



**Self Help
Africa**

MAKING A BUSINESS CASE **FOR NUTRITION**

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selfhelpafrica.org

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Introduction

As part of Self Help Africa's (SHA) overall commitment to integrate nutrition within programming, the organisation has been looking at ways in which to introduce 'nutrition-smart' thinking within its agri-enterprise and business development work.

As evidence and recent studies confirm, the burden of malnutrition continues to have a severe impact on society at large, with distinct effects on individuals, households, communities, and businesses across the entire spectrum of the value chain.

Trends in global hunger and malnutrition (undernutrition) had been reducing over the last two decades. However, current estimates indicate almost 690 million people hungry worldwide (8.9% of the world's population) up by 10 million in the last year and 60 million over the last 5 years. Sub-Saharan Africa is disproportionately impacted by hunger at around 19.1%, double the global average and increasing from 17.6%¹. Prevalence of overweight and obesity, also a form of malnutrition, continues to increase worldwide with almost 40% of the adult population impacted. Women of reproductive age are disproportionately affected². The current Covid 19 pandemic is likely to further exacerbate on global hunger and malnutrition.

Access, availability and affordability of healthy nutritious diets are required in order to shift current malnutrition trends. However, this is challenging as fundamental changes in strategies and systems are required throughout the food chain process (production, processing, distribution and consumption) with commitments at both national and global levels. Shifting to healthy diets can contribute to reducing health and climate change costs. The adoption of healthy diets is projected to lead to a reduction of up to 97% in direct and indirect health costs and 41-74% in the social cost of GHG (greenhouse gasses) by 2030³. Currently healthy diets are unaffordable especially for poor people and particularly within sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia where at least 57% of the population have insufficient income for a healthy diet⁴.

1 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020*.

2 *Global Nutrition Report*, 2018.

3 *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020*.

4 *Ibidem*.



Poverty and malnutrition are intrinsically linked, however the two-way relationship between nutrition and incomes is not well understood. Higher incomes do not necessarily improve nutrition. Direct interventions in nutrition have the potential to improve nutrition outcomes much faster than economic growth alone⁵. Improving nutrition increases economic growth and reduces income poverty in three ways:

1. stronger and healthier bodies lead to higher physical productivity;
2. well-nourished children are generally more intelligent, better learners in school and more productive and successful as adults; and
3. well-nourished populations spend less on health care, freeing resources for investment and growth.

Similarly, adequate food in the household does not guarantee adequate nutrition - as is the case in many regions in countries where there are high levels of food production and availability yet high levels of childhood stunting. The conclusions from studies indicate that apart from availability of food other factors are critical, including nutrition knowledge, caring practices, access to health facilities, and WaSH (water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion). These collectively contribute to good nutrition⁶.

5 Shekar, *Nutrition and Income Poverty*. 2005.

6 Maitra, 2018; Shekar, 2005.



Nutrition within the Business Sector

The economic costs of malnutrition within the business sector have not been significantly researched and are not well understood. A recent study⁷ across 19 countries looked at the cost of malnutrition (underweight and obesity) in these low, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries, estimating that \$8-38 billion a year (equivalent to 0.2-0.9 percent of GDP) is potentially lost due to low productivity from underweight and \$4-27 billion (equivalent to 0.1-0.6 percent of GDP) lost due to obesity. Anaemia and low stature (stunting as a child) were also shown to reduce productivity and were a significant economic loss for businesses. Notably, business representatives themselves in general, did not consider undernutrition an issue within their workforce. There is an assumption that undernutrition only impacts low skilled, low earning staff which, in fact, is not the case. Although there is a perception that overweight and obesity are a more significant concern in LMICs (low and middle-income countries), undernutrition is still having a much higher impact on productivity loss at present. This may change going forward.

⁷ Wellesley et al., *The Business Case for Investment in Nutrition*, 2020

In light of the above, it is imperative for an organisation like SHA to bring nutrition considerations into its business and enterprise support work. SHA could explore ways in which to introduce a nutrition dimension across different stages of the value chain demonstrating a business case for adopting a 'nutrition-smart' approach within programming.

