SESSION 3: CONVENIENCE

Convenience is well recognized as a factor in food choice. This session will explore factors that shape consumer behavior, ways in which that understanding may be used to develop convenient and nutritious foods, and private sector approaches to the development and marketing of new food products.

Faith Thuita (University of Nairobi) will describe a Focused Ethnographic Study (FES) methodology developed by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) which was used to examine infant and young child feeding practices, behaviors and beliefs from a household perspective in three counties in Kenya. The studies explored infant and young child diet and its determinants from the perspectives of physical environment, technology, social organization, culture and the social environment to address specific research questions, the answers to which would contribute to identifying potential interventions to improve IYC nutrition and provide guidance for the development of action plans. Faith will give an overview of the study and the caregivers’ need for convenience as a strategy to save on time and cooking fuel.

Well intended efforts aimed at restricting nutrition and health claims on foods for infants and young children may inadvertently limit consumer knowledge and ability to make informed food choices related to the health merits of competing products. Global guidance, based on evidence, is necessary to help strike the balance and ensure that efforts are united towards the single goal of improving infant and young child feeding practices during the first 1000 days window of opportunity. Jane Badham (JB Consultancy) will share examples of why such guidance is necessary and how it can support appropriate labeling and marketing practices.

Convenience and nutritional content are key attributes of foods that may be important to certain consumers. Understanding the role of these attributes in regards to food processing for convenience and nutrition are critical to success in achieving the objective of enhancing nutrition through convenience. Kara Ross (Kansas State University) will introduce the concept of food hierarchies, and how they influence a consumer’s considerations of attributes of certain foods. Research on legumes in Zambia illustrates how a careful appreciation of this decision-making process confronting consumers can
facilitate the development of new products that meet the consumption needs of consumers.

Consumers in developing markets appear to be motivated by the same values as consumers in the developed world, and preliminary results suggest the same will be true of lower income consumers in these countries. Despite their effectiveness in creating new food products, multi-national companies still have very little penetration among lower income consumers in developing markets. The biggest challenge is not how to make products nutritious, but rather how to package, distribute and market nutritious products to lower income populations in an economically sustainable way. Tara Acharya (PepsiCo) will describe the approach of multi-national companies to understanding what motivates consumers to buy products: how the product is packaged and marketed, where it is placed on shelves, its price, and the taste of the product. Messages regarding nutritional benefits tend to be of secondary importance. Learning from the private sector approach, the development community might recognize the opportunity for convenient foods and that deliver improved nutrition.