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for every child

First Foods Africa

Tackling child food poverty and malnutrition

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1. Executive summary

Globally, one in four children under 5 years of age (181 million) live in severe child food poverty. About one-third of these children (59 million) live in sub-Saharan Africa. Children living in severe child food poverty miss essential nutrients required for survival, growth and development. Evidence shows that severe child food poverty drives the persisting high rates of undernutrition – both stunting and wasting – in the African continent.¹

Traditional food security initiatives fail to address children's unique nutrient needs. These initiatives focus on improving household access to staple foods and agricultural incomes, neglecting the need for nutritious, safe and affordable foods for children.

Innovative large-scale approaches are needed to improve children's first foods, food environments and food practices. UNICEF is uniquely positioned to drive this transformation – in partnership with national governments, development partners and private sector leaders. UNICEF's **First Foods Africa** initiative will support local production and consumption of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods for young children, especially those most vulnerable to malnutrition and related poor survival, growth and development.

UNICEF's First Foods Africa aims to respond to child food poverty, building on UNICEF's expertise and experience with local and regional production of ready-to-use therapeutic foods. It is guided by the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 and the UNICEF Vision on Food Systems for Children. First Foods Africa is a central component of the UNICEF Africa Strategy, contributing to the African Union Agenda 2063, for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa.

UNICEF First Foods Africa intends to:

- **Incentivize local production** of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods – in Africa, by Africa, and for Africa's young children under 5 years of age.
- **Strengthen policy environments** to protect, promote and support access to nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods by children in Africa.

- **Stimulate adequate consumption** of nutritious first foods through large-scale social marketing and social and behaviour change programmes.

UNICEF aims to work primarily with national and local governments, Regional Economic Communities, the African Union, while also engaging selected medium-to-large African food companies with national and regional reach that are committed to ending child food poverty and malnutrition across Africa. UNICEF will also build on its longstanding collaboration with key global partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), and key financial institutions and investment partners.

The Child Nutrition Fund will be a key financial instrument for supporting UNICEF's First Foods Africa Initiative. It will incentivize investments in medium-to-large African companies that are aligned with UNICEF criteria for engaging with the food industry and facilitate financial access to funding for the technical support and programme actions needed to implement First Foods Africa across its three pillars.

First Foods Africa seeks to create systemic, sustainable transformation of food systems for children in Africa, working with public and private sectors to address the specific needs of children. It aims to change production priorities, policy frameworks and consumption practices, so that all children receive the nutritious diets they need. First Foods Africa will contribute to sustainably reducing the prevalence of child food poverty and malnutrition in Africa, for Africa and by Africa.

2. The challenge

Sub-Saharan Africa has made important strides in reducing child stunting (chronic malnutrition) over the last two decades: since the year 2000, the prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years has fallen by a remarkable 22 per cent, from 41.5 to 32.3 per cent.² This is important progress and must be celebrated.

However, during the same period, the number of children with stunting increased from 55.1 million to 62.3 million,² due to population growth. Child wasting also remains a significant issue in the region, with an estimated 11.4 million children affected.

Today most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are not on track to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) nutrition targets for children. Child malnutrition jeopardizes the present and the future of African children and nations, affecting children's physical growth and cognitive development, their future learning and earning capacities, and thus their contribution to socioeconomic growth and development.

Child food poverty is driving malnutrition

The poor quality of children's diets is the main driver of child malnutrition and is reflected in the alarming high number of children living in **child food poverty**, which is defined by UNICEF as children's inability to

access and consume a nutritious and diverse diet in early childhood.

To meet the minimum dietary diversity for physical growth and brain development, children need to consume foods from at least five out of the eight defined food groups.³ If children are fed three or four food groups per day, they are living in child food poverty. If they are fed two or fewer food groups per day, they are living in **severe child food poverty**.

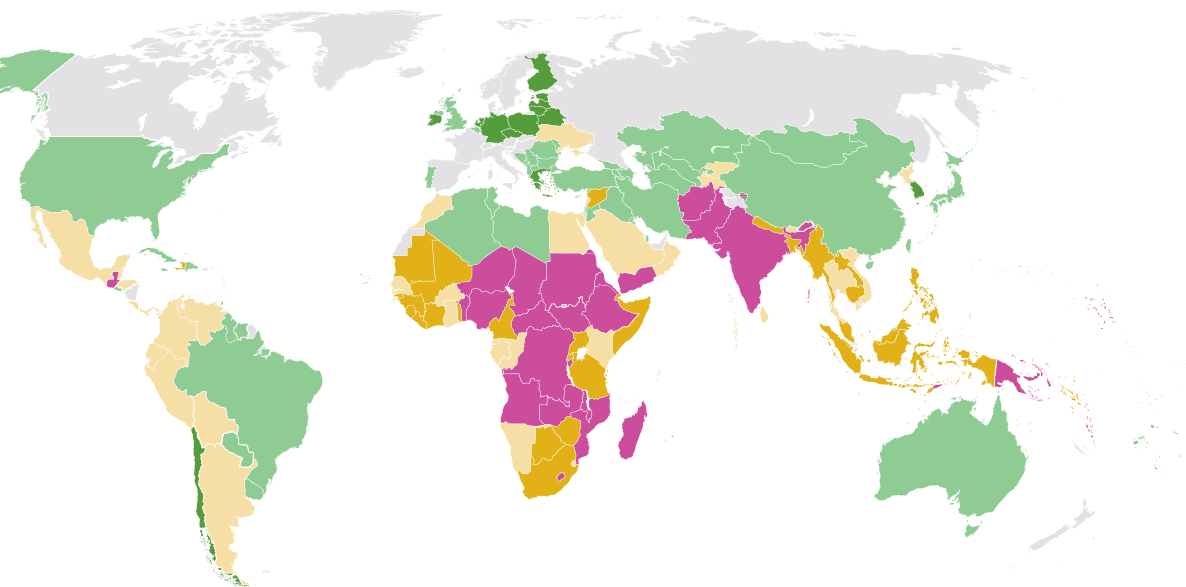
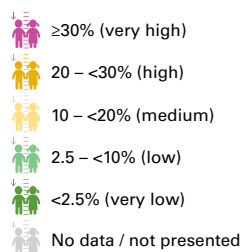
In sub-Saharan Africa, one in three children (59 million) live in severe child food poverty, surviving on extremely poor diets that include at most two food groups (breastmilk/milk and a cereal/tuber). Sub-Saharan Africa is home to about one-third of children living in severe child food poverty globally.⁴

Severe child food poverty affects all countries in sub-Saharan Africa, albeit unequally. Ten countries – Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, the Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa, Uganda and the United Republic of

Figure 1:

Percentage of children under 5 affected by stunting, by country, 2024

Source: UNICEF, WHO, World Bank Group, Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates, 2025 edition.



Tanzania – account for two-thirds (66 per cent) of the region's total burden of severe child food poverty.

The global food and nutrition crisis, along with localized conflicts and climatic shocks, is intensifying severe child food poverty, especially in fragile and humanitarian settings where families have no access to diverse, nutrient-dense foods for children.

In fragile countries, one in three children live in severe child food poverty. In extremely fragile contexts, such as Somalia, the percentage soars to exceptionally high levels, with 63 per cent of children affected. Most children facing severe child food poverty in sub-Saharan Africa are fed starchy staples like grains, roots, tubers and plantains. In contrast, their diets rarely include nutrient-rich foods such as flesh foods, eggs, pulses, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables. However, diets that rely heavily on starchy staples fail to provide the necessary nutrient density to meet the unique requirements for growth and development in early childhood.

About half of children affected by severe child food poverty belong to households in the two poorest wealth quintiles, while the other half are from households in the middle and upper quintiles. This indicates that factors beyond income, such as poor food environments and poor food and feeding practices are also driving severe child food poverty.

The consumption of unhealthy foods is becoming an emerging feature of children's diets in sub-Saharan Africa, even among children living in severe child food poverty. An alarming number of these children consume foods and beverages high in sugar, salt and unhealthy fats, including ultra-processed foods⁵ and sugar-sweetened beverages, which displace more nutritious options from their diets.

Overall, progress towards ending severe child food poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is largely insufficient. More needs to be done to address the drivers of child food poverty and malnutrition.

Systems – not families – are failing children

UNICEF identifies three major drivers of child food poverty in early life: poor food environments, poor feeding and care practices and household income poverty.

Poor food environments disrupt access to nutritious foods. In remote and fragile settings, climatic shocks, insecurity and poor infrastructure can disrupt food production and access to nutritious foods. Meanwhile, the poor quality of commercially produced complementary foods (containing excess sugar, sodium and other harmful ingredients) and the over-abundance of low-cost, nutrient poor ultra-processed foods that are widely accessible and displace more nutritious options, are challenges for adequate child nutrition everywhere.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 3 children live in severe child food poverty.

