



Improving Access to Locally Produced Nutritious and Safe Complementary Foods in Africa

Meeting Report

Regional Dialogue | December 2-3, 2024

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AGRA | Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa |
| AgriFI | Agriculture Financing Initiative |
| ATNi | Access to Nutrition Initiative |
| CF | complementary food(s) |
| EBITDA | earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization |
| EC-INTPA | European Commission Directorate General for International Partnerships |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| EF | Expertise France |
| EU | European Union |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FDA | Food and Drugs Authority |
| GRET | Groupe de recherches et d'échanges technologiques |
| HKI | Helen Keller International |
| LMIC | low- and middle-income countries |
| MSME | micro, small and medium enterprises |
| N4G | Nutrition for Growth |
| NAFDAC | National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control |
| NGO | nongovernmental organization |
| PFS | Partners in Food Solutions |
| PLS | Progressive Licensing Scheme |
| RUTF | Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food |
| SBN | Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network |
| SME | small and medium enterprises |
| SME | small and medium enterprises |
| SON | Standards Organisation of Nigeria |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| WFP | World Food Program |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

Executive summary

The Regional Dialogue on ‘**Improving Access to Locally Produced Nutritious and Safe Complementary Foods in Low- and Middle-Income Countries**’, held in Dakar, Senegal, on December 2-3, 2024, marked a pivotal step in addressing systemic barriers to complementary foods (CF) in Sub-Saharan Africa. This meeting was co-hosted by the European Commission, Micronutrient Forum, World Food Programme, in close collaboration with their partners. This Regional Dialogue convened over 100 stakeholders from governments, the private sector, technical agencies, and financial institutions – from 16 African countries – to define concrete priority actions and investment opportunities toward improving access to locally produced, nutritious, and safe complementary foods across the region.

The regional dialogue reinforced the importance of adopting a comprehensive systems framework to address these priorities holistically. This approach moves beyond isolated solutions to tackle the entire ecosystem holistically, recognizing that fragmented efforts often fail to address the root causes. This framework recognizes the interdependence of policy, financing, capacity building, demand creation, and collaboration, ensuring that progress in one area reinforces advancements in others. By adopting a systems approach, stakeholders can identify synergies, leverage shared resources, and ensure sustainability of the solutions. The recommended priority actions across five areas serve as a roadmap for action, aligning regional efforts with global commitments to ensure a healthier and more equitable future for all.

Five priority areas

- 1. Strengthen knowledge and innovation in complementary foods:** Enhance existing collaboration platforms (or establish new platforms) to document, disseminate, and ensure access to best practices, case studies, and other technical resources. A centralized virtual knowledge hub will strengthen knowledge sharing, accelerate innovation, and align strategies among stakeholders. Tracking progress by embedding a robust accountability framework into the knowledge hub, allows to drive action and investments, and ensure transparency.
- 2. Strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks:** Align national standards with global benchmarks such as Codex Alimentarius and WHO guidelines. Accelerate the ECOWAS initiative to harmonize complementary food standards in the region and build enforcement mechanisms, including standardized protocols and practices and regional laboratories.
- 3. Mobilize financial and infrastructure resources for sustainable growth:** Explore and develop blended finance models, tailored credit lines, and introduce co-financing options for infrastructure development to reduce risk and enable small- and medium-enterprises (SMEs) to scale sustainably. Educating investors and financial institutions on the specifics of the CF sector and combining investments with technical support will enhance collaboration between producers and investors.
- 4. Build capacity of local producers:** Address skill gaps and infrastructure deficits through sector-specific (vocational) training programs and equip food safety laboratories with real-time testing and certification capabilities. Establish a regional technical repository to facilitate access to information on existing capacity-building initiatives and connect producers with specific technical needs with organizations that offer technical expertise.
- 5. Create demand and expand markets:** Develop and implement consumer-centered marketing campaigns and trust-building measures like certification systems to strengthen consumer confidence. Expand equitable distribution networks and integrate CFs into social protection programs to improve accessibility for underserved populations.

Introduction

On 2-3 December 2024, the Regional Dialogue on ‘**Improving Access to Locally Produced Nutritious and Safe Complementary Foods in Low- and Middle-Income Countries**’ convened over 100 stakeholders from regulatory authorities, local enterprises, technical agencies and financial institutions – with representation from 16 African¹ countries – to address systemic barriers to the local production of complementary foods (CF)² which are nutritious and safe. This meeting was co-hosted by the European Commission, Micronutrient Forum, and World Food Programme (WFP), in close collaboration with the Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNi), Expertise France, Helen Keller International (HKI), the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), the French NGO GRET, and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement. The Regional Dialogue identified opportunities and actionable strategies to overcome existing challenges and barriers to access locally produced, nutritious, and safe CF across Africa and highlighted the importance of a system’s approach to catalyze sustainable change.

Nearly 64 million children aged 6-23 months in Africa live in severe [food poverty](#).³ This deprivation not only undermines survival but also stunts growth, cognitive development, and long-term economic potential. Locally produced, fortified CFs offer promise but face [significant challenges](#)⁴ including securing quality raw materials, accessing tailored financing and technical assistance, and developing effective marketing and distribution strategies, that hinder their competitiveness, market penetration, and sustained growth.

The Regional Dialogue identified opportunities and actionable strategies for addressing these challenges and improving access to CFs for children ages 6-23 months. The meeting emphasized the need for collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches that strengthen the ecosystem in which producers operate and leverage existing mechanisms while addressing critical gaps. This document consolidates insights and recommendations from the Regional Dialogue, offering a comprehensive roadmap to overcoming systemic challenges. By focusing on innovative solutions, strategic partnerships, and culturally aligned demand-creation efforts, these priorities aim to transform the CF ecosystem, improve nutrition outcomes, and empower communities to build a more resilient and equitable future.

Strengthening the complementary food eco-system is key

Improving access to locally produced, nutritious, and safe CFs in Sub-Saharan Africa requires a transformative approach that addresses the interconnected challenges of the CF eco-system holistically. The CF ecosystem is a complex and dynamic structure of stakeholders, processes, and resources that collectively influence the production, distribution, accessibility, and demand for safe and nutritious CFs. This includes:

- **Stakeholders:** Governments, technical agencies, financial institutions, producers, distributors, retailers and consumers
- **Processes:** Policies and regulations, production, marketing, distribution, demand creation and consumer awareness
- **Resources:** Financial investments, infrastructure, capacity-building efforts and technical assistance.

1 Stakeholders representing 16 African countries (alphabetical order): Bénin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo.

2 Refers to commercially available complementary foods specifically designed, distributed and promoted for 6-23 months old children by local or regional, food companies (lipid-based and/or cereal-based) which can be enriched with additional micronutrients to improve their nutritional quality.

