



Meeting Report

UNPACKING THE COMPLEXITY OF IMPROVED NUTRITION IN GHANA: a Consultative Process with National Stakeholders

Held on July 3, 2018 – Swiss Spirit Hotel & Suites Alisa, Accra, Ghana

**Prepared by the University of Ghana and
the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Ghana**

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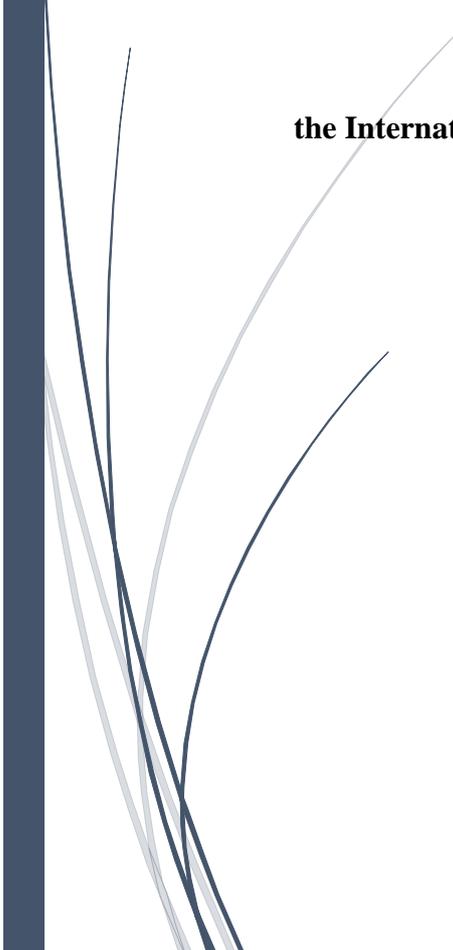


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Background and Rationale

Over the past decade, Ghana has achieved significant reductions in hunger and improvement in nutrition of women and children. Undernourishment rate (Food Balance Sheet indicator) has declined and remained below 5% over the past decade.¹ Young child growth has improved as indicated by reduced stunting (low height-for-age), from 28% in 2008 to 19% in 2014; underweight, from 14% in 2008 to 11% in 2014; and wasting- from 8.5% in 2008 to 5% in 2014.² However, in the context of increasing urbanization and income growth, challenges of urban food and nutrition insecurity and overnutrition have begun to arise. Understanding the drivers of these positive changes will provide useful lessons for future actions for food and nutrition security. While consideration of emergent problems related to urbanization and overnutrition is also necessary. This requires broad consideration of the actions and occurrences that may have contributed in the past, and how Ghana's changing food system can be leveraged for future progress.

To achieve these objectives, two new research initiatives have commenced in Ghana. These are 'Stories of Change in Nutrition in Ghana', and 'Leveraging Food Systems for Improved Nutrition in Ghana'. Both have been initiated by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). This report provides a summary of a consultative stakeholder meeting held jointly by the two initiatives on July 3, 2018 in Accra, to engage key stakeholders just as the two initiatives are commencing activities in Ghana. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce participants to the research plans and activities and to present preliminary findings. The meeting also was an opportunity to seek stakeholder input on: a) the actors, actions, and policy processes that have led to improvements in key nutrition problems in the past ; and b) the opportunities for leveraging a changing food system for continued progress on nutrition. Finally, the meeting also sought to learn from stakeholders what were feasible approaches and pathways for engagement and participation. Proceedings of the meeting are presented below.

Evidence-informed decision-making is necessary to address malnutrition. Over the past two decades, there has been an increased commitment, globally and nationally, to address malnutrition in all its forms. [*Transform Nutrition West Africa \(TNWA\)*](#) (2017-2021) is a new regional platform led by the IFPRI to support effective programmatic and policy action on nutrition issues in West Africa. As part of its broader research program, TNWA is leading *Stories of Change in Nutrition* initiatives in each of its four focal countries: Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and Senegal. The objective of these mixed-methods Stories of Change studies is to capture both knowledge and practical experience from those working on nutrition in West Africa. It seeks to understand how multi-sectoral nutrition-relevant policies and programs are designed and implemented in different contexts, what has worked well, what has not, and why.