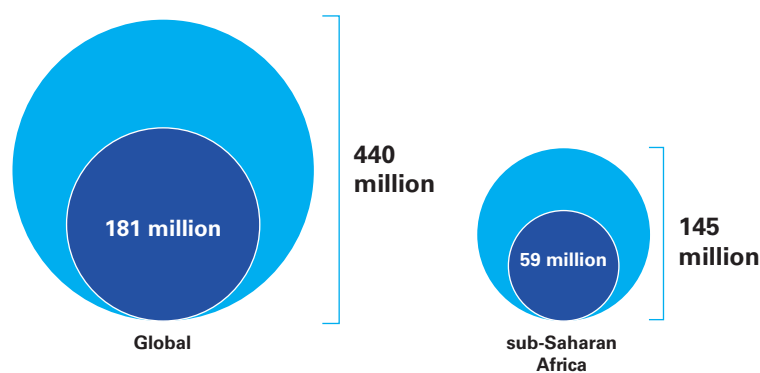
Figure 2.

Number of children living in child food poverty and severe child food poverty (in millions), globally and in sub-Saharan Africa, 2022

Source: UNICEF Child Nutrition Report 2024.

Globally,
440 million
children under 5 are living
in child food poverty,
of which
181 million
children under 5 are living
in severe child food poverty

- Severe child food poverty
≤2 food groups
- Total child food poverty
≤4 food groups



Poor feeding and care practices

undermine young children's diets. Harmful practices and beliefs about what young children should eat, combined with limited family support, compromise the quality of their diets. Discriminatory gender norms limit women's access to education and earning opportunities and deny mothers the autonomy to make decisions for their young children.

Household income poverty limits families' ability to afford nutritious diets for their children. Families living in extreme income poverty struggle to afford nutritious foods, particularly animal-source foods and fruits and vegetables. In households of lower-income countries, staple and junk foods are significantly more affordable than nutritious foods. As a result, full stomachs – not nutritious food – become a priority.

The forces that lead to severe child food poverty are often beyond the control of parents and families. These forces persist because food, health and social protection systems are failing to improve access to nutritious, safe, affordable and diverse foods

and equip families with the tools they need to feed their children.⁶

Food systems are failing to provide millions of families and young children with adequate access to nutritious, safe, affordable and diverse foods. At the same time, shops and markets are flooded with an overabundance of aggressively marketed ultra-processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages that are low in essential nutrients for children's growth and development and high in sugar, salt and unhealthy fats.

Health systems are failing to provide parents, families and communities with access to timely and quality information, counseling and support on child feeding, as they often lack the resources and capacity. Community and health workers are frequently overburdened, with limited training and support, and tend to focus more on curative services than preventive approaches to malnutrition. They often have inadequate training, supervision, accountabilities and remuneration to provide families with the information and support caregivers need to feed their young children a nutritious diet.

The forces that lead to severe child food poverty are often beyond the control of parents and families.

Social protection systems are failing to protect vulnerable children against malnutrition in early childhood. Without social protection, families are exposed to economic hardship, social exclusion and severe child food poverty. Where social protection programmes exist, they are often fragmented in scope, inadequate in coverage, inflexible to changing needs and disconnected from nutrition services.

The challenge ahead

Food systems are not only failing children – but also **our planet**. Globally, food systems account for one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, largely from agriculture and industrial meat production, but also from the carbon impacts of processing, packaging and transporting food, especially ultra-processed foods, which are associated with greater biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions and plastic pollution.

The resulting climate shocks – such as extreme heat, droughts and floods – along with biodiversity loss and damage to water, air and soil, have significantly reduced the quantity, diversity and quality of food available to children and families. This has increased food insecurity and nutritional poverty among vulnerable children, households and populations.⁷

The **food and beverage industry**, particularly large transnational corporations, plays a central role in driving avoidable malnutrition, ill health and environmental harm.⁸ Commercial actors prioritize profits over well-being, invading markets with ultra-processed foods high in fats, salt and sugar, which lack nutritional value, are associated with malnutrition, disease and mortality,⁹ and generate significant waste.¹⁰

Such **products**, including follow-up commercial milk formula, flavoured or sweetened milks, and commercially produced complementary foods¹¹ with high levels of added sugar and potentially

harmful additives, contribute to addictive eating habits and unhealthy diets among young children, while the resulting costs are borne by children, societies, governments and nations.

While many food industries are producing and marketing harmful foods for children and the planet, governments are failing to develop, adopt and enforce solid **policies and laws** to curb the supply and demand of those foods. As a result, the food environments where children live, learn and play are flooded with unhealthy/unsafe commercially produced complementary foods, ultra-processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages.

The unregulated marketing practices of some food industries contribute to increase the **demand** for and desirability of cheap, nutrient-poor ultra-processed foods and unhealthy complementary foods.

Fortunately, not all food and beverage companies are the same. The food and beverage industry is multifaceted and heterogeneous. Some companies align – or aspire to align – with a vision of food systems that provide nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable foods benefiting children and the planet.

The food and beverage industry can and must be a force for good, for all children, without exception. For this to happen, it is essential to address the structural drivers that perpetuate inadequate production models, weaken regulatory frameworks and hinder demand for locally-produced, nutritious foods.

This transformation will contribute to generating a system where food production is guided by more than profit margins, is increasingly localised, serves the needs of children, reduces negative impacts on the environment, and supports local and national economies.

New solutions for persistent challenges

A complex play of interacting factors, including unhealthy foods, poor food environments and harmful food practices is threatening the right of African children to adequate food and nutrition, as well as their right to a sustainable planet. Widespread severe child food poverty fuels malnutrition, undermining the growth and development of children and societies. Children are left behind by a broken food system that has turned its back on them.

The costs of inaction or inadequate action to address childhood stunting and its main drivers – including child food poverty – are high, especially in Africa. The World Bank has estimated an average income loss of 7 per cent of GDP per capita in countries with high levels of childhood stunting. In sub-Saharan Africa, the loss is even higher, estimated around 9–10 per cent of GDP per capita,¹²

representing a loss of at least US\$115 billion across all countries in the region.¹³

Innovative large-scale approaches combining food and nutrition priorities are needed to improve children's first foods, food environments and food practices. UNICEF is uniquely positioned to drive this transformation – in partnership with national governments, development partners and private sector leaders – and contribute to realizing the right to adequate food and nutrition for every child.

With this goal in mind, the UNICEF-led First Foods Africa initiative will support local production and consumption of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods for young children, particularly those who are most vulnerable to malnutrition: the youngest, the poorest and those left behind by development and impacted by humanitarian crises.



3. The initiative: First Foods Africa



Our vision

First Foods Africa is positioned to strengthen the capacity of African food systems to deliver nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods for young children, particularly the most vulnerable children.



Our goal

First Foods Africa aims to reduce child food poverty and malnutrition in young children through improved availability, affordability and access to nutritious first foods produced in Africa for African children.



Our actions

UNICEF First Foods Africa comprises six key actions that will be implemented across three pillars.



Our objectives

First Foods Africa has three main objectives:

- **Incentivize local production** of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods – in Africa, by Africa, and for Africa's young children under 5 years of age.
- **Strengthen policy environments** to protect, promote and support access to nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods by children in Africa.
- **Stimulate adequate consumption** of nutritious first foods through large-scale social marketing and social and behaviour change (SBC) programmes.

Table 1: The six key actions implemented by UNICEF First Foods Africa

PILLARS	ACTIONS
Incentivizing local production	Increase market availability and affordability of nutritious, safe, sustainable and appropriate first foods specifically designed for young children.
	Procure and effectively deliver nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods for vulnerable children in fragile and humanitarian settings in a timely manner.
Strengthening policy environments	Strengthen national and regional standards, laws and regulations for the formulation, promotion and distribution of first foods for young children.
	Strengthen social protection systems to increase access to nutritious first foods for young children from vulnerable, income-poor families.
Stimulating adequate consumption	Support social marketing actions to make locally-produced nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods desirable to families and communities.
	Support social and behaviour change to create positive social norms and help families feed their young children locally-produced nutritious first foods.

What are first foods?

Through all of its early childhood nutrition programmes, UNICEF promotes the consumption of fresh, locally available, nutritious foods – such as fruits, vegetables, legumes and animal-source foods – to prevent malnutrition and set children on the path to healthy growth and development. First foods are best introduced from six months of age, following a period of exclusive breastfeeding. First Foods Africa complements this approach by addressing specific gaps in young children's diets through incentivizing the local production and consumption of nutrient-dense, minimally-processed first foods.

First Foods Africa refers to these minimally-processed first foods as the complementary foods, food ingredients, food snacks and food supplements needed to address the specific gaps in the diets of children after

the initial six-month exclusive breastfeeding period, particularly among children at risk of food poverty in early childhood. They include nutrient-dense, age-appropriate, minimally-processed, sustainable, and adequately formulated complementary foods, which are essential for optimal growth and development. They also include food ingredients and nutritious food snacks that can complement children's portions of family meals and supplement children's diets by providing essential nutrients, supporting energy levels and promoting healthy eating habits between meals.

