



## Regional Dialogue on Improving Access to Locally Produced Nutritious and Safe Complementary Foods in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

December 1-3, 2024. Dakar, Senegal

Co-hosted by: European Commission, Micronutrient Forum and World Food Program

Co-organised by: Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, GRET and ATNI

### Background

Food systems globally are failing to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable populations, leading to widespread malnutrition and health disparities. Young children aged 6-23 months of age in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are especially at risk. Millions of young children are not receiving nutritious, diverse diets due to the lack of locally produced, affordable, accessible, and aspirational nutrient-dense complementary foods (CF). Nearly 181 million children live in severe child food poverty surviving on just one or two food groups a day or less, with around 64 million in Africa, heightening the risk of micronutrient deficiencies. This deprivation during early childhood has long-lasting adverse impacts on child survival, physical growth, and cognitive development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and deprivation.

While increasing access to and promoting homemade, nutritious CF is vital, ensuring the availability and affordability of locally produced, commercially available fortified CF is essential to reduce food poverty in young children. However, efforts to increase commercial production of safe, nutritious CF face significant challenges. Furthermore, unhealthy options - such as nutritionally inferior imported CF, often from large multinationals - are aggressively marketed, easily available and widely consumed by an alarming number of young children, displacing more nutritious foods.

Local and regional producers<sup>1</sup> - irrespective of their size - face numerous barriers (Box 1) that limit their ability to make CF affordable, available, accessible, and aspirational. Larger companies must also contend with stiff competition from multinational corporations while small and medium enterprises are more acutely affected by restricted access to finance and technical expertise. Despite these differences, both types of enterprises struggle to achieve market penetration and sustained growth.

#### Box 1: Barriers impacting local production of complementary foods

1. Access to finance and business viability
2. Capacity and capability
3. Policy and regulatory environment
4. Demand and market creation
5. Supply chain inefficiencies
6. Collective action

There is an urgent need for a whole-of-systems approach to address these barriers and improve access to locally produced CF that is available, affordable, and aspirational for millions of children vulnerable to malnutrition. This approach will not only benefit young children but also improve food security and resilience, strengthen local economies and reduce dependence on imports. By empowering local CF producers, communities benefit from more affordable and culturally appropriate food options, local job creation and reduced poverty, which in turn can enhance the community's ability to purchase nutritious foods. A more resilient food supply chain is essential to sustaining these gains.

A collaborative approach, engaging producers, governments, suppliers, distributors, researchers, technical agencies, and investors is required to influence a transformative change in the food system and the food environment. This meeting aims to identify and agree on critical actions and investment priorities to improve

<sup>1</sup> Producers of breastmilk substitutes and/or sugar-sweetened beverages are not invited to this meeting.



access to and use of nutritious and safe CF that are commercially available, affordable, accessible, and aspirational for all.

### About the regional meeting

The European Commission, Micronutrient Forum and the World Food Program (WFP), as co-hosts, in close collaboration with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), GRET and ATNI (Access to Nutrition Initiative) are organizing a 'Regional Dialogue on Improving Access to Locally Produced Nutritious and Safe Complementary Foods in Low- and Middle-Income Countries' from December 1 - 3, 2024 in Dakar, Senegal, strategically coinciding with the *Foire Internationale de Dakar* (FIDAK). The organization of this meeting is financed by the European Union and generously supported by Expertise France through their EU4SUN project.

The meeting agenda will adopt a systems approach and be highly interactive. Participants are expected to arrive on December 1, with a welcome reception and a visit to the locally produced nutritious food stand sponsored by WFP at FIDAK in the late afternoon and evening. The official discussions will take place on Monday, December 2 and Tuesday, December 3. The meeting agenda and pre-reads will be shared two weeks before the meeting.

In continuum with the regional dialogue, WFP and the Senegalese Food and Nutrition Association (ANAS) are organizing a nutrition value chain fair and seminar at the FIDAK. By bringing nutrition into focus at this business fair, they aim to emphasize the need for locally produced, safe and nutritious foods to improve access to healthy meals and fight malnutrition. WFP and ANAS seek to strengthen food systems by supporting local producers and inspire innovative solutions to promote healthier food choices and improve food security for vulnerable communities across West Africa.

### Objectives of the meeting

This meeting will bring together stakeholders from across the food system to collaboratively:

- identify context-specific, evidence-based investment priorities and strategies for local commercial production of (fortified) foods for complementary feeding.
- foster partnerships between national and regional stakeholders - by exchanging experiences, best practices and lessons learnt - to promote continuous improvements in access to safe and nutritious local solutions.
- inform regional and country commitments for the Nutrition for Growth summit (N4G), hosted by the French Government in March 2025 in Paris, with the intent of creating an enabling policy environment, establishing programs and partnerships, discussing multi-sectoral linkages and making investments to stimulate demand and accelerate the availability of locally produced nutritious and safe CF.

### Expected outcomes

This regional meeting will lay the groundwork for actionable strategies that can enhance food availability, affordability, and accessibility for vulnerable children. The discussions and recommendations of the meeting will inform and encourage regional and country commitments at the N4G Summit in Paris, in March 2025. Specifically, the meeting will be instrumental in:

1. Establishing agreed-upon investment priorities for enhancing local production of safe and nutritious CF to guide governments, donors, and the private sector.
2. Delivering actionable policy recommendations for creating an enabling environment to support local CF production, with a focus on improving policy and regulatory frameworks, reducing supply chain barriers, and increasing access to finance.
3. Strengthened public-private partnerships to support local and regional enterprises and create a sustainable local CF production ecosystem.





### Scope

The meeting will focus on enhancing the local and regional production of nutritious and safe CF in LMICs, particularly in regions with high child food poverty. Four key focus areas are prioritized, based on literature and expert insights, for their potential to drive systemic change in local CF production and ensure sustainable growth (see Table 1): 1) policy and regulatory environment; 2) access to financing and business viability; 3) capacity and capability building; and 4) demand and market creation. While addressing these barriers, *supply chain inefficiencies* and *collective action* will be considered as cross-cutting themes, essential for coordinated progress.

**Table 1 Scope of the meeting**

In Scope	Out of Scope
Commercially produced CF and CF supplements	CFs produced at home Commercially produced foods high in sugar and salt, and low in nutrient density; marketed for young children
Local and/or regional CF production	Produced and distributed and/or imported by multi-national companies Global or multi-national food supply chains
Creating an enabling (national and regional) policy and regulatory environment such as policy reforms, regulatory frameworks, harmonized standards.	International trade policies, agreements or international food regulations
Access to investments and affordable financing such as financial models/ mechanisms and investment strategies.	Investments in specific nutrition interventions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social behavioral change communication interventions</li> </ul>
Capacity building for local producers and other food systems actors'/ stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• health system nutrition programs, or</li> <li>• home-based food fortification strategies like micronutrient powders.</li> </ul>
Demand creation as a joint responsibility of public sector and private sector, and their respective roles	
Mechanisms and metrics for effective multi-sectorial collaboration	Establishing new public-private partnerships