provision of technical assistance to this cooperative," he adds.



For more information contact:
Abel Jorge Dabula,
SBN Mozambique Coordinator
ajdabula@gainhealth.org

Delphinus' success:

finding opportunities in milk value addition



Nine years since launching Delco Limited, a dairy business and member of the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Tanzania, Delphinus Penessis has transformed it from a cheese making enterprise into a successful yoghurt and fermented milk processing brand that has captured the markets and hearts of rural Tanzanians. But, along the way, he has faced challenges such as market vagaries and COVID-19, which have tested his personal resilience and that of his business. He credits the Delco team and his own fighting spirit for the company's survival.

While working in rural Tanzania, Delphinus noticed how dairy farmers struggled with an oversupply of milk that was going to waste. Spotting a gap in the market, in 2010, he was inspired to launch Delco Limited, a milk processing company, to add value to the product.

Although Delphinus had no previous experience in milk sector and markets, he had been involved in fish processing – so knew the importance of value addition. He took the bold step to invest in the dairy industry which diversified his business/ streams of income and would address the problem of excess milk faced by farmers.

"I had an extensive background in value addition, having been in the fish processing business, which

"Beyond getting products to the market, every entrepreneur should ask themselves what other value they add to consumers and how their business impacts the lives of their clients."

Delphinus Penessis,
Founder, Delco Limited

involved salting, drying, pickling, filleting, and canning to cater for both local and export markets for a decade. I understood what value addition entailed," says Delphinus, "but the milk value addition was different, so I needed to familiarise myself with the specifics of the business."

Delphinus researched dairy businesses in the area and explored potential opportunities he could tap into. He identified cheese making as the entry point. With no equipment and a lack of power supply in the north-western region of Kagera, he decided to embrace traditional methods, such as using a charcoal stove to pasteurise the milk. However, after about two years, and with limited traction in the cheese market, Delphinus capitalised on a growing demand for fresh milk from traders in Nairobi and Arusha. He took the decision to pivot and concentrated on producing pasteurised milk to meet the growing demand from local and regional communities instead.

A reluctant reception

The idea of purchasing pasteurised milk was met with scepticism by some locals, as they regarded processed foods as being laden with chemicals and harmful to their health. They were also used to purchasing raw milk which they boiled prior to consumption.

The skepticism of the locals persisted, and demand from traders in Arusha and Nairobi also dwindled after a year, due to alternative and cheaper markets. "I reviewed the cost I was incurring to get the milk to the market, and the charges I was paying to get a permit for operating a milk pasteurisation factory, and realised I was operating at a loss," Delphinus recalls.

Consequently, Delphinus decided to once again pivot his strategy to embrace adding value through making yoghurts and fermented milk.

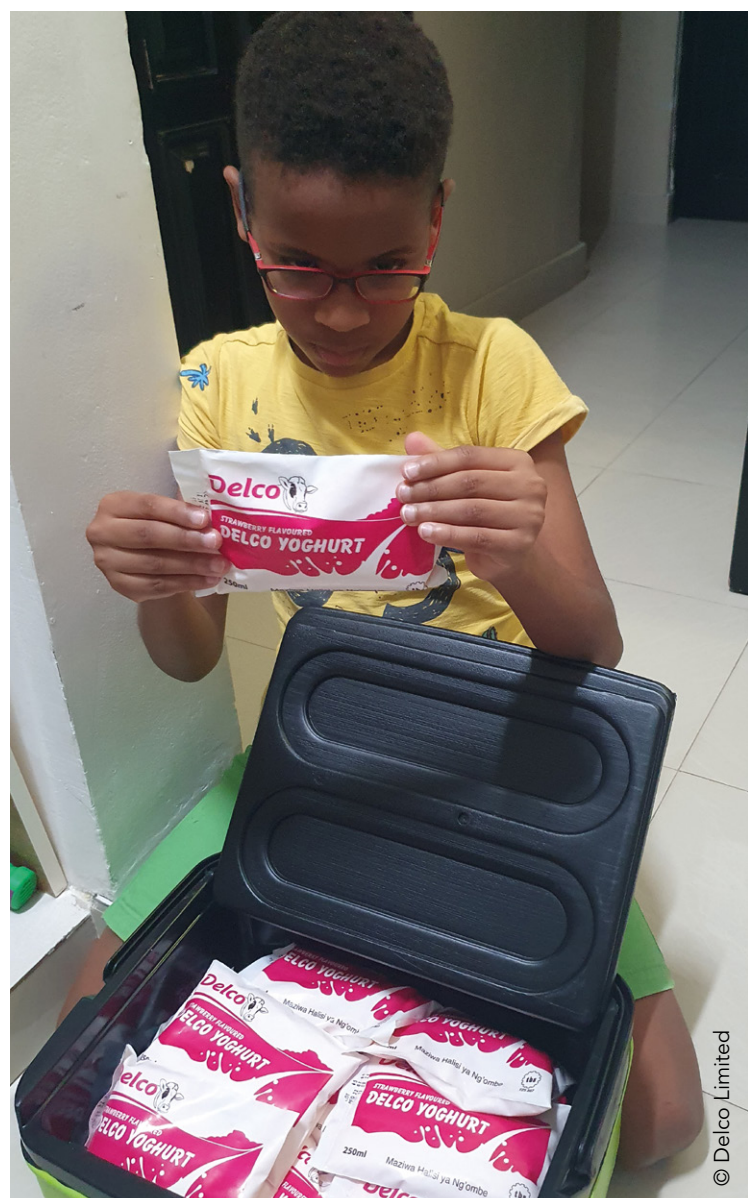
Finding fortunes in milk

In 2012, Delphinus was processing 50 litres of yoghurt a day, and using a hand-operated filling and sealing machine to fill plastic pouches with produce. Now, the business processes 500 litres of yoghurt per day, using milk sourced from local farmers, and an automatic packaging and filling machine. The team has also grown to 15 members. Sold under the Delco Yoghurt brand name, the yoghurts are available in strawberry flavour, while the fermented milk is sold under the name Delco Mtindi.

The company targets the mass market, distributing products to kiosks across the Kagera region and in Bukoba Town; one of the largest in the region. The yoghurt and fermented milk are also supplied to local schools to increase access to nutritious food options for school-age children. As the company is situated in a region bordering Uganda, its products are also supplied to traders to resell to at the border.

Cushioning the blows

But it has not always been smooth-sailing. The business has grappled with erratic milk supplies, especially during the dry season when farmers are not willing to sell due to low milk yields as a result of reduced pasture. The farmers must therefore conserve the reduced amount of milk they do produce for their own consumption. Competition from vendors who buy milk from farmers with the assurance of prompt payment has also been a challenge for the enterprise, because Delco has a payment agreement with farmers where they receive payment within a certain period – usually weekly or monthly – whereas vendors pay farmers immediately after delivery. As such, the company has sometimes operated below capacity. To insulate the company from supply fluctuations, Delphinus invested in rearing his own cows to cover the milk shortfall.



However, the most significant test was the COVID-19 pandemic. Delphinus suffered a huge blow when the Ugandan government closed the border from April to August 2020, to restrict the spread of the virus. A large proportion of his customers are traders and shops within the border area, and this, coupled with school closures, saw 60% of the business' operations close. "While operations were slowly shutting and we weren't recording any tangible sales, we were still required to make statutory contributions, including paying taxes, renewing our licenses, and paying our workers," he notes.

Fortunately, the financial support of TSh 34 million (USD 15,000) that Delphinus received from SBN Tanzania partner, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), helped cushion the impact of the pandemic and keep the business afloat. The funding also prompted him to revise his strategy and focus. “That boost gave us the impetus to get aggressive with marketing, by going into domains we had not ventured into before, including visiting the rural areas of the Kagera region, carrying out door-to-door sales, and doing shop-to-shop marketing to entice customers to buy our products,” he reveals. This, Delphinus says, expanded their customer base and meant they were able to move stock even when some customers were unavailable due to the impact of COVID-19.

Milking a prosperous future

A trained basketball coach, Delphinus says a key lesson to remember is that the winning team is the one that hangs on – and this ethos contributed to shaping the business and steering it out of the pandemic. “I believe staff

are the lifeline of the business. Because of their tenacity, we were able to weather the storm and work as a team in implementing our recovery measures,” he reflects. The GAIN grant and savings from his business were particularly valuable during this time, as they enabled him to continue paying staff salaries and managing the company’s operations.

