



**UN Network**


SERIES 2

# Tales be told

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Consolidating joint action on nutrition at country level to make a bigger impact



A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's face, looking downwards. The person has dark skin and is wearing a purple t-shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

*“As the world physically distanced to stave off the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced bouts of isolation and we began to see new meaning in solidarity and new value in partnerships.”*

DR. PURNIMA KASHYAP,  
DIRECTOR/GLOBAL COORDINATOR OF THE UN NETWORK

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# Foreword

It is with great pride and pleasure that I introduce this second series of *Tales Be Told* and with it, this collection of new inspiring stories of UN collaboration on nutrition. The release is timely, as it comes knocking at the door of the third phase of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, and as the UN nutrition community sets in place a new coordination entity, UN Nutrition. While the gears are in motion for change, I'm confident that these country stories will endure and trigger learning across borders. I'm also hopeful that stories like these will help to reinforce the country-owned, country-driven ethos of SUN 3.0.

In a certain sense, *Tales Be Told* is a learning laboratory; a mechanism for capturing good practices, amplifying country voices and showing the world how the United Nations is working together on nutrition so that we invest in people today for a better future tomorrow. This year has given us an increased appreciation for joint action. As the world physically distanced to stave off the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced bouts of isolation and we began to see new meaning in solidarity and new value in partnerships. The UN [nutrition] Network (UNN), in its varying forms, has provided that outlet for nutrition, helping to bolster the SUN Movement in many countries.

The UNN is about celebrating diversity and leveraging the individual strengths of the United Nations agencies for a stronger collective. It's a way to put into practice the principles of UN reform and to place people — mothers, fathers, children and elders — at the center.

Our UN colleagues have had the courage to tell us their stories and the patience to answer our questions, despite heavy workloads that multiplied virtually overnight alongside the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). This is in and of itself testament to the perceived importance and popularity of these 'tales'.

Enjoy the read!



**Dr. Purnima Kashyap**

*Director/Global Coordinator of the UN Network*



# Acronyms

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>AAITG</b>    | Action Aid International in The Gambia  |
| <b>AFSeN-A</b>  | Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda                                |
| <b>AOP</b>      | Administrative Office of the President (Afghanistan)                          |
| <b>ASAP</b>     | Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (Burundi)                    |
| <b>ASG</b>      | Assistant Secretary-General   |
| <b>CERF</b>     | Central Emergency Relief Fund   |
| <b>CERFAM</b>   | Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (Côte d'Ivoire) |
| <b>CHANGE</b>   | Community Health Advanced through Nutrition and Gender Equality project       |
| <b>CMAM</b>     | Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition                              |
| <b>COVID-19</b> | Coronavirus disease   |
| <b>CSA</b>      | Civil Society Alliance  |
| <b>CSO</b>      | Civil society organization  |
| <b>CU5</b>      | Children under five   |
| <b>DaO</b>      | Delivering as One   |
| <b>DFID</b>     | Department for International Development                                      |
| <b>DHS</b>      | Demographic and Health Survey   |

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| <b>DPCG</b>  | Development Partners Coordination Group (Rwanda)                |
| <b>DPN</b>   | Development Partners Network (Nigeria)                          |
| <b>DRC</b>   | Democratic Republic of the Congo                                |
| <b>ECHO</b>  | European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations       |
| <b>ESARO</b> | Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (UNICEF)            |
| <b>FAN</b>   | Food Assistance and Nutrition (Sierra Leone)                    |
| <b>FAO</b>   | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations         |
| <b>FMARD</b> | Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Nigeria) |
| <b>FNCO</b>  | Food and Nutrition Coordination Office (Lesotho)                |
| <b>FNG</b>   | Fill the Nutrient Gap   |
| <b>FSN</b>   | Food security and nutrition                                     |
| <b>GAP</b>   | Global Action Plan on Child Wasting                             |
| <b>GNR</b>   | Global Nutrition Report   |
| <b>HACCP</b> | Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points                     |
| <b>HDN</b>   | Humanitarian development nexus                                  |
| <b>HIES</b>  | Household Income and Expenditure Survey                         |
| <b>IEC</b>   | Information Education Communication                             |
| <b>IFAD</b>  | International Fund for Agricultural Development                 |
| <b>ILO</b>   | International Labour Organization                               |
| <b>IMAM</b>  | Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition                     |
| <b>INFF</b>  | Integrated National Financing Framework                         |
| <b>IOM</b>   | International Organization for Migration                        |
| <b>IYCF</b>  | Infant and young child feeding                                  |



|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>JICA</b>    | Japan International Cooperation Agency                                    |
| <b>JNSP</b>    | Joint Nutrition Support Program (Nepal)                                   |
| <b>JP</b>      | Joint Programme   |
| <b>LGBTI</b>   | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people                   |
| <b>MAM</b>     | Moderate acute malnutrition   |
| <b>MDAs</b>    | Ministries, departments and agencies                                      |
| <b>MINAGRI</b> | Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (Peru)                             |
| <b>MIP</b>     | Maximum Intervention Programme (Lesotho)                                  |
| <b>MoBNP</b>   | Ministry of Budget and National Planning (Nigeria)                        |
| <b>MoH</b>     | Ministry of Health  |
| <b>MSGs</b>    | Mother support groups   |
| <b>MSNP-I</b>  | Multi-sectoral nutrition plan-I, 2013–2017 (Nepal)                        |
| <b>MSNP-II</b> | Multi-sectoral nutrition plan-II, 2018–2022 (Nepal)                       |
| <b>MS-NPAN</b> | Multi-Sectoral National Plan of Action for Nutrition, 2018–2022 (Myanmar) |
| <b>MSP</b>     | Multi-stakeholder/sectoral platform                                       |
| <b>MUAC</b>    | Mid-upper arm circumference   |
| <b>NaNA</b>    | National Nutrition Agency (The Gambia)                                    |
| <b>NCDs</b>    | Noncommunicable diseases  |
| <b>NCN</b>     | National Council on Nutrition (Nigeria)                                   |
| <b>NECDP</b>   | National Early Childhood Development Programme (Rwanda)                   |
| <b>NGOs</b>    | Non-governmental organizations  |
| <b>NIPN</b>    | National Information Platform for Nutrition                               |
| <b>NISR</b>    | National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda                                |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>NNFSP</b>    | Nepal Nutrition and Food Security Portal (Nepal)                     |
| <b>NRA</b> s    | Non-Resident Agencies  |
| <b>NSDP II</b>  | National Strategic Development Plan, 2018/19–2022/23 (Lesotho)       |
| <b>N4G</b>      | Nutrition for Growth   |
| <b>3N</b>       | Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens initiative                            |
| <b>PAHO/WHO</b> | Pan American Health Organization                                     |
| <b>PNG</b>      | Papua New Guinea   |
| <b>PNSN</b>     | National Nutrition Security Policy (Niger)                           |
| <b>PPO</b>      | Policy and Plan Overview   |
| <b>PROSPER</b>  | Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Empowered Resilience (Malawi) |
| <b>PyENSAN</b>  | National Nutrition and Food Security Policy and Strategy (Honduras)  |
| <b>RA</b> s     | Resident Agencies  |
| <b>RUTF</b>     | Ready-to-use therapeutic food  |
| <b>SAM</b>      | Severe acute malnutrition  |
| <b>SBCC</b>     | Social and behaviour change communication                            |
| <b>SBN</b>      | SUN Business Network   |
| <b>SDGs</b>     | Sustainable Development Goals  |
| <b>SISESAN</b>  | Nutrition and Food Security Monitoring Information System (Honduras) |
| <b>SOP</b>      | Standard operating procedure   |
| <b>SUN</b>      | Scaling Up Nutrition Movement  |
| <b>TWGs</b>     | Technical working groups   |

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>UHT</b>       | Ultra-high temperature   |
| <b>UNAIDS</b>    | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS                             |
| <b>UNCDF</b>     | United Nations Capital Development Fund                                |
| <b>UNCT</b>      | United Nations Country Team  |
| <b>UNDAF</b>     | United Nations Development Assistance Framework                        |
| <b>UNDAPII</b>   | United Nations Development Assistance Plan, 2018–2023 (Rwanda)         |
| <b>UNDP</b>      | United Nations Development Programme                                   |
| <b>UNFPA</b>     | United Nations Population Fund   |
| <b>UNICEF</b>    | United Nations Children’s Fund   |
| <b>UNIFEM</b>    | United Nations Development Fund for Women                              |
| <b>UNN</b>       | UN [nutrition] Network   |
| <b>UNN-REACH</b> | UNN’s Renewed Efforts Against Children Hunger and undernutrition       |
| <b>UNOCHA</b>    | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs     |
| <b>UNRC</b>      | United Nations Resident Coordinator                                    |
| <b>UNSDCF</b>    | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework           |
| <b>UN WOMEN</b>  | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| <b>UTSAN</b>     | Technical Unit for Food Security and Nutrition (Honduras)              |
| <b>WASH</b>      | Water, sanitation and hygiene  |
| <b>WFP</b>       | World Food Programme   |
| <b>WHO</b>       | World Health Organization  |

# Introduction

The UN [nutrition] Network (UNN) galvanizes the United Nations family to support nutrition gains at the country level, and in turn, unleash the power of nutrition to drive sustainable development. Founded in 2013 by the Principals of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the Network, today, rallies as many as sixteen agencies.<sup>1</sup> This three-fold increase in membership is a vote of confidence in the Network, recognizing that it is changing mindsets to embrace collective action on nutrition across sectors and institutions. While the UNN is one of the four main networks in the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, its services and tools have also been availed by non-SUN countries, who are equally keen to consolidate UN technical expertise and help governments address nutrition holistically.

UNN-REACH<sup>2</sup> has played a catalytic role in setting up and strengthening UNNs at the country level, as demonstrated in various stories in *Tales Be Told* – both

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1 These include: FAO; the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); IFAD; the International Organization for Migration (IOM); the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); UNICEF; the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS); the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN); WFP; WHO and the World Bank.

2 REACH stands for the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition initiative, which is the intensive support arm of the UNN's multi-sectoral technical assistance facility.

Series 1 and Series 2. In addition, UNN analytical tools have provided a vehicle for mobilizing the United Nations around nutrition as well as for establishing a common language and front. The Network has also capitalized on the leverage of United Nations Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) to further instill joint approaches and elevate nutrition on the political agenda, even in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Launched in 2019, *Tales Be Told* quickly became a UNN 'best-seller', prompting many more countries to come forward with their stories. This second edition is structured according to four themes: (1) UNN people, including UNRCs and their stake in the national nutrition agenda; (2) UNN capacity strengthening; (3) UNN programming and partnerships; and (4) UNN analytics. It is particularly rewarding to see how investments in joint planning/frameworks and sensitization of UN leadership in recent years have materialized in integrated programming. COVID-19 is inevitably a common thread, given the large mark it has made worldwide over the last year. While the 'tales' are presented here as a complete set, they can also be read on an individual basis, depending upon the areas that interest readers most.

The aim is not just to share experiences, but also to learn from and inspire one another so that singular contributions go farther; so that inequities underpinning undernutrition, overweight and obesity are progressively eroded. Nutrition is the foundation for good health and prosperous nations. Likewise, it has always been an intersection of many disciplines. What's different today is that there is a push to come together, not only because it is slated into UN reform, but because it makes sense. Global pandemics, such as COVID-19 are making that more apparent.

Generous funding from the European Union, Irish Aid and the United Nations agencies has enabled the work highlighted in this publication, be it enhanced nutrition governance, joint programming or better data management. A special thanks goes to the World Food Programme, which has provided substantial financial backing and hosted the UN Network Secretariat since its inception.

# UNN Country Stories







## UNN PEOPLE

UNN Champion  
shares his tips on  
how to spark collective  
success in nutrition



REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES IN CHAD

*Tale 1*



Mohamed Cheikh Levrac was recognized for his remarkable efforts as the Chad International UNN-REACH Facilitator during the SUN S/Heroes Reception at the 2019 SUN Global Gathering. He dedicated his distinction to his fellow colleagues in Chad, reminding the audience that the achievements were collective gains. The message was clear: every stakeholder's contribution counts. The UN Network (UNN) Secretariat's follow-up interview shed additional light on his inspiring work.



Mohamed Cheikh Levrac, Chad International UNN-REACH Facilitator, is honoured at the SUN Global Gathering, November 2019

UNN Secretariat/Sarah Cruz

**Question 1: Your colleagues in Chad commended your ability to put nutrition actors from different stakeholder groups at ease, to create a pleasant working environment and to help actors reach consensus. What characteristics enable you to do so? Which tools and tactics do you draw upon?**

A UNN-REACH facilitator must have certain skills and know-how, be able to work in a team and have professional leadership. The facilitator must be tactful, remain neutral and flexible, be accepted and trusted by their collaborators and partners, and be able to bring the different parties to a consensus (win-win). In the context of multi-sectoral work, everyone must have a role to play. The facilitator must recognize that role and highlight it, as this will motivate the actor or sector concerned and help them feel like they are making a valuable contribution to the process.

The use of scientific evidence and UNN-REACH tools increases awareness among stakeholders about the issue and the need for a solution. The facilitator should also act as a point of reference/resource, providing information and facilitation support to all stakeholders, as needed.

**Question 2: *Given the multisectorality of nutrition, nutrition is everyone's business but we find that it can be challenging to make it everyone's responsibility. What words of wisdom do you have for others in the nutrition community?***

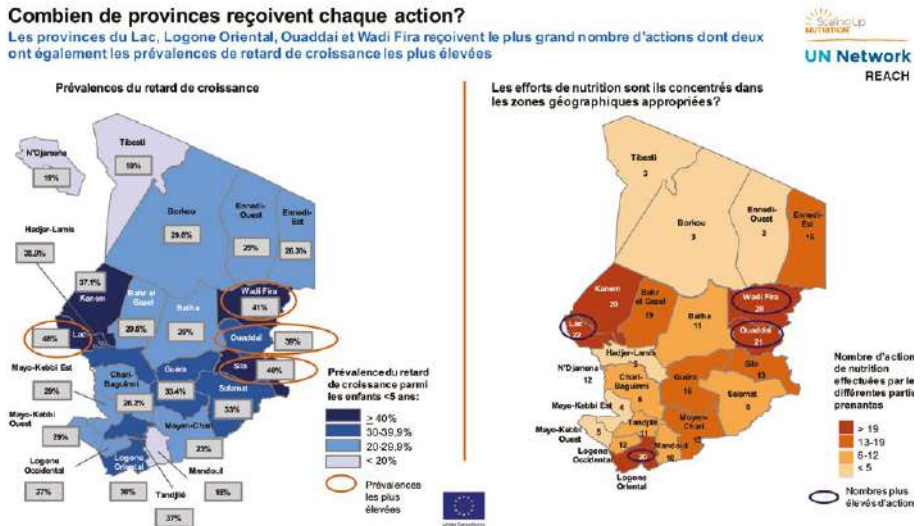
**Y**es, multisectorality is everyone's business and no sustainable result or impact can be achieved without everyone's contribution. Even if we act at the sector level, we must think multisectorally. We must remember that we are pursuing a noble objective that can only be achieved with everyone's help—including ourselves. This is why each stakeholder must feel accountable, involved, and like a key actor in the process.

**Question 3: *Today, multi-sectoral nutrition actions and the coordination thereof at sub-national levels is a topic of great interest within the SUN community. In your experience, what are three ingredients for success for countries aspiring to pursue this (and three challenges) that you think they should be aware of as they embark on this task?***

**T**his approach is inevitable if we are looking to obtain results and have an impact on indicators. At least three elements must be taken into account: (1) the *functional coordination capacities*; (2) the *involvement of local authorities and stakeholders*; and (3) *funding*. Policies, strategies and

action plans aim to scale up interventions on the ground, which requires good coordination at the sub-national (provincial) level, functional capacities, budgetary allocations and joint programming. By combining these elements, and many others, we can advance nutrition. It will not be easy because we are trying to promote a new way of working– to change habits and to motivate key sectors to give up their own flag in the name of joint efforts. It must be done in a participatory manner, and thus with the actors themselves. An effort must be made to bring stakeholders to a consensus and tools, such as the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview, the dashboards and the mapping exercise can help convince them and raise awareness on the issue.

**FIGURE 1.**  
Excerpt from the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping (2019) conducted through UNN-REACH



With that said, the multi-sectoral approach is still new, especially at sub-national levels. Some of the major challenges we face, besides reaching a common understanding, are sustainability and empowerment. In other words, it's a question of who is going to take over, as the results documented thus far were mostly achieved through external support and expertise, which will disappear eventually. It is imperative that the mechanisms put into place are embedded into and administered by national structures with independent funding and management, thereby enabling further development and sustainability of the approach.

**Question 4: *What strategies/efforts do you recommend taking to bridge the central and decentralized workstreams to ensure coherence and maximize impact?***

**A**lthough coordination mechanisms are necessary at all levels and coordination at the central level is essential, a platform must be established in Chad's regions as activities are implemented at the field level. It is therefore necessary to strengthen capacities at the regional level, including to support regions in formulating their own inter-sectoral action plan and having autonomy in planning, implementation and monitoring. The central level must ensure continuous monitoring and support for the sub-national level, with a focus on capacity development, communication and training on decentralized planning.



**Question 5: Your colleagues captured a long list of achievements at the SUN S/heroes Reception. Which achievement are you most proud of and why?**

All of these achievements are close to my heart and were made possible thanks to the engagement of the colleagues you mentioned. What I would like to highlight here is our experience in nutrition governance at the provincial (sub-national) level.

It's a challenge that we care deeply about and on which we have been working for some time. The idea came from the UNN-REACH approach pursued in Niger, based on the convergence of activities in geographic areas. We first launched a pilot project covering five regions [in Chad]. After one year, we expanded to eleven regions and we are currently planning to establish four more provincial committees in the coming months to reach a total of fifteen regions. The convergence approach is starting to gain momentum in Chad, where nutrition actors are attending monthly meetings of multi-sectoral platforms under the Governors' authority, and where some provinces already have an Inter-sectoral Nutrition Budgeting Plan in place. Joint work is beginning to have a concrete impact at the field level.





## UNN PEOPLE

# Building a holistic approach in Costa Rica



HOW THE UNRC TACKLES UN REFORM,  
NUTRITION GOVERNANCE AND  
THE ENTRENCHED PATRIARCHY

*Table 2*

On the day I spoke to Alice Shackelford, the United Nations Resident Coordinator of Costa Rica,<sup>3</sup> the arrival of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was imminent, along with unseasonal rain. In the face of the mounting pressure of the day, Alice was fully present and sincere, with a refreshing level of honesty about the issues. As the interview progressed, this kind of focused attention was evident in her approach to a spectrum of issues she handles as Resident Coordinator — including the gender bias she overcomes daily.



