

**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY  
FOR NAMIBIA**

**Prepared under the auspices of the**

**NATIONAL  
FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION COUNCIL**

**Windhoek, Namibia  
August 1995**





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FOOD AND NUTRITION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE  
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## **PREAMBLE**

**Namibia has now been independent for more than five years and the nature of the struggle facing our country has changed. The fight is no longer for freedom from political domination but for freedom from hunger and malnutrition for the Namibian people. We must struggle together to improve living conditions for those of the population who go to sleep each evening wondering where the next day's food will come from, for those who see their children growing thinner as a result of inadequate food consumption and for those in danger of not reaching their full physical and intellectual potential because of childhood malnutrition.**

**To achieve freedom from hunger and malnutrition requires a coordinated effort from all sectors of Government and from all Namibians. We must work together to assure that all of us, old and young, rural and urban, have reliable access to safe and nutritious foods at all times. The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development must assist farm households to produce more food and agricultural crops both for home consumption and to increase their income by selling food commodities to urban and other markets throughout Namibia. Food markets, particularly at the local level, must be developed to ensure a stable supply of food at reasonable prices. Safe and adequate water supplies are essential to enable households to develop appropriate levels of environmental sanitation. The Ministry of Health and Social Services must provide preventive, promotive and curative services that reach all households and assist them in addressing their own health and nutrition problems. The Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Labour and Manpower Development must work together to ensure more employment opportunities and the upgrading of skills. The Ministry of Basic Education and Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science and Technology have the responsibility for the general education of our people, for equipping youth for the formal job market and for assisting households to make good use of their resources. Other Government Ministries, as well as regional and local authorities, have a role to play in ensuring that households have access to adequate food, have the knowledge to employ appropriate nutrition and childcare practices and have access to supporting and social services to enable all Namibians to reach their full potential.**

**Although the Government has the responsibility for developing an appropriate framework within which to address these issues, NGOs, the private sector, local communities and Namibia's development partners have important roles to play both in developing and implementing projects. Their skills and resources complement those of Government. These institutions must be encouraged to accept their role in tackling hunger and malnutrition.**

**For such multi-sectoral efforts to be effective, they must be based on a common understanding of the nature and scale of the food and nutrition problem in Namibia. They must also address the problem through mutually supportive programmes and projects. Namibia's Food and Nutrition Policy provides overall guidelines to coordinate our efforts to ensure that we are all working together to overcome hunger and malnutrition.**

**Sam Nujoma  
President of the Republic of Namibia**

## FOREWORD

In 1991, the Ministry of Health and Social Services initiated efforts to formulate a National Food and Nutrition Policy for Namibia. As issues related to food and nutrition can only be addressed through cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination of efforts, we convened a series of workshops to bring together all the relevant Ministries, organisations and individuals to identify and discuss the major policy issues related to food and nutrition. Unfortunately, when our Nation was hit by severe drought in 1992, our limited resources had to be diverted to emergency management. It seems ironic that the formulation of this policy was delayed by the very problems which it is intended to address.

Since our initial efforts, Government has substantiated its political will and commitment to ensure that all Namibians have reliable access to a healthy diet. In 1992, the Right Honourable Prime Minister declared the Namibian Food and Nutrition Decade, making it a Government-wide effort to improve conditions for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable Namibians. Also in 1992, Namibia committed itself to the principles and goals of the Global Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition at the International Conference on Nutrition, along with 158 other nations of the world. In 1994, Government began to act on its intentions and commitments by creating the National Food Security and Nutrition Council, and its Technical Committee, to develop, coordinate and link the necessary conditions and actions for improved food security and nutrition in Namibia.

We have come one step closer to meeting our food security and nutrition related objectives by elaborating this Food and Nutrition Policy for Namibia. This important policy document will provide us with the necessary framework and guidelines to actively address the problems of food insecurity and malnutrition in Namibia over the medium to long-term. It was prepared through wide consultation with broad-based cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

The policy document identifies three key areas which must be addressed through enabling policies to purposefully and meaningfully address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in Namibia. These include:

- Improving Household Level Resources
- Improving Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices
- Improving Social and Supporting Services

The document identifies and reviews current sectoral policy initiatives which will contribute to achieving the above objectives. It then goes further to expound additional policy statements needed to complete the Food and Nutrition Policy for Namibia.

This policy puts us one step further towards assuring adequate food and nutrition for all Namibians.

Solomon Amadhila

**Chairman of the Food Security and Nutrition Council**





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## 1. THE FOOD AND NUTRITION SITUATION IN NAMIBIA

Namibia is a drought-prone country with the driest climate in sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of Namibians live in rural areas (over 72% in 1991) and the agriculture sector by far provides the most important source of employment, supporting directly or indirectly some 70% of the country's population.

Total cereal production varies considerably according to rainfall, but even in the best years the country must import a significant amount of its cereal requirements, often well over a half. Nonetheless, there is not a food security problem at the national level, as commercial distribution channels are well developed. In the past, the nation has been able to meet its normal commercial import requirements without difficulty and without Government intervention. These have usually been supplemented to some extent by food aid in drought years. Namibia is a major exporter of fish, livestock and meat.