Delphinus names product differentiation and market-led expansion as the guiding principles of his business. To this end, Delco is looking to venture into the production of vanilla-flavoured yoghurts by 2022 in response to market demand. The company also wants to start producing fortified fermented milk to meet the health needs of the elderly, pregnant women, and children.

Finally, to encourage and support the next generation of food producers, Delco intends to establish a training centre for students and farmers where they can meet experts and learn about milk processing and value addition.



For more information contact:
Haika Malleko,
SBN Tanzania Coordinator
hmalleko@gainhealth.org

4

Strategic Partnerships

One-third of the world's population is affected by poor nutrition, making it a significant global concern impacting individuals, businesses, and economies alike. The COVID-19 pandemic uncovered major vulnerabilities across our food systems that limit countries' ability to respond to health and economic shocks.

Amid these crises, it is crucial that stakeholders throughout the food system engage in dialogues with each other to better understand the issues at hand. Through multi-stakeholder collaboration, a variety of organisations and companies can be engaged to explain, debate, challenge, support, and advocate ideas that ultimately create positive change in the food system.

The Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) facilitates strategic partnerships with a variety of stakeholders across the food system, all of whom play a role in defining and shaping the food and nutrition landscape within countries including government, NGOs, civil society organisations, and the private sector.

Working with governments is crucial in helping raise awareness around issues faced by small- and medium- enterprises (SMEs) in the food chain – for example, how existing restrictive policies can be amended to improve the enabling environment for business to produce and distribute safe and nutritious foods. In Ethiopia, SBN representatives are facilitating connections between government officials and private sector actors to help the country achieve its goal of tackling all forms of malnutrition by 2030. Elsewhere, members of the SBN are working with the Zambian government to promote enhanced nutrition directly to consumers via the Healthy Diets Campaign and Good Food Logo.

Partnering with NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) is vital, as they both play a key role in supporting the creation and execution of nutrition programmes and interventions especially in ensuring voices of marginalised groups are actively considered. In Tanzania, for example, the SBN collaborates with the Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania (PANITA) – which comprises over 300 regional and international CSOs. Together, they use their considerable reach to educate those in local schools, government offices, and communities on the importance of healthy diets and ways to access more nutritious foods.

SBN partners with academic institutions, who provide evidence-based research that inform nutrition interventions and access to local technical experts that provide training to network members to enhance their knowledge and skillsets. For instance, in Bangladesh, training on food safety and nutrition has been provided to SBN members by the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science at Dhaka University and the Food Engineering Department at the Bangladesh Agriculture University.

Last but not least are the plethora of partnerships with private sector actors – including the SMEs who are innovating and driving change at ground level. While SBN collaborates to support their growth, these relationships are also essential in encouraging more businesses to adopt better business practices to scale their nutritional impact. This chapter reveals just some of the partnerships that SBN has facilitated and cultivated, and how these are proving beneficial not only for the parties involved, but the food industry and consumers at large

Better together:

*collaborating to tackle malnutrition
in Bangladesh*



To reduce micronutrient deficiencies and improve access to safe, affordable nutrition for all Bangladeshis, the country's Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) has worked hard to leverage partnerships with key government stakeholders, and help them work towards meeting national nutrition priorities.

Improving nutrition is critical in Bangladesh, where the [Global Nutrition Report](#) states that child stunting is 31% and anaemia in women is almost 40%. Since joining SBN in July 2019, the People's Republic of Bangladesh has been resolutely committed to working closely with the government to support small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in their efforts to tackle malnutrition. Making up almost 70% of all food-related businesses, SMEs form the backbone of the food supply system for the vast majority of Bangladeshis. "SBN strategically supports SMEs through its partnership with the government, to strengthen the capacity of SMEs and enable them to revamp their supply, distribution, and services of nutritious, safe and affordable food," explains SBN Bangladesh's Coordinator, Syed Muntasir Ridwan.

Supporting small for a big impact

According to Syed, there is no common framework regarding public-private partnerships on nutrition, which has led to mutual mistrust and sensitivity. Although it has had to tread carefully and work to build trust among different stakeholders, SBN Bangladesh's priority has been to provide critical support for SMEs, and brokering strategic partnerships with government entities has been key to this effort. "Partnerships with government ministries and trade bodies can significantly influence and foster wider change through the whole value chain," Syed reveals. "The adoption of business-friendly policies enables SMEs to flourish and reach their full potential."

"SBN Bangladesh aims to empower the private sector through leveraging multi-stakeholder support to transition towards a food system that leads to economic, health, and environmental sustainability."

Syed Muntasir Ridwan,
SBN Bangladesh Coordinator

One SBN activity has been the creation of an SME platform at the sub-national level, through a collaboration with the National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (NASCIB) and the Chamber of Commerce. As the apex trade body for SMEs, NASCIB has the capacity to create sub-national committees, and has also contributed to the health and nutrition of Bangladeshis by building the capacity of its 3,000 members, and connecting them with local and national technical and financial service providers.

At the end of 2020, SBN Bangladesh and NASCIB hosted five workshops, each with 23-30 SMEs and 20 stakeholders in attendance. The aim was to better understand how the SMEs were affected by COVID-19, their general challenges, and to demonstrate their options for growth and development. The workshops served to promote understanding of what additional support SMEs need to grow and move forward, and contribute towards improving access to affordable, safe, and nutritious food.

The entrepreneurs involved saw this as a unique opportunity for growth, to sustainably expand their market to benefit both their businesses and consumers by improving their products' nutritional value. The group of entrepreneurs



most engaged with this effort were women, many of whom have ambitious plans for their enterprises and the impact they could have on nutrition within their communities. As such, the SME platform aims to have at least 50% women entrepreneurs as SBN members in the sub-national SBN committees. SBN Bangladesh is also working with NASCIB and its partners to develop a women-only community within their network to promote gender equality and address the specific challenges female entrepreneurs face, such as access to finance and safety concerns in transporting their products.

Pushing hard for progress

Bangladesh's regulatory environment is relatively complicated, leading to high levels of non-compliance by SMEs. In addition, the regulatory bodies lack adequate technical and

human resources to monitor food safety across Bangladesh. To eliminate these barriers, SBN Bangladesh has been working with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), and other key partners to provide capacity building for regulatory bodies, such as the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA), and ensure that SMEs have access to simpler information and certification mechanisms.

SBN Bangladesh's collaboration with the Ministry of Industries, for example, has facilitated the connection of SBN members with relevant ministries and civil societies who are well-positioned to provide long-term support and technical assistance. For example, through their connection with other government agencies, such as the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) and the Bangladesh National

Nutrition Council (BNNC), the network can encourage policy-level advocacy and ensure easy access to any material produced. A cooperation agreement has been signed with BFSA which will endorse and validate a food safety curriculum developed by SBN Bangladesh, WFP, and GAIN, to aid individuals, businesses, and organisations in consuming and producing nutritious and safe food.

To increase the availability of local technical support for SMEs, SBN Bangladesh is also collaborating with research and academic institutions, including the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science (INFS) at Dhaka University, and Bangladesh Agriculture University's (BAU) Food Engineering Department. These collaborations are working to improve access to food safety and nutrition knowledge for SMEs. In addition, involving these organisations in project development helps build the capacity and skillset of the organisations themselves.

Strategy for success

"SBN Bangladesh aims to empower the private sector through leveraging multi-stakeholder support to transition towards a food system that leads to economic, health, and environmental sustainability," explains Syed, "and this has been one of our key strategies for success." For example, Bangladesh has a very strong civil society movement, which SBN has been leveraging to raise awareness on nutrition with the business

community. SBN has also been working with its partners to integrate the role of the private sector in improving nutrition outcomes with a wide range of public organisations, including United Nations (UN) Nutrition, BNNC, research networks, academia, and development institutions. Moreover, SBN's Steering Committee in Bangladesh consists of 29 members, including representatives from key government, civil society, the UN, and private sector stakeholders, which has to align the interest of different cross-cutting groups across food systems. "Each partner has been involved in the development of the SBN Strategy, from the initial stages to its finalisation," Syed adds. "SBN Bangladesh has also taken a systemic approach in linking the aspirations and interests of different partners with national nutritional priorities. It is vital that we tap into the strengths, incentives, and interests of each of our partners to help us to reach our strategic objectives."

Plans for expansion

Looking ahead, SBN Bangladesh is identifying areas where it can leverage its partnerships to widen its positive impact. For example, while the government already mandates the fortification of multiple food products, compliance requirements with regards to loose/unpackaged products are low due to the lack of accountability. SBN Bangladesh is therefore planning on enhancing the capacity of all NASCIB members involved in the wholesale sector, on fortification and food safety.