Within the agribusiness support sphere, SHA acts as an incubator for established businesses and an accelerator for partner enterprises that wish to be brought to scale. SHA's main role is providing expertise which will help make supported enterprises investment-ready and link them with the impact investment community⁸. Part of SHA's support could focus on promoting the integration of nutrition into business in two ways:

- As a way to incentivise investment in nutrition-enhanced products by companies that have both an economic return for the company, and also a return in terms of health and wellbeing for clients.
- As a way to promote the health and wellbeing of a company's workforce.

More details are provided in the next section.

⁸ *Embracing Change*, Self Help Africa, Strategic Plan 2017-2021



Lake View Fisheries, Kenya

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Enterprise Development within Self Help Africa Programming

SHA in its ambitious strategy 2017-2021 “Embracing Change” has committed to an overall mission “to support sustainable livelihoods for Africa’s smallholder farmers”. 90% of rural populations in Africa are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods yet many remain food insecure, undernourished and climate vulnerable.

In order to address this, SHA works with smallholder farmers to increase production of diversified nutritious crops through inputs, information, capital, markets and technology. A core component includes embedding nutrition within programmes to ensure that production choices take into consideration nutrition at both household level to improve dietary diversity and reduce seasonal hunger, and at business sector level where demand for quality nutritious produce is critical.

Given that SHA has access to both smallholder farmers and the private sector, this is an ideal opportunity to bring together these two important players (groups) for the collective good of supporting the processing of more nutritious foods which can benefit all and support the alleviation of hunger and malnutrition. A high percentage of the population, in the countries where SHA is working, struggle to afford a basic nutritious diet. Therefore supporting the production/processing of nutritious foods together with improved knowledge on nutrition can have dual advantages in terms of demand and supply and be of benefit to all.

2.1 Investing in Nutrition Enhanced Products within SHA Enterprise Programming

One way for SHA to support nutrition outcomes in terms of business products is to introduce a ‘nutrition-smart’ lens in the selection process of companies with which it intends to work. When looking at companies to which SHA could add value, priority would be given to those that are processing nutrition-rich foods and therefore directly contribute to supporting healthy diets and improving food and nutrition security. In terms of agri-enterprise, SHA could aim to allocate 70-80% of its support in agribusinesses to companies involved in processing foods. There can be two approaches where this support would add value: 1) technical assistance in terms of enhanced quality of products and 2) developing a strategy and improving nutrition information and knowledge on the various products. Depending on each individual company, a plan of action would be developed to support this process.

Self Help Africa's offering - 1

Technical assistance with regard to food safety, handling and ethical production of high nutritious foods - product development

At company level:

- Add nutritional value to the food being processed such as fortification or combining foods.
- Extend the shelf life to improve food security- dried processed fruit and vegetables, canned foods, freezing etc.
- Adhere to international best practices in terms of safety regulations.

Companies need to have at least one of these elements above.

This would require categorising each producer/ company/enterprise on the product or service being supplied by the company, looking at the following questions:

- Is the product of nutritional value – a high quality food product?
- Is there a policy/standards level angle in terms of quality and safety of produce which SHA can support?
- Is there an opportunity to support product development such as improved nutrition

labelling?

- Is there an opportunity to improve nutrition communication in terms of branding and marketing?

At producer level - smallholder farmer:

Where an enterprise/company has strong links with the producers (smallholder farmers) and understands the context, support could be provided for the development of a strategy and a plan to strengthen nutrition information and knowledge through training/capacity building within producer groups. The following are suggested interventions:

- Promoting diversification in the production of nutritious crops.
- Promoting health/nutrition education with a focus on utilisation of various crops.
- Supporting advocacy campaigns such as radio messaging, nutrition field days etc.

This aspect is well developed within SHA's Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Programming - relevant material available on request.

Self Help Africa's offering - 2

Supporting the development of a strategy and a plan to strengthen nutrition information and knowledge

There is often an assumption that there is considerable knowledge among people and communities regarding good nutrition practices, including the use of various locally available foods within food groups. However, given the high levels of malnutrition (under and overnutrition), it is clear that there are significant gaps in knowledge and practices in this area. Therefore, this is an ideal opportunity for SHA, together with individual companies, to support the development of a basic strategy on how best to strengthen nutrition information and knowledge within local communities. Such support may take the form of nutrition education packages around the various products being manufactured/processed to better inform clients, customers and communities on the nutritious value of these products. The promotion packages need to be varied to target different groups, including local media campaigns, through community radio, pamphlets, various forms of

advertising and short video clips on social media etc. The advantages can be multiple and benefit both producers and consumers alike.

1. Catalyse and stimulate markets for nutritious foods: better informed customers/clients will potentially make better food choices when purchasing and utilising food within their household.
2. Influence behavioural change in the consumption of a more varied, diversified and nutritious diet through better informed customers/clients.
3. Understand the nutrition value and significance of locally produced foods: media can influence consumers to be aware of the value contained in their own indigenous crops and foods.
4. Improve nutrition outcomes within communities over time.

2.2 Nutrition to Promote the Health and Wellbeing of a Company's Workforce

Around 58% of the world's population will spend 1/3 of their adult life at work⁹ - a workforce covering many levels from direct employees in factories, headquarters and other settings, to indirect workers, such as smallholder farmers in the supply chains with a combination of many approaches. There is an enormous opportunity to positively impact on health and nutrition at this level. This is a relatively new area of focus, with limited studies on what works well in terms of nutrition within the workplace. However, there is gathering momentum on its importance from a variety of stakeholders including SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) Business Network, GAIN (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition) and others. In order to positively impact on employee health and nutrition, companies need to buy-in to change within the workforce environment. Recent work by committing, developing, and rolling out a Work Force Nutrition (WFN) programme has been shown to benefit both employers and employees in many ways. Evidence demonstrates benefits including reduced absenteeism, lower rates of accidents and mistakes, enhanced productivity, and improved health outcomes. Returns on investment are up to 6:1 (see figure 1 below).



Employers would need to buy-in to the value of health and nutrition within its workforce, conducting a self-assessment of where the company is currently at and then develop a Workplace Nutrition Programme. This plan should be a 3-5 year plan that needs to be both realistic and doable. Recent research suggests four core areas of focus which can have positive outcomes on health and nutrition over time¹⁰. It is also suggested that a combination of these interventions has a better impact than nutrition education alone.

9 Pauline Harper, Interim Director, Health & Wellness at the Consumer Goods Forum https://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/press_releases/health-cgf-and-gain-announce-new-alliance-to-roll-out-improved-nutrition-in-the-workplace/

