

BUILDING NETWORKS WITH PURPOSE:

ALIGNING PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT WITH GOVERNMENT NUTRITION PRIORITIES

THE OPPORTUNITY

Over 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, leading to high malnutrition levels, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Engaging a resilient private sector, especially micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), is vital as they dominate food value chains and are essential in delivering food to the most malnourished populations. In Africa for instance, MSMEs deliver 70-80% of food to these populations¹. Governments can leverage private sector innovation and market-driven approaches to promote healthier diets and address malnutrition. However, mobilizing the private sector to align with government nutrition priorities is complex. Businesses often lack clear commercial incentives for organizing around nutrition and face challenges such as insufficient technical support, difficulty adhering to regulatory standards, and a restrictive policy environment. These barriers hinder private sector investment in safe and nutritious food production and promotion. Additionally, the lack of available platforms for businesses to connect with each other, government entities, and support partners around nutrition exacerbates these challenges. The key issues include:



- Lack of opportunities for the business community to come together as a collective and interface with government to (1) understand what private sector investments are needed to improve nutrition, (2) learn how to responsibly invest in them and (3) explore opportunities for improving the policy environment to incentivize these investments.
- Reduced capacity for businesses to network and build partnerships focused on improving nutrition.
- Limited awareness among entrepreneurial support organisations on the need to promote technical and financial resources that can support businesses in fulfilling their commitments to improved nutrition.



THE SOLUTION

The SUN Business Network (SBN), co-convened by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), operates within the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement's multi-sectoral framework to address malnutrition, through private sector engagement. To help governments navigate the complexities of involving the private sector in nutrition efforts, SBN provides a mechanism for mobilizing and engaging businesses at the national level. SBN aims to increase the availability and affordability of nutritious foods, promote sustainable food policies and practices, and improve diets for the most vulnerable populations. Through its national networks, SBN supports governments to mobilize businesses, including MSMEs that are critical to the functioning of food systems to improve access to healthier diets for especially low-income consumers by:

- **Convening and aligning:** Bringing businesses together with governments and other stakeholders to ensure private sector investments align with national nutrition priorities.
- **Networking and peer support:** Creating platforms for businesses to network, share experiences and enable peer support.
- **Connecting MSMEs with resources:** Linking MSMEs in food value chains with resources to support their growth. This includes tools, manuals, technical assistance, investor linkages, data and information.
- **Strengthening accountability:** Enhancing businesses' accountability by promoting responsible business practices, including compliance to national food, nutrition and safety standards.

THE IMPACT

Presently, SBN has 17 active national networks across Africa and Asia, that have mobilized 1600 businesses, primarily MSMEs, to voluntarily sign up as members. By facilitating member networking, directing members to resources, and providing technical support and financing through connections with investors and entrepreneurial support organizations, SBN has empowered its members to expand their businesses and enhance their nutritional impact. Progress is evident in multiple national networks, with businesses making promising strides in boosting the production of and demand for nutritious foods. Collectively SBN members produce over 100 varieties of nutritious foods (including fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy, fish, nuts and fortified foods- foods known to be lacking in existing diets) and reach approximately 100 million consumers. Access more national network success stories [HERE](#) that highlight the entrepreneurial journeys of SBN members and illustrate how their networks have supported them in overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities to enhance their nutritional impact. These SBN member stories, along with many others, exemplify the important signalling function that national networks play in promoting good business practices in achieving national nutrition targets.

SBN national networks have also established themselves as credible partners to governments, helping businesses, through technical assistance, in complying with legal frameworks that ensure the production of safe and nutritious food. They also collaborate with governments to enhance the policy and regulatory environment, incentivizing private sector innovation and investment in improving nutrition, such as in the development of new nutritious and safe food products. For instance, in collaboration with partners, SBN Tanzania, alongside a consortium of dairy experts, led the development of fortified yogurt, a novel product in the country. This initiative resulted in the creation of new industry-wide standards for fortified yogurt production (see [HERE](#) for more information). Similarly, in Pakistan, the national network supported government to develop a clear policy roadmap to mobilize MSME investment in advancing national nutrition priorities (see [HERE](#) for more information). Access more national advocacy success stories [HERE](#).

