

Report on the Implementation of the “Good Nutrition Starts with Me” Youth Initiative

A NaNA-AfriCAN collaboration to create an empowered and engaged network of Youth and Media



INTRODUCTION:

Background and Purpose

The AfriCAN “Good Nutrition Starts With Me” Youth Initiative is aimed at sustaining youth engagement and ensuring that nutrition remains a key part of youth advocacy and development efforts. By identifying Youth and Media as primary stakeholders, the initiative aims to address nutrition issues within local communities, nationally, and eventually across the continent. It is aligned with The Gambia’s National Nutrition Policy (2020-2025), which emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in improving nutrition outcomes.

Initiative Launch and Stakeholder Engagement

As an initial step in rolling out the initiative, AfriCAN and the Gambia’s National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) established a dedicated taskforce comprising technical partners from Nutrition, Agriculture, Health, and Education sectors, as well as various stakeholders including representatives from Youth, Media, IT, Academia, and Research. A Terms of Reference was established for the Taskforce, and the group’s first meeting was convened at the AfriCAN Office. Additionally, two orientation meetings—one for Media and another for Youth groups—were organized to introduce these groups to the Initiative and to clarify the intended forms of partnership and collaboration. Following these initial efforts, the NaNA, as lead implementing partner, worked closely with taskforce members to execute the activities described in this report.

Activity 1: 5-day Workshop for the Review and Development of Training Materials

The workshop was held from February 14th to 17th, 2024 at the National Nutrition Agency conference facility. During this period, Taskforce members reviewed and updated existing materials, including evaluating them for relevance, adequacy, and quality using a pre-designed template. This process ensured that the materials addressed the critical needs of the intended audience. The workshop successfully identified the topics and content for PowerPoint presentations to be used during training sessions as well as the Facilitators. Subsequently, a smaller team, including a graphic artist developed these materials into a comprehensive training package with initiative branding. The selected Facilitators also contributed to finalizing the training materials.

Activity 2: Training of Youth Groups and Media Networks on Nutrition

Two separate five-day training sessions were organized at the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA). The first session, for youth networks, took place from February 26 to March 1, 2024, while the second, for media networks, was held from March 4 to March 8, 2024. Each training began with a formal opening ceremony, where senior management from NaNA and AfriCAN welcomed participants and encouraged active engagement and sharing of knowledge. The Lead Facilitator, Mrs. Haddy Crookes (Senior Program Officer, NaNA), and Co-Facilitator, Mr. Musa Dahaba (Senior Program Officer, NaNA), introduced the training and gathered participant expectations. Knowledge was evaluated through pre- and post-training tests.

The workshops were interactive and participatory, with facilitators encouraging the use of local languages to make the content more accessible. Main topics and facilitators included:

- Day 1: Understanding and promoting a healthy diet (Basic nutrition) – Ms. Haddy Crookes, NaNA
- Day 2: Malnutrition Types, Causes, and Consequences – Mr. Bakary Jallow, NaNA
- Day 3: Understanding nutrition throughout the life cycle – Mr. Musa Dahaba, NaNA Prevention and management of Diet-related NCDs – Ms. Haddy Crookes, NaNA
- Day 4: Production, Preservation, and Processing – Dr. Olawale (University of The Gambia); Agriculture

- Day 5: Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Nutrition – Mrs. Fatou Darboe (Ministry of Health)

Each day began with a recap session led by facilitators, allowing participants to review and reinforce their learning from previous sessions. Participants were actively engaged in group discussions, hands-on activities, and practical demonstrations, all of which contributed to a deeper understanding of the nutrition topics. Useful resources and tools were provided to help participants apply their new knowledge in their daily lives.

The quality of the training approach, resources, and tools was highly appreciated by participants. The sessions were described as inspiring, informative, and empowering, equipping attendees to make healthier food choices for themselves and their communities. These positive aspects were captured in anonymous evaluation forms completed at the end of the workshops. A total of 74 participants were trained in the first cohort of the Initiative. Analysis of pre- and post-test results showed significant improvements in knowledge among participants. Each training batch concluded with a formal closing ceremony with participants expressing appreciation to the facilitators for their guidance and support.

Activity 3: Certification Ceremony

On **March 26, 2024**, a Certificate Handing Over Ceremony was held to honor participants who completed the “Good Nutrition Starts with Me” Youth Initiative’s five-day Capacity Enhancement training. The occasion was also used to commemorate International Women’s Day with a presentation made on Nutrition along the Lifecycle – positioning women as key to sustainable development through their improved nutrition, health and well-being throughout the lifecycle.

Each participant received a Certificate of Attendance as recognition of their commitment and participation. During the ceremony, all attendees confirmed and signed their personal commitment cards, where they pledged to take action to improve nutrition starting with themselves. These individual commitments are intended to contribute to a broader, collective commitment, with the ultimate goal of fostering nutrition-literate communities.

The event was chaired by Mrs. Haddy Crookes, Lead Facilitator, and attended by key members of the taskforce review committee with participants pledging to uphold the expectations set forth by the program.

The training was effective in providing both youth and media representatives with the relevant knowledge and skills needed for making informed choices about diet and lifestyle. In addition to personal development, the training empowered participants to become agents of change within their households and communities—actively working to address malnutrition in all its forms. The National Nutrition Agency, in partnership with AfriCAN, remains committed to promoting good nutrition practices and improving the nutritional status of the Gambian population.