For more information contact:
Mahmudul Hasan,
SBN Bangladesh Coordinator
shasan@gainhealth.org

All hands on deck:

a global collaboration to end malnutrition



Around the world, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has spent the last decade working to invest in nutrition, with the aim of breaking the cycle of malnutrition across generations and leaving no one behind. To this end, SUN networks are partnering with other organisations in many countries – such as Nigeria, where the SUN Business Network (SBN) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) collaborated to provide nutrition training, encourage private sector commitments to nutrition goals, and improve access to finance for small businesses in the food system.

The SUN Movement launched in 2010 as a result of growing global recognition that malnutrition is an underlying development challenge that requires a multistakeholder approach to eliminate. The global Secretariat works collaboratively with SUN countries to engage civil society, donors, implementers, United Nations (UN) agencies, academic institutions, and the private sector to improve national efforts to reduce malnutrition. Due to the complex nature of malnutrition, addressing it requires a multi-stakeholder approach across the food system. Private sector companies especially play a critical role in scaling up successful nutrition interventions, as they can help ensure

“The partnership with UNICEF was a step towards inter-network collaboration and alignment against a common objective. It meant more and more partners were accepting the important role of the private sector in addressing malnutrition.”

Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator

the provision of high quality, effective, and affordable products and service using a market-based approach.

As such, the Nigerian SBN was launched on 21 April 2016 with a mandate to amplify and strengthen the private sector’s contribution towards improving nutrition within the country. Since then, it has grown to represent over 230 members from the private sector which have the capacity for direct and indirect impact on improving nutrition.

SBN is one of the SUN Movement’s four global networks, which also include the Donor, Civil Society, and UN networks. Just as SBN brings together private businesses, the UN network brings together all UN agencies working in nutrition to support SUN countries. Through the UN network, SBN Nigeria established a partnership with UNICEF to strengthen public-private engagement to address malnutrition in Nigeria. Their collaboration ran from May 2019 until December 2020, and saw major private and public sector groups brought together to develop and drive a common vision for nutrition in two Nigerian states – Kano and Lagos.

Private sector potential

The partnership was driven by Oluwaseun Okediran, UNICEF’s Nutrition Manager, and SBN Nigeria Coordinator, Ibiso Ivy King-Harry, who noted that having a shared vision, clear objectives, and a willingness to collaborate, were key factors behind the success of the partnership.

Kano and Lagos were selected based on their robust private sector base and the willingness and readiness of the Chambers of Commerce in those states to collaborate on the project. Through the partnership, public-private sector engagement and technical support to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was achieved.

As a result of the UNICEF partnership, a Food Safety and Nutrition Curriculum containing key information on food safety and nutrition was developed. This was shared with 171 businesses (comprising 217 individuals) via nutrition trainings, which served to increase knowledge and awareness of nutrition and demystify the role of business in addressing malnutrition. It also supported businesses in effectively linking their activities with nutrition outcomes, promoted private sector contributions to the reduction of non-communicable diseases, and addressed food system issues around post-harvest loss prevention, market access, and research priorities.

Resources from SBN Nigeria's partnership with UNICEF were also used to build the capacity of businesses, so their leaders could serve as Private Sector Ambassadors. These ambassadors have joined SBN and each made a signed commitment to improve nutrition in Nigeria, by moving their enterprises towards enhanced nutrition as part of their business practices. Twenty-six of these businesses have made commitments to their workforces and/or customer bases – such as nutrition education and reducing salt, sugar, and trans-fats in the processed foods produced.

And, in collaboration with the states' respective Chambers of Commerce and Industry, partnership linkages were also established to ensure access to finance and technical support to business owners.

Proactively tackling challenges

Whilst the partnership undoubtedly strengthened public-private engagement in addressing malnutrition in Nigeria, the process was fraught with challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic was a major trial, bringing about



restrictions on travel, business operations, and face-to-face meetings. As a result, the Nutrition Curriculum had to be adapted for virtual delivery rather than in-person training – although this enabled more beneficiaries to attend than would have been possible in-person.

Public sector inclusion into this initiative was often a slow process owing to the bureaucratic processes of engaging relevant personnel within relevant public sector agencies. Leveraging relationships within a SUN Government network helped address this issue by providing the required linkage at sub-national level.

Strength in numbers

To build on the project's successes, the SBN team, in close collaboration with other networks, such as the Civil Society network, hopes to advance in creating an enabling environment for businesses via public-private sector dialogues, and further scale up consumer awareness to drive demand for nutritious foods. It also aims to continue collaborating with business associations, government, other SUN networks, and Chambers of Commerce, to deepen sub-

national engagement across states where partners have a presence.

The successful nutrition and food safety training conducted in Kano and Lagos has also been replicated by the SBN in other states to ensure more businesses are aware of the importance of nutrition and their roles in improving it. This will lead to the production and access to more safe, nutritious foods in Nigeria.

SBN looks forward to the collaboration developing into a multi-year-funded partnership to ensure business leaders in at least six additional states are provided with nutrition and food safety training, with an improved focus on improved nutrition for women and children.

“The partnership will serve as a model for other SUN countries, and learnings will be shared widely. It shows there is strength in numbers: joining forces with others makes your voice louder and increases your reach. Partnerships increase potential for impact: without the financial support from UNICEF, we would not have been able to have strong sub-national level engagements in both states,” notes Ibiso.



For more information contact:
Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator
sbnnigeria@gainhealth.org

Engagement for a prosperous Nigeria:

devising state-specific initiatives to tackle malnutrition



In 2020, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Business Network (SBN) Nigeria began a training initiative to build the skills and knowledge of SBN members, and other small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), to help businesses support the government's aim of tackling national malnutrition. The initial training consisted of a funding master class and a food safety and nutrition workshop. This case study looks at the initiative in more detail, focusing on the Kano and Cross River states, to understand how it seeks to align the public and private sectors on the issue of malnutrition.

Food insecurity and malnutrition are significant concerns in Nigeria. Over a third of children under the age of five experience stunting, and one in eight do not live to see their fifth birthday. Maternal death rates are also high, at one in 30 women, while 11% of women are underweight and 28% are overweight or obese.

These issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as its knock-on effects have caused food prices to rise and made nutritious food more difficult to access. Furthermore, in the north-west of the country, armed conflict by militant Islamist group Boko Haram has resulted in two million people being internally displaced and at risk of starvation.

The Government of Nigeria has long recognised the importance of nutrition and its role in development – and is thus committed to addressing the issues of malnutrition. As such, the National Multisectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition 2019-2023 is currently in place, which aims to reduce malnutrition and stunting and increase the rates of exclusive breastfeeding.

To support this, SBN Nigeria is assisting local governments and businesses in Kano and Cross River states with strategy creation, education and training workshops, and biofortification.

Obstacles to overcome

The states of Kano and Cross River in the north-west and south-south of Nigeria, respectively, are both impacted by food insecurity and malnutrition. However, these are driven by notably different social and nutritional contexts.

In Kano, many agricultural-focused small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face difficulties obtaining loans or grants with which to start, register, or improve their businesses – in turn, meaning they're unable to offer more nutritious food. A lack of labour is also an issue, as the social and cultural restrictions of this mainly Muslim area mean that it is predominantly only men who are allowed to be involved in agricultural production and associated work.

In Cross River, food storage and preservation are the primary concerns. Cold storage facilities for harvested product are typically unavailable, leading to high levels of food waste – an issue compounded by infrastructure challenges, such as poor roads linking farmers, off-takers, and markets. Education and awareness around the importance of good nutrition, food safety, packaging, and preservation, is also lacking among smaller SMEs.

The government has already launched various initiatives in Cross River State to help tackle these problems. For example, primary healthcare centres have been educating pregnant women on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices for after their child is six months of age, and school programmes have been rolled out to provide better nutrition to children. They are also offering basic equipment to local agro-businesses at more affordable prices, and supporting the production of bio-fortified crops, such as maize and cassava.

However, limited funding and contextual challenges – including the COVID-19 pandemic and #EndSARS protests – have hampered progress; which is why input from and collaborations with organisations such as SBN are crucial.

Pillars of support

SBN has taken several key approaches to elevate and propel the Nigerian Government's existing initiatives. The first is the launching of an SME capacity building programme, designed to help SMEs develop a robust set of skills through a series of in-person and virtual workshops. Held between March 2020 and May 2021, these entailed: education on basic nutrition and food safety, and highlighting the links between the two; a funding masterclass, providing SME owners and entrepreneurs with knowledge on accessing finance, identifying funding opportunities, and assessing their businesses' financial risk profile; and training on food preservation- and safety-related processing and packaging techniques.