Finally, first foods also include food supplements, such as small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements (SQ-LNS) and multiple micronutrient powders (MNPs) that are needed when children cannot access a nutritious diet, including in food insecure, fragile and humanitarian contexts.^{14,15}

Table 2: Types of first foods supported by UNICEF through First Foods Africa

Complementary foods	Packaged nutritious and safe complementary foods comprising cereal grains, animal/plant source protein, vitamins and essential micronutrients for young children.
Food ingredients	Minimally-processed foods such as dried powders made of a single food (egg, fish, legumes, nuts, etc.) that can be added to home-prepared complementary foods and young children's portion of the family meal.
Food snacks	Nutrient-dense, safe, and palatable snacks that can be used as a complement to home-prepared foods for young children.
Food supplements	SQ-LNS to enrich home-prepared complementary foods with energy and essential micronutrients.
Micronutrient powders	MNPs containing essential micronutrients for home-based fortification of home-prepared foods for young children.

Our initial focus

First Foods Africa will initially be implemented in 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa with some of the most significant challenges in terms of child food poverty and malnutrition, and opportunities in terms of local production. These include seven countries in West and Central Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal; and seven countries in Eastern and Southern Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

In these frontrunner countries, First Foods Africa will create a small network of selected local producers of first foods who are committed to addressing child food poverty and meeting the nutrient needs of young children. Many other countries in Africa are also starting to engage based on needs and opportunities, and region-specific approaches to first foods will be developed in other regions beyond Africa.

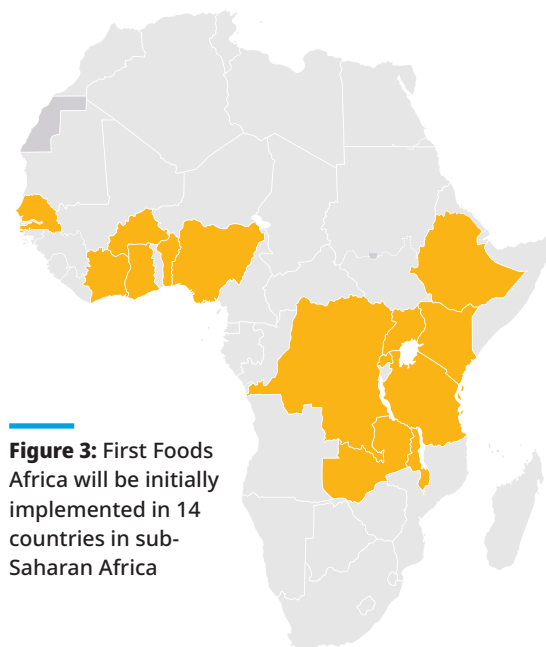


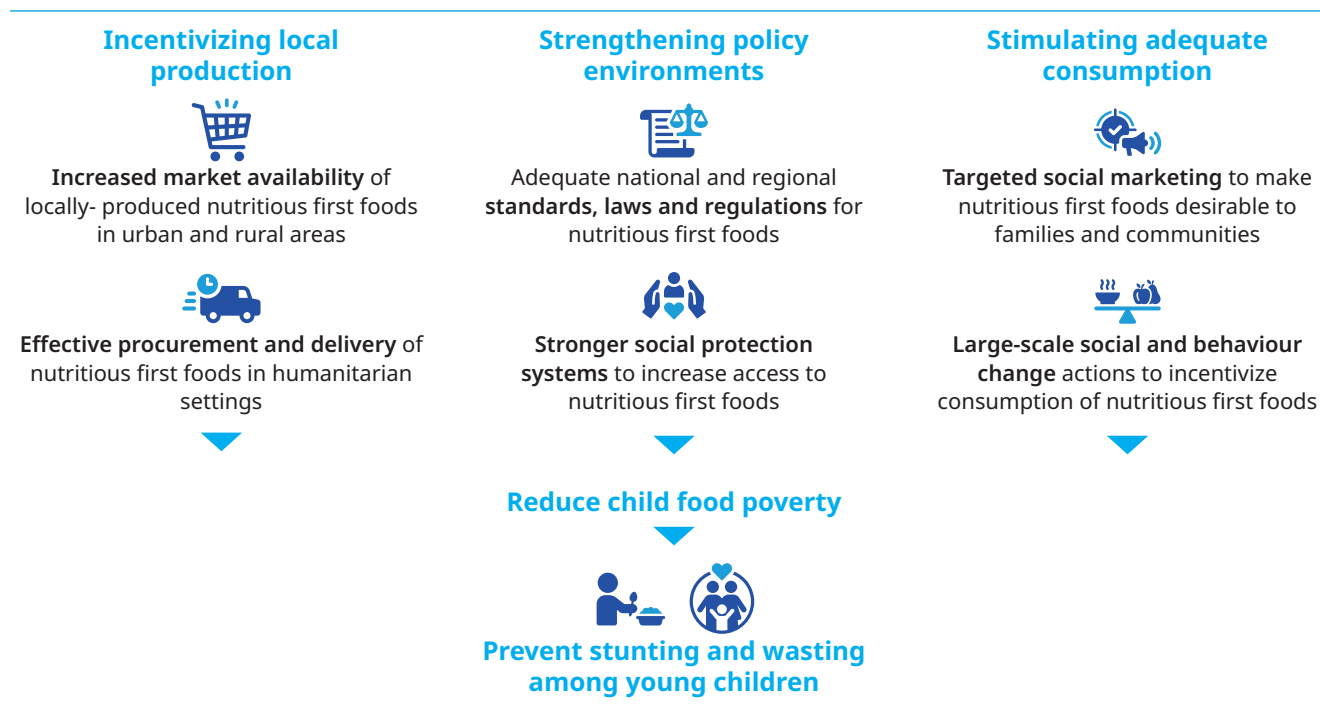
Figure 3: First Foods Africa will be initially implemented in 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa

Our action framework

UNICEF's First Foods Africa builds on the UNICEF Action Framework to Improve the Diets of Young Children During the Complementary Feeding Period,¹⁶ which outlines the three primary determinants of young children's diets – adequate foods, adequate nutrition practices and adequate nutrition services.

First Foods Africa aims to transform food systems to respond to children's specific nutritional needs, reduce child food poverty and prevent childhood stunting and wasting (Figure 4).

Figure 4: First Foods Africa – Logic model



Our impact on children

First Foods Africa aims to benefit all **all children under 5 years** in focus countries, bringing together public and private sector actors to change production priorities, policy frameworks, and consumption practices so that children receive the nutritious diets they need to grow and develop to their full potential.

First Foods Africa aims to contribute to ~10% per cent reduction in child food poverty in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030 – or 15 million fewer African children living in child food poverty. Addressing child food poverty will contribute to reducing child malnutrition in Africa and to reaching the SDG 2030 nutrition targets.

Our comparative advantage

UNICEF is well-positioned to support the development of local and regional markets for nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods, leveraging its expertise in policy, programmes, logistics, and supply chains for children's foods, and its unique role as a trusted adviser to national governments and regional institutions.

UNICEF will leverage its experience as a global player in the market of food supplements, and as the main global partner, buyer and supplier of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF). Over the years, UNICEF has intensified efforts to localize the production of RUTF, bringing it closer to children and countries in need, and to support the local sourcing of safe ingredients that comply with the highest food safety standards, like milk powder, vegetable oil, peanut butter and sugar.

UNICEF's unique expertise in strengthening national regulatory frameworks for children's

foods will help ensure a level playing field for private sector players in the first foods market, adhering to the highest safety and quality standards. Concurrently, UNICEF will leverage its experience with social protection systems, as well as its experience in humanitarian response, to provide vulnerable families with adequate social transfers, increasing young children's access to nutritious complementary foods.

Finally, UNICEF will use its expertise in social behaviour change to boost the desirability and demand for locally-produced nutritious foods, thereby expanding markets, benefiting local businesses and strengthening national economies.

Our funding needs

The resources needed to deliver First Foods Africa include programmatic costs to implement activities across the three pillars, and capital investment to incentivize African companies to produce nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods.

Programmatic costs in 14 countries in Africa have been estimated at about US\$250 million. Initial investment costs have been estimated at US\$50 million. The total cost of First Foods Africa is US\$300 million or an estimated average of about US\$20 million per country.

The **Child Nutrition Fund (CNF)** will be a key financial instrument to support UNICEF First Foods Africa. The CNF will incentivize investments in medium-to-large African companies that are aligned with UNICEF criteria for engaging with the food industry. The CNF will facilitate financial access to funding for the technical support and programme actions needed to implement the initiative across its three pillars.

4. The children we want to reach

First Foods Africa seeks a sustainable transformation of food systems that will benefit **all children under 5 years of age** in a phased manner across the African continent.

First Foods Africa will enhance the availability and affordability of nutritious first foods, ensuring that they are specifically formulated to meet the unique nutritional needs of children, while adhering to the highest safety and quality standards that will be gradually adopted by regional and national authorities.

