

# GAIN KENYA

## DIGEST



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### GAIN Kenya at the UN Food Systems Summit Preparatory Meetings

The Kenya UN Food Systems Stocktaking Moment convened government leaders, policymakers, private sector actors, researchers, farmers, youth, and civil society to review progress and accelerate action toward transforming food systems to deliver healthier, equitable, and resilient diets for all Kenyans. The summit served as a critical platform for assessing national progress on the implementation of Kenya's five food systems pathways and catalysing action ahead of the 2030 Agenda.

### GAIN Kenya's Engagement

As a key partner in Kenya's food systems transformation, GAIN Kenya actively participated in the summit's preparatory meetings, reaffirming its commitment to addressing malnutrition and promoting healthy, safe, and affordable diets.

GAIN Kenya Country Director, Ruth Okowa, joined a plenary panel on Diversified Diets for a Healthy Kenya, emphasizing the need for practical innovations to ensure vulnerable populations can access affordable, nutritious food. “This is a critical platform for strengthening accountability, unlocking investments, and deploying innovations that can transform food systems,” noted Ms. Okowa during the panel session.



*GAIN Kenya Country Director contributing during a plenary panel on Diversified Diets for a Healthy Kenya.*

### **GAIN Co-Chairs Pathway 3 on Diversified Diets**

GAIN Kenya, alongside UNICEF, co-chaired the Diversified Diets Pathway (Pathway 3) led by the Ministry of Health. This pathway seeks to improve dietary diversity, a key element in addressing Kenya’s triple burden of malnutrition.

During a side event themed “Nourishing the Future with Healthy Diets: Accelerating Progress through Food Systems Transformation”, GAIN Kenya’s FoodFit brand took centre stage. Dennis Aberi, GAIN Kenya Deputy Country Director, presented FoodFit as an innovative brand promoting safe and nutritious food consumption. By empowering mama mbogas—small-scale vegetable vendors—through training in food safety, branding, and business skills, FoodFit is improving vegetable quality and accessibility for low-income consumers. The initiative has reached over 10,000 vendors and influenced healthier diets among more than 3 million Kenyans, while creating sustainable, safer food chains.

### **Showcasing Innovation for Healthier Diets**

Moreover, GAIN Kenya exhibited three transformative initiatives driving equitable access to nutritious foods: Commercialisation of Biofortified Crops (CBC), SnackSmart Alliance and Food Culture Alliance.

### **Driving Food Systems Transformation**

Through research, partnerships, and people-centred innovations, GAIN Kenya continues to align its work with Kenya’s food system pathways, tackling the country’s triple burden of malnutrition while promoting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient food systems.



*James Gacheru, a GAIN staff, sharing GAIN’s work with one of the delegates who visited the GAIN exhibition booth at the Kenya National Food Systems Summit*



## **GAIN Kenya and UNICEF Partner to Improve Nutrition for the Most Vulnerable**

GAIN Kenya is proud to announce the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNICEF Kenya to strengthen efforts to improve access to nutritious, safe, and sustainable foods for the most vulnerable. This strategic partnership underscores a shared commitment to addressing malnutrition and shaping healthier food environments for children, adolescents, and families in Kenya.

### **A Shared Vision for Healthier Diets**

Under this agreement, GAIN and UNICEF will collaborate closely with the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders to promote healthy diets and improve nutrition outcomes. The partnership will leverage advocacy, collaborative programming, and knowledge exchange to amplify efforts that prioritize the nutritional needs of children and adolescents across all stages of growth.

“Children’s right to healthier diets is non-negotiable,” said Ruth Okowa, Country Director of GAIN Kenya. “This partnership with UNICEF strengthens our resolve to make nutritious diets accessible, affordable, and desirable, ensuring that children and families can make healthier choices for better lives.”



