

# Empowering parliamentarians for sustainable nutrition action

Action brief

**Country:** United Republic of Tanzania  
**Topics:** Social mobilization, advocacy and communication  
**Sub-topics:** Engaging parliamentarians for legislative advocacy, budget oversight and public outreach

**Date:** 2024



## Overview



Engagement with parliamentarians, as key players in the political landscape, is critical for advancing the nutrition agenda. Not only can members of parliament influence budgets and expenditures for nutrition, but engaging them can also contribute to mainstreaming nutrition, food security and children's rights into policies and strategies across sectors and help raise public awareness about nutrition issues.

In this regard, the United Republic of Tanzania has seen a transformative shift in recent years, catalysed by the proactive engagement between the Parliamentary Group on Nutrition, Food Security, and Child Rights and the SUN Civil Society Alliance (PANITA). This collaborative initiative has helped elevate nutrition as a paramount agenda in the country's developmental discourse.



## SDGs





## Objectives of the action brief

This action brief explains how to increase parliamentary oversight on issues related to nutrition, food security and children's rights and provides concrete examples on how to engage members of parliament on nutrition issues.



## Period covered

This action brief covers 2011 to 2023.



## What action was taken?

Before PANITA's intervention in the United Republic of Tanzania, nutrition was not a priority issue for most parliamentarians, and there was a lack of awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of malnutrition. PANITA realized that it was important to educate and sensitize parliamentarians on the importance of nutrition for the development of the country and the well-being of its people.

PANITA began by identifying and nurturing a group of dedicated members of parliament and representatives who epitomized a commitment to championing nutrition, food security and children's rights. This deliberate focus on advocacy marked a departure from the conventional approach.

PANITA developed a comprehensive strategy to engage with parliamentarians and increase their awareness and commitment to nutrition. Over the years, PANITA undertook an instrumental role in formalizing efforts through the development of a pioneering strategic plan from 2013 to 2017. This blueprint was accompanied by comprehensive capacity-building initiatives tailored to equip the

parliamentarians with a distinct understanding of nutrition-related issues and foster dialogues on embedding nutrition priorities within governmental budgets and plans.

These multifaceted engagement strategies yielded a cohort of influential champions for nutrition within parliament, including such key figures such as the speaker and deputy speaker of the National Assembly, several ministers, and more than 100 members of parliament. The sustained involvement led to the evolution of a sustainable approach delineated in the Second Strategic Plan from 2020 to 2025.

A pivotal outcome of this effort was the amplification of awareness and comprehension among members of parliament regarding nutrition issues, evidenced by a surge in pertinent queries and the qualitative depth of debates on nutrition during parliamentary sessions. The collective efforts culminated in successful campaigns, including the historic inclusion of nutrition in the Political Parties' Election Manifesto in 2015, pivotal tax exemptions on fortificants and increased nutrition budgets.





Moreover, PANITA's influence extended beyond the corridors of parliament, earning recognition for its substantial contribution to members' endeavours.

A monumental shift took place in the United Republic of Tanzania's approach to nutrition advocacy, transcending mere dialogue to tangible action and policy reforms. The sustained commitment of high-calibre parliamentary champions and the institutionalization of nutrition priorities into the fabric of governance are helping to ensure a trajectory of sustainable nutritional advancements.

PANITA learned many lessons and challenges during the process:

- It is important to maintain regular and consistent communication and follow-up with parliamentarians, as they have busy schedules and competing priorities.

- Tailoring messages and information to suit the interests and needs of parliamentarians, depending on their political affiliation, committee membership and constituency, is critical.
- There is a need to balance the technical and political aspects of nutrition and to use both evidence and stories to convey the urgency and importance of nutrition.
- It is important to collaborate and coordinate with other stakeholders – such as the government, donors, academia and media – to create a conducive environment and common voice for nutrition advocacy.

Key lessons learned underscore the potency of strategic engagement, capacity-building and sustained collaboration in effecting transformative change.



## What would the country do differently?

PANITA could have worked with the entire parliament instead of just with champions. This was not possible because of resource constraints.

### Challenges:

- High political turnover. Changes in higher political leadership affect plans and priorities. This calls for more advocacy since every regime comes with its own priorities.
- Working with parliamentarians is expensive in terms of their time and funds to support their initiatives.
- Competing advocacy agendas from other sectors can make nutrition less feasible. Nutrition is not a political issue and therefore does not receive the attention it should.
- The high post-election attrition rate brings new members who require intensive mentorship to own the agenda in question.



## Adaptation and applicability

→ Members of parliament have various backgrounds and interests, and most of them have little knowledge on nutrition. It is important that they understand the advocacy agenda and create an agenda relevant to their regions and constituencies without compromising the cultural and political dimensions. Members of parliament need to be

supported with technical expertise tools, such as data in simple language, and fed with current evidence.

→ Engagement with members of parliament must be long-term and strategic, and they must be kept in the loop on nutrition matters so that nutrition remains on top of their priorities.



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## Next steps

The next steps are to continue working with members of parliament as the catalyst for the nutrition agenda.



## Further information



[www.panita.or.tz](http://www.panita.or.tz)



[https://youtube.com/@Panita\\_tz?si=R-wPj45GvLimayj1](https://youtube.com/@Panita_tz?si=R-wPj45GvLimayj1)



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