
CLARITY OUT OF CRISIS:

THE CONCLUSION OF GAIN'S 2020 STRATEGY REFRESH

In 2020, food systems the world over were shocked by the COVID-19 lockdowns. This shock starkly revealed three things: the essential role food systems play in averting hunger and malnutrition and in generating livelihoods; the fragile nature of many food systems; and the potential this moment offers to transform food systems to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

When the COVID-19 crisis struck, GAIN was in the middle of a planned refresh of its 2017-2022 strategy. The refresh was conceived as a stress test of the efficacy of our strategy but quickly got superseded by the real-world stress test that is the Coronavirus. We had asked three things to a set of key stakeholders drawn from the nine countries where we work in Africa and Asia, as well as global partners: Is our purpose clear? What do we do well and what can we do better? and Is our current direction of travel as impactful as it could be? We asked our staff and our Board these same questions.

The headline result - GAIN's purpose was clear to our core stakeholders: making food systems more likely to generate positive nutrition outcomes by connecting public and private sectors to improve the consumption of safe nutritious food to promote healthy diets in a sustainable way – for all people, especially the most vulnerable. The focus on mobilising private investment and businesses large and small continues to be a distinctive contribution GAIN is making. Working with governments to enable them to shift policy in favour of nutritious diets is central.

BUT EIGHT AREAS WERE RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER EFFORT:

- 1. While** our value in being one of the few organisations to link food systems and nutrition outcomes via public-private engagements was clear to core stakeholders, they thought we had not done a good enough job of communicating our position and our value add to wider audiences. This is something we will remedy.
- 2. Our** stakeholders also thought we have not been creative and innovative enough in fundraising and mobilising for our cause. While we have significantly broadened the number of donor and foundation partners, where are the initiatives to engage with philanthropy, with public giving and with corporate giving? None of these are easy areas to build up and can be sensitive – but we will be putting more effort into these in the next few years.
- 3. The** stakeholders—external and internal—liked our strengthened focus on negotiating and, when possible, transforming the gender power imbalances we encounter in the course of our work and giving more emphasis to environmental consequences. Both these enhancements of our work were under way before the COVID-19 crisis. Our stakeholders appreciated our view that the outcomes food systems generate (hunger reduction, good nutrition, jobs,

greenhouse gas mitigation and the sustainable use of natural resources) should increasingly be viewed as indivisible, that we cannot pick and choose outcomes in isolation but need to be aware of their interplay. But they also cautioned us to be careful not to spread too thinly. By all means use a wide-angle lens to scope opportunities to improve the consumption of safe nutritious foods while linking food systems to health systems and social protection systems, but make sure you settle on a focused activities continuing GAIN's emphasis on concrete results, at scale around nutrition indicators.

4. **O**n scale, our stakeholders asked us to do more and keep strengthening this dimension. Our work on large scale fortification, an important component (20% in value) of our portfolio, generates scale in coverage, but achieving scale in other programs is not so straightforward. We were encouraged to keep looking for other scaling mechanisms via policy, influencing and new partnerships including repurposing government policy such as subsidies and taxes, leveraging existing finance facilities with new models, shifting consumer demand and creating supply chain efficiencies to commercialise nutrient rich foods.
5. **R**eaffirming our roots as an alliance builder, we were encouraged to do even more to work in alliances and structured partnerships which can turn great ideas and proven interventions into change at scale. This will be an important priority in 2021 and beyond.
6. **O**n vulnerability, we were advised to continue to work harder to reach the poorest. COVID-19 has made it clear that the weakest in society are affected the hardest by shocks. What is GAIN going to do to better protect them? We are a development organisation not an out-and-out humanitarian one, nevertheless we have an obligation to try to reach the most vulnerable. It is not enough to develop market-based solutions for those on 3 to 4 USD a day, we need to try harder to develop more solutions for those in the most extreme poverty, on less than 2 USD a day. Can we for example, do more to affect food and cash based social protection programmes to enhance access to nutritious food for the poorest?
7. **O**n the resilience of food systems, we were encouraged to make our work focus more on strengthening the backbone of food systems. Our new COVID-19 response programme, Keeping Food Markets Working (KSMW), does this in the short to medium term by protecting the diets of food system workers and preventing SMEs that produce nutritious food from going out of business, but what can be done more strategically? What can we do to: (a) build greater diversity into processing locations (e.g. national premix fortification facilities that do not depend so much on imported premix); (b) make more financing facilities available to SMEs producing, processing and distributing nutritious foods (e.g. developing our own finance facility but also leveraging the ideas and metrics via a Nutritious Food Financing Alliance); (c) provide more TA to enterprises (e.g. scenario planning), (d) support urban food system planning, (e) accelerate leadership development (e.g. supporting female entrepreneurs) and (f) generating real time data collection to track the rapidly changing context and initiate preventative action (e.g. tracking prices of key foods in key markets on a weekly basis).
8. **A**nd finally, on systems, the COVID-19 crisis has reminded us of the connectedness of all parts of the food system and what happens when one part of the system no longer functions. Food Systems are only as strong as their weakest link. This raises the question: What can we do to cluster our programmes in the same geographic space, so that they converge and generate synergies? This is not always easy because the needs and interests of our stakeholders do not always easily allow for such convergence, but we will work harder to link our programmes conceptually around our strategic objectives of building demand for nutritious foods improving access to them and strengthening the enabling policy and advocacy environment for both. And whenever funding permits, we commit to clustering

some of our programmes in the same geographic space in the search for greater coherence and impact.

So, the analysis is clear. The current crisis has crystallised: (1) the essential nature of the food system for nutrition and also for a wide range of human and environmental outcomes, (2) even working through food markets we all have to find ways to reach the poorest and most vulnerable, including using a strong gender lens, (3) we have to build more resilient food systems to withstand future shocks, and (4) we need to work together more than ever—in alliances, across food, health and social protection systems, and across food system outcomes.

We know that the mirror that our staff, Board, and external stakeholders have held up to GAIN to help us see ourselves better, and the insight they have given us on the rapidly shifting landscape we inhabit, will help us position ourselves more strategically, so that working with our partners we can have a greater impact on people’s nutrition status. GAIN’s position as a leading organisation in this space was recently endorsed by our selection as the lead of the UN Food Systems Summit’s Action Track on Ensuring Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for All. Through this Summit and other processes such as the Nutrition for Growth Summit we are involved in at the country and global levels, we hope the strategy work will help others find greater clarity of purpose and function as we all emerge from the current phase of the crisis and ready ourselves for the threats and the opportunities to come.

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