

CHAMPIONING GENDER EQUALITY TO END MALNUTRITION



GAIN Gender Policy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this gender policy is to provide a clear vision of what the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) aims to achieve through its programs across the globe in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment.

GAIN recognizes the impact of gender inequality on every aspect of nutrition, from household decision-making to agricultural production. GAIN also recognizes the constraints for women in recognizing their potential, from exclusion from family decision-making to restricted education and employment opportunities, to gender-biased laws limiting their access to land and financing. GAIN considers women's empowerment essential for improving individual and population nutrition, and driving economic growth.

Gender equality is a human right. GAIN recognizes gender inequality as a cause and an effect of malnutrition and poverty and strives to create an environment that will actively address gender inequality through the nutrition programs we facilitate and deliver.

GAIN's has three gender equality objectives:

- 1. Empower women and men to ensure women can access the nutrition they need to flourish, including for a safe and healthy pregnancy**

GAIN's programs seek to ensure that men and women know what nutrition women need to grow and develop, to learn and work, and to have safe and healthy pregnancies, and are able to access that essential nutrition.

- 2. Empower women and men to ensure their children receive the nutrition they need for healthy development, particularly during the 1000 day window**

GAIN's programs seek to ensure that families understand their children's nutrition needs during the 1000 day window, and women are empowered and supported to make decisions that ensure access to adequate nutrition for their children.

- 3. Support a Whole-of-Community approach to gender equality and nutrition**

GAIN's programs seek to help ensure that all people, regardless of gender, have the voice and tools they need to improve nutrition in their families, communities and populations. GAIN focuses on empowering adolescent girls through education, empowering women through livelihoods, strengthening women's voices, and better harnessing the important role of women in society.

DEFINITIONS: GENDER AND EQUALITY

The United Nations¹ defines gender as:

The social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

The United Nations describes gender equality as:

The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

Gender Equality as a human right:

Gender equality as a human right was established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and enshrined in numerous subsequent documents, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The UN Millennium Declaration (2000) includes the following resolution: "To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable." Millennium Development Goal 3 is thus to "Promote gender equality and empower women." Additionally, the outcome document of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002, at which GAIN was founded, reads: "Each girl and boy is born free and equal in dignity and rights; therefore all forms of discrimination affecting children must end."

GAIN's OBJECTIVES: NUTRITION AND GENDER EQUALITY

1. Empower women and men to ensure women can access the nutrition they need to flourish, including for a safe and healthy pregnancy

GAIN seeks to ensure that adolescent girls and women can access the nutrition they need to grow and develop, to learn and work, and to have safe and healthy pregnancies. Pregnant and lactating women often lack access to basic health services and the resources that support adequate prenatal micronutrient intake required for maternal and infant health. Anemia is the most common form of malnutrition, afflicting an estimated 47 percent of women worldwide, and anemia in pregnancy is one of the leading causes of maternal death.ⁱⁱ Women and men should be empowered with adequate information and access to appropriate nutrition prior to pregnancy and during pregnancy and lactation to enable women to make the right nutrition decisions.

2. Empower women and men to ensure their children receive the nutrition they need for healthy development, particularly during the 1000 day window

Women's nutrition at the time of pregnancy, during pregnancy, and during lactation, and children's nutrition from conception to the age of two years (the '1,000 day window') has lifelong impact on the health and development of every girl and boy.

Women's empowerment is a significant determinant of families' access to nutrition. Women are often the family's primary caregiver and income generator. The International Food Policy Research Institute has estimated that if family decision-making was equalized, nearly two million more children in Sub-Saharan Africa would be adequately nourishedⁱⁱⁱ. Where women have lower social status, their decision-making autonomy is curtailed in reproductive health and family planning, health care-seeking behavior, optimal breastfeeding practices, dietary diversity in the food they feed themselves and their families, and the amount of time spent on child-rearing.^{iv} According to UNICEF's conceptual framework, inadequate caring practices and discriminatory attitudes that prevent the provision of such care are among the underlying and basic causes of malnutrition.^v

Women should be empowered to make the right nutrition decisions for their children and families with:

- Adequate information, training, support, and access to appropriate nutrition prior to pregnancy, and during pregnancy and lactation.