A multi-pronged approach will ensure that nutritious and safe first foods reach all children, regardless of their economic situation or the context in which they live:

- **Families not living in income poverty** will benefit from increased availability and affordability of nutritious first foods through sustainable market-based approaches.

- **Families living in income poverty** will benefit from increased affordability of nutritious first foods and from improved social protection programmes that will bridge access gaps to nutritious first foods.
- **Families living in humanitarian settings** will be reached with emergency programmes delivering nutritious first foods to the most vulnerable children.

First Foods Africa will primarily target children living in severe food poverty and at high risk of malnutrition and poor growth and development,¹⁷ prioritizing investment for:

- The **youngest** – children 6 to 23 months of age
- The **poorest** – children belonging to income-poor families
- The **most vulnerable** – children living in fragile contexts¹⁸ and humanitarian settings.¹⁹

A multi-pronged approach will ensure that nutritious and safe first foods reach all children, regardless of their economic situation or the context in which they live.



Table 3 summarizes the number of children that will be reached by First Foods Africa.

Table 3: Number of children reached by the First Foods Africa
Six key actions

	Regulatory frameworks and social marketing	Market affordability and behaviour change	Strengthened social protection systems	Direct local procurement and effective delivery
Countries	Children under 5 years	Children under 5 in child food poverty and access to markets	Children under 5 in child food poverty and income poverty	Children under 5 in severe food poverty in fragile and humanitarian settings
West and Central Africa				
Benin	2,173,104	902,221	550,483	81,036
Burkina Faso	3,610,877	1,554,161	1,013,104	117,978
Côte d'Ivoire	4,262,981	1,623,907	1,020,162	136,075
Democratic Republic of the Congo	18,199,988	8,201,427	5,322,289	630,558
Ghana	4,327,554	1,701,460	1,084,250	137,451
Nigeria	35,377,688	12,968,315	7,926,760	1,160,051
Senegal	2,611,432	1,119,821	685,610	99,794
Subtotal	70,563,624	28,071,312	17,602,658	2,362,943
Eastern and Southern Africa				
Ethiopia	18,181,829	8,367,362	4,770,526	863,131
Kenya	6,958,268	2,335,960	1,711,009	114,566
Malawi	3,086,309	1,357,938	951,887	80,851
Rwanda	1,913,732	667,913	514,859	24,212
Uganda	7,868,838	3,617,089	2,587,986	197,867
United Republic of Tanzania	10,757,653	4,649,301	3,364,212	241,769
Zambia	3,124,568	1,276,692	895,166	75,937
Subtotal	51,891,197	22,272,255	14,795,645	1,598,333
Totals	122,454,821	50,343,567	32,398,303	3,961,276

5. Our strategic approach

To transform food systems, decisions about what food is produced and promoted need to be guided by nutrition, health, protection, environment and human rights principles and standards, for which governments are primarily responsible through policy and legislation, normative guidance and regulatory frameworks, as per UNICEF Programme Guidance on Engaging with the Food and Beverage Industry.²⁰

Through First Foods Africa, UNICEF will collaborate with regional and national authorities to strengthen food regulatory frameworks and food standards for young children, improve access to nutritious foods through social protection programmes and humanitarian response, and enhance consumption of locally-produced first foods through social marketing actions and SBC approaches.

UNICEF will also leverage the private sector – for the first time at this scale – to address young children’s unique nutritional needs. Interventions will be delivered across the three pillars of First Foods Africa: incentivizing local production, shaping policy environments and stimulating adequate consumption.

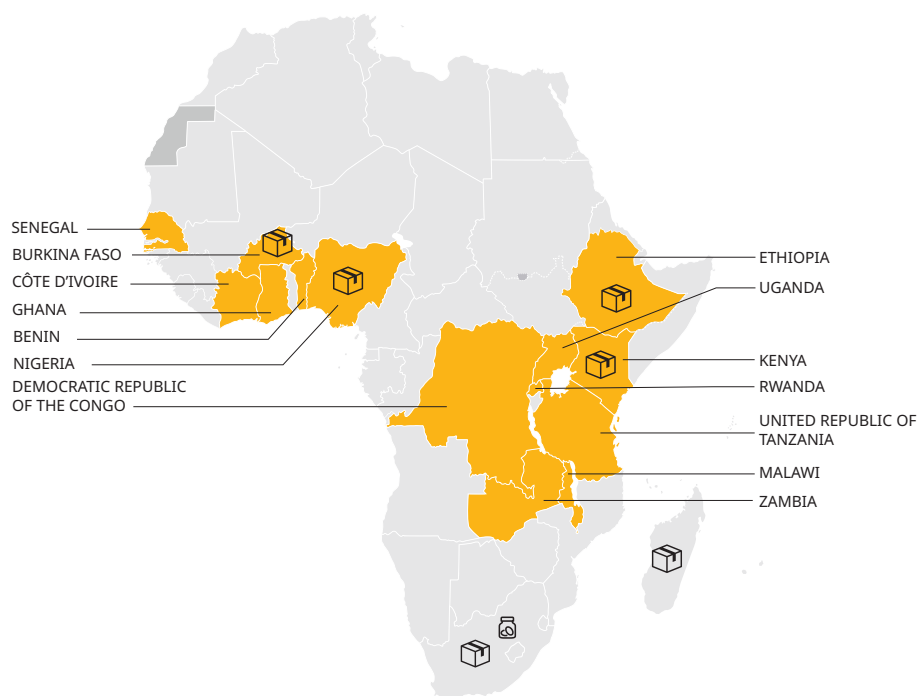
Pillar 1: Incentivize local production of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods.

The first pillar of First Foods Africa aims at improving availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods in markets across sub-Saharan Africa. It also aims to reach the most vulnerable children living in



The first pillar of First Foods Africa aims at improving availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods in markets across sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 5: Map of companies producing RUTF in sub-Saharan Africa and First Foods Africa countries



fragile and humanitarian settings with direct procurement and effective delivery (by governments, UN agencies and NGO partners) of nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods.

1.1. Increase market availability and affordability of nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods.

UNICEF will engage national authorities and regional institutions to establish a supportive policy environment for the local production and regional trade of first foods for young children.

Together with partners, UNICEF will strengthen the capacities of medium-to-large African food companies to produce nutritious first foods, by promoting entrepreneurship, facilitating access to finance and providing technical support.

UNICEF will focus on companies that can supply national and regional markets, while smaller companies and cooperatives may be engaged within the local supply chain and in collaboration with agri-food initiatives led by key partners such as IFAD and FAO.

1.1.1. Strengthen the network of local producers of nutritious first foods in Africa.

UNICEF has enabled the development of a network of 6 local producers of RUTF and SQ-LNS in 6 countries in Africa and is also assisting local producers of MNPs. This network will be further strengthened to expand coverage and increase the sourcing of food ingredients from local markets, including milk, whey and soy powders, vegetable oil, peanuts, chickpeas, groundnuts and other food items.

Concurrently, UNICEF will support selected medium-to-large African food companies on the production of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable complementary foods, food ingredients and healthy snacks.

Companies will be selected based on financial viability, product portfolio (quality, affordability, adequacy to children's needs), local sourcing of raw materials, environmental impact, business practices, gender equity and youth engagement. UNICEF will not engage with companies whose profits are predominantly from ultra-processed foods. Inclusion and exclusion criteria will be in accordance with [UNICEF Guidance on Engaging with the Food and Beverage Industry](#).

A new network of selected African food companies will be established to enhance the market availability and affordability of nutritious first foods that meet the unique nutritional needs of young children while complying with the highest quality standard. This network will complement the existing LNS and MNP producers' networks and expand the local supplier base for families, governments, UNICEF and partners.

1.1.2. Promote an enabling policy environment to incentivize local production.

First Foods Africa will work with the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, national governments, and relevant partners to establish a supportive policy environment for local production and regional trade of nutritious first foods and attract private investments all along the value chains.

First Foods Africa will promote trade, fiscal and regulatory policies that support local producers meeting nutrition, environmental and health standards, while fostering gender equity and youth involvement. Removing fiscal barriers and offering incentives will create a favourable playing field for local producers.

1.1.3. Build the technical capacity of eligible companies as appropriate.

Selected medium-to-large African companies will receive targeted support to reformulate first foods using locally available, nutrient-dense ingredients from missing food groups in children's diets, creating low-cost, sustainable, culturally appropriate options across diverse African contexts. Support will cover product development, food quality systems, regional trade and sourcing ingredients from local supply chains.

1.1.4. Provide innovative financing support – access to financing, loans, credit to eligible selected suppliers.

Several medium-to-large African manufacturers of first foods are too large for grants and seed funding but ineligible for traditional commercial banks or development institutions. Perceived risk and lack of

investment readiness hinder their access to necessary financing.