*GAIN Kenya Country Director, Ruth Okowa (Front left) and UNICEF Country Representative (Middle) holding copies of the MOU after signing. The occasion was witnessed by the Head of the Division of Nutrition and Dietetics in the Ministry of Health and senior officials from GAIN and UNICEF.*

### **A Learning Visit to EKYAN: Building on Success**

The signing of the MOU was preceded by a joint learning visit to the Engaging Kenyan Youth in Agriculture and Nutrition (EKYAN) programme in Kirinyaga County, led by UNICEF Kenya and Kuza One (Kuza Biashara). EKYAN is equipping young agripreneurs with skills in climate-smart agriculture, nutrition, and digital innovation to drive community transformation.

During the visit, representatives from the County Government of Kirinyaga, UNICEF, GAIN Kenya, and Kuza reviewed the programme’s progress and explored its sustainability. The County shared its Wezesha Kirinyaga Agriculture Perspective and a comprehensive EKYAN Institutionalisation Strategy aimed at embedding EKYAN interventions into county development plans. GAIN Kenya was honoured to join as a learning partner and applauds the County’s efforts to institutionalise EKYAN’s transformative approach.

Read more: <https://bit.ly/4ltCF6y>

## Rooted in the Leaf: Crafting Kenya's Ultimate Vegetable Recipe Book

Vegetables have long been the unsung heroes of Kenyan kitchens—humble, nutrient-rich, and deeply intertwined with culture, tradition, and memory. From the earthy taste of managu (African nightshade) to the nutty richness of kunde (cowpea leaves) and the comforting aroma of mchicha (amaranth), indigenous greens have nourished generations while carrying stories of resilience and community. Yet, in the face of modern diets dominated by processed foods, these culinary treasures risk being forgotten.

To preserve and celebrate this legacy, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), under the Vegetables for All project, embarked on a journey to create a vegetable recipe book that champions Kenya's indigenous leafy, yellow, and orange vegetables. The five-year Dutch-funded project aims to improve dietary diversity among over 1.1 million urban and peri-urban consumers in Nairobi, Kiambu, Machakos, Nakuru, and Mombasa Counties.



*Stakeholders discussing contents of the Vegetable recipe book during GAIN Stakeholder Forum in Nairobi.*

### Why This Recipe Book Matters

This recipe collection is more than a cookbook—it is a cultural archive, a nutrition guide, and a culinary innovation toolkit. Its threefold mission is to preserve traditional knowledge, innovate with modern twists, and make healthy cooking accessible to every household. Designed with everyday cooks in mind, the recipes feature affordable ingredients from local markets, simple cooking steps, and pro tips such as avoiding overcooking to retain nutrients.

### A Collaborative Journey

The creation of this recipe book was a rigorous, collaborative effort, blending traditional knowledge with modern nutrition science.

**Phase 1:** The Big Recipe Review in February 2025: Fifteen draft recipes were carefully reviewed by nutritionists (including Division of Nutrition and Dietetics of the Ministry of Health officials and County Nutrition Coordinators), food scientists, and chefs for nutritional value, local ingredient availability, and taste. Processed ingredients were replaced with fresh herbs, colourful vegetables, and smarter cooking methods—like shorter cook times to preserve nutrients.



**Phase 2:** Taste Testing and Refinement in April 2025: In partnership with Kenyatta University, the recipes underwent real-world testing. Students joined a lively cooking and tasting session at the university's Food & Nutrition Lab, adding youthful insights and scientific rigor. "The students' energy was contagious—they made us rethink how Kenyans really want to eat their veggies!" noted Theodore Onyango, GAIN Project Coordinator.