- Adequate information, training, support about the benefits of (1) exclusive breastfeeding between the age of 0-6 months, (2) continued breastfeeding between the ages of 6-24 months, and (3) appropriate complementary feeding practices, to ensure mothers and caregivers understand how best to meet their children's nutrition needs.
- Access to adequate, affordable nutritious food options.
- Maternity protection policies, with adequate duration of maternity leave, and workplace policies that support exclusive and continued breastfeeding.

The correlation between gender equality and children's nutrition

Women's marginalization generally corresponds with higher rates of malnutrition. In South Asia, where women's status is often particularly low, studies have found that improvements in women's power relative to men's, both within the household and in the community, strongly influence children's nutritional status. It is estimated that if women and men had equal status in South Asia, with all other factors held constant, the percentage of underweight children would decline from 46 to 33 percent—a reduction of 13.4 million malnourished children^{vi}. In Pakistan, for example, discrimination against girls and women is widespread, and child malnutrition rates are among the highest in the world, as is the proportion of low birth weight infants, at 25 percent.^{vii} In Sub-Saharan Africa, women's status and the long- and short-term nutritional status of children are also linked. If women and men enjoyed equal status, child malnutrition in the region would decrease by nearly 3 percentage points—a reduction of 1.7 million malnourished children under three.^{viii} Empowering women to participate in decision making will help improve and sustain health and nutrition.

3. Support a Whole-of-Community approach to gender equality and nutrition

GAIN seeks to help ensure that all people, regardless of gender, have the voice and tools they need to improve nutrition in their families, communities and populations. A whole-of-community approach is essential to achieve this, engaging both women and men in addressing social gender roles, empowering women and ensuring all community stakeholders are engaged in the process of improving the nutritional status of all its members. Empowered women can play a key practical and advocacy role in improving access to nutrition at every level from farm to fork.^{ix} Important levers to achieve this include family planning strategies to support gender-equitable education and employment, enabling young women to remain in school for longer, to achieve higher levels of education, livelihoods, and economic independence.

PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH GAIN PROGRAMS

Empowering women and men to ensure women can access the nutrition they need to flourish, including for a safe and healthy pregnancy

Many millions of people are reached by GAIN's large scale food fortification programs. By facilitating the delivery of essential vitamins and minerals through staple foods, GAIN helps ensure women's healthy development and healthy pregnancies, reducing maternal, neonatal and infant deaths, and increasing productivity.

Large scale food fortification can ensure 20-30% of women's recommended daily intake of key micronutrients at population level.^x Fortified foods are also better at lowering the risk of the multiple deficiencies that can result from seasonal deficits in the food supply or a poor quality diet. This is an important advantage to growing girls and boys who need a sustained supply of micronutrients for growth and development, and to women of fertile age who need to enter periods of pregnancy and lactation with adequate nutrient stores. Fortification can also be an excellent way of increasing the content of vitamins in breast milk and thus reducing the need for supplementation in postpartum women and infants.

GAIN's universal iodization program helps reduce the risk of miscarriage and stillbirth. Food fortification with folate reduces the risk of spina bifida by 41% and reduces the risk of perinatal mortality associated with neural tube defects by 66%.^{xi} Fortification with iron reduces pregnancy complications, perinatal and maternal mortality related to iron deficiency anemia. Improved maternal vitamin A levels are reflected in breast milk levels, and can lower mortality by 11%.^{xii} And zinc fortification improves immune function and reduces the risk of diarrhea and pneumonia.^{xiii xiv}

GAIN works to ensure the following principles are a core part of projects implemented by, or with, governments and other stakeholders:

- Distribution of multiple micronutrient supplements to pregnant and lactating women, and calcium supplementation for pregnant women.
- Distribution of balanced energy protein supplementation (through provision of specifically formulated nutritious foods) to malnourished pregnant women, for prevention of adverse perinatal outcomes or during lactation which is a period with higher energy demands than pregnancy
- Distribution of food supplements in food insecure areas (using health system, private sector, voucher system, cash transfer)
- Strengthening capacity for nutrition behavior change interventions and counseling skills of health personnel and volunteers

Empowering women and men to ensure their children receive the nutrition they need for healthy development, particularly during the 1000 day window

GAIN delivers its maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN) program based on the recommendations of the World Health Organization and UNICEF:

- Early initiation of breastfeeding with one hour of birth;
- Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life; and
- The introduction of nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods at six months together with continued breastfeeding up to two years and beyond.