*Alice Shackelford, United Nations Resident Coordinator of Costa Rica, visits programming site in the north, 2018*

UN Resident Coordinator's Office, Costa Rica

Worldwide, 55 percent of United Nations Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) are women and 45 percent are men. Gender parity has been reached and exceeded.<sup>4</sup> Even so, the acceptance of a woman wielding power continues to be a complex issue, one that Alice negotiates with the same courage and hope she brings to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Meeting these by 2030 is a challenge for Costa Rica, and one of the common denominators of the seventeen goals is nutrition. Costa Rica faces a triple burden of malnutrition — micronutrient deficiencies; overweight and obesity; and stunting — with the current prevalence of overweight among under5s at 8.1 percent, overshadowing stunted under5s, at 5.6 percent. Anaemia impacts almost 25 percent of pregnant women, while nearly one-third of adults are obese (31.5 percent).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Alice Shackelford has since taken up duties as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Honduras.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations. *Gender Parity Strategy webpage*. Available at <https://reform.un.org/content/gender-parity-strategy>.

<sup>5</sup> SUN Movement Secretariat. 2019. *Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Progress Report 2019: Costa Rica country profile*. Geneva. Available at [https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SUN\\_Report\\_EN\\_2019\\_Country\\_Costa\\_Rica.pdf](https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SUN_Report_EN_2019_Country_Costa_Rica.pdf).

Growing inequalities are impacting social, economic and environmental development of the country and require structural changes and reforms. At the same time, climate change is another factor that will impede the country's ability to meet the SDGs. Along with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, Costa Rica is part of the 'dry corridor';<sup>6</sup> where ecosystems are characterized by drought, excessive rain and severe flooding – negatively impacting agricultural production.

Many of Alice's observations touched on the idea that UNN is a helpful platform for cultivating the collective spirit of various agencies and translating it into action in support of country priorities. While progress is being made on many fronts, Costa Rica is still not expected to meet the 2030 global targets for anaemia in women of reproductive age, low birth weight, adult obesity (neither among men or women) and health conditions such as diabetes, which can be triggered by poor dietary practices.<sup>7</sup> My conversation with Alice offers some insights as to why this might be as well as her hopes for the country.

### **Question 1: What are the three most pressing issues Costa Rica faces currently?**

**C**osta Rica is a country with a complex bureaucracy. It has more than 300 public institutions which make governing complicated in terms of decision-making and authority. Second, the political and social polarization in the region means there is a strong presence of evangelical and populist groups in politics, creating a strong divide when it comes to some specific human rights

<sup>6</sup> FAO. 2015. *Disaster Risk Programme to strengthen resilience in the Dry Corridor in Central America*. Available at <https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/46281>.

<sup>7</sup> Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Costa Rica country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/latin-america-and-caribbean/central-america/costa-rica/>.



issues, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people and women's sexual and reproductive rights. Finally, the issue of economic growth, or low productivity. [They have] huge fiscal problems where the majority of the GDP goes just to pay the interest of public debt and there is high fiscal evasion. This directly impacts the 2030 Agenda and the capacity to make critical changes and investments.

## **Question 2: Describe your role in coordinating the Nutrition agenda.**

**T**he 2030 Agenda makes a strong argument for the need to coordinate amongst agencies, and the United Nations Development System reform has helped this even more. This is now a clear directive and an excellent tool for UNRCs to further enhance. At the same time, facilitating joint in-depth analysis of the country and alignment with SDGs is another critical entry point where the engaged agencies can see the value to connect the dots. In Costa Rica, we have established a working group on nutrition [as part of the UN Network] with a joint workplan to be able to support government more strategically.

The visits of the Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for SUN and the Global Coordinator of the UN Network were extremely useful to further incentivize a holistic approach. My role has been to build upon these incentives. In this way, I was able to coordinate better with government and advocate for a re-strengthened focus on the nutrition agenda – and the SUN [Movement] in particular. Now the national SUN is much stronger and better placed to drive public policy and strategic interventions with inclusion of various ministries as well as non-governmental actors.

**Question 3: How have you worked with the diverse components of nutrition to bring resident and non-resident United Nations agencies (RAs and NRAs) to develop a common response to support the government?**

It is not easy to engage NRAs on this specific issue. For example, WFP has never engaged with us on this. Another important element is reaching an agreement with government – after much resistance – to include the private sector in the coordination mechanism.

Only a truly multi-sectoral approach can support an effective and result-oriented nutrition agenda with a human rights-based approach. In this regard, the national pact Costa Rica signed on the 2030 Agenda with all sectors (three state powers, the electoral commission, civil society, faith-based organizations, municipalities, private sector, trade unions and others) creates a platform to position the nutrition agenda with [a] multiplying effect.

Four years ago, the SUN agenda was not receiving attention or dedication until the UN RCO [Resident Coordinator Office] started to re-engage with them to provide strong technical support as well as a political momentum. We found a great champion in the Ministry of Health to work with, which has helped the follow-up. This was further supported from the two visits from Gerda Verburg, [the Coordinator of the SUN Movement] and the visit of the Coordinator of the UN Network of the SUN, and follow-up by the same agencies. The SUN Secretariat is very active in engaging with Costa Rica, providing input, incentives and information.

Costa Rica has very high human development indicators and has positioned itself as a model in terms of social protection and environment development. This often means that it is not seen as country where issues of poverty and

nutrition are on the top of the agenda and the reduction in ODA has made it more challenging. However, the strategic use of data to identify the increased rates of obesity and overweight in adults as well as children, and even very small children has [made its urgency evident].

#### **Question 4: How do you approach the role of the UN RC?**

I am a strong believer that the UN has to be coordinated at country level. The comparative advantage of the UN in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where there are so many actors, has to be a united one to support a multidimensional approach to development. I am also a strong believer in the reform, which puts forward the stronger role of the RC in this process. [My role is] facilitating, convening, enunciating the connections between agencies to encourage them to think beyond their usual turf. This applies to nutrition issues as well. The issue of coordination is key for the RC, linked to the national and regional level, and bringing in alliances with civil society. This naturally requires a strong leadership by the government.

#### **Question 5: Can you give me an example of one of the ways you've put this approach into action?**

When I arrived, Scaling Up Nutrition was quite dead. By reactivating that, appointing a focal person in the RC office, and engaging with key actors and stimulating UN agencies, we have strengthened the SUN Movement, with the government in the lead, focused on key challenges such as obesity and overweight. In the beginning, the government was closed to the idea of bringing in civil society, but now we've managed to emphasize the importance of bringing in these partners for a wider coordination.

For nutrition, we look at what the three main agencies – UNICEF, FAO and WHO – bring to the table, and make sure this happens in an articulated and coordinated manner. There was a need to bring the agencies around the table given that was not happening beforehand. We also have a civil society advisory group to strengthen alliances for key advocacy areas, and we hold a regular development partners meeting for this purpose. Naturally, we're working on engaging other agencies like [the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration], given the huge issue with refugees (asylum seekers) and migrants (regular and irregular).

### **Question 6: *How has the UN Network supported you?***

**M**ost of all, the visits have been appreciated. In 2019, we had the visit of Purnima, [current Director of the UN Network]. [She was] liaising with donors and development partners. We need regular follow-up to help the team here to strengthen the relationships. Funding continues to be an issue given the upper middle-income level graduation of Costa Rica. They also give us technical support on administrative processes and reporting as well as incentives to enhance mapping interventions across the UN System and building innovative partnerships.

### **Question 7: *What challenges do you face building coalitions?***

**T**here is still a fear within the UN that working together takes away the individual role and positioning of the agency. Resistance within the UN System is evident at national and international levels and requires strong stewardship and institutional change. A lot of agencies still do not receive enough incentives and directions from HQ to invest in inter-agency work.

### **Question 8: *What's the way forward?***

- Strengthening nutrition governance in a more articulated manner with a strong human rights-based approach around the most excluded groups and patterns of inequality.
- A clear leadership in government on the issue. Not just the Ministry of Health, but also other actors.
- Finally, to strengthen knowledge management and sharing within the government.

Next year we will call for a more inclusive meeting of SUN, including civil society and the private sector to support public policy on nutrition, and to give it stronger internal coherence. [We need to] work on local level in the municipalities and the communities in the valleys around San José; get out of the coast to the border areas where there are many challenges.

### **Question 9: *What is your experience being a female leader in the context of Central America?***

**T**hank you for asking. The UN has made a lot of effort to put women in positions of leadership, but the males now need to accept women in those positions. Male chauvinist and patriarchal attitudes are still present within the UN System. That is a reality that women in power still face. You are treated differently. You are commented on differently. If you are energetic, you are hyperactive. If you feel committed to an issue, you're emotional. These kinds of things are heavy and very present. That's not always easy.

[At the UN] we integrate gender at all levels. We have a strong gender inter-agency group and gender is positioned in the UNDAF,<sup>8</sup> and we work a lot with women's organizations. We are following up on the system-wide plan and the gender scorecard. There is resistance by leadership to do more – not only with male, but also female leaders.

[The struggle is not] just with gender equality, but also diversity, people with disabilities, the LGBTI community and indigenous, Afro-descended people. All of these groups are included in the frame of a human rights-based approach.

These are critical issues that affect nutrition. The day before yesterday, we were at a women's center in a disadvantaged part of San José, where the incidence of obesity is huge. The more you go into the underprivileged community, the issue of diet is critical, as is the access to a nutritional diet. Women are some of the most effected, and their children by extension.

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8 UNDAF refers to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, recently superseded by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).



UNN PEOPLE

Perspectives from  
UN leadership on how  
nutrition is gaining  
ground in Lesotho with  
support from His Majesty  
King Letsie III



FOUR QUESTIONS/TWO VOICES

Tale 3



Salvator Niyonzima, United Nations Resident Coordinator for Lesotho in action, December 2019  
UN House/Thabiso Ntoanyane



Mary Njoroge, WFP Country Director and former UNN Chair standing with recipient of a WFP-supported cash-based transfer programme, October 2019  
WFP/Kathleen McCarthy

Despite steady progress on the reduction of stunting levels, the triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight/obesity – remains persistent, compounding a host of social and economic challenges.<sup>9</sup> To gain a fuller picture of nutrition developments in Lesotho, the UN Network Secretariat sought out the perspectives of two prominent UN figures.

Salvator Niyonzima, United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), and Mary Njoroge, World Food Programme (WFP) Country Director and former UN Network (UNN) Chair, are front-line advocates of cross-sectoral nutrition integration. Since 2017, Salvator’s role has been to oversee the coordination of all United Nations agencies in the country. Mary has worn two hats. She has overseen the alignment of seven agencies – FAO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, the World Bank and WHO – which have joined forces on nutrition through the UNN platform, drawing upon hands-on support from the neutral UNN-REACH facilitator. This, in turn, informs her role as WFP Country Director, working closer to the ground. Here are highlights from the two interviews.

<sup>9</sup> Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Lesotho country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/southern-africa/lesotho/#profile>.



## Question 1: *How have government-led nutrition actions taken root in Lesotho in the past five years?*

### Salvator:

A collaborative effort including UN agencies, civil society, academia and the business [community] was based on a strategic analysis that brought together the latest available data. After that, we made sure that every agency would see themselves in the priorities we have lined up. Then work is divided according to our comparative advantages.

In terms of nutrition, there was a concerted effort building on the humanitarian intervention from 2015–2017, [to address the drought caused by El Nino.] Under the leadership of WFP, and with support from UNN-REACH, we developed in 2018 a Zero Hunger Strategic Review and a roadmap [to chart our progress]. Funding from the Irish government in 2017 [for UNN-REACH] allowed the UN to achieve a number of milestones.

One is improving data and evidence. We also conducted a Multi-sectoral Nutritional Overview [using the UNN tool] to see what was happening at district and community levels. The UNN developed an inventory that showed us what the various UN agencies are doing – such as UNICEF, FAO, UNFPA, WHO and the World Bank. This allowed us to see areas of duplication and avoid them. We discovered from using the UNN-REACH tools, for example, that cash top-ups were being duplicated by various agencies.

### Mary:

Traditionally, nutrition has been perceived to fall into the women's domain and only affect the vulnerable, children, women and the elderly. His Majesty King Letsie III, in his roles as African Union Nutrition Champion, FAO Nutrition Ambassador and World Bank Champion on Human Capital, has greatly helped to shift this mentality and elevate discussions regarding nutrition into the highest echelons of government.

Additionally, His Majesty's recognition of nutrition as one of the key elements in the socio-economic development of Lesotho and his unwavering passion and advocacy has led men, at all levels of society, to become more engaged in the discourse around nutrition.

In 2019, this included high-level events, such as the official opening of the Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM) in Abidjan, the WFP June Executive Board Session in Rome and the Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in Africa that took place in Maseru. At each of these events, King Letsie III committed to firmly place Nutrition and Food Security on the continental and global agenda and encouraged increased investments to ensure that malnutrition issues are fully addressed and eliminated.

In the national context, His Majesty's leadership role is supported by his government. Following the development of the food and nutrition strategy and costed action plan, the Government of Lesotho will be convening a high-level stakeholders' forum to discuss the applicability of crowdsourcing to fast-track the reduction of malnutrition, particularly stunting, and the achievement of nutrition targets. UNN-REACH Lesotho shall continue to engage with His Majesty King Letsie III to ensure improved nutrition governance through multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder coordination in the country.

## ***Question 2: How do communications and behaviour change factor into the equation?***

### **Salvator:**

**M**alnutrition is driven by poor nutrition practices, from lack of information. The staple food here is maize and people eat porridge made from it. Households believe that if they eat that with vegetables and meat, that is enough variety in their diet. Over the years, maize production has fluctuated

because of climate change, which means if there's no maize, the staple food is destroyed. We want to give them a wider variety of options [to choose from]. Babies and lactating mothers need to be able to grow and cook other foods. Planting small gardens [also helps in this regard]. There is currently a behavior change communication campaign underway. We are implementing funding from CERF (Central Emergency Relief Fund) as well as the EU and European Commission's Department for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) to increase better nutrition practices.

**Mary:**

UNN-REACH, through [the] WFP Country Office and [the government's] Food and Nutrition Office are at [the] final stage of the formulation of the Advocacy, Social Behavioural and Communication Strategy, which is key to communicating the interconnectedness of nutrition challenges and solutions. Additionally, UNN-REACH in partnership with Government has commissioned a Maximum Intervention Programme to reduce stunting by promoting the empowerment of women and men to participate in a multi-sectoral approach of intervention convergence in the worst affected districts. Lesotho is also embarking on establishing the current status of nutrition investment and resource mobilisation through [a] nutrition finance tracking exercise [with support from UNN-REACH and the UNN Secretariat], which in the future, will form a full-fledged system that will identify gaps and inform the national nutrition budget and off-budget lines on annual basis.

**Question 3: Coordination is fundamental for multi-sectoral interventions. How do you bring the various agencies together?**

**Salvator:**

There is a before and an after. Before the UN reform in January 2019, there wasn't enough impartiality from the RC, even with the 'firewall', a mechanism put in place to avoid confusion between the two roles.

There was a conflict of interest because this person was also the head of the UNDP.<sup>10</sup> The separation between the two posts freed up my time to focus on coordination. In the ‘after’, I have a much clearer understanding of what each agency is doing, which allows me to see synergies. We use a framework called UNDAF<sup>11</sup> to work with countries. In some cases, I’ve seen that the UNDAF wasn’t always used as a guiding document, but now it is my role to keep everyone on track.

**Mary:**

UNN-REACH activities thus have a galvanizing effect on broader sustainable development by incorporating nutrition components into appropriate programmes for which nutrition is not a primary objective. Lesotho is on the path to ‘kicking out hunger and malnutrition’ by working together across sectors and stakeholder groups from the national to the community level. UNN-REACH has provided the country with a one-stop shop for nutrition, allowing different actors including the government, UN, civil society and other development partners to draw on the data and visual outputs generated through their tools to understand the scope, magnitude and distribution of the country’s nutrition challenges. Specific achievements include the elevation of nutrition in the country’s National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) II, a clear articulation of the UN’s approach to nutrition in the UNDAF and the validation of the Food and Nutrition Strategy and Costed Action Plan. This includes evidence-based studies related to the status of nutrition in Lesotho to inform policies.

Additionally, UNN-REACH Lesotho has made strides in providing localized solutions to nutrition challenges. The National Nutrition Awareness Campaign in 2019 was led and coordinated by multi-sectoral district teams. The campaign

<sup>10</sup> UNDP stands for the United Nations Development Programme.

<sup>11</sup> UNDAF refers to the United Nations Development Framework, recently superceded by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

successfully produced context-specific solutions, including: the use of infant and young child feeding; micronutrient supplementation; food value chain and food systems analysis; a study called Fill the Nutrient Gap; and the impact of HIV/AIDS on family nutrition and WASH.

*Recent conversations with other UN colleagues shed further light on how the Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) analysis was an avenue for joint UN engagement, led by WFP with the involvement of FAO, IFAD and UNICEF. It turns out that Salvator, in his capacity as the UNRC, delivered the opening speech at the launch of the FNG report, reaffirming the inter-agency dynamic and his commitment to the national nutrition agenda.*

#### **Question 4: Finally, we know nutrition is a ‘maker and marker’ of sustainable development. What progress is Lesotho making to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2030 and how can nutrition be leveraged to accelerate gains?**

##### **Salvator:**

**D** progress has been uneven. For SDG 4, Lesotho has made progress on primary enrollment, almost reaching universal levels. At the secondary level, it goes down to 43 percent, which means there are a lot of losses along the way. Another area of relative progress is gender equity [SDG 5]. The number of women who participate in political processes, such as female MPs, is 25 out of 120. It’s still low but shows progress. The wealth gap has widened. The Gini coefficient [SDG 10], a measure of inequality in an economy is 0.5,<sup>12</sup> which is quite high. In a nutshell, Lesotho has made some relative progress, while other SDGs are still lagging behind. [Compared to] universal indicators, we are still quite low.

<sup>12</sup> Bureau of Statistics. 2019. *Lesotho Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018, Survey Findings Report*. Maseru. Available at [https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/Eastern%20and%20Southern%20Africa/Lesotho/2018/Survey%20findings/Lesotho%202018%20MICS%20Survey%20Findings%20Report\\_English.pdf](https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/Eastern%20and%20Southern%20Africa/Lesotho/2018/Survey%20findings/Lesotho%202018%20MICS%20Survey%20Findings%20Report_English.pdf)

**Mary:**

Currently, hunger and malnutrition in Lesotho is totally incompatible with the 2030 Agenda and the 2020 vision of Lesotho. Achieving food and nutrition security accelerates progress towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goal 2 and the development aspirations of Lesotho. UNN-REACH brings together the UN Agencies for planning and agreeing on areas of support to government initiatives meant to reduce the effects of malnutrition in the country. The multi-level National Coordination Structure on Sustainable Development has been established, the highest level being the National Oversight Committee that is chaired by the Right Honourable the Prime Minister.

Additionally, the UN Resident Coordinator leads the UN Country Team in consultations with the government to define and agree on the UN strategic response to the government's development priorities, with the view to make substantial progress towards achieving the global 2030 development agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This response is captured in the UNDAF, which was prepared in collaboration with the government and other stakeholders, and informed by the Common Country Analysis, as well as innovative initiatives including foresight, scenario building, public engagement and other processes. This framework, with the SDGs at its core, contributes to the achievement of the National Strategic Development Plan II objectives and supports [the] Lesotho Government's aspiration to achieve the 2030 Agenda.



