

## FoodLAND Project Proposition for Nutritional Recommendations in Addressing Malnutrition in Tanzania

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 distinctive 360 nutritional recommendations that are relevant, suitable and feasible to implement pursuing to combat the diverse forms of malnutrition prevalent in each of these project 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. Although there is good progress in reducing the prevalence of stunting, rapid increase in overweight and obesity is observed in Tanzania, which adds a new dimension to the strategies for addressing malnutrition. Prevalence of anaemia has remained high over years which is a threat to children and women's survival. Some of the contributing factors to this scenario include changing consumption patterns and lifestyles, especially of those living in urban areas.

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 Tanzania has revealed that micronutrient deficiencies such as anaemia are highly prevalent mainly among women of reproductive age and children below five years. In addition, low diversified diet is common among women of reproductive age and children below two years which could be the reason for the observed high rates of malnutrition. It was further observed that there is inadequate child feeding practices which could be associated with poverty, food insecurity and education level especially among rural households. The differences in nutrition status and food consumption behaviour were obvious among rural and urban areas.

The nutritional recommendations advanced 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 focused on the more recent scientific literature, ad hoc 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**

A total of 90 nutritional recommendations for Tanzania have been generated and proposed by the nutrition experts in the FoodLAND project. The recommendations are



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. Some of the recommendations urge the government to action, including education and outreach session in the community level for improving consumers' nutritional awareness and skills. 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. 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, healthy habits are encouraged above all, both regarding diet diversity, including the consumption of fruits and vegetables to avoid micronutrients deficiencies and animal protein intake, as well as undertaking physical activities. Apart from those general recommendations, women of reproductive age, including pregnant and lactating women are incited to take recommended supplements, among others. Provision of nutrition counselling to mothers is also highly recommended.

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

## Conclusion

It is evident that there are a lot of factors surround and linking food availability, accesses, intake, and nutritional quality of the food placed in the plate. Dissemination of these recommendations through the FoodLAND project complements the government efforts to disseminate Tanzania Food Based Dietary Guidelines which have similar recommendations. To academic institutions further research is needed in order to better understand the societal dynamics in consumption behaviour and food systems.