Through multi-stakeholder partnerships, GAIN reaches mothers and caregivers in low-income families and empowers them with education and options to ensure they can provide appropriate nutritious food for their children. This includes supporting policies and education to promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, and affordable, sustainable access to multi-nutrient supplements and high-quality and affordable nutritious foods that complement breast milk and provide essential nutrients from six months of age. GAIN encourages complementary feeding based on a diversified local diet as the main focus, with alternatives to complement the nutrient gaps. Projects involve a range of partners: local businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations, non-profit global venture funds, and UN organizations.

GAIN considers an integrated comprehensive approach, aimed at delivery of health, nutrition and hygiene interventions through health facilities as well as community and market-based delivery channels, has the highest probability of achieving measurable impact on stunting reduction by virtue of maximizing sustained access cost-effectively. The program combines market and public approaches to address public health needs. Women groups at the community level are being trained to produce and sell a high-quality complementary food, which provides them with an income, thus empowering the women socially and economically, and improving nutrition of the children in the community. Partnerships incentivize small local private sector companies to commercialize the fortified complementary foods: they receive support, supporting local companies with product development, distribution, quality control, and guidance for appropriate Code-compliant marketing in support of breastfeeding. They also harness the know-how of the public sector in distributing products to people who need them.

All GAIN-supported nutritious food products for infants meet international standards: the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius. GAIN's MIYCN program promotes and supports strong national regulatory environments for optimal infant feeding practices and foods, including adherence to international standards and guidelines.

The reality is that foods traditionally consumed by families are often of inadequate nutritional quality and diversity to meet the specific nutritional needs of small children who can only consume small volumes of foods, leaving some mothers without options to secure essential nutrients for their children. GAIN helps empower mothers and caregivers by supporting multistakeholder partnerships to help ensure the sustainable, affordable availability of nutrition options in line with WHO and UNICEF recommendations:

- Home fortification of local foods with micronutrient supplements.
- Fortified complementary foods (small-scale community-based or industrial production).
- Behavior change interventions including education to enable mothers and caregivers to make informed choices.

GAIN's Multi-nutrient Supplements Initiative seeks to reduce micronutrient deficiencies by 20-30% in 50 million children. The activities in this area focus on increasing access to and use of home fortification products, including multi-nutrient powders and lipid-based nutrient supplements with efforts to generate awareness, political will and resources; improve policies; encourage public and private sector actors to expand access to multi-nutrient supplements; and expand the evidence base on the effectiveness of home fortification.

GAIN's Nutritious Foods for Mothers and Children Initiative aims at improving the nutritional status of children under 2 and pregnant and lactating women, seeking to reduce vitamin and mineral deficiencies by 20-30% and stunting by 5-10%. Organizational efforts in this area support in-country production and distribution of high-quality, affordable, low-cost fortified foods for young children and development and improved access to nutritious foods for pregnant and lactating women. The focus is placed in particular on the development of adequate delivery models to ensure access to nutritious foods by target populations.