UNN PEOPLE



# A day in the life of a UNN-REACH facilitator

KOU BAAWO IN LIBERIA

Tale 4

The work of a UNN-REACH facilitator can be compared to a skilled juggler – balancing multiple interests and not dropping any of the concerns of various stakeholders – as much as it can be compared to a ringmaster who can keep track of what is happening in multiple locations at the same time. This is what a facilitator manages on a ‘good’ day, when the kinds of obstacles that might interfere with orchestrating a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition are somewhat predictable. Obstacles like funding shortages, an uncollaborative partner or an unexpected drought can be overcome with strategies proven over time.

On 1 May 2020, we (the UN Network Secretariat) spoke to Kou Baawo, the UNN-REACH Facilitator in Liberia since December 2018, who told us about how such obstacles had been shoved to the side by the COVID-19 pandemic. Liberia was in lockdown, with 152 cases. Relative to other countries, this is a low prevalence, but the government was taking necessary precautions, and Kou’s job, as she knew it, was largely on hold. For how long, it was not clear.

This prompted reflection on what this would mean for nutrition governance and how her role would need to adapt. What measures could she take to help ensure that momentum around nutrition was not lost in the face of COVID-19? How could UNN-REACH work, including the analytics, be leveraged and feed into the COVID-19 response?



*UNN-REACH Facilitator, Kou Baawo, stands with House Speaker and other members of the House of Representatives following a meeting about the role of the 54th Legislature in the Nutrition agenda, April 2019*  
 SUN Secretariat Liberia/Mameni L. Morlai



When Kou was interviewed, the UNN-REACH response to COVID-19 was in process. Since then, the country-specific workplan has been approved and includes dissemination of COVID-19 nutrition messages to counties and health facilities and support to national coordination mechanisms with partnering United Nations agencies (FAO and WFP) as well as to establish a new National Food Assistance Agency. Kou's work to strengthen the capacity of Liberia's SUN Secretariat would now entail helping those government staff to host and manage regular meetings through Zoom or Skype. The updated workplan also includes provisions to support resource mobilization for nutrition and continue UNN-REACH processes, such as the Policy and Plan Overview (PPO) and the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping. In addition, other UNN-REACH processes that involve gathering and travel or missions were restructured.

This article was originally designed to capture the myriad factors a UNN-REACH facilitator contends with on any given day, but the pandemic has changed the nature of the interview, as it is changing much of the world. Instead of a straightforward look at her daily challenges, Kou gave us a picture of her work in context; what it was on that day compared to what it was before the pandemic. Here, in her words, is a picture of her current hurdles, how they contrast with what was happening before COVID-19 and a hypothesis of what the next year might hold.

### **Question 1: *Tell us about today***

**P**ublic offices and schools are closed right now and I am working from home. All REACH activities are on hold until a revision is done to move forward. A conversation with the SUN Secretariat to continue current activities at the multi-sectoral level disclosed that [the] majority of the network members are challenged with adapting to the new way of working since many of them cannot afford internet support from home. These are things we

are thinking about as we revise our plans. We are thinking of sending out email questionnaires to gather more information, instead of face to face meetings.

In Liberia, the majority of Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement MSP<sup>13</sup> staff don't have internet support or smartphones for Zoom or WhatsApp. We've been challenged with that since the lockdown. We haven't been able to meet. We cannot discuss COVID-19 related health messages [sent from headquarters] that we have and want to adapt to the local context. Messages such as, 'What should you do if you're breastfeeding and you're suspected or infected?'

Our government counterparts don't have the technology to continue meetings. We want to support them so we can carry on. Technology is the main hurdle right now. There is a communication platform set up for the COVID-19 context. Whatever communication there is, goes through that platform.

## **Question 2: How was your agenda progressing before the lockdown?**

**R**EACH's presence in Liberia has given the nutrition programme attention and the momentum started rising with REACH presence. REACH reactivated the SUN Secretariat, started by engaging various stakeholders, and holding meetings, and finally they became [a] multi-sectoral platform with membership from all sectors.

Another success was engaging with lawmakers to get their attention for nutrition. During a visit from [the] SUN Global Coordinator [and Assistant Secretary-General], Gerda Verburg, on 7–9 March 2019, she met with the

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13 MSP stands for multi-sectoral platform.

President. This gave the President the awareness that nutrition is on the global agenda and Liberia is featured. The government has already placed nutrition as a priority, reducing stunting in particular, so there was need to focus and work with the Ministry of Health and the SUN Secretariat to achieve this. The President nominated some top officials we could work with, and in May 2019, we engaged 33 lawmakers.<sup>14</sup> Presently, we have one active nutrition focal person in the House of Representatives. To add, we have started work on developing a multi-sectoral nutrition strategic plan.

Liberia is divided into fifteen counties, engaged through the civil society organizations (CSOs) and SUN civil society alliance, with representatives from health, WASH, education and other sectors. We were able to visit seven counties, where civil society actions on nutrition have started. The engagement we started at the county level was rapidly gaining momentum and [unfortunately it was also interrupted]. In one of the counties, the superintendent was so impressed with the meeting we had with them last January, that he asked for a follow-up meeting with the SUN Secretariat before COVID-19 shut everything down.



*Provision of office supplies and equipment to the Ministry of Health for Liberia's SUN Secretariat, August 2019*

UNN-REACH/Kou Baawo

<sup>14</sup> To learn more, visit <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/news/un-nutrition-lobbying-starts-pay-liberia>.

### **Question 3: Looking towards the future, how will your plan be adapted to the pandemic?**

**W**e are planning on pushing activities that cannot be implemented because COVID has pushed everything back one or two steps. That's one reason we are planning on doing a desk review, focusing on "the impact of COVID-19 on the nutrition of vulnerable populations: women and children under-five, especially malnourished children, as well as gender issues." This review is still pending approval from headquarters.



*Portrait of Kou Baawo, the UNN-REACH Facilitator in Liberia*

Anonymous photographer

One thing we are focusing on now is [keeping] track of existing programs. [For reference], we are using the context of Ebola and considering what was done during that crisis. There was a rapid review of policies and strategies to support the response and development of a national plan involving all sectors; community engagement and involvement; and setting up an Incidence Management Team with the involvement of county authorities. The involvement of all stakeholders, development and implementing partners and donors was an essential part of the response.

We were moving into starting the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping, but presently that activity has been postponed. Stunting is a frontline issue, but before we engage with that, we wanted a multi-sectoral strategy so that we implement together. All the sectors have different strategies and policies; there is a need to align.

We are in the process of moving the SUN Secretariat focal point into the Office of the President, we were in the process of getting the lawmakers (through the

focal point) to agree to this and support the initiative. If we stop at this point, the progress might be stalled.

Now things are on hold. These important actions we started have to be pushed forward into the coming year. We are not sure how long COVID-19 will last.

#### **Question 4: In light of the current situation, what are your top two asks for nutrition?**

**L**iberia has been recovering from a long-term civil crisis and a broken economy. The population has lived on relief and assistance, followed by the global crisis of COVID-19 in just two years under new government leadership. Liberia is still recovering, and more importantly, major support to nutrition programs is heavily donor-driven. My asks would be that government moves the national development agenda forward in preparation for sustainability. A multi-sectoral strategic response plan for nutrition with a common agenda for sustaining ongoing efforts could make a difference. Finally, in order to reduce stunting, which is now a national priority, it is important to implement nutrition programs from a holistic stance, engaging program actions at all levels of line ministries, agencies and sectors.



While the situation is challenging and there are new complications, Kou continues to persevere. Since the interview, the UNN-REACH supported Policy and Plan Overview<sup>15</sup> was completed, an indication that nutrition processes are moving forward all things considered. The findings highlight prospects for further integrating nutrition in sectoral plans and policies (e.g. health, agriculture, water, education) by better articulating linkages and adding further details on implementation approaches. This outlines a good roadmap for follow-up, which will undoubtedly accelerate as COVID-19 subsides.

<sup>15</sup> Visit <https://bit.ly/3msDqiH> to view the Liberia Policy and Plan Overview.



UNN PEOPLE

# Streamlining progress in Myanmar

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE  
SCALING UP NUTRITION –  
UN NETWORK RETREAT



*Tale 5*

From 10–11<sup>th</sup> February this year, a nutrition-focused retreat was held in Yangon, organized by the country's United Nations Network. Its purpose was to review collective UN efforts on nutrition in Myanmar over the past three years and to solidify a joint plan to help the government implement the Multi-sectoral National Plan of Action for Nutrition (MS-NPAN). While the event was framed as a UN Network (UNN) retreat, a range of other actors active in the country's SUN Movement attended to ensure alignment and complementarity.



Group photo of the participants at the UN Network retreat, February 2020

WFP Myanmar

High-level officials from government, development organizations and academia were present, including the Chair of the country UNN, the Director/Global Coordinator of the UN Network, Representatives/Country Directors of each member agency, technical colleagues as well as representatives from the National Nutrition Centre,<sup>16</sup> the SUN Civil Society Alliance (CSA) and the SUN Business Network (SBN). The workshop was funded by UNICEF, the chairing agency of the UNN in Myanmar, with preparations led by the UNN-REACH Facilitator.

On the first day, moderators updated participants on the progress of the SUN Movement and its UN Network as well as the MS-NPAN. Experiences were exchanged along with lessons learned. This was followed by a brainstorming session on UNN priorities for 2020. The second day's agenda included more interactive sessions, covering diverse topics from planning for the next phase of the MS-NPAN to public financing, preparation for high-level events and further efforts to articulate the country UNN's priorities for the year ahead.

Soe Nyi Nyi, the UNN-REACH Facilitator for Myanmar, was pleased that so many stakeholders were in attendance. "It has been three years since the first retreat, which is a long time. We needed to discuss what the network is planning and what we aim to achieve, to choose priorities for the implementation of the MS-NPAN, which runs from 2018–2023. [It also gave us an opportunity] to discuss the challenges we've faced and how to strengthen the network with the government."



*UNN-REACH Facilitator, Soe Nyi Nyi, facilitates group work during the retreat, February 2020*  
WFP Myanmar

<sup>16</sup> The National Nutrition Centre currently serves as the Secretariat of the country's SUN Movement.



## A review of progress from 2015 to the present

The history of government engagement in the nutrition agenda is strong, observed Dr. Purnima Kashyap, Director/Global Coordinator of the UN Network. For example, the creation of the MS-NPAN in 2017–18 was a country-led process. “Myanmar has taken ownership of having the REACH facilitator and they support SUN facilitation. They continue to work on a collective agenda. [The collaboration around the MS-NPAN] wasn’t led by the UN, but this group of stakeholders contributing towards a national plan.”

The ensuing expansion in nutrition programming has led to progress on various fronts. According to figures from the 2020 Global Nutrition Report, Myanmar is on course to meet the global targets for under-five overweight and exclusive breastfeeding.<sup>17</sup> While stunting has declined from just over 40 percent in 1990 to 29 percent in 2016, there remain 1.4 million children under five years of age who are classified as stunted (DHS 2015–16). “At the same time, acute undernutrition, or wasting, remains high affecting 7 percent of preschool children.”<sup>18</sup>

Soe led this review during the retreat to help make sure participants were on the same page. The recount started with the initiation of the UNN in 2015 among four United Nations agencies, with membership expanding to four others in 2016. Soe went on to describe how the UNN moved swiftly to support the government with sweeping nutrition stocktaking exercises (also

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17 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Myanmar country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/south-eastern-asia/myanmar/>.

18 Government of Myanmar. 2018. *Multi-Sectoral National Plan of Action for Nutrition, 2018–2022*. Ministry of Health and Sports. Available at <https://www.mohs.gov.mm/page/7190>.

known as the UNN analytics), through its technical assistance facility, UNN-REACH. This helped the country develop a nation-owned multi-sectoral/ stakeholder nutrition plan to achieve Zero Hunger and enable broader development. Evidence generation and advocacy were continued in 2017 along with the development of a National Nutrition Strategy. By 2018, the MS-NPAN was complete and plans were in motion to devise state and regional level nutrition plans. Then, UNN continued supporting the government on high-level coordination which also involves, United Nations agencies, civil society and donors. In 2019, joint activities, such as updating the Myanmar Food-based Dietary Guidelines and the formation of SBN were initiated, bringing participants up to the current situation.



*UN colleagues participate in an interactive exercise to stimulate collective thinking on nutrition, February 2020*  
WFP Myanmar

## The Outcome - Simplifying the nutrition agenda

One of the needs that emerged from the 2020 retreat is to simplify many action items. Feedback from participants indicated that the current workplan, which reflected the requirements of individual districts instead of the bigger picture, presented challenges for implementation. The agenda needs to be streamlined to issues that will really make a difference. One outcome of the gathering was an agreement to restrict the list to collective actions, instead of including those led by individual agencies.

Purnima relayed a stronger focus on results. “The government was strong on allocating resources, identifying challenges for resources and seeking funding from external sources, as well as looking at greater accountability.” This will help to measure the impact of the MS-NPAN. Retreat participants agreed it should be written with greater accountability incorporated.



*UN Network Director/Global Coordinator delivers a motivational speech during the workshop, February 2020*  
WFP Myanmar

From Myanmar, Soe described the follow-up that was slated to happen on two levels. “The first is the technical level. The main agenda in the technical meeting was how to continue to support the MS-NPAN. This has been happening weekly, using Zoom because of the [COVID-19] pandemic. The second level is at the heads of agency level, which we haven’t been able to organize due to COVID-19. Restrictions are tighter. We are now working virtually but we haven’t met since the retreat.”

Along with the rest of the world, Myanmar has been challenged by the pandemic. The first COVID-19 case was registered in Myanmar on 23 March 2020, which interrupted some of the momentum the conference created. “COVID-19 is creating a ‘new normal,’” Soe reflected. “We are already discussing how to continue. [The first step is to address] challenges with technology on sub-national level to conduct virtual coordination with regions and states.”

After the retreat, Purnima reflected on its impact. “The collective engagement of the UN, government, Business Network, World Bank, donors and civil society was the main take-away from the meeting. They [government officials] were planning the annual workplan in alignment with what the UN would contribute to it. They were looking not only at national engagement but also sub-national. Myanmar has moved into district-level engagement on nutrition.” It will surely take some adjusting to the ‘new normal’, but with the country’s strong commitment to the SUN Movement and determination to succeed, Myanmar is on track to regain its footing and continue to reduce malnutrition in all its forms.





UNN PEOPLE



*Non-traditional actors  
align nutrition priorities  
in Papua New Guinea*

*Take 6*

An unusual combination of factors characterizes the nutrition profile of Papua New Guinea (PNG), located on the eastern half of New Guinea in Melanesia. For the largely rural population of eight million, with only 18 percent in urban areas,<sup>19</sup> stunting impacts one in two children under five years old, about double the 25 percent average for developing countries.<sup>20</sup> The causes, stemming from poverty, include environmental issues, poor access to markets and others. These figures come from the Papua New Guinea Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), conducted in 2009–2010. The absence of more current data highlights two areas that need urgent attention if nutrition governance is going to be improved: capacity building and budget allocation.

“In PNG, there are virtually no donors. If you are talking about nutrition, there is no competition for space. No rubbing shoulders for the same resources. You have to generate your own internal resources, because of its status as a lower-middle income country,” explained Hanifa Namusoke, a nutrition specialist for UNICEF, who worked in PNG from 2015 through 2019.

Agriculture and livestock; forestry; and mining and petroleum are the top three revenue generators. PNG’s income status acts as a deterrent to donors. Those who fund nutrition interventions in countries with lower economic status are not active in PNG. However, in the same way that the COVID-19 pandemic has yielded a few unexpected benefits, so too does this give PNG a hidden advantage. Without donor funds, development partners have had to band together, with greater urgency than they would in another setting, to align their efforts with government and impact the local population.

19 Tean, O., Nouwah, S., Apeng, D., & Basse, T. 2020. Strengthening nutrition coordination and advocacy in Papua New Guinea: Role of the SUN Pooled Fund. Emergency Nutrition Network. *Nutrition Exchange*, Issue 13:24–25. Available at <https://www.enonline.net/nex/13/png>.

20 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Papua New Guinea country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/oceania/melanesia/papua-new-guinea/#profile>.

This has given rise to less 'traditional' United Nations agencies taking part in the UN Network (UNN). Along with expected members, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have actively participated in the nutrition arena. Even if the UN colleagues do not refer to the group as the UN Network *per se*, there is considerable collaboration on nutrition among these agencies and interesting institutional arrangements for doing so. These efforts were bolstered by then United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), Roy Trivedy, who was pivotal in ensuring that the costed National Nutrition Strategic Action Plan for 2018–2022 was accepted by PNG's government.



## Two coordination bodies: People and Prosperity

Coalitions for multi-sectoral coordination are divided into two groups, articulated by the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2018–2022: ‘People’ and ‘Prosperity’. This link is important in formalizing UN coordination architecture for nutrition and creating buy-in among the agencies. As the larger of the two, the People group covers sectors for health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Concurrently, the ‘Prosperity Group’ views similar issues through an economic lens. These coalitions clarify priorities to present to UN and government leadership.

Coordination happens within each group as well as between them. They worked together to support the development of PNG’s first National Nutrition Policy (2016–2026) as well as a Strategic Action Plan that was completed in 2018, revised in 2019, and launched in October of the same year. At present, both groups share a focus on the reduction of the country’s alarming stunting levels (50 percent nationally) when advocating for nutrition policy with local government.





A unique chairing arrangement features two chairs and two co-chairs. UNICEF serves as the chair and WHO the co-chair for the People contingency, while UNCDF (chair) and FAO (co-chair) co-host the Prosperity Group.

Joint planning is translated into individual mandates for organizations, such as UNICEF or UNDP. Furthermore, PNG is part of the 'Delivering as One' (DaO) initiative, which reinforces efforts to address stunting and wasting as part of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2), among others. UNICEF focuses on direct nutrition interventions, such as infant and young child feeding, and FAO complements with its technical assistance on nutrition-sensitive agriculture. A third partner, the World Bank, provided a loan to support both tracks.<sup>21</sup>

In 2011, stunting was not positioned among PNG's outcome areas in the UNDAF (2012–2017), an oversight with dire consequences. In the most recent UNDAF (2018–2022), stunting is now emphasized as a direct result of the 'People Group'. A third example is the support given by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF at health clinics in rural areas, where health workers hold information sessions with mothers on self-care, parenting techniques and nutrition.

