

EXISTING WORKFORCE NUTRITION POLICIES IN NIGERIA AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



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KEY MESSAGES

- People spend 1/3 of their adult lives at work. By leveraging the workplace as a connector to people, we can bring access to and knowledge about healthy nutrition to millions of people around the globe through **workforce nutrition**.
- The most important opportunities for expanding workforce nutrition policies include **incentivizing food provisioning** at the workplace whilst **applying minimal nutritional requirements** and creating a **supportive environment for breastfeeding mothers** in line with international standards.
- With supportive policies in place, even greater impact can be achieved when ensuring minimal **accountability** and **compliance mechanisms** against these policies.

SETTING THE SCENE

Malnutrition in all its forms, from undernutrition to micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition, is a global public health burden. It is estimated that 2 in 3 women of reproductive age are affected by nutrient deficiencies¹. In Nigeria, 40% people live below the poverty line², and as much as 96% of the population cannot afford a healthy diet³. Never has there been a greater need to engage all actors and options to address the malnutrition burden the world faces. People spend one-third of their adult lives at work, therefore, by leveraging the workplace, access to and knowledge about healthy nutrition can be brought to millions of people around the globe. Workforce nutrition is an underutilised opportunity to deliver proven benefits for employers, workers, and communities. A definition and framework for workforce nutrition can be found [here](#).

In recent years, Nigeria has taken some critical steps to recognize the role that workplaces can play in enabling good nutrition, most notably in Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2016-2025) and the National Health Promotion Policy (2019). Further improved action in the policy arena could help start or scale up workforce nutrition programmes and contribute to addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth).

WIN-WIN-WIN APPROACH

As elaborated in a GAIN evidence brief⁴, poor-quality diets and insufficient food quantity are linked to reduced work capacity. This suggests that the malnutrition burden can be partly addressed through a win-win-win approach which improves individual lives, business outcomes, and national economies. Individual outcomes observed as a result of workforce nutrition programmes have included increased job satisfaction, reduced sick days, higher consumption of healthy foods, and increased duration of exclusive breastfeeding, amongst others. Business outcomes are reduced absenteeism, enhanced productivity, reduced medical costs, and significantly lower rates of accidents and mistakes, which together could lead to an increase in the national GDP⁵. **Thus GAIN, as part of the Workforce Nutrition Alliance, urges Nigerian regulators and policymakers to support employers by implementing public policies for improved workforce nutrition.**

¹ Stevens, G. A., Beal, T., Mbuya, M. N., Luo, H., Neufeld, L. M., Addo, O. Y., ... & Young, M. F. (2022). Micronutrient deficiencies among preschool-aged children and women of reproductive age worldwide: a pooled analysis of individual-level data from population-representative surveys. *The Lancet Global Health*, 10(11), e1590-e1599.

² World Bank. *A Better Future for All Nigerians: Nigeria Poverty Assessment*. 2022

³ FAO. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*. 2022





⁴ Nyhus Dhillon, C. & Stone, G. *The evidence for workforce nutrition programmes*. 2019. <https://www.gainhealth.org/resources/reports-and-publications/evidence-workforce-nutrition-programmes>

⁵ Lambrechts, M. & B. Stacy. *Increasing productivity and reducing vulnerable employment*. *Atlas of the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2020. <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgoalatlas/goal-8-decent-work-and-economic-growth/>

IMPROVING WORKFORCE NUTRITION RELATED POLICIES

An outline of the four nutrition pillars for workforce nutrition and the related existing policies in Nigeria is presented in Table 1. Based on an analysis of these policies, the table also provides opportunities to further employer-driven approaches to improve nutrition among formal worker populations. Even greater impact can be considered when expanding existing policies to include reaching workers in supply chains (as opposed to only those directly employed by the company) as well as establishing minimal accountability and reporting requirements against these policies.

