

Sun Business Network Case Study 1: Zambia Good Food Logo

Introduction

The SUN Business Network (SBN) is the private sector branch of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and aims to support businesses to grow the role they play in improving nutrition and to support SUN countries in developing national business engagement strategies.

The Partnering Initiative (TPI), working together with the SBN, has developed four case studies which explore SBN engagement of business towards improved nutrition. These case studies focus in particular on how SBN facilitates and supports the role of government in catalysing/steering private sector action. Across a range of countries and contexts, the case studies aim to explore this approach to tackling the Sustainable Development Goals, and to identify lessons learned – both good practice and challenges – to share within and outside the SUN network.

This case study explores an initiative which aims to bring together government ambitions to promote nutrition, with local companies providing nutritious food, by developing a certification process and logo.

1. Nutrition in Zambia, and the Sun Business Network (SBN)

Zambia is one of the poorest countries in the world, with nearly half the population food insecure, and high rates of under-nutrition, particularly among children¹. Over a third of children under 5 years old are affected by stunting, 11.6% of infants have a low birthweight, and a third of women of reproductive age suffer from anaemia. At the same time, obesity levels are increasing, with around 12.4% of adult women and 3.8% of adult men affected, while around 6.6% of adults suffer from diabetes².

While crop yields are up in 2021, thanks to good annual rainfall, access to food is down, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy. At national level, Zambia defaulted on its sovereign debt in November 2020, because of low commodity prices exacerbated by a slowdown in economic activity caused by the pandemic. A presidential election in August 2021 led to a change of Government and a landslide victory for the United Party for National Development (UPND) led by Hakainde Hichilema.³

For the future, soil erosion and poor water management are limiting factors for Zambia, and these – together with one of the highest deforestation rates in the world – make the country particularly vulnerable to climate change. Food insecurity is predicted to increase substantially by 2055, as a result of climate change impacts⁴.

The Republic of Zambia joined the SUN movement in December 2010, and the SBN in Zambia now has 81 members. Its current priorities are the launch and rollout of the Good Food Logo initiative alongside the

¹ <http://www.fao.org/climatechange/epic/projects/countries/zambia/en/> accessed 17/8/21

² <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/eastern-africa/zambia/> accessed 1/9/21

³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zambian-opposition-leader-hichilema-heads-closer-victory-presidential-vote-2021-08-15/> accessed 17/08/21

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/climatechange/epic/projects/countries/zambia/en/> accessed 17/8/21

healthy diet campaign, the expansion of the network beyond Lusaka, and technical assistance to private sector and government to increase supply and demand of nutritious foods.

2. The Good Food Logo (GFL)

The impetus for the Good Food Logo arose from consultations during the development of the Zambia SBN national strategy, and brought together public and private sector priorities into one initiative. In the context outlined above of widescale under-nutrition, coupled with growing rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the Ministry of Health was focusing on childhood nutrition. At the same time, small companies were asking for product endorsement, with set criteria and a badge that healthy products could qualify for. With many food products in Zambia imported from South Africa, local businesses trying to boost better nutrition felt unsupported.

The Good Food Logo (GFL) is a joint initiative of the Zambia National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC), the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS – part of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry), and SBN, to increase access to nutritious foods. It is a front-of-pack logo for products that meet a set of nutrition criteria which are based on international dietary guidelines from the World Health Organisation (WHO). The criteria focus on the levels of saturated and trans fatty acids, sugar, salt, dietary fibre, energy and micronutrients in foods and beverages. The Zambia Bureau of Standards has its own certification logo, so the GFL is additional to this.

The GFL initiative aims to benefit all stakeholders, by enabling government to promote nutrition; supporting local companies by including local foods and providing a market tool; and improving customer decision-making around healthy food through clear labelling.

The GFL is tailored to the local food basket, and draws on a database of 300 processed products, with criteria for each product. It has five main criteria, focussing on trans fats, salt, sugar and dietary fibre, as well as micronutrients. It does not focus on fortification, as the aim was to include local fruit and vegetables and healthy meat, not just processed foods.

The intention was to focus on urban areas because the population is more concentrated, offering a better value proposition for companies, and because rural areas – despite being poorer – have better access to fresh ingredients. People in urban areas are also seen as “trend-setters”, influencing behaviour elsewhere.

3. GFL timeline

Timeline:

- Late 2015: The initiative started with initial groundwork.
- 2018: Original intended launch date for the logo.
The original team working on the GFL left.
- October 2020: The Good Food Logo was launched.

Phase 1: For the first 12 to 18 months, the main focus was on credibility and the standards. There was minimal consultation with communities, but initial surveys were carried out into how people decide what is nutritious. NGOs and health promoters were consulted, and the team looked at what business needed as well as at the nutrition challenges.