Alongside government departments, these workshops were conducted and facilitated in collaboration with additional stakeholders, such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Nigerian Association of Small-Scale Industrialists (NASSI), and Smallstarter Africa.

Outside of this programme, SBN spoke to individuals in Cross River State (and also Plateau State) about the challenges that women face in business. This led to the launch of an event in Lagos entitled 'Business Through A Gender Lens' – to which members of government, chambers of commerce, and women's groups were invited to discuss how women can be supported to move into different trades and take on active roles in



the agricultural and food production sectors. SBN hopes to continue addressing and finding solutions to these challenges during the next phase of sub-national engagement projects.

Last but not least, to aid businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, SBN – together with GAIN – launched a financial support programme for SMEs. While GAIN offered funding for recovery grants, SBN was instrumental in organising and managing aspects such as applications and submissions, communicating with businesses, and disseminating information and guidelines.

An optimistic outlook

Although the sub-national engagement programme is still in its early stages, the initial results and feedback are optimistic. For instance, up to 500 businesses, a good number of which are women-led, attended the workshops over the 14-month period – which is viewed as a positive step in engagement levels.

Funding has been secured for the initiative to be scaled-up in existing states and rolled out into others across Nigeria. There has already been

demand for this as, after sharing details about the initiative on their social media channels, SBN received a number of requests from businesses in other states for similar training.

SBN is also set to conduct an evaluation of the trainings provided thus far – to explore their impact, learn whether the government and SMEs have made any changes as a result, and identify future priorities.

The organisation plans to continue helping progressively build the capacity and skillsets of businesses in selected states and, funding permitting, aims to implement a new programme that specifically supports women entrepreneurs.

This is in addition to providing guidance and assistance to the Nigerian Government in its plans, including helping local governments align with National Policy on Food and Nutrition-led targets and goals, developing radio programmes on food and nutrition safety to aid with capacity building and training, and engaging more with farmers and agricultural value chain actors located in rural communities.

Enhancing engagement

As SBN's initiatives evolve, it's important that feedback is noted to ensure offerings to government, and SMEs remain optimal and effective. For instance, some attendees of the sub-national engagement programme noted that the trainings could be made more accessible, as they are currently only offered in the English language and community groups and elders were not consulted during their development. The scope of training could also be expanded to include other topics (such as how to reduce post-harvest loss, nutrition labelling, and new products using locally-available foods) and also be more inclusive towards micro-sized enterprises, who are often overlooked and have different requirements.

To help achieve their goal of reaching more women entrepreneurs, SBN and the Chamber of Commerce could focus on engaging more with stakeholders in this area (such as the government ministry dedicated to women's affairs). SBN and government officials could also organise meetings with key stakeholders in different states to help better understand priorities and areas of weakness.

Government partners in Cross River State have also shared a desire to collaborate with the wider SUN network to help create greater access to nutritious foods and also to develop a database of local entrepreneurs.

Finally, for impact to be truly sustainable, there needs to be a focus on consistent engagement, effective showcasing of successes, and ongoing advocacy with the government to ensure that policies, regulations, and guidelines reflect and support agri-businesses' needs and requirements.



For more information contact:
Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator
sbnnigeria@gainhealth.org

SBN Ethiopia's strategic plan:

*embracing public-private partnership for
Ethiopian nutrition*



In their efforts to engage the private sector in the government's nutrition agenda, the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) in Ethiopia has been cultivating collaborations between enterprises working in the food system and the government officials responsible for the environment in which they operate. Through meetings, awareness campaigns, and a Strategic Plan, this teamwork is making strides in improving nutrition for all Ethiopians.

Over the last decade, Ethiopia has made significant strides in tackling nutrition challenges. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, stunting reduced from 58% in 2000 to 38% in 2016, while the number of underweight children dropped from 41% to 23.6% within the same period. However, the country is still one of the highest contributors to the global burden of malnutrition, ranking fifth globally. Harnessing the unique skill set that exists within the private sector is emerging as a key strategy in the country's fight against malnutrition.

Government support to boost nutrition

To bridge the gap between government and the private sector, SBN Ethiopia has facilitated dialogues and advocated for private sector inclusion in all matters related to improving food systems and access to safe nutritious foods in the country.

"Despite being the producers and suppliers of foods in Ethiopia, the private sector is largely excluded in the development of policies that govern food production. Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ethiopia do not have a problem running businesses. Instead, they have to grapple with numerous restrictive policies and the high cost of doing business, which inhibits them from scaling up. That prompted us to start

"As a network, we are focusing on improving and strengthening the private sector's contribution towards improving nutrition in Ethiopia while collaborating with the government to provide a strong enabling environment for business investment in nutrition, to ensure that all people have access to good food and nutrition."

Abenezer Feleke,
Programme Lead, SBN Ethiopia

engaging the government," explains Abenezer Feleke, Programme Lead for SBN Ethiopia.

This engagement started in 2020, with a members' meeting convened by SBN Ethiopia to discuss with SMEs the challenges they were experiencing and potential opportunities for scaling up their operations and impact on nutrition.

Among the issues raised was a restrictive policy and regulatory regime that included prohibitive taxes – especially on imported ingredients for companies that provide fortified foods – and was slowing business growth. As nutrition is a matter of national importance, members believed tax relief could serve as an incentive for more businesses to invest in improving the nutritional quality of processed foods.

Consumer preference has also been a critical issue for businesses in Ethiopia, with the perception that imported products are of better quality serving as a limiting factor for local producers. They called for awareness campaigns aimed at consumers to highlight the need of

embracing locally-produced products, including pulses, oilseed, and fortified flour, that meet the nutrition threshold and support local businesses.

While SBN Ethiopia has been keen to promote locally-made, affordable, and nutritious foods, members highlighted the Ethiopian Standards Agency's (ESA) lack of specific standardisations on fortified products as making it difficult for businesses to operate within a uniform regulatory environment.

Members also raised concerns over their limited internal capacity and expertise, and requested training in areas such as marketing, commercialisation, quality control, and safety protocols. Such assistance would support them in enhancing their internal capacity and reaching a wider customer base.

Partners in progress

Following these deliberations, SBN Ethiopia facilitated a public-private sector dialogue which brought together the SBN Focal Point, who works in the Ministry of Health; policymakers; Ministry of Trade and Industry officials; the Deputy Director General of the Food Beverage Pharmaceutical Industry Development Institute; and officials from the ESA, for a follow-up meeting. During this dialogue, the challenges that had been previously raised by SMEs were discussed. Among the meeting's positive outcomes was the partnership established between SBN Ethiopia and the ESA to develop a standard on fortified foods.

"To get the conversation with government officials going and have them attend these deliberations was tough, because they had not previously interacted with businesses in the food and nutrition sector. We are happy that we are now seeing a great deal of commitment by officials on issues we raised, and that they



are engaging with us and accommodating our recommendations. To have changed government mindset on involving the private sector in the nutrition agenda is quite a success on our end," enthuses Abenezer.

The meetings gave rise to seven key objectives that guide SBN Ethiopia's three-year Strategic Plan for engaging the private sector in nutrition. Each objective is geared towards tackling the challenges and concerns that members have raised, and include:

- Developing a strong SBN brand and membership
- Improving nutrition policies and regulations
- Increasing business engagement in the non-nutrition sector
- Growing nutrition partnerships
- Improving nutrition sensitivity along the agricultural value chain
- Increasing availability of fortified products and supplements
- Enhancing nutrition awareness and demand.

Each objective spells out specific activities to be implemented, who is to execute them, their duration, and key performance indicators.

For example, under the strategic objective on improving nutrition policies and regulations, SBN Ethiopia has set out initiatives geared towards providing input to government on behalf of the private sector and cultivating strategic relationships with key government departments.

Once completed, the strategy was endorsed in a follow-up workshop attended by government officials and a launch event. “Developing the national nutrition strategy was one of the most complex and challenging endeavours I have ever undertaken. A lot of work still needs to be done, and having SBN Ethiopia as one of the key actors is not just key, it is a necessity if we are going to really tackle the burden of malnutrition in this country,” says Mrs. Frealem Shibabaw, Founder of the Ethiopian School Meals Initiative, and State Minister of Peace.