Namibia has a relatively small population (1.4 million in 1991) for its vast area. This reflects the low carrying capacity of most of the land area. The population is quite diverse in terms of socio-economic patterns, agro-ecological environment and ethnic origin. This is also reflected in its food consumption patterns. In the south of the country, the majority of households must purchase most of their food requirements and eat primarily meat and maize porridge with a fat or sour milk sauce. In the northwest, the diet consists of maize, meat and milk. In the north of the country, most people rear livestock and cultivate millet. Maize porridge, millet, sugar, oil, meat and milk are eaten regularly. Locally gathered fruits, vegetables and termites supplement the diet. In the north east, freshwater fish supplements millet, meat and maize meal in the diet.

Average income figures place Namibia as one of the better off countries in Africa. This, however, hides a wide disparity and highly uneven income distribution within the country. The majority of the population have few resources, and many have difficulty covering even their basic needs. This is reflected in a number of indicators of food security and nutritional status. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey for 1993/94 indicates that 47% of all households spend more than 60% of their income on food (a generally accepted indicator of poverty) and that 13% of all households have to spend as much as 80% of their income on food.

Poor nutritional status in adult women and young children is exacerbated by high fertility rates. The total fertility rate (i.e. the average number of children born to a woman throughout her life) is 6.1 children on average, but rises to well over 7.0 in parts of the north. Almost 36% of eighteen year-olds have begun childbearing. High fertility rates and short birth intervals increase the nutritional demands on women and make it less likely that they can care appropriately for their children. Women's capacity to care properly for their children and themselves is further constrained by their work load. Many face the double burden of being the principal income earners and food producers, as well as taking care of the family. Almost 43% of rural families and 31% of urban families are female-headed. This has serious implications for the amount of time that women can spend on childcare, a particular problem when children are ill.

The incidence of low birth weight babies is high at 16%, suggesting that the nutritional status of Namibian mothers is poor. This is supported by 1992 data showing that almost 14% of women with children under five suffer from chronic energy deficiency, as indicated by their body mass indices (BMI). Though there are no firm data at present, it seems likely that adult women may suffer to a significant extent from anaemia.

Surveys indicate that there is widespread undernutrition among children less than five years old throughout Namibia. The 1992 National Demographic and Health Survey showed that more than 29% of children were stunted, (low height-for-age), while 8% were severely stunted. Stunting levels were

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much higher in the northeast (42%) than in other parts of the country, and rural children had higher levels of stunting than urban children. Nationwide, 27% of children were underweight, including 9% severely underweight. The incidence of underweight children is highest in the northern regions.

There is also high incidence of a number of micronutrient deficiencies. Surveys in 1991 showed that more than two-thirds of the population suffered from moderate to severe iodine deficiency disorders. This has led to Government introducing salt iodization legislation, which was preceded by an iodine supplementation programme in the most affected areas. Vitamin A deficiency is also a major problem.

Nutrition status is not simply a result of household access to and availability of food, but also of how those resources are used within the household (sometimes referred to as knowledge, attitude and practices). Households must have access to health care and other social services. Food has to be stored properly, cooked appropriately and individuals have to eat a balanced diet. Households require access to clean water and must know about and practise good sanitation.

Appropriate breast-feeding and weaning practices must also be encouraged. Almost all children are breast-fed for some period of time, but most receive either water or some supplementary food before four months of age. Exclusive breast-feeding, which is recommended for the first 4-6 months of life, is only practised by about 20% of mothers. There is a clear decline in the duration and prevalence of breast-feeding with increasing urbanisation. For poor families, the early introduction of solids places an extra burden on the household's resources, and may mean that the infant gets insufficient and inappropriate weaning foods.

Malnutrition and disease can be mutually reinforcing. A sick child often loses appetite and eats less, at precisely that time when the body needs more nutrients to combat disease. A malnourished child is more likely to contract diseases as the body's resistance is much lower. The leading causes of death in children under five are diarrhoea, malaria, undernutrition and acute respiratory disease.

Access to safe water is essential for good health and nutrition. Urban areas have good access to water and sanitation facilities, though peri-urban areas, particularly in the north, are often not well served by the municipal services. In 1991, it was estimated that only 43% of the rural population had proper access to a reliable source of safe water. This has gradually been increasing since Independence. Very few rural households (less than 20%) have latrine facilities. Water-borne sanitation in rural areas is limited to public buildings.

Access to health facilities has also improved since Independence. The majority of the urban population lives within a 30 minute walk to a health facility. However, in 1992 almost 30% of the rural population lived more than two hours travelling time, and over half lived more than five kilometres away from the nearest health facility.

All this information, both socio-economic and nutritional, suggest that Namibia has a major problem of household food insecurity and malnutrition. It is precisely for this reason that the country needs a well articulated, cross-sectoral food and nutrition policy, to provide a framework and guidelines for strategies and programmes to address these problems and ensure that, as guaranteed in the constitution, the Government can "raise and maintain an acceptable level of nutrition and standard of living of the Namibian people."

## **2. GOVERNMENT POLICY AND OBJECTIVES**

The food and nutrition status of individuals and households is determined by food availability, access to food, the use made of available resources within the household and the biological utilisation of food within the body. Because of the broad areas of economic and social life which this covers, food and

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nutrition objectives can be said to form a basic part of the overall objectives which Government has set for itself through the Constitution and the First National Development Plan. Specifically, the Government has established four broad national development objectives:

- to revive and sustain economic growth,
- to create employment opportunities,
- to alleviate poverty, and
- to reduce inequalities in incomes.

Government has identified education, health, agriculture and rural development and housing as their four priority sectors. These sectors have a critical influence on the food and nutrition status of households and individuals through their effects on the factors mentioned above.