## Integration with local government

In 2018–19, the UNN collaborated with the SUN Civil Society Alliance (CSA) Network to bring the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Planning and Monitoring on board as 'nutrition champions'. Additionally, the UNN provided technical support to civil society organizations (CSOs) and

<sup>21</sup> World Bank Group. 2020. *World Bank Commits to Papua New Guinea's Fight Against COVID-19*. Press release. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/14/world-bank-commits-to-papua-new-guineas-fight-against-covid-19>.

academia for nutrition-related research that fed into advocacy. Together, these efforts helped nutrition secure a more prominent place on the political agenda, leading to the Prime Minister’s call to action to rise up against malnutrition one household at a time.<sup>22</sup>

## Challenges

Even with the multi-agency chairing set-up, and the efforts of the UNRC, who tried to provide technical support to each agency to ensure reports are completed efficiently, there are still many obstacles to be resolved. The collective nutrition agenda was rarely tabled at United Nations Country Team (UNCT) meetings during the 2018–19 reporting period, an indicator that further efforts are needed to fully embrace the joint spirit of the UNN.<sup>23</sup>

As in many countries, the response to COVID-19 has opened up new options to move forward on the above challenge. New funding from the Secretary-General sets collaboration as a condition for the various agencies that comprise the People and Prosperity groups. To ensure a maximum impact in nutrition, health, WASH and other sectors, the various actors are working together to implement joint activities with the new funds.

22 Tean, O., Nouwah, S., Apeng, D., & Basse, T. 2020. Strengthening nutrition coordination and advocacy in Papua New Guinea: Role of the SUN Pooled Fund. Emergency Nutrition Network. *Nutrition Exchange*, Issue 13:24–25. Available at <https://www.enonline.net/nex/13/png>.

23 UN Network Secretariat. 2019. *UN Network Papua New Guinea country profile*. Available at <https://bit.ly/3a0c6ET>.



The World Bank has approved an emergency USD 20 million (approximately PGK 70 million) project for PNG to provide rapid support to the country's COVID-19 pandemic response. The commitment is part of a wider package of World Bank funding to tackle a number of the country's most pressing health challenges.

### *Striving for continuous improvement*

Various United Nations agencies are coordinating their programmes. For example, FAO and several CSOs will review UNICEF programmes before starting their own, but funding alignment has not yet become part of this process. There is still duplication in the reporting process, where each agency files their own report instead of focusing on projects as a collective. "Overall, the importance of good health-seeking behaviors among local populations is not just the focus of one agency, it is a collective effort," says Marielle Sander, Resident Representative for UNFPA.

Hanifa also expressed her view. “What PNG needs is someone to kickstart [better coordination]. For the next five years, they need someone to hold them to the agenda, to fit nutrition into the governance of the country.” Otto Tean, the SUN Government Focal Point, is based in the National Planning Department and is straight-forward in appealing for increased support from the SUN networks, including the UNN. Having more data could surely facilitate those efforts and steer decision-making so as to make a solid dent in child stunting.





UNN PEOPLE



*Leadership, coordination  
and advocacy hold key  
to strengthen joint action  
for nutrition in Rwanda*

INTERVIEW WITH THE UNRC

*Tale 7*

Rwanda joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in December 2011, one of the early-riser countries. Between 2012–2016, the country received UNN-REACH support, helping to nurture approaches such as joint nutrition programming.<sup>24</sup> The UN Network (UNN) was set up in 2016, after phasing out the REACH country engagement, and comprises five United Nations agencies: the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

We interviewed Fodé Ndiaye, the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC) in Rwanda since July 2017, on his views regarding nutrition and UN collaboration in the country. Prior to his appointment in Rwanda, Fodé served as the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Niger for five years. The heads of different United Nations agencies in the country supported the preparations for this interview, including Julianna Lindsey (UNICEF); Edith Heines (WFP); Gualbert Gbehounou (FAO); and Dr Kasonde Mwinga (WHO) as well as the Resident Coordinator Office Team Leader, Josephine Ulimwengu.



*Fodé Ndiaye (left), United Nations Resident Coordinator for Rwanda, visits UN programming site on World Food Day, October 2019  
FAO/Teopista Mutesi*

<sup>24</sup> The UNN-REACH (Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition) initiative was founded in 2008 and has used a multi-sectoral approach to build national capacity in nutrition governance and scaling up actions against malnutrition.

## Question 1: What do you see as the role of the UNRC in nutrition?

The role is centered around leadership, coordination and advocacy. As Resident Coordinator (RC), I lead the work of the UN Country Team, which consists of all the UN heads of agencies, and that is the highest governing body of the UN in Rwanda. Nutrition is an important part of our United Nations Development Assistance Plan 2018–2023 (UNDAP II, now known as the Cooperation Framework), which is aligned with and contributing to the implementation of the National Strategy for Transformation [2017–2024], which in turn, is grounded in the 2030 Agenda and the Africa Agenda 2063.<sup>25</sup> The UNDAP II has an outcome directly linked to nutrition; outcome 3, that “By 2023, People in Rwanda, particularly the most vulnerable, enjoy increased and equitable access to quality education, health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services”. Nutrition is also mainstreamed in the other pillars of the UNDAP II, economic transformation and transformational governance.

An important concrete achievement for the UN in Rwanda within the field of nutrition was the development of the joint UN agency programme, *Effectively Fighting Chronic Malnutrition in Rwanda: Phase I (2013–2018) and Phase II (2018–2023)*, which piggy-backs on the agencies involved in the SUN Movement. This 6.5 million USD programme is supported by the Swiss Development Corporation and UN agencies, including FAO, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and IFAD, lining up with important ministries such as the Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, and of course, the National Early Childhood Development Programme (NECDP). The NECDP is a Government programme with the general mission to coordinate all interventions that support adequate ECD for children from conception to six years of age, as outlined in the Rwanda

<sup>25</sup> Agenda 2063 is the blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. Available at <https://au.int/en/agenda2063>.

Early Childhood Development Policy.<sup>26</sup> We made sure to emphasize these multi-sectoral linkages, even more so in Phase II of the programme, to address stunting in Rwanda. The joint programme has been endorsed by the participating Government entities as well as the Ministry of Finance, and the Government leads the implementation of programme activities and provides in-kind support.



26 NECDP is the national agenda mandated to coordinate inter-sectoral action to implement community-based interventions for nutrition, including growth monitoring and promotion at community level, cooking demonstrations, micronutrient powders to reduce anemia in young children and kitchen gardens to improve dietary diversity.



As RC, I am also representing the UN in different coordination mechanisms, for example co-chairing the quarterly Development Partners Coordination Group (DPCG) meetings and the annual Development Partners Retreat, where government and development partners meet to discuss important matters, including nutrition, related to the development of Rwanda. I bring the UN perspective, but also the perspectives emerging from discussions in the DPC Group via monthly meetings.

## **Question 2: How has the SDG framework and a wider understanding of nutrition helped to galvanize UN collective action?**

The Government of Rwanda has long considered improving nutrition as a top priority. Nutrition is also linked to human capital building, which is key for the country to achieve its development goals. The SDG framework, as I mentioned before, has stressed the importance of applying a multi-sectoral approach that cuts across other goals. At least twelve of the seventeen goals, including SDG2, contain indicators that are highly relevant to nutrition. In the country, we have various sectoral policies and strategies that are aligned with the SDGs and these make a good entry point for UN action in advancing nutrition. Awareness-raising on the Agenda 2030 is also helping to promote sustainable development in line with the Government's 2050 Vision to improve living standards.

The SDGs promote a collective agenda and you can't see any single UN agency being the sole custodian of any SDG – this feeds into the joint process of creating the agencies' Country Programme Documents and a conducive environment for working together. The current situation with COVID-19 has taken a toll on what we are doing, but it has also presented an opportunity to further strengthen the collective elements around supporting relevant action on the Government's development plans, where nutrition is one aspect.

### **Question 3: Can you tell us more about how COVID-19 is affecting UN joint action for nutrition in Rwanda?**

The UN has now finalized its Joint Programme against COVID-19, which was an opportunity for the United Nations to help shape the government's economic recovery plan. The Joint Programme includes a big component on agriculture, food security and nutrition as well as on social protection. Even within the Development Partners Group, we've made sure that nutrition was part of the four sub-groups that have been established to support the fight against COVID-19, especially in the sub-group for social protection and vulnerable people, co-led by UNICEF and DFID, as well as the sub-group for the food security, agriculture and nutrition, led by FAO, WFP and the EU.

These new platforms and the joint work taking place within them have helped us to broaden the stakeholders involved. Through the UN Joint Assessment on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, some messages and policy recommendations have been shared with the government and national stakeholders, including on food security and nutrition. The UN Network has also supported the rapid analysis data collection to help provide the government with the right data in order to better handle their food distribution during the pandemic.

The Policy Brief from the SUN Secretariat on COVID-19 and nutrition<sup>27</sup> showed us some of the ways that COVID-19 has negatively impacted Rwanda. For example, access to school feeding has been negatively affected by school closures and also the closure of the Early Childhood Development centres [part of the National ECD Programme], places where young children normally have access

<sup>27</sup> SUN Movement Secretariat in collaboration with MQSUN+ and the global SUN networks. 2019. *SUN Movement Information Note on COVID-19 and Nutrition*. Available at [https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SUN-COVID-19\\_InformationNote\\_ENG.pdf](https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SUN-COVID-19_InformationNote_ENG.pdf); SUN Movement Secretariat. 2019. *COVID-19 and Scaling Up Nutrition Factsheet*. Geneva. Available at [https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID-19-factsheet\\_NOV\\_EN.pdf](https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID-19-factsheet_NOV_EN.pdf).

to food at the community level. However, Rwanda's community approach for nutrition is helping the country in the fight against malnutrition.

#### **Question 4: *Has the enhanced role of the UNRC empowered you to foster collective action on nutrition?***

The coordination efforts are supported by a stronger RC Office, with additional human resources in key areas, such as strategic planning and team leadership; economics; development finance and partnership; data management and reporting; and communication and advocacy. We've brought together all the agencies looking at various rights, including the Right to Food; we're coordinating not just on programming but also on policy and advocacy. Some of the joint programmes may not be labelled as nutrition but they still support nutrition. For example, the joint agriculture programme on Rural Women Economic Empowerment covers social and behaviour change communication activities to promote the consumption of nutritious foods among women smallholder farmers, along with the environment and resilient agriculture.

Stunting and anemia are impacting children under five and women of reproductive age more than others; therefore, we have also brought in agencies working with a gender lens perspective, such as UN WOMEN. In all our work, we are determined to reach the most vulnerable – children, women, people with disabilities and others – leaving no one behind.

We are also broadening the work to ensure that UN programmes work in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. We support refugees as well as host communities, and we support young entrepreneurs to develop their skills and bring more affordable food to the table. We are also right now starting a new programme in collaboration with the UN in DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo] on cross-border trade and social cohesion in Rwanda and DRC. An important aspect of the programme is to improve livelihoods for people living in the border areas.

## **Question 5: *How best can nutrition be leveraged within the existing SUN networks in Rwanda?***

Only by applying a multi-sectoral approach, addressing both immediate and underlying factors influencing nutrition, will we be able to improve malnutrition in the country. And effective coordination is key to success. A number of SUN networks are active in Rwanda, including the Civil Society Alliance, the Donor Network and the Academia Network. The technical working group for food, nutrition and WASH is also a coordinating platform. The UN Network is supporting the process of working with the private sector, but a business network has not been set up yet. We are also discussing working with the private sector through other mechanisms, such as the DPCG, not specifically on nutrition but as part of the development agenda and supporting human capital development in the country.



### Question 6: What do you see as the UN Network's recent successes?

We have the development of the new National Nutrition Policy, which has been approved by the Social Ministries Cluster, but the Cabinet still needs to give its final approval. UN agencies have supported the publication of the national Food-based Dietary Guidelines, the integration of nutrition in the updated curriculum for the community health workers and initiating nutritional care for the prevention and management for diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) at health facility level.

### Question 7: Can you describe some of the remaining challenges for UN engagement in nutrition and how these might be overcome?

Of course, we still have challenges. Current data is showing a decrease in stunting levels in children under five, down from 44 percent in 2010 to 38.2 percent in 2015, but prevalence still remains high, particularly among rural households and in the Western Province (45 percent). The level of wasting declined from 5 percent to 2 percent between 2010 and 2015.<sup>28</sup> We still don't know the full impact that COVID-19 will have on undernutrition.

Other elements to highlight are NCDs which are increasing in Rwanda, including obesity in certain age groups that needs attention.<sup>29</sup> This double burden of malnutrition is being tackled through the Food-based Dietary Guidelines, and also through the quality of nutrition-specific interventions via the health sector

<sup>28</sup> National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. *Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)*. Available at <https://www.statistics.gov.rw/datasource/demographic-and-health-survey-dhs>.

<sup>29</sup> As of 2015, the national prevalence of under-five overweight is 7.9 percent, which has increased slightly from 6.9 percent in 2010. Meanwhile, 9.3 percent of women and 1.9 percent of men are obese (Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Rwanda country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/eastern-africa/rwanda/#profile>).

and scaling up nutrition-sensitive interventions, such as agriculture, WASH and social protection. The UN is playing a key role in this.

The Government also needs to put in place long-term strategies to ensure the procurement of essential nutrition commodities, such as ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs) and micronutrient powders. The use of data to inform programming also needs to be strengthened. Rwanda is a data-rich country with strong routine monitoring systems, but we have to use them better for policy discussion in order to ensure equitable use of resources. We have a strong partnership with the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR). In my opinion, we really have to address issues of sustainability and budget allocation because Rwanda is heavily dependent on external finance through the World Bank and other development partners when it comes to, for example, addressing stunting.

It's really important that we focus efforts on financing. Thanks in part to our advocacy, Rwanda has been included as one of the fifteen countries involved in the Integrated National Financing Framework [INFF], an initiative in the Addis Ababa agenda for action on financing for the SDGs, focusing on domestic resources. The INFF was launched by the Prime Minister [Édouard Ngirente] as part of the UN75 commemoration on 21 September 2020. The Government of Rwanda now has a better understanding of what it will cost to achieve the SDGs, including ending hunger and poverty, and of the financial flows, both the category and the amounts, that the country can tap into.

### **Question 8: *What do you think are some of the lessons learned from these experiences?***

Initially, UN agencies were working in silos with a fragmented approach, but Rwanda has been one of the pilot countries for Delivering as One UN. When we moved towards establishing the UN Network, it enabled

us to work together in a more coordinated approach and to combine resources, increase synergies and avoid overlap and duplication. We no longer have nutrition-specific programmes delivered by individual UN agencies, but rather the joint programme derived from UNDAF II (UNSDCF). This has also triggered resources from the Swiss Development Corporation, to form the basis for the joint programme on stunting.

Another lesson has been the benefits of combining efforts. As RC, I supported three approaches that were relevant to nutrition and accepted by the UNCT. These include: (1) a thematic approach – nutrition was a theme for us to focus our joint efforts; (2) a geographic approach – we started the joint programme in two districts and this yielded some positive results for reducing stunting, for us to build on for next steps; and (3) a wider approach – we went beyond the UN actors and brought in more agencies and institutions but through other lenses, such as gender, youth, governance, etc.



## Question 9: What are the next steps for nutrition in Rwanda?

The UN is now awaiting the Cabinet approval of the new National Nutrition Policy, which was recently developed. Once approved, the UN will support its dissemination to stakeholders and its implementation. There is also a National Food Composition Table in progress, which will be a good reference for professionals and food policymakers. An important next step for the UN Network is to ensure sustainability for nutrition – Rwanda scored lowest in mobilizing resources in the SUN MEAL (65 percent), and we need to strengthen domestic resource mobilization.<sup>30</sup>

As they say in the country of one thousand hills, *turi kumwe*: we are working together to come through this [COVID-19] pandemic, to build back better and to strongly support our nutrition agenda. Coordination, partnership, data and analysis, financing and sustainability remain key!



30 SUN Movement Secretariat. *Rwanda*. Available at <https://scalingupnutrition.org/sun-countries/rwanda/>.





## UNN PEOPLE

*UN Network incites  
animated exchanges about how  
to combat under/over-nutrition  
paradox from Kenya to  
the Philippines*



Tale 8

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2019 SUN GLOBAL GATHERING

A plethora of nutrition actors from all corners of the globe gathered in Nepal on 4–7 November 2019 to share stories, exchange tips and regroup about what is in store for the future. Nine years into the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, the SUN stands at a crossroads in an era when nutrition issues are more complex and intertwined than ever. Go universal? Formalize its regional presence? Place its constituent global network secretariats under one roof? These are just some of the questions that the SUN Movement is facing, as numbers of undernourished and overweight people rise and the data suggests that these are two sides of the same coin. Countries and the nutrition community are sorting out how to tackle what is referred to as the ‘triple burden’ – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies plus overweight and obesity – cognizant that policies and paradigms need to be recalibrated and new stakeholders need to be involved. Most agree that collaboration and partnership are central to this tall task and embraced the 2019 SUN Global Gathering as a space to focus on the ‘how’.

The UN Network (UNN) Secretariat took a graceful dive into the triple burden theme, organizing a workshop on day 2 where it gave the floor to government speakers from Africa, Asia and Latin America alongside international experts. Attracting over 100 participants, the session was a prime opportunity to present a newly released World Bank Report on obesity, which highlights the *Health and Economic Consequences of an Impending Global Challenge*. The World Bank representative also spoke about the need to build the evidence base as part of fortifying efforts that address overweight and obesity, such as the formulation of obesity policy at the country level.



Participants listen to a multi-country panel to gain insights about measures being taken at country level to combat overweight and obesity, November 2019  
UNN Secretariat/Sarah Cruz

Victor Aguayo, Global Chief of the UNICEF Nutrition Programme, spurred a rich session of ‘real talk’ about the path taken in three countries. Keynote speaker, Hon. Dr. Azucena Dayanghirang, Executive Director of the National Nutrition Council in the Philippines, proudly spoke about the sweetened beverage tax levied on 19 December 2017 through greater fiscal reform. The tax, formulated with technical assistance from United Nations agencies such as WHO, has resulted in marked declines in the sales of these beverages, as high as 18 percent observed for powdered teas between January 2018 and February 2019. She went on to explain that, in parallel, the beverage industry made positive shifts, taking measures to reformulate products with regular sugar (indigenous to the nation) instead of high-fructose corn syrup, decreasing portion sizes as well as conducting awareness-raising campaigns on healthy diets. For her, “the UN Network is needed as a value technical assistance provider to SUN Focal Points and nutrition coordination mechanisms, empowering them to mobilize various development actors towards global nutrition targets and outcomes.”



*SUN Government Focal Point from the Philippines, Hon. Dr. Azucena Dayanghirang, speaks about how fiscal policy can be used to curb levels of overweight and obesity, November 2019*  
UNN Secretariat/Sarah Cruz



*Dynamic discussion unfolds as comments are taken from the floor, November 2019*  
UNN Secretariat/Sarah Cruz

Cecilia Gamboa, Costa Rica National Policy Coordinator for Food and Nutrition in the Ministry of Health and National SUN Focal Point, complemented, indicating that it was a combination of good policies, efficient programmes (e.g. fortification of staple foods) and community educational centres which enabled them to virtually eliminate levels of undernutrition in Costa Rica, including anaemia. At the same time, she cautioned that overweight and obesity levels are on the rise, and the urgency to act in that sphere. She sees the “need to reassess national policies and structures, position obesity in the political agenda, articulate sectors and ministries, change menus in schools, etc.” as concrete steps to take moving forward.