Tackling unforeseen challenges

Despite having a successful strategy to enlist government support for nutrition-led businesses, SBN Ethiopia still struggled to navigate the bureaucracy of government to ensure sustained interest in private sector engagement. “We needed to make sure that the people who would come on board were the right people to walk with us in this crucial journey, and the reputation that the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition has in matters of

nutrition and food systems played a key role in making that happen,” says Abenezer.

Even with these measures in place, the onset of COVID-19 posed further challenges as SBN Ethiopia was forced to work mostly virtually with government officials – something that often proved difficult due to connectivity problems.

Solid strategies for success

As the network looks to continue solidifying its partnerships with government officials and advance the nutrition agenda, it sets timelines and goals for each of the objectives under the Strategic Plan. For example, under the Increase Nutrition Awareness and Demand objective, SBN hopes to have successfully rolled out, through partnerships, one major nutrition awareness campaign aimed at increasing the demand and consumption of nutritious foods by the end of 2021.

Abenezer says that, although it is too early to gauge the specific results of SBN Ethiopia’s interactions with the government as it is still a work in progress, he believes the enthusiasm exhibited by officials in their attendance of workshops and forums organised by SBN, frequent dialogues on implementing the Strategic Plan and nutrition agenda, and assistance provided to the network in growing its membership, is a sign of good things to come.



For more information contact:
Abinet Tekle,
SBN Ethiopia Coordinator
afeleke@gainhealth.org

Beyond rhetoric:

scaling up Zambian nutrition through the private sector



With a goal of addressing Zambia's critical nutrition situation, the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) has partnered with the Ministry of Health, the National Food and Nutrition Commission, and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to raise public awareness about the importance of healthy diets. Through this collaboration, SBN Zambia has developed a Healthy Diets Campaign and a Good Food Logo (GFL) with the aim of increasing the consumption of foods that contribute to a healthy diet and help reduce micronutrient deficiencies.

Good nutrition is essential in leading a healthy and productive life. Yet, poor nutrition remains a critical public health concern in Zambia – with stunting rates among children under five years of age averaging 35% nationally.

Despite progress in recent years, chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies remain widespread, as the country has seen substantial increases in the prevalence of overweight and related non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

SBN in Zambia is working with the Government of the Republic of Zambia to engage the private sector in promoting good nutrition through increased supply and demand for affordable nutritious products. Under its mandate, the 127-member network also supports the creation of a stronger 'ecosystem' for businesses involved in the nutrition value chain.

In Zambia, the SBN is co-convened by the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) and WFP, which provide overall guidance to network members. This comes in the form of technical assistance, provided to private sector entities working along the food value chain to increase the production, processing, and marketing of nutritious food.

"The Good Food Logo has added impetus to our core value of nutrition education for the local people."

Sylvia Banda, Founder and CEO,
Sylva Food Solutions

Campaigning for better futures

The Healthy Diets Campaign is one of SBN Zambia's flagship initiatives, developed by the Ministry of Health (MoH), NFNC, and WFP. Launched by the Vice President's Office in October 2020, it is a nationwide drive to raise public awareness about the importance of healthy diets, with the aim of increasing the consumption of nutritious foods and tackling the triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, and overweight.

The campaign uses various strategies, including mass media such as TV, radio, billboards, social media, and community engagements to reach the public. Some examples of nutrition messaging include:

- A healthy diet provides all the daily nutrients and energy the body needs to function properly and perform well.
- You can achieve a healthy diet by making smart food choices, like whole grains, fruit and vegetables, and processed foods that have less fat, sugar, and salt.
- Children who do not meet their nutritional needs may stop gaining weight and growing. Feed your child a variety of healthy foods to provide all the vitamins and minerals they require.



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When good becomes great

Another key initiative to help consumers make good nutritional choices at the point of purchase was the development of the GFL – a joint venture between SBN Zambia, the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS), and the NFNC.

This logo is a front-of-pack (FOP) certification given to foods that meet a set of defined nutrition criteria. The product criteria are based upon the World Health Organization's (WHO) international dietary guidelines, which consider the levels of saturated and trans fats, sugar, salt, dietary fibre, energy, and micronutrients in foods and beverages. The Zambian national criteria were adapted to the local nutrition context by a set of technical government experts (MoH, NFNC, Food and Drug Authority, and ZABS).

The GFL is the first scheme of its kind aimed at reducing the consumption of food ingredients that contribute to overnutrition and associated NCDs, as well as encouraging the consumption of essential micronutrients. These forms of malnutrition are driven and compounded by limited knowledge, low consumer demand

for nutritious food, inadequate availability of affordable nutritious products, and the increasing presence of cheap and convenient junk food.

The SBN Zambia team attributes the initial effectiveness of the Healthy Diets Campaign and the GFL roll-out to open communication, well-planned preparatory design meetings, and allocation of responsibilities. For example, while WFP managed the media agency relationship, NFNC and MoH ensured messages developed were in-line with national government nutrition priorities, programmes, and policies, and secured buy-in from the office of the Republican Vice President.

Alignment with the government's agenda and the embedding of these initiatives within government structures was critical to the campaign's long-term sustainability and success. "What was impactful was the team's ability to get higher buy-in, and have the Vice President launch the campaign," explains Ntindah Luembe, SBN Zambia Coordinator. "Political will at the highest level of government is key to creating an enabling regulatory environment that encourages small- and medium-sized enterprises

(SMEs) to grow with nutrition at their centre, and in contributing to national nutrition outcomes.”

Lessons learned from unforeseen challenges

The Healthy Diets Campaign faced a number of challenges in its development. For example, the time required to produce and implement the FOP nutrition label was longer than expected, and often beyond the timeline of donor funding, which posed financing concerns. Those involved in the project learned that sensitisation and re-sensitisation of key collaborating stakeholders is essential as there are high levels of staff turnover, so ensuring everyone is on the same page is vital to maintaining progress. Another difficulty was that many tasks needed to occur simultaneously, which necessitated adequate staffing with sufficient expertise to meet the needs of the programme.

Other challenges related to businesses targeted by the GFL. For example, in some cases, there was a slow uptake of the GFL by businesses, even after certification of products, due to the need for existing packaging materials to be used up before new stock is purchased. This was a long process because many companies

source these from South Africa, so buy in bulk when they place their orders. In future GFL roll-outs, it is suggested that a packaging ‘buy out’ programme be included, to purchase existing packaging stock from SMEs so they can quickly transition to packaging that bears the GFL. Furthermore, there was inconsistent use of the logo among some companies, so clear guidelines on how it should be presented are needed at the time of the roll-out to ensure its correct and consistent usage.

Encouraging healthier prospects for all

SBN Zambia will continue to work with the government through the NFNC and other key partners to engage and enable food system SMEs to expand the production and marketing of nutritious foods. It will also continue supporting national efforts, such as the Healthy Diets Campaign and GFL, to improve consumer decision-making in favour of safe and nutritious foods, steering people away from ultra-processed foods that are high in salt, sugar, and fats. The private sector has a key role to play in supporting consumers to make healthier food choices, and SBN Zambia will continue to facilitate their participation.



For more information contact:
Ntindah Luembe,
SBN Zambia Coordinator
ntindah.luembe@wfp.org

Zambia's Good Food Logo:

a badge for better nutrition



The Zambia Bureau of Standards and the National Food and Nutrition Commission have come together, in partnership with the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) Zambia, under a 'Good Food Logo' (GFL) initiative to help address the country's widescale under-nutrition, and growing rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases. The GFL certification process and logo is helping the government promote nutrition – as well as small local companies that are providing nutritious food.

Despite food production consistently exceeding domestic requirements, 48% of the population are unable to meet their minimum calorie requirements. Over a third of children under five years old are affected by stunting, 11.6% of infants have a low birth weight, and a third of women of reproductive age suffer from anaemia. At the same time, obesity levels are increasing, with around 12.4% of adult women and 3.8% of adult men affected, while around 6.6% of adults [suffer from diabetes](#).

Labelling local nutrition

GFL is a joint initiative of the Zambia National Food and Nutrition Commission, the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS – part of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry), and SBN Zambia, to increase access to nutritious foods. It is a front-of-pack logo for products that meet a set of nutrition criteria based on international dietary guidelines from the World Health Organization. The criteria focus on the levels of saturated and trans fatty acids, sugar, salt, dietary fibre, energy and micronutrients in foods and beverages.

The main aims of the initiative, which began in late 2015, are to: enable the government to promote nutrition; support local companies by including local foods and providing a marketing tool; and improve customer decision-making around healthy food through clear labelling. GFL

is tailored to the local 'food basket', and draws on a database of 300 processed products, with criteria for each product.