First Foods Africa will provide this missing middle with an adapted investment vehicle to increase the availability of concessional loans and expert technical assistance, in partnership with UNCDF and financial institutions and via expansion of the Child Nutrition Fund (*Chapter 7*).

1.2. Procure and effectively deliver nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods for vulnerable children in fragile and humanitarian settings in a timely manner.

More than 51 million children living in severe child food poverty in sub-Saharan Africa live in fragile and humanitarian settings, or in high-risk contexts with poor nutrition and socioeconomic indicators, with no access to diverse, nutrient-dense foods at home. Almost half of them belong to income-poor families.

First Foods Africa will support procurement in Africa of the first foods needed by African children in fragile, humanitarian, and high-risk contexts, and distribute them as part of a broader set of comprehensive interventions for nutrition in emergencies and in high-risk contexts.²¹

First Foods Africa will strengthen the emergency response across selected countries to ensure that access to nutritious diets remains possible for all children, and that food assistance meets the specific nutritional requirements of young children and is issued from national and regional markets.

1.2.1. Procure and distribute locally-produced food supplements - SQ-LNS and MNPs.

Established suppliers in sub-Saharan Africa will be engaged to gradually meet the SQ-LNS and MNPs needs in fragile and humanitarian settings and in high-risk contexts to prevent malnutrition. UNICEF will use the Child Nutrition Fund to procure SQ-LNS and MNPs, generating match funding from local governments.

SQ-LNS and MNPs suppliers will also be supported through the First Foods Africa's Innovative Financing to access adequate loans and credits to purchase or renovate equipment to meet the increased demand.

1.2.2. Procure and distribute locally-produced complementary foods, food ingredients and nutritious food snacks.

UNICEF with its partners – especially UNCDF and WFP – will also work on the identification of existing complementary foods and food ingredients and the development of new formulations in Africa, by African companies, that are suitable for distribution in fragile and humanitarian settings and high-risk contexts.

Selected, suitable food companies will also be supported through the First Foods Africa's Innovative Financing to access adequate loans and credit to increase the production of first foods for fragile and humanitarian settings, and in high-risk contexts.

BOX 1

Gender and Youth: How First Foods Africa will contribute to youth employment and gender

Empowering women. First Foods Africa seeks to empower women and enhance their role in the food sector. UNICEF will prioritize working with companies that enforce gender equity and include women in managerial positions. First Foods Africa will create opportunities for women in leadership roles and promote gender equality via training, mentorship and financial resources tailored to women.

Developing the skills and potential of young people. First Foods Africa will foster entrepreneurial skills among Africa's youth in the food sector, including by evaluating their needs, building their expertise and helping them implement their ideas. UNICEF will prioritize partnerships with African companies that employ young people and involve them in developing innovative solutions for nutritious foods.

Pillar 2: Strengthen policy environments to protect, promote and support children's access to nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods.

Through its second pillar, First Foods Africa aims to work with national authorities and regional institutions to strengthen standards, laws and regulations on the formulation and promotion of foods for young children, to improve their nutritional quality, and to regulate supply and marketing of unhealthy products.

First Foods Africa also seeks to strengthen social protection systems by embedding nutrition in national social protection policies, providing cash or food vouchers, and subsidizing the cost of nutritious foods to increase access for income-poor families, and for those living in fragile and humanitarian settings.

2.1. Strengthen national and regional standards, laws and regulations for the formulation and promotion of first foods for young children.

First Foods Africa will contribute to improve existing – and develop new – national and regional standards, laws, and regulations for complementary feeding as well as commercially produced complementary foods, in line with global guidance and latest evidence. It will also address national and regional regulations on labelling, marketing and taxation of unhealthy, cheap, ultra-processed foods consumed in Africa.

Strengthened, harmonized regulatory frameworks will contribute to creating an equal playing field for all the stakeholders working on the value chain of nutritious, affordable, sustainable first foods and will protect children from harmful commercial practices that promote the consumption of unhealthy and unregulated commercially produced complementary foods, and cheap, unhealthy ultra-processed foods.

2.1.1. Develop national guidelines on complementary feeding.

First Foods Africa will support governments to develop national guidelines on complementary feeding that are aligned with the updated WHO Guideline for Complementary Feeding to help with the promotion and use of nutritious first foods and address the local drivers of child food poverty.

2.1.2. Establish standards on the safety, quality and composition of first foods.

First Foods Africa will contribute to establishing context-specific regional and national standards on the safety, quality and composition of commercially produced complementary foods, based on latest WHO guidance, relevant Codex Alimentarius standards and global best practice.

These will help determine which products are appropriate to be marketed as suitable for this age group as part of the requirements set out in WHO Guidance on the Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children (contained in World Health Assembly resolution 69.9).

2.1.3. Implement legal and policy guidance for regulation of commercially produced complementary foods.

UNICEF in collaboration with WHO and FAO will work with regional institutions and national authorities to improve and implement legal measures based on the quality, safety, composition and labelling standards developed for commercially produced complementary foods.

Legal and policy guidance will be based on the requirements set out in relevant Codex Alimentarius standards, the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions, including the WHO Guidance on Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children contained in World Health Assembly resolution 69.9.

2.1.4. Establish national and regional frameworks for improved food laws and regulations.

Since many foods marketed at older children or adults are commonly fed to infants and young children, First Foods Africa will collaborate with national authorities and regional institutions to develop consistent regulatory frameworks that encompass fiscal policies, marketing restrictions and nutrition labelling. The fiscal policies advocated by the initiative involve taxing ultra-processed foods and beverages, eliminating incentives for ingredients used in ultra-processed foods and beverages, and redirecting incentives toward locally-produced nutritious and safe foods.

In these endeavors, UNICEF will work with governments and relevant regional institutions, including the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Southern African Development Community, the East African Community and other relevant regional entities.

BOX 2

First Foods Africa and the Climate Crisis: Good for Children, Good for the Planet

The climate crisis threatens to worsen child food poverty and slow or reverse global progress on ending child malnutrition. In sub-Saharan Africa, an additional 10 million children are projected to suffer stunting by 2050 as a result of climate change. At the same time, unsustainable food systems are driving environmental degradation and climate change.

First Foods Africa is a signature initiative within the UNICEF Agenda for Child Nutrition and Climate Action. It will contribute to mitigation efforts by strengthening regulations that protect children and the planet, incentivizing local production and providing a sustainable alternative to ultra-processed foods, which are linked to biodiversity loss, greenhouse gases and plastic pollution. It will also contribute to adaptation as an innovative intervention to protect vulnerable children from the impacts of climate change.

These features make First Foods Africa an innovative and compelling bankable initiative under climate financing streams. With increasing strain on international nutrition budgets and growing calls for new financing mechanisms for nutrition, climate financing offers an opportunity to finance First Foods Africa.

2.2 Strengthen social protection systems to increase access to nutritious first foods by income-poor families.

The social protection system can improve child nutrition, particularly for the poorest children.²² First Foods Africa will strengthen nutrition-responsive social transfers, such as cash transfers, food vouchers and food transfers, to improve access to nutritious foods for infants and young children from low-income families.

Establishing synergies between social protection systems and the local production of nutritious first foods will improve access to healthy diets, transform food systems and develop local economies.

2.2.1. Leverage social transfers to increase access to nutritious first foods for the poorest children.

First Foods Africa will engage national authorities to incorporate locally-produced first foods in social programmes to reach vulnerable young children. The initiative will ensure that first foods are available for purchase in local retails, with the help of cash or vouchers. In locations where first foods are not available, social programmes will directly deliver them as food transfers.

Depending on the context, UNICEF promotes the coordination of different social transfer modalities converged with nutrition counselling.

When government resources are scarce and cannot subsidize the cost of nutritious first foods, First Foods Africa will advocate for sustainable financing from financial partners such as the World Bank, to incrementally expand nutrition-sensitive social protection towards universal coverage.

2.2.2. Strengthen social protection to increase access to nutritious first foods in humanitarian settings.

In humanitarian and fragile contexts, particularly those marked by food and nutrition insecurity, food transfers will be necessary to complement cash transfers. Here, UNICEF will facilitate the procurement of nutritious first foods from African companies supported by First Foods Africa.

Where local procurement of nutritious first foods by governments is not possible, UNICEF, WFP and other partners will directly procure supplies, channeling them through national social protection programmes.



Establishing synergies between social protection systems and the local production of nutritious first foods will improve access to nutritious and safe diets, transform food systems and develop local economies.

Pillar 3. Stimulating consumption of nutritious first foods through large-scale social marketing and social and behaviour change programmes.

In collaboration with partners, UNICEF will develop social marketing strategies to increase demand for locally-produced, nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods and make them desirable to families.

Context-specific SBC strategies will be developed, based on national food and feeding guidelines, to promote optimal food practices and overcome barriers to providing nutritious diets to young children. SBC actions will be delivered through various systems, including the health system, where community and health workers will be engaged in implementing the [UNICEF community counselling package](#) for infant and young child feeding.