Kenya’s Gladys Mugambi, Head of the Nutrition and Dietetics Unit in the Ministry of Health and SUN Government Focal Point, echoed that interventions need to be backed by sound policy work, regulatory and M&E frameworks and guidelines, all elements of nutrition governance. Taking the fortification example, one strategy applied in the Kenyan context was to establish an alliance for the formulation of standards and guidelines to get all producers on board. The “need to understand what people are actually eating” is also critically important says Patrizia Fracassi, Senior Nutrition and Food Systems Officer at FAO, who underscored that “food systems is not just about farmers and consumers, but everything in between.”

Participants further plunged into the topic during interactive group work, moderated by UNN-REACH facilitators, that elucidated recurring themes and bottlenecks. In some countries, the emphasis remains on efforts to address undernutrition despite notable levels of overweight and obesity. Taboos about double-duty actions, such as breastfeeding, particularly how it is perceived as having sexual undertones, were cited as barriers that need to be overcome. Promising experiences from Sierra Leone were shared about leveraging traditional and religious leaders to change nutrition behaviours and eating practices. Similarly, they spoke about how men are being engaged to address misconceptions that ‘fat children are healthy and fat adults wealthy’. Others talked about emerging and perennial challenges, such as food labelling fraud, capacity constraints in food labs for quality assurance and nutrition education gaps.

While there are common threads, it was clear from the discussions that no two situations are the same. There is no magic bullet. Participants agreed on the need to root action in robust situation analysis and adopt context-specific solutions, including different approaches for rural and urban settings. So, the magic will likely come from multi-pronged approaches that are tailored to the context. Participants also recognized the potential of nutrition communication strategies, food legislation/regulations and M&E.



*Interactive breakout sessions are a way to exchange more experiences among the participants, November 2019*

UNN Secretariat/Sarah Cruz



As the direct link between children who are stunted and later become overweight gains clarity, countries are veering into this new nutrition territory, but it is anything but straight forward. Image regarding socioeconomic status, gender barriers, food culture and fiscal incentives all factor into the equation. Reflecting on the workshop, Laurent Michiels from the UNN Secretariat recognizes “that the way to success is not really clear for most countries.” For this reason, workshops of this sort are imperative to helping countries and the greater nutrition community learn from one another and to minimizing the likelihood that the mistakes are repeated. Every moment counts in the lead up to the final decade of the 2030 Agenda.

To learn more, view the workshop presentations.

- Costa Rica presentation by Ms. Cecilia Gamboa, Costa Rica National Policy Coordinator for Food and Nutrition in the Ministry of Health and National SUN Focal Point. Available at <https://bit.ly/3qL5eRP>.
- Kenya presentation by Ms. Gladys Mugambi, Head of the Nutrition and Dietetics Unit in the Ministry of Health, SUN Government Focal Point and member of the SUN ExCom. Available at <https://bit.ly/37RHlzy>.
- FAO presentation by Dr. Patrizia Fracassi, Senior Nutrition and Food Systems Officer. Available at <https://bit.ly/379C7zZ>.



UNN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

United Nations agencies  
support Afghanistan's  
Food Security and  
Nutrition Agenda



LOOKING FORWARD TO A NEW ERA

Table 9

*This article is a collaboration between a number of key nutrition actors in Afghanistan, including: **Said Shamsul Islam Shams**, coordinator of the Technical Secretariat of the AFSeN-A; **Maureen L. Gallagher**, until recently Chief of Nutrition for UNICEF Afghanistan and **Zakia Maroof**, a nutrition specialist working with UNICEF; **Muhebullah Latifi**, National Nutrition Coordinator at FAO; and **Muhammad Akbar**, Programme Policy Officer with WFP and **Martin Ahimbisibwe**, Head of the WFP nutrition team in Afghanistan.*

Afghanistan has the potential to make significant progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its rich natural resources and young population. However, the country also faces considerable challenges in terms of complex and protracted conflicts, climate change, gender inequalities and widespread poverty. Some progress has been made in tackling malnutrition but stunting and wasting levels in children under five remain high at nearly 41 percent and 10 percent, respectively.<sup>31</sup>

The country joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in September 2017 and launched the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A). Three United Nations agencies – the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – have been active contributors to Afghanistan’s multi-sectoral nutrition response and committed to providing financial support to AFSeN-A’s Technical Secretariat for a minimum of two years. The UN Network is combined with donor partners in Afghanistan and known as the UN-Development Partners Forum.

<sup>31</sup> Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Afghanistan country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/southern-asia/afghanistan/>.



## **Question 1: What role has the 'UN Network' played in supporting the development of Afghanistan's multi-sectoral nutrition response?**

There have been three main phases of UN support for nutrition in Afghanistan: before, during and after establishing the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A). In the first phase, the support included both nutrition-specific activities and agriculture activities via various platforms. This was followed by a second phase where three United Nations agencies (FAO, UNICEF and WFP) provided technical and financial resources to establish, enable and operationalize the National Technical Secretariat of the Food Security and Nutrition Steering Committee (the multi stakeholder platform, as spelled out in the AFSeN-A). This secretariat was housed within the Office of the Chief Executive from October 2017 to April 2020, which enabled multi-sectoral and high-level engagement with the Government of Afghanistan.

During this period, the three United Nations agencies (set up as the UN-Development Partners Forum) focused on advocacy and technical support to enhance multi-sectoral dialogue and coordination of food security and nutrition (FSN) and preparing a roadmap for the AFSeN-A, including a multi-sectoral strategic plan that has been developed and is being rolled out.

The UN-Development Partners Forum has also played a critical role in enhancing the current capacity of the AFSeN secretariat, particularly with scaling up nutrition coordination at provincial level, although this is still at an early stage. The three agencies have backed up the AFSeN focal point in all provinces where one or all agencies have a presence, resulting in stronger and functional provincial committees in several locations.



**Question 2: *What are the comparative advantages of engaging with the ‘UN Network’ that are not available from other networks?***

Having the three United Nations agencies sitting together as a network has enabled a streamlining of approaches so that organizations were not having parallel conversations with the same body. This has helped to reduce duplication of efforts and double funding, and promoted a strong dynamic relationship between the different agencies, for example, providing joint technical support for the AFSeN strategic plan.

“The ‘UN Network’ shares common objectives and is able to align its operational plans to complement the AFSeN Agenda. This, in turn, is underpinned by the commitment of the United Nations agencies to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their multi-sectoral approach,” noted Said Shamsul Islam Shams, coordinator of the Technical Secretariat of the AFSeN-A.

### **Question 3: How did the United Nations organize itself to discuss nutrition in Afghanistan?**

The respective agencies found a critical need to work together to strengthen national capacity to address nutrition challenges using a multi-sectoral approach – and establishing the AFSeN secretariat offered an appropriate platform for this. A common agenda was established to further guide national and UN priority actions.

The United Nations agencies therefore organized themselves through existing structures, for example, the Development Partners Forum, with UNICEF and WFP co-chairing the forum on a rotating basis alongside Canada (Global Affairs Canada); the One-UN for Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods; and the One-UN for Nutrition (sub-working group). Each agency also co-chairs one of the three working groups established under Afghanistan's Nutrition Executive Committee, overseen by the Deputy Prime Minister. These include: the food security working group (FAO); the nutrition working group (UNICEF); and the public awareness and advocacy working group (WFP). Nutrition is also discussed in the Nutrition Cluster, the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster and various technical working groups.



#### **Question 4: *Has the AFSeN-A Development Partners Forum been effective? If so, in which ways?***

The Forum has achieved a number of milestones, not least helping to develop the AFSeN Strategic Plan (2019–2023) that was signed off by the Government of Afghanistan; creating a national authority to control food quality;<sup>32</sup> and mainstreaming nutrition into legislation. For example, the mandatory fortification of flour and edible oil was ratified in 2018/19 thanks to AFSeN. However, there is no measurement for the Forum’s overall effectiveness. More regular meetings and measurement of tangible outcomes might help to make the nutrition agenda more visible. It has been difficult to get traction for nutrition funding in the country, despite high-level meetings.

#### **Question 5: *How is the UN-Development Partners Forum collaborating with other SUN networks?***

There is collaboration between networks both inside the country and also at the global level. Within the country, the member United Nations agencies have provided various forms of technical assistance to Afghanistan’s Civil Society Alliance. Efforts are in place for the Forum to support the strengthening of the SUN Business Network as a way to advocate for and strengthen nutrition-sensitive food systems and related policies. Nevertheless, there could be improvements in bilateral engagement between stakeholders, who are involved in multi-sectoral platform meetings (currently disrupted due to COVID-19). The Technical Secretariat has been pushing for tangible outcomes, in particular from civil society.

<sup>32</sup> The responsibility and funding were previously split between the Ministry of Public Health and Agriculture.

## **Question 6: How do SUN networks such as the UN-Development Partners Forum need to adapt in the context of fragility and the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**F**ragile states like Afghanistan, with a high proportion of vulnerable people, have been exposed to the effects of COVID-19 in terms of delivery of health and social services, reduced household incomes, broken livelihoods and access to quality diets. However, the pandemic has also brought various stakeholders closer together in establishing ways to improve services to vulnerable people amidst competing government priorities. The SUN networks can take advantage of the strengthened multi-stakeholder platforms and dialogue for innovations to establish more comprehensive approaches and improved service delivery within the COVID-19 response.

“During school closures, UNICEF and WFP have been collaborating on community-based programmes for deworming interventions. The Government is now looking to focus on more home-based care – COVID-19 could be a game changer for increasing community delivery of nutrition interventions in Afghanistan,” says Maureen L. Gallagher, former Chief of Nutrition for UNICEF Afghanistan.

The COVID-19 nutrition response is being coordinated by the United Nations through the Nutrition Cluster. This has included the provision of guidance on programming for various nutrition interventions in context of COVID-19 and adaptation to the local setting, joint resource mobilization for the emergency response, joint advocacy for scaling up treatment and preventive nutrition services, and joint advocacy to reinstate the multi-sectoral coordination secretariat for food security and nutrition (AFSeN).

**Question 7: *What are the challenges for nutrition with the country's new political administration? How are the United Nations agencies collectively working together to support the government to overcome these challenges?***

The announcement of the presidential election results in March 2020 was followed by a political transition that brought about several changes in governance structures. Around the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic set in. As both issues continue amidst other pre-existing issues (e.g. peace, security, education, health and social services delivery), the country faces a number of competing priorities. This has generally slowed the pace of government-led nutrition initiatives as well as the ability of the UN-Development Partners Forum to engage with and support the government.

The 'UN Network' is now working closely with the AFSeN secretariat to ensure that it is reinstated. This effort envisions that the AFSeN secretariat is made financially and operationally sustainable by embedding it in the Government's formal structure (Tashkeel). United Nations agencies have also been providing technical support for the country's COVID-19 operational response and the United Nations Resident Coordinator is a member of the national COVID-19 committee.





### **Question 8: *Can you tell us more about the new governance structures in place for nutrition in Afghanistan?***

**A**n official letter has now been received, confirming that the Administrative Office of the President (AOP) is to house the Technical Secretariat, with a request for financial support from United Nations agencies. Such support for the multi-sector platform (AFSeN-A) is to be provided for a transition period, until the Government determines a sustainable strategy.

The move to the AOP presents another opportunity for the AFSeN secretariat to resume work and retain its multi-sectoral coordination role. Placing it at this high level enables leadership and some influence over other relevant sectors and ministries. It also provides an opportunity to transition into a fully-fledged, government-funded unit or authority.

### **Question 9: *What more could be done in the future to improve collective UN engagement in nutrition to support the Government? and how?***

The One-UN approach has been imposed on the United Nations by the Government, but it is debatable as to how much agencies are ready to work as one. At the policy and strategic level, the United Nations mandate in a country should clearly spell out a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition. Is it written in their strategy<sup>33</sup> and are they accountable for it? At the operational level, the ‘UN Network’ could benefit from including more members. For example UN WOMEN and UNDP are not part of the Network.

“In the past, country-level support has been based on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The ‘UN Network’ also needs to have a common country action plan that is aligned to the AFSeN Agenda. This has the potential for United Nations joint action plans to ensure synergy in planning, implementation and co-funding with minimal duplication and a stronger focus on national priorities,” explains Zakia Maroof, a nutrition specialist working with UNICEF.

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<sup>33</sup> The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, formerly UNDAF.





## UNN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING



# *A spirit of collaboration in Nepal*

UNN-REACH PROVIDES A BOOST

*Tale 10*

From the beginning, the partnership between Nepal and the UN Network's country support mechanism, UNN-REACH<sup>34</sup> was symbiotic. The Nepali government has made steady progress on the nutrition front since 1970, when the National Nutrition Policy Coordination Committee and the institution of the Joint Nutrition Support Program (JNSP) were established.<sup>35</sup> This history, along with a willingness to develop more robust nutrition governance, would set the stage to make the UNN-REACH intervention a productive endeavor.



*Training of trainers workshop  
NNFSS/Sagar Shrestha*

Nepal made a significant leap in reducing child stunting between 2001 and 2011, dropping about 15 percentage points.<sup>36</sup> Even so, the 2011 figures were still daunting, roughly one year before UNN-REACH entered the country. According to the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 41 percent of children under five years of age were stunted and 11 percent were wasted. By 2016, the end of UNN-REACH's tenure in the country, 36 percent of children under age 5 were stunted and 10 percent were wasted,<sup>37</sup> still exceeding prevailing thresholds that signal a public health problem.

<sup>34</sup> REACH refers to the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition inter-agency initiative, established in 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Pomeroy-Stevens, A., Shrestha, M.B., Biradavolu, M., Hachhethu, K., Houston, R., Sharma, I., and Wun, J. 2016. Prioritizing and Funding Nepal's Multisector Nutrition Plan. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, Volume 37(4) Supplement: S151-S169. Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0379572116674555>.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Health and Population (Nepal), New ERA & ICF International Inc. 2012. *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011*. Kathmandu & Calverton. Available at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR257/FR257%5B13April2012%5D.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Nepal country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/southern-asia/nepal/>.

The above statistics do not evenly reflect impact on both indicators although the declines in stunting are encouraging. Furthermore, the kind of institutional change UNN-REACH supports typically takes time to translate into impact. Stunting is a more long-term indicator, not only reflecting nutrition gains but also broader development. What is harder to measure is how various structures have been designed and operationalized that help the government monitor and chart their progress on this issue, bringing together a wide spectrum of players to contribute to continuous improvement.

## Initial steps

UNN-REACH was first established in 2008 by FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, and repositioned under the broader UN Network (UNN) in 2015. As it was in Nepal in 2012, the initiative continues to be a support mechanism for improving nutrition governance, working in close collaboration with SUN networks, including the UNN.

Along with the National Planning Commission, UNN-REACH led the SUN Joint Annual Assessment in Nepal, galvanizing networks that included the Civil Society Alliance, academia, development partners and others. In 2014, they organized a meeting on resource mapping and costing with participation from all national stakeholders.

“The REACH facilitator played an important role in bringing the senior government officials from the relevant ministries together to plan and implement nutrition activities in Nepal,” commented Dr. Geeta Bhakta Joshi. As a member of the National Planning Commission, he is recognized for his outstanding achievements in promoting nutrition in his country.



*Dr. Geeta Bhakta Joshi participates in a regional nutrition budgeting workshop as part of efforts to improve nutrition governance in his country, April 2016*  
NNFSS/Sagar Shrestha

The objective of the National Nutrition and Food Security Secretariat (NNFSS) was to support policymaking and improve the food security and nutritional status of the Nepali people. According to the UNN-REACH Facilitator Ingo Neu, an international professional in NNFSS, government was so proactive about multi-sectoral planning because a member of the Secretariat was a ‘champion of nutrition’, who pushed the nutrition agenda for this body, coordinating the five ministries from a common platform.

Savita Malla, a Nepali nutrition expert who worked on communication strategy during this period and now serves as a policy specialist at the global SUN Movement Secretariat, reflected, “REACH’s most important contribution was to help the Government of Nepal establish the multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder platforms. We were part of the implementation of the multi-sectoral nutrition plan (MSNP)-I (2013–2017) and development of MSNP-II (2018–2022), both of which were costed. Without REACH, it would not have developed as quickly or in such an organized way.”



## The power of collective action

Generation one REACH tools<sup>38</sup> were less standardized and automated than the current versions. As a result, the multi-sectoral mapping exercise did not capture coverage data for beneficiaries or geography as it did in other countries. Nevertheless, the process of collaboration was so participatory that it yielded this collective action, even without sophisticated data. In fact, Nepal was an ideal setting for the development of the UNN tool on nutrition capacity assessment.<sup>39</sup>



The successful integration of the programme was largely due to local ownership of the tools, which were used as a means of building government capacity in nutrition governance. According to Neu, what mattered most was not the coordination of the United Nations within its various offices, but the extent of collaboration with local government. Neu elaborated, “In Nepal, the government wanted REACH to establish a NNFSS within the government. They decided it should be staffed by eight people in total and tasked with coordination for all actors and stakeholders. Five ministries, along with projects, NGOs and broader society, including academia and civil society took part.”

<sup>38</sup> In response to popular demand, the analytical tools initially developed for UNN-REACH have been rebranded as UNN services open to all countries. To learn more, visit the [UNN website](#).

<sup>39</sup> For further information, see <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/tools/nutrition-capacity-assessment>.

## Scaffolding local nutrition governance architecture

Referring to how meetings were organized, Neu explained, “you can’t just mix them all up – government, NGOs and academics, or it will become a waste of time. We focused on structure, objectives, outputs and deliverables and a workplan. Groups were organized according to technical areas, with terms of reference.”

To support the implementation of the MSNP, high-level committees were established in addition to technical multi-sectoral groups that focused on capacity development, monitoring and evaluation as well as advocacy and communications. The participation of academics, the private sector and donors was an integral part of the process. “Multi-stakeholder architecture brought about a massive change in how nutrition governance progressed,” Neu added. There were monthly meetings that provide a regular forum for three working groups. “A capacity development master plan led the way to implement parts of the advocacy strategy. For the first time, partners had one guiding document for this,” Neu recalled.

UNN-REACH always adapts tools to the local context, but in Nepal this was taken one step further. When the mapping exercise was conducted in 2013, data points were connected to other government policies and strategies, not just nutrition. Furthermore, the Nepal Policy Overview<sup>40</sup> included additional rating streams, such as one that looked exclusively at government commitment and funding. These additions were made at the request of the NNFSS.

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40 Findings available at <https://bit.ly/37QyDkX>.