The intention was to focus on urban areas because the population is more concentrated, offering a better value proposition for companies, and because rural areas – despite being poorer – have better access to fresh ingredients. People in urban areas are also seen as 'trend-setters', influencing behaviour elsewhere.

Early stakeholder engagement

The team had significant initial success in inspiring and recruiting key private and public sector stakeholders, engaging volunteers (to help support the work of the small GFL team), in raising the profile of the logo, and gaining support and significant funding for the roll-out. The team's approach was the pivotal success factor. For instance, they consulted widely, bringing together input from the public and private sectors – reportedly speaking to all sizes of business and liaising with government bodies, including: the Food and Safety Department of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Health, the National Food and Nutrition Commission, and ZABS.

This support from, and engagement with, government stakeholders gave confidence to the GFL team who were amazed by their willingness and commitment, highlighting that government stakeholders rarely missed a meeting. The involvement of ZABS was particularly important for the development of key GFL performance indicators, and in helping to drive the process.

The remarkable level of public-private engagement and cooperation with GFL across the sectors led to the formation of an expert oversight committee. This committee brings



together representatives from government and the private sector, as well as the United Nations, other non-governmental organisations, and academia. Practical support from such actors has included the following:

- In-kind support from volunteer consultants: TechnoServe loaned expert volunteers, who carried out the initial research, and TechnoServe and Royal DSM reviewed the different labelling options.
- Columbia University in New York provided help from three cohorts of Masters of Business Administration professionals, who assisted with the initial stages of the project. They helped to validate the data and shape the marketing plan.
- Technical nutrition expertise was provided by an in-country expert who had previously worked in the food composition team of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and provided credibility.

- Community-based focus groups came together to advise on logo design.
- Leadership and ownership of the initiative was provided by the National Food and Nutrition Commission and ZABS.
- Management of the marketing campaign was led by a media agency, guided by the SBN Zambia technical team.

With a high profile and good level of interest in 2018, the GFL team, under SBN Zambia, received funds from Irish Aid, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, and as part of a sub-grant in an FCDO-funded programme, to support the logo and the roll-out.

Successes and challenges

Whilst the GFL initiative was conceived in 2015, the logo wasn't officially launched until 2020. Since then, 10 companies have been successfully certified. Another 20 have applied to participate in the GFL certification process. Other products are still being tested, or are in the pipeline for testing.

Ten certified products are in GFL packaging and on the shelf. These include dried vegetables, maize cereals, high-energy protein supplements, sorghum, millet and cassava meal, instant porridge (millet and maize), groundnuts, and beans. Another 34 products have been accredited but are not yet in packaging with the GFL due to companies' delays in refreshing their packaging. Some are holding back due to the cost of incorporating the logo. One company is using the logo to advertise its products on its lorries, and is also helping to raise awareness of the logo.

The challenge of cost for small businesses highlights the importance of consulting with them in the early stages of programme

development to understand what the logistical challenges might be. For example, if the issues of incorporating a new logo into the packaging design and printing had been fully understood, then a simpler logo with fewer colours would probably have been designed. Small companies, and micro businesses in particular, do not have the resources to invest in something which does not offer immediate payback, so there is also a need to provide financial and technical support.

Further, small producers are facing various challenges in getting their GFL-certified products stocked in supermarkets and chain stores. Most large retail stores are South African-owned, so consequently, mainly stock South African products rather than local ones. A limited number of products come from Zambian companies, with the exception of one large national company with a broad portfolio of products.

And the initiative faces other challenges: a large proportion of food bought by consumers is purchased loose from local markets, rather than packaged in the supermarket. While fresh vegetables and fruit, beans and soya pieces, for example, qualify for the GFL, for now they can only receive the logo if they are packaged. Alongside this contextual barrier, the COVID-19

pandemic has caused prices to fluctuate and costs to rise – for example, the cost of food has increased substantially – leaving both small businesses and consumers short of money and limiting their capacity to engage with the GFL initiative.

New partnerships in nutrition

Collaboration between the local media house, the SBN, and Zambian government is critical to success of the GFL initiative. The campaign to raise awareness aims for mass communication – with people hearing it on radio, seeing it on the TV and finding it in stores. The initiative also hopes to engage with bigger retailers to give it that big brand focus.

Recent discussions with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, as well as the Zambia Development Agency (ZDA), around collaboration on this initiative has the potential to boost the GFL.

For change at scale, it is going to be essential to engage with big business. The current strategy is to try to increase demand for healthy products by raising consumer awareness. This demand, it is hoped, will then encourage big companies to follow this positive trend.



For more information contact:
Marjolein Mwanamwenge,
Head of Nutrition

marjolein.mwanamwenge@wfp.org

Building food security:

partnering to mobilise businesses in Kenya



In Kenya, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement's Business Network (SBN) is working to build food security by bringing together the public and private sectors, and development actors. With its unique multi-stakeholder secretariat, SBN Kenya has been able to mobilise small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and support them to supply safe, nutritious and accessible food.

A decade of rapid economic growth has seen Kenya achieve lower-middle-income status, but the increased wealth has not benefitted all Kenyans equally. Social and economic inequalities mean that one-third of Kenyans live below the poverty line, and over a quarter of children in some areas are affected by stunting. Agriculture remains the main economic driver, although 80% of the land is either arid or semi-arid.

The most [significant challenges](#) to achieving food and nutrition security are rapid population growth, climate change, and underperforming food systems, and COVID-19 exacerbated these issues. In 2021, around [2.1 million people faced extreme food insecurity](#), particularly in arid areas. Two years of [drought](#), two waves of locusts, conflict over diminishing resources, livestock diseases, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, led to increased food prices in urban areas, and acute food shortages in rural areas.

Founded in 2014, SBN Kenya's aim is to empower the private sector to contribute to the reduction of malnutrition by supplying safe and nutritious foods to consumers, especially the most vulnerable. It now has over 120 business members, and seeks to mobilise businesses to align with the government's 'Big 4 Agenda' goal of achieving 100% food and nutrition security by 2022.

Partnering for nutrition

SBN Kenya's strategy (2019-2023) was developed through extensive multi-stakeholder consultations

with businesses, including women-owned enterprises, and other SUN networks in the country. With five strategic pillars, the network aims to create partnerships that will support business operations and develop an enabling business environment:

- Enhance financial capacity of SME's to attract financial investors, civil society organisations, government, donors, and prizes/grants (such as the [SUN Pitch Competition](#)).
- Provide technical assistance so that businesses can upskill and grow in product development, production, food quality and safety, business planning, innovation and technology.
- Educate businesses on the importance of workplace nutrition to improve the nutritional outcomes of workers in the formal and informal sector.
- Create a conducive business environment and enhance compliance with existing laws and regulations for micro, and SMEs, and help create awareness around existing and/or future nutrition-related policies through [sensitisation forums](#).
- Assist in driving forward access to markets and increase demand for nutritious foods.

To support SBN Kenya's ambitious strategy, an innovative governance structure has been put in place. Guided by the SUN Focal Point, based in the Ministry of Health, SBN Kenya is co-convened by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, and the United Nations World Food Programme. It is also supported by an independent multi-stakeholder secretariat, which brings together the public and private sectors with representatives from business member organisations, the government, and United Nations organisations. This secretariat meets once a quarter, and is responsible for:

- Providing overall collective strategic guidance and oversight especially in the

implementation of SBN's strategy (2019-2023).

- Supporting SBN in the development and implementation of projects, proposals, business models, and partnerships that can deliver sustainable nutrition impact in the private sector.
- Championing the role of business in multi-stakeholder approaches to scaling up nutrition at both national and sub-national levels within the country.
- Coordinating SBN activities and advocating for business engagement in scaling-up nutrition.
- Identifying new opportunities for business contributions to nutrition and recruiting new members to the network.
- Mobilising resources and managing funds.
- Advocating, developing, and managing partnerships with network stakeholders, including government, donors, and others.

Secrets to success

SBN Kenya's strengths arise from its cross-sector approach, convening the public, private and development sectors. It is private sector-driven, with three business members/associations on the secretariat, in three key roles. As a result of this, SBN is one of the most active SUN networks in Kenya. The diverse secretariat membership is very motivated and solutions oriented.

In March 2021, the representation of businesses in the secretariat was strengthened, with an election for companies to identify business members who would represent them as secretariat members. A chairperson, secretary and vice-chair were selected from business members. The more meaningful representation of business members on the secretariat to speak for themselves and articulate their issues is seen as 'game changing'.

