

STRENGTHENING NUTRITION FRAMEWORKS AND WORKFORCE NUTRITION PROGRAMS IN INDIA

Road to the 2025 Paris N4G Summit

Introduction

On March 27th and 28th, 2025, France hosted the Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G) in Paris. Launched in 2013 in London, N4G is a flagship international conference aimed at securing concrete political and financial commitments to combat malnutrition in all its forms. N4G brings together governments, international organisations, philanthropies, businesses, NGOs and other key stakeholders at a global and regional level to elevate nutrition as a key development agenda and accelerate progress against malnutrition.

In preparation for the 2025 Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) contributed to the N4G mobilization efforts by organizing a series of Multistakeholder Nutrition Dialogues in India.

The first dialogue brought together participants from diverse sectors, including civil society organizations, government representatives, and private sector actors, spanning different economic, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds. It aimed at integrating nutrition into responsible business practices and set the stage for the second dialogue, which positioned Workforce Nutrition (WFN) as a vital agenda within the private sector.

The second dialogue convened participants from various sectors, including healthcare professionals, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and the HR sector to assess challenges and identify actionable opportunities for WFN. By addressing barriers such as cost constraints, cultural diversity, and leadership engagement, this session laid the groundwork for solutions to be presented at the upcoming Paris N4G Summit.



Context:

India faces multiple challenges, including poverty, climate change, and widespread nutritional deficiencies such as anemia and seasonal food insecurity. Malnutrition in India is a complex issue, where undernutrition coexists with overnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.



For instance, **35.5%**¹ of children under five are stunted, and over **57%** of women of reproductive age are anemic.



In addition to the challenge of undernutrition, the number of overweight adults, with obesity rates increasing from around **20%** in 2015 to **24%** in 2019, is now nearly equal to the number of underweight adults.



There is a pressing need to revamp India's nutrition strategy, focusing on creating **sustainable** and **resilient food systems** to support healthy diets.



The primary driver of this double burden is **poor diet quality**. Furthermore, India is experiencing increasing trends in the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and diets high in cholesterol (unhealthy fats) and sodium (excess salt).

¹ <https://www.gainhealth.org/impact/countries/india>





INSIGHT 1

Advancing Workforce Nutrition Through ESG Integration and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Participants highlighted several challenges hindering the integration of nutrition indicators into business practices and reporting frameworks, as well as the creation of Workforce Nutrition Programs (WNPs) within companies. They emphasized the difficulty companies face in incorporating workforce nutrition into Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) framework due to unclear reporting guidelines in India. They also recognized the need for sector-specific standards to ensure fair and accurate reporting, particularly noting that supply chain partners in non-food sectors often struggle to adopt nutrition-focused ESG practices. Additionally, mid-sized companies and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) face significant barriers due to the lack of resources and guidance to implement workforce nutrition programs effectively. Without additional support such as funding and assessment mechanisms from larger corporations, these smaller companies are often left to navigate these challenges on their own.

For these reasons, participants strongly highlighted the importance of public-private sector partnerships to create a supportive

ecosystem to advance workforce nutrition, an opportunity that is often underutilized or developed through fragmented efforts.

Such partnerships should be leveraged to implement nutrition initiatives, incentivize investments in nutritious food, and provide companies with essential tools and training such as workshops on nutrition policies, supply chains nutrition initiatives, ESG reporting integration.

In addition, participants emphasized the need for government-led incentives to make these solutions more attractive and feasible taking into consideration the challenges companies face in implementing workplace nutrition programs such as the high costs of providing nutritious meals with quality ingredients or establishing infrastructure like on-site cafeterias and catering services. They advocated for measures such as tax benefits and funding for nutrition-focused startups. Furthermore, they recommended integrating nutrition metrics within the Business Sustainability and Sustainability Reporting (BSRS) framework in collaboration with the Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for developing standardized reporting.



INSIGHT 2

Overcoming Leadership Disengagement: Shifting Perceptions of Nutrition as a Strategic Investment

Building on the discussion around the challenges of integrating nutrition into ESG frameworks, participants also explored the role of leadership in driving Workforce Nutrition Programs (WNPs) within companies. A key challenge identified was the frequent disengagement of leadership teams from employee wellness and nutrition initiatives. Additionally, participants noted that wellness programs were approached differently across companies, with promoter-led businesses and multinational corporations having varying priorities.

