

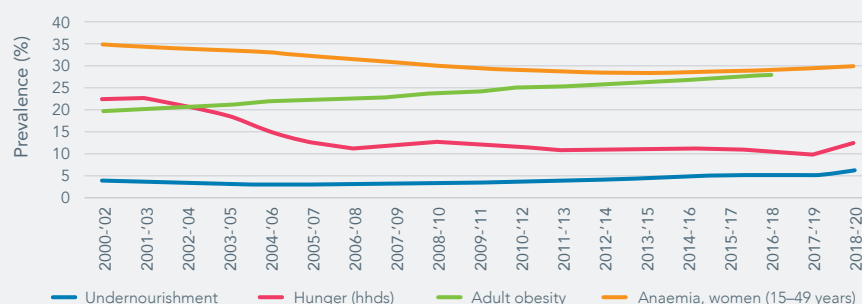
THE ROLE OF THE FORMAL FOOD INDUSTRY IN ADDRESSING MALNUTRITION AND IMPROVING POPULATION DIETS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Issue Brief – Feb 2026

The double burden of malnutrition in South Africa

South Africa faces a double burden of malnutrition (DBM), the simultaneous presence of undernutrition (stunting, wasting, underweight, micronutrient deficiencies), and overnutrition (overweight, obesity), or diet-related non-communicable diseases. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, global progress in reducing undernourishment has stalled, while in South Africa, rates continue to rise. Around 7 million (11%) South Africans experience chronic hunger, 27% of children under five years are stunted, and 31% of women over 15 years are anemic. Meanwhile, roughly 21 million (54%) adults are overweight or obese – the highest prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa and still increasing (see Figure 1).¹

Figure 1: Food and nutrition insecurity in South Africa, 2000-2020



Source: FAO 2022

Food industry actions influence nutrition

Food and beverage manufacturers, supermarkets and quick-service restaurants play a major role in shaping food environments and diets in South Africa. They offer a variety of foods, both healthy and unhealthy, which have mixed impacts on both undernutrition and overnutrition. Addressing the DBM requires leveraging the formal food industry's positive potential while curbing harmful practices.² However, industry self-regulation has proven largely ineffective due to strong commercial incentives for non-adherence, prioritized market interests, and the absence of enforceable regulations.³



Priority Actions

Government officials

Support the adoption and implementation of the Draft Regulation Relating to the Labelling and Advertising of Foodstuffs (R.3337 of 2023).

Develop and enact legislation requiring quick-service restaurants to display comprehensive nutrition information in-store on menus, online and on apps.

Food industry

Develop and publish specific, time-bound targets for reducing nutrients of concern (sodium, sugar, sat fat, trans-fat) and energy/portion sizes across the overall portfolio, and routinely report progress towards them.

Improve the availability and affordability of healthier products across all geographic areas, e.g., through increased shelf space, strategic placement or price promotions exclusively for healthier options.



Key findings

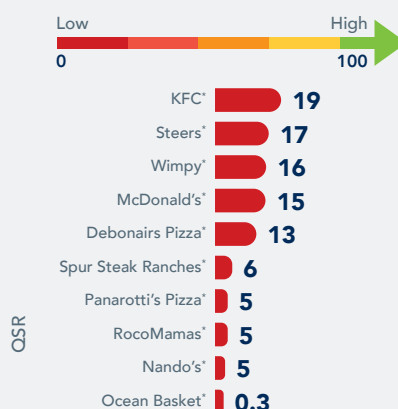
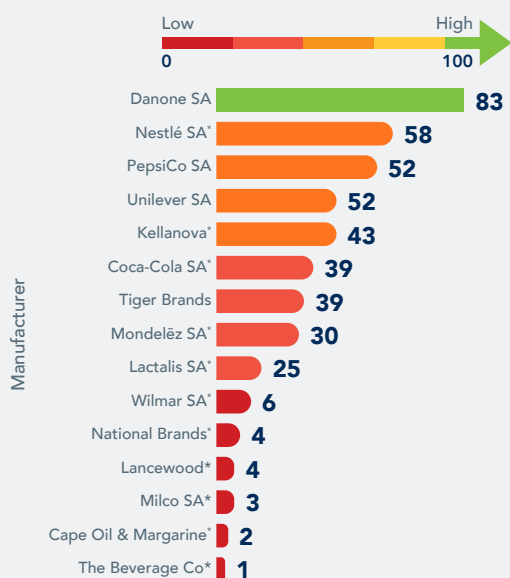
Commitments and practices for supporting healthier food environments and improving population nutrition (Scores out of 100)⁶

Food and beverage manufacturers

Average score:
29/100

Quick-service restaurant (QSR) chains

Average score:
10/100



Supermarket chains

Average score:
20/100



*Assessment based on publicly available information only

The final report and individual scorecards for each company are published on our website



Independent monitoring of food industry action:

INFORMAS BIA-Obesity⁴ & BIA-DBM⁵ tool

Independent, comprehensive assessment and benchmarking of the voluntary commitments and practices of South Africa's formal food industry with regard to addressing and preventing all forms of malnutrition.⁶

Key findings

- 1 Companies reported taking increased action in the areas of corporate strategy, nutrition labelling and disclosure of external relationships and lobbying.
- 2 Considerable improvements are required in the areas of product pricing, availability and positioning, promotion practices, product formulation, as well as in specifically addressing the double burden of malnutrition.

This Issue Brief was developed with support from the Center for Evidence based Health Care (CEBHC) at Stellenbosch University.
Credits: Nasreen Jessani

Contacts

Carmen Klinger MSc
LMU Munich/SAMRC
carmen.klinger@mrc.ac.za
cklinger@ibe.med.uni-muenchen.de

Peter Delobelle MD PhD FRSPH
CDIA / University of Cape Town
peter.delobelle@uct.ac.za

Zandile Mchiza, BSc, PhD
SAMRC/UWC
zandile.mchiza@mrc.ac.za

Jillian Hill, BPsych, MPH, PhD
SAMRC
jillian.hill@mrc.ac.za

References:

- 1 Global Food and Nutrition Security Dashboard. Country profile: South Africa. Retrieved October 8, 2025, from <https://www.gafis.info>.
- 2 Klinger C, Okanmelu EC, Holliday N, et al. Recommendations for the food industry to address undernutrition: a systematic review. Manuscript under review.
- 3 Erzse A, Karim SA, Foley L, et al. A realist review of voluntary actions by the food and beverage industry and implications for public health and policy in low- and middle-income countries. *Nat Food*. 2022; 3:650–663. DOI: 10.1038/s43016-022-00552-5.
- 4 Sacks G, Vanderlee L, et al. BIA-Obesity (Business Impact Assessment-Obesity and population-level nutrition): A tool and process to assess food company policies and commitments related to obesity prevention and population nutrition at the national level. *Obes Rev*. 2019; 20 Suppl 2:78–89. DOI: 10.1111/obr.12878.
- 5 Klinger C, Okanmelu EC, Delobelle P, et al. Tool for assessing food industry commitments and practices to address the double burden of malnutrition: a Delphi study. *Global Health*. 2026; 22,14. DOI: 10.1186/s12992-025-01175-8.
- 6 Klinger C, Okanmelu EC, Nkurunziza M, et al. Assessing and benchmarking the voluntary policies and commitments of the formal food industry in South Africa using the BIA-DBM framework. *OSF*. 2024. DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/FZV5W.