3.1. Support the development of social marketing strategies to reach families and communities.

First Foods Africa will use social marketing to boost demand for locally-produced nutritious first foods, positioning them as desirable and aspirational for families, through media campaigns, influencer engagement and interactive tools. Choice architecture and behavioural nudges will be used to guide families toward healthier choices.

3.1.1. Develop and scale up social marketing interventions with caregivers and children to improve diets.

First Foods Africa will use targeted social marketing to shape caregiver preferences and behaviours, creating demand for locally-produced, nutritious first foods. These efforts will make such foods desirable and aspirational through positioning, branding and culturally resonant promotions.

Campaigns will leverage mass media, including radio, TV, social media and mobile messaging, alongside endorsements from

influencers, celebrities and community leaders. Engaging content like videos, jingles and animated stories featuring local characters will build emotional connections with caregivers and children. Interactive tools, such as games and stories, will further encourage healthy behaviours in young children.

3.1.2. Develop and scale up social marketing initiatives with retailers to promote first foods.

First Foods Africa will also work with retailers to ensure that locally-produced nutritious first foods are available, well-positioned and adequately marketed and promoted in local shops and markets.

Strategies will focus on the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion, and packaging) and include point-of-sale promotions like choice architecture to make locally-produced nutritious options more visible and appealing. UNICEF will also introduce incentives, such as educational toys or books, to encourage locally-produced nutritious and safe choices while supporting early childhood development.

3.1.3. Engage communities in social marketing interventions to promote nutritious first foods.

Through collaboration with local authorities and civil society, First Foods Africa will organize events such as farmers' markets, health fairs, and village gatherings to promote healthy eating and showcase locally-produced nutritious first foods to raise awareness and inspire community advocacy for better nutrition.

By actively involving communities in identifying culturally preferred foods through participatory assessments, the initiative will ensure that promoted first foods align with local culinary traditions.

3.1.4. Use multiple channels and influencers in social marketing to promote nutritious first foods.

First Foods Africa will collaborate with national and international influencers, celebrities and community leaders to

BOX 3**Leveraging community health and nutrition workers' entrepreneurship**

Community health and nutrition workers, deeply embedded in their communities and often serving on a voluntary basis, earn invaluable trust. By empowering them through entrepreneurship, First Foods Africa can unlock their potential as agents of change. Their intimate knowledge of local needs guides the development of locally driven solutions, for example the transformation of food systems to better meet young children's nutritional requirements.

Initiatives such as small-scale food processing units, built upon existing community gardens or agricultural fields, offer not only sustainable food access but also dignified employment for community workers, especially young women. The community cadres may also engage in First Foods Africa as vendors of the locally produced first foods. These efforts play a critical role in combating child malnutrition while improving food security and fostering the use of locally-produced nutritious foods to feed young children across entire communities, creating a virtuous cycle of empowerment, innovation, and sustainable transformation that benefits all.

promote locally-produced nutritious first foods.

UNICEF and its partners will engage nutrition champions and goodwill ambassadors to advocate for nutritious and safe foods and feeding practices, leveraging social media's reach, even in rural areas. Campaigns will use diverse media platforms, including social media, apps and mobile-friendly websites, featuring local characters and mascots to deliver culturally resonant messages that encourage positive food choices.

3.2. Use social and behaviour change to address social norms and help caregivers and families feed their infants and young children locally-produced nutritious first foods.

First Foods Africa seeks to transform social norms and foster a culture that values feeding young children locally-produced, nutritious first foods. Health and early education systems will play a key role, engaging caregivers and families through trusted community interactions.

SBC strategies will address misconceptions about child nutrition and empower families to make informed choices, emphasizing animal-source foods, legumes, fruits and vegetables, as well as other locally produced complementary foods, ingredients and snacks. The initiative will integrate SBC principles into service delivery, policies and early childhood curricula.

3.2.1. Support the design and implementation of context-specific social and behaviour change initiatives to incentivize consumption of locally-produced first foods and create positive social norms.

First Foods Africa will engage caregivers and families through

culturally resonant strategies that tap into their emotions, aspirations and values. The initiative will foster pride in locally-produced first foods and address gender norms limiting women's autonomy in nutritional decisions. Community ownership will be strengthened through partnerships with local leaders, focus groups and advocacy campaigns.

An Africa-wide SBC campaign will celebrate cultural heritage with recipes, cooking shows and food festivals, supported by leaders, influencers and farmers.

3.2.2. Engage community, health and nutrition workers, and preschool teachers, in providing quality counselling, education and support on child feeding to caregivers, families and young children.

First Foods Africa will address the lack of support for caregivers by strengthening health systems to deliver effective infant and young child feeding (IYCF) counselling. The UNICEF Community IYCF Counselling Package and other tailored resources will equip health and nutrition workers to provide better guidance. Health workers will be trained in communication skills to deliver effective support and guide caregivers on how to introduce the best available first foods for children, while also advocating for improved access to diverse, nutrient-rich options.

Recognizing the early years as critical for shaping food preferences, the initiative will collaborate with pre-schools by engaging teachers and staff to develop age-appropriate activities that encourage nutritious food choices while discouraging ultra-processed foods. First Foods Africa will also work with school vendors and local farmers to ensure pre-schools offer nutritious first foods.

6. Partnerships

First Foods Africa will engage public authorities, African companies, technical agencies, development partners and financial institutions to generate a sustainable transformation of Africa's food systems for children.

National governments, regional and continental institutions

'First Foods Africa is guided by the African Union Vision 2063 for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. The food systems transformation envisioned by First Foods Africa relies on meaningful changes in public policies. National authorities, regional economic communities and the African Union will play a central role in driving this transformation by strengthening the policy environment to incentivize local production and consumption of nutritious first foods, and by adopting legally binding frameworks to curb the supply and demand of unhealthy, commercially produced complementary foods and ultra-processed foods.

Medium- to large-scale African-owned companies

The private sector can and must be a force for good contributing to the positive transformation of global and local food systems for the greater benefit of children. First Foods Africa will engage African companies who are committed to joining forces to end child food poverty and malnutrition in Africa. First Foods Africa will adopt a transparent process to select suitable companies, excluding those that violate the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, or those whose core business is ultra-processed foods, in alignment with the [UNICEF Guidance on Engaging with the Food and Beverage Industry](#).

Companies supported by the initiative operate at a national or regional scale, including medium-sized companies (50 to 250 employees, established teams

and structured operations) and large companies (more than 250 employees, complex organizational structures and significant market presence).

All companies engaged by the initiative should be registered with national authorities and adhere to the highest food safety and quality standards. First Foods Africa will work with companies at an early stage (when they are still defining their products, entering new markets, or solidifying their business models) and at a growth stage (with established and new products, scaling their business, optimizing efficiencies and expanding market reach).

Specialized UN agencies

First Foods Africa will engage other key UN agencies, including:

- **FAO** for enhancing agrifood policies, supporting local production of ingredients, environmental policies and reviewing Codex standards.
- **IFAD** for investments in production and value chains of first foods, climate-friendly practices, and supporting smallholder farmers.
- **UNCDF** for increasing African companies' access to financial capital to enable local production of safe, nutritious first foods.
- **UNIDO** for promoting and accelerating inclusive and sustainable supply chains, industrial development and regional trade
- **World Bank Group** for supporting national social programmes that facilitate access by vulnerable families with young children to nutritious first foods produced by African companies.
- **WFP** for the procurement, distribution and promotion of first foods for children affected by severe fragility and humanitarian crises.
- **WHO** for strengthening national and regional standards, laws and regulations on complementary foods and all foods generally consumed by young children.

**First Foods Africa
will engage African
companies who are
committed to end
child food poverty
and malnutrition
in Africa.**



Academia and civil society organizations

First Foods Africa will engage academia and civil society organizations:

- **National and international universities and research institutions** for assessments of existing products, companies and consumers' preferences related to first foods and feeding practices, and policy development and programme design.
- **National and international civil society organizations** for implementing interventions related to incentivizing local production, shaping policies and stimulating consumption of first foods.

Development partners and financial institutions

The resources needed to deliver First Foods Africa include programmatic costs to implement the activities across the three pillars, and capital investment to incentivize African companies to produce nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods.

Programmatic costs will be covered through contributions from development partners in the nutrition, food, health, and climate funding streams. Capital investment will be mobilized from financial institutions, development banks and social impact investors through innovative financing for children. Emergency financing will also be key for direct local procurement of adequate food supplements and delivery in fragile contexts and humanitarian settings.

The Child Nutrition Fund (CNF) will be a key financial instrument to support First Foods Africa. The CNF will incentivize investments in medium-to-large African companies that are aligned with UNICEF criteria for engaging with the food industry. The CNF will facilitate financial access to funding for the technical support and programme actions needed to implement First Foods Africa across its three pillars.

A steering committee comprising technical and financial partners with expertise in the local production of nutritious foods will also be established to guide implementation of the initiative.