**FIGURE 2.**

Excerpt from the Policy Overview in Nepal (2014) conducted through UNN-REACH

**UNN-REACH Policy Overview ascertains the extent to which nutrition is covered by policy and strategy frameworks (Nepal)**



| Document   | Period covered | Next revision | Responsible institution                   | Partners                          | Nutrition | Remarks   |
|--|----------------|---------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------|---|
| NARC's Strategic Vision for Agriculture Research | 2011-2030      | TBD           | Nepal Agricultural Research Council       | FAO                               |           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reform and reinforcement of the agricultural research system is required to overcome food &amp; nutrition insecurity</li> <li>New varieties/hybrid crops &amp; improved breeds of animals &amp; fish have the potential to provide more nutrients</li> </ul> |
| Agriculture Biodiversity Policy                  | 2007           | TBD           | Ministry of Agricultural Development      | FAO, WFP                          |           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 1 direct reference to nutrition</li> <li>Agrobiodiversity is the backbone for the sustainable development of agriculture, food security, &amp; poverty alleviation</li> </ul>   |
| National Agriculture Policy                      | 2004           | TBD           | Ministry of Agricultural Development      | FAO, WFP                          |           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 2 direct references to nutrition</li> <li>Nutrition is recommended to be a component of extension services provided to farmer's groups in support of agricultural production and productivity</li> </ul>  |
| Nepal Biodiversity Strategy                      | 2002           | TBD           | Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation | Global Environment Facility, UNDP |           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biological diversity in Nepal touches upon human health and nutrition</li> <li>Nepal has a wealth of non-timber forest products, this diversity can provide marginalised farmers with a valuable nutritional resource</li> </ul>                             |
| National Strategy on Maternal Undernutrition     | 2013-2017      | TBD           | Ministry of Health & Population           | UNICEF, WHO                       |           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low SMIs among adolescent girls (25.8%) are worse compared to women of reproductive age (18.2%)</li> <li>The majority of women in Nepal have iron and other micronutrient deficiencies</li> </ul>  |

**Findings indicate opportunities for better integrating nutrition into agriculture policies and strategies**

● Maternal & child nutrition receives significant attention    ○ Maternal & child nutrition receives is not addressed at all



## UNN-REACH on the frontlines after earthquake Gorkha

The extent of UNN-REACH's value became clear when the Gorkha earthquake struck in April 2015, and the government asked Neu, the international facilitator, to play the role of inter-cluster coordinator. Drawing on the relationships he had forged with the United Nations, civil society, donors, ministers and more, Neu oversaw clusters for nutrition, health, protection, food security and others. His appointment was a vote of confidence that not only attests the value of the UNN-REACH facilitator, but also how UNN-REACH helped to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus. "Since we were the neutral body that worked within the government, we had a certain 'clout' that helped us organize other agencies for the relief effort," Malla commented. "REACH staff were on the ground in the immediate aftermath. We also helped the government develop their National Disaster Assessment report."

## A new way to share information

One of the most significant outcomes of UNN-REACH's intervention was the establishment of a web-based portal that all stakeholders could use for reference: the Nepal Nutrition and Food Security Portal (NNFSP). This included updated contact information, reports, mapping and other outputs from the analytical tools. Every organization working on nutrition would enter information about their projects, including what groups they were targeting and what types of interventions they were providing. From there, all uploaded information was mapped so data could be visualized. The portal was user-friendly, so stakeholders could upload their information in less than 45 minutes.



Looking back, Malla reflected on some of the challenges the group faced. “At first, the portal was difficult to develop, because different organizations were committed to their own websites, but after it was up and running, the UN and NGOs noticed this was one platform where all resources were available, as a government-owned initiative. Sometimes, when documents were not available, people would contact us, asking for them.” This portal was key in supporting knowledge brokering among a wide range of actors and fostering a climate of trust and transparency.

## Milestones

**A**s a knowledge broker – a person or organization who facilitates the access, interpretation, adaptation and utilization of information to meet the needs of implementers or policy makers<sup>41</sup> – Neu was able to establish strong ties with government from the start, and move capacity building quickly towards concrete outcomes.

Here are some of them, across a range of sectors:

- On the **communications** front, jingles, a nutrition logo, talk shows and more were developed. Journalists were trained in twenty-one districts and created a Media Network. The National Advocacy and Communication Strategy was endorsed and launched.
- The nutrition **monitoring and evaluation** framework was updated and implemented with ownership by all relevant ministries.
- To improve **capacity**, a pool of trainers from various public institutions were deployed to spread their new skills. Six districts were supported in developing annual, costed multi-sectoral plans, with additional allocation of funds.

<sup>41</sup> UN Network Secretariat. 2019. *UNN-REACH Facilitator as Knowledge Broker: Summary of a 2018 Study by the Society for Implementation Science in Nutrition*. Rome. Available at <https://bit.ly/39Ms5Xl>.

Joyce Njoro, former Senior Programme Officer at the UNN Secretariat, who oversaw the UNN-REACH engagement in Nepal, commented, “What was unique in Nepal was that the Secretariat was headed by Ingo Neu, whereas in many other countries, the Secretariat would be headed by local staff. The bigger concern was, how do we sustain this?”

Four years later, the NNFSS is still operational and a model that other countries can learn from and emulate. The sustainability of the ‘governance architecture’ such as NNFSS and the portal is further testament to the trust-building, facilitation and incremental capacity development that UNN-REACH undertook while in-country.





UNN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING



UNN-REACH  
supports high-impact  
Sierra Leone National  
Nutrition Fair

Tale II

This year's National Nutrition Fair, held on 5–7<sup>th</sup> February in Freetown, featured panel discussions and booths from international and local organizations, showcasing their nutrition projects. There were theatre performances by the Children's Advocacy Forum, a local non-profit, as well as the opportunity for malnutrition screening for children. Participants also included school-age children and health workers.



*Exhibition booth at National Nutrition Fair underscores the role of healthy diets in good nutrition, February 2020*  
WFP/Evelyn Fey

A poster on display, developed by UNN-REACH asked: Are children receiving the nutrition actions they may need? The answer was portrayed in two formats. One graphic showed various interventions children receive, such as deworming tablets, Vitamin A and optimal maternal breastfeeding, among others. Second, a map of Sierra Leone broke down nutrition interventions by district, revealing the number of actions that reach at least 30 percent of the target population.

Panels focused on the underlying issues leading to malnutrition, such as household food insecurity, inadequate primary health services, unhealthy household environment (including limited access to safe water and sanitation facilities) and suboptimal care and support. The latter is the leading cause of death among children below the age of five in Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, the country has made some progress in reducing acute malnutrition between 2010–2019, which went from 6.9<sup>42</sup> percent to 5.4 percent.<sup>43</sup> The national prevalence

42 2010 SMART Survey.

43 Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF. 2019. *Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019: Key Indicators*. Freetown and Rockville. Available at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR122/PR122.pdf>.

of under-five stunting is 29.5 percent,<sup>44</sup> as compared to the developing country average of 25 percent<sup>45</sup> and the regional average in West Africa 27.7 percent – all within the ‘high’ range of public health significance.

Resources, such as the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping book, were displayed in both the SUN and UN booths. This book profiles key findings from a sweeping mapping exercise undertaken in 2019, including where intervention coverage is low. The mapping was conducted with the UN Network (UNN) tool, with support from the UNN Secretariat under the auspices of the UNN-REACH country engagement. The book gave participants a reference point for how the country’s nutrition profile was progressing, along with *Tales Be Told*, Series 1,<sup>46</sup> to promote learning across borders.

The UNN-REACH Facilitator worked with several United Nations agencies to ensure that high-level representation from government was present and that successful resource mobilization from the agencies and other in-country development partners was achieved. In addition, UNN-REACH resources were utilized to support the participation of district nurses and nutritionists as well as representatives from mother support groups.



Mr. Sheriff, SUN Focal Point, and Mrs Nenebah Jalloh, SUN National Coordinator, stand with other participants, February 2020

WFP/Evelyn Fey

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Sierra Leone country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/western-africa/sierra-leone/>

<sup>46</sup> UN Network Secretariat. 2019. *Tales Be Told. Series 1*. Rome. Available at <https://bit.ly/36BUNGn>.

What made this year's event a success, especially compared to the previous one held in 2017, was the participation of high-level officials, including the Vice President, the Minister of Health, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, heads of agencies from the United Nations, including the UNN chair and other non-governmental organizations that took part.

Ms. Gerda Verburg, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, who is also the Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, helped to create momentum in the lead-up to the Fair during her visit to Sierra Leone on 2–5 February 2020. For the soccer fans in the audience, Gerda also spoke about the possibility of winning the World Cup sometime in the next two decades. The Olympics and the World Cup are both goals the entire population can get behind. Gerda's appeal not only focuses national passions, it also addressed a growing obesity problem, with levels estimated at 13.3 percent for women and 3.8 percent for men in 2016.<sup>47</sup>

During her visit, Gerda also met with the First Lady, Mrs. Fatima Maada Bio, who is not only an advocate of better nutrition, but also chairs a regional campaign called 'Hands off our Girls'. Both the UNN-REACH facilitator at the time, Sulaiman Sowe, and the former facilitator, Dr. Philip Kanu, were represented during the meeting with the First Lady. Dr. Kanu is the co-chair of the campaign, which works to reduce teenage pregnancies and to protect girls. Empirical evidence suggests that there are links between adolescent pregnancies, low birthweight (under 2.5 kg), stunting and overweight and obesity.

Pledges were made, including by a committee organized by the Vice President that would include line ministries and civil society, to make commitments leading up to the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) summit that will take place in Tokyo. Finally, President Julius Maada Bio, who was attending an African Union summit in Addis Ababa at the same time, offered to become the 'nutrition champion' for the country, in coordination with the First Lady's campaign.

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47 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019.



## UNN PROGRAMMING/ PARTNERSHIPS

### *White gold*

BUILDING A MILK VALUE CHAIN  
IN BURUNDI



*Tale 12*

A network of community engagement has been growing in the western part of Burundi since 2015.<sup>48</sup> It starts with a gift of a pregnant cow, given to a rural farmer, one of 3,000 who will then pass on the calf to another farmer. This simple, effective model was the beginning of an extensive milk value chain that has extended into many facets of life with benefits, from more nutritious school feeding to family planning support to increased trade opportunities. What happened in Burundi was the result of joint efforts involving several United Nations agencies – the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – as well as public-private partnerships. Not only is it a story about people working together across sectors and stakeholder groups, it is also a story of human ingenuity that found a way to thrive despite severe limitations.

### 'A forgotten crisis'

In 2015, Burundi faced a daunting number of nutrition, environmental, economic and political challenges. The media has called the situation 'a forgotten crisis' because of high levels of food insecurity, climate change factors and human rights abuses.<sup>49</sup> Burundi is ranked 185<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries on the 2018 Human Development Index,<sup>50</sup> and its poverty rate is extremely high at over 70 percent.<sup>51</sup> Limited agricultural production,

48 IFAD. 2015. *Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP) Burundi Fact Sheet*. Rome. Available at <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/publication/asset/39572144>.

49 Nantulya, P. 2019. *Burundi, the Forgotten Crisis, Still Burns*. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Washington D.C. Available at <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/burundi-the-forgotten-crisis-still-burns/>.

50 UNDP. 2018. *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*. New York. Available at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018\\_human\\_development\\_statistical\\_update.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_human_development_statistical_update.pdf).

51 World Bank Group. 2018. *Republic of Burundi: Addressing fragility and demographic challenges to reduce poverty and boost sustainable growth systematic country diagnostic*. Available at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/655671529960055982/pdf/Burundi-SCD-final-06212018.pdf>.



excessive rains, floods and drought are additional factors that Burundi faces. Conflict has reigned in the country except for the period between 2005 and 2015. When the European Union withdrew 50–60 percent of its funding in 2015, the private sector followed suit, alarmed by political instability.<sup>52</sup> This was the same year that the exodus began, with over 400,000 refugees and asylum seekers fleeing to Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda.<sup>53</sup>

From a nutritional lens, Burundi's child stunting prevalence is the second highest of all countries included in the 2019 Global Hunger Index.<sup>54</sup> Over 5 percent of children in Burundi experience wasting and 6.1 percent die before the age of five. Virginia Villar Arribas, WFP Country Director, began her post in 2015. She pointed to several 'layers', or situational factors, that account for the high levels of stunting. Food production is low. If you divide the amount of food available in Burundi by the amount of people, there are only 55–100 days of food per person per year. Affordability is another issue, as 67 percent of the population cannot afford to buy nutritious food.<sup>55</sup>

"These long-standing problems challenge the country's development," she reflects. The milk value chain was designed to target each of these areas by increasing awareness about the importance of better nutrition and augmenting food supply simultaneously with income, so that families have increased buying power.

52 Interview with Virginia Villar Arribas, WFP Country Director. 4 June 2020.

53 UN News Center. 2018. *Without urgent funding, Burundi risks becoming a 'forgotten crisis'* – UN refugee agency. Available at <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/without-urgent-funding-burundi-risks-becoming-%E2%80%98forgotten-crisis%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-un-refugee-agency>.

54 Concern & Welthungerhilfe. 2019. *Global Hunger Index 2019: Burundi*. Available at <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2019/Burundi.pdf>.

55 Interview with Virginia Villar Arribas, WFP Country Director. 4 June 2020.



## First steps

The milk value chain begins with enriched animal fodder to improve the quality and quantity of cow milk. Provided by FAO, the feed was developed in response to community members' needs. The second link in the 'chain of community solidarity' is the cow, often pregnant, given to a rural farmer who qualifies for the programme. The milk produced from the cow is then brought to a local milk collection center, a cooperative, whose formation was supported by IFAD. By 2016, twelve cooperatives were collecting milk in Gitega.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Kanova, L., Pronesti, N., Blankman, J. & Sebushahu, T. 2018. *Mission Report: Joint RBA visit to Burundi, 5–9 November 2018*. FAO, IFAD and WFP. Rome.

From there, milk is transported to The Modern Dairy, the country's single plant to sterilize the milk at ultra-high temperature (UHT). The long-life milk is then stored in Tetra Paks, impermeable paper containers that do not require refrigeration. Funding from the Netherlands focused on the factory itself, while WFP provided capacity building, from training farmers who milked the cows to the cooperative staff who collected the milk and transported it to the factory, to the workers who completed the final steps of testing and packaging.

The next question concerned the market. Consumers had limited buying power, scarce refrigerators and no cold chain to transport the milk. Instead of milking, some farmers killed their cows for meat, an outcome that threatened to stop the economic potential of the programme in its tracks.

## School feeding

Once milk production increased, demand had to keep pace. WFP bought and supplied 420,000 liters of milk to nearly 37,000 school children in 2017 and 2018. One in four children in Burundi are fed at school, a total of 631,000 children. In rural areas, milk has not been widely available. Sensitization about its nutritional benefits, such as protein, calcium, B vitamins, potassium and vitamin D took place through the schools, with teachers and parents participating.

Liliane Bigayimpunzi oversaw the school feeding programme for WFP from 2007–2018. Children in 400+ schools were given milk three days per week, which supplemented the maize, beans and vegetables that are fed to the children for lunch. School gardens, jointly supported by the Ministry of the Environment, Agriculture and Livestock with WFP, were one aspect, where children helped to grow crops such as carrots, cabbage and onions; they were

also given seeds to take home and plant, another measure supported by FAO. Furthermore, nutrition was included as part of the life skills course in the school curriculum.

While milk in schools may not address stunting directly as it reaches children after they are two years old, it helps to shape eating habits that spill over into family life and the wider community. “Children who drink milk at school go home and demand it from their parents, who will then give it to all the siblings,” Virginia explains. In this way, “children can change the downward spiral of malnutrition and redirect it upwards.”



## Nutrition-specific and sensitive interventions

The milk value chain is nutrition-specific because it addresses immediate causes of malnutrition, such as nutrient intake and disease. As highlighted above, the programme has improved food security and dietary diversity; strengthened the food value-chain through partnership; and promoted positive nutritional behaviour change in the community. Milk production has increased from 840,000 litres in 2016 to 1.2 million litres in 2018.

The milk value chain is nutrition-sensitive in that it tackles the underlying determinants of malnutrition, such as food insecurity, limited access to health services and a poor hygienic environment as well as basic causes, such as poverty, gender inequalities, low educational attainment and more. Impact assessments carried out by WFP show that between 2014 and 2016, 3,000 new jobs were created in the targeted rural areas. The benefit of more robust markets meant that farmers' revenue increased from US\$400 to US\$650 per year. In addition, the project has helped to develop the private sector and reduced milk importation from other countries, mitigating the loss of hard currency.

Family planning is yet another piece of the puzzle. WFP and UNFPA are collaborating with schools and health centers to educate young girls and women about delaying pregnancy for both nutritional and economic reasons. While UNFPA is not formally part of the project, its engagement in Burundi's nutrition scene has intensified following its decision to join the UN Network (UNN) in 2018 in pursuit of common goals.

## Sustainability and expansion

The milk value chain continues to benefit farmers, families, traders, merchants, drivers and staff that run the cooperatives where milk is collected. With 630,434 cows provided since the start, the project is now integrated into the economy and supported by government ministries, such as the Environment, Agriculture and Livestock, Public Health, Finance, Trade and Good Governance.

Currently, funding for the school feeding programme is provided by the government itself. While nearly 300,000 litres of milk were purchased by WFP in 2017 and 2018, their contribution represents only 12 percent of the factory's annual sales today, versus 80 percent in past years. There are also other signs of growth. The original twelve milk cooperatives, or collection centers, have expanded to 54. The government runs a citizen association, called *fin-lait* to negotiate prices of milk. As the quality of milk has improved, new opportunities have presented themselves. Burundi now exports milk to neighbouring Tanzania.

The private sector in this chain is more than a contributor; it is a key player. Transport companies, Tetra Pak producers, merchants, truck drivers and agricultural workers are some of the businesses and jobs created as a result of this project. The Modern Dairy of Burundi is giving back to the community and has identified future activities that will strengthen ongoing collaboration, such as campaigns with over 4,000 women to raise awareness regarding the nutritional value of milk.

Going forward, several United Nations agencies are exploring how to scale up with the private sector. Possible opportunities include opening more milk processing factories (there is still only one in the country) and diversifying

the range of products, such as moving into yogurt production. Conversations about a partnership with Kerry Dairy from Ireland are also taking place. Furthermore, a local entrepreneur uses discarded UTH bags from the milk to plant trees. The Netherlands is looking for ways to translate the success of the milk value chain into other crops (e.g. bananas, rice, beans and maize).

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic has elicited new ways of coping and connecting, the value chain in Burundi shows that extreme circumstances can lead to innovation. This pattern is evident when we look at what happened in Burundi over the past five years: how improving nutritional options for the population has benefitted so many other aspects of the community.





## UNN PROGRAMMING/ PARTNERSHIPS

# Effective joint programming in The Gambia



TARGETING THE SAME COMMUNITIES  
AT THE SAME TIME TO REDUCE MALNUTRITION

*Table 13*



Undernutrition is a major public health problem in The Gambia, especially among women of reproductive age and young children. Chronic malnutrition has stagnated for the last decade or so, with a stunting prevalence of 24.5 percent of children under five; and under-five wasting stands at 11 percent (2013).<sup>57</sup> To achieve a greater impact, The Gambia joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in 2011 and has focused on a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach to improve malnutrition in these vulnerable groups.