In Ghana, the School of Public Health at the University of Ghana is leading the Stories of Change (SoC) in Nutrition research to examine drivers of improved nutrition over the last ten years, beginning from 2009, and anticipating outstanding challenges for the future. This is being done by unpacking the complexity of multisectoral policy and program processes to reduce the rate of stunting and other nutrition-related factors that may have contributed to improvements in nutrition over time. Specifically, SoC in Ghana aims to:

1. Capture nutrition-relevant country-level changes and challenges that have occurred over the past decade, by focusing on political commitment to nutrition, policy and program coherence (across sectors as well as administrative levels), and implementation.

2. Capture anticipated future nutrition-relevant country-level changes and challenges, based on stakeholder perspectives (up to 2025) focusing specifically on political commitment to nutrition, policy and program coherence, and implementation.
3. Capture community-level perceptions on changes in nutrition over time as well as anticipated changes and challenges to their lived experience with regards to nutrition and overall health.

Diets are essential to improve nutrition, and central for implementing nutrition-sensitive interventions. *Leveraging Food Systems for Improved Nutrition* is a new multidisciplinary study being implemented by IFPRI-Ghana, applying the 'Value Chains for Nutrition' (VCN) diagnostic tool. The initiative will collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data on nutrient consumption, food preferences, and the broader food environment. This will be used to identify a basket of nutritious foods with potential for improving diets in Ghana to assess the constraints and opportunities on the demand-side, the supply-side, and related to processing or value addition. In addition, the study will unpack the complex drivers of improved diets to yield concrete policy options for how different sectors can leverage past successes and accelerate further progress towards improving diets and ending hunger and undernutrition.

Meeting participants and speakers

A diverse set of participants were invited, including from Government (Ghana Health Service, The Women in Agriculture Directorate of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, Ghana School Feeding Programme, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Ghana Education Service – School Health and Education Programme), academia and research institutes (ISSER, University of Ghana, International Potato Centre); UN agencies (UNICEF, WFP); private sector (Okata Farms and Foods, Grameen Foundation, Ghana, Ghana Trade and Livelihood Coalition); Scaling-up Nutrition Movement (National Development Planning Commission); and International Organizations (USAID, SNV-Ghana, World Vision). This comprehensive selection of invitees allowed for contributions and insights from a diverse set of perspectives.

The meeting was facilitated by Dr. Amos Laar, Senior Lecturer, University of Ghana. In the first set of presentations (summaries below), Dr. Karl Pauw, IFPRI-Ghana Country Program Leader, gave a presentation on the economic perspectives on improved nutrition in Ghana; Dr. Noora-Lisa Aberman, Associate Research Fellow at IFPRI-Ghana, presented on trends in nutrition security in Ghana, and Afua Atuobi-Yeboah, TNWA consultant, presented on the Stories of Change (SoC) preliminary work on the trends in nutrition policy landscape in Ghana. Thereafter, Dr. Grace Bediako, Acting Director-General of the National Development Planning Commission delivered a keynote. In the second half of the morning, Dr. Richmond Aryeetey, Senior Lecturer at the University of Ghana and study lead for SoC Ghana, presented the planned activities of the Stories of Change in Nutrition Initiative and Dr. Noora-Lisa Aberman presented the Leveraging Food Systems for Improved Nutrition concept and preliminary analysis. The presentations were followed by a facilitated group discussion.

Summary of Presentations

The Food and Nutrition Landscape

The first set of presentations was to provide information on the nutrition landscape in Ghana from a multi-sectoral perspective. The first presentation by Dr. Pauw highlighted the relatively small agro-processing industry in the country (10%) compared to increased food imports (46%) of basic products as a challenging economic issue. Implications for this trend includes underutilization of labour opportunity for modernization and expansion of the agri-food system and continued dietary shifts linked to income growth and lifestyle changes. The second presentation by Dr. Noora-Lisa Aberman showed the trends in nutrition outcomes in Ghana with a focus on the six World Health Assembly (WHA) targets: improving maternal, infant and young child nutrition by 2025, and reducing child stunting, anemia in women of reproductive age, low birth weight, child overweight, exclusive breastfeeding, and child wasting. Between 2003 and 2014, there were significant improvements in stunting and wasting in children under five years; anaemia for both women of reproductive age and children under five years of age had improved between 2003 and 2014 (but less so for children), but remain high, at over 40% and over 65% for women and children, respectively. Data show a significant increase in maternal obesity, from around 8% in 2003 to a little over 15% in 2014. Young child overnutrition appears to be decreasing and is still under 5%; early initiation of breastfeeding improved from 46% in 2003 to 56% in 2014, and exclusive breastfeeding rates declined from 63% in 2003 to 52% in 2014. Low birth weight (weight at birth < 2.5kg) increased from 2% in 2003 to 9.5% in 2014, although only 28% of live births were weighed.