GAIN works to ensure the following principles are a core part of projects implemented by, or with, governments and other stakeholders:

- Distribution of multiple micronutrient supplements, to 6-11 months old infants, young children
- Provision of nutritious complementary foods or nutrient supplements to children aged 6-23 months, especially in areas where prevalence of stunting is high and access to an adequately diverse, nutritious diet is limited (e.g. Indofood's MP-ASI SUN is being distributed in NTT as part of Project Laserbeam)

- Application of high-dose or medium dose LNS respectively for treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition
- Monitoring of linear growth through height-for-age measurement, as recommended in the new Lancet Nutrition series. Strengthening capacity of local health staff for height measurement
- Strengthening capacity for nutrition behaviour change interventions and counseling skills of health personnel and volunteers
- Distribute food supplements in food insecure areas (using health system, private sector, voucher system, cash transfer)

For example, GAIN supports the Maternal Infant and Young Child Nutrition Working Group in Indonesia, which advises the Ministry of Health (MoH) on relevant nutrition topics, such as the range of lipid-based nutrient supplements that are used in the treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition and to fill the nutrient gaps in complementary food through fortification at the point of food preparation (home fortification). In 2012, GAIN started “Project Baduta” in East Java to improve infant feeding and maternal nutrition practices and to improve access to affordable, high quality, fortified complementary foods and food supplements.



Supporting a Whole-of-Community approach to gender equality and nutrition

GAIN promotes a whole-of-community approach to gender equality and nutrition in three key ways:

1. Empowering adolescent girls through education opportunities.

Increasing attendance of adolescent girls has been found to be an effective way to positively impact on the age of marriage, the age of first pregnancy, life skill building including knowledge on maternal health, maternal nutrition, family health and nutrition and use of health centers and birthing centers. School feeding can be an important enabler to keep children in school, and also offers an important opportunity to provide nutritious meals as well as nutrition education. GAIN works with Ministries of Education to promote nutrition and health awareness, and to provide more nutritious meals and nutritious supplements at schools, increasing regular attendance and enrolment in secondary school.

GAIN's school nutrition programs work with key partners and governments to develop cost-effective, scalable and sustainable models for school nutrition that improve the micronutrient status of school children, particularly girls, aiming to:



- Reduce key micronutrient deficiencies by 15-20% in target children;
- Improve school enrollment and retention particularly among girls;
- Explore and build the evidence base for the potential of reducing stunting rates through school nutrition;
- Develop cost-effective, scalable and sustainable models for school nutrition that improve the micronutrient status of school children and particularly primary and secondary-school aged girls;
- Leverage GAIN's experience and network to build multi-stakeholder partnerships between government, the private sector, NGOs, and civil society to improve nutrition for adolescent girls; and
- Empower women through direct involvement in program management and oversight.

GAIN also operates through other delivery channels to promote and secure nutrition in this age group, including community and market-based delivery platforms, exploring opportunities to reach young women in the workplace, for example those working in the garment industry, horticulture, manufacturing, catering, and cash crop plantations.

2. Empowering women through livelihoods (nutrition in agriculture)

If women farmers across the developing world had the same access to labor, fertilizer, extension services, and seeds as male farmers, yields would increase as much as 20-30 percent per household, and reduce hunger for 100-150 million people.^{xv}

The integration of nutrition in agriculture depends on many factors, with gender equality and women's empowerment playing a critical role. Dominant gender issues concern land rights and operations, equal income generation, decision-making in crop variety and dietary diversification, and overall production and input into markets. Women often lack access to the same basic resources for agricultural production as their male counterparts. Equal access to means of production for men and women would raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent, contributing to food security and economic growth.^{xvi}



Nearly 70 percent of employed women in South Asia and more than 60 percent of employed women in sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture.^{xvii} In many African societies women have the primary responsibility of growing food for the household. Women also play a significant role in small-scale food processing and marketing and are often the dominant decision-maker with respect to issues concerning food and nutrition security.

Through nutrition in agriculture programs, GAIN strengthens the empowerment of women in the following ways:

- Women owned companies and concepts that support women farmers are key criteria when screening for grants in the Marketplace for Nutritious Foods initiative.
- The role of women and intra-household decision making is actively assessed in agriculture value chain nutrition projects (e.g. peanuts, cocoa, rice).
- Specifically, where mothers are sourcing foods for children and the nutritional content of those foods, GAIN delivers focused ethnographic studies with mothers of rural households.

