

## FoodLAND Project Reveals Nutritional Recommendations for Addressing Malnutrition in Kenya

Over the past four years, the FoodLAND project has worked diligently to address the pressing issue of malnutrition in six African countries in Northern and Eastern regions, namely Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The project's efforts culminate in a comprehensive set of 360 nutritional recommendations that are relevant, suitable and feasible to implement pursuing to combat the diverse forms of malnutrition prevalent in each of these areas, ultimately striving to contribute to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly target 2.2, which calls for the significant reduction of all forms of malnutrition.

Decades of shifts in food systems have led to a concerning rise in specific forms of malnutrition, juxtaposing issues like stunting and wasting with escalating rates of obesity and overweight. In African nations, these challenges manifest uniquely across different regions. Currently, Kenya is fighting the tripartite burden of malnutrition that is undernutrition, overnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Evidently, the rates of undernutrition are gradually decreasing whereas those of overnutrition are increasing across the lifecycle groups at a national level. However, different counties exhibit different levels of malnutrition.

These trends underscore an urgent need to align food supply chains with nutrition goals, particularly in ensuring accessibility and affordability of nutritious foods, especially for vulnerable demographics like children and mothers. Indeed, the food situation analysis in Kenya has revealed some challenges, such as the percentage of babies that are breastfed (the current national prevalence rate of exclusive breastfeeding is 60%), and the diversity and frequency of children diet, including milk intake. However, the rates of stunting, underweight, and overweight among the under-fives have been reduced, they are still the most common challenges in this age bracket. Among adolescents, boys have a higher propensity of being underweight than girls, whereas girls have a higher propensity of being overweight than boys.

The nutritional recommendations put forward by FoodLAND aim to bridge the gap between existing food behaviours and optimal nutrition. The nutrition working group worked with three key data sources for the development of the recommendations: an extensive desk review carried out for all the African countries involved in the project, surveys conducted in both urban and rural settings, with a specific focus on women with children in their first 1,000 days, and inputs from significant nutrition stakeholders, involved in the validation of the recommendations generated, identification of gaps in those recommendations, and generation of recommendation to close the identified gaps.

### Specific recommendations for men and women and for different age groups

The nutrition experts of FoodLAND have generated a total of 121 nutritional recommendations for Kenya, adapted to the specific needs of people in their different lifecycle stages and have also focused on the different dietary needs adult men and women have.

Within the Kenyan context, the government, through the ministry of health and aligned ministries, has set in place strategies to improve the nutrition status of its citizens through



campaigns, direct interventions at health facilities, health services and educational activities. The nutrition experts took this into account when formulating the recommendations, and some of them include the ministry of health as the main actor of implementing the recommendations. The rest of the recommendations are mainly addressed to households and consumers, as well as to food manufacturers.

The nutritional recommendations aimed at improving the nutritional status of children focus primarily on activities to elevate and protect breastfeeding, promoting exclusive breastfeeding to children below 6 months and continuing breastfeeding until they are two years old; implement iron supplementation to all children, and address re-emergence of rickets (vitamin D deficiency) by sunbathing children in minimal clothing for 13-30 minutes 2-3 times a week, among others. The latter two are extended to the whole childhood, as these deficiencies endure in this age bracket. The recommendations addressing children from 6 months to more than 5 years strongly encourage diversifying their diet, ensuring intake of per-day recommended five food groups, including protein and nutrient-dense food such as meat, fish and eggs. Actions towards reducing malnutrition, both wasting or underweight and overweight are also included in the recommendations.

For adolescents, recommendations regarding the adoption of healthy habits and reduction of highly processed snacks and sweetened beverages are the most significant, together with an appropriate intake of water.

For adults, different recommendations are made to women of reproductive age (including pregnant and lactating women) and men. Women are encouraged to improve their diet quality and prevent micronutrient deficiencies, among others. Recommendations for men are more focused on avoiding hazardous foods and substances and improving level of physical activity.

The recommendations for elderly are similar to those for adults, including the improvement of food diversity in their diet, and taking care of their health status and avoiding unhealthy behaviours.

