



STRENGTHENING WORKFORCE NUTRITION IN UGANDA:

Addressing Policy Gaps, Financing Challenges, and Health

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) hosted a two-day nutrition dialogue in Uganda, centred on workforce nutrition programs and their impact on employee's health and wellbeing. The event brought together more than 300 participants from a diverse range of stakeholders. These included representatives from financial institutions, healthcare, technology providers, marketing experts, academia, civil society organizations, food producers, and government officials from different ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Health, Public Services and the Office of the Prime Minister which works as the leader of government business in Uganda.

Building upon the 2021 N4G Summit, the dialogue aimed to explore synergies and strategies for leveraging workforce nutrition programs to combat malnutrition and enhance the health and well-being of the workforce in both structured and semi-structures workplaces with a hundred or more employees.



Uganda is a low-income country in which **41%** of the population lives below the poverty line, and where about **82%** of the population cannot afford a healthy diet.

As a result, the country faces multiple nutritional burdens, namely, **undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, overweight, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases.**



To address these issues, Uganda has taken some critical steps in recent years to enable improved nutrition for the wider population by introducing the **Presidential Initiative on Healthy Eating and Healthy Lifestyle, the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan 2020-2025**, and the **Nutrition Advocacy and Communication Strategy (NACS II) 2020-2025.**



During the dialogues, the **Executive Director of the Uganda Bureau of Statistic (UBOS)** presented the current state of malnutrition in the country and its improvement since the 2016 report.¹



He shared that the prevalence of stunting, wasting and overweight among children under five years old had reduced from **28.9% to 24.4%**, **3.5% to 2.9%**, and **3.8% to 2.8%** respectively.



He also noted the sub-regions with the highest levels of **stunting** to be **Karamoja, Kigezi, Tooro** and **Ankole**. The sub regions with the lowest levels of stunting were **Teso, Kampala** and **Acholi**.



The proportion of overweight women and men aged **15-54** also showed an increase between 2016 and 2022 from **16.5% to 18%** and **7.7% to 9.2%** respectively.



Obesity rates among women and men increased from **7.2% to 8.2%** and **1.2% to 1.5%** respectively.



Despite some advances, significant improvements in nutrition for the population are still needed. Policy frameworks often overlook the critical role of employers in promoting good nutrition for workers. Greater emphasis is required to incorporate employer-driven initiatives into national nutrition strategies and to establish mechanisms for policy implementation and accountability. Strengthening workforce

nutrition programs across their four pillars – Healthy food at work, Nutrition education, Nutrition health checks, and Breastfeeding support – can help contribute to achieving key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

¹ <https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/National-Population-and-Housing-Census-2024-Final-Report-Volume-1-Main.pdf>



INSIGHT 1

Addressing Policy Gaps and Data and Financing Challenges in Uganda

Participants highlighted the lack of a national workforce nutrition policy and clear guidelines as a significant challenge to implementing workforce nutrition programs in Uganda. This issue is further compounded by limited data availability on the impact of workforce nutrition programmes – in terms of both employee health and wellbeing, and the business profit. This adds to the challenges of informing and guiding effective interventions.

To address these challenges, several solutions were proposed. One was to leverage innovative tools to track key performance indicators across the four pillars of the Workforce Nutrition Alliance and, another to foster strong public and private sector partnerships to aid in gathering and analyzing data. Mapping this data systematically would help ensure consistency in how information is collected, providing valuable insights to guide government commitments towards integrating enhanced workforce nutrition policies.

Furthermore, participants recommended engaging financial institutions to support government initiatives by providing technical assistance and bridging the funding gap for the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan 3 (UNAP3). This approach could facilitate smart investments in early childhood nutrition, strengthening the foundation for long-term health improvements.

These efforts could ultimately support the development of national dietary guidelines and bolster initiatives aimed at reducing stunting. Moreover, the creation of a framework on nutrition that looks at nutritious food availability, access and utilization would enable the government to drive food system transformation, enhance food security, and promote sustainable nutrition solutions at a national level. This can be achieved through the implementation of initiatives like workforce nutrition by both public and private sector actors.



INSIGHT 2

Empowering Workers for Healthier Diets

The discussion underscored the widespread lack of nutrition knowledge among workers, which contributes to poor dietary habits, such as a reliance on low-nutrient foods and insufficient consumption of fruits and vegetables. Additionally, this trend is often influenced by the perception that vegetables are primarily associated with lower-income diets. This issue is further exacerbated by limited access to safe and nutritious foods in many workplaces, where meals options often consist primarily of starch-heavy staples such as posho and beans, without the inclusion of vegetables.

Participants emphasized the need for deliberate efforts to drive social and behavioral shifts to overcome workers' attitudes and other barriers to adopting healthier diets. One proposed solution was implementing capacity-building initiatives within workplaces to educate employees about the importance and benefits of good nutrition in relation to their well-being.

Additionally, given the low utilization of fortified products in Uganda, promoting the use of these products in workplace canteens and cafeterias was recommended. Such efforts could help address macro- and micronutrient deficiencies on a larger scale, contributing to improved health and productivity among the workforce.





Promoting Breastfeeding in the Workplace

Participants identified a recurring challenge faced by women in the workplace, particularly young mothers: high levels of absenteeism and reduced productivity due to anaemia, which is prevalent among working women. Additionally, the limited duration of maternity leave, restricted to just three months – with a few employers granting extra 30 days as annual leave for lactating mothers – pressures breastfeeding mothers to cease breastfeeding prematurely out of fear of losing their jobs at the expense of their children.

To address these issues, participants encouraged stakeholders to promote breastfeeding by raising awareness, especially among educated women and within public offices and other formal workplaces such as factories. Efforts to support breastfeeding mothers and address anaemia through workplace programs were seen as critical steps toward improving maternal health and

Conclusion:

The Nutrition Dialogue in Uganda highlighted key challenges and solutions for improving workforce nutrition. Addressing policy gaps, data limitations, and funding shortages is crucial for implementing effective workforce nutrition programs. Empowering workers with nutrition education, healthy food at work, promoting fortified foods, and supporting breastfeeding mothers can enhance health and productivity. These insights pave the way for Uganda's contributions to the 2025 Nutrition for Growth Summit, built around a workforce-based approach to tackling malnutrition and delivering a healthier, more productive workforce. In the upcoming weeks experts will convene to finalize Uganda's nutrition commitments. We anticipate that these commitments will not only address the challenges identified during the Nutrition Dialogues but also reflect the innovative solutions proposed, demonstrating a tangible step forward in building a healthier and more sustainable food system.





References:

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2. Closing the nutrition gap in Uganda: Implementing Workforce Nutrition Programme – Nutrition Dialogues. (2024, October 17). Nutrition Dialogues. <https://nutritiondialogues.org/fr/dialogue/54972/>
3. Uganda Nutrition Situation report 2021/2022. <https://library.health.go.ug/sites/default/files/resources/NUTRITION%20PERFORMANCE%20REPORT-6.pdf>

Healthier Diets. For all.

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