Afua Atuobi-Yeboah, TNWA consultant, then presented preliminary findings on trends in the nutrition policy landscape over the past decade in Ghana with a focus on nutrition-sensitive and specific-interventions and actions. The framework for the presentation was the UNICEF conceptual model of malnutrition, which shows the hierarchical determinants of malnutrition. In total, 63 nutrition-relevant policies had been identified from sectors including health and nutrition, gender, education, environment- water and sanitation, and economic and social and some of these policies had cited the WHA targets and indicators.

Keynote Address by Director-General -NDPC

In her keynote address, Dr. Grace Bediako, Acting Director-General of the National Development Planning Commission, indicated the importance of the consultative meeting in helping stakeholders to recognize nutrition as an important issue for the national development agenda. She described government strategies that contribute to nutrition, including the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda, and the NDPC's commitment to the Scaling up Nutrition Movement. She pledged the full support of the Food and Nutrition Security Cross-Sectoral Planning Group (CSPG) of the NDPC towards the two research initiatives. Her address was followed by the next set of presentations on the scope of the two initiatives.

Stories of Change in Nutrition

The Stories of Change presentation by Dr. Richmond Aryeetey highlighted the growing global and regional interest in nutrition. Building on this, SoC in Nutrition in Ghana will focus on understanding the nutrition policy and programme landscape, focusing on: documenting knowledge and practical experience on nutrition in Ghana, understanding how multi-sectoral nutrition-relevant policies programs have shaped the landscape, what has

worked well, what has not, and why. The study will also look at the important stories to learn from to inform future actions. The study focuses retrospectively on the period between 2008 and 2018, to understand what has changed; but also look forward into the future, building on lessons that have been learned from the past. The key framework for the enquiry will focus on policy commitment and coherence. Planned activities will include: analysis of stakeholders and how they have worked together, using the Net-Map method. This will be complemented by in-depth and key informant interviews to learn about policy processes and commitments, to elicit gaps and draw out lessons. In addition, a decomposition analysis using existing survey data (DHS) will be used to describe the trends in outcomes and drivers of nutrition outcomes. Further, a timeline of key changes in nutrition indicators and their determinants will also be constructed as part of the SoC activities.

Leveraging food systems for improved nutrition in Ghana

This initiative will examine the complexity of food systems and food choices in Ghana, focusing on the following specific objectives: describing food systems and understanding links between food systems and diets using a food systems approach. The food systems approach allows for identification of comprehensive multi-sectoral pathways to improved diets and layered interventions and contribution of foods to nutrient intake and sourcing patterns. The presentation emphasized the food environment determines the food households can reach, and that that different types of households have different food environments. What ends up consumed by a household is then mediated by household characteristics such as food preferences, financial limitations, and nutrition knowledge. The planned food systems approach facilitates examination of all stages of the food chain, from production to consumption. The Value Chains for Nutrition Approach diagnostic tool entails the following steps:

1. Understanding nutrition problems and macro food environment
2. Characterizing diets, identifying constraints and relative contributions of key foods
3. Identifying high-potential foods
4. Undertaking supply and value chain analysis (of high potential foods), including nutrition value and processing to improve nutrient content
5. Inputting results into a supply-demand typology which helps prioritize intervention options to allow for analysis of the overall diet
6. Testing evaluating their effects on diets

Summary of Discussion

To facilitate the discussion session following the presentations, the following three questions were posed to participants:

1. What are the key drivers of change in nutrition outcomes over the last 10 years and across sectors?
2. What food systems actors have not been engaged in nutrition problems but should be?
3. Are there other key platforms working on multi-sectoral nutrition issues? Are the existing platforms sufficient for engaging other sectors and actors?

What are the key drivers of change in nutrition outcomes over the last 10 years and across sectors?

The discussion on the key drivers of change in nutrition outcomes over the last decade focused on three main topics: the influence of nutrition on the global agenda, Ghana's macro policy environment, and overall strengthening of health systems.