Devolving responsibility

In 2021, three regional chapters were created, transferring some responsibilities to a regional level to further support the engagement of SMEs outside Nairobi, and business-to-business linkages and support: "You can zone [the SMEs] and put five counties together, like the regional chapters we have established. That has given them a lot of confidence, and they really feel that they can engage at that level," SBN Kenya explains. Establishing WhatsApp groups for the regional chapters has not only enabled members to share opportunities, and other relevant information, but the added visibility regionally has also allowed SBN to recruit more businesses based outside of Nairobi, who would not otherwise have heard of the network.

Closing the gaps

SBN Kenya is still quite new, and the more inclusive approach to the secretariat only began in early 2021, so there are still a number of gaps that the team is aiming to tackle. There is further work to be done on raising awareness about SBN activities, and the benefits of membership. Businesses still need quite a lot of support, particularly those outside of Nairobi – and the this is a key focus for the SBN team going forward.

Importantly, SBN Kenya is also looking to work more closely, in partnership with SMEs and big businesses, to identify specific business opportunities around nutrition: "We need to get better at helping businesses to find their niche in addressing malnutrition. We have the SBN strategy, we are interacting with the businesses. But they might be the answer to come up with long-haul solutions that can prevent and treat malnutrition." SBN Kenya is also identifying possibilities to strengthen relationships with bigger businesses which can provide additional capacity support.

Sustainable solutions

The successful creation of the new regional chapters is part of a wider strategy to move towards a more devolved model as the network grows, with oversight from Nairobi. In addition to mentoring each other, and sharing opportunities, the regional chapters also have the potential to benefit from local resources. As a result, SBN Kenya is working to strengthen linkages between the SMEs and county governments.

There are also aspirations to take the 'business-to-business support' model beyond Kenya, pairing Kenyan businesses with companies in Geneva or Washington DC, for example, to provide mentoring and increase confidence.

With businesses likely to play a key role in the sustainability of the network in the future, SBN Kenya is also planning on refining the value proposition for bigger businesses, and attract them to join as network members.

Future focus

- The cross-sectoral nature, and the level of engagement of the secretariat, offer huge potential to support and drive forward the work of the network. Maintaining that momentum and enthusiasm, and finding ways to implement key decisions and initiatives, despite stretched resources, is likely to be key in ensuring continued commitment.
- There are clear learning points from the actions taken by SBN Kenya since 2018, including the successful membership drive, the model of devolving responsibility to regional groups, the WhatsApp networks, and – in particular – the multistakeholder governance model. These could be captured

and shared with other networks, to map the way for similar initiatives.

- To maintain the commitment of business members, it will be important to continue offering value for being part of the network. Different types of value also need to be identified and shared with larger companies, in order to bring them – and their resources – into the network.
- Informal vendors in open/wet markets play a key role in food supply chains, so SBN Kenya will be expanding its scope to include them, in addition to SMEs, to empower vendors to deliver safe, affordable and nutritious foods.
- The SBN Kenya central team is very small which can be limiting. To continue to support and grow the network, it will be important to find ways to enable the network to self-manage itself, as far as possible.



For more information contact:
Charles Opiyo,
SBN Kenya Coordinator
copiyo@gainhealth.org

Merging the private sector and civil society:

nourishing Tanzania's schoolchildren



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.



For more information contact:
Haika Malleko,
SBN Tanzania Coordinator
hmalleko@gainhealth.org

Collaboration in Kenya:

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



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 underweight. 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.



For more information contact:
Charles Opiyo,
SBN Kenya Coordinator
copiyo@gainhealth.org

Nurturing networks:

building up Ethiopia's food system SMEs



As Ethiopia looks to address the nutrition challenges it faces, the private sector is stepping up its resolve to make its contribution to this agenda. Since it was set up three years ago, the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN), has been working to improve and strengthen the private sector's contribution towards improving nutrition in Ethiopia and ensuring nutritious foods are more accessible and affordable to all.

Three years after the idea of convening private sector players in the nutrition sector was proposed, SBN Ethiopia now comprises 25 members drawn from various value chains. Officially launched in April 2021 by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), SBN Ethiopia's focus is on organising small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food sector to improve the country's nutrition status and explore ways to assist these businesses in scaling up.

With Ethiopia relying on its [National Nutrition Plan](#) blueprint and [The Seqota Declaration](#) to tackle all forms of malnutrition by 2030, the government is enlisting the support of the private sector to help achieve this ambition. As such, SBN Ethiopia's work to create awareness among food system SMEs on their role in

"As we advocate for, mobilise, and support private sector commitments and investments in nutrition, we are keen to diversify membership of the network from gender, value chain, and regional perspectives to ensure that our nutrition agenda has everyone on board."

Abenezer Feleke,
Programme Lead, SBN Ethiopia

addressing malnutrition is highly relevant. It is hoped they will be emboldened and encouraged to embrace innovations and technologies, like food fortification, to enhance the availability of affordable and nutritious foods for all.

The network also seeks to identify challenges faced by nutrition-led businesses, while pointing them to opportunities and providing guidance. "At SBN Ethiopia, we have created a platform where businesses can showcase products, interact and learn from each other, identify opportunities, and together work to find lasting solutions to the nutrition challenge," reveals Abenezer Feleke, Programme Lead.

Strategies for success

Once the network's establishment was agreed upon, an expression of interest was sent to businesses in the food and nutrition sector. The first members to show enthusiasm were from dairy, oil, and coffee value chains.

Over the course of four months, the network held a consultative workshop with private sector representatives and a validation workshop on the draft strategy with stakeholders from the private sector, policymakers and government, before finally hosting a strategy launching workshop. These events highlighted pathways to grow the network and engage more partners, and the resulting three-year Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap identifying seven priority intervention areas that can influence business practices around nutrition. These areas were divided into core objectives, priority initiatives, key performance indicators, and bodies responsible for step-by-step implementation.

Exciting new beginnings

The [launch event](#) for the network, held on 27 April 2021 in Addis Ababa, was attended

by 50 individuals from small- and medium-scale businesses, government, academia, and development agencies. In addition to introducing the network to the public and garnering support, the event helped increase awareness about the local members creating nutritional and affordable products. It was also used as a recruitment drive to grow SBN Ethiopia's membership.

"Prior to the event, we created social media platforms and a [website](#) that explained the benefits of joining the network, and invited businesses to the launch. These platforms also gave some existing members a chance to showcase their products," notes Abenezer. "Following the day, our membership grew by nearly half."

Abenezer also notes that the attendance of 15 media outlets, spread across TV, radio, and print, was key. "The enthusiasm exhibited by the media during the press conference shifted the conversation from the network itself to nutrition in Ethiopia and the need for dietary diversification; an issue that had greatly been missed in national debates. This coverage gave the conversation momentum and elicited more interest with businesses and government," he enthuses.

Learning lessons from challenges

Amidst its successes, the network has also had to deal with setbacks. The COVID-19 situation meant meetings had to be done virtually and, with some members located in rural areas that lack connectivity, including everyone was exceedingly difficult. The network also had to cancel a series of physical events planned for members and partners. Meanwhile, members involved in the importation of raw materials were affected by the cancellation and disruptions of flights, which slowed their operations.



To help minimise the pandemic's impact, SBN Ethiopia collaborated with GAIN to provide a COVID-19 relief fund through the Keeping Food Markets Working Programme, to protect the businesses and sustain the supply chain at this critical time.

The pandemic wasn't the only challenge. The security situation in the northern region of Tigray, impacted by armed conflicts that began in 2020, equally disrupted network operations, as members in the region were unable to attend meetings and communication was cut from the area. The government's attention also shifted to managing the conflict, and most of the activities SBN Ethiopia had planned with officials were cancelled or postponed.

Rewarding hard work and achievements

One of the network's key endeavours was organising the [first National SUN Pitch Competition in Ethiopia](#), led by GAIN and the United Nations World Food Programme, with support from Irish Aid.

The [competition](#) sought to identify innovative, nutrition-sensitive SMEs providing scalable, inspiring, disruptive, and investable solutions. A call for applications began in early June, and attracted over 20 entries which were narrowed down to five finalists. The finalists underwent a boot camp facilitated by the [Base of Pyramid Innovation Centre](#) (Bopinc), business support service experts and anchor partner for the National SUN Pitch Competition. The experts coached the finalists on business development, marketing, consumer profiling, investment readiness and how best to pitch to investors. On pitch day, the businesses were assessed by four judges based on business relevance, nutrition impact, financial viability, and overall business sustainability, to determine the top three winners, who were crowned on 28 June 2021. A USD 10,000 cash prize was shared between them.

