

Addressing Nutrition Gaps in the Community while Improving Business in the ADS

Adequate nutrition is essential for human development and socioeconomic well-being. In Uganda, malnutrition remains a fundamental challenge. The 2011 demographic and health survey indicated that 21% of Ugandan children in the poorest quartile were underweight compared to 8% in the richest quartile, while 5% of children under five years were severely anemic. The government's *Uganda Nutrition Action Plan 2011–2016* points to malnutrition as the underlying cause of nearly 60% of infant deaths and 25% of maternal deaths. The plan encourages the consumption of nutrient-enhanced foods, which the government supports by promoting local production of fortified staples and ready-to-use therapeutic foods and by increasing awareness of their benefits.

As part of its efforts to improve access to medicines and health care in Uganda, Management Sciences for Health (MSH) and its partner, the National Drug Authority, have collaborated on a drug shop accreditation program to improve access to quality medicines and pharmaceutical services in rural communities. The model uses regulatory, supervisory, and educational interventions to transform class C drug shops into the Accredited Drug Shop (ADS), which deliver a wider range of medicines and pharmaceutical services than was previously allowed. Currently, efforts are underway to scale up the model and ensure its long-term sustainability. A study sponsored by MSH indicated that ADS could become more profitable by broadening their sales to include more general products.

Assessing the Feasibility of Stocking General Commodities in ADS

To make informed decisions, MSH set out to determine which commodities might interest shop owners and sellers, potential initial quantities, the ability of the shops to obtain the required capital to stock the products, and the available storage space or willingness to create it. In collaboration with Living Goods (U) Ltd, whose agents sell household and health-related products door to door, MSH drew up a comprehensive list of commodities including items such as detergents, disinfectants, nutrition products, toiletries, and cookware.

MSH collected data from 61 ADS shops in Mityana district, which were purposively selected to include all sub counties and represent both urban, peri-urban, and rural shops. Findings indicated that the majority of the respondents knew that they were allowed to sell non-drug items in the shops; however, they stocked a very narrow range—mainly diapers and sanitary pads. Nevertheless, all ADS were interested in adding commodities, specifically fortified foods and baby caps and socks. Eighty percent of the ADS had adequate storage space, and the rest were willing to create space to stock more products; moreover, 43% of the ADS were able to find the necessary financing. However, most were worried about the competition for clients with nearby shops and the low consumption of these products compared to medicines. They were also concerned about the poor quality of some brands of similar products on the market.

Identifying Dealers

Having identified the most popular commodities, MSH compiled a list of their manufacturers or distributors: Unilever (U) Ltd, Maganjo Grain Millers Ltd, Kiboko Enterprises Ltd, Mukwano Oil Industries

Ltd, BIDCO Uganda Ltd, Unga 2000 Ltd, and Kendo Mills. We contacted each company, and from this initial interaction, Maganjo Grain Millers Ltd and East African Basic Foods Ltd showed the most interested in introducing their products in the ADS.

Negotiations revolved around the potential products, prices and discounts, credit terms, distribution networks, marketing, and the potential for storage at the district before distribution to the individual shops. Before the manufacturers would commit to the venture, we agreed to assess the ADS sellers' level of interest in stocking the specific fortified foods selected by the manufacturers based on product information and price.

Assessing the Level of Interest in Selected Products

We developed a data collection tool and worked with the association of drug shop sellers and owners in Mityana district to mobilize and train ADS peer supervisors to collect the required data. Results indicated that the ADS sellers and owners were interested in stocking all the selected commodities—especially Baby Soya with Enkejje (fish) from Maganjo Grain Millers Ltd. The table below lists the products selected for the assessment.

East African Basic Foods Ltd	Maganjo Grain Millers Ltd
Baby Soya 500g	Baby Soya with Milk 500g
Health Booster 500g	Baby Soya with Enkejje 500g
High Protein Porridge 1kg	Baby Soya with Chocolate 500g
Instant Soya Porridge 500g	Toto Infant Cereal 500g
Soya Kawa 150g	Brain Booster 500g
Soya Kawa 500g	Super Meal 500g

Signing the Memorandum of Understanding

Realizing the potential for additional business in ADS, the two companies agreed to meet with the association of drug shop sellers and owners in Mityana to work out collaboration details, which became the basis of a memorandum of understanding. Because of delays with Maganjo Grain Millers, we moved ahead with East African Basic Foods Ltd for the pilot, and the MOU between East African Basic Foods Ltd and Mityana drug shop sellers and owners association was signed.

Training Sellers about the Products

With support from MSH, East African Basic Foods Ltd designed and conducted a training workshop for the sellers to educate them about the new commodities. ADS sellers also received leaflets describing each product. At the end of the training, the sellers placed orders for commodities with administrative support from the association leadership. East African Basic Foods Ltd delivered the orders to the association offices within two days, and the shop owners arranged to pick up their items or have them delivered by public transportation.



Loading items on an East African Basic Foods Ltd truck for delivery

The first set of items was consumed within one month, and the association placed another order for the second batch of commodities. These were also delivered to the association within one day.

Preliminary results of this pilot indicate great potential, and communities in Mityana district are enthusiastic about the new products. In addition, the manufacturers are happy with this venture: *“This collaboration is to our advantage, since it is an opportunity to open up new markets for our products,”* said the marketing manager at East Africa Basic Foods Ltd.



Annet Nakitende Muwanguzi explaining to a mother how to supplement her baby’s diet with Baby Soya

Feedback from ADS Owners and Sellers

We visited four ADS shops to assess the response the sellers had gotten from their customers. On the whole, the products are gaining popularity in the community. The sellers mentioned that once customers purchase the first product, they keep coming for more. Some customers wanted even bigger pack sizes for products such as Booster.

With the information they got from East African Basic Foods Ltd, the sellers find it very easy to describe the products. Annet Nakitende Muwanguzi of Mugabi Drug Shop in Mityana Town said, *“Once you have the relevant information related to the product, it becomes very easy to sell them because these products are very relevant in our communities. They address a number of needs we experience.”*

The most popular products have been Booster and Baby Soya. Baby Soya is well-liked by diabetics, the elderly, and mothers of children under five years, while Booster has gained popularity among immune-compromised patients and those with sickle cell disease.

One owner felt that the introduction of these products filled a long-time gap. *“I once stocked similar products, but I only abandoned them when my supplier cheated me. Now I have a new source, so I will continue with the sales,”* said Oliver Kajumba Asiika, Obulamu Drug Shop, Mityana Town Council.

With time, we expect that demand for the products will grow following the enthusiasm that communities have already shown. Introducing fortified foods into ADS will help address the accreditation model’s profitability and sustainability concerns, while supporting the government’s plan to boost the consumption of these healthy products and help reduce malnutrition and related health problems in the community.



Asiika Obulamu ADS in Mityana Town Council shows how products are displayed to catch the clients’ eyes. On the top right-hand shelf is Baby Soya