Table 1: Existing policies and opportunities to further strengthen policies on Workforce Nutrition in Nigeria for the four nutrition pillars, based on an analysis of the national labour and nutrition policies

Nutrition pillar	Existing workforce nutrition related policy components	Opportunities to further strengthen policies on workforce nutrition
Healthy Food at Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that workplaces offer healthier meals is a priority area in the Agricultural Sector, Food security and Nutrition Strategy 2016-2025⁶ Regulations for preparing, heating, and consuming meals need to be in place in the workplace factory settings⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivise all employers to subsidise healthy meal options available at or near the workplace Apply and specify minimal nutritional requirements with nutrition services in relevant policies, using the National Dietary Guidelines for Nigeria⁸. Require workers' representation in canteen management
Nutrition education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Health Promotion Policy⁹ mentions a healthy work environment The National Policy and Strategic Plan of Action on prevention and control of NCDs¹⁰ refers to health promotion (5.2) and dietary advice, with special mention of workplaces (5.3.3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivise employers and worksites to reinforce government mass media campaigns for workers on healthy eating and good nutrition
Health Checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer to carry out pre-service medical examination¹¹ No direct reference found under existing laws, rules, or policies on the inclusion of health checks in worksites, beyond occupational health and safety No direct reference found under existing laws, rules, or policies on provision of antenatal screening for pregnant employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require employers to (partially) cover the costs of annual and confidential diet-related health checks for workers and nutrition counselling for workers (either to all workers or at least those at risk, as identified by health checks) Ensure that pregnant workers have access to government-provided additional health screening (i.e., antenatal check-ups) during working hours
Breastfeeding Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Law requires 12 weeks of maternity leave (6 weeks prenatal + 6 weeks postnatal) at 50% of pay¹² Mothers to be allowed half an hour twice a day for nursing the baby¹³ Government workers are entitled to 16 weeks of maternity leave (full pay) and 2 hours off-duty per day for breastfeeding or expressing milk¹⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider extending maternity leave policy to at least 18 weeks as per International Labour Organization (ILO) recommendation 191 for all workers Extend law to 6 months maternity leave at 2/3rd pay (as per recommendations of the International Labour Organisation) Require non-dismissal policy of women from announcement of pregnancy to at least 1 month post maternity leave Consider parental leave for supporting spouses, suggested for at least 2 weeks as per ILO recommendation Enrol more public and private organisations to implement the breastfeeding policy, as only 9% of organisations have a workplace breastfeeding policy¹⁵

A CALL TO ACTION

Nigeria has taken some positive steps towards increasing good nutrition for workers and calling for workforce nutrition-friendly initiatives in its national strategic objectives. Further refining and expanding existing policies to encourage minimal but broad workforce nutrition standards would help address the burden of malnutrition and associated non-communicable diseases. Essential considerations include the incentivization for food provisioning at or near the workplace and applying minimal nutritional standards to canteen offerings based on national Dietary Guidelines. In addition, refinements should include the extension of maternity entitlements in line with international standards. Finally, even greater impact can be achieved when expanding existing policies to include reaching workers in supply chains (as opposed to only those directly employed by the company) as well as ensuring minimal accountability and compliance mechanisms against all policies. When combined, these actions will contribute to healthier lives of citizens, improved commercial results and more stable labour relations.

⁶ Agricultural Sector, Food security and Nutrition strategy 2016-2025, strategic priority area 7

⁷ Section 49(3)(d)(i) Nigeria Factories act (1987)

⁸ Food-based dietary guideline for Nigeria – A guide to healthy eating (2001) available at <https://www.fao.org/3/as841e/as841e.pdf>

⁹ National Health Promotion Policy (revised) 2019, Appendix 1

¹⁰ National Policy and Strategic Plan of Action on Prevention and Control of NCDs (2013)

¹¹ Section 8(1), Labour Act 1971

¹² Section 54(1), Labour Act, 1990

¹³ Labour act 1990

¹⁴ Section 100219 of Public Services Rules (2008 Edition)

¹⁵ Unicef and WHO report, WBW 2022