Phase 2: In the second stage, the team moved to looking at the marketing and consumer perspective – what would catch people’s attention visually, as well as a detailed survey of consumption habits for medium and lower medium income. 42 initial logo designs were narrowed down to 10, and then members and stakeholders were invited to vote.

Phase 3: The next question was who should run the programme. The team decided on the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS), despite the concerns of some members, as ZABS had the infrastructure and the means for testing. A pilot phase was agreed, during which funding would be provided (see Section 5 below) after which the initiative would have to become self-financing.

Phase 4: The final phase of this stage (in 2018) was fundraising. The project had a high profile, and good levels of interest. After extensive fundraising work, three-year funding was obtained from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, together with grants from Irish Aid and from the UK Government via the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO)⁵.

“At this stage we had done the marketing plan and proposal, we had signed agreements for running it, and how it would sit. We had secured the funding. The logo was a rock star! The next bit was it hitting the ground running.”

When the two core people behind the initiative left, they recommended that the rest of the team be kept on, but this did not happen. There was a complete change of personnel. Relationships had to be rebuilt, and expertise and understanding that had been built up was lost.

Phase 5: With a new team taking over, in March 2020 a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS) and the National Food and Nutrition commission, to jointly run the GFL certification programme.

Phase 6: The Good Food Logo was finally launched in October 2020 by the Vice President, as part of the wider Healthy Diets campaign, which aimed to create nutrition awareness among the general public.

Phase 7: Continued support for the GFL in 2021 is being backed by a publicity campaign, which includes television advertisements for producers and consumers, as well as a promotional social media drive.

4. Public-private engagement, and cross-sector support for the GFL

A remarkable level of public-private engagement and cooperation across the sectors has been mobilised to support the development and launch of the Good Food Logo. An expert oversight committee has been formed, bringing together government and the private sector, as well as the UN, other NGOs, and academia. Throughout the process, practical support has come from the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society working together:

- In-kind support from volunteer consultants: Technoserve loaned expert volunteers, who carried out the initial research, and Technoserve and DSM did a map review of the different labelling options.
- Columbia University in New York provided help from three cohorts of MBA professionals, who assisted with the initial stages of the project for six months at a time. They helped to validate the data and shape the marketing plan.
- The GFL team partnered with the Choices Foundation, who had a number of logo programmes in Europe and Asia.
- Technical nutrition expertise was provided by an in-country expert who had worked in the food composition team of FAO, and provided credibility.
- Community-based focus groups came together to advise on logo design.
- The initiative is led by the Zambian government- the Nutrition Council and the Zambia Bureau of Standards.
- A media agency manages the current marketing campaign, guided by the SBN technical team.

5. Funding

The GFL programme is funded by the World Food Programme (via SBN Zambia), and received funding from the UK Government via the FCDO, from Irish Aid to support the roll-out, and from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support the logo and the roll-out.

⁵ Previously the Department for International Development (DFID)

6. Key successes, and success factors

The team had significant early successes in inspiring and recruiting key stakeholders, engaging volunteers, and in raising the profile of the logo and gaining support and significant funding for the roll-out.

The team's approach was a significant success factor. In the early stages of the initiative, they consulted widely, bringing together input from the public and private sectors, and engaging a range of key stakeholders: *"We spoke to all sizes of business. We did surveys and focus group interviews and selected within that group a mix of three sizes. Everyone agreed that this would meet our needs. From government we had the Food and Safety department, we had the Standards Bureau and the Standards Officer. Also the Minister of Commerce, the National Food and Nutrition Agency from their certification and nutrition sides, plus the Ministry of Health itself – someone from the Permanent Secretary's office."*

The level of support from government stakeholders was a significant success factor during this early phase: *"The willingness and commitment amazed me. Not one person from government missed a meeting or just came for the sake of it."* The involvement of ZABS has been particularly important, developing KPIs for the GFL, and helping to drive the process.

The GFL initiative also had a huge amount of help from volunteers and experts, which provided credibility, and enabled the initiative to be moved forward despite having only a small group leading it.

Extensive initial research by the GFL team into other logo initiatives helped them to refine what they were aiming for, to ensure maximum engagement:

- Keeping the message simple, and not over-complicating the nutritional information;
- Inspiring and encouraging consumers, rather than telling them what to do;
- Developing a logo that would evoke life, brightness and colour.

7. Key challenges

The key challenges faced by the GFL initiative fall into three main categories: changes in personnel and stakeholders (and the resultant issues in terms of timing); technical and cost challenges; and challenges caused by the context of food sale and consumption in Zambia.

