

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE TITLE	Tackling Serious Malnutrition Challenges in Namibia's Omaheke Region
DIALOGUE DATE	Friday, 25 October 2024 09:00 GMT +02:00
CONVENED BY	Nutrition and Food Security Alliance of Namibia (NAFSAN - www.nafsan.org)
EVENT LANGUAGE	English
HOST LOCATION	Gobabis, Namibia
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	Community Level
AFFILIATIONS	Facilitating meetings and dialogues in which innovative and practical solutions are explored that ensure food and nutrition security for everyone in Namibia (where poverty and inequalities are currently leading to a rise in malnutrition cases and deaths), is an integral part of NAFSAN's work, especially through the collaboratively developed Nutrition for Health approach (www.nafsan.org/n4h).
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/56606/



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

19

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0	0-11	0	12-18	11	19-29
6	30-49	2	50-74	0	75+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

16	Female	3	Male	0	Other/Prefer not to say
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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

3	Children, Youth Groups and Students	4	Civil Society Organisations (including consumer groups and environmental organisations)
2	Educators and Teachers	0	Faith Leaders/Faith Communities
0	Financial Institutions and Technical Partners	3	Food Producers (including farmers)
3	Healthcare Professionals	2	Indigenous Peoples
0	Information and Technology Providers	0	Large Business and Food Retailers
0	Marketing and Advertising Experts	0	National/Federal Government Officials and Representatives
0	News and Media (e.g. Journalists)	1	Parents and Caregivers
0	Science and Academia	0	Small/Medium Enterprises
0	Sub-National/Local Government Officials and Representatives	0	United Nations
1	Women's Groups	0	Other (please state)

OTHER STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

ADDITIONAL DETAIL ON PARTICIPANT DIVERSITY

Participants came from eleven different civil society organisations working across the Omaheke Region in eastern Namibia, in both urban and rural settings. They are working with communities in areas of health, education, early childhood development, agriculture and socio-economic development. Among the participants were also two indigenous San women.

SECTION TWO: FRAMING AND DISCUSSION

FRAMING

Poverty and inequalities are on the rise in Namibia, and the country's southern parts are particularly hard hit by years of drought and severely affected by climate change. All of this - together with commonly unhealthy eating patterns and lack of knowledge around good breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices - leads to an increase of malnutrition cases and deaths in both urban and rural communities. Especially the Omaheke has been in the malnutrition-spotlight for many years, as visible through this report here: https://www.nafsan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Report_Omaheke-Feb2024_12Mar2024-submitted.pdf The interactive Nutrition-for-Health training (www.nafsan.org/n4h) that was facilitated during the two days prior to this dialogue, provided valuable insights and gave participants a comprehensive and practical understanding around different forms of malnutrition, food groups, the First 1000 Days, food safety and food systems in general. All materials used are available online here: <https://www.nafsan.org/n4h-materials> The Dialogue on the third day of the workshop then provided them with an additional opportunity to engage with one another and share their views, perspectives, concerns and ideas.

NUTRITION SITUATION PRESENTATION

<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Nutrition4Health-Training-OverviewProgramme-1.pdf>

DISCUSSION

Before the Nutrition-for-Health training, facilitators already asked about participants views on nutrition and health, as well as the challenges they foresee when it comes to nutrition-related interventions in communities, hereby prompting some initial thoughts and discussions. After the training during the actual dialogue, facilitators asked about participants views on nutrition and health now, hereby prompting specifically for any identified challenges, suggested solutions, and possible opportunities, e.g. in form of resources, partnerships or initiatives to enhance food and nutrition security.

SECTION THREE: DIALOGUE OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES

1. Lack of Nutrition Knowledge: Limited understanding of nutrition, malnutrition, gardening, and balanced diets is prevalent, hindering communities from making informed dietary choices.
2. Parental Influence on Diets: Parents play a significant role in shaping household and children's diets. Their level of knowledge and willingness to adopt healthier practices directly impacts the family's nutritional status.
3. Lack of Dietary Discipline: Many community members struggle with maintaining consistent discipline in adhering to healthy diets, even when knowledge is present.
4. Traditional Beliefs: Cultural traditions heavily influence food and nutrition security. For instance, in some communities, it is believed that children should not eat meat, as it is reserved for adults, leaving them reliant on staple foods.
5. Resistance to Lifestyle Changes: Factors such as income, education, and cultural norms affect the community's willingness to adopt healthier lifestyles. For example, lower-income households often perceive vegetables as expensive and inaccessible, associating them with wealthier individuals.
6. Economic Challenges and Food Costs: The high cost of nutritious foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, makes them less accessible compared to traditional staple foods.
7. Water Scarcity and Costs: Access to water is limited and costly. Many households lack taps with running water, and those with access often face challenges due to the distance of water points and the expense of collection or irrigation.
8. Unbalanced Food Parcels: Food aid parcels distributed in the community often do not provide a balanced diet, exacerbating nutrition issues.
9. Knowledge Gaps Among Food Distributors: Food distributors often lack sufficient understanding of nutrition and may distribute items that do not adequately address the community's dietary needs.