3 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Child Food Poverty: Nutrition Deprivation in Early Childhood. UNICEF; 2024

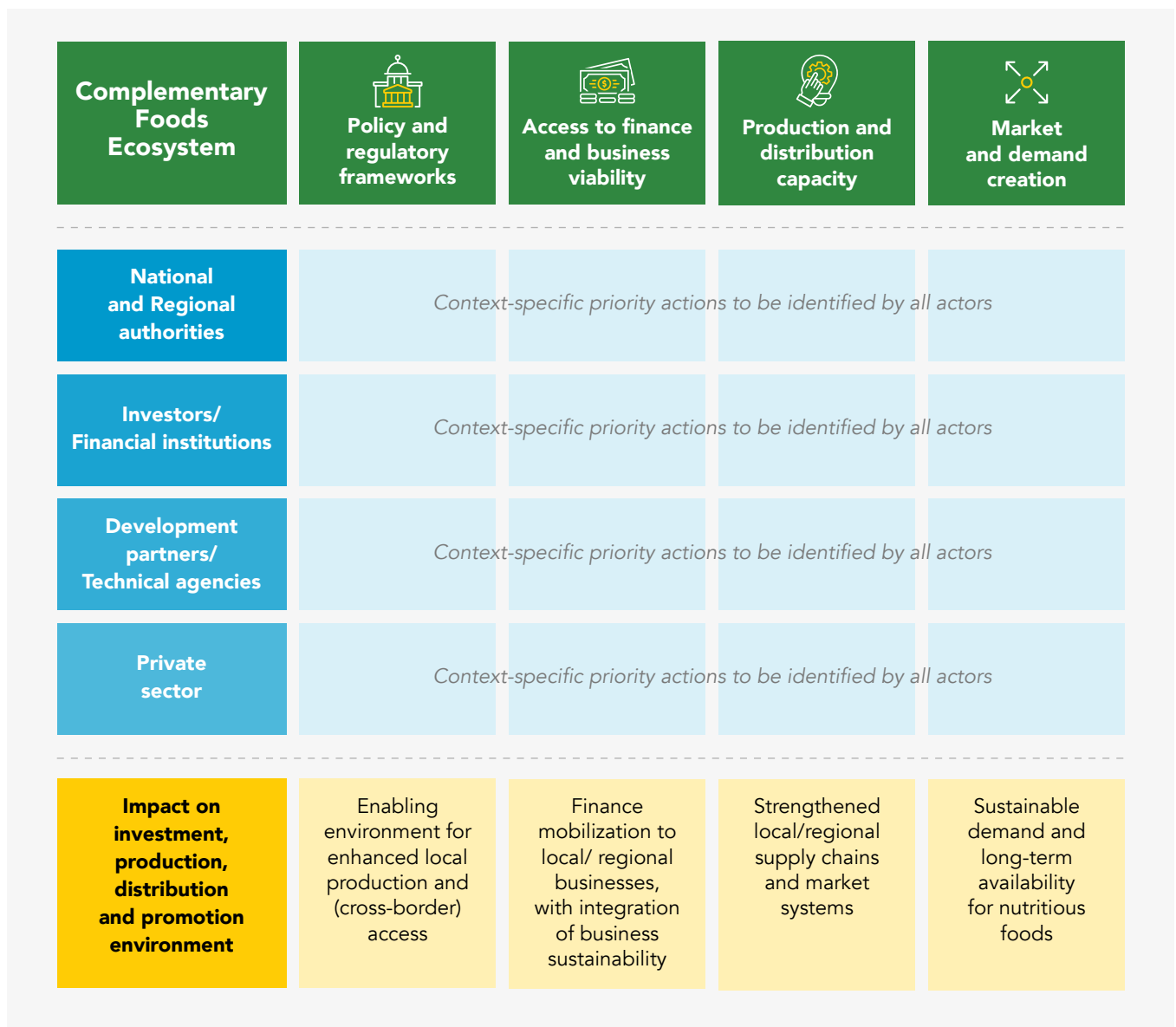
4 Micronutrient Forum. *Barriers to Improving Access to Locally Produced Nutritious and Safe Complementary Foods in Low and Middle-Income Countries*. Micronutrient Forum; 2024.

An overview of the various actors in the CF ecosystem was prepared in advance of the Regional Dialogue (see **Annex A** for this and other resources).

The Regional Dialogue underscored that isolated efforts in any one of the components – whether in policy, financing, production or demand creation – are insufficient to achieve the scale and sustainability required to meet the nutritional needs of millions of children. A systems approach that recognizes the interdependence of the various components in the CF eco-system, and the necessity of aligning these provides a comprehensive framework for achieving sustainable, scalable impact.

The framework (**Figure 1, Annex B**) is predicated on the principle that coordinated, multi-stakeholder efforts aligning resources, expertise, and incentives across the CFs eco-system are necessary. It recognizes that progress in one area reinforces others, creating a resilient and enabling environment for CFs where policies enable local production and investment, financing fuels operational efficiency and scale, capacity building equips producers, demand creation drives markets, and supply chains ensure access. By emphasizing collaboration among governments, development partners, technical agencies, financial institutions, and private sector actors, the systems approach addresses systemic barriers comprehensively, ensuring sustainable, scalable, and inclusive solutions to improve access to locally produced CFs and strengthen local economies.

Figure 1: Complementary Foods Ecosystem Framework



Accountability mechanisms are integral to this coordinated, multi-stakeholder framework, providing the tools to measure progress, ensure transparency, and refine strategies to maximize impact. An effective framework integrates diverse metrics to address product quality and safety, affordability and accessibility, business and systemic indicators, and policy alignment (**Box 1**). By leveraging both quantitative and qualitative data, stakeholders can monitor progress in individual priority actions while tracking broader systemic transformation.

Box 1: Suggested metrics for monitoring progress

- **Product quality and safety:** percentage of products adhering to Codex Alimentarius and WHO nutrient profiling models; compliance with labelling requirements; number of accredited food testing laboratories in the region.
- **Affordability and accessibility:** price of CFs relative to household incomes; cost-effectiveness of products (price per serving vs. nutritional benefits); percentage of households that can access and afford these foods.
- **Systemic and business indicators:** gross profit margins, operating profits; return on investment; customer acquisition and retention rates; percentage of product portfolio meeting standards.
- **Policy and regulatory alignment:** number of countries aligning national regulations with regional standards; percentage of certified products in regional markets; number of accredited laboratories, certification bodies.

Platforms such as the Global Complementary Feeding Collective,⁵ Food Systems Dashboard,⁶ and Nutrition Accountability Framework⁷ may play a role in consolidating these metrics, facilitating transparency, coordination, and data-driven decision-making.