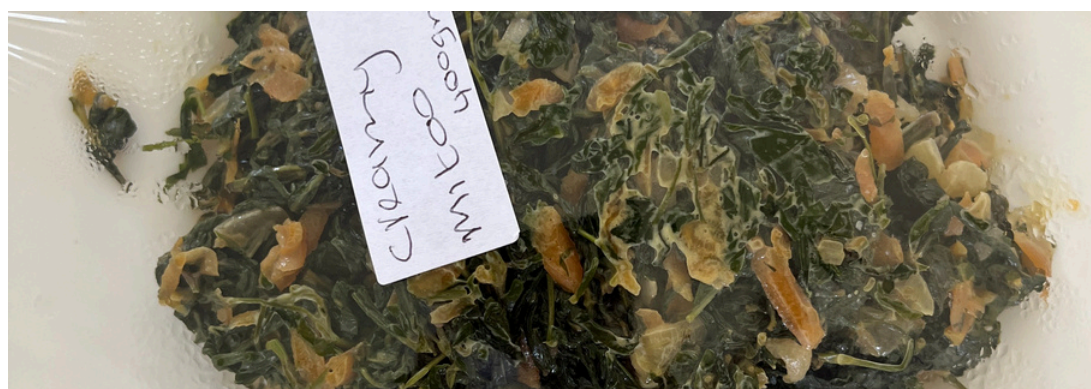


*County Nutrition Coordinators, Mary Makau (Machakos) and Esha Bakari (Mombasa) preparing a dish from the recipe book*

### What's Next?

The finalised vegetable recipe book will be launched in August 2025, offering easy, affordable, and mouth-watering vegetable recipes. From mchicha bhajia to mitoo with coconut milk, the book invites Kenyans to rediscover the joy of cooking with indigenous greens.

Cooking vegetables is not just nourishment—it's a celebration of heritage, health, and home. With this recipe book, GAIN Kenya and its partners invite every family to keep the leafy stories alive, one delicious plate at a time.



*Creamy mitoo prepared during the Taste Testing and Refinement session*



*GAIN Kenya staff pose for a group photo with County Nutrition Coordinators, and students after a lively cooking and tasting session at the Kenyatta University Food & Nutrition Lab*



*Group photo with workshop participants and a guest parliamentarian- Hon. Babu Owino from Embakasi East in Nairobi Kenya (Seated at the middle).*

## **Machakos Members of County Assembly (MCAs) Sensitised on Food Safety and Agricultural Training Policies**

In June 2025, GAIN through the Vegetables for All project organized a three-day workshop to sensitize Machakos MCAs on four key documents: the Machakos Food Safety and Control Policy and Bill, and the Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) Policy and Bill. The workshop was attended by representatives from Agriculture, Health, Trade, Legal Affairs, and Education Departments.

The workshop aimed to build awareness and consensus around improving food safety and revitalising agricultural training. The Food Safety Policy outlines plans to enhance food quality through public testing labs, preventive measures, and multi-sectoral coordination. The accompanying bill proposes the formation of a County Food Safety Committee to enforce and guide food safety standards. The policy is a guiding framework developed by the county government to outline goals, principles, and actions on food safety. The bill, on the other hand, is a proposed law that must go through County Assembly approval and once enacted, becomes legally enforceable legislation.

The ATVET Policy seeks to transform the county's Agricultural Training Centre into an inclusive training institute offering agricultural education, ICT, mental health support, and income-generating programmes. The ATVET Bill supports this transformation with legal provisions for governance, funding, and alignment with national TVET laws.

Participants provided critical feedback, which will inform the next steps: incorporating amendments, conducting public participation, and tabling the documents before the County Assembly. Once adopted, these policies and bills are expected to strengthen food systems, create jobs, and promote sustainable agriculture in Machakos County.



## Empowering Mama Mbogas for Better Nutrition and Business Growth

Across Kenya's bustling markets and street corners, mama mbogas—last-mile vegetable vendors—play an essential role in ensuring families have access to fresh, affordable produce. Yet, despite their vital contribution to food security and nutrition, many face significant challenges that hinder their businesses and livelihoods. From unreliable vegetable supply chains and lack of cold storage facilities to inadequate market infrastructure, poor stall hygiene, and limited access to financial and business support, mama mbogas often struggle to sustain and grow their enterprises.



*Beatrice Injendeka, a mama mboga in Umoja 2, Nairobi County selling vegetables to her customer.*

These challenges are compounded by the rising cost of living, competition from supermarkets, and shifting consumer preferences towards processed foods.

