

Working Together for Our Future: What Zambia's Private Sector Can Do to Improve Nutrition

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Today in Zambia, four out of 10 children are malnourished, hindering the potential of the country's future workforce.¹

- Despite Zambia's economic growth and continued investment by the government and donors, malnutrition rates in Zambia remain among the highest in the region. Malnutrition is the underlying cause of up to 45 percent of child deaths.^{2,3} By 2026, if Zambia does not invest in efforts to improve nutrition, more than 156,000 infants and children will die.³
- The causes of malnutrition in Zambia include repeated infections, poor health, and not eating enough nutritious food, including breast milk. Underlying causes include food insecurity, high fertility rates, high rates of adolescent pregnancy, gender inequity, poverty, and lack of safe water, hygiene, and sanitation.
- Malnutrition leads to reduced immunity, impairing people's ability to fight and recover from illness. This is particularly important in Zambia, where 13 percent of adults (15 percent of women and 11 percent of men) are HIV positive.¹



Photo credit: Jessica Scranton, FANTA/FHI 360

Why does this matter?

- Malnutrition undermines human capital. Malnutrition in childhood impairs both physical growth and cognitive development, decreasing future employees' intellectual ability and capacity for physical labor.^{2,3,4}
- Malnourished children have an increased risk of chronic diseases in adulthood (such as diabetes and heart disease), affecting future workforce productivity.²
- Malnourished children are more likely to have repeated illnesses and infections, causing parents to be absent from work to take care of sick children.²
- Malnourished children perform worse in school and are more likely to repeat grades and drop out of school than well-nourished children.^{4,5} By 2026, if there is no change in stunting, children will lose

40.5 million equivalent school years of learning from stunting alone.³

- Malnutrition is hurting Zambia's economic progress. If there is no improvement in nutrition, economic productivity losses for the country will exceed 180.768 billion Zambian kwacha (ZMW), or US\$18.315 billion, by 2026.³

But malnutrition is preventable and treatable. The children of Zambia can be free of malnutrition if we act now.

Sources: ¹ Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2013–14; ² Lancet Nutrition Series 2013; ³ Reducing Malnutrition in Zambia: Estimates to Support Nutrition Advocacy—Zambia Nutrition PROFILES 2017; ⁴ Grantham-McGregor S et al. 1999. 'Effects of Health and Nutrition on Cognitive and Behavioural Development in Children in the First Three Years of Life'. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 20(1): 53–75; and Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007. 'Developmental Potential in the First 5 Years for Children in Developing Countries'. *Lancet* 369(9555): 60–70; ⁵ Mendez MA and LS Adair. 1999. 'Severity and Timing of Stunting in the First Two Years of Life Affect Performance on Cognitive Tests in Late Childhood'. *Journal of Nutrition* 8(29): 1555–62; and ⁶ International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). 2015. *Global Nutrition Report 2015: Actions and Accountability to Advance Nutrition and Sustainable Development*.

What can the private sector do to improve nutrition?

Business owners play a critical role in improving nutrition in Zambia. For example, by providing employees with a supportive environment for breastfeeding, business owners can help create a healthier and happier workforce, both now and in the future.

Support the Government of Zambia's efforts in nutrition, which focus on the first 1,000 days of life, from conception to a child's second birthday, and target the country's most vulnerable groups, including pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls, and children under 5 years of age, by:

- Allowing working mothers to take a 6-month maternity leave.
- Providing access to quality health care for working mothers and their children.
- Allowing working mothers to work flexible hours and providing lactation areas at work for breastfeeding and pumping breast milk.
- Providing adolescents and youth, particularly girls, with skill-building opportunities to help delay marriage and pregnancy into adulthood.
- Providing nutrition information to employees (you can obtain this information at a local health centre).

Supporting breastfeeding in the workplace benefits companies' bottom line. Research shows that children who are breastfed for 6 months, with no other foods or liquids, are healthier than their malnourished peers.² Healthier children mean fewer lost days of work for parents, who would otherwise need to tend to sick children, and a happier and healthier workforce, both now and in the future.

For a country like Zambia, nutrition is a smart investment: For every US\$1 spent on nutrition, there is a US\$16 return in health and economic benefits.⁶



What else can the food industry do?

Food producers, processors, manufacturers, and distributors in Zambia are all essential to provide Zambians with a nutrient-dense and protein-rich diet. It is crucial that companies working in the food industry:

- Diversify food production and make animal protein (dairy, eggs, meat, poultry, and fish) and micronutrient-rich foods (fruits and vegetables) more available throughout the country at affordable prices.
- Adhere to national food and nutrition standards.
- Strengthen food safety and food handling practices.
- Improve food storage and processing and reduce waste.
- Invest in locally produced, low-cost fortified complementary foods for children 6–24 months of age.
- Increase wages for male and female agricultural workers and ensure that men and women receive equal pay for equal work to increase families' ability to buy nutritious food.
- Support activities that promote good nutrition, such as events in the workplace or in the community.



GOVERNMENT OF ZAMBIA