## Getting to know the members

The UN Network (UNN) in the country comprises five core agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the International Organization for Migration (IOM); the World Food Programme (WFP); the World Health Organization (WHO); and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which chairs the platform. While there has been an understanding among United Nations agencies in The Gambia that nutrition programming is most effective when it addresses both the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition, the multi-sector approach was given a huge boost by a multi-agency programme – 'Post Crisis Response' (PCR). The PCR brought together three UNN members – FAO, UNICEF and WFP – and was designed to help hard-hit regions recover from a food and nutrition insecurity crisis peak in 2015. A wide range of activities characterize the programme, implemented under a Co-Delegation Agreement in the spirit of joint programming and improved coordination.

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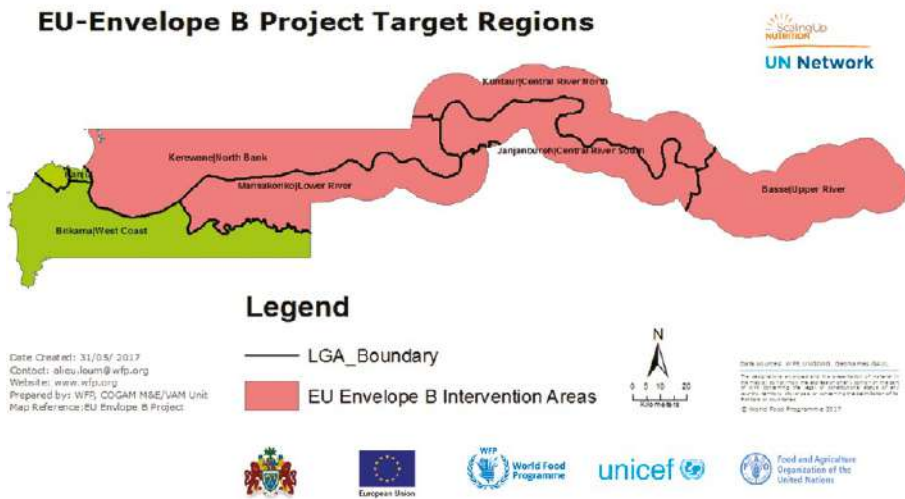
57 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Gambia country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/western-africa/gambia/#profile>.



## Tackling undernutrition in rural communities

The PCR is an €11.4 million EU-funded intervention that took place between January 2017 and December 2019. The programme was designed to help communities ‘bounce back’ from a cumulative effect of shocks, both agricultural and non-agricultural, that were having a negative impact on food and nutrition security. The PCR’s overall objective was to contribute to the reduction of stunting and wasting among children 0–24 months from food-insecure households that reside in the following four regions: North Bank; Lower River; Central River; and Upper River.

**FIGURE 3.**  
Map of geographic convergence in programming



## Embracing complementarity

The “PCR was designed to provide a holistic multi-sectoral programme for addressing FSN and [to do this] sustainably,” Wanja Kaaria, WFP Country Director, reported. “This meant covering all angles, from community engagement and support to smallholder farmers, and including safety net support for the most vulnerable.” Each agency was responsible for a different aspect of programming, with FAO coordinating and facilitating the implementation of the project. It also led on interventions aimed at improving household food security through cash for work interventions and support to agricultural production.

UNICEF was responsible for health-related programming to promote optimal nutrition and care practices, with a focus on the first 1,000 days (between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday). WFP provided preventive support for moderate acute malnutrition (MAM).

Implementing partners included the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, the National Nutrition Agency, The Gambia Red Cross Society and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, a private company, Gambia Horticultural Enterprise, was provided with knowledge and skill enhancement through Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) training as well as other essential equipment to support local production of fortified blended cereal.

## *Catalyst for closer collaboration*

A formal contract as well as a memorandum of understanding was signed by the three United Nations agencies that clearly specified the funds allocated to each of them along with their respective responsibilities and activities. All agencies reported on financial expenditure in the period and contributed to the final donor report. Wanja confirmed that “the first driver for UN agency collaboration was joint funding, but the SUN UN Network was an existing platform that we leveraged.” She went on to explain that the UNN platform enabled the UN colleagues to strengthen that joint approach within the programme.

According to the participating agencies, the joint implementation approach resulted in an effective programme based on a set of mutually reinforcing activities and more efficient use of available resources. For example, UNICEF and WFP conducted joint screening for MAM and Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM). The MAM and SAM children with no complications were referred

to health workers and registered in the Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) programme. Children with SAM that had complications were referred to facilities for specialized treatment, whereas children identified with MAM were provided with food supplements.

As part of efforts to integrate interventions for maximum impact, FAO supported the households with malnourished children by providing vegetable seeds and fertilizer. These families grew and produced vegetables that were consumed by the household while the excess produce was sold to generate income for other family needs. Joint nutrition education was conducted for health workers and village support groups in the rural communities to create awareness on infant and young child feeding (IYCF) best practices, using locally available food products. A comprehensive package of social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) was covered jointly by UNICEF and WFP. This initiative used the national IYCF toolkit materials for nutrition care and hygiene education sessions delivered through health facilities as well as nutrition education and counselling conducted at the community level.



## Coordinating mechanisms

Good coordination and regular communication between the UN partners proved essential, especially as each agency had different organizational structures and decision-making procedures. The UNN served as a point of convergence. Monthly inter-agency meetings were held as technical working groups (TWGs) and supplemented with regular meetings with government partners. UN joint activities included the development of workplans through the TWGs; targeting of beneficiaries through joint screening; joint implementation; and joint supervision and monitoring of interventions. There was a project steering committee, chaired by the Ministry of Health or its delegate at ministerial level, to provide oversight, direction and supervisory support to the programme. The integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) TWG quarterly meetings, supported by UNICEF, ensured effective coordination and knowledge sharing. They also provided an opportunity to discuss progress and challenges with regard to treating acute malnutrition.

The National Nutrition Agency (NaNA), under the office of the Vice President, is coordinating the implementation of all nutrition programmes in the country. As part of its efforts, NaNA leads and coordinates the development and validation of nutrition education materials and provides technical expertise in training health professionals on the management of SAM. Both NaNA and the Ministry of Health (MoH) worked closely with UNICEF and WFP on developing IYCF resources, including community engagement on SBCC, in a process that reflects strong national ownership.

The Department of Agriculture was in charge of implementing agriculture-related activities in the programme, including input distribution and technical training for farmer field schools. Frontline extension workers

benefitted from training and are now able to carry out agriculture extension services with improved technological packages. The project also involved non-governmental organizations (NGOs), notably Catholic Relief Services, Action Aid International in The Gambia (AAITG) and United Purpose, in the operation and management of the Savings and Internal Lending Community initiatives. The Gambia Red Cross Society took part in the lean season blanket supplementary feeding to prevent stunting. For a sustainable supply of micronutrient-rich foods, Gambia Horticultural Enterprise partnered with WFP for the local production of fortified blended cereals.



## Programme results

As previously mentioned, UNICEF and WFP undertook screening exercises as a joint effort, in collaboration with NaNA, MoH and the Gambia Red Cross Society. The active nutrition screening campaigns were a key activity within the nutrition component of the PCR programme, reaching about 67,329 children (6–59 months). This enabled early detection of MAM and SAM cases and subsequent action to be taken promptly. Screening was undertaken at the onset of the lean season months (March to May) and based on WFP's beneficiary registration and monitoring system in all regions, involving approximately 1,516 villages. Monitoring data shows that there was a consistent decline in children identified with MAM and SAM as programme implementation progressed.

Following the training of mothers on mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurement by UNICEF, community screening was also conducted monthly. Children were then referred to the community health nurse for further assessment, supplementation and/or treatment, if needed. Mothers/ Caregivers were also oriented on IYCF and healthy diets. In addition, community MUAC training was initiated through the PCR programme and is now being mainstreamed in current nutrition interventions. This is one of the critical elements of sustainability and building resilience in communities to withstand future nutrition shocks.



**TABLE 1.**

## Map of geographic convergence in programming

| Intervention  | Results of implementation   |
|---|---|
| Blanket Supplementary Feeding   | Lean season support provided for 34,259 children (6-23 months) for prevention of acute malnutrition; supplementation for 3,571 children (6-59 months) for treatment of MAM. Food supplementation targeted pregnant and lactating women (PLW) in 2017 and 2019 and blanket feeding in 2018, reaching more than 19,400 PLW.   |
| Treatment of SAM (including procurement of nutrition supplies, antibiotic and deworming supplementation)  | 12,249 children (2996 inpatient and 9224 outpatient) provided with lifesaving treatment for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM).  |
| Case finding of acute malnutrition and integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) programme   | Annual active nutritional screening rounds reached 67,329 children 6-59 months at its peak. All MAM cases were referred for supplementary feeding of children 6-23 months.  |
| Nutrition service delivery support  | Over 60,728 people received nutrition education, counselling and care practice promotion at distribution sites (4 regions). The SBCC was expanded to include household visits and face-to-face sessions in non-primary health care villages.  |
| Nutrition technical support   | 206 health workers and support staff at four hospitals across the country for the protection and promotion of breastfeeding, MoH and NaNA were supported in their community engagement for the promotion of optimal IYCF practices. Orientation of 147 Community Health Nurses and 540 Village Support Groups, who subsequently provided counselling support to 30,000 mothers/caregivers.  |
| Training of frontline agriculture extension workers   | Training on Good Agriculture Practice and Climate Smart Agriculture and provision of motor bikes to enhance outreach to farming communities.  |
| Cash-for-Work (CFW), distribution of seeds and inputs, the Farmer Field School approach, and distribution of further agricultural production and processing equipment | Increased access to income and strengthened knowledge and skills on climate-smart agriculture and horticulture, which contributed to improving both the production and access to food (included for households with children with SAM or MAM who were included in the seeds and inputs distribution)  |
| Provision of community-level water facilities   | Construction of new borehole water system in 3 health facilities, rehabilitation of water infrastructures in 3 health centers and 1 nutrition rehabilitation center. Provision of solar panels, water pumping system connected to 2000 liters reserve water tank and borehole machine. WASH sensitization for 10,200 people to raise awareness of good sanitation and hygiene, linked to complementary food preparation and hygiene to avoid diarrhea among young children. |

Generally, malnutrition has declined considerably over the course of the programme. Stunting and wasting prevalence reduced from 23 percent and 10 percent in 2015<sup>58</sup> to 19 percent and 6 percent in 2018.<sup>59</sup> While these reductions cannot be directly attributed to the PCR, the programme may have contributed to these achievements. During the project period, other nutrition interventions were implemented by NaNA and the Ministry of Agriculture, thereby enhancing synergy and complementarity. It is also worth noting that the project's short timeframe meant that it would be difficult to achieve an impact on stunting.

As highlighted by Sandra Lattouf, UNICEF's Country Representative, one of the key successes of the PCR was its emphasis on an exit strategy to enable government ownership, community resilience and sustainability of the interventions. "Some of the innovative sustainable options were the introduction of community-based MUAC training for screening children, and the incorporation of IMAM protocol as a module into nurses training curriculum was also a great success," says Sandra. In the future, this will reduce the cost of in-service training and introduce many health workers to community screening of SAM and MAM.

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58 National Nutrition Agency. 2015. *National Nutrition Survey; The Gambia 2015*. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/gambia/sites/unicef.org.gambia/files/2018-11/The%20Gambia%20National%20Nutrition%20Survey%202015.pdf>.

59 The Gambia Bureau of Statistics. 2019. *The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018, Survey Findings Report*. Banjul. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/gambia/sites/unicef.org.gambia/files/2019-12/Gambia%202018%20MICS.pdf>.

## Challenges to working together

Despite the programme's extensive reach (see Table 1), United Nations agencies reported that the efficiency of the PCR programme was variable. The project steering committee did not meet quarterly as planned due to frequent changes in top management at the MOH, the chair of the committee, and the busy calendars of members. Management structures between the three United Nations agencies were appropriate and effective, but multi-sector, multi-agency coordination mechanisms did not always function adequately. After a slow start (the PCR took one year to begin implementation), efficiency was improved through more integrated and joint activities. However, some pipeline breaks occurred for the nutrition products and SBCC materials were distributed later than planned. Nevertheless, the reported overall budget disbursement by late November 2019 was greater than 90 percent for all three agencies.

## Lessons learned and next steps

Wanja confirmed that joint UN programming can be challenging due to issues of aligning resources at the same time and coordinating project cycles between different agencies. "Yet the PCR really showed what we can achieve when agencies have concerted efforts in the same region, targeting the same communities at the same time – and with multi-sectoral engagement. It really contributed to reducing malnutrition." Furthermore, PCR stakeholders felt that the partnership arrangement had built synergies between the three agencies due to effective day-to-day collaboration and communication on the programme's activities.

The PCR programme in The Gambia was able to successfully link up United Nations agencies on the food and nutrition security agenda, with complementary technical expertise and mandates, along with relevant government ministries. The legacy of this joint approach is a renewed commitment to working together, including on new challenges. The UNN team meets quarterly to discuss programme implementation in their various agencies and also joins NaNA in SUN meetings to provide technical advice. Thanks in part to the close working collaboration established by the PCR, the UNN and The Gambian government released a joint statement on COVID-19 and food and nutrition security, outlining critical actions that need to be coordinated to prevent and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the country's most vulnerable population groups.





## UNN PROGRAMMING/ PARTNERSHIPS

# Setting up a UN Network in Honduras



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES  
IN THE COVID-19 ERA

*Tale 14*

## Introduction

Honduras joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in 2019 as the 61<sup>st</sup> member, making it the fourth Central American country to join SUN. The move was one of the latest signs of the Government’s commitment to nutrition, with an agenda that has included updating its National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and Strategy (PyENSAN2030),<sup>60</sup> together with an associated Action Plan (2019–2023).

“It’s been a bold move from the Government to join SUN,” confirms David Nataren, Programme and Policy Officer with the World Food Programme (WFP<sup>61</sup>). “Part of the motivation is to share knowledge – to find out what other countries with similar conditions are doing, how they are working to prioritize their food security and nutrition [FSN] plan, even when facing tough spending decisions. In Honduras, we have a scarcity of resources and a lot of competing priorities.”

A high percentage of the country’s population live in poverty (64 percent): of which 40 percent live in extreme poverty. Over two thirds of the extremely poor live in rural areas.<sup>62</sup> Estimates indicate that twenty-three percent of children under five years old are stunted nationally. With that said, the prevalence of stunting increases to nearly 50 percent in the ‘Dry Corridor’, an area populated by smallholder farmers that is particularly susceptible to irregular and long-lasting droughts, which have worsened due to climate change.<sup>63</sup>

60 Gobierno de la República de Honduras, Secretaría de Coordinación General de Gobierno & UTSAN. 2018. *Política Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional de Largo Plazo y Estrategia Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional: PyENSAN 2030*. Tegucigalpa. Available at <https://bit.ly/3oH55wX>.

61 WFP is chairing the UN Network in Honduras.

62 Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas. 2017. *Encuesta Permanente de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples en Honduras*.

63 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report: Honduras country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/latin-america-and-caribbean/central-america/honduras/#profile>.



FAO-supported storage system for irrigation water in the Dry Corridor to increase the resilience of households and communities  
FAO

## UNRC call for a multi-dimensional approach

Increased efforts to ensure a multidimensional approach to nutrition are being supported under the leadership of the newly-appointed United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), Alice Shackelford, and the Resident Coordinator Office. “This is critical in a country such as Honduras, where structural nutrition issues are coupled with over 60 percent poverty, 75 percent informality [in the job market] and a lack of social security measures and protection mechanisms,” says Alice.

She also considers strengthening the nexus between humanitarian and development interventions as being crucial. “The 2030 agenda and the response to COVID-19 provides a very strong opportunity to look at an integrated approach to sustainable development and humanitarian response.”

Furthermore, she underscored the “need to keep a medium/long-term approach and integrate these efforts in the strategy for eradication of extreme poverty and reduction of inequality, critical to the 2030 Agenda and leaving no one behind. And this directly links to capacity of the population to actively engage

and strengthen democracy and [the] rule of law. The UN has to be up to the task and be able to work as a system and not any more as individual agencies and mandates,” she adds passionately.

## Network membership

The UN Network (UNN) is one of the SUN networks in Honduras, along with the Civil Society Network and the Academic Network.

David confirms that it has been easier in the early stages to bring on board the agencies that have more obvious synergies, such as WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and that the organizations are already working together on joint proposals. The UNN has also had exploratory discussions with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to see how each agency fits with the Food and Nutrition Security Plan, cognizant that this is definitely the way forward and not the work of just one agency.

They were invited to join the Network at the United Nations Country Team meeting in September 2019, which was attended by eight agencies. UN stakeholders describe the multi-sectoral approach to nutrition as being in its early stages in Honduras. It is a particular priority for the UNN to make sure the World Bank is included in the network. “We need WB’s technical expertise and investment if we’re to have a holistic approach as advocated by the SUN Movement,” says David.



## Nutrition data gaps

A top priority for United Nations agencies is to collect key data in order to put nutrition within the framework of public policies, with all actors working across different sectors. The lack of capacity in data management was highlighted during Gerda Verburg's [United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Coordinator of the SUN Movement] visit last year.

"We need to have a faster and easier reading of the nutrition situation in the country, using evidence that has been built jointly at the country level," confirms David. "At the moment the Government has to turn to the UN for a specific study – there will be more efficiencies if we work together to build capacity. When we have the numbers, it will also enable us to talk to the private sector about investing in good nutrition."



According to Jose Ramirez Arita, Early Childhood Development Officer with UNICEF Honduras, COVID-19 has shown the government that it is possible to handle information virtually. "I believe that the Network should support the government in information management. Our country still does not have a digital online system that can show the number of children affected by malnutrition, [such as] anaemia, etc. This information is only known from surveys, which are not very frequent."

Family, Health Promotion and Life Course Advisor with PAHO, Evelyne Ancion Degraff, agrees that the lack of nutrition data is a major concern in Honduras. In 2019, PAHO coordinated a workshop in which UNICEF and WFP participated, in order to build national capacity for the implementation of a National Nutrition Surveillance System. “Participants included the SUN Movement Country Representative and the UN Network, and nineteen health districts were also represented. Since then, national health authorities have expressed their commitment to developing the surveillance system.”

The UNN is now working with the government and academia to build a Food Security and Nutrition Observatory with standardized databases and systems that increase accessibility to up-to-date information. To this end, FAO and WFP are working with the government’s Technical Unit for Food Security and Nutrition (known as UTSAN) to strengthen the Food and Nutrition Security Monitoring and Evaluation Information System (SISESAN). The COVID-19 crisis has added impetus to this work.