In addition, the Government has also undertaken a number of commitments, and adopted objectives which are directly targeted to the food and nutrition status of its population. In 1990, Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides a moral framework for ensuring nutritional security for all Namibians, especially women and children. In the National Plan of Action for Children, the Government stated that "no child should go to sleep hungry and cold, and everything possible must be done to provide sufficient food and adequate shelter for all". It set itself the goals of:

- reducing the incidence of underweight children to 15%, with not more than 3% severely underweight
- reducing the incidence of stunting to 15%
- reducing the incidence of wasting to 4.5%

Government has also declared 1993 - 2002 the "Food and Nutrition Decade", demonstrating its commitment to eradicating hunger and malnutrition in Namibia. In December 1992, Namibia made a commitment at the International Conference on Nutrition, along with another 158 countries of the world, "to make all efforts to eliminate before the end of this decade:

- famine and famine related deaths;
- starvation and nutritional deficiency diseases in communities affected by natural and man-made disasters;
- iodine and vitamin A deficiencies."

A pledge was also made "to reduce substantially within this decade:

- starvation and widespread chronic hunger;
- undernutrition, especially among children, women and the aged;
- other important micronutrient deficiencies including iron;
- diet-related communicable and non-communicable diseases;
- social and other impediments to optimal breast-feeding;
- inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene, including unsafe drinking water."

Namibia's commitment to these objectives are elaborated and reinforced in the National Declaration on Food and Nutrition.

The overall objective of a Food and Nutrition Policy must be to improve the nutritional status of the population. This has three elements:

- to improve the quantity and quality of food eaten by the population with the aim of ensuring an adequate diet for all;
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- to empower households to use the resources available to them to improve childcare, feeding practices and their environmental sanitation; and
- to provide an adequate level of social and supporting services.

Policies, strategies and programmes to achieve these objectives must be designed in accordance with other basic Government principles:

- to maximise popular participation in the development process, by emphasising community participation in solving their own food security and nutrition problems;
- to decentralise activities and decision making to respond to the high level of regional differentiation in Namibia;
- to educate and sensitise the Namibian people in food and nutrition issues;
- to create awareness in all parts of the Government and community structures of the importance of nutrition issues and their cross-sectoral nature; and
- to reduce individual and community dependence on Government and other central structures to solve their food and nutrition problems.

In Namibia, women are usually the people responsible for ensuring that the family is fed. Thus improving households' ability to maintain healthy and adequate diets also supports the Government's objectives to increase the empowerment of women.

### **3. CURRENT POLICY INITIATIVES AND INTER-SECTORAL POLICY LINKAGES**

Malnutrition and food insecurity arise from a combination of three underlying causes:

- lack of household level resources;
- inappropriate or insufficient knowledge, attitudes and practices; and
- inadequate social and supporting services.

Lack of household level resources means that households do not have the resources either to produce their own food or to buy it.

Inappropriate or insufficient knowledge, attitudes and practices implies that food preparation and combinations, health and sanitation practices and weaning and infant feeding practices do not optimise the use of existing resources.

Inadequate social and supporting services means that households do not get the necessary support from, or have access to, extension workers or primary health care workers, or even from private structures such as the retail sector to complement their private resources.

It is clear that a food and nutrition policy must link-in with appropriate sectoral policies, particularly with respect to service provision. Sectoral policies currently in place, or in the pipeline, which provide policy guidelines for addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition are presented below.

#### **3.1 Policies Aimed at Improving Household Level Resources**

##### *Agricultural Policy*

The draft National Agricultural Policy has among its objectives:

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- ensure food security and improve nutritional status;
  - create and sustain viable livelihood and employment opportunities in rural areas; and
  - improve the living standards of farmers and their families, as well as farm workers.

These clearly will have a strong positive impact on the food and nutrition status of the country. Household food security is a principal tenet of the National Agricultural Policy and will be pursued by, amongst other policies:

- stabilising and diversifying food production in areas of the country where environmentally sustainable potential exists with special reference to a balanced diet and the improvement of the nutritional value of the diet;
- where agricultural potential is limited, encouraging alternative means of income generation, particularly activities which utilise raw agricultural products as inputs;
- encouraging proper management and cultivation techniques of indigenous veld foods for improved food security, nutrition and income generation;
- consolidating and strengthening food commodity and price monitoring and reporting systems and the national drought management capacity;
- promoting the maintenance of strategic grain reserves by the private sector through a combination of storage alternatives at national, regional and farmer levels;
- improving the efficiency of food supply markets, thus lowering food prices; and
- implementing food supply programmes, such as labour-intensive public works programmes, aimed at the chronically food insecure and those vulnerable to food insecurity in times of drought.

### *Agricultural Land Reform Legislation*

Access to arable land is an important prerequisite for food and nutrition security for many rural families. The draft National Agricultural Policy states as a central objective the need to ensure that all land, private or communal, is efficiently and sustainably utilised and developed. It is envisaged that the communal system of land tenure will be continued. The Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act has become law, and will soon be followed by a proposed Agricultural (Communal) Land Reform Bill.

### *Industrial Policy*

A comprehensive industrial strategy is being developed based on the 1992 White Paper on Industrial Policy. This will focus on fostering manufacturing growth while reducing geographical and ownership concentration, increasing diversification and linkages and creating manufacturing employment. Emphasis will be placed on facilitating growth in the small scale and informal sector.