Path forward

The subsequent sections of this report delve deeper into each core area, providing detailed insights and identifying recommended priority actions that build on the discussions at the Regional Dialogue. The recommendations are rooted in a comprehensive multi-stakeholder systems approach, leveraging existing mechanisms (where available), and introducing innovative approaches to improve access to local solutions. An in-depth analysis of existing solutions, including their scope, strengths, and limitations is an essential first step to strengthen the foundation for the **priority actions in five core areas** detailed below. Together, these efforts aim to create a resilient ecosystem that empowers local producers, enhances access to nutritious foods, and improves economic and social well-being across Sub-Saharan Africa.



Strengthen knowledge and innovation in complementary foods

The Regional Dialogue underscored that there is a wealth of knowledge and best practices, across Africa, showcasing innovative solutions to systemic barriers in the CF eco-system. These insights highlight the transformative potential of locally driven approaches. However, much of this valuable information remains undocumented and inaccessible, or siloed, limiting its ability to inspire replication and scale impact. While current platforms, such as the SUN Business Network (SBN), provide valuable technical resources and stakeholder networks, the need for more robust documentation and communication, centralized access to knowledge resources, and the systematic sharing of insights and lessons learned is critical.

5 <https://www.complementaryfeedingcollective.org>

6 <https://www.foodsystemsdashboard.org>

7 <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/naf>

What is needed?

To fully harness the region's wealth of knowledge and innovative potential, efforts must focus on improving access to and communication around available resources, as well as systematically consolidating, documenting, and disseminating lessons learned. Regular opportunities for sharing experiences will empower stakeholders to efficiently adopt proven practices, address systemic barriers collectively, and accelerate innovations at scale. Additionally, robust accountability frameworks must be integrated within these efforts. Business and system metrics specific to locally produced CFs will enable stakeholders to track progress, drive accountability, and ensure solutions are impactful and sustainable.

Priority actions

- Strengthen the evidence and experience base by systematically documenting lessons learned and case studies on effective approaches in CF production, distribution, promotion, and business models.
- Establish a comprehensive regional knowledge hub as part of an existing platform to provide access to normative guidance, regulatory and financial information, technical briefs, and business case studies.
- Amplify knowledge dissemination by supporting networks such as the Coalition of African Producers of Complementary Foods, and organizing regular online and in-person meetings to share and learn.
- Develop and implement an accountability framework integrating CF business and systemic metrics into one dashboard to drive accountability, transparency, and track progress in improving CF access (see **Box 1** for suggested metrics). Together with the scorecard of the Global Complementary Feeding Collective (in development), which will monitor complementary feeding indicators, policies, and programs, these frameworks will drive accountability, ensure transparency, and track progress in access to and consumption of safe and nutritious CFs.



Strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks

Fragmented policies, inconsistent standards, and weak regulatory enforcement remain significant barriers to the production, distribution, competitiveness, and cross-border trade of locally produced CFs.³

The absence of centralized food safety laboratory facilities in West Africa was identified as a significant barrier to achieving consistent and reliable quality assurance for CFs. Stakeholders noted that the lack of accessible, real-time testing and harmonized certification infrastructure not only hampered producers' ability to meet safety and nutritional standards but also delayed regulatory approvals and undermined consumer confidence in locally produced products. Effective regulatory frameworks must support public health priorities and promote inclusivity and equity across the national and regional food system while considering the operational realities of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).



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What is needed?

Defining robust policies, complementary feeding guidelines, CF standards, and food quality and safety standards and guidance were identified as essential to safeguard food safety, quality, and affordability. Enforcing these standards is critical to ensuring transparency in nutrition composition and compliance with nutrition quality and food safety requirements and preventing the influx of non-compliant products that undermine the market competitiveness of locally produced nutritious and safe CF products. At the same time, governments must incentivize SMEs, for instance by introducing targeted fiscal measures such as tax exemptions and subsidies, to reduce operational costs and enhance the affordability of CFs. For instance, Rwanda offers duty-free import on all inputs and tax exemptions for agricultural equipment.⁸ Ghana's Progressive Licensing Scheme⁹ (PLS), offers another compelling example of an innovative regulatory approach that eases compliance burdens for SMEs while maintaining high standards of safety and quality (**Box 2**). Scaling such strategies regionally could greatly enhance the resilience and competitiveness of local CF producers.

Box 2: Ghana's Progressive Licensing Scheme

The Ghana Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) has introduced a Progressive Licensing Scheme⁹ (PLS) to support the growth of local food producers, including CF manufacturers. This innovative approach allows businesses to gradually meet regulatory standards through a phased process, providing them with the support and guidance needed to succeed. By fostering a collaborative relationship with producers and aligning PLS with national goals to boost local production and reduce reliance on imports, the scheme creates an enabling environment for SMEs. Ghana's model demonstrates how inclusive policies can drive food safety and quality, strengthen local industries, and build resilient food systems. (See **Annex C** for details)

Priority actions

- a. Update and adopt harmonized standards for CF through ECOWAS and other regional authorities, such as ECSA-HC and SADC,¹⁰ to ease cross-border trade and shared accountability, while aligning the regulations with international frameworks such as Codex Alimentarius and WHO guidelines, to ensure quality and compliance.
- b. Strengthen and streamline national certification, approval and enforcement processes across relevant government departments, creating a unified, user-friendly regulatory framework for nutritious and safe CF that supports compliance with product standards, accurate labelling, and responsible marketing.
- c. Strengthen food safety and quality assurance and enforcement systems by establishing accredited laboratories capable of comprehensive analysis in line with national and international food safety and quality standards, building monitoring and reporting platforms, and strengthening skills of inspectors.
- d. Provide financial incentives for producers of certified CF through national tax exemptions (e.g. of premixes), subsidies, and procurement of locally produced certified CF in social protection programs.
- e. Expert review of the WHO '[Guidance on ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children: implementation manual](#)'¹¹ ensuring appropriate promotion of locally produced, nutritious and safe CF is compliant with global guidance on marketing of breastmilk substitutes.

8 Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands. Rwanda Agri-Economic Outlook. 2024. Accessed January 22, 2025. <https://www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl/documenten/publicaties/2024/04/30/rwanda-agri-economic-outlook>

9 <https://fdaghana.gov.gh/programmes/progressive-licensing-scheme-2>

10 ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States; ECSA-HC: East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community; SADC: Southern African Development Community.