7.1. Personnel and stakeholder changes:

The early stages of the GFL initiative were very much personality-driven, depending in particular on two key people, and the team that worked with them. The departure of these two people, just at the point when the initiative was about to be scaled up and launched, followed by the decision to replace the entire team, resulted in a two-and-a-half-year delay in the launch of the logo. Institutional knowledge disappeared, and relationships and partnerships which had been built by the team – on which much of the work depended – were lost.

This delay had two key results, both of which have significantly affected the success of the launch. Firstly, companies which came on board early, subsequently dropped out because of lack of action over two to three years, and the initial impetus and enthusiasm was lost: *"I'm a businessman, I do not have time to sit in meetings with no solution."*

Secondly, the delay meant that the logo was finally launched in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing its impact: *"When somebody goes to the shop, they want to buy millet or sorghum and get out of the shop as quickly as possible. They really don't care much... I think if we didn't have this COVID situation, it would have made more impact."* Alongside this, the pandemic has caused prices to fluctuate and costs to rise – for example the cost of food has almost doubled - leaving both small businesses and consumers short of money and limiting their capacity to engage with the GFL initiative.

Staff changes in partner organisations also caused challenges. Key stakeholders who had been too busy to prioritise it in the earlier stages, became interested when the profile and funding increased, and then wanted to input when it was too late. Local WHO office staff – already very stretched – moved on, causing

further delays. People in government agencies would all agree, but then staff changed and the new people no longer understood the logo or the work. Despite the early support of government, with the eventual launch it has not proved possible to get either the Ministry of Trade, Commerce and Industry, or the Ministry of Health on board. The GFL campaign was only supported by the Ministry of Health as a small part of the Eat Well campaign.

8.2. Technical and cost challenges:

Small companies who want to apply for and use the GFL logo face a number of technical and cost challenges. In the pilot stage of the programme, costs were subsidised, but participating companies now need to cover their own costs, and this has been made more challenging by the financial impacts of the pandemic.

The certification process itself can be prohibitively expensive for many SMEs. In order to be eligible to apply, companies need to have ZABS approval. This involves factory audits (with no guarantee of passing) and is too costly for many. Companies then have to pay for the testing and certification process for their products, and a number of them have not passed. However, they still have to pay, and this requirement to “bet” on success and risk money, is a deterrent to companies.

For the companies and products that do successfully pass the certification process, the next hurdle is getting the logo onto their packaging. Firstly, most companies import packaging from South Africa in bulk. Therefore, even after being awarded the logo, it could be up to a year before they can use it on their packaging, as they cannot afford to throw away expensive unused packaging. Secondly, the cost of designing a new plate to print the logo on their packaging can be up to 10,000 Kwacha (\$600) which is prohibitive for many small companies. And, finally, the cost of the printing itself is putting some companies off signing up, because they have to pay for three additional colours for the logo as well as their existing packaging colours. As a result of these challenges, most of the 32 products which have so far been certified do not actually carry the logo on their packaging – limiting the opportunity for recognition by customers and profile for the logo.

8.3 Sale and Consumption of food in Zambia

Most big shop chains in Zambia are owned by South Africans, and consequently stock mainly South African products rather than local ones. The Zambian market is dominated by Trade Kings, a big Zambian company with a huge variety of brands. Their foods contain high levels of sugar and salt, and low nutrients. It is very difficult for small producers to compete with them. Until the public start to demand healthier products, and put pressure on, there is no incentive to change this model.

Because of this market dominance by big brands and South African companies, it is very difficult for small producers to get their products stocked in supermarkets and chain stores – and there may be up to ten suppliers trying to sell the same product. Consequently, it is a difficult market to break into, and many of the products that have been GFL certified, are not widely available.

A large proportion of food bought by consumers is purchased loose from the market, rather than packaged in the supermarket. This includes fresh vegetables and fruit, beans and soya pieces etc, none of which can be certified as unpackaged products – although they may be healthier - are not eligible for the GFL. Alongside this, the main staple that everyone eats is mealie meal, which is also not covered by the GFL. And individual growers are not registered with ZABS, and hence cannot apply for the GFL, which also means that market products cannot be certified.

8. Outcomes

10 companies have been successfully certified so far.

30 companies have applied to participate in the GFL certification process. Of these, 10 have been successfully certified, while 11 didn't meet the criteria, and others have yet to submit samples or are still in the process.

10 certified products are in GFL logo packaging and on the shelf

34 products have been accredited so far. These include dried vegetables, maize cereals, high energy protein supplements (HEPS), sorghum, millet and cassava meal, instant porridge (millet and maize), groundnuts, and beans. 10 of these products are in packaging and on the shelf. Most of the other products are not yet in packaging with the GFL logo due to companies yet to refresh their packaging while others are holding back due to the cost of incorporating the logo.