### *Fisheries White Paper*

The Fisheries White Paper, plus the Sea Fisheries Act, contain details of the importance of developing marine fisheries sustainably as a source of protein for the local population. Major initiatives are underway to promote domestic fish consumption. There are currently no clear policy guidelines or initiatives for the development of inland fisheries.

### *Forestry Policy/Legislation*

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The country's first National Forest Policy states amongst its objectives that:

- Forestry should be made an essential part of the land use planning policy. Sufficient land must be set aside for multi-purpose forestry activities.
- Forestry should play a key role in the contribution to sustained food production and must therefore be closely integrated with other rural sources of livelihood such as animal husbandry and farming in order to improve nutrition in the country. Forestry must be included in agricultural and other rural development projects.

It is further stated in the policy that:

- Provision of sufficient fodder, fuel and pasture, especially in areas adjoining forests, is necessary in order to prevent depletion of forests beyond the sustainable limit. Since fuelwood continues to be the predominate source of energy in rural areas the programme of afforestation should be intensified with special emphasis on augmenting fuelwood production to meet the requirements of the rural people.

These statements, and several others in the document, illustrate the importance which the nation's National Forestry Policy places on food security and rural development issues.

### *Social Welfare Policy*

At present, all people over sixty years of age in Namibia are eligible to receive an old age pension. This is an important source of income for many families, particularly during periods of drought. The increasing cost of providing the pension raises concerns about the programme's long-term sustainability. To meet the challenge of expanding service provision and reducing inequalities in the system of welfare assistance and services, social welfare policy focuses on:

- improving efficiency of services provided by improving coordination and reducing overlap;
- targeting assistance to those really in need;
- encouraging greater community involvement and responsibility for providing for the needs of the disadvantaged;
- encouraging greater private sector and NGO involvement in the provision of services and facilities; and
- encouraging those who are able to become more self-reliant and less dependent on Government assistance.

## **3.2 Policies Aimed at Improving Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices**

### *Health Policy*

The health sector has the major aim of achieving health for all Namibians by the year 2000. This is to be achieved through emphasis on the primary health care approach. Individuals, families and communities involved in the organization, provision and financing of their own health and health care services will be progressively extended to reach all communities with special attention to the disadvantaged and the isolated small communities in rural areas.

Health status and nutrition status are interlinked. Disease increases an individual's nutritional requirements while often reducing appetite. Poor nutritional status increases susceptibility to



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infection. Thus, food and nutrition issues are addressed directly or indirectly by the following MOHSS programmes: the Maternal and Child Health Programme; the Expanded Programme on Immunization; the Control of Diarrhoeal Diseases and Acute Respiratory Infections; the Food and Nutrition Programme; the Tuberculosis Control Programme; the Malaria Control Programme; the Environmental Health Programme; and the Emergency Preparedness Programme.

### *Education Policy*

A number of policy directives on education have been issued since Independence. These are aimed at improving access to education and improving education quality. It is particularly important for the future nutritional status of children that girls have good access to education, as studies indicate that improved education of mothers is a significant element in reducing child malnutrition.

### **3.3 Policies Aimed at Improving Social and Supporting Services**

#### *Water Supply and Sanitation Policy*

The overall long-term Water Supply and Sanitation Policy (WASP) has the following elements:

- essential water supply and sanitation services should become available to all Namibians and be accessible at a cost which is affordable to the country as a whole;
- the equitable improvement of services should be a result of the combined efforts of the Government and the beneficiaries, based on community involvement, participation and responsibility;
- communities are to have the right - with due regard for environmental needs and the resources available - to determine which solutions and service levels are acceptable to them. The beneficiaries shall contribute towards the cost of the services and at gradually increasing rates for standards exceeding those determined by the basic needs;
- the environmentally sustainable development, harnessing and utilisation of the water resources of the country is to be pursued to accommodate the various needs.

The operative strategy is to develop reliable and accessible sources of safe water with sufficient capacity on a sustainable basis to serve all homesteads and settlements at an affordable cost. The sanitation strategy is to ensure the safe and affordable disposal of all human and other noxious wastes, including sewage and industrial effluent. These are prerequisites for a safe healthy nutritional environment, particularly for infants at the vulnerable weaning stage.

#### *Environmental Policy*

Policies to achieve food security and good nutritional status must be sustainable. Adequate food and nutrition cannot be achieved today at the expense of the environment. This applies not only to livestock and grain production, but to the use of veld foods, freshwater fish and other traditional foods which provide necessary variety and balance to the diet. Namibia's Green Plan suggests appropriate directions for the management of water resources, wetland conservation, the use of wildlife and the exploitation of indigenous plant life which endeavour to establish sustainable systems for the benefit of both local communities and the country as a whole.

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### *National Housing Policy*

The National Housing Policy identifies the need to develop a national shelter strategy and to implement a national programme of housing. The Build-Together Programme translated this policy into an implementation programme for low-income households.

### *Population Policy*

Fertility levels throughout the country are high. It is estimated that each woman will have an average of 6.1 children, while the population growth rate is estimated at 3.0% per annum. This rate of increase makes it more difficult to maintain even the current poor levels of food security and nutritional status, particularly since current growth in agriculture falls far below this rate. The MOHSS's Safe Motherhood initiative focuses on improving information, access to and utilisation of, family planning services with the objective of increasing the use of contraceptives to 50% of women of child-bearing age. A Population Planning Unit has been established in the National Planning Commission, and is now formulating a population policy.

