



Baby Grubz: Optimum Children's Nutrition Made with Nigerian Ingredients

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Malnutrition among children is a common problem in Nigeria. Even educated and professional women struggle to provide adequate nutrition to their children. Seun Sangoleye turned her struggles into a business that helps other mothers. Using locally sourced ingredients, she started Baby Grubz, a baby food company that specializes in affordable, nutritionally balanced baby food products for children ages 6 months through 5 years. The success of the company in Nigeria and the United Kingdom (in part because of a positive social media presence) is encouraging future growth domestically and abroad.

Food Science in Action:

- ✓ Product Development
- ✓ Nutrition
- ✓ Food Processing
- ✓ Sensory Science
- ✓ Sustainability
- ✓ Food Technology

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country and largest economy in the Sub-Saharan region; however, it currently has the highest malnutrition burden of any African country, with over 12 million stunted children.¹

In Nigeria, poor nutrition is passed down through the generations, as underweight mothers are more likely to give birth to low birthweight children and have children who are undernourished. The rate of child stunting (a sign of chronic malnutrition) in children under 5 years of age is 33% while the rate of child wasting (an indicator of acute malnutrition) is 11%.¹

According to a report by UNICEF¹, key practices for first 1000 days of life (pregnancy through 2 years of age) in Nigeria are:

- Variety of foods consumed during pregnancy and lactation as well as iron & folic acid supplements (IFA)
- Early initiation of breastfeeding
- Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months
- Continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years
- Timely initiation of complementary feeding and variety of foods given to infants after the first 6 months

However, in 2021, only 23.1% of Nigerian women initiated breastfeeding within the first hour and only 34.4% exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months (which falls short of the World Health Assembly target of 50%).¹

The most common foods provided to Nigerian children between 6 and 23 months of age are pap (maize meal porridge), rice, eggs and beans. Very little emphasis is placed on meat, fish, fruit, and vegetables. The main reason for not providing children with a more diverse diet is a lack of money to buy nutritious foods—this was reported across all geographic regions as well as for both urban and rural populations. Another obstacle to providing nutritious foods is the lack of availability at markets due to food being out of season.¹



Figure 1. Company Logo. Courtesy of BabyGrubz

Statistics provide a broad picture. Specifically, Seun Sangoleye, CEO and Mum-in-Chief of Baby Grubz (logo Figure 1) in Nigeria, had a son who developed rickets. Rickets manifests as impaired growth and bone deformities, which require the correct balance of Vitamin D, calcium, and phosphorus from the diet.² In Nigeria it typically occurs from a calcium deficiency.³ There was no easily available calcium-rich food for her to help her son. As a concerned mother, Sangoleye took matters into her own hands, by taking locally available ingredients and combining them to make nutrient dense foods that would address this need.

Response

Sangoleye looked in the local market to find foods that were nutrient dense and appropriate for her young child, and was unsuccessful. Foods with the desired nutrition profile were imported and were too expensive and not culturally appropriate. The local raw ingredients had the nutrients, but required extensive preparation. The local prepared foods that were available lacked the essential nutrients. She wanted to make available foods with the nutrition children required, with local ingredients, and have them easy for parents to serve. Many local individual foods contain the components for a complete diet, but need some fortification; understanding the nutritional composition of the products would become a critical aspect of the company.

As Sangoleye learned how to help her son, she realized there was a business opportunity to help other mothers struggling with the same issues. In 2013 Baby Grubz was founded, with the first

products of sprouted mixed grains cereal and rice cereal, which are still part of the portfolio. The company began as a small ready-to-eat baby food catering service. The food had limited shelf life and would need to be distributed and consumed within days of production. By 2017, Baby Grubz had pivoted to shelf-stable cereals, flours, and snacks.

Developing effective products required a thorough knowledge of chemistry and nutrition profile of the ingredients along with the use of traditional African meal preparation. Since the primary objective was to achieve an optimum nutritional profile, determining how to get the correct flavor and texture with processing through shelf life was a challenge. The process could take a year, and the seasonal variability of the ingredients had to be considered. All ingredients (grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables) are sourced locally from Nigerian farmers, the markets, or employees' own gardens, with superfoods like moringa, millet, and sweet potatoes particularly important raw materials.

For shelf stable products, controlled roasting, drying, and milling are used to process the raw materials. These techniques reduced moisture levels in the products therefore extending shelf life by minimizing microbial growth and other chemical changes in the ingredients. Production is done using Good Manufacturing Practices, a staple of the food industry, to ensure quality foods. Freshness is preserved with food grade moisture-proof packaging.

Baby Grubz products are aimed at children 6 months to 5 years old. The goal of the company is

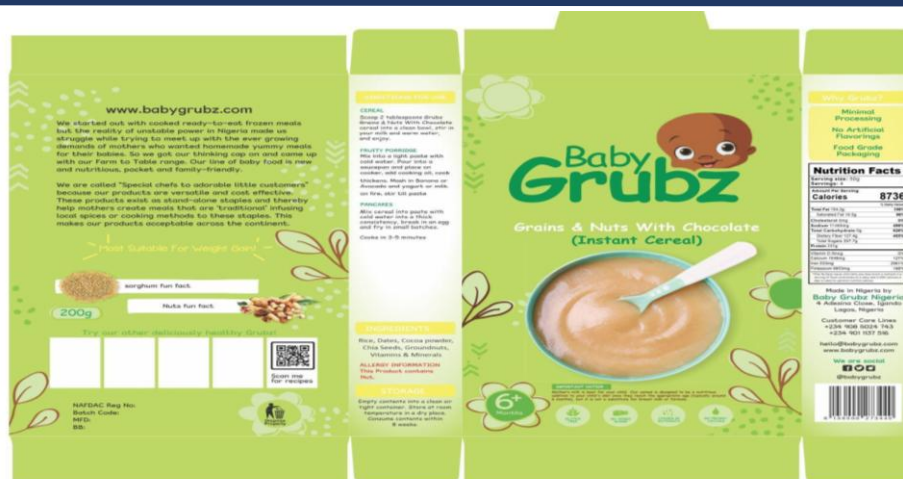


Figure 2. Example of packaging
Courtesy of BabyGrubz

to address moderate malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies at an affordable price. Each product must meet WHO/FAO complementary feeding standards for protein, fat, iron, and calcium. Sangoleye increased her knowledge of nutrition from research, online nutrition courses, and collaboration with pediatric dietitians. Information is obtained from the food composition data from the Nigerian Food Composition Table and database. Example formulas are:

Grubz Sweet Potato Cereal: Sweet potato, sorghum, soybean, groundnut, basil and moringa leaves, nutrient premix

Grubz Grain and Nuts Cereal: Sprouted millet, sprouted sorghum, fermented soybean, groundnut, date powder, nutrient premix

Grubz Banana and Dates Cereal: Sprouted sorghum, bananas, groundnut, date powder, cinnamon, nutrient premix

The premix, a custom blend of vitamins and minerals, is used to ensure there are no nutrition gaps, and is provided by a local nutrition company (BNSL). Learning about the unit operations and methods of ingredient processing (such as sprouting, roasting, and drying) was another hurdle for the founder. Sangoleye had to educate herself on these aspects of food manufacturing through online food processing courses, reading research papers, and working with experienced production managers who were willing to share their knowledge. With this knowledge of how to make great products, she was able to innovate the business and then take her strengths of marketing and management to create a successful business.

Baby Grubz baby cereals are sold as dry powder that is mixed with warm water and then cooked

on the stove for 3-5 minutes to form a puree-type texture. Packaging provides preparation and nutrition information (Figure 2), which results in a happy child (Figure 3). Different products have different goals, both nutritionally as well as to aid in bowel movements and to aid with sleep. Besides baby cereals, Baby Grubz also sells ingredients, such as soybean flour and shrimp powder, that can be used in recipes to make other food for babies and young children.

Results

Baby Grubz has been a successful business. In addition to current products on the market, some new RTE (ready-to-eat) products are currently undergoing regulatory approval before being added to the company product portfolio.

Over the years, Baby Grubz has worked with the smallholder farmers to have more consistent post-harvest handling to minimize variation in the raw materials, as well as developing a quality assurance system. Without import costs for ingredients or packaging, the price of the foods are kept affordable. Plus there is the benefit of helping the local economy. Besides Baby Grubz, there is now a network of women distributors who act as both entrepreneurs and nutrition advocates. Research was done to learn about processing options like sprouting, roasting, and drying to eliminate antinutrients in the ingredients which improves shelf life

Over 500,000 children have been fed Baby Grubz products in their distribution markets of 26 Nigerian states (in 185 locations), and into Ghana, Togo, and the UK. Beyond Africa, the food is sold through the company's website⁴ in the United Kingdom (to the African diaspora familiar with the ingredients). Baby Grubz claims to have



Figure 3. The powder is easy to prepare to feed your child and support their health. Photos courtesy BabyGrubz 3

reduced deficiencies in protein, vitamin A, vitamin D, iron, and calcium.

A big part of the company's marketing is its presence on social media. There is a company blog on the website⁴, as well as pages on Instagram and Facebook (Figure 4), demonstrating the value of the products, offering recipes and advice for feeding babies, and spreading nutrition information.

Lessons Learned

In her business journey, Sangoleye learned a number of key lessons and offers the following recommendations to others:

- Get a co-founder—trying to start a business alone was very difficult.
- Find a mentor to help guide the business development.
- Begin with one flagship product.
- Expect to grow and build scalability into the manufacturing from the beginning

Next Steps

- Baby Grubz plans to expand distribution of its products to the U.S. in 2026.
- The company wants to move from the modern market (supermarket) to the traditional market, serving the BoP

(bottom/base of the pyramid) market—referring to a business model that focuses on selling nutritious, affordable, and accessible food products to low income populations.

- In 2 years, the goal is to supply 10% of Nigeria's complementary foods market and scale across Africa.
- In 5 years, they will begin innovative packaging (like single-serve sachets) and expand regional distribution.
- An opportunity is to enhance the digestibility of the products and improve texture and nutrient retention, along with reducing processing time. Baby Grubz is exploring the use of enzymes and extrusion to address these issues.
- As part of the long term quality efforts, Baby Grubz is working toward HACCP and ISO certifications.

Baby Grubz is utilizing local ingredients in familiar formulas for broad acceptability of taste and affordable pricing. By having nutrition as a goal in product development, the foods are making a big difference to the health of the youngsters of Nigeria and the UK. The company is looking forward to improving their production and distribution to continue to help children be properly nourished.

Why your Baby's Brain loves Sweet Potatoes!

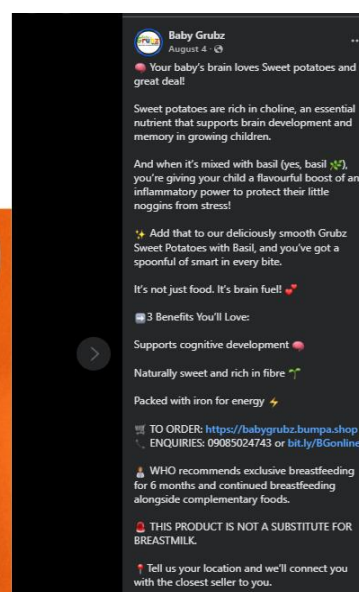


Figure 4. Example of nutrition-based information shared on Baby Grubz Facebook Page.⁵

References

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