11 Guidance on ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children: implementation manual. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



Mobilize financial and infrastructure resources for sustainable growth

Financial barriers are among the most significant challenges to scaling the production, distribution and adoption of locally produced CFs. High compliance costs, limited access to tailored financial products, and inadequate infrastructure make it difficult for local producers to grow sustainably while meeting safety and quality standards³. Compounding this issue is the disconnect between investors and producers. Stakeholders shared that many financial institutions lacked familiarity with the CF sector's unique dynamics while local producers often struggled to demonstrate investment readiness due to gaps in business planning and financial expertise.

What is needed?

Transforming the financial landscape for the CF sector requires a dual approach: ensuring financial tools are fit for purpose and meet sector-specific needs and capacity-building programs to prepare both, local producers and financial institutions for meaningful engagement. Blended finance mechanisms that combine grants, concessional loans, and patient capital¹² were suggested as attractive approaches. For instance, the Agriculture Financing Initiative¹³ (AgriFI) has supported enterprises in Senegal by offering concessional loans and technical assistance to enhance efficiency and expand production capacity. Similarly, initiatives by the International Finance Corporation have focused on de-risking investments in agri-food businesses,¹⁴ helping SMEs access the capital needed to grow. In addition, tailored financial products such as flexible credit lines and co-financing schemes for infrastructure were identified as essential for supporting operation growth.

Box 3: Proparco's financial support to Nutri-K, Nigeria

Nutri K, a leading producer of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) in northern Nigeria, secured a €2 million loan from Proparco, a French private sector development financing mechanism, to expand its production capacity and strengthen local supply chains.¹⁵ Operating in a fragile market, Nutri K faced significant financing challenges, with commercial banks offering high interest rates and short repayment terms. Proparco's affordable and patient capital provided a sustainable financing solution, enabling the company to scale operations, upgrade equipment, and invest in product innovation. The support also fostered stronger partnerships with local peanut farmers, reducing reliance on imports and enhancing supply chain resilience. (See **Annex C** for details)

Strengthening producers' financial literacy and business management skills was seen as essential to help them effectively engage with investors and present viable business opportunities. In parallel, the need for financial institutions to improve their understanding of the CF sector was voiced to assess risks accurately and align their investments with profitability and social impact goals. Innovative platforms like dedicated deal rooms – as planned at the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) Food Systems Summit 2025 – were suggested to enable direct engagement between producers and investors, fostering collaboration and showcasing business potential.

Priority actions

- a. Strengthen collaboration between finance institutions and CF producers, strengthening their mutual understanding through briefs, tools, training, and clarifying the risks, benefits, and social impact of CF.
- b. Expand sector-specific blended finance mechanisms that combine grants, concessional loans, and private investment, to provide tailored financial solutions for CF producers.
- c. Explore innovative structures such as the use of guarantees, layered capital funds, and specialized credit lines to strengthen operations, support capacity building, and enable scaling.

¹² Patient capital is a term used to describe long-term investment in form of funding or project cycles, where sustainable growth is prioritized alongside financial returns.

¹³ <https://edfimc.eu/what-we-do/agrifi>

¹⁴ <https://www.ifc.org/en/what-we-do/sector-expertise/blended-finance/blended-finance-agribusiness>

¹⁵ <https://www.groupernutrisset.fr/en/nutrik-increases-its-production-capacity-with-support-from-proparco>

Priority actions

- d. Provide interest rate subsidies in partnership with governments, central banks, and development partners to implement subsidized interest rates for CF-specific loans.
- e. Organize and leverage deal rooms at stakeholder forums that connect local CF producers with investors and provide technical support during pre- and post-investment stages.
- f. Provide financing options to develop collective infrastructure and operations specifically, subsidies and co-financing for collective or cooperative use of equipment upgrades, such as cold chains.



Build capacity of local producers

Gaps in technical expertise, limited access to modern infrastructure, and inefficiencies in production processes remain significant barriers for local producers, preventing them from delivering consistently high-quality, safe, and nutritious CFs. These challenges compromise their competitiveness in the market and limit their ability to meet consumer expectations.³ While vocational training programs and technical assistance initiatives exist, these often lack sector-specific curricula, that focus on the identified needs for producing CFs at the required quality and scale. Key topics such as food safety, fortification techniques, sustainable production practices, marketing and distribution approaches, and business management were reported as frequently missing from the training programs. Capacity strengthening services, while available through organizations such as TechnoServe and GRET, are frequently underutilized due to limited awareness or accessibility among those who need them most. While partnerships with technical agencies, regulatory bodies, and farmer cooperatives were seen as potential solutions to these challenges, lack of coordination was identified as an issue limiting producers' access to technical expertise, regulatory guidance, and reliable supply chains, resulting in inefficiencies and missed opportunities.

What is needed?

Capacity strengthening of local producers requires a multi-faceted approach and collaboration across many stakeholders in the CFs eco-system. For instance, capacity-building services by organizations such as TechnoServe and GRET could be scaled in coordination with a regional network such as the SBN. Producers suggested enhancing central access to relevant resources (such as case studies), ongoing mentorship, training on food safety and quality standards, and support for business and financial management. Additionally, strengthening partnerships with farmer cooperatives was identified as a key strategy to improve access to reliable raw materials. In Nigeria, the SUN Business Network collaborated with NAFDAC and SON¹⁷ to organize multiple sessions on food and food safety at both national and sub-national levels, and NAFDAC's training school offers a platform for knowledge sharing including training on food safety and quality).¹⁸ Burkina Faso's analysis and quality control centers were also presented as successful models of how such hubs can strengthen local production systems and improve compliance with regulatory standards.

Box 4: Nutri'zaza: Investing in local producers in Madagascar¹⁶

Nutri'zaza is a social business that collaborates with local distributors, government institutions, NGOs, and research organizations to strengthen production capabilities, supply chain efficiency, and market access for fortified CFs. A core aspect of Nutri'zaza's approach is equipping local producers with technical training on product development, food safety and quality control, to ensure that products meet international food safety standards while remaining affordable and accessible. The use of local ingredients supports local farmers and reduces reliance on imports. Its diversified distribution strategy, including "baby restaurants" (hotelin-jazakely), NGOs, and retail outlets, enables the company to reach the most underserved communities. Since its inception in 2013, Nutri'zaza has distributed over 56 million ready-to-eat meals, expanded its reach to 153 neighborhoods, and established 37 baby restaurants. (See **Annex C** for details)

16 <https://gret.org/en/projet/nutrizaza-a-social-business-fighting-against-malnutrition-in-madagascar>

17 NAFDAC: National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control; SON: Standards Organization of Nigeria

18 <https://training.nafdac.gov.ng>

Priority actions

- a. Provide access to a centralized information hub for technical assistance through an existing network to connect producers with service providers, identify specific training needs, and offer mentorship or access to onsite/online trainings.
- b. Partner with regional and national regulatory bodies, technical experts for product quality training tailored to the needs of local CF producers.
- c. Deploy investment readiness program that strengthens the CF producers' skills in business management, financial planning and forecasting, helping them meet investor requirements effectively.
- d. Support farmer cooperatives with capacity building initiatives and improved agricultural practices, ensuring a reliable supply of high-quality raw materials and reinforcing the entire CF value chain.
- e. Integrate sector-specific courses in vocational curricula covering modules on food processing, safety standards, production processes, through national education systems.



