

Impact Story 18:

How can businesses advance nutrition? The case of the 2021 Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit

THE OPPORTUNITY

Nutrition for Growth (N4G) is a Summit held every four years alongside the Olympic Games to galvanise global actions to tackle malnutrition. Launched in London in 2012, Japan hosted the 2021 N4G Summit in Tokyo, which was delayed a year due to COVID-19.



The focus of the London N4G was heavily on nutrition “direct” actions through health systems and this Summit mobilised \$4 billion to tackle undernutrition and \$19 billion in complementary nutrition-sensitive investments. Many stakeholders, large, small, based in high- or low-income settings, public or private, play a role in nutrition but it is businesses which dominates food, the fundamental building block of the diets that underpin nutrition. From a small enterprise in Bangladesh to a multinational with presence across the world, the private sector produces and sells the vast majority of what we all eat, including consumers on the lowest incomes. At the first N4G Summit in 2013 in London, however, there were few specific business commitments.

The involvement of businesses in such global initiatives is not easy: the politics of food can be controversial, trying to align rights and commerce. Individual companies also find it hard to engage with big governmental processes, and governments themselves are not always good at engaging non-state bodies – whether private or civil society. But given their significance to nutrition, it is vital to enable business to be involved and make serious and measurable commitments alongside governments and traditional donors. What happened in the Tokyo N4G?

THE SOLUTION

The Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit preparatory workstream on ‘Building food systems that promote healthy diets and nutrition, ensure producers’ livelihoods and are climate smart’, coordinated by the UK and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) asked GAIN and the Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI) to lead consultations on bringing in the private sector.

We began by convening jointly with the Japanese and Dutch governments the [‘Building Business Contributions for the 2020 Global Nutrition Summit’](#) in The Hague in June 2019, with sixty company and private sector representatives from business associations. One outcome of this consultation was the agreement of six leading business organizations - Food Industry Asia (FIA), The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF), the International Food and Beverage Alliance (IFBA), the SUN Business Network (SBN), Nutrition Japan Public Private Platform (NJPPP) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) to form a working group for the N4G – called the Business Constituency Group (BCG). ATNI and GAIN supported this working group, which was itself a ‘first’ - bringing together different associations around a common goal and representing a diverse and large set of businesses – from SMEs to MNCs. They represented almost every major food manufacturer and retailer, plus global companies in the finance, IT, agriculture, transport, and infrastructure sectors as well as SMEs in emerging markets. BCG members employ tens of millions of people, and through supply chains, affect the livelihoods of hundreds of millions more especially in the farming and rural areas.

Over the following 18 months, the BCG met every month and provided a platform for dialogue and information exchanges between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Summit preparations. The process enabled companies from all over the globe to be informed, to debate and to feed in their ideas and solutions to the N4G.

One of the first tasks completed by the BCG was to work with Japan on a set of principles to create a transparent and accountable basis for cooperation. The Commitment-Making Guide set out the values which should be respected by all participants in the conference with some specific ones applicable to business. This included a requirement for companies to uphold and apply that the Code of Conduct on Breast Milk Substitutes (BMS), the global standard to apply WHO standards on best practice for breastfeeding, a key nutrition policy.

THE IMPACT

First the BCG facilitated **the first comprehensive set of commitments by the private sector at the N4G**. Like any commitment, delivery will be the key and ensuring that they are translated into action the acid test. Their impact on the ground will be measured over the next few years through the reporting system set up for the N4G – the Nutrition Accountability Framework. Working together, the BCG facilitated five areas of SMART commitments at the Summit from marketing to product reformulation, to capacity building of SMEs in low- and middle-income countries. They cover a wide range of activities of private sector companies’ activities in food systems, potentially benefitting many consumers around the world. For these companies and investors, the commitments represent changes in core business models, practices, and operations. The commitments were incorporated into N4G commitments – [What is Business Committing at the Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021? - Statement by the Business Constituency Group](#).

Highlights of Business Commitments at N4G Japan

Initiative	Commitment
Responsible Business Pledge for Better Nutrition (RBP) : Framework to enable private sector leadership and SMART commitment-making for the N4G Summit.	Aligned with the N4G Commitment-making Guide and Principles of Engagement, the Pledge calls for nutrition as a priority at board-level and for each corporate signatory to bring forward at least three RBP commitments from: Nutrition-Smart Agriculture, Product Reformulation and Innovation for Improved Nutrition, Business Model Innovation for Improved Nutrition, Responsible Marketing, Promote Healthy Eating, Workforce Nutrition and Finance and Investment for Improved Nutrition.
N4G Investor Pledge : set new investor expectations related to corporate governance, strategy, lobbying and transparency for food and beverage manufacturers and retailers.	Supported by ATNI, 53 institutional investors representing \$12.4 trillion in assets signed up to the Investor Expectations on Nutrition, Diets and Health, thereby joining the coalition.
Collective commitments by the end of 2022 on sodium reduction and a new Global Responsible Marketing Policy by members of the International Food and Beverage Alliance (IFBA).	IFBA has set new global targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for maximum sodium content of packaged foods across some forty food sub-categories, for 2025 and 2030. Each IFBA company will commit to meeting these targets across key categories that together comprise at least 75% of the company’s sales. This is the first collective voluntary global sodium content targets. • companies must either limit products they market to children under 13 to products that meet a set of specific nutrition criteria; or refrain from directing marketing to children under 13 altogether.
Workforce Nutrition Alliance , co-led by CGF and GAIN	Supports employers to adopt and expand workforce nutrition programs – target 3 million employees in organisations and supply chains by 2025.
The SUN Business Network (SBN) pledges a set of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) commitments to raise awareness of the role of SMEs in nutrition	These commitments include the recruitment of 3,000 SMEs across Africa, Asia, and Latin America by the end of 2024, as well as engaging SMEs to sign the Responsible Business Pledge, and identify sustainable support to and multi-stakeholder capacity building of SMEs.

Second, the work of the BCG linking together investment, production, and consumption of food to nutrition outcomes showed how nutrition can contribute to food system reforms, to complement a focus on health and life saving interventions through the public health system. This is an important lesson for future work: healthier diets and food system is essential to better nutrition for all.

Third, it showed how well planned and robust cooperation between private and public sectors around nutrition can work. Compared to the business participation and commitments at the first N4G Summit in London in 2013, this joint effort for business participation and the commitments is a significant step forward. BCG was developed specifically as a mechanism for the N4G, but it provides insights into the potential of collaboration to nudge and drive business to do more to meet nutrition goals. The ingredients for this are clarity on a role for business; better information flow from governments to business and vice-versa; a transparent and public set of principles for engagement; recognition of the critical role of business structures - not just individual companies; and clear measurement and accountability arrangements.



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