

# OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

<b>DIALOGUE TITLE</b>	Partnering for Healthier Food Systems: SMEs and Punjab Food Regulator in Focus
<b>DIALOGUE DATE</b>	Saturday, 28 December 2024 09:30 GMT +05:00
<b>CONVENED BY</b>	1. Mr. Faiz Rasool, Head of Policy & Advocacy (GAIN), 2. Mr. Sarim Mehmood, CEO & Founder, Fruit of Sustainability (SMC-Private) Limited 3. Mr. Muhammad Awais Khan , Founder National Alliance for Safe Food
<b>EVENT LANGUAGE</b>	Bi-Lingual (English/Urdu)
<b>HOST LOCATION</b>	Lahore, Pakistan
<b>GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE</b>	Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
<b>AFFILIATIONS</b>	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)
<b>DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE</b>	<a href="https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/57070/">https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/57070/</a>



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

37

## PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0	0-11	0	12-18	22	19-29
12	30-49	3	50-74	0	75+

## PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

13	Female	24	Male	0	Other/Prefer not to say
----	--------	----	------	---	-------------------------

## NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

0	Children, Youth Groups and Students	0	Civil Society Organisations (including consumer groups and environmental organisations)
0	Educators and Teachers	0	Faith Leaders/Faith Communities
0	Financial Institutions and Technical Partners	3	Food Producers (including farmers)
0	Healthcare Professionals	0	Indigenous Peoples
2	Information and Technology Providers	2	Large Business and Food Retailers
0	Marketing and Advertising Experts	5	National/Federal Government Officials and Representatives
1	News and Media (e.g. Journalists)	0	Parents and Caregivers
1	Science and Academia	11	Small/Medium Enterprises
2	Sub-National/Local Government Officials and Representatives	1	United Nations
3	Women's Groups	6	Other (please state)

## OTHER STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Others were representatives of the team members of convenors.

## ADDITIONAL DETAIL ON PARTICIPANT DIVERSITY

The SME's/Stakeholder Nutrition Workshop brought together 37 diverse participants, including 1 from Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), 6 from convenor and co-convenor teams, 11 from SMEs, 10 from food producers and regulatory authorities, and 11 from regulatory bodies. Notably, 35% of participants were females, ensuring strong gender representation. This diversity enriched discussions and helped shape collaborative solutions to address nutrition challenges across sectors.

# SECTION TWO: FRAMING AND DISCUSSION

## FRAMING

The introduction of the Stakeholder Dialogue was framed around Pakistan's critical food system challenges, including malnutrition, regulatory gaps, and the implications of climate change. Convenor, Mr. Faiz Rasool, Head of Policy & Advocacy at GAIN, highlighted the alarming prevalence of stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies in Pakistan, alongside rising obesity and poor diets. He also emphasized how climate change exacerbates these issues, disrupting food production, increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, and affecting the availability and affordability of nutritious food. The dialogue acknowledged community anxieties about nutrition, including the effects of pollution, seasonal food insecurity, and systemic barriers to addressing malnutrition. It underscored the importance of fostering partnerships to combat these challenges. Climate change was discussed as a critical factor influencing agricultural yields, food supply chains, and the nutritional quality of available foods, thereby intensifying the urgency to align food safety regulations and SME practices with sustainable global standards. The event explored the intersection of these issues, emphasizing regulatory simplification, mentorship, and innovation to empower SMEs to create affordable, nutritionally rich, and climate-resilient food products. Dr. Rasool urged stakeholders to take coordinated action to mitigate these compounded challenges through systemic reforms and capacity-building initiatives. This framing set the stage for actionable discussions, fostering inclusivity and inspiring collaborations to transform Pakistan's food systems into more sustainable, climate-resilient, and nutrition-focused frameworks.

## NUTRITION SITUATION PRESENTATION

[https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Stakeholder-Nutrition-Dialogue-N4G-28122024-Lahore-Pakistan\\_compressed.pdf](https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Stakeholder-Nutrition-Dialogue-N4G-28122024-Lahore-Pakistan_compressed.pdf)

## DISCUSSION

Participants were divided into three thematic focus groups. The groups were tasked with discussing pre-defined topics to identify challenges, propose solutions, and share insights. The thematic areas included: • Regulatory Compliance and Innovation • Building SME Capacity • Collaboration Between SMEs and Food Regulators

# SECTION THREE: DIALOGUE OUTCOMES

## CHALLENGES

The Stakeholder Dialogue revealed key challenges faced by participants across three focus areas: regulatory compliance and innovation, building SME capacity, and collaboration between SMEs and food regulators.

### 1. Regulatory Compliance and Innovation

Participants identified outdated regulatory frameworks, overlapping laws, and inadequate documentation systems as significant barriers to compliance. SMEs often face a lack of advanced technology and minimal collaboration between industry and academia, stifling innovation. Regulatory processes were deemed cumbersome, with insufficient support from personnel lacking technical expertise. These gaps hinder SMEs' ability to align with local and international food safety standards, limiting their competitiveness.

### 2. Building SME Capacity

SMEs struggle with knowledge gaps in food safety, market awareness, and strategic planning. Many lack a clear vision or mission, affecting their ability to establish long-term growth. Financial constraints, including high operational costs, taxes, and limited access to affordable credit, further exacerbate their challenges. Participants highlighted difficulties in marketing their products effectively due to limited consumer outreach and understanding of market trends. The absence of robust mentorship programs and capacity-building workshops leaves SMEs without the guidance needed to overcome these hurdles.

### 3. Collaboration Between SMEs and Food Regulators

A lack of awareness about government support programs and unclear access procedures emerged as critical challenges. SMEs cited inefficiencies caused by overlapping and inconsistent regulations from various authorities, creating confusion and mistrust. Limited platforms for transparent communication between SMEs and regulators hinder the development of practical solutions and collaborative opportunities. Corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies further complicate SMEs' efforts to comply with regulations and build credibility.

## URGENT ACTIONS

Participants identified urgent actions to address challenges in regulatory compliance, SME capacity building, and collaboration with food regulators, focusing on creating sustainable food systems and improving nutrition.

### 1. Simplifying Regulations

Streamlining regulatory frameworks was emphasized, including reducing overlapping laws, digitalizing documentation, and simplifying licensing processes. Regulatory bodies were urged to align local standards with international benchmarks to enhance global competitiveness. Employing technically skilled personnel was proposed to improve regulatory enforcement and support.

### 2. Building SME Capacity

Participants highlighted the need for mentorship programs and workshops to address knowledge gaps in food safety, strategic planning, and market awareness. Financial support mechanisms, such as subsidies, affordable credit, and tax relief, were seen as essential to ease operational challenges. Training sessions on consumer behavior and market trends were recommended to help SMEs understand and meet customer needs. Developing clear visions and missions for businesses was also suggested to guide sustainable growth.

### 3. Enhancing Collaboration

Creating platforms for dialogue between SMEs and regulators was proposed to foster transparency and trust. Regular consultations, public awareness campaigns on compliance, and harmonized regulations were highlighted as key steps. A one-window compliance system was suggested to streamline interactions and reduce bureaucratic hurdles.

### 4. Leveraging Technology and Innovation

Investing in modern monitoring systems and digital tools to simplify compliance was identified as a priority. Strengthening partnerships between industry and academia was recommended to drive innovation and develop solutions to regulatory challenges. Encouraging SMEs to adopt sustainable practices and create nutritionally rich, climate-resilient products was deemed critical for addressing malnutrition.

## AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

The Stakeholder Dialogue highlighted several areas of divergence among participants, reflecting varying opinions on addressing challenges - these areas of divergence underscore the complexity of the challenges in Pakistan's food systems and the varying capacities and priorities of stakeholders.

### 1. Regulatory Compliance and Innovation

Participants generally agreed on the need for regulatory reforms but differed on the pace of implementation. While some advocated for the immediate adoption of modern monitoring systems, others supported a phased approach to accommodate resource-limited SMEs. Views also diverged on prioritizing enforcement versus simplifying regulations, with some emphasizing strict adherence to standards and others focusing on reducing bureaucratic hurdles to foster compliance.

### 2. Building SME Capacity

There was consensus on the importance of mentorship and capacity-building programs, but opinions varied regarding funding mechanisms. Some participants favoured direct financial support, such as subsidies and grants, while others preferred flexible options like tax relief and low-interest loans. Diverging views also emerged on resource allocation, with some prioritizing operational cost relief and others advocating investments in market research and strategic planning.

### 3. Collaboration Between SMEs and Regulators

Participants agreed on the importance of fostering collaboration and trust, but opinions differed on the methods to achieve this. Some advocated for formal platforms for regular engagement, while others suggested informal channels for accessibility. Divergence was also noted regarding aligning local regulations with international standards. While some supported immediate global alignment to boost competitiveness, others preferred a gradual approach, citing the need for additional support for smaller SMEs to adapt.

## OVERALL SUMMARY

The Stakeholder Dialogue: "Partnering for Healthier Food Systems & Nutrition" held on December 28, 2024, at the , Lahore. Organized by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) as convenor and the Fruit of Sustainability as co-convenor, the workshop convened 37 participants from diverse sectors, including SMEs, regulatory authorities, academia, and industry leaders. The dialogue aimed to address critical challenges in Pakistan's food systems, focusing on malnutrition, food safety, and SME capacity building, while fostering collaboration between SMEs and food regulators.

### 1. Workshop Proceedings

The event commenced with a recitation of the Quran and Pakistan's national anthem, followed by a welcome address from Mr. Sarim Mehmood, CEO of Fruit of Sustainability. His remarks underscored the need for sustainable practices and innovation to combat malnutrition and improve public health outcomes. Keynote presentations by Dr. Faiz Rasool from GAIN and Dr. Talat Naseer Pasha from the Punjab Agriculture, Food, and Drug Authority provided insights into Pakistan's malnutrition crisis and the regulatory landscape, respectively. Discussions highlighted the implications of climate change, pollution, and systemic inefficiencies on nutrition and food safety.

### 2. Key Focus Areas

Participants engaged in thematic discussions across three focus groups:

- Regulatory Compliance and Innovation: Challenges included overlapping regulations, insufficient technological resources, and gaps in industry-academia collaboration. Proposed solutions included streamlining regulations, employing technical experts, and fostering innovation through partnerships.
- Building SME Capacity: Key issues were financial constraints, lack of mentorship, and limited market awareness. Participants recommended mentorship programs, financial support mechanisms, and training on strategic planning and consumer engagement to empower SMEs.
- Collaboration Between SMEs and Regulators: Limited awareness of government initiatives and unclear processes for accessing support hinder collaboration. Suggestions included creating dedicated dialogue platforms, simplifying compliance processes, and harmonizing local regulations with global standards.

### 3. Outcomes and Recommendations

The workshop emphasized the urgency of regulatory simplification, capacity building, and fostering partnerships. Proposed actions included mentorship programs, financial incentives, digitalizing compliance processes, and creating one-window platforms for regulatory support. Public awareness campaigns were also highlighted to improve consumer trust and promote food safety.

### 4. Areas of Convergence and Divergence

Participants generally agreed on the need for systemic reforms, but diverged on timelines and methods for implementation, particularly regarding technology adoption, funding mechanisms, and aligning with global standards. These differences reflected the diverse capacities and priorities of SMEs and other stakeholders.

As a convenor i would like to highlight following areas as recommendations:

- Interactive Training Programs and Resources:** Regulators should provide regular, accessible training sessions, webinars, and resource materials that simplify complex food safety regulations. These should be tailored specifically to the needs of SMEs, offering clear guidance on how to navigate regulatory processes and implement standards effectively.
- Engagement and Dialogue Platforms:** Regulators and SMEs should be encouraged to engage in open dialogue. Regular consultations, forums, and roundtable discussions can help address concerns, clarify misunderstandings, and align goals related to food safety and nutrition. These platforms can also serve as spaces for sharing best practices, new innovations, and industry trends.
- Co-Creation of Standards:** Regulators should involve SMEs in the creation and refinement of food safety and nutrition standards. By soliciting feedback from SMEs, regulators can ensure that regulations are practical, realistic, and aligned with the operational realities of small businesses. This collaborative approach can help ensure that standards are both stringent enough to protect public health and flexible enough to be achievable by SMEs.
- Leveraging Technology for Compliance:** Encouraging the use of digital tools, platforms, that help SMEs track and comply with regulatory requirements can simplify the process and reduce the burden on businesses. Regulatory authorities could support the development and integration of such tools, making compliance more accessible.

# SECTION FOUR: PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT & METHOD

## PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

Participants were then briefed about the group activity: Focus Group Discussions and Stock Taking of Challenges & Solutions. The briefing emphasized the following points: 1. The facilitators explained the structure and objectives of the exercise, highlighting its importance in identifying specific challenges and generating actionable solutions for Pakistan's food systems. 2. Each group would focus on a distinct thematic area: regulatory compliance, SME capacity building, or SME-regulator collaboration. 3. Discussions would be documented systematically by assigned record keepers.

## METHOD AND SETTING

Participants were divided into 3 thematic focus groups. These were tasked with discussing pre-defined topics to identify challenges, propose solutions, and share insights. A. Two facilitators were assigned to oversee the progress of discussions in each group. B. Record Keepers for Accurate Documentation C. Participants were seated at separate round tables, with each table representing one of the thematic areas. This setting fostered a collaborative and interactive environment.

## ADVICE FOR OTHER CONVENORS

Make sure sharing in advance with the Participants a detailed agenda and the roles of regulators and the businesses, SME's and the food businesses

# FEEDBACK FORM: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As Convenor, I extend heartfelt gratitude to all contributors to the success of the workshop, Partnering for Healthier Food Systems & Nutrition: SMEs and Food Regulators in Focus. Thanks to Fruits of Sustainability as co-convenor, the Punjab Food Authority representatives for their insights, and the Director General of Punjab Agriculture, Food, and Drug Regulatory Authority for their perspectives. I also recognize the vital contributions of SMEs and appreciate the steadfast support of my team.

## RELEVANT LINKS

- **Media Coverage-1**  
<https://e.thenews.com.pk/pindi/30-12-2024/page14>
- **Media Coverage-2**  
[https://epaper.pakobserver.net/pages.php?station\\_id=1 &page\\_id=19476&date=2024-12-29](https://epaper.pakobserver.net/pages.php?station_id=1 &page_id=19476&date=2024-12-29)
- **Media Coverage-3**  
<https://www.nation.com.pk/E-Paper/islamabad/2024-12-30/page-11>

## ATTACHMENTS

- **Media Coverage Report**  
[https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Stakeholder-Nutrition-Dialogue-N4G-28122024-Lahore-Pakistan\\_compressed-1.pdf](https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Stakeholder-Nutrition-Dialogue-N4G-28122024-Lahore-Pakistan_compressed-1.pdf)
- **Convenor Setting the Stage**  
[https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/SMEs-Nutrition-Dialogue-Pakistan-Head-of-Policy-GAIN-scale\\_d.jpg](https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/SMEs-Nutrition-Dialogue-Pakistan-Head-of-Policy-GAIN-scale_d.jpg)