## **4. FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY**

The Namibian Government has the objective of developing a social and economic environment which increases the income earning opportunities available to the people and allows for better and more sustainable use of the land for food production. Government will place priority on empowering the population, through promotion of good food, health and nutritional practices, to become self-reliant in meeting their food and nutrition needs at the household level.

For households and individuals to have good food and nutrition status, they must have:

- access to adequate resources to grow or purchase the necessary food commodities,
- the knowledge and understanding to use those resources to their best advantage, and
- access to appropriate services, such as safe water supply, health clinics and reliable market structures to enable full exploitation of resources.

### **4.1 Improving Household Level Resources**

The Namibian Government is committed to improving household food security by creating conditions which will ensure that all people at all times have physical and economic access to the food they need. This can only be achieved by improving and stabilizing the level of household resources. This must be achieved through a combination of (1) increased, stabilized and/or diversified subsistence production of nutritionally sound food commodities, (2) increasing the income earning opportunities available to the population, including the sale of surplus agricultural production, and establishing effective social security and nutritional safety nets for the truly destitute and vulnerable segments of the population. Improving and diversifying sources of household level resources will contribute significantly to a food secure Namibia. All such initiatives should be planned and implemented in a way which ensures the inclusion of women and marginalised households amongst the beneficiaries.

#### **4.1.1 Nutrition and Food Production**

##### *Nutrition and Crop Production*

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At the national level, Namibia has ready access to international food markets which minimises any aggregate food security problems. From the perspective of improving food and nutritional status, the policy emphasis must be to encourage food insecure farmers to grow more food and more nutritious foods, both for their own consumption and for sale on local markets as a source of income generation.

The draft National Agricultural Policy identifies the need to increase, or at least stabilise, and diversify food production in all areas of the country with special emphasis on increasing drought tolerance and crop diversification for a balanced diet and the improvement of the nutritional value of the diet. Information on food consumption patterns is scarce, but sufficient to indicate that the major nutritional problems arise from inadequate energy intake (lack of calories) and insufficient intake of micronutrients such as vitamin A, niacin, iron and iodine.

- *Agricultural extension programmes must be developed to increase and stabilise production of grain, vegetable and fruit crops where water resources permit, both to increase farm household consumption and to improve availability on local markets.*
- *Particular emphasis must be given to increasing production on farm households which are vulnerable to food insecurity and at risk of malnutrition.*
- *Access must be ensured to adequate resources (arable land, labour, water, fertiliser and seed) and services (extension, credit, and research) for all sections of the farming community, particularly women and marginalised households.*

#### *Nutrition and Livestock Production*

In much of Namibia, water availability does not allow for crop production. Livestock production, particularly cattle, goats and sheep, is an important economic activity for farm households in these areas and contributes directly to their milk and meat consumption. Staple foods are purchased on the market, in part from the earnings from livestock sales.

- *The food and nutrition status of livestock farm households must be supported through the development of more effective marketing structures both as outlets for livestock sales and to increase access to staple foods, fruits and vegetables.*
- *Range management, veterinary services and water supplies must be developed as part of a comprehensive livestock production programme, covering all parts of Namibia.*

#### **4.1.2 Nutrition and Household Income**

##### *Skills Development*

For the urban population, household resources depend on members of the household obtaining employment in the formal or informal sector, or setting up their own businesses. For rural households, income from off-farm employment can be a critical resource in addressing food security, particularly during droughts. Employment is constrained by lack of formal job opportunities, insufficient skilled staff for those jobs which are available and the relative immaturity of the informal sector in most parts of the country.

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- *Programmes must be developed and implemented to enhance vocational skills for formal sector employment, particularly in the peri-urban areas and targeting women.*
- *More support programmes must be developed to assist people in starting their own businesses, particularly in agro-industry in the rural sector and in the peri-urban areas.*
- *Income generation projects must be targeted at the most nutritionally vulnerable households. They must include technical advice and training in financial management and project development.*
- *Career development advisors must be provided at schools.*

#### *Access to Credit*

Often small businesses, including agricultural activities are inhibited either in their initial start-up period or in the expansion phase, when they could provide employment for others, by lack of access to credit. Potential entrepreneurs may lack the collateral required by the formal banking sector.

- *The potential for a credit guarantee scheme, focused on the informal sector should be explored, to give this sector greater access to the formal banking system.*
- *Credit circles should be developed and encouraged, especially amongst women in the rural and peri-urban sectors.*
- *Institutional and legislative barriers limiting access to credit by all citizens, but particularly to women in their own right, must be removed.*
- *There must be a public information campaign on credit availability and usage.*

#### **4.1.3 Social Security and Nutrition Safety Nets**

The Government is committed to improving social welfare services to the most vulnerable segments of the population. It recognises that there will always be some people who cannot count on traditional or family support mechanisms, particularly in situations such as drought, when these mechanisms become too stretched to address the problems of the family. The Government alone will have difficulty meeting all the legitimate calls for assistance it receives. Therefore it encourages greater community involvement in providing for the needs of the disadvantaged. NGOs and the private sector are also encouraged to become involved in the provision of services. Although the reduction of malnutrition amongst the disadvantaged must be one of the objectives of a social security safety net, Government feels that direct distribution of food to these sections of the population should only take place under very restricted circumstances, such as within the context of school feeding programmes, or where there is clear evidence of impending human suffering and severe malnutrition. Food distribution is costly and encourages dependence. Where possible other forms of assistance should be given preference.

