



Africa Catalyzing Action for Nutrition

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AfriCAN in Brief (1)

Background

The Global Nutrition Report (2022) raises the alarm that the world is facing a worsened nutrition crisis post Covid-19, with worrying trends across every form of malnutrition - from hunger to obesity. The State of Food Security and Nutrition (2023) further confirms that hunger is on the rise in all the subregions of Africa with a much larger proportion of its population facing hunger – nearly 20% compared to the other regions with 8.5 percent in Asia, 6.5 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 7.0 percent in Oceania.

Natural and human initiated disasters, rising food and fuel prizes among others, further exacerbate the situation with populations having reduced or limited access to what constitutes a “healthy diet” in different parts of the world and specifically in Africa. At the same time, access to cheaper, highly processed foods with low nutrient content, high in fat, sugar and or salt coupled with unregulated advertising, are more readily available and accessible to the detriment of the health and nutrition of local populations, especially children and the youth. Meanwhile, there is still not enough recognition, prioritization, and investment in indigenous food crops by both African governments, academia, research institutions as well as development partners.

There is some positive news though, in that nutrition is currently on the development agenda and progress in addressing hunger and malnutrition is being registered in some African countries. The overall challenge for the continent, however, is that political will has not adequately been translated into political action, nor has the communication to communities on their roles and responsibilities and the implications of Nutrition Declarations and Commitments endorsed by their governments, been forthcoming. The harsh reality, therefore, is that Africa as a whole, is not on course to meet continental (Malabo Declaration on Nutrition Security) or global targets (Sustainable Development Goal 2) on reducing hunger and malnutrition.

Furthermore, while Africa’s focus as well as development partners has been and still is on undernutrition i.e. reducing stunting and wasting, the continent is now carrying the triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition including diet related non communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and certain cardiovascular diseases and cancers. Africa’s already overburdened health system is ill equipped to handle the added challenges that these bring.

Africa Catalyzing Action for Nutrition (AfriCAN) was thus born out of a sense of urgency and the belief that political will and action towards addressing the continent’s nutrition challenge, can only be sustained by the people’s will and action; and the people’s will, and action can only be sustained through continuing communication, education and with adequate and relevant information.

Vision, Mission, Goal and Approach

AfriCAN’s **approach** is to *inform, educate, advocate, and inspire sustained action at all levels* towards improving nutrition, and the **goal** is for *communities to become “Nutrition Literate”, with the knowledge, skills, and the will to improve their nutrition situation individually and collectively.*

AfriCAN believes that the missing pieces to Africa's Nutrition puzzle lie within the continent and its communities, and its **mission** is to *mobilize and harness the continent's underutilized and untapped resources¹ towards improving nutrition sustainably*. Africa has the advantage of being the region with the most youthful population and the youth² are therefore targeted as the foundation for AfriCAN's **vision** of a *healthy and well-nourished Africa*.

Strategic Plan 2023-2026

AfriCAN will work through existing structures with national nutrition entities as the primary entry points into countries, building on what already exists, catalyzing action at all levels and specifically at the level of communities.

AfriCAN positions women as key to sustainable development through their improved nutrition, health, and well-being along the lifecycle. AfriCAN will therefore seek to catalyze nutrition action at each stage of the cycle, while emphasizing the critical stages of childhood, adolescence, pregnancy, and lactation.

AfriCAN will also in collaboration with partners, work to “demystify Nutrition”, document and promote positive traditional practices while raising awareness on socio-cultural factors which are key in perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition³, such as early marriages for girls including teenage pregnancies, as well as the gender gap in education, especially beyond the primary level.

The AfriCAN Strategic Plan is thus built on the following pillars and initiatives:

Strategic Pillars

- i. Community Engagement
- ii. Capacity Enhancement
- iii. Partnerships and Networking
- iv. Resource Mobilization and Management
- v. Advocacy

Strategic Initiatives

- i. “Good Nutrition Starts with Me” Youth Initiative
- ii. “Nutrition Literate” Community Initiative
- iii. “Under the Baobab Tree” Platform

The Youth and Community initiatives are interconnected, with one building on the other and requires the capacities of the youth to be first enhanced, to enable them to recognize and act towards improving their own nutrition situation. This is expected to strengthen and give credibility to their actions and messages on good nutrition at the household and community levels. The “Good Nutrition Starts with Me Youth” Initiative is therefore designed to prepare the youth to practice what they will be advocating for, in communities of which they are part, and thereby contribute to nutrition literate communities.

The “Under The AfriCAN Baobab Tree” Platform is cross-cutting, providing a platform for consultations, information sharing, consensus building, decision-making, innovation, and advocacy among others.

¹ These underutilized and untapped resources include but are not limited to, an estimated 60% of the global uncultivated arable land; an innovative youth population; indigenous food crops; local and traditional knowledge and practices; diverse technical capacities and skills both within the continent and in the diaspora; media including traditional media; academia and research institutions at regional and national levels; a growing vibrant local private sector; with the Education sector identified as an underutilized sector in addressing malnutrition, even with the success of the homegrown school feeding program. ² The African Union defines youth or young persons in the African Youth Charter, as those between the ages of 15 – 35 years ³ For example, anaemia has been found to be the leading cause of disease burden and disability among adolescents, yet there are few nutrition interventions targeting this age group.