7. Financing

UNICEF aims to work primarily with **national and local governments** and a selected number of **medium-to-large African food companies** with national and regional reach who are committed to end child food poverty and malnutrition in Africa. The Child Nutrition Fund (CNF) will be a key financial instrument to support First Foods Africa. Financing partners may also include regional and global banks and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and African Development Bank.

Strengthening policy environments and stimulating consumption

The CNF will facilitate access to funding for the technical support and programme actions needed to implement First Foods Africa across its three pillars. It will do so by mobilizing its growing finance partners and donors to support UNICEF's work to shape policy environments and stimulate consumption of first foods, relying primarily on its Programme Window and Match Window.

- **Through the Programme Window**, the CNF is already supporting programmable grants to countries facing unique opportunities

to improve children's diets by improving their national policy environment. The CNF is supporting such work by providing programmable grants to carry out market assessments, to engage national governments on normative guidelines and policies, and to support technical assistance, advocacy, communication, and monitoring.

- **Through the Match Window**, the CNF will match domestic resources allocated to the procurement of some of the first foods. The CNF is already in a position to offer national and subnational governments match funding for small-supplements, including SQ-LNS, and there are a number of ongoing discussions with national countries in Africa to match their domestic contributions.

In addition to the support provided through the CNF, UNICEF will build on its existing work on child nutrition and social protection to ensure that, wherever possible, health and social protection systems support vulnerable households in these countries to access first foods.



The Child Nutrition Fund will help stakeholders prioritize investments that protect and promote children's right to food and nutrition, incentivizing local production of nutritious first foods for young children.

UNICEF will partner with the World Bank and other international development partners to support governments in strengthening social protection policies and programmes to reach the poorest families with social transfers that integrate nutritious first foods.

To reach the most vulnerable children living in fragile and humanitarian settings, UNICEF will work closely with key humanitarian actors, including the Committee on World Food Security, the Global Network Against Food Crisis and the Global Nutrition Cluster to ensure that sustainable initiatives such as First Foods Africa are prioritized in the financing of the emergency response to food and nutrition crises.

Incentivizing local production

The CNF will also support the First Foods Africa agenda by incentivizing investments in medium-to-large African companies that are aligned with UNICEF's criteria for engaging with the food industry. To do so, the CNF will make use of existing and new financing instruments available through its Supplier Window.

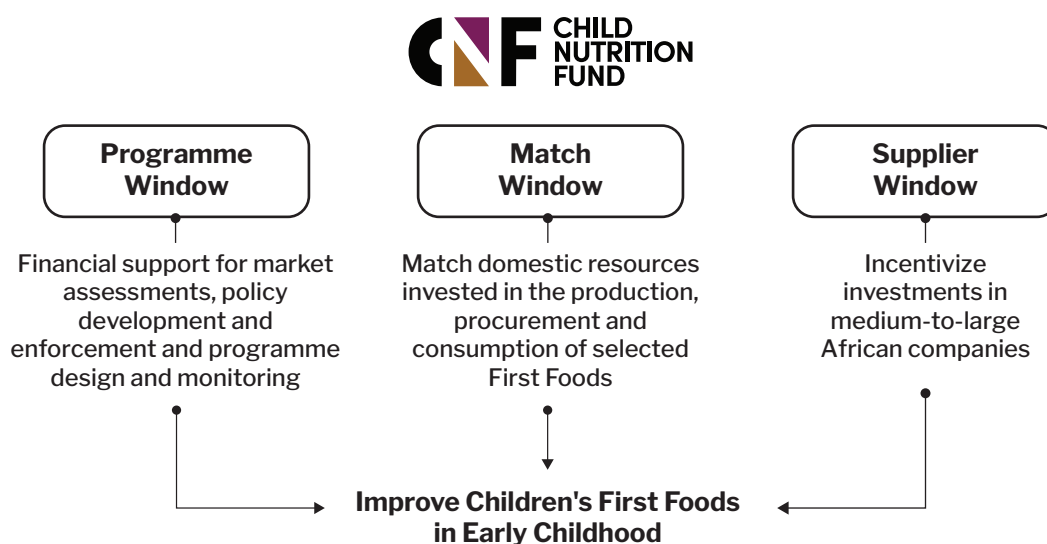
- **Existing financing instruments**, include the UNICEF-UNCDF partnership to invest in the manufacturing of nutritious foods for children in Africa, which aims to boost the availability of essential supplies for the prevention, detection and treatment of child malnutrition by investing in local manufacturing capacity. The US\$5 million facility, operated by UNCDF, will focus on least developed countries as well as lower-middle income economies in sub-Saharan Africa.

- **New financing instruments** are expected to include different modalities:

- * **New partnerships with UNCDF** to bring a new asset manager capable of pooling together a diverse range of investors in first food manufacturing in Africa.
- * **New partnerships with multilateral development banks**, such as the European Investment Bank, to establish an investment mechanism capable of mobilizing capital expenditure and/or volume guarantees for nutrition commodities, including first foods.
- * **A new supplier financing facility** is being developed to attract investment from development finance institutions and private impact investors. It will provide access to de-risking capital and support manufacturers producing nutritious first foods in Africa. The facility will use grants from public donors and private foundations to catalyze additional investment and will include a technical assistance component focused on regulatory and policy frameworks, safety and quality standards, and production ecosystems.

The Child Nutrition Fund will help stakeholders prioritize investments that protect children's right to food and nutrition, contributing to prevent all forms of malnutrition by incentivizing local production of nutritious first foods for young children, in line with UNICEF principles on engaging with the food and beverage industry.

Figure 6: Child Nutrition Fund support for First Foods Africa.



8. Costs and benefits

First Foods Africa seeks a sustainable transformation of food systems that will benefit the 122 million children under five years living in the 14 countries that will be initially reached by the initiative.

The package of interventions proposed has a cost of USD 250 million in those countries.

US\$100 million (40 per cent of the programme costs) will ensure direct local procurement and effective delivery of nutritious first foods and food supplements (SQ LNS and MNPs) to about 4 million children under 2 years of age living in severe child food poverty in fragile and humanitarian contexts, for a cost of about US\$25 per child.

US\$42 million (17 per cent of the programme costs) will ensure strengthening social protection programmes to reach 32 million children under 5 years of age living in child food poverty and income poverty. Support will include direct contribution to social policies budgets and advocacy for public procurement and leveraging contributions by international partners, for a cost of about US\$1.3 per child.

US\$36 million (15 per cent of the programme costs) will ensure increased market availability

and affordability of nutritious first foods for over 50 million children under 5 years of age living in child food poverty who belong to non-income-poor families, for a cost of about US\$0.7 per child. An additional investment of about US\$50 million will be unlocked by First Foods Africa to local medium-to-large African companies to boost the business of nutritious first foods.

US\$27 million (11 per cent of the programme costs) will ensure strengthened regional and national standards, laws and regulations to regulate the supply and marketing of unhealthy commercially produced complementary foods and ultra-processed foods high in fats, salt, and sugar. This will benefit the entire population of over 122 million children under 5 years of age in sub-Saharan Africa.

US\$27 million (11 per cent of the programme costs) and US\$19 million (7 per cent of the programme costs) will ensure implementation of context-specific, tailored social marketing and SBC interventions, benefiting all children under 5 years of age, as interventions will be adapted based on their conditions.

Benefits of First Foods Africa



4 million children

under 2 years of age in severe child food poverty in fragile and humanitarian settings reached with **direct local procurement and delivery of nutrition first foods.**



32 million children

under 5 years of age living in child food poverty and income poverty reached with **strengthened social protection** to increase access to nutritious first foods.



50 million children

under 5 years of age living in child food poverty in non-income-poor families reached with **improved market availability and affordability** of nutritious first foods.



122 million children

under 5 years of age benefiting from **improved regulatory frameworks** that disincentivize unhealthy foods and incentivize locally-produced nutritious first foods.

Table 4 shows the costs for each of the six key actions of First Foods Africa across the 14 countries

By incentivizing local production, shaping policy environments, and stimulating adequate demand of nutritious first foods, First Foods Africa aims to achieve a 20 per cent **reduction in child food poverty** in sub-Saharan Africa and 35 million fewer children living in child food poverty by 2030.

The total cost of implementing the First Foods Africa Initiative also includes an additional initial investment cost of about US\$50 million, or US\$3.5 million per country, as capital investment to incentivize local production of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods.