## COVID-19 exposes new vulnerabilities

The current pandemic has further revealed data gaps related to food and nutrition vulnerabilities in the country, particularly the high informality in the job market. When the Government announced a lockdown on 10<sup>th</sup> March, millions of people in urban areas were not included in any census or eligible for social protection. The International Labour Organization (ILO) mobilized to conduct a rapid assessment, estimating that 72 percent of the working poor in Honduras are employed in the informal sector and were now in need of help due to being unable to work. According to the study, around 200,000 households in the ten largest cities of the country have lost their income due to the pandemic, placing the vulnerable at high risk of malnutrition.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> ILO & WFP. *Forthcoming. Microeconomic and Livelihood Recovery Study.*

The government has distributed food rations to 800,000 vulnerable families (around 3.2 million people) in response to the crisis, yet many more are in need. Programme targeting has been based on information from before the crisis and thus food and cash is being distributed to individuals who were already vulnerable. Much of the nutrition programming prior to COVID-19 was focused on the ‘Dry Corridor’, but for the first time in seven years, there have been rains and food shortages are not expected in this region. Moreover, urban areas have been more affected by COVID-19 than rural populations, as smallholder farmers can produce their own food. At the beginning of the lockdown, about 78 percent of the markets nationwide reportedly experienced some sort of food shortage and prices of food increased in general.



*UN personnel supporting the delivery of food and hygiene supplies for people in need during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020*  
 UNHCR Honduras

COVID-19 has once again highlighted the lack of data in Honduras that the new public observatory seeks to address. “The pandemic is going to create a multi-polar crisis for food security and nutrition in the country. We need to keep a check on what’s happening in the Dry Corridor as we expect the recovery may only be in the short-term, while at the same time, dealing with the huge rise in numbers [of vulnerable families] in urban areas,” confirms David.

## *New opportunities to work together*

**T**he UNRC affirms that “only together can we address the crisis produced by the pandemic and the UN at country level is committed very much in this regard both through the humanitarian response and the response to the socio-economic impact.”

COVID-19 has uncovered challenges as well as created opportunities for the UN to work together. The United Nations agencies are increasingly collaborating in areas such as research, data collection, advocacy and joint programming. “It has helped us to look for real synergies, not just talking – it has served as a bridge to move us to the other side and to make things happen,” says David.

Following the government’s declaration of a humanitarian emergency in the country, the Food Security and Nutrition Cluster was activated under WFP’s leadership and prepared an emergency response plan, working closely with other sectors including social protection and with support from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The initial focus has been on supporting immediate needs, such as increasing hospital capacity and feeding those facing hunger.

In close collaboration, WFP and UNICEF are providing technical support to the country’s Early Childhood Unit for a programme that distributes complementary foods to children under two years old in six departments of the country. “The idea is not to substitute household foods. Along with the cereal [Super Cereal Plus], the child continues to be fed with the food that the home community has”, says Arita from UNICEF. “It’s interesting because this intervention, which we plan to scale up, is the first to be led [by the] Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion [where the Early Childhood Unit is housed] rather than the Ministry of Health.”



United Nations agencies have also worked on a socio-economic response to the impact of COVID-19, supporting the government in specific recovery measures. For example, WFP in alliance with ILO has worked on a microeconomics study, using a livelihoods approach to identify vulnerable populations outside of the current social protection system. The study also explores how COVID-19 has affected the FSN of women differently than men. In addition, conversations with the World Bank have been held to advocate jointly for an expansion of social protection measures.



FAO and WFP are monitoring the FSN situation across the country to guide response activities. WFP is working on generating evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on food consumption habits with regard to processed food and sugar-sweetened beverages, bearing in mind the country's overweight and obesity challenges. The studies are part of efforts to address the lack of evidence and better inform policy and programming in the country. Similarly, FAO is carrying out rapid evaluations with the National Institute of Statistics on the impact of COVID-19 on FSN.

According to Wendy Carranza Rios, National Officer for Food and Nutrition Security Policy with FAO, attention to priority groups must be coordinated, effective and relevant to the needs of the population. “FAO has worked to strengthen the decentralized management of FSN in the territories, specifically in the process of training community volunteers, in the implementation of the Integrated Care for Children in the Community strategy and the promotion of adequate food.”

## Challenges and lessons learned

From the UNRC’s perspective, the challenges in Honduras are two-fold: “an external one, in terms of a weak institutional architecture (and efficiency) and internal one, in terms of limited incentives for agencies, funds and programmes to break their traditional institutional approach.” According to Evelyne at PAHO, there is still a need to define the UN coordination mechanisms and to elaborate a UNN plan. “While COVID-19 has been an opportunity for PAHO to work with UN agencies on issues, mostly related to the pandemic response and to sexual reproductive health, there is a need to reinforce collaboration on nutrition,” says Evelyne. Wendy from FAO added that there was a need in Honduras to establish a National Nutrition Authority to lead and coordinate advocacy, prevention and nutritional care to tackle malnutrition in all its forms.

## Next steps

David from WFP claims that, “nutrition is very young as a subject in this country – we have to keep pushing for funding for the whole FSN strategy and national plans.” COVID-19 has disrupted some of the momentum that UN actors were making in terms of engaging nutrition

champions. The Network was engaged in conversations with the Office of the First Lady, capitalizing on her interest in social policy. It was also just days away from presenting a study on the cost of the double burden in Honduras before lockdown occurred. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness in Government of the need to involve all sectors in the fight against malnutrition and the cost of inaction on the economy, particularly during the post-COVID-19 era.

“The role of the UN is focused on strengthening the capacity of institutions to provide response and service provisions as well as strengthening internal UN mechanisms of coordination and joint programming,” summarizes Alice. “This will be part of the new United Nations Cooperation Framework for Sustainable Development (2022–2026), which is being worked upon right now.” The UNN has a key part to play in these next steps and can help country actors connect the dots to fortify the efforts underway.







## UNN PROGRAMMING/ PARTNERSHIPS

Revising plans  
for COVID-19  
response



UNN-REACH WORK IN LESOTHO  
AND SIERRA LEONE

Tale 15

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many nutrition programmes and activities, forcing United Nations agencies and other organizations to re-visit priorities and make adjustments for the 'new normal'. Countries such as Lesotho and Sierra Leone benefit from the presence of a UNN-REACH<sup>65</sup> facilitator to help guide this process.

The UN Network Secretariat interviewed Maseqobela Williams, UNN-REACH facilitator in Lesotho and Marian Bangura, UNN-REACH facilitator in Sierra Leone, on how they have responded to the challenge of COVID-19 in their respective countries and their plans for a subsequent recovery.



Nutrition and COVID-19 workshop in Freetown, Sierra Leone, October 2020

UNN-REACH/SUN Sierra Leone

<sup>65</sup> UNN-REACH is a country support mechanism for improving nutrition governance, which works in close collaboration with nutrition coordination structures and SUN networks, including the UN Network.

## Part 1: Changing plans in Lesotho

But simply, “COVID-19 has meant that stakeholders have not been able to go about ‘business as usual’, says Maseqobela, who has served as the in-country facilitator since 2017.

“The country was quite slow to become affected [by COVID-19] so we were able to take precautions early and to close our borders to control the spread of infection. We were also able to look at existing food security and malnutrition problems that were already there and to get ourselves prepared,” she explains. Lesotho’s lockdown measures led to both the public and private sectors closing down all services, with severe repercussions on food and nutrition security. At the community level, food access and availability have been particularly affected. According to the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee report (2020), the country is facing increased socio-economic hardship with a projected rise in its food insecure population from 380,000 to 582,000 by March 2021.

One of the first actions of the UN Network (UNN) was to contact all the members agencies and government stakeholders to discuss what they could do quickly. A National Integrated Response Plan for COVID-19 had been prepared at the beginning of March, but nutrition was not clearly prioritized. Rather, the focus was on agriculture and food production. “This was a real gap in the plan,” says Maseqobela. As a result, the current UNN-REACH response has focused on bridging the gap by highlighting sector-specific actions (e.g. health, water, education and social development) as they relate to nutrition.

## UNN analytics help re-align workplans



To respond to the new situation, the UNN-REACH workplan was adjusted to align with both the national COVID-19 response and the ‘Nutrition during Emergencies’ axis of the Food and Nutrition Strategy and Costed Plan of Action (2019–2023). UNN-REACH was compelled to re-programme its remaining funds (USD 50,000) in order to respond to the pandemic.

UNN analytics were useful in guiding planning and prioritization activities. For example, the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview<sup>66</sup> (2018) and the Lesotho Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping<sup>67</sup> (2019) were used as a basis for identifying districts that needed immediate attention, even before the onset of COVID-19, and have provided insights on the type of interventions that may have immediate impact. UNN analytics have also informed a strategic approach for the pursuit of joint programming by United Nations agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], the United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF] and the World Food Programme [WFP]), leveraging their respective areas of competence and mandates.

<sup>66</sup> See <https://bit.ly/39TgJk0> to discover more.

<sup>67</sup> To learn more, visit <https://bit.ly/3lUTV5Y>.

## The Maximum Intervention Programme (MIP)

Stakeholders realized that, “we had to strategically attend to those districts that were already affected by malnutrition,” confirms Maseqobela. “We chose four target districts with the highest prevalence of stunting among children under five: Mokhotlong; Thaba-Tseka; Butha-Buthe; and Mohale’s Hoek.<sup>68</sup> This was an emergency – we wanted to look at diversifying diets in hard-to-reach areas and among the most vulnerable populations by introducing community-based promotion on productivity of more nutritious foods.” Drawing upon the findings of UNN analytics, Mohale’s Hoek district was replaced by Quthing (which had a lower stunting prevalence), as there were already a large number of ongoing interventions in Mohale’s Hoek.



68 Ministry of Health [Lesotho] & ICF International. 2016. *Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey 2014*. Maseru. Available at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR309/FR309.pdf>; Bureau of Statistics. 2019. *Lesotho Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018. Survey Findings Report*. Maseru. Available at <https://bit.ly/343lr9Y>.

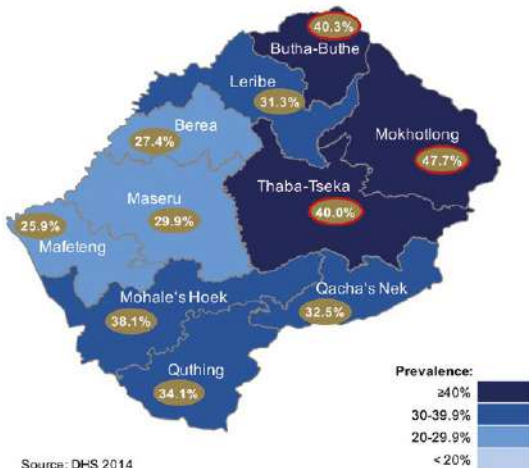
**FIGURE 4.**

Excerpt from the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview (2019), showing 4 target districts

**All districts have high levels of chronic malnutrition, especially three districts in the northeast, located in the mountains**



**Prevalence of Chronic Malnutrition**



- The prevalence of stunting in the north-eastern districts of Butha-Butha, Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka is above the critical 40% threshold for chronic malnutrition set by WHO
- In 4 of the 10 districts, prevalence is just below the highest critical threshold (between 30 and 40%)
- The western districts of Maseru, Berea and Mafeteng have the lowest prevalence of chronic malnutrition, however are still above the high threshold of 20% for chronic malnutrition

Source: DHS 2014



The programme recognizes cross-sectoral linkages by tapping into the National Information System for Social Assistance, which was made available by the Ministry of Social Development. This enabled eligible households (ultra-poor and poor) with children under the age of five, to be identified and later verified by district/village records.

Food baskets are distributed to these districts. Furthermore, the UNN-REACH Facilitator and other stakeholders realized that nutrition could be put centre-stage through two adaptations: (1) the promotion of simple vegetable production; and (2) awareness-raising on recommended infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices by distributing printed Information Education Communication (IEC) materials from all relevant United Nations agencies.

## Focus on diversifying diets

FAO already had a plan for vegetable seed distribution in the four target districts, but this had not yet been implemented. UNN-REACH collectively agreed to utilize FAO's experience in seed procurement, and to produce a training manual in English and Lesotho in order to guide beneficiaries in growing practices and explain the importance of consuming vegetables for a healthy diet. In total, 500 households with children under two in each district will receive ten seed varieties including infographics on vegetable production.

Distribution of the enhanced food basket was delayed due to harsh winter conditions and observance of COVID-19 mitigation measures. Ultimately, the MIP was launched in November 2020 and will be followed by planting demonstrations.



## Promoting breastfeeding awareness and COVID-19 guidance

The other strand in the new programme is to promote increased demand and access to nutritious foods through consumer knowledge and awareness, including optimal feeding practices for young children. This is being pursued through joint partnerships with the government and other stakeholders.

“We realized that this was an opportunity to increase awareness of nutrition and COVID-19, and to draw on the respective areas of competence among UN agencies. WFP was already distributing food baskets – why not add more to the package, such as IYCF and COVID-19 guidance, with a focus on continued breastfeeding,” says Maseqobela.

Consequently, UNN-REACH funding has been used to develop IEC materials based on advocacy messages and social and behaviour change communications (SBCC) from different United Nations agencies, including: UNICEF’s IYCF global guidelines on breastfeeding, FAO guidelines on vegetable production and WFP’s food basket and nutrition messages. The guidance has been made available in both English and Lesotho. There is also a need to be strategic in ensuring the messages are catered to differing levels of literacy.

The plans foresee sharing IYCF guidance through nutrition clubs at village level, with support from district nutrition officers and with COVID-19 mitigation measures in place. Furthermore, UNICEF will support end-user monitoring of eligible households to guide corrective action.



**FIGURE 5.**

Excerpt from the Lesotho handbook



My name is 'Maloney Mamohau, I stay at Lithabaneng in Maseru. I am a breastfeeding mother. Corona virus has not restricted me from consulting with the clinic and practising good hygiene at all times. During this time of corona virus, I frequently wash my hands with soap and running water for at least twenty seconds, even before and after breast feeding my child.



I also make sure to continue with my child's immunisation schedule so that she stays healthy during this period.



I plant enough vegetables for the family and avoid going out to the market where people are crowded.



If I do not feel well, I follow hygienic measures towards my infant and also express milk and safely offer the breast milk to my infant.



## *Strengthening a multi-partner and multi-sectoral response for nutrition*

In Lesotho, the UNN-REACH Facilitator is fortunate to be based in the Office of the Prime Minister, where she provides technical support to the Food and Nutrition Coordination Office (FNCO). This has given her a vantage point for strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement through regular meetings with government and incremental capacity-building of the FNCO team. Since the country went into lockdown, Maseqobela has been consulting via phone and virtual meetings with both government and UN colleagues.

Maseqobela acknowledges that, “We are very lucky in having a collective culture, nurtured by the UNN and chair – and exercises such as REACH and UNN mapping tools have helped inform nutrition strategy and key UN documents such as the UNDP [United Nations Development Assistance Plan].”

COVID-19 has also proved a catalyst for broadening the network of United Nations agencies and other partners involved in nutrition in Lesotho, including plans to work closely with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on a food production initiative, and to further strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), both within the Ministry of Health and the country’s school feeding programme.

## Before COVID-19 and now: What has changed for UNN-REACH?

“It is not that we are necessarily doing anything new,” claims Maseqobela. “Strategically, we decided to continue with our plan [2020–2021 UNN-REACH workplan] but to conduct it in a more robust manner, with a wider involvement of stakeholders”.

UNN-REACH has created a sound enabling environment for nutrition, particularly at the national level. In the wake of COVID-19, even more attention is now being focused on the facilitation of actions at the district and community levels. “We are striving to strengthen the Maximum Intervention Programme approach to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 – and we are doing things in a more collective manner,” affirms Maseqobela.



## Part 2: Impact of COVID-19 on health and nutrition programming in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone registered its first case of COVID-19 on 30 March 2020, two months after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic. Initially, many nutrition programmes were suspended due to measures instituted by the government to stop the spread of the virus. According to Marian Bangura, the UNN-REACH Facilitator, most United Nations agencies and development partners have diverted some of their project funds to the COVID-19 response, such as the provision of infection prevention control materials (e.g. personal protection equipment and soap), related food assistance and the promotion of relevant public health messages.

Unfortunately, preventative measures such as restrictions on movement, physical distancing and a ‘no touch’ policy have affected access, utilization and delivery of life-saving health and nutrition services in the country. For example, there has been a large decline in the number of pregnant women accessing antenatal services and reductions in immunizations for infants aged 0–11 months.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, 63 percent of households are now food insecure (up from 48 percent in the previous quarter), and nine out of sixteen districts have a higher prevalence of children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) than before the onset of COVID-19.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ministry of Health and Sanitation. 2020. *Health Information Bulletin*. Freetown.

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Statistics Sierra Leone, FAO & WFP. 2020. *Emergency Food Security Monitoring system: Measuring the impact of COVID-19 on food security and vulnerability in Sierra Leone*. Freetown. Available at <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000120232/download/?ga=2.94461403.619863859.1605784568-1926261681.1605633275>.

## Embedding nutrition in the COVID-19 response

The COVID-19 pandemic in Sierra Leone has triggered the creation of a Food Assistance and Nutrition (FAN) pillar. According to the UNN-REACH Facilitator, this is the first of its kind in all the emergencies that the country has faced over the years, including the rebel war, the Ebola outbreak and the mudslide that claimed thousands of lives. The pillar consists of two clusters: (1) the Nutrition Cluster, chaired by the Directorate of Food and Nutrition within the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and co-chaired by UNICEF; and (2) the Food Security Cluster, chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture and co-chaired by WFP.

The FAN pillar, strongly supported by the Vice President,<sup>71</sup> collaborated with other nutrition and food security partners to contribute to the COVID-19 National Emergency Plan. The plan provides technical oversight and coordinates all food assistance and nutrition support. A coordinated approach between actors is ensured via sharing roles and responsibilities, weekly cluster meetings and reporting, and implementation tracking to avoid duplication and overlap.

Through the coordinated efforts of the different working groups, the pillar has produced a context-specific Standard Operating Procedure for Nutrition Response to COVID-19 as well as defined a food package for vulnerable households and individuals to be distributed to treatment centres and quarantine homes nationwide. As the infection spread to the districts, the national-level coordination structure was decentralized. Each district established its own mechanism for coordinating COVID-19 response activities, headed by the district coordinator.

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<sup>71</sup> Both UNN-REACH and SUN are housed in the Vice President's office.

## UNN-REACH support to development COVID-19 communications

One of the areas identified for urgent attention was the provision of communication materials for COVID-19 guidance. “We held a partners’ meeting under the Nutrition Cluster to brainstorm on activities that the cluster should embark on for the COVID-19 response. Everyone agreed that the development of communications - for raising awareness on nutrition issues - was a top priority,” says Marian.

A new workplan for UNN-REACH (2020–2021) was being developed at the same time so a decision was made to allocate funds to support the response, with a focus on disseminating nutrition information. UNN-REACH and Sierra Leone’s Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Secretariat provided technical assistance, especially during the review of existing communications and adapting global guidelines to the local context. Collaborative efforts in developing the new materials resulted in new knowledge management products that are ‘owned’ by all nutrition technical staff from government, United Nations agencies and other partners.

Financial support (USD 10,000) was provided to produce nutrition messages through various media, including three video clips on breastfeeding by COVID-19 infected mothers and advice to pregnant and lactating women on the use of health facilities to access life-saving services. In addition, two radio messages were devised on healthy eating to boost immunity, especially during lockdown. Other materials include guidance notