

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE TITLE	Workforce Nutrition and Large-Scale Food Fortification: A Synergistic Approach to Combating Malnutrition in Nigeria
DIALOGUE DATE	Tuesday, 10 December 2024 09:00 GMT +01:00
CONVENED BY	Chioma Doris Nnabugwu, Senior Associate, Global Workforce Nutrition Programme, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)
EVENT LANGUAGE	English
HOST LOCATION	Abuja, Nigeria
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	National level
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/55968/



The outcomes from Nutrition Dialogues will contribute to developing and identifying the most urgent and powerful ways to improve nutrition for all, with a focus on women and children and young people. Each Dialogue contributes in four distinct ways:

- Published as publicly available PDFs on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal
- Available as public data on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal "Explore Feedback" page
- Available publicly within a .xls file alongside all Feedback Form data for advanced analysis
- Synthesised into reports that cover which nutrition challenges are faced, what actions are urgently needed and how should these be taken forward – particular, in advance of the Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris, March 2025.

SECTION ONE: PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

92

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0	0-11	0	12-18	9	19-29
44	30-49	22	50-74	0	75+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

40	Female	35	Male	0	Other/Prefer not to say
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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

0	Children, Youth Groups and Students	2	Civil Society Organisations (including consumer groups and environmental organisations)
0	Educators and Teachers	1	Faith Leaders/Faith Communities
1	Financial Institutions and Technical Partners	6	Food Producers (including farmers)
4	Healthcare Professionals	0	Indigenous Peoples
1	Information and Technology Providers	5	Large Business and Food Retailers
1	Marketing and Advertising Experts	20	National/Federal Government Officials and Representatives
2	News and Media (e.g. Journalists)	0	Parents and Caregivers
9	Science and Academia	4	Small/Medium Enterprises
0	Sub-National/Local Government Officials and Representatives	1	United Nations
1	Women's Groups	17	Other (please state)

OTHER STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

They include 15 Development Partners, 1 Technical Service Provider, 1 Occupational Health Services. The total no of participants is 92: 70 physical, 22 virtual. Information for the above breakdown is for 70 physical and only 5 virtual participants.

ADDITIONAL DETAIL ON PARTICIPANT DIVERSITY

Participants cut across all stakeholder groups in the Workforce Nutrition (WFN) and Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF) spaces - organized private sector, farmers' groups, industry, banking, government/regulatory, premix suppliers, academia, development partners, civil society, and consumers. There was no attempt to ensure representativeness according to place of abode (rural/urban) because the variable had no relevance for the subjects to be discussed; same goes for wealth, and ethnicity.

SECTION TWO: FRAMING AND DISCUSSION

FRAMING

WFN programs can improve health of the workforce and reduce the burden of malnutrition. Proper nutrition can significantly affect employees' energy levels, concentration, productivity, overall health. By leveraging the workplace where people spend 1/3 of their adult lives, it is easy to facilitate access to healthy diets & good nutrition knowledge. Benefits of WFN include increased job satisfaction, improved productivity, reduced days off work due to illness, reduced medical costs, increased earnings, increased returns on investment, better nutrition knowledge, increased consumption of healthy foods, reduced risks of NCD's, & lowered rates of accidents and mistakes. WFN prog. are not widely implemented in Nigeria; only a few private sectors like Olam Agri do. Sharing Olam Agri as an example was to stimulate discussions that would lead to widespread implementation of WFN in Nigeria. The National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey (NFCMS) reported a prevalence of Red Blood Cell Folate deficiency of 91% for adolescent girls, 95% for women of reproductive age and 85% for pregnant women. The findings juxtaposed with estimated pooled birth prevalence of Neural Tube Defects of 3.28/1,000 births in Nigeria hint at a Public Health (PH) problem. The prevalence may be higher since less than 40% of women gave birth in health facilities. The NFCMS showed that a large % of Nigerians do not consume fortified foods. Rice is a staple consumed daily by majority of Nigerians across all socioeconomic groups; average per capita consumption is 32 kg. Results from Promoting Rice Fortification in Nigeria project point to acceptability of fortified rice and its potential for enhancing micronutrient intake. Rice is currently fortified voluntarily. Voluntary fortification programs, however, often have low compliance & inconsistent implementation, thereby limiting its PH benefits. Identifying and leveraging synergies between WFN & LSFF can enhance efforts to combat malnutrition.

NUTRITION SITUATION PRESENTATION

<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Improving-Workforce-Nutrition-Leveraging-Rice-Fortification-to-Combat-Birth-Defects.pdf>

DISCUSSION

A presentation was made by the curator on Improving Workforce Nutrition and Leveraging Rice Fortification to Combat Birth Defects including Spina Bifida in Nigeria to set the tone for the dialogue. The presentation on Workforce Nutrition (WFN) covered the definition of workforce nutrition programmes, how workforce nutrition programmes tackle malnutrition, evidences of the effectiveness of workforce nutrition programmes, current workforce nutrition related policies and interventions in Nigeria, and what still needs to be done. The presentation on 'Leveraging Rice Fortification to Combat Birth Defects such as Spina Bifida in Nigeria' covered the prevalence of, and consequences of micronutrient deficiencies in Nigeria, folate deficiency and birth defects, potential of rice fortification as a public health intervention - the evidence so far, and, what needs to be done? After the presentation, participants were grouped into 4 (2 groups for WFN, and 2 for LSFF) to the group discussions using the below guiding questions: 1. Understanding of WFN? 2. Positioning WFN for well-nourished and healthy workforce? 3. Changes needed - policies, strategies, ensuring equitable and just implementation? 4. Supporting proposed changes? by whom? Realistic timelines to entrench WFN? 5. Understanding of relationship between micronutrient deficiencies and birth defects? 6. Implementing mandatory rice fortification - challenges/barriers, potential solutions, steps and actionable policy suggestions, stakeholders, realistic timelines?

SECTION THREE: DIALOGUE OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES

- Nigeria has no specific Work Force Nutrition (WFN) policy, but there are WFN-related policy statements in some workplace and labour policies.
- Most workers do not have access to safe, nutritious and adequate food during work hours. Nutrition education, meal planning, health care and wellbeing constitute key needs.
- Work pressures and challenges associated with urban environments requiring employees to leave home very early could result in poor dietary habits and inability to maintain good nutrition.
- Concerns about food quality and gaps in food hygiene standards where organizations have canteens – meals are not monitored for quality and hygiene standards.
- In most public sector work environment, breast feeding spaces/creches are not provided; nursing mothers are therefore unable to breast feed their babies exclusively for the first six months. This is further compounded by labour laws that provide for 12 weeks maternity leave – 6 weeks pre – and 6 weeks post-delivery.
- In work places with no canteens or a reasonable arrangement to secure access to safe, and affordable nutritious foods during work, time is lost, productivity is reduced, and absenteeism increases.
- Folate deficiency is a public health problem in Nigeria based on findings from the NFCMS.
- A systematic review and meta-analysis estimated a pooled birth prevalence for Neural Tube Defects in Nigeria at 3.28/1000 live births. The prevalence may however, be higher than available data suggest because less than 40% of women gave birth in health facilities.
- Previous mandatory LSFF initiatives have not achieved intended outcomes of addressing micronutrient deficiencies. Contributing factors identified include insufficient enforcement of regulations and a lack of consumer awareness about benefits of fortified foods.
- Rice fortification is currently voluntary, and voluntary fortification programs often have low compliance rates and inconsistent implementation, limiting public health benefits.

URGENT ACTIONS

- Agree on definition of healthy meals to promote for WFN.
 - Develop and enforce right WFN policies, systems and programs that respond to public service rules and labour laws.
 - Develop WFN programmes implementation templates with options for formal, informal, public, private, urban, and rural contexts, with a minimum non-negotiable standard.
 - Create awareness on the significance of good nutrition in the workplace.
 - Employ use of technology for nutrition education, nutrition and health monitoring, and accountability.
 - Carry out health and hygiene check before hiring cafeteria staff to address food safety concerns.
 - Explore opportunities for public private partnerships for WFN programmes.
 - Integrate WFN variables into monitoring and inspection frameworks and enforcement checklists of Ministry of Labour for monitoring compliance.
 - Implement WFN Scorecard to classify workplaces based on compliance with WFN pillars - Platinum, Gold, and Silver, with nutrition incorporated as a key indicator of a 'Good Place to Work'.
 - Make rice fortification mandatory.
 - Create awareness with industry, consumers and policy makers on the importance and benefits of rice fortification.
- Ensure political buy-in to shape policies for mandatory rice fortification for improving public health outcomes.
- Build capacity of small-scale rice millers for effective implementation of mandatory rice fortification; of regulators and laboratories for enhancing regulatory effectiveness and improving analytical competence; and of local artisans for local fabrication and maintenance of blending equipment.
 - Ensure availability of Fortified Rice Kernels (FRKs) and ensure packaging of FRKs in smaller, affordable quantities for small-scale rice millers. To ensure sustainability, encourage and facilitate in-country production of FRKs.
 - Develop standards for FRKs and fortified milled rice.
 - Establish framework for monitoring compliance with established mandatory rice fortification standards.

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

- The only divergent view recorded in the discussion on WFN was around the need to create budget lines for workforce nutrition in government ministries, agencies, and departments (MDAs). Some participants felt that there are already multiple budget lines in existence in MDAs without funds allocated to them. The participants also reiterated that at times funds released are often times diverted and used for different purposes. They proposed that instead of creating new budget lines for workforce nutrition, budgetary allocation for WFN activities should be made in existing projects rather than creating separate budget lines. They believe care should be taken to monitor the use of available funds to achieve intended outcomes.
- For the LSFF group, some participants disagreed with the call to review the rice fortification roadmap. They claimed that the review would not be necessary because the road map already aligns with the goals of rice fortification initiatives, and addresses current challenges with mandatory rice fortification.

OVERALL SUMMARY

The organisation of the Nutrition Dialogue by the Global Alliance for improved Nutrition (GAIN) in collaboration with the Civil Society Scaling Up Nutrition in Nigeria (CS-SUNN) was a step in the right direction, because CS-SUNN is the entity supporting the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in articulating the commitments of the Government of Nigeria to be presented at the N4G summit in 2025.

The dialogue brought to the fore salient issues that routine gatherings would not have brought up. It presented an opportunity to reflect on critical findings from the report of the National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey released in April 2024 that would otherwise not be critically discussed yet. The dialogue also presented an opportunity for stakeholders to deliberate upon what to consider during the upcoming review of several nutrition documents such as the Food and Nutrition Policy, the Agriculture Sector Food and Nutrition Strategy, National Guidelines for Micronutrient Deficiency Control, and the working document of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

The presentation that was made to set the tone for the group discussions was a valuable resource for the groups because it provided context for all the discussions. The mix of participants made it possible to gain insights from various perspectives and also brought balance to the discussions.

The prior meetings/training with facilitators and note takers helped in no small way to ensure engagement of participants and capturing of key decisions within the groups. The presentation to plenary by facilitators of each of the 4 discussion groups helped validate the challenges and the proposals by participants on how to address them. Related to this is the presence of the Lead Technical Advisor on Nutrition in the Office of the Vice President who is directly responsible for advising the Vice President on Nutrition - the Vice President is the Chair of the highest decision-making body for Nutrition related issues in Nigeria, the National Council on Nutrition. The significance of this is that he would brief the VP about the outputs from the dialogue. This would already have prepared the way for request that would eventually end up on the VP's table.

A critical outcome of the dialogue is the commitment by various stakeholders to put in the work necessary to implement the actions agreed upon. This is important because the government staff that participated in the dialogue were people that could take decisions on behalf of their ministries, departments, and agencies and could provide information for evidence informed recommended actions to address challenges identified. For example, the participants that work closely with the legislative arm of government provided information about an existing rice bill that includes provisions for rice fortification which has successfully passed its first reading, and proposed the need to work with the responsible committee to review the bill to ensure it captures the essence of mandatory rice fortification. Another example of the benefit of having government officers that could take decisions participating in the dialogues is the insights provided by staff of the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (FMITI) into the many programmes and initiatives that rice millers could key into to reduce costs of imported critical LSFF equipment and materials. This knowledge also shaped a lot of the recommendations regarding the mandatory fortification of rice.

The dialogue led to a general appreciation of the relevance and importance of good nutrition in the workplace and the benefits for both employees and employers. Participants also appreciated the need to address micronutrient deficiencies for the prevention of Neural Tube Defects; for most of the participants, this was an area that they had not paid attention to previously. It is expected that the appreciation of the importance of both WFN and LSFF will lead to further engagements as each entity carries out in-depth reviews of the outcomes of the dialogue as they chart the way forward to address issues raised and actions proposed that are within their purview.

SECTION FOUR: PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT & METHOD

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

The dialogue embodied several key Principles of Engagement, including fostering multi-stakeholder diversity and inclusivity, respecting diverse perspectives while building trust among stakeholders, promoting openness to sharing and learning, acting with integrity and ethical responsibility, and maintaining a sense of urgency. Additionally, care was taken to ensure that the nutrition dialogue event remained free from the marketing or promotion of any products. Prior to the event, facilitators were thoroughly briefed on the importance of recognizing and managing potential areas of divergence among group discussants. They were also provided with an overview of the diverse sectors invited for the dialogue which are represented by the key stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive understanding. However, financial disclosures from participants were not discussed as part of the process.

METHOD AND SETTING

Aspects of the recommended methodology used include identifying a curator, facilitators and record keepers; defining dialogue details; organising event logistics; announcing dialogue on the Portal; designing agenda; preparing participants' list, sending invitations and tracking replies; agreeing on how the discussion groups will be run; meeting with, and training facilitators and record keepers; hosting Nutrition Dialogue; and collecting/analysing participants' information for the feedback form.

ADVICE FOR OTHER CONVENORS

For future Nutrition Dialogue events, convenors are encouraged to start planning well in advance to allow for adjustments during the preparation phase. This includes finalising the nutrition dialogue concept note, identifying suitable facilitators and key stakeholders, and logistics. Early preparation ensures a smooth process and fosters deliberate and collaborative team consensus without undue pressure.

FEEDBACK FORM: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Heartfelt appreciation goes to my GAIN colleagues for their invaluable support and contributions to this event. I am deeply grateful to our partner, CS-SUNN, for facilitating robust government stakeholder engagement. Special thanks go to the curator for providing structured guidance, and to the facilitators for their expertise. Finally, I sincerely appreciate the participants who took out time to join and enrich the dialogue with their presence.

RELEVANT LINKS

- **Nutrition Dialogue Report**
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jj5ECleZQEwaqbT-K6WkD48Yf9lLeRwB/view?usp=sharing>

ATTACHMENTS

- **Group Discussion for LSFF Group 1**
<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Shared-Group-Discussion-1.jpg>
- **Group Discussion for WFN Group 1**
<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Shared-Group-Discussion2.jpg>
- **Group Discussion for WFN Group 2**
<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Shared-Group-Discussion-3.jpg>
- **Group Discussion LSFF Group 2**
<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Shared-Group-Discussion-5.jpg>
- **Participants including representatives from Office of the Vice President, GAIN, Ministry of Labour and Employment**
<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Participant-1.jpg>