- *As a first step those groups most in need of assistance must be identified.*
- *There is a need for greater cooperation between Government and its social partners in the private sector to identify cost-effective ways of providing a social safety net for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.*

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- *Potential distribution mechanisms and the precise form of assistance, e.g. cash, food coupons, or direct food distribution, must be examined for their cost-effectiveness and alternatives considered.*
  - *The logistic costs of direct food distribution are such that this should only be undertaken either when other forms of assistance are inappropriate, for example because of inadequate market structures, or where food is particularly appropriate for targeting particular sections of the population, as in school feeding programmes.*

#### 4.1.4 Other Factors Affecting Household Level Resources

##### *Nutrition and Drought*

Drought is a perennial event in Namibia, and can have a direct and dramatic impact on the food security and nutritional status of vulnerable groups of the population. Crop-producing farm households are directly affected by poor harvests. Livestock farmers may lose animals, resulting in reduced food supplies (milk and meat) and loss of future income and savings. Commercial farm labourers, one of the most vulnerable groups, may be laid off and lose not only income but their family's place of residence. Government recognises the need to provide some immediate protection to drought affected groups of the population, but, at the same time, wishes to avoid creating or encouraging dependency.

- *In the long-term, the problem of drought must be tackled by reducing the population's vulnerability by encouraging greater use of drought resistant crops, encouraging earlier marketing of livestock when drought threatens and diversifying sources of income for rural areas. Efforts to reduce vulnerability to drought over the long-term will be guided by Namibia's Food Security and Nutrition Action Plan.*
- *In the short-term, drought relief, in the form of livestock feed subsidies and food assistance, will continue, but ways must be found to improve efficiency in targeting recipients, delivering assistance and reducing long-term vulnerability to drought.*
- *Drought planning should be built into all plans, every year. The Government, donors and NGOs should be prepared for drought at any time. Interventions should support traditional household "coping strategies".*

##### *Women's Time Constraints*

Women in Namibia bear the major responsibility for feeding their families. Their work burden, especially when they are the head of the household, is an important constraint on the ability of the mother to spend enough time feeding and caring for herself and her family. This is particularly important for the young child, who needs frequent feeding, especially when being weaned or when the child is ill. The time constraints felt by the family can also result in children being required to participate in both agricultural and child care activities, often at the expense of their education.

- *When designing programmes aimed at increasing resources for rural households, particular attention will be paid to the issues of time demands on women. Ways have to be found to reduce the conflicts they face between spending time generating income for the family and spending time caring for the family.*
  - *Women's access to appropriate time-saving mechanisms, such as water taps and fuel-saving stoves, should be improved.*
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### ***The Impact of AIDS on Household Level Resources***

As the number of AIDS cases increases, account must be taken of the effect that this will have on food security and nutrition. AIDS victims are usually struck in their most productive years. This is bound to have an effect on agricultural productivity and output, as labour becomes more scarce at critical times of the crop year. There will also be a loss of "parenting", as more children become AIDS orphans. All this will put great pressure on the health and social service system by increasing the needs of the population.

- *Government must monitor the incidence of AIDS in the country, not only from the point of view of demands on the health system, but also in terms of its impact on agricultural production and household food security.*
- *Increased efforts must be addressed at improving public awareness of AIDS and methods of protection.*
- *Plans must be developed to direct resources towards AIDS orphans, and to find ways of incorporating them in the community.*

### ***The Impact of Alcohol Abuse on Household Level Resources***

The prevalence of alcohol abuse is increasing and constitutes a nutritional and socio-economic problem in both urban and rural areas. There are a number of diseases which are aggravated by persistent excessive alcohol intake. Poor nutritional status may increase the susceptibility of alcoholics to infections and disease. Among the diseases related to nutritional status are: pellagra, diarrhoea and cirrhosis of the liver. Alcohol dependent individuals generally have a poor appetite, sometimes as a result of chronic gastritis.

The family members of alcoholics also suffer in many ways. Alcoholics are often unable to work productively, thus reducing the level of household resources available to the family for food and other requirements. Scarce household resources are often depleted to support the alcohol addiction. In many rural households, cereal is diverted from food consumption to alcohol production. Alcoholic parents have been known to give their children alcohol when food is not readily available. Domestic violence, particularly against women and children, is often aggravated by alcohol abuse.

- *Government will encourage and support initiatives which improve the understanding of the extent of alcohol abuse in Namibia and its social and psychological implications.*
- *Government will collaborate with its social partners to provide detoxification and rehabilitation services to alcoholics.*
- *Government will encourage the establishment and utilization of recreational and education facilities to keep youth from alcohol and inform/educate them on the dangers of alcohol abuse.*
- *Government will investigate necessary legislative action to control bottle stores and shebeens and to counter the illicit purchase of alcohol by youth.*

## **4.2 Improving Household Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices**

Increasing the resources available to poor households, in order to increase their access to food, can only be achieved in the medium-term. Families must also be assisted to make the best use of the resources currently available to them. Foods must be stored and preserved in such a way as to maintain as much of their nutritional value as possible. Members of the family, in particular small children and pregnant women, must be fed with the appropriate foods at the right frequency to assist

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growth. Health and sanitation practices must support good nutritional practices and avoid the debilitating interaction of disease and malnutrition.

The Government of Namibia recognises the need to promote good food and nutritional practices, through information campaigns, use of the formal and informal education systems, extension activities and, where appropriate, build specific elements into projects, to empower the population to make better use of the resources available to them.