Global awareness on nutrition has increased, as has interest for multi-sectoral work in nutrition. For instance, recent policies and initiatives focused on nutrition frame the issue as related to but broader than the health sector. This has contributed to making nutrition a priority domestically. Regarding cross-sectoral planning and programming, over the last decade NDPC has moved from viewing nutrition as a health and agriculture issue, to viewing it as a truly multisectoral development issue. This has facilitated broader recognition of the importance of nutrition among partners and stakeholders in Ghana.

There is improved institutional capacity including having environmental health and sanitation officers available in various metropolitan and municipal assemblies to address environmental sanitation which is linked to nutrition. There is also an increased number of social protection programs and projects related to food and nutrition including school feeding program and cash transfer program (LEAP).

Health sector actions have contributed to better management of diseases. In particular, incidence of malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia, as well as deaths associated with these conditions, has declined. This is partly explained by increased coverage of vaccines such as for Rotavirus and the implementation of the Malaria Drug Policy. In addition, implementation of the community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) has contributed to reduction in severe acute cases of malnutrition. Generally, at the national level, there has been a significant improvement in access to health care, especially through the Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) programme. Furthermore, there has been a slight decrease in family size, which can contribute to improvements in nutritional status. Proliferation of communication media (including social media platforms, community radio, etc.) has expanded information dissemination. There is, however, opportunity for negative messages being shared.

What food systems actors have not been engaged in nutrition problems but should be?

Discussion on key food system actors began with the recognition that the characteristics of the food systems is very different across different parts of the country. For instance, in rural areas, indigenous foods including baobab and insects are commonly consumed, which can contribute to diet quality. In addition, seasonality is an important factor to consider. Especially in Northern Region where there is one growing season, leaving 7 months during which the population is vulnerable to food shortages.

A number of food systems actors and bodies were identified as necessary to engage with to support food system strengthening. These include:

- Farmers associations;
- Local government authorities (district/municipal assemblies);
- Distributors of agricultural commodities;
- Actors working on the food environment in schools;
- Association of Ghana Industries;
- Regulatory bodies (FDA, GSA, etc.);

- Media and others who play a role in food advertising;
- Agricultural research institutes, especially those working on bio-fortified foods and higher yielding varieties;
- Food producers and processors to promote awareness of and buy-in on nutrition;
- Department of Cooperatives within the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations; and
- Groups in churches and women's groups, to promote awareness and support them to be agents for change.

Are there other key platforms working on multi-sectoral nutrition issues? Are the existing platforms sufficient for engaging other sectors and actors?

A number of existing platforms for multi-sectoral nutrition were mentioned by participants. First, it was noted that the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) is responsible for coordinating nutrition policy issues across the ministries. As the coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN), the NDPC convenes a multi-stakeholder platform known as the Nutrition Cross-Sectoral Planning Group (CSPG) that operates at the national level. The three northern regions also have regional nutrition multi-stakeholder platforms put together by UN REACH and Ghana Health Service (GHS).

It was noted that, in spite of this platform, coordination across sectors could be improved. For instance, there are working groups in agriculture, health and social protection that should be better linked to the CSPG. In addition, activities such as the SNV review of the National Nutrition Policy should be discussed within the CSPG.

Other discussion points

Other discussion focused on interrogation of the improvements in undernutrition rates in the country. In particular, participants questioned the variations in improvements across the three northern regions. Analysis of Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data by the University for Development Studies sheds some light on this. They found that stunting decreases with age so the proportion of children under five that are over two versus under two may change the outcome statistics. Furthermore, there are disparities in health service access. Mothers in Upper East were more likely to benefit from health services and to deliver in a health center than in Northern Region.

In addition, there were question related to the implementation of the National Nutrition Policy by the NDPC. It was explained that the implementation plan entails a number of steps and processes that are underway. Firstly, all relevant institutions are expected to prepare medium-term plans (always done in Ghana), then nutrition aspects of the plans would be teased out in the district assemblies. In this way, all the relevant actors, their plans, and the budget would be compiled and assessed in a results matrix.