URGENT ACTIONS

- 1) Food Availability and Access:
 - 1.1. - Emergency Food Relief: Implement emergency (yet nutritious) food relief programs, droughts or natural disasters
 - 1.2. - Strengthening Supply Chains: Improve infrastructure and logistics to ensure efficient food distribution.
 - 1.3. - Access to land and water.
- 2) Economic Constraints
 - 2.1. - Social Safety Nets: Expand and strengthen social safety net programs to provide financial assistance to vulnerable populations. Consider innovative and efficient approaches, like a Universal Basic Income: <https://basicincome.org>, which was already piloted very successfully in one part of Namibia but so far not yet implemented at national level: <http://bignam.org>
 - 2.2. - Targeted Food Subsidies: Implement targeted food subsidies for low-income households.
- 3) Mindset and Beliefs
 - 3.1. - Community Mobilization: Engage community leaders and influencers to promote healthy dietary practices.
 - 3.2. - Behaviour Change Communication: Develop effective communication strategies to address misconceptions and promote healthy eating, such as Nutrition-for-Health (www.nafsan.org/n4h)
- 4) Lack of Information and Education
 - 4.1. - Mass Media Campaigns: Use mass media to disseminate nutrition information and promote healthy eating, hereby also using RightStart Namibia (www.rightstart.com.na), a platform to support parents of young children.
 - 4.2. - Community-Based Education: Organize community-based nutrition education programs (such as Nutrition for Health) to reach diverse populations.
- 5) Traditional Practices
 - 5.1. - Identify Nutrient-Rich Traditional Foods: Promote the consumption of traditional foods that are rich in nutrients
- 6) Discrimination and Inequality
 - 6.1. - Inclusive Policies: Implement policies that address discrimination and ensure equal access to food and healthcare.
 - 6.2. - Empowerment Programs: Empower marginalized groups, particularly women, to participate in decision-making and access resources.

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

The diverging issues include:

- Cultural and Dietary Practices: Different cultures have unique dietary traditions, food preferences, and taboos that influence nutritional outcomes.
- Socioeconomic Disparities: The extent of income inequality and access to healthcare and education can vary significantly between countries and within regions.
- Environmental Factors: Local environmental conditions, such as soil quality, water availability, and climate patterns, affect agricultural productivity and food security.
- Policy and Governance: Government policies and regulations, as well as the strength of public health systems, can influence the nutrition landscape and affect some people more than others.

OPPORTUNITIES (= convergent views)

1. Community Training Programs: Facilitate workshops like Nutrition for Health (N4H) and share educational materials to empower facilitators who can train their communities, raising awareness about nutrition, health, and food security.
2. Community Gardens: Establish backyard and community gardens to foster collaboration, promote shared goals, and address malnutrition and food insecurity collectively, ensuring inclusivity.
3. Nutrition Sensitization: Conduct awareness campaigns targeted at pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, emphasizing the importance of proper nutrition for both themselves and their children to break the cycle of malnutrition.
4. Support for Garden Establishment: Assist communities in setting up gardens by providing essential resources such as seeds, tools, equipment, and materials, along with practical training. Promote the cultivation of fruits and vegetables to encourage healthier diets.
5. Empowering Rural Communities: Organize small-group training sessions to ensure effective knowledge transfer and deeper understanding. Focus on reaching and empowering individuals in the most remote rural areas, ensuring inclusivity and widespread impact.

OVERALL SUMMARY

With poverty and inequalities being on the rise in Namibia, which is also severely affected by climate change and drought, the country is suffering the triple burden of malnutrition. Unhealthy eating patterns and lack of knowledge around good breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices contribute to the increase of malnutrition cases and deaths in both urban and rural communities.