Create demand and expand markets

Limited consumer awareness of nutritious foods and intense competition from multinational brands undermine the adoption of locally produced CFs. These challenges are compounded by weak distribution networks and insufficient marketing strategies, which often fail to effectively position locally produced foods as affordable, high-quality, and desirable options.³ While current programs and public health campaigns by governments and technical agencies have raised awareness about nutrition, the focus is predominantly on home-prepared meals, leaving a gap in awareness and demand for nutritious and safe CFs. Furthermore, many caregivers lack the knowledge to differentiate between nutrient-dense CFs and energy-dense, nutrient-poor alternatives, making them susceptible to the widespread promotion of lower-cost, less nutritious options.⁴ Whereas [guidance on the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children](#)¹⁰ exists, in certain countries, the interpretation of this guidance also inhibits the promotion of high-quality, nutritious and safe CFs. The Regional Dialogue emphasized that creating demand for locally produced CFs is essential to ensuring market growth and sustainability while addressing critical nutrition needs.



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What is needed?

Creating demand for locally produced CFs requires a consumer-centered approach that builds trust, drives awareness, and ensures accessibility of nutritious and safe CFs, while at the same time safeguarding against the promotion and consumption of unhealthy foods. Public awareness campaigns must emphasize both the nutritional benefits of CFs and their alignment with local preferences, social norms, and consumer wants and needs. For instance, in 2023 the National Council for Nutrition Development (CNDN) in Senegal launched a national campaign (Wallu dome, ñam ñam)¹⁹ on complementary feeding, featuring the slogan the “*sama dome sama yitté*” (“my baby, my concern”).

This campaign launched through the media (TV, radio) and at the community level, leverages trusted community influencers and highlights the importance of relatable messaging and aspirational branding to drive demand and foster consumer loyalty. Certification mechanisms, such as quality seals and nutritional labels, are essential for building consumer trust and differentiating high-quality local products from lower-quality alternatives.

In addition, equitable distribution networks, such as community-driven distribution systems and cooperative-led retail models from Kenya (**Box 5**), have demonstrated success in improving accessibility of nutritious and safe CFs reaching children and parents in underserved rural areas as well as reducing costs.

Governments must lead in creating awareness, supported by civil society, consumer organization and private sector partnerships to build consumer trust and effectively drive demand through context-specific awareness campaigns, equitable distribution networks, and trusted branding mechanisms.

Box 5: Expanding market access in Kenya: The PFS-TechnoServe Alliance

Partners in Food Solutions (PFS)-TechnoServe Alliance for Inclusive and Nutritious Food Processing (AINFP)²⁰ strengthens market access and demand creation for locally produced nutritious foods by providing technical training, business development, and access to finance. Through direct links to institutional buyers, retailers, and export markets, the Alliance helps food processors improve product quality, scale operations, and expand distribution networks. This approach boosts demand and market reach, ensuring that nutritious, locally produced foods are widely accessible, even in underserved areas. To date, the PFS-TechnoServe Alliance has provided training and consultations to over 1000 businesses and stakeholders in the food processing sector and supported over 350,000 smallholder farmers who directly supplied these food processors. (See **Annex C** for details)

Priority actions

- a. Adopt a consumer-centered approach, designing multi-channel, aspirational campaigns that align the health and nutrition benefits of CF with the wants and social norms of different market segments.
- b. Collaborate on awareness and education campaigns across public and private sectors integrating messages on locally produced nutritious and safe CF benefits, with general infant feeding messages.
- c. Promote trust in local brands using tools such as logos, seals and quality labels to differentiate certified nutritious and safe CF products from inferior alternatives.
- d. Enhance affordability and expand rural access by integrating CF into social protection programs, partnering with institutional buyers and government schemes, and leveraging cooperatives, small retailers, and community networks – alongside investments in last-mile logistics.
- e. Harness regional trade opportunities, providing targeted guidance to help local CF producers expand their market reach, such as under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

¹⁹ <https://cndn.sn>

²⁰ <https://www.technoserve.org/fight-poverty/projects/partners-in-food-solutions-technoserve-alliance>

Collective and coordinated action for a stronger complementary food ecosystem

Building a resilient eco-system for CFs demands collective, comprehensive, and coordinated action from all stakeholders: governments, technical agencies, development partners, private sector actors, and financial institutions. The Regional Dialogue reinforced that no single entity can address the complex, systemic barriers of the CF eco-system alone. Progress depends on collaborations that align resources, expertise, and strategies across actors to drive impactful, sustainable change.

A systems approach anchored in a comprehensive CF framework was proposed as a guiding tool to address these barriers holistically. This framework emphasizes the interdependence of key components of the CFs eco-system, demonstrating that progress in one area—such as policy, financing, capacity building, or demand creation—reinforces advancements in others. By fostering these synergies, the framework drives systemic and sustainable change across the CF ecosystem. Examples such as Africa Improved Foods (AIF) in Rwanda and Yedent Agro Group in Ghana showcase how this approach can be operationalized (**Box 6**).

Box 6: Scaling local solutions in Rwanda and Ghana

Africa Improved Foods (AIF),^{21,22} in Rwanda and Yedent Agro Group,^{23,24} in Ghana demonstrate how strategic partnerships, local sourcing and high-quality manufacturing practices drive success in the CF sector.

- **Collaborative partnerships and financing:** Each has formed alliances with public institutions, development agencies and development finance institutions, enabling access to patient capital and technical expertise.
- **Strong farmer integration:** Both companies' partner with local smallholder farmers, ensuring reliable raw material supply whilst supporting rural livelihoods.
- **Commitment to quality and food safety:** Through certification and robust production standards, both companies consistently deliver safe and nutritious products that meet the demands of the consumers and institutional markets.
- **Scaled local manufacturing:** By investing in large-scale facilities, the companies are equipped to produce high volumes of CF, necessary to meet the demand across wide geographic areas.
- **Institutional marketing and distribution:** Both companies leverage strong public-sector alliances such as supplying WFP and government-supported programs to reach vulnerable communities and broaden market access.