### *Nutrition Education*

Nutrition education is a key element in promoting good nutritional practices. In some cases, resources may be available in the household but because of lack of information and inappropriate practices, family members may not get the nutrients they need. This can be a particular problem in peri-urban areas, where there are high levels of rural in-migration and traditional food and nutrition practices have become disrupted. Unless both men and women understand what foods the body needs to maintain health and support growth, it will be difficult to achieve lasting improvement in nutritional status.

- *An institutional structure must be identified or developed to support the coordination of nutritional education activities in the country. A consistent message must be developed as to the nature and content of dietary guidelines, for maximum impact of education efforts.*
- *Nutrition education must be strengthened in the formal education system.*
- *The public and private sectors, including NGOs, must work together to ensure that the whole country has access to nutrition education programmes, whether in the formal or informal sector.*
- *As many education channels as possible should be identified and utilised including: formal education, community education projects, extension services, adult literacy groups and the media.*
- *Nutrition education must be included in the training of health, agricultural and community development extension workers.*

### *Maternal and Child Nutrition*

The early years of life are the most critical for ensuring healthy growth and development into full adult potential. Good nutrition status starts in the womb and should be followed after birth by optimal breastfeeding and appropriate weaning practices. Nutritional data indicate that growth faltering and malnutrition are greatest during the weaning period until the age of about three years.

- *Good maternal nutrition, and appropriate breastfeeding and weaning practices will be addressed not just through ante-natal and post-natal clinics, but through wider nutrition education coverage.*
- *As indicated in the Baby and Mother Friendly Initiative, working mothers must be enabled to breast-feed optimally. If necessary, changes must be made in the Labour Law in support of these initiatives.*
- *A code on breast milk substitutes will be introduced to ensure the suitability of products sold in Namibia.*

### *Growth Monitoring and Promotion*

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Growth monitoring and promotion has been established at health facilities and efforts are being made to implement this at the community level. In this programme, individual infants who are not gaining weight at an acceptable rate are identified, and their families assisted in changing their child care practices to improve the infant's nutrition. This is seen as an important way of helping communities identify their own nutritional problems and, as far as possible, address them with the existing resources of the household. The approach of emphasising early identification of growth faltering and rehabilitation within the community and the household is seen as fundamental to Government's objectives of encouraging self-reliance and empowering communities to deal with their own nutritional problems.

- *Community based growth monitoring and promotion will be established as soon as is possible. This programme will be the major pillar to tackle protein-energy malnutrition in young children.*
- *Institutional growth monitoring, rehabilitation and promotion must be strengthened.*
- *Health workers must be trained to disseminate information to the community on how to improve the growth and health of their infants and young children.*

### *Micronutrient Deficiencies*

The Namibian population suffers from a number of micronutrient deficiencies: iodine (goiter), vitamin A deficiency (xerophthalmia), iron deficiency (anaemia) and niacin deficiency (pellagra). As a general principle, these deficiency diseases should be addressed by promoting good nutritional practices and encouraging people to eat a varied diet. In some cases, food fortification may be a cost-effective way of addressing these deficiencies. Supplementation may be appropriate as an immediate intervention, where deficiencies are serious and likely to lead to irreversible physical and mental harm.

All three approaches are currently employed in Namibia. Iodine deficiency has been addressed through the salt iodization legislation and programme, and through the distribution of iodine capsules in the most seriously affected areas. Vitamin A capsules are distributed through the primary health care system. Garden projects aim to improve the quality of the diet through consumption of home-grown vegetables. Other deficiency diseases are more complex in their origin. Pellagra is a particular problem associated not only with low niacin intake but with alcoholism. Anaemia is associated not only with poor diet but with high levels of malaria.

- *Ideally, micronutrient deficiencies must be tackled through the improved quality of diets. This will be addressed through initiatives to increase home production of fruits and vegetables where water is available, and to increase the variety of foods available on local markets at reasonable cost.*
- *Programmes to promote good nutritional practices must be encouraged. In the short run, these must be reinforced by appropriate supplementation programmes implemented through the PHC system.*
- *Research will be undertaken into the feasibility and cost of possible further food fortification, including the possible fortification of mahangu, maize meal and cooking oil with vitamin A.*
- *All salt, whether for human or animal consumption, whether imported or produced domestically, must be iodized.*
- *The Government supports both public and private sector initiatives to tackle alcohol abuse, not simply in terms of the effect it has on nutrition, but also on the morale of individuals and communities.*



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### 4.3 Providing Adequate Social and Supporting Structures

The Namibian Government places great importance on encouraging self-reliance and initiative amongst the population. However, Government accepts responsibility for developing appropriate institutions, such as well-functioning markets and effective rules and regulations, which enable families to assist themselves. In addition, certain services, such as agricultural extension, health immunisation services and information collection and dissemination, are more effective and economic when provided on a collective basis, whether by the public or the private sector. It is important that these institutions and services reach out to the most remote parts of the country and are accessible to marginalised households and communities.

#### *Improved Food Quality and Safety*

Good nutrition results not only from the quantity of food consumed, but also from the quality of food consumed. It is important that people have confidence in the safety of the foods that they purchase.