NAFSAN, as Namibia's SUN Civil Society Alliance, recently developed the comprehensive and highly interactive Nutrition-for-Health training approach (www.nafsan.org/n4h) and decided to hold a dialogue right afterwards. In this way, participants - coming from various civil society organisations working with very diverse communities will have a practical understanding around different forms of malnutrition, food groups, the First 1000 Days, food safety and food systems in general.

The Dialogue revealed how access to nutrition is one of the main challenge for poverty-stricken communities and families, with current social protection systems being ineffective and fragmented. Hence, much more efficient solutions, like the implementation of a universal basic income grant at national level are urgently needed to address high rates of malnutrition and provide a socio-economically transformative stimulus.

At the same time, decentralised local food production at household- and community-level needs to be inspired from within (intrinsically motivated) and supported from the outside by local authorities and development partners (e.g. through access to land, water, seeds, tools, know-how and other resources).

In addition, practical and correct information needs to be provided on healthy eating and drinking, with a focus on pregnant mothers and young children, hereby tapping into helpful indigenous knowledge and practices, while dispelling unhealthy and harmful myths that exist in communities.

Changing believes and practices around nutrition requires innovative solutions, such as the Universal Basic Income for all Namibians from 0-59 years of age, and for a real long-term commitment by multiple stakeholders to support parents and caregivers of young children through Right Start Namibia - as a platform that will continue to exist for the next 30+ years, because inter-generational problems such as malnutrition can only be overcome through inter-generational solutions where all stakeholders genuinely commit to collaborate over such an extended period of time, to really make an impact.

Such commitment from multi-sectoral stakeholders is needed at all levels to implement the various solutions, and the Nutrition-for-Health training in combination with the Nutrition Dialogue was a good step for Civil Society in Namibia's Hardap region to come together and to learn with and from one another, and to discuss ways in which such collaboration can continue, as well as what positive changes need to be advocated for.

One of these changes is also for Civil Society to be fully recognise as not only as an advocacy voice that holds government accountable and as an implementing partner 'on the ground', but also as a competent and reliable partner when it comes to planning and coordination on national and sub-national levels.

SECTION FOUR: PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT & METHOD

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

Integrating the dialogues into the highly participatory and interactive Nutrition-for-Health training context already helped increase levels of engagement, while the selection of participants was based on previous mapping of civil society organisations that are actively working in the Omaheke region. Facilitators paid particular attention to ensure that a safe space was created in which everyone could freely share their views and perspectives, especially women, youth and indigenous people. Participants could also express themselves in their vernaculars, whereby other participants would then provide translations.

METHOD AND SETTING

The session took place in Gobabis, after an interactive two-day training-of-facilitators for Nutrition-for-Health. Dialogues started in plenary, before going into small groups, also using prompting questions around 1) Challenges, 2) Solutions, and 3) Opportunities. Facilitators then deepened the discussions with the whole group and provided a brief summary at the end.

ADVICE FOR OTHER CONVENORS

FEEDBACK FORM: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Commonwealth Foundation and the European Union for their support, plus all Civil Society Organisations who participated: Advanced Community Healthcare Services Namibia, Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Elim Woonstelle, Intrahealth Namibia, Light for the Children, Namibia National Farmers Union, Omaheke Community Development Foundation, Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia, Steps for Children, Walvis Bay Corridor Group, Youth for Climate Action Namibia

RELEVANT LINKS

- **Nutrition for Health: Embracing Our Namibian Food Systems**
<https://www.nafsan.org/n4h>
- **Nutrition-for-Health, all materials**
<https://www.nafsan.org/n4h-materials>
- **Right Start Namibia**
<https://www.rightstart.com.na/>
- **Universal Basic Income**
<https://basicincome.org/>
- **Basic Income Grant (BIG) Coalition - Namibia**
<http://bignam.org/>
- **BIG Namibia Pilot - 10 years later (impact & lessons learned)**
http://bignam.org/Publications/BIG_ten_years_later_report_2019.pdf
- **Food and Nutrition Security Policy in Namibia**
<https://www.nafsan.org/nfns/>

ATTACHMENTS

- **Malnutrition Report on Omaheke (NPC, 2024)**
https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Report_Omaheke-Feb2024_submitted.pdf
- **Malnutrition Report on Omaheke (NAFSAN, 2023)**
<https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/NAFSAN-OmahekeReport-April2023-updated-.pdf>
- **Presentation by NAFSAN for Omaheke (2023)**
https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Presentation_OmahekeNutritionManual_June23.pptx
- **Nutrition for Health Training for ECD-Centres and Soup Kitchens in Omaheke (2024)**
https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/N4H@ECDSoupKitchen_Report-Oct2024.pdf