3. Strengthening women's voices and better harnessing the important role of women in society

GAIN works in food insecure communities to advance women's empowerment through education and vocational training of men and women, and by opening economic opportunities. The projects range from behavior change communication and nutritional education (such as education in appropriate breastfeeding and complementary feeding), to business management.

GAIN's approaches include:

- A focus on an integrated, comprehensive approach including attention to hygiene, water and sanitation, in addition to health and nutrition.
- Increased investment in nutrition behavior change interventions, using a comprehensive multi-channel approach (inter-personal communication, community mobilization and population-level campaigns), including exploring the skills and competencies of the private sector, and building on community mobilization efforts such as civic forums.
- Adoption of a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach, including the private sector, to ensure that service delivery through health facilities is being complemented and strengthened with improving availability and accessibility of nutritious complementary foods and complementary food supplements through the retail and community-based delivery channels, while addressing workplace nutrition policies, such as breastfeeding policies and care for pregnant and lactating women

Case study: women's empowerment in India

In India, low status and disempowerment means that for many women, their rights to food, nutrition, and health are compromised by a combination of factors including intrahousehold discrimination in food and other resources, low decision making opportunity, constrained mobility, disproportionate work burden, domestic violence, and social norms (such as early marriage). These factors combine to disempower women in achieving their nutrition and health potential.

GAIN's women's empowerment project in Uttar Pradesh, with the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust, seeks to develop a community mobilization module to incentivize mothers and caregivers through Self Help Groups to adopt appropriate MIYCN practices, to access and utilize government's nutrition and health schemes, such as the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS), and thereby take greater responsibility for their own nutritional outcomes as well as ensure that the delivery mechanisms, targeting and quality of these government services are improved and will actually reach those that need it most in Uttar Pradesh.

Gender, Nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

GAIN supports efforts to empower women and children in the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly in regards to Goal 3 - the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. GAIN supports the mainstreaming of a gender perspective across the Post 2015 Development Agenda as central to promoting nutrition, agricultural development, and economic growth in the developing world. The table below demonstrates GAIN's activities in support of each of the current MDGs.

Goal 1: To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
GAIN supports projects that provide fortified foods to large populations – through market channels where feasible and through public sector delivery systems when the market fails. More nutritious food improves individual productivity and helps to reduce poverty.
Goal 2: To achieve universal primary education
GAIN fortification programs (including school feeding programs) reach children with essential vitamins and minerals and lead to improved cognitive function and intellectual capacity.
Goal 3: To promote gender equality and to empower women
GAIN's projects promote fortification of staple foods consumed by girls and young women; fortification yields health benefits by reducing iron deficiency and anemia. GAIN works with women groups at the community level to incentivize mothers and caregivers to adopt appropriate MIYCN practices, and to execute their entitlements to access and utilize government's nutrition and health schemes, By improving women's physical and mental capacities their ability to participate as equal citizens in society is enhanced.
Goal 4: To reduce child mortality
GAIN's programs improve young child feeding practices and bolster the nutritional status of infants and young children. GAIN supports exclusive breastfeeding for six months and the development of nutritious complementary food and food supplements for infants older than six months, in addition to continued breastfeeding for 2 years and beyond.
Goal 5: To improve maternal health
GAIN's work contributes to healthy motherhood and better prospects for babies by improving the micronutrient status of girls, adolescents and women. Under-nourished, anemic women are at severe risk of death and illness when they have children, and are likely to have babies with low birth weight.
Goal 6: To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
GAIN has supported small scale projects to provide nutrient dense meals to people living with HIV and is working with PEPFAR to integrate nutrition into HIV/AIDS work.
Goal 8: To develop a global partnership for development
As an international alliance, GAIN facilitates active partnerships providing resources and technical assistance to international and national alliances of governments, the private sector and civil society that work together to reduce poverty and improve nutritional and health status.

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GAIN works in partnership with governments and international agencies, and through projects involving more than 600 companies and civil society organizations in more than 30 countries with the objective of increasing access to the missing nutrients in diets necessary for people, communities and economies to be stronger and healthier. Over half of the beneficiaries are women and children.