

## Impact Story 26:

# Sustainable Healthy Diets for Kenya's Tea Workers

### THE OPPORTUNITY

Tea is a global business, with the yearly global tea production worth over USD 17 billion, **23% of which is produced in Kenya**. The country is the top global exporter of black tea, **and their tea sector accounts for 26% of foreign exchange earnings and employs approximately 2 million people, 650,000 of which are tea farmers**. However, Kenyan tea farmers and workers have high rates of malnutrition and non-communicable diseases (not transmissible directly from one person to another, such as diabetes) because their diet is largely based on staple foods (like rice, bread, maize, and wheat) and often lacks essential nutrients.

Malnutrition in Kenya's tea-growing areas, such as Kericho Country, is a significant challenge for the population. In that region alone, **28.7% of children are stunted, slightly higher than the national average of 26.0%**. **12% of Kericho women aged 15 -49 ,are underweight, while 29% are overweight**. Besides the effects on health, wellbeing, and development, malnutrition has a negative impact on workforce productivity. Undernutrition alone is projected to cost Kenya about **\$38.3 billion in GDP from 2010 to 2030** due to, among other factors, the decrease in workforce productivity.



### THE SOLUTION

Although the workplace is acknowledged as a key platform for addressing malnutrition, its potential remains underutilised. Evidence on the effectiveness of workforce nutrition programmes for low wage workers in low- and middle-income countries is still limited in scope. GAIN saw an opportunity to establish a workforce nutrition programme designed and implemented for both tea farmers and employed labourers of tea farms in four tea factories in Kericho County, Kenya. The programme was implemented between January 2020 and December 2022 in collaboration with the Ethical Tea Partnership, and aimed to reach **26,000 workers**.

The goal of the programme was to improve consumption of healthy diets by promoting the demand and access to nutritious and healthier foods, focussing on:

- Increasing demand for nutritious foods, including fortified and biofortified foods through behaviour change communication. This involved hosting activities to improve awareness of nutritious and healthy diets through nutrition sessions, cooking demonstrations and competitions, text messages & radio promotion, and promotional food tags on vegetables and fruits and fortified foods (like oil, wheat flour, and iodized salt) in markets
- Increasing access to local and seasonal vegetables by promoting the cultivation of kitchen gardens to grow indigenous vegetables, distributing seeds and orange fleshed sweet potato vines.

Alongside these interventions, the project team partnered closely with tea factory managers and collaborated with local government health officials throughout the duration of the programme.

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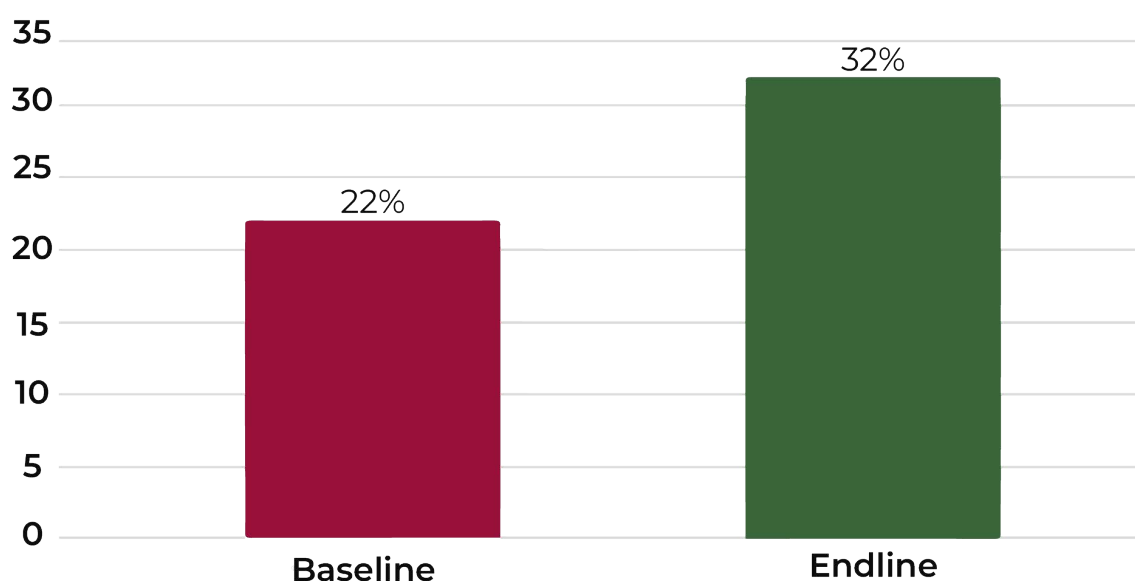
## THE IMPACT

The programme reached a total of **136,025 Kenyan individuals**. This includes **27,205 workers** who were directly impacted by the interventions, as well as **108,820 household members** who were reached indirectly.

By the end of the programme, the percentage of smallholder farmers who were growing orange-fleshed (vitamin A enriched) sweet potatoes in their kitchen gardens **had doubled from 24% to 48%**. The programme also saw a statistically significant increase in awareness of fortified foods, with **61.4 to 76.6% increase** observed among the workers, demonstrating a knowledge about the benefits of consuming fortified foods for their health and wellbeing. The shift in awareness of fortification benefits was linked to activities such as educational messaging on popular local radio stations, training on growing healthy plants at tea buying centres, cooking demonstrations, and training of kiosk vendors.

The percentage of women in the programme meeting the minimum dietary diversity—defined as consuming at least 5 out of 10 food groups—**rose significantly from 22% to 32%**. Instead of carbohydrate-rich foods, both workers and smallholder farmers were eating more animal sourced for a healthy body. They were also eating more nuts and seeds, leafy greens and a wider variety of vitamin A-rich nutritious vegetables and fruits.

**Percentage of women meeting minimum dietary diversity**  
(Consuming  $\geq$  5 out of 10 food groups)



These findings show that workforce nutrition programmes can effectively improve nutrition awareness and diet quality among agricultural workers. These insights can be valuable for government, policy makers, donors, and employers who are working on approaches to promote healthier diets in Kenya and similar contexts.

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