It was also noted that many businesses perceive nutrition initiatives as optional or confined to specific programs, such as child and maternal health. There is a need for a shift in perception to look at nutrition as a strategic investment rather than a social initiative. Participants emphasized that leadership involvement is crucial for ensuring nutrition and well-being are prioritized across all levels of the organization.

To address this, participants proposed raising awareness of the role of nutrition in employee well-being, targeting corporate leadership with

examples from pilot projects and case studies to demonstrate the benefits of workforce nutrition. They also suggested supporting these efforts with data metrics and reporting mechanisms, such as tracking absenteeism trends and health check-up data, to show stakeholders the impact

of wellness programs and ensure accountability and continuous improvement. Additionally, these efforts should be aligned with core HR strategies, embedding them into the organizational culture to enhance employee well-being and performance.



INSIGHT 3

Bridging Cultural Beliefs and Workplace Nutrition: Engaging Employees for Healthier Habits

The concept of a healthy and nutritious diet often conflicts with the cultural and dietary beliefs held by different populations. India's diverse food culture makes it challenging to introduce standardized healthy food options across workplaces, as foods considered healthy in one region or community may not be accepted in workplace settings. Moreover, personal beliefs and misconceptions about nutrition make it difficult for employers to shift employees' mindsets toward healthier habits. This resistance can result in reluctance to embrace wellness initiatives or participate in nutrition-related activities, posing a significant barrier to the effective implementation of workplace wellness programs. Another barrier in the workplace is the widespread availability of snacks and food through vending machines, which often promote unhealthy eating habits by offering high-calorie, low-nutrient options.

To remedy this problem, participants shared solutions tailored to different organizational needs. One approach proposed was to revise workplace food policies to encourage balanced diets while limiting access to junk food. Companies could also pursue wellness certifications, in collaboration with government initiatives, to establish themselves as leaders in employee well-being, thereby enhancing their reputation and marketability. Moreover, beyond policy changes, participants proposed integrating wellness into daily operations requiring engagement from HR departments, departments heads and other stakeholders. Encouraging open discussions and shared accountability in services can help drive buy-in and ensure the successful implementation of nutrition initiatives.

Additionally, raising awareness and fostering employee engagement were also identified as critical strategies. Participants shared that companies could launch educational campaigns to drive employee participation in wellness pilot programs within the organization. Additionally, they suggested that companies provide employees with the necessary resources and spaces to support their physical and mental health. This could involve developing or repurposing existing spaces into small wellness infrastructures such as breastfeeding rooms, medical rooms, and hydration stations.

To measure the benefits of these efforts, participants highlighted the importance of collecting metrics and employee feedback after the implementation. This could include organizing monthly health and nutrition sessions, introducing interactive initiatives such as healthy snack campaigns or fitness activities, and gathering employees' feedback on the changes. These steps would help track the impact of wellness programs and foster greater engagement and acceptance among employees.



Conclusion

The two Stakeholder Dialogues in India underscored the need to incorporate Workforce Nutrition Programs (WFN) into broader sustainability frameworks, including corporate reporting and evaluation structures. Participants highlighted the crucial role of corporate leadership, organizational structures, and public-private partnerships in driving the success of these programs, emphasizing the potential impact of government incentives. They also explored ways to educate the population and raise awareness about nutrition, acknowledging the cultural and belief-based challenges that arise from India's rich diversity. Finally, participants issued a strong call to action for the government and companies to take a proactive role in advancing the Workforce Nutrition (WFN) agenda. They urged stakeholders to make clear, actionable commitments at the Paris N4G Summit, addressing key challenges such as cost, infrastructure, and cultural sensitivities while ensuring WFN is integrated into national policies and corporate strategies.

References

1. Roundtable Discussion on Nourishing Responsible Business Practices : Committed to healthier diets for all – Nutrition Dialogues. (2024, December 31). Nutrition Dialogues. <https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/57823/>
2. Creating a Better Workplace, One Bite at a Time : Committed to healthier diets for all – Nutrition Dialogues. (2024, December 31). Nutrition Dialogues. <https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/57302/>



Healthier Diets. For all.

GAIN India

Mahindra Towers,
2A Bhikaji Cama Place,
New Delhi 110066,
India

🌐 www.gainhealth.org
✉ @gain_alliance
✉ @GAINalliance
☎ +291 11 43147575

