The Amsterdam Initiative against Malnutrition a public-private partnership strongly committed to reducing malnutrition
What is AIM?

The Amsterdam Initiative against Malnutrition (AIM) is a delivery mechanism that brings different stakeholders together to improve food and nutrition security. The stakeholders, or partners, in the initiative develop innovative solutions to a global problem: malnutrition. Worldwide there are 2 billion people suffering from the severe consequences of an inadequate diet that lacks essential vitamins and minerals. The AIM partners are determined to contribute to ending malnutrition through a broad portfolio of projects. These projects are executed throughout the entire food value chain with a focus on the consumer.

How?

AIM uses a market based approach and develops innovative (social) business models, in order to help ensure that the projects are financially sustainable in the long-term. This market based approach has several advantages, as it may lead to product innovation, value chain optimization and the use of locally produced ingredients. The people in the target groups are treated as consumers who make their own decisions based on good information. The fact that the projects are executed in different sectors and at different stages of the value chain is very valuable, making it a comprehensive approach. AIM works at multiple levels of these value chains with, for instance, farmers, food processors, supermarkets, health clinics, health advocates and laboratory analysts. As malnutrition is a complex and multifaceted problem, all projects target a different part of that problem. The local partners take the lead in all projects, as bottom-up interventions offer the only road to success.
So far ten projects have been initiated. In order for them to succeed, four factors need to be taken in account. AIM calls the combination of these success factors the ‘enabling environment’:

**Demand creation and behavioural change**
Educating people about the importance of healthy and nutritious food has proven not to be very effective in actually improving diet or lifestyle. Therefore, AIM tries to understand what is behind people’s choices, to learn more about their taste, preferences, aspirations and motivations. Understanding what motivates consumer behaviour and drives behavioural change, helps the project partners to create new products and brands which are more easily accepted by the consumer.

**Quality control and assurance**
It can be difficult for farmers or food producers to comply with the complex body of regulations on hygiene, safety and quality. AIM tries to help actors in the value chain to deal with this issue. Quality control projects help farmers and producers to comply with specific hygiene, safety and quality standards in order to be able to supply food to local and regional markets. Quality and safety is also extremely important for consumers. Money spent on fake or unsafe products cannot be spent again, and such products can have devastating consequences. Building brands that are reliable, safe and trustworthy will help consumers to make healthy decisions.

**Access to finance**
Investments are needed to scale up the ideas that have the largest impact on nutrition security. As financial sustainability is of major importance to all projects, special attention is given to improving access to finance for local entrepreneurs.

**Policy & advocacy**
In some countries legal obligations to fortify foodstuffs, such as adding vitamin A to vegetable oils, give an enormous boost to tackling hidden hunger. Where it is possible, AIM tries to inspire both governments and organizations to create an environment that favours nutrition security.
When nutritious food is combined with poor quality water and/or poor hygiene practices, the health effects of the food are made insignificant because of diseases like diarrhea. Similarly, good hygienic practices combined with unhealthy food and polluted water will still lead to poor health. Therefore, offering a combination of safe water, nutritious foods and hygiene products appears to be a very effective health intervention. That is the idea behind the water and health kiosks in Kenya branded as Smartlife. This idea is supported and partly financed by Aqua for All.

With Smartlife, AIM has created a reliable and attractive concept for water and health products. A Smartlife health advocate goes door-to-door telling people about the benefits of healthy water, nutrition and good hygienic practices. People can buy safe water, nutritious foods and hygienic products in the Smartlife kiosks, but products are also delivered to homes. AIM hopes that within a few years, Smartlife will be found across Kenya, improving the health of many people in a very effective way.
Vegetables for all

Vegetables are a vital component of a balanced diet. Unfortunately, the diets of many people in low-income countries lack vegetables. This project targets the whole vegetable chain from seed to stomach, with a specific focus on the consumer. A market study by TNS executed in Kenya shows that people prefer to buy vegetables but do not always have the financial means to do so. Improved access to locally produced vegetables has to change that.

It starts with the production of vegetables. Rijk Zwaan produces high quality vegetable seeds; vegetables that have a high content of micronutrients. The company has a history of developing a wide range of locally adapted vegetable varieties. Farmers are trained to adopt the best practices for vegetable farming and are given access to farmer credit organized by Rabobank Foundation. The basic idea is to link farmers to local markets. In order to do so, adequate transportation and cool storage of fresh vegetables will be developed, as well as a distribution channel for dried vegetables. Researchers from Wageningen UR are helping to develop cheap, safe and effective drying techniques ensuring the preservation of micronutrients in the vegetables.

The dried products can also be used in soups and stews, which in combination with fortified stock powder or cubes, provide a healthy meal. Simultaneously, targeted campaigns and health education aimed at the end consumer will create demand for the products.