Recognising these gaps, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), through the Vegetables for All project, is empowering mama mbogas with the knowledge and tools they need to thrive. Recently, over 3,000 mama mbogas received refresher training on critical areas such as nutrition, food safety, proper handling practices, sourcing quality vegetables, customer relations, and basic business skills. These practical sessions aim to transform vendors into trusted community advisors who not only sell vegetables but also guide families on healthy eating and meal preparation.

Beyond training, GAIN's support includes providing branded materials such as aprons, display covers, and waste disposal buckets to enhance vendor visibility, improve hygiene, and build consumer trust. According to Mary Mutani, a mama mboga in Nairobi, "The training I received from FoodFiti has helped me manage my business better and improve hygiene. I now attract more customers because they see the difference."

**“ The training I received from FoodFiti has helped me manage my business better and improve hygiene. I now attract more customers because they see the difference. - Mary Mutani, a Mama Mboga, Nairobi County ”**

By equipping mama mbogas with the right skills and resources, GAIN is helping them overcome barriers, boost incomes, and contribute to healthier, more resilient communities. When a mama mboga thrives, she not only feeds families but also uplifts entire neighbourhoods through economic empowerment and improved nutrition.

## **Progress Towards Finalising Kenya's Draft National Food Redistribution Guidelines**

The Retail Trade Association of Kenya (RETRAK) and GAIN organised a two-day workshop in June to refine Kenya's draft National Food Redistribution Guidelines. The workshop brought together key stakeholders committed to reducing food waste and enhancing food security and focused on reviewing the draft guidelines and incorporating key additions. Participants defined eligible and ineligible food items and introduced a food risk categorisation system (low, medium, high risk) to guide handling and storage. New guidance on consumption timelines, hygiene standards, and proper labelling of surplus food was added. Definitions of food safety hazards and quality assurance protocols were also strengthened.

Key updates included defining food traceability, clarifying legal alignment, assigning stakeholder roles, and proposing the formation of County Food Redistribution Committees. Emphasis was also placed on safe transportation, accountability, and the need for food safety training for all handlers.



*Workshop participants pose for a group photo after the workshop*

These guidelines will strengthen Kenya's food system by helping reduce food loss and waste which is a key workstream under the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), a global community of experts and organisations dedicated to transforming food and land use systems to be more sustainable, equitable, and resilient.



## Strengthening the Capacities of SMEs for Improved Nutrition Outcomes

In June 2025, the CASCADE project, in collaboration with the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) and the State Department of Trade, convened a five-day training for over 30 businesses across the dairy, poultry, and cereals value chains. This training aimed to equip entrepreneurs with vital knowledge on KEBS standardisation and certification processes.



*Participants engage in a group discussion during the training session*

Throughout the week, participants deepened their understanding of regulatory requirements and compliance procedures which are key steps toward improving the safety and marketability of their products. This knowledge positions them to access new markets, comply with national standards, and pursue strategic partnerships that can grow their businesses.

The training responded directly to findings from a capacity needs assessment conducted by the Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network (SBN) in March 2025, which identified KEBS certification as a key gap among network members.

An action matrix developed during the training will guide follow-up steps and ensure integration into ongoing CASCADE SBN chapter engagements. This ensures continuity and progress toward engaging the private sector in meaningful policy implementation.

Beyond technical training, the workshop contributed to SBN's broader mission of engaging the private sector as an important player in the food system.



*Participants pose for a group photo after the training on KEBS standardization and certification processes.*

## **Agricultural Taxes and Levies: A Barrier to Nutritious Food Access**

To support a more enabling environment for nutritious food systems in Kenya, GAIN has conducted a study assessing the political, legal, and economic impacts of agricultural taxes and levies on access to safe, affordable, and nutritious foods.

The assessment, which covered six counties (Nairobi, Mombasa, Machakos, Kiambu, Nakuru, and Nyandarua), examined the structure of current market and transport Cess charges, their impact on food affordability, and their broader effects on market efficiency and private sector investment in food systems.