Finally, it was highlighted that there is a need to encourage greater awareness of nutrition among consumers. This can be accomplished through education campaigns as well as promotion of nutrition champions. It was suggested that politicians and community leaders, such as religious leaders, can be encouraged to play this role.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it was acknowledged that the nutrition situation is changing, with improvements in undernutrition and worsening of overnutrition outcomes. A number of drivers of these changes were identified. Global prioritization of nutrition has helped raise its prominence nationally and strengthening of health systems have supported improvements in undernutrition. Changes in the food system related to improvements in yields have improved quantities of foods available, while urbanization and reliance on prepared and packaged foods may have negative implications for food quality and safety. To sustain progress in the future, it was suggested that there is a need to understand and address socio-cultural drivers of diets, encourage champions of nutrition from national to local levels, and continue to fill in gaps in understanding and data related to the changing nutrition landscape. Representatives from both research initiatives committed to working to address these points and to continuing to engage with stakeholders throughout the research process.

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Appendices

Opening Address

Unpacking the Complexity of Improved Nutrition in Ghana: A consultative process with national nutrition stakeholders

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS
BY THE AG. DIRECTOR-GENERAL
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING COMMISSION
3RD JULY 2018
SWISS SPIRIT HOTEL AND SUITES ALISA, ACCRA**

Good morning,

Let me take this opportunity to thank the organisers for inviting the National Development Planning Commission to be a part of this consultation. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to join you today, at this very important forum, and to deliver an address. The meeting is a significant step towards a collective resolve on how to ensure that nutrition is centrally placed in our development agenda. Among others, this meeting aims to provide further insight into addressing malnutrition and food insecurity in Ghana.

Nutrition recognised as a development issue in Ghana

Reducing malnutrition has been one of Ghana's development priorities. While we have long recognised nutrition as a development issue in Ghana, the way in which we have tackled the issues has varied from one development agenda to the other; and the perspectives have been different over the years. For example, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I), 2003-2005 and the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II), 2006-2009 recognized the contribution of improved nutrition to reducing poverty and inequalities and pursued interventions in this regard. The succeeding medium term policy framework, the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA I), 2010-2013, and the successor GSGDA II, went further; acknowledging nutrition and food security as cross-cutting development issues that have consequences not just for human development, but indeed for all aspects of development. The GSGDA I and II therefore emphasised the need for collaboration among different actors working in relevant sectors, to address these pertinent issues. This continues to be the general direction in which Ghana is tackling malnutrition and food insecurity.

In this context, in 2011, Ghana joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, a global move to end malnutrition in all its forms. This movement has reinforced the shift from the earlier view that nutrition was purely a health issue, to embrace the different dimensions of nutrition, including sectors such as education, social protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene, that are indirectly linked to nutrition. A key component in the promotion of the agenda, is the convening of a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral group known as the Food and Nutrition Security Cross-Sectoral Planning Group (CSPG), by the National Development Planning Commission. The membership of the CSPG comprises government agencies in relevant sectors of the economy, and stakeholders from academia; civil society organisations; and development partners involved in nutrition planning and implementation.

The Food and Nutrition CSPG has, under NDPC leadership, developed a food and nutrition security strategy. The preparation of the strategy involved many levels of consultation with a wide range of nutrition and food security stakeholders. This has contributed immensely to the comprehensiveness of the strategy. Evidently, the proper attention is now being paid to the issues of diet, food systems, achieving food sovereignty, and early warning systems and emergency preparedness which hitherto had received only little attention.

In May this year, the President launched the Ghana Zero Hunger Strategic Review, which presents an analysis of the current situation of nutrition in Ghana in light of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture*. The review presents some of the challenges of addressing malnutrition and food insecurity in Ghana. From the perspective of planning for nutrition, the review confirms the standing constraints of inadequate funding; inadequate human resources; weak collaboration among actors in the field; and lack of proper data collection and management on nutrition and food security. From the perspective of specific actions to be taken, the review identifies the challenges of limited health education and education on dietary diversity; inadequate supply of bio-fortified foods; incidence of a majority of women not practising exclusive breastfeeding; among others.

It is satisfying to note that the current national development agenda, the President's Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (CPESDP, 2017-2024), dubbed "*An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All*", identifies these challenges and provides national direction for addressing them. The National Medium-Term Development Policy framework (NMTDPF), 2018-2021, which translates CPESDP (2017-2024) into objectives and strategies proposes the following: implement measures to reduce food loss and waste; promote the production of diversified; nutrient-rich food and consumption of nutritious foods; strengthen early-warning and emergency preparedness systems; promote healthy diets and lifestyles; and reduce infant and adult malnutrition. Others include strengthen a multi-sector platform for decision making on nutrition; institute sustainable mechanisms for funding nutrition and food security; strengthen nutrition and food security research, data and information management systems; develop and disseminate a multi-stakeholder social mobilization, advocacy and communication strategy on nutrition and food security; and institute capacity-building programmes for nutrition and food security at all levels.