- *A structure must be developed to establish national food standards and for the systematic testing for the safety and quality of foods, e.g. through the establishment of a Bureau of Standards.*
- *A comprehensive set of food legislation and guidelines must be developed and promulgated.*
- *Institutional support must be developed to monitor and enforce these standards and guidelines.*
- *Regulations will be supported by efforts to sensitise and educate the public on the importance of food quality and safety.*

#### *Development of Food Markets*

Government recognises the importance of developing competitive food markets both from the point of view of increasing opportunities for farmers to improve their earnings from food production but also to improve access to food at reasonable prices for both the urban and rural population.

- *Government will ensure that obstacles to the development of competitive food markets are removed through:*
    - *developing and operating market information systems;*
    - *encouraging price surveillance and monitoring systems;*
    - *sensitizing, mobilising and providing incentives for the private sector and local communities;*
    - *discouraging monopolistic behaviour;*
    - *improving access to markets through better infrastructure; and*
    - *providing necessary credit for marketing agents and small scale producers.*
  - *Support must be directed especially towards the development of local markets.*
  - *Establishing practical mechanisms for fish distribution and marketing systems throughout the country.*
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### *Food and Nutrition Monitoring and Surveillance*

Up to date information on the prevalence of nutritional problems is important, not just for the management of nutritional interventions but also as an indicator of welfare and living standards in the population. A food and nutrition surveillance system should not only provide information to central Government, but will provide the basis for district level responses to increased food insecurity.

- *A comprehensive food and nutrition monitoring system must be developed with the following components:*
  - *rainfall and food production, building on and improving the present Early Warning and Food Information System;*
  - *better use of the existing Health Information System, to give incidence of nutrition related diseases as presented at health facilities;*
  - *a system for reporting back information from the Community Based Growth Monitoring and Promotion Programme, so that eventually this will develop into a comprehensive nutrition surveillance system; and*
  - *the development of a Household Food Security Monitoring system, which will collect data on food markets, household income and assets, food production and nutritional status from a number of sentinel communities.*

### *Nutrition Research and Planning*

Nutrition activities are constrained by the sparsity of information on food habits, child feeding practices, food consumption levels and the precise links between food intake and the incidence of disease in different areas of the country. Projects and programmes have sometimes been implemented without any clear understanding as to their impact on the food and nutrition status of the beneficiaries.

- *Research into food consumption, food habits, and into appropriate methods for monitoring accessibility and availability of food, by suitably qualified individuals, must be encouraged to enable programmes to be more effectively focused and targeted.*
- *The food and nutrition implications of all relevant programmes and projects should be explicitly taken into account at the identification, formulation, assessment, coordination, implementation and evaluation phases of those projects.*
- *Incorporation of food security and nutrition objectives in development policy planning and implementation.*

## **5. STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

The Food and Nutrition Policy for Namibia can only be developed and implemented through a coherent, coordinated cross-sectoral approach to the various elements discussed above. This has involved collaboration between central Government Ministries and agencies, regional and local authorities, NGOs, the private sector and the concerned donor agencies.

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A National Food Security and Nutrition Action Plan has been prepared in a highly participatory manner to serve as the major tool for the implementation of Government's Food and Nutrition Policy. The Action Plan outlines existing Government, NGO and private sector programmes and initiatives addressing food and nutrition issues and proposes a comprehensive set of mutually supportive, cross-sectoral, broad-based actions to fill the identified gaps in the existing programmes and to help achieve Government's food security and nutrition related goals and objectives. The Action Plan provides a detailed strategic framework for the implementation of Government's food and nutrition policies.

All programmes will have a built-in monitoring and evaluation component so that, over time, our understanding of the problems and successes of different approaches to promoting good nutrition increases, thus allowing successful initiatives to be replicated in other parts of the country, as appropriate.

## **6. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

An institutional framework, which would facilitate the required linkages for cooperation and coordination to implement Government's food and nutrition policies, programmes, projects and activities to achieve food security and nutrition objectives, was established by Cabinet on 13 September 1994. This framework consists of a three-tier institutional structure which will assure that issues of food security and nutrition are actively addressed and appropriately linked (1) at the policy and decision-making level, (2) at the technical level, and (3) on a day-to-day operational basis.

A "National Food Security and Nutrition Council" (FSNC) was established at the senior level. The Council is comprised of the Permanent Secretaries of eight relevant Ministries: the Ministry of Health and Social Services (Chair), the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, the Ministry of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing and the National Planning Commission. The Council is a decision-making, policy level body whose membership has the capacity to commit their Ministries to a particular course of action. With meetings twice a year (more frequently if required), the Council advises and reports directly to Cabinet.

The Council is supported by a "Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee" (FSNTC). This body is comprised of representatives of all Ministries represented on the Council, as well as NGOs, international agencies, the academic community and other co-opted members according to issues under discussion. The Technical Committee is chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development. The FSNTC has overseen all major food security and related initiatives, including the formulation of the Food and Nutrition Policy and the Food Security and Nutrition Action Plan. They will be responsible for the maintenance, coordination and implementation of the policy and the Action Plan. The Technical Committee reports to and advises the Food Security and Nutrition Council.

A "Food Security and Nutrition Secretariat" (FSNS) was also created to support the Technical Committee and the Council. The Secretariat is located in the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, and works under the direct supervision of, and is responsible to, the Chairperson of the Technical Committee. The Secretariat undertakes the day-to-day work related to Government's food security and nutrition initiatives.

Government will also establish or strengthen institutional mechanisms at the regional level to facilitate cross-sectoral and multi-agency cooperation and coordination of food security and nutrition related initiatives. The regional structure will be appropriately linked to the national structure.

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