**Partners** RijkZwaan, WUR, GAIN, Hivos, SNV, Rabobank Foundation, BoPInc, Africa Bio Medica, Faida Mali
In the past few years, the number of sustainability programs and certification standards for the production of cash crops has grown rapidly. These structures usually focus on labour circumstances, environmentally friendly production methods and economic improvements. While good agricultural practices are strongly promoted, awareness on good nutritional practices is often low. Levels of malnutrition are still severe in the main tea, coffee and cocoa production areas.

GAIN, the Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen UR, and others are working together to implement the idea of improved nutrition in sustainability programs, sector initiatives or company projects in coffee, cocoa and tea chains in Indonesia, India, Kenya, Ivory Coast and Ghana. In the pilot projects, concrete integrated models that link agricultural and nutritional practices are developed, which companies can use in their supply chain sourcing strategies.

Farmers are encouraged to integrate nutritious food production in their farming systems for their own consumption, for example by growing nutritious vegetables, intercropping of fruit and nut trees and breeding chicken. Education and training on nutrition will be given to the farming families, as well as training to improve their productivity. Furthermore, plantation owners are stimulated to provide their workers with nutritious meals and educate them on the importance of a balanced and nutritious diet. When farmers, workers and their families eat more nutritious food, they are likely to be healthier and more productive, which is shown in different case studies in the last few years.

**Healthy food for coffee, tea and cocoa farmers**

**Improve nutrition in cash crop value chains**

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**Partners** WUR, GAIN
The 1,000 days between a woman’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday are the most crucial and irreversible for a child’s later development. This project targets particularly children between the ages of 6 months to 59 months, as they can benefit enormously from additional nutrients in their diet. In the MixMe project, food supplements are packaged, distributed and sold at the local market. The MixMe multiple micronutrient powders are unflavoured and therefore easy to combine with different meals.

DSM delivers the core premixes to a local plant of Phillips Health Services Ltd in Nairobi where small sachets will be filled with the mixture of minerals and vitamins. These sachets will be distributed to the commercial and institutional market, the latter including, for example, health clinics, obstetric clinics and hospitals. However, the food supplements should also be easily available in stores close to the consumers, such as the kiosk around the corner.

The MixMe products have to become aspirational as well. Therefore, the MixMe sachets are promoted through health and marketing campaigns. A pilot will be started that allows community health workers, who normally work on a voluntary basis, to promote and sell certain products, enabling them to make a living out of health advocacy. Careful research and monitoring of the overall effects of this ‘door-to-door promotion’ will inform the government on the pros and cons of this approach.

**Partners** DSM, GAIN, Phillips Healthcare Services
Milk is very popular in Kenya. In fact, milk is a staple food product, making it a very important part of the diet. This counts for all people in Kenya, and more specifically for young children from 6 months of age. Therefore, it makes sense to use milk, or dairy in general, as a carrier to deliver vitamins and minerals. When this fortification is not formally regulated it is possible to create a market incentive for producers to fortify their produce. That is the idea behind the fortified dairy programme in Kenya; allowing milk and yoghurt to be used as a carrier for vitamins and minerals to low income families.

AIM is working together with a local milk cooperative (Kinangop Dairy Cooperative) to bring fortified milk to the market under a special brand name. The cooperative represents a relatively small fraction of the total market, especially if you include the ‘informal’ raw milk market. The basic goal is that the cooperative obtains a first mover advantage, and sets an example when it comes to safety, quality and additional health benefits. As soon as the demand for their milk brand increases, other cooperatives are likely to follow the new standard of milk production. Thus, one cooperative can have the power to transform a big market.
Improving nutrition in remote farming communities

**Remote supermarket**

It starts with a local supermarket

**Smallholders**

are supported to improve production (quantity, quality and diversity) and sell it to the supermarket

**Oversupply**

trucks take the excess supply to other warehouses

**Consumers**

obtain access to healthy, locally produced food

**Rural retail hubs**

In rural Africa, a large percentage of local produce is unlikely to end up on supermarket shelves as the frequency, quality and variety of local produce is just not sufficient — until now. SPAR, supported by Wageningen UR and Rijk Zwaan, is trying to change this situation. The main idea is that a local retail store will transform into a community hub with a supermarket, fresh produce distribution centre, small health centre and pharmacy. In this way everybody will have access to a high quality shopping and services environment.

Local farmers are stimulated to unite and form cooperatives. The farmers in the cooperatives are enabled through the rural retail hub to make smart decisions on what to produce and in what quantities. Rijk Zwaan supplies the cooperatives with high quality vegetable seeds and extension services help farmers increase their production and improve quality and predictability of the harvest. In this way, the portfolio of local produce is diversified. The quality of the crops is controlled and the crops are cleaned and packaged, preparing the products for the local supermarket shelves. Trucks will continue to supply the supermarkets with staples and specialties. Instead of returning empty-handed however, the trucks take the excess stock back from the fresh produce centre and bring it to the SPAR distribution centre from where it can be sent to supply supermarkets in other regions.