The first-place winner was Muluken Anteneh from [Anjo-nus](#), a fruit and vegetable enterprise that processes nutritionally-rich foods from bananas, including flour. In addition to addressing nutrition challenges, the processing of bananas by Anjo-nus has helped reduce post-harvest losses and created a market for 150 Ethiopian farmers. He received USD 5,000 as a cash prize.

The first and second runner-ups were Selam Wondim of [Grohydro Manufacturing SC](#), a soilless farming equipment manufacturer, and Alem Greiling, the founder of Nutridense, which processes oats procured from farmers into a wide range of food products, respectively.

A brighter future ahead

SBN Ethiopia aims to expand to over 250 members by 2023 and, to support this, is investing in marketing, and publicity campaigns across major cities including Addis Ababa, Mekelle, and Adama.

One such campaign was rolled out in major business districts to reach the small food and nutrition companies and entrepreneurs who operate there. These areas also have large populations that can be targeted at scale to enhance awareness of SBN Ethiopia's activities. The campaigns include information about the network, benefits to members, and details on how to join.

SBN recognises the importance of sustaining a relationship with the government and continuously advocating for positive change by facilitating more dialogues with officials and policymakers. Among other topics, these dialogues will cover enhancing food fortification standards, deepening partnerships through frequent public-private nutrition activities, and looking for solutions and opportunities around issues inhibiting the production and distribution of local high-priority and nutrient-rich foods. In addition to these dialogues, the network has plans for a major nutrition awareness campaign and further partnership meetings, which will include relevant government institutions in their efforts to improve nutrition across Ethiopia.



For more information contact:
Abinet Tekle,
SBN Ethiopia Coordinator
afeleke@gainhealth.org

Keeping focus:

how SBN member commitments are helping achieve nutrition goals



In order for lasting change to be achieved and secured in the areas of malnutrition and food security, it is important for businesses in Africa to commit to helping improve nutrition outcomes. To ensure this and increase the number of businesses co-investing in safe and nutritious foods, the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) has introduced business member commitments.

When joining SBN, new members are asked if they would like to make one or more nutrition-focused commitments. These can involve elements such as developing new and fortified formulations, creating accessible pricing, increasing distribution, and assisting in nutrition awareness creation. SBNs in three African countries – Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania – applied this strategy in its membership process early on, and this has provided SBN with useful data and insights.

This case study unpacks SBN's first attempt at evaluating its member commitment approach across three networks. It will assess the data and review the extent to which members have been able to progress their commitments, how they've been supported by SBN, the challenges that have been faced, and propose recommendations for the future.

Understanding the big picture

To gain an understanding of progress being made by businesses in their nutrition commitments, most national SBN networks conduct an annual survey – taking note of whether they have made improvements to quality, pricing, and/or the volume of nutritious and safe foods. The survey also aims to collect insights on member partnerships facilitated by SBN, and take into account feedback on how the network can better support its members.

Typically, assessments are conducted through in-person interviews and questionnaires held by an independent consultant in each country, although they were carried out virtually in 2020 due to COVID-19-related restrictions. With varying response rates following requests for interviews, the final sample in Mozambique was 65 members, 51 in Nigeria, and 13 in Tanzania.

The assessed members are located in various regions across these countries, and work in sectors ranging from agriculture, food and beverage, and manufacturing, to health, transport and logistics, retail and distribution, and advocacy.

Variations on a theme

Although many work in similar fields, the approaches to commitments made by businesses across the three countries notably differed – partly of their own accord, and somewhat resulting from the SBN enrolment rules in each country.

In Mozambique, for instance, members are asked to make at least one commitment from a list of 20 falling under four categories: improve the nutritional profile of products under the company portfolio, develop new nutritious products, improve pricing and distribution, and implement a workplace nutrition programme.

Meanwhile, in Nigeria, members are encouraged to make their commitment 'SMART' (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) – and with no set number or criteria attached, this option is more flexible and open-ended. Of the 51 members sampled in this country, 25% have specific SMART commitments (adhering to all five elements), while the remaining commitments fit into at least one SMART category (such as measurable or achievable).

Finally, in Tanzania, members are asked to select up to four corporate commitments from 18 goals that sit within seven different categories, including corporate strategy and management, supporting healthy diets and lifestyles, engagement with policymakers, and appropriate formulation of products.

Journeying to success

Progress achieved varies by country – although results were self-reported due to COVID-19 restrictions, meaning statements could not be verified. Nigeria demonstrated the most success, with 84% of businesses sampled, reporting making progress on their commitment(s). Eight percent changed their commitment to another, while just six percent did not make any progress. In terms of developing nutritious food products – a key factor in tackling malnutrition – 49% of sampled members stated they have developed new, nutritionally-enhanced foods and launched them onto the market, while 19% have created products but not yet launched them.

Tanzania, meanwhile, saw 54% of sampled members demonstrate measurable progress towards their commitment(s). The remaining 46% reported facing difficulties in achieving this as a result of insufficient technical expertise, lack of funding, and limited knowledge of obligations. As such, only one of the 13 businesses developed a new nutritious food product or enhanced an existing one.

Business members sampled in Mozambique also indicated mixed levels of success: 31% achieved their initial commitments, 31% were currently working towards doing so, and 18% had made no progress. With regards to the development or enhancement of nutritious foods, 15% of commitments made were dedicated to development (of which just over half have been

completed), and 19% to product improvement (of which slightly over a third have been realised).

A number of factors play a role in whether a small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) does or does not achieve their commitment targets, and the primary ones are similar among all three countries: lack of financial resources; lack of technical knowledge and support; lack of guidance, tools, tracking mechanisms, and formalised business procedures; and insufficient human resources. Others, such as extreme weather, country insecurity, COVID-19, and inflation, were also noted.

Many hands make light work

While efforts from businesses themselves are crucial in achieving commitment success, the importance of SBN's support should not be overlooked. In each country, the network offers assistance via a number of approaches. In Nigeria, for instance, SBN provides technical support, business development support, and financial support – and 72% of those surveyed noted receiving assistance in at least one of these areas, with the majority benefiting from technical assistance.

In Tanzania, SBN assistance can be found in the form of technical assistance, financial support via grants, and an annual pitch competition – for which the winner receives more dedicated support to develop their business idea. Meanwhile, in Mozambique, a large portion of support is provided via activities such as generating links between businesses, holding workshops, trainings and roundtable events, and providing technical support. These were initially made possible thanks to funding from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, but this investment has now ended – and SBN Mozambique is currently looking at other investment options to allow

them to continue providing assistance and guidance.

Changes for the better

Across all three countries, SBN teams are aiming to drive more of a focus on SMART commitments, as these enable them to better track the progress and accountability of members, and also recognise areas in which more support might be needed.

In Tanzania, the network's focus will also be on revising their list of commitments to make them more inclusive for small-scale businesses, and working with members to highlight their potential and possibilities for achievements and growth. Mozambique's network team will also be reviewing their commitments, with a particular aim of encouraging food production-focused companies to select three commitments on product content, packaging in relation to food safety, and communication. And, in Nigeria, SBN will be reassessing the approach that members take in making commitments: whether selection and formulation decisions will remain primarily with businesses, or if they will take more of a lead from the network and be focused around a specific set of pillars.

As SBN teams look to revise their approaches for formulating commitments and supporting members in their realisation, the businesses and consulting teams provided feedback and recommendations that could be taken into consideration.

For example, Nigeria's sampled members highlighted that SBN could do more to publicise the fact that support is actually available: of the 29% of members who stated they had not received any support, two-thirds weren't aware it was on offer. Furthermore, some who received assistance stated the amount on offer was not

sufficient to meet their needs – reflective of the fact that a lack of guidance and technical support were cited as two of the biggest challenges faced by businesses.

The other primary aspect highlighted for improvement was that of financing, as many members state the need for enhanced assistance in this area – such as providing information on and access to grants and low interest loans, and building capacity in sourcing and securing such aid.

SBN could also look to provide further clarity and information with regards to commitments: what each commitment specifically entails, how many are expected to be made and their level of adaptability, the benefits of and incentives for making them, and what support members can expect to receive from the network to help in achieving these.

Finally, more could be done to encourage and assist collaboration between network members in each region, and greater opportunities for connection – such as networking events – could be facilitated.



For more information contact:
Uduak Igbeka,
Africa Regional Lead, SBN Global
uigbeka@gainhealth.org