(See **Annex C** for details)

Existing collaboration platforms, that convene local producers (such as the SBN) or synthesize and translate knowledge into action (such as the Micronutrient Forum), must be leveraged and come together to ensure easy access to information, evidence, and capacity-strengthening opportunities. Collaboration platforms offer powerful spaces for stakeholders to share experiences and lessons learned, harmonize strategies, and align policies. Regular multi-stakeholder forums are essential for fostering collaboration, ensuring that the voices of all actors—from SMEs to policymakers—are heard and translated into actionable plans.

21 <https://ftma.org/portfolio/africa-improved-foods-aif>

22 <https://africaimprovedfoods.com>

23 <https://yedentghana.com>

24 <https://soygrowers.com/wishh-strategic-partners-leverage-success-in-ghana-with-mastercard-foundation>

The formation of the Coalition of African Local Producers of Complementary Foods during the Regional Dialogue represents a significant milestone towards collective action. It symbolizes a unified commitment by these producers to addressing common challenges and building sustainable solutions that ensure every child has access to safe, nutritious, and affordable CFs.

Box 7: Coalition of African Local Producers of Complementary Foods

Local producers took an unprecedented initiative and launched this Coalition at the Regional Dialogue in December 2024, to collectively tackle systemic barriers in CF production. This Coalition is envisaged to foster knowledge sharing, collective advocacy, and joint initiatives such as shared procurement and branding, to scale operations and enhance competitiveness. This milestone collaboration marks a critical step in building resilient food systems and improving access to safe, nutritious CFs for young children across Sub-Saharan Africa.

The upcoming Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in Paris, at the end of March 2025, offers a crucial opportunity for all actors in the CF ecosystem to commit to priority actions and investments to increase access to locally produced nutritious and safe CF. Achieving lasting impact requires long-term planning, structured follow-up, and systematic knowledge transfer that empowers local actors to tailor solutions to their unique contexts. By leveraging the systems approach and fostering partnerships, we can create an inclusive, resilient food system that strengthens local economies, improves child nutrition, and lays the foundation for a healthier, more equitable future for children across Sub-Saharan Africa.



Annex A: Resources

Background documents prepared for the Regional Dialogue

Micronutrient Forum. [Barriers to Improving Access to Locally Produced Nutritious and Safe Complementary Foods in Low and Middle-Income Countries](#). Micronutrient Forum; 2024

Micronutrient Forum. [Obstacles à l'amélioration de l'accès aux aliments complémentaires nutritifs et sûrs, produits localement dans les pays à revenu faible et intermédiaire](#). Micronutrient Forum; 2024.

Panam Parikh, Marti van Liere, Clémence Boulle-Martinaud, Greg Garrett and Nadine Nasser (2024). Increasing access to nutritious local CFs: A whole-of-systems approach. Field Exchange 74. <https://doi.org/10.71744/t1gg-gn13>

Landscape of actors in the Complementary Food Ecosystem in Africa, notably West-Africa. <https://micronutrientforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/21Feb2025-CF-actors-landscape.xlsx>

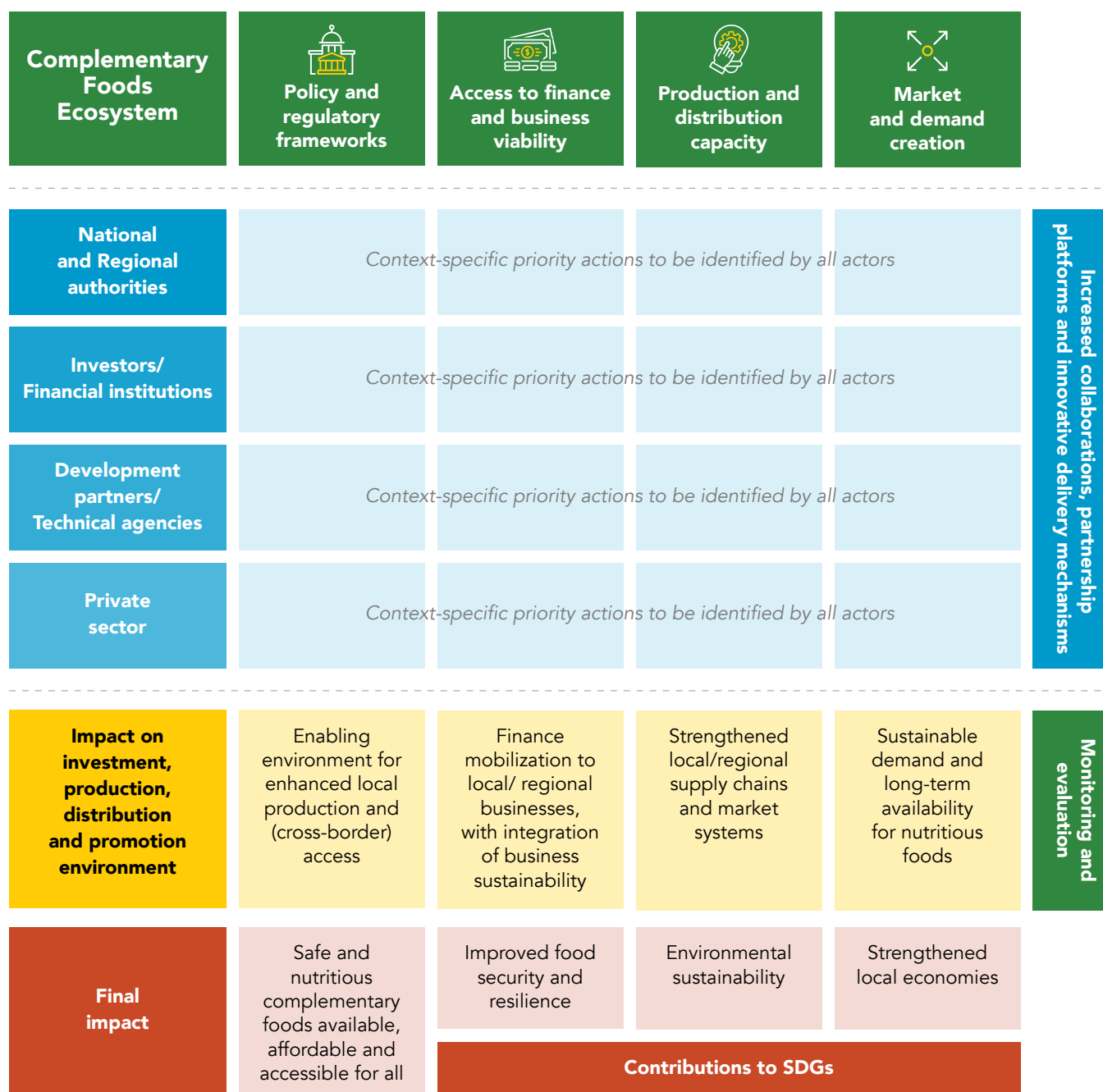
Related publications and materials

Micronutrient Forum. [Local solutions to improve access to nutritious and safe complementary foods in Africa: Summary brief](#). Washington, DC: Micronutrient Forum; 2025.