Table 4: Cost (in USD) of delivering the six key actions of First Foods Africa

Countries	Incentivizing local production		Shaping policy environments		Stimulating adequate consumption		Grand total
	Market availability and affordability	Direct local procurement and effective delivery	Enhanced regulatory frameworks	Strengthened social protection programmes	Social marketing actions	Social and behaviour change interventions	
West and Central Africa							137,097,635
Benin	2,381,665	2,933,410	1,789,742	889,232	1,740,264	1,224,138	10,958,451
Burkina Faso	2,430,333	3,693,641	1,824,472	1,450,475	1,780,129	1,251,522	12,430,572
Côte d'Ivoire	2,412,783	4,057,607	1,816,538	1,460,286	1,762,892	1,244,516	12,754,622
Democratic Republic of the Congo	3,289,630	14,198,341	2,396,757	6,697,592	2,509,516	1,709,442	30,801,278
Ghana	2,453,934	4,089,690	1,840,466	1,538,153	1,799,991	1,264,271	12,986,505
Nigeria	3,570,360	24,961,861	2,631,246	9,884,482	2,718,169	1,888,743	45,654,861
Senegal	2,382,892	3,315,292	1,793,387	1,053,674	1,739,542	1,226,559	11,511,346
Eastern and Southern Africa							113,391,803
Ethiopia	3,442,464	18,883,295	2,505,236	6,054,173	2,635,070	1,795,070	35,315,308
Kenya	2,433,738	4,243,456	1,830,671	2,291,295	1,780,568	1,255,793	13,835,521
Malawi	2,407,013	2,941,890	1,806,774	1,373,278	1,761,686	1,237,740	11,528,381
Rwanda	2,363,120	1,785,462	1,772,771	841,276	1,727,404	1,211,369	9,701,402
Uganda	2,457,349	5,347,788	1,859,003	3,355,485	1,792,748	1,276,254	16,088,627
United Republic of Tanzania	2,494,857	6,255,908	1,890,246	4,295,110	1,820,681	1,300,156	18,056,958
Zambia	1,528,726	3,142,343	1,148,607	1,136,595	1,120,244	789,091	8,865,606
Grand total	36,048,864	99,849,984	26,905,916	42,321,106	26,688,904	18,674,664	250,489,438

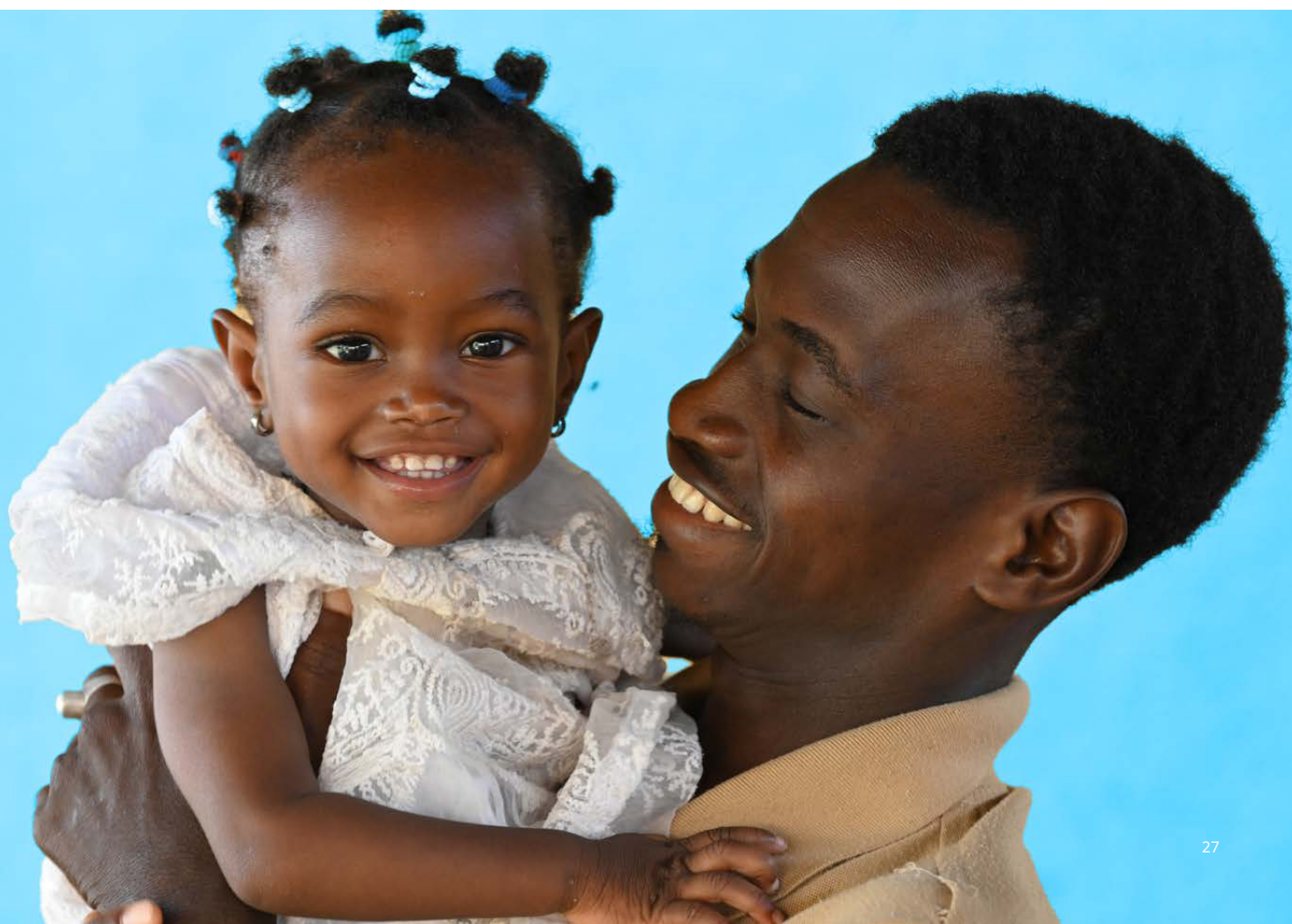
Call to action

First Foods Africa seeks to create a systemic and sustainable transformation of Africa's food systems for African children. It aims to bring together public and private sector actors to increase the availability, accessibility, affordability and consumption of locally- produced nutritious and safe first foods for young children.

First Foods Africa aims to change production priorities, strengthen policy frameworks and improve feeding practices so that all children receive the nutritious and safe diets children need to grow, develop and learn to their full potential; every African child, everywhere in Africa.

First Foods Africa is for Africa, by Africa, in Africa. It will contribute to reduce the prevalence of child food poverty and malnutrition sustainably, mobilizing national and international capital investment and leveraging partnerships and innovative approaches to unlock the power and potential of Africa.

UNICEF calls on governments and partners – including civil bilateral and multilateral partners, civil society organizations, private sector stakeholders, philanthropic foundations and international financial institutions – to mobilize the capacities, knowledge and funding required to implement this ground-breaking initiative, for every child in Africa.



Annex 1

Summary of First Foods Africa interventions, activities and indicators

Pillar	Interventions	Activities	Indicators
I. Incentivize local production of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods	Increase market availability, and affordability of nutritious, safe, and sustainable first foods specifically designed for young children	• Strengthen the network of local producers of nutritious first foods in Africa	Number of children who benefit from increased market availability of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods
		• Promote an enabling policy environment to incentivize local production	
		• Build the technical capacity of eligible companies as appropriate	
		• Provide innovative financing support – access to financing, loans, credit	
II. Strengthen policy environments to protect, promote and support children's access to nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable first foods	Procure and effectively deliver nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods for vulnerable children in fragile and humanitarian settings in a timely manner	• Procure and distribute locally produced food supplements - SQ-LNS and MNPs	Number of children who received adequate first foods in fragile and humanitarian contexts
		• Procure and distribute locally produced complementary foods, food ingredients and nutritious food snacks	
	Strengthen national and regional standards and norms for the formulation and promotion of first foods for young children	• Develop national guidelines on complementary feeding	Number of children who benefit from improved food standards, laws, and regulations
		• Establish standards on the safety, quality and content of first foods	
		• Implement legal and policy guidance for regulation of commercially produced complementary foods	
		• Establish national and regional frameworks for improved food laws and regulations	
III. Stimulate consumption of nutritious first foods through large-scale social marketing and social and behaviour change programmes	Strengthen social protection systems to increase access to nutritious first foods for infants and young children from income-poor families	• Leverage social transfers to increase access to nutritious first foods for the poorest children	Number of children who received adequate first foods from nutrition-sensitive social policies in development and fragile and humanitarian contexts
		• Strengthen social protection policies to increase access to nutritious first foods in humanitarian settings	
	Support the development of social marketing strategies to make locally-produced nutritious, safe and sustainable first foods desirable to families and communities	• Develop and scale up social marketing initiatives with caregivers and children to improve diets	Number of families reached by social marketing actions that promote adequate foods
		• Develop and scale up social marketing initiatives with retailers to promote first foods	
		• Engage communities in social marketing interventions to promote nutritious first foods	
		• Use multiple channels and influencers in social marketing to promote nutritious first foods	
	Use social and behaviour change to address social norms and help caregivers and families feed their infants and young children locally-produced nutritious first foods	• Support the design and implementation of context-specific social and behaviour change initiatives to incentivize consumption of locally produced first foods and create positive social norms	Number of families reached by social behavior change interventions that promote adequate diets
		• Engage community, health and nutrition workers, and preschool teachers in providing quality counselling, education and support on child feeding to caregivers, families and young children	

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