These broad strategies require further expansion into implementable actions to be carried out over the period 2018-2021 by relevant actors. The indicators to monitor the strategies include: reduce the proportion of children under 5 years who are affected by one or a combination of the triple burden of malnutrition, namely, underweight, overweight and micronutrient deficiencies; increase the proportion of children under 6 months of age who are exclusively breastfed, and reduce the proportion of children under 5 years and women age 15-49 years with any form of anaemia. This will require multi sectoral, multi stakeholder collaboration to achieve the shared national objectives and strategies. It will require sharing of information on new approaches and findings of reviews on milestones reached.

Challenges and Prospects of addressing Malnutrition and Food Insecurity

Indeed, failure to address malnutrition is costly. Beyond its adverse effects on economic development, malnutrition in early childhood increases the risk of avoidable deaths from infections in childhood and non-communicable diseases later in life. It has negative consequences on poverty and adverse impacts on the environment. Failure to address

malnutrition will subtly but continuously challenge Ghana's capacity to reach its development potential. Every child must be well-nourished to enable him/her develop the needed cognitive ability for higher educational achievement, and ultimately, contribute to increased economic growth.

It is notable that the first 1000 days of a child's life are the most critical for the development of the body and the brain. The indicators of undernutrition are however generally focused on the body. Good nutrition is a major determinant of this development, and underdevelopment of the body or the brain, caused by a lack of good nutrition during the first 1000 days, is often irreversible. This notion has played a major role in Ghana's drive to address malnutrition, as has also, the staggering revelation of the Cost of Hunger in Africa, Ghana report (2016) that Ghana lost an estimated GH¢4.6 billion to the economy in 2012 as a result of child undernutrition.

Recognising the central role of nutrition in development has led to several initiatives aimed at addressing malnutrition in many counties. At the global level, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include food security and optimal nutrition as explicit development targets. In April 2016, the United Nations declared a decade of action on nutrition with the aim of expanding the scale of action against malnutrition. The question is, how can we harness fully the potential benefits of nutrition for Ghana's development?

I am happy to see representatives/stakeholders from across the nutrition and food security community here to deliberate on innovative approaches to solving Ghana's nutrition problems. The two approaches that will be presented to us today: *The Stories of Change in Nutrition in Ghana* led by the University of Ghana, and the *Leveraging food systems for improved nutrition in Ghana*, led by IFPRI, promise to enlighten us on past successes and provide a clearer sense of direction on how we can work efficiently and effectively together to achieve Ghana's nutrition and food security objectives. Each of us here brings a unique and important perspective to the process and so I encourage us all to engage actively by sharing our expertise, experiences, and perspectives.

Thank you and I wish us fruitful deliberations.

Grace Bediako (Dr).

Agenda

8:30	Registration	
9:00	Introduction and Workshop Objectives	Dr. Amos Laar, Senior Lecturer, School of Public Health, University Of Ghana
9:15	Economic Perspectives of Improved Nutrition in Ghana	Dr. Karl Pauw, Country Program Leader, IFPRI-Ghana
	Trends in nutrition security	Dr. Noora-Lisa Aberman, Associate Research Fellow, IFPRI-Ghana
	The policy landscape for nutrition	Ms. Afua Atuobi-Yeboah, Research Assistant, School of Public Health, University of Ghana
	Opening Address	Dr. Grace Bediako, Director-General, NDPC
10:30	Coffee Break	
11:00	Introduction to Ghana's Stories of Change in Nutrition Initiative	Dr. Richmond Aryeetey, Senior Lecturer, School of Public Health, University of Ghana
	Introduction to Leveraging Food Systems for Improved Diets Study	Dr. Noora-Lisa Aberman, Associate Research Fellow, IFPRI-Ghana
	Discussion	
12:15	Workshop closing	
12;30	Lunch	

Participant list

	Name	Organization	Email	Phone
1.	Dr. Abdul-Razak Abizari	University for Development Studies –School of Allied Health Sciences, Tamale	abizaria@yahoo.com	0243588774
2.	Eunice Berko	University of Ghana, Dept. of Nutrition & Food Science	euberko@gmail.com	0246622268
3.	Dr. Edith Tetteh	University of Ghana - School of Public Health	eftetteh@yahoo.com	0242886252
4.	Dr .Amos Laar	University of Ghana - School of Public Health	amos.laar@gmail.com	0244982176
5.	Dr. Tom van Mourik	International Potato Center	t.vanmourik.cgiar.org	0247223730
6.	Sandra Ayisi Addo	University of Ghana, Dept. of Nutrition & Food Science	nutrilmezo@yahoo.com	0202812204
7.	Victoria Tsekpo	WIAD-MoFA	victsekpo@yahoo.com	0206481238
8.	Karl Pauw	IFPRI- Ghana	k.pauw.cgiar.org	0502253585
9.	Ibrahim Akalbila	GTLC	iakalbila@yahoo.co.uk	0509610294
10.	Peter Aboagye	WIAD-MoFA	pkfaboagye@yahoo.com	0550239019
11.	Eric Banye	SNV-Ghana	ebanye@snv.org	0244881135
12.	Elizabeth Appiah B.	Ghana School Feeding Programme	eappiahkubih@yahoo.com	0244583808
13.	Heckel A. Abban	University of Ghana, Dept. of Nutrition & Food Science	abbanheckel@gmail.com	0244450327
14.	Vera L. Kwara	World Food Programme	vera.kwara@wfp.org	
15.	Eric Aforporpe	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD)	kotiaforpor@gmail.com	0244368404
16.	Dr. I Sagoe-Moses	Ghana Health Service	i_sagoemoses@yahoo.com	0244646061
17.	Ernest Sekyere	Ministry of Finance	Esekyere@mofep.gov.gh	0246557410
18.	Constance Baah	Ministry of Finance	cbaah@mofep.gov.gh	0277634241
19.	Jennifer Alorvor	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD)	a_jenny@outlook.com	0246838025
20.	Tony Nyamiah	Ministry of Finance	nyamiah63@yahoo.com	0266151538
21.	Jennifer Viglo	Fisheries Commission	jeglo2005@yahoo.com	0242914391
22.	Gloria Folson	NMIMR, UG	gfolson@noguchi.ug.edu.gh	
23.	Stephen T. Matey	World Vision International	Mateystephen2005@yahoo.com	0242203583
24.	Mawuena Asem	World Vision International	asemmawuena@gmail.com	02429115516
25.	Jenna Tajchman	USAID	jtajchman@usaid.gov	0544312056
26.	Grace Bediako	NDPC	grace.bediako@ndpc.gov.gh	0208228383
27.	Lila-Karen Amponsah	NDPC	lilakaren.amponsah@ndpc.gov.gh	
28.	Alfred Yeboah	Grameen Foundation	ayeboah@grameenfoundation.org	0544312766
29.	Paulina S Addy	MoFA-WIAD	addypolly@yahoo.com	0244422712
30.	Mugmini Musah	Grameen Ghana	musamos@yahoo.com	0242114717
31.	Juliana Pwamang	USAID	jpwamang@usaid.gov	0244311932
32.	Lilian Selenje	UNICEF		
33.	Felix A Asante	ISSER	fasante@ug.edu.gh	
34.	John Agandin	IFPRI	j.agandin.cgiar.org	0246258194

35.	Mrs. Gertrude Quashigah	Ghana School Feeding Programme	gertrude.quashigah@gmail.com	0244239175
36.	Ayisha Suleman	Ghana School Feeding Programme	sulemanayisha@gmail.com	0548328328
37.	Dorcas Hushie	GES/SHEP	panyinhushie@yahoo.com	0207097097
38.	Makel Akoto-Kwudzo	Okata Farms & Foods	okatafarms2005@gmail.com	0245812957
39.	Griffith Ammah	NFS, UG	rageammah@gmail.com	0200000120
40.	Nathaniel Coleman	UG- School of Public Health	Micnasam2@gmail.com	0243532174
41.	Afua Atuobi-Yeboah	School of Public Health	afuaay@gmail.com	0244888257
42.	Dr. Richmond Aryeetey	School of Public Health	raryeetey@ug.edu.gh	0261128506
43.	Mara Van Den Bold	IFPRI-USA	M.vandenBold@cgiar.org	0544649634
44.	Noora-Lisa Aberman	IFPRI-Ghana	n.aberman@cgiar.org	0558273915
45.	Gladys Arhin	IFPRI-Ghana	g.arhin@cgiar.org	