Micronutrient Forum. [Summary brief: Making Food Systems Work for Complementary Feeding in Low and Middle-Income Countries](#) February 2024

Micronutrient Forum. [Expert Consultation brief: Improving the Micronutrient Quality of Complementary Feeding in Early Childhood](#). June 2023

Annex B: Complementary food ecosystem



Definitions

- Private sector:** Refers to local and regional producers – of all sizes - of complementary foods.
- Development partners and technical agencies:** Include organizations and entities that provide technical and strategic support to/for initiatives and policy advocacy aimed at enhancing food systems, building capacity, and improving food security and resilience. These partners work across different sectors and often collaborate with governments, the private sector, and non-governmental sectors to drive progress in food production, nutrition, and health.
- Investors and financial institutions:** Refers to entities like development banks (e.g., the African Development Bank, World Bank), impact investors (e.g., Acumen, BlueOrchard), and private sector investors (e.g., venture capital funds, blended finance platforms) that provide funding to support local food production and SMEs. Additionally, microfinance institutions and commercial banks offering tailored financial products, including loans and credit, to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) access capital for scaling production and improving supply chains are also considered here.
- National and regional authorities:** These refer to government bodies such as ministries of health, agriculture, trade, and finance at the national level, as well as regional economic communities like the East African Community (EAC) or Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These authorities are responsible for developing and enforcing policies, setting regulatory standards, and providing incentives to promote local production of complementary foods. Their role is vital in creating an enabling environment for food security initiatives, ensuring compliance with nutrition and safety standards, and fostering regional collaboration.

Annex C: Case studies

1. Ghana's Progressive Licensing Scheme

The Ghana Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) has implemented a "Progressive Licensing Scheme" (PLS)⁹ to support the growth and development of local food producers, including CF manufacturers.

Key features of PLS include:

- **Gradual approach to compliance:** Instead of imposing a rigid set of standards and requirements upfront, the Ghana FDA has adopted a more gradual, step-by-step approach to help local producers gradually meet the necessary regulatory requirements.
- **Collaborative relationship with producers:** The FDA has fostered a collaborative relationship with local producers, working with them to understand the challenges they face and identifying practical solutions as well as providing targeted Good Manufacturing Practices training and technical assistance to address regulatory barriers.^{25,26}
- **Alignment with national priorities:** The PLS is aligned with Ghana's broader policy objectives of promoting local production and reducing import dependence. By supporting the growth of local enterprises, the scheme contributes to these national goals.
- **Enabling environment for local producers:** The scheme creates an enabling environment for local producers by providing them with a clear roadmap for compliance and the necessary support to meet the required standards. This helps to level the playing field and enhance the competitiveness of local products.

The PLS has been instrumental in encouraging the development of local CF producers in Ghana, as it recognizes the importance of nurturing these enterprises and helping them navigate the regulatory landscape.

2. Proparco's Financing Support to Nutri K in Nigeria

Nutri K, established in 2019, is a leading producer of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) in northern Nigeria. To support its growth and address challenges in production capacity, Proparco, a subsidiary of the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) Group, granted a €2 million loan to Nutri-K10. This financial support is part of the Food & Agriculture Resilience Mission (FARM) and Choose Africa 2 initiatives, which facilitates access to financing for African SMEs, particularly in fragile regions.

As a rapidly growing enterprise in the country, Nutri-K faced significant challenges in securing financing from commercial banks. Proparco addressed this gap by providing a loan under favorable terms, ensuring a repayment schedule that aligned with business needs and cash flow projections. This financing allowed Nutri K to expand production capacity, upgrade processing equipment, and strengthen supply chain resilience. Additionally, it enabled investments in product innovation and marketing, further enhancing the company's competitiveness in the local market.

25 <https://citinewsroom.com/2020/07/fda-launches-new-licensing-scheme-for-small-scale-food-processing-facilities>

26 <https://gna.org.gh/2023/03/more-than-900-micro-small-scale-enterprises-licensed-under-pls>

Key aspects of Proparco's support include:

- **Enhancing production capacity:** The funding contributes to the establishment of a new factory, increasing Nutri K's capacity to provide international standard quality solutions. This expansion addresses the urgent nutritional needs of Nigeria and its neighboring regions.
- **Strengthening local supply chains:** The investment strengthens partnerships with local peanut farmers, supporting agricultural communities by creating economic opportunities and promoting sustainable production. This approach reduces reliance on imports and enhances the resilience of Nutri K's supply chain.
- **Alignment with national priorities:** By bolstering local production capacities, the partnership aligns with Nigeria's broader policy objectives of promoting local production and reducing import dependence. With approximately 12.1 million children under 5 suffering from stunting and 1.5 million pregnant or breastfeeding women affected by malnutrition in Nigeria in 2023, this partnership will make significant contribution to the fight against malnutrition,

This collaboration between Nutri K and Proparco exemplifies how targeted financial support, and strategic partnerships can drive sustainable growth in the local food industry, enhance food security, and stimulate economic development in Nigeria.

3. Nutri'zaza: Investing in local producers in Madagascar

Nutri'zaza is a social enterprise in Madagascar dedicated to combating child malnutrition through the production and distribution of fortified CFs. Established in 2013, the company operates under a public-private partnership model, with stakeholders including local businesses, government institutions, NGOs, and research organizations.

Key success factors include:

- **Diverse partnerships and collaborations:** By working closely with government agencies, research institutions, and private sector actors, Nutri'zaza ensures that best practices in food safety, nutrition, and business development are shared across the local food ecosystem. This collaborative approach strengthens the overall capacity of local producers and enables them to scale sustainably.
- **Comprehensive capacity building:** Nutri'zaza invests in technical training and skills development for its workforce, ensuring that local producers and food processors have the expertise to manufacture high-quality, safe, and nutritious CFs. This focus on continuous learning and quality control has improved operational efficiency and enhanced the competitiveness of local food production.
- **Supporting local ingredients and supply chains:** To improve affordability and accessibility, Nutri'zaza prioritizes the use of local, nutrient-rich ingredients sourced from smallholder farmers and local food processors. This approach reduces reliance on imports, strengthens agricultural value chains, and creates economic opportunities for local suppliers.
- **Diversified distribution channels:** Nutri'zaza employs a multi-faceted distribution strategy, including partnerships with NGOs, local "baby restaurants" (hotelin-jazakely), and traditional retail outlets. This approach ensures product reach to consumers in remote and underserved areas.