Key findings revealed that non-harmonised and overlapping Cess charges—particularly those applied during transportation and at points of market access—are inflating food prices and reducing affordability for low-income consumers. This is limiting the competitiveness of nutritious foods and discouraging private sector participation across the value chain. In addition, limited reinvestment of collected revenue into food systems infrastructure and weak stakeholder participation in the policy process have further hindered progress.

To address these challenges, the study recommends harmonising Cess policies across counties to eliminate duplication and reduce the cost burden on food producers, transporters, and traders. Strengthening legal and institutional frameworks is also critical to ensure transparent, fair, and predictable taxation practices that foster private sector confidence and long-term investment.

Digitising Cess collection systems is another key recommendation—offering improved efficiency, accountability, and real-time revenue tracking while minimizing informal or arbitrary charges. The study also calls on county governments to increase reinvestment of collected funds into food systems infrastructure—such as markets, feeder roads, and cold storage facilities—to enhance market efficiency and food quality.

Finally, it emphasises the importance of inclusive stakeholder engagement. Small-scale traders, transporters, and other private sector actors should have a clear voice in the design, implementation, and monitoring of taxation and market policies that affect their operations.

These recommendations are expected to inform ongoing stakeholder consultations and pilot reforms, as GAIN continues to advocate for national adoption of the Cess Harmonisation Bill, aimed at creating a more coherent and supportive environment for food systems transformation in Kenya.





***Participants from public and private laboratories during a joint capacity-building session in May 2025***

## **Strengthening Food Safety Compliance Across Public and Private Sectors**

To boost compliance with food and nutrition-related standards—including quality, food safety, fortification, and climate resilience—the CASCADE Project is working closely with both public and private sector actors to enhance capacity and coordination.

As part of this effort, CASCADE supported a five-day capacity-building workshop targeting food testing laboratory analysts and managers. The training brought together participants from 12 public and 8 private laboratories, as well as key regulatory

bodies including Kenya National Public Health Institute (KNPHI), Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), Kenya Dairy Board (KDB), Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS), and County Public Health Officers (CPHOs). The workshop focused on biosafety, biosecurity, biorisk and waste management, aligning with ISO standards to improve the integrity and safety of food testing systems. Key topics included risk assessment, sample and chemical handling, occupational safety, emergency preparedness, and best laboratory practices. A major outcome was the development of action points to support policy alignment, inter-laboratory coordination, and the review of Cap 254 to strengthen regulation of private food testing labs.

Additionally, CASCADE partnered with Nairobi City County Government to support the development of Street Food Vending Regulations. These aim to safeguard public health by ensuring hygiene, food safety, and quality standards in the preparation and sale of street foods. The regulations promote structured operations through clear licensing and compliance mechanisms, while also supporting the livelihoods of vendors. They address infrastructure, equipment standards, waste management, health certification, and regular inspections—paving the way for a professionalised, safer street food sector that benefits both vendors and consumers.

## **Bridging the Gap between the Media and Nutrition Experts to Promote Factual Reporting**

GAIN through the CASCADE project in Kenya convened a media toolkit dissemination workshop and media review meeting, bringing together media champions from various media houses and subject matter experts in areas such as food safety, advocacy, private sector, gender, women empowerment, and food fortification. The experts represented communities, target counties, and the national government.



*Participants actively take part in an interactive session during the CASCADE project media toolkit on nutrition dissemination workshop*

The workshop provided a platform to strengthen collaboration between media professionals and technical experts, ensuring that factual, consistent, and impactful reporting on nutrition issues reaches both communities and policymakers.

Through the dissemination of the CASCADE Media Toolkit on Nutrition, participants gained valuable insights into critical topics such as climate resilience, social protection, gender, and evidence-based nutrition practices. More importantly, the workshop fostered collaboration to develop a media advocacy and publicity plan aimed at amplifying CASCADE's messages across various platforms.

By equipping the media with the right tools and knowledge, the CASCADE project is enabling more accurate and effective storytelling, helping to shift public perceptions, drive policy action, and promote improved nutritional outcomes.



*Workshop participants attentively following a presentation*