10 Nyhus Dhillon C & Stone G, *The Evidence For Workforce Nutrition Programming*, 2019.

Figure 1: The effects of poor diets on work output

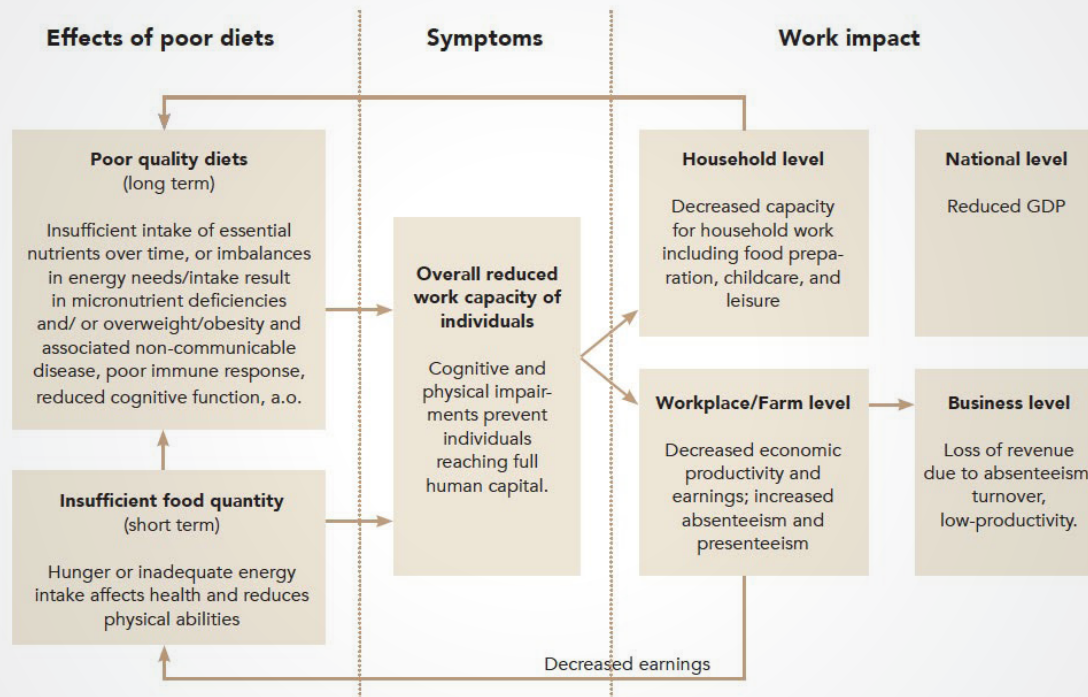


Figure 1: The effects of poor diets on work output. Model adapted by GAIN from Collins and Roberts, 1988, and additional links from subsequent research from Victora et al., 2008, Gibson, 2013, Hoddinott et al. 2013 and Drake and Walker, 2004, and Haas and Brownlie, 2001.

Self Help Africa's offering

Supporting self-assessment and the development of a nutrition workforce programme

Where companies commit to addressing nutrition and health within the workforce, SHA could provide support in the initial self-assessment and in the development of a Nutrition Workforce Programme. A self-assessment score card¹¹ can be used to identify the stage at which the company is and possible areas of support.

The scorecard assesses a company's position in four areas in particular:

- Provision of healthy food at work
- Nutrition education
- Nutrition-focused health checks
- Workplace breastfeeding support

Provision of Healthy Food at Work:

- Does the company have a place where people can prepare food and eat?
- Is there a canteen? If so, is the food varied and healthy, encouraging staff to eat a balanced diet, which can also change eating habits and make better choices in what is eaten? This could be done incrementally over time.
- Do staff have access to safe drinking water?
- Is there a vending machine? Is the food in the vending machine nutritious?
- Is there a service where food is being supplied to the workforce for purchase? Is it healthy nutritious food (outside catering service)?
- If the company supplies snacks or meals at meetings etc, are these healthy and nutritious?

Having access and availability to more nutritious food can support employees in making better food choices and enhance behaviour change over time.

Nutrition Education:

- Does the company promote healthy eating – such as national campaigns?
- Does the company have a variety of methods for nutrition/health promotion, such as posters, videos, booklets within the workplace?
- Does the company conduct nutrition and health education programmes?
- Does the company promote physical activity alongside nutrition/health education?

Better knowledge and information is required in order to support positive behaviour change.

¹¹ Work Force Nutrition Alliance website

Nutrition- focused Health Checks:

- Is a health check programme available for staff at a voluntary and confidential level (subsidised or free)?
- Is the health check significant in terms of the number of indicators measured such as weight, BMI, blood pressure, cholesterol levels etc.?
- Is the health check and follow-up conducted on a regular basis – annually/bi-annually, as required?
- Does follow-up include counselling by relevant health professionals or nutritionists?

Regular personalised health checks and counselling can assist in the workforce maintaining good health and nutrition. It can also assist in reducing the risk of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

Breastfeeding Support:

- Is standard maternity leave available to new mothers within the company, with standard maternity pay?
- Are private spaces and breaks to breastfeed or express breastmilk available for actively breastfeeding employees?
- Is there no dismissal from pregnancy notification until 1 month after returning from maternity leave or compliance with national legislation?
- Is there hand washing facilities within breastfeeding space and storage facilities from storage of breastmilk?

Workplace breastfeeding support is beneficial in many ways. It ensures that mothers continue to breastfeed young children, which is nutritionally beneficial for the children. Breastfeeding rooms were considered more important than dedicated breaks in prolonging breastfeeding, impacting positively on reduced absenteeism and increased productivity.¹²

SHA Networking:

At country level SHA, within its agri-business programmes will link in with the various institutions and networks that support nutrition within the business sector. These include the SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) Business Network and other key players such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), sharing experience, skills and tools as relevant.

Support in terms of nutrition can be provided through SHA's own capacity or by outsourcing to other relevant stakeholders within the various ministries (where this exists) or other relevant partners. This will be context specific. Relevant tools and material will be shared with companies, where appropriate.

¹² Nyhus Dhillon C & Stone G, 2019.



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