Since its inception, Nutri'zaza has distributed over 56 million ready-to-eat meals across 153 neighborhoods and through 37 baby restaurants in Madagascar¹⁴. The enterprise has created approximately 160 jobs, with 70% of positions held by women, contributing to both improved child nutrition and local economic development.

4. Expanding market access in Kenya: The PFS-Technoserve Alliance

The Partners in Food Solutions (PFS)-TechnoServe Alliance for Inclusive and Nutritious Food Processing (AINFP)¹⁵ presents a successful model for creating demand and expanding markets for local food producers in Kenya. By linking small and medium-sized food processors with industry experts, the program enhances their capacity to produce, distribute, and market high-quality, safe, and nutritious foods.

Key success factors include:

- **Market linkages:** By facilitating connections between processors and potential markets, including institutional buyers and retailers, the program increases the visibility and accessibility of locally produced foods.
- **Capacity building:** The alliance provides technical training and business development support, enabling local processors to adopt international food safety and quality standards, thereby improving product competitiveness.
- **Access to finance:** The initiative assists processors in securing financing, which is crucial for scaling operations and meeting market demand.

The PFS-TechnoServe Alliance has provided training and consultations to over 1000 businesses and stakeholders in the food processing sector food processors and more than 65 food-sector institutions. Customized consultancies have been delivered to 100 of these processors, resulting in the creation of 333 new jobs; development of 14 new or improved nutritional product lines; and facilitation of \$2.6 million in financing. These efforts have also supported approximately 350,000 smallholder farmers, who directly supplied these food processors.

5. Partnerships bring local solutions to scale in Rwanda and Ghana

Africa Improved Foods (AIF) in Rwanda and Yedent Agro Group of Companies in Ghana illustrate effective collective and coordinated actions to combat malnutrition through public-private partnerships and inclusive business models.

Africa Improved Foods (Rwanda)

Established in 2016, AIF^{16,17} is a public-private partnership launched to combat malnutrition while building a sustainable and scalable food production model. AIF operates through a strategic collaboration between the Government of Rwanda, Royal DSM N.V., the Dutch Financing association for developing countries (FMO), and International Finance Corporation (IFC, the World Bank's private sector development arm), enabling it to extend its reach across the value chain.

Key success factors include:

- **Strong government buy-in:** The Rwandan government is an active shareholder, distributing AIF's fortified foods for children aged six months and above and pregnant and lactating mothers in its national social protection programs.
- **Patient capital and long-term outlook:** With the support from investors like DSM, FMO, IFC, and CDC Group, AIF has benefited from patient capital that allows for a longer investment horizon – prioritizing impact over short-term profits. AIF reached EBITDA²⁷ break-even in just three years and net profit in five years, demonstrating the sustainability of its model.
- **Quality improvements in the supply chain upstream:** AIF works closely with local maize farmers to improve maize quality, focusing on reducing aflatoxin contamination and post-harvest losses. The adoption of a cob model (encouraging the sale of maize cobs instead of grains) and supporting the construction of drying sheds, increased the farmers' awareness from 76% to 98%, significantly improving food safety. Additionally, 28 cooperatives were registered as agro-dealers, bringing inputs closer to farmers. These approaches ensure a consistent supply of quality raw materials.

²⁷ EBITDA or earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization is a measure of a company's net income – also known as earnings or profit – with non-cash expenses added back to operating income.

- **World class manufacturing and quality standards:** Supported by DSM-Firmenich, AIF ensures that all products are manufactured in compliance with international nutrition and safety benchmarks.
- **Targeted upstream capacity building:** AIF has implemented farmer capacity-building programs focused on improving post-harvest handling, good agricultural practices, financial management, and promoting female leadership in farming cooperatives. These initiatives have enhanced productivity, reduced post-harvest losses, and improved market access for smallholder farmers, particularly women-led enterprises.
- **Leveraging institutional distribution channels:** AIF supplies and distributes its fortified CF products to the Rwandan government distribution networks for its social protection programs as well as to the World Food Programme (WFP); Catholic Relief Services; and the Red Cross reaching vulnerable populations in Rwanda and the region (Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda and DRC), including pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children.

Despite these key successes, AIF's commercial marketing efforts have, so far, been relatively limited with only about 5-7% of its output distributed commercially.²⁸ AIF currently impacts 1.6 million beneficiaries per day in humanitarian aid and 103 thousand consumers through its products and initiatives.¹⁷ As it expands further, AIF has ambitious plans with a focus on increasing commercial distribution and expanding its footprint across other African countries.

Yedent Agro Group of Companies (Ghana)

Yedent,^{18,19} a wholly Ghanaian-owned agro-processing enterprise established in 2003, focuses on fortified cereals, soya-based products, and ready-to-eat foods. Its sustainable and inclusive business model integrates the entire cereal and legume (maize, soy, millet) value chain, ensuring quality and affordability for consumers.

Key success factors include:

- **Strategic partnerships and collaborations:** Yedent collaborates with 10,660 smallholder farmers across Ghana, building a stable and resilient supply chain for locally sourced raw materials. Additionally, Yedent's partnerships and/or collaboration with the Ghana Health Services, WFP, the American Soybean Association's World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (ASA/WISHH), and the Mastercard Foundation have significantly improved its processing capacity, distribution networks, and farmer support programs.
- **Innovative financing and grant support:** While Yedent has benefited from grant funding and concessional financing from partners like GAIN and WFP, its long-term sustainability depends on balancing institutional sales with retail market expansion. To address high interest rates and limited access to commercial financing, Yedent is actively working to diversify revenue streams by strengthening its retail presence, investing in direct-to-consumer marketing, and optimizing its pricing strategies.
- **Commitment to quality and safety:** Yedent adheres to international food safety and quality standards, having achieved FSSC 22000 certification, which enhances product credibility and consumer trust in both local and export markets.
- **Capacity building and technical trainings:** Yedent collaborates with GIZ, WFP, GAIN, and ASA/WISHH to strengthen its operational and system capacity, including technical training, product development expertise, and certification processes. This has improved efficiency and product competitiveness in both institutional and commercial markets. Moving forward, Yedent is focused on expanding these training programs to include digital business management and climate-smart agriculture, ensuring long-term resilience.
- **Expanding market reach:** Yedent has successfully expanded its reach through institutional buyers such as WISHH, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, particularly targeting underserved communities. However, to enhance sustainability, the company is now focusing on building a stronger presence in the commercial market.

Moving forward, Yedent is focussed on balancing institutional and commercial markets to drive long-term sustainability.

28 <https://african.business/2025/01/trade-investment/africa-improved-foods-targets-shift-to-commercial-food-production?>