As the concept expands with improved capacity and cohesion in the community, the retail hub turns into a community hub that includes for example health services.

**Partners**

Spar International, SPAR South Africa, RijkZwaan, GAIN, BoPInc, Wageningen UR
Today, one third of all deaths of children under the age of five are caused by the effects of malnutrition. Another 160 million children under the age of five suffer every day from the effects of chronic malnutrition and hunger. Roughly 100 million of them live in families that earn an income above the poverty line. These children could benefit from fortified food products in their diets, provided that the products are affordable and accessible.

In this project, global and local partnerships focused on the reduction of malnutrition are linked with key players in the food value chain. Together they bring to market a fortified food product that can be used with local homemade food. In this way the partners help to bridge the nutritional gap.

Key elements to the project are the sourcing of local ingredients and capacity building in the agriculture value chain. The efforts are accompanied by education programs and campaigns to inform people about a healthy diet and lifestyle. Unilever adds its technical food expertise, robust distribution system and global scale to the project. All together the different elements will form a solid foundation from which to innovate and create a continuum between education and on-going supply of a fortified food product. With as the main goal to improve the health of millions of children.

Partners: Unilever, GAIN, Renaissance Consultants Ltd
Even the most promising business case can fail when the environment in which it works is not favorable. The quality improvement network project aims to improve one aspect of the enabling environment, by helping producers comply with safety and quality standards. Bless Agri-Food lab and Hilina are the partners in this project.

A network of special quality labs is built in order to ensure food safety and quality along the food chain. In the quality labs, which are under the guidance of an international lab, local staff are trained in order to upgrade local knowledge and expertise on critical issues. In these labs, the safety and nutritional quality of a product is examined. If the product does not meet the requirements, the producers obtain advice on how to improve internal processes and control. In this way the quality labs help to ensure quality and safety for the end consumer, and at the same time guarantee an adequate level of essential nutrients in the products.

In addition to complying with applicable local standards, producers might even qualify themselves to supply, for instance, local refugee camps and local hospitals. The first AIM quality lab will be started in Ethiopia, where the capabilities of an existing private lab will be extended to do quality control on micronutrient content. GAIN works on a similar lab in West Africa. Step by step a regional network of quality labs will develop, opening new doors for local producers.

**Partners** GAIN, DSM, AkzoNobel, Intertek, Bless AgriFood Lab
Most of the AIM projects are supported by government subsidies, at least in the initial phase. These subsidies are meant to bridge the ‘pioneer gap’, by co-financing the private sector’s innovation efforts to develop new products in uncertain markets. In case pilot projects such as MixMe, dried vegetables or fortified dairy appear successful, those projects can be scaled up. However, access to finance can be problematic. Therefore one of the AIM partners, Rabobank Foundation, is creating a special AIM fund to support projects of small and medium size enterprises who want to scale up nutrition based businesses which not only have a financial return but also a social impact.

Ideally, people and institutions from all over the world will be able to invest in the AIM fund. An additional benefit of this approach is that the investment experts of Rabobank Foundation will evaluate the projects from an investor’s point of view and will advise the project initiator how to adjust the project in such a way that it will address the business issues and make it a commercial success.
After reading about the nine projects, you may notice that all projects are closely related to each other. Ideally, a consumer would obtain water and MixMe from the Smartlife kiosk and buy a reliable and trustworthy milk brand. She would continue to the market where she can choose from a wide range of vegetables. The consumer would be sure that those products are produced locally under strict safety and quality regulations. When this kind of story becomes common, AIM will have achieved ultimate success.

In the meantime, all projects are closely monitored and evaluated. One of the benefits of AIM is that it provides a platform where companies and organizations can learn from each other. Regular exchange of experiences can avoid doubling of efforts and strengthen new projects. BoPinc is the partner especially dedicated to sharing practices and learning.

Wageningen UR will, in close cooperation with ICCO, investigate whether the implied correlations and the expected relationships really materialized as expected and whether the results obtained can indeed be ascribed to the interventions. The MixMe project, for instance, will be a success when people buy the product regularly, not when they try it only once. The research conducted will contribute to the global body of knowledge. AIM believes this is very valuable, as scientific evidence is needed to convince others to follow the path of AIM’s interventions.

**Partners** WUR, ICCO, GAIN, BoPinc
Who’s in?

The partners in AIM all bring in their own expertise. The participating companies, Unilever, DSM, AkzoNobel, SPAR and Rijk Zwaan are all experts in developing, marketing and selling safe and high quality products, ranging from seeds to food supplements. Hivos, ICCO, BoPInc and GAIN have deeply rooted networks in and knowledge of the target countries. Wageningen UR helps to monitor and evaluate the impact of the interventions. Rabobank Foundation helps improve access to finance in the target countries. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an important partner and co-finance. However, most important are the local partners. Each project has at least one or two leading local partners.
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