One company is using the logo to advertise its products on its lorries, helping to promote their products, and also helping to raise awareness of the logo.

9. The future, and plans for sustainability

With the new Zambia Coordinator coming on board, the GFL initiative is being driven forward. The drive to raise awareness aims for: *“Mass communication - people hear it on radio, on TV, they see it on boards, they need to find it in the stores, so they also need to engage with the bigger retailers to give it that big brand focus as well.”*

The recent confirmation that the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry would be supporting the initiative, as well as the Zambia Development Agency (ZDA) coming on board, looks set to give a huge boost to the GFL. One respondent also suggested that the ZDA might be able to support participating small businesses with financial and technical assistance to achieve certification.

There is also an aim to create a platform where members can share their problems and grievances, and these can be heard and, where possible, alleviated.

The aim is to bring big companies on board as well, to continue to raise awareness among consumers, and to use civil society as a watch dog to ensure the logo is not being misused.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

- The GFL is an innovative initiative, and at the outset – despite extensive research – the team found little information or data on the development of similar logos.
- The GFL team succeeded in building the brand from nothing; merging the commercial and development side and showing that people can come together for something this big.
- The complete change-over of key staff in the SBN, together with staff changes in government, had a drastic impact on the timing and hence success of the project. Care needs to be taken to ensure continuity and sustainability of ambitious initiatives such as the GFL, and that they do not depend too much on one or two individuals.
- It is important to ensure that all government stakeholders are on board from the start, even if this takes some effort, so that the initiative doesn't get derailed or delayed part-way through the process
- It is important not to recruit businesses too early in the process, and to manage stakeholders' expectations about how long this kind of change takes, so that they don't get discouraged.
- One challenge of bringing together the private and public sectors is the different speeds/timescales. Businesses cannot afford long delays and decision processes, whilst government departments cannot take risks and find it difficult to make rapid decisions.
- Rather than relying on surveys, more in-depth community engagement might have helped to understand that consumers really wanted, and their food-buying patterns.
- Barriers to healthy eating are not simply about people not knowing what is healthy, but about choices influenced by things such as status, culture, convenience, and lifestyle preference. Simply making nutritious food available and sign-posting it, is rarely enough to bring about behaviour change in any society, so this type of initiative needs to focus on making healthy food appealing, as well as raising awareness of nutrition.

- It is also important to consult businesses, especially micro businesses, to understand what the logistical challenges might be. For example, if the costs and challenges of incorporating the logo into the packaging design and printing it, had been fully understood, then a simpler logo with fewer colours would probably have been designed. The GFL team acknowledged that they are nutritionists, not business experts, making in-depth consultation with the businesses even more essential.
- Small companies need support to overcome the obstacles. Micro businesses, in particular, do not have the resources to invest in something which does not offer immediate payback, and hence need financial and technical support.
- For change at scale, it is going to be essential to engage with big business. The current strategy is to try to increase demand for healthy products, by raising consumer awareness. This demand, it is hoped, will then encourage big companies to follow this positive trend. It would also be worth exploring other possible ways to engage large companies, and whether other SBN networks have managed to do this successfully.

11. Methodology and acknowledgements

This case study is based on five interviews with key stakeholders from the original and the current country office teams driving the initiative, from WFP, and from one of the businesses involved in the initiative.

As such, the case study does not claim to present a comprehensive or fully representative account, but rather an overview of the initiative which draws out key points and insights.

Many thanks to the SBN global team and Zambia country team for their continued support throughout the research, and to the interview respondents for their time and insights.

About the SUN Business Network

The SUN Business Network (SBN) is the world's leading private sector focused nutrition initiative: a neutral platform to foster partnerships and collaborations. It aims to engage and mobilize business at a global and national level to act and invest responsibly and to innovate in responsible and sustainable actions in emerging markets to improve the consumption of safe food and to make good nutrition more aspirational, accessible, affordable and available for all people.

Globally, the stewardship of the SUN Movement is enabled by the United Nations Secretary General nominations of a SUN Movement Coordinator, Lead Group, Executive Group and Secretariat. The SUN Business Network is co-convened by GAIN and WFP.

About The Partnering Initiative

The Partnering Initiative (TPI) is a leading independent not-for-profit dedicated to unleashing the power of partnership for sustainable development. TPI was founded in 2003 around a passionate belief that only through collaboration among business, government, NGOs and the UN can we tackle the greatest environmental, development and business sustainability challenges, and make the systemic shifts necessary to eliminate poverty.

For 18 years, TPI has worked extensively with all sectors of society to drive effective collaboration. Throughout that time it has been internationally recognised as a pioneer in the theory and practice of cross-sectoral partnering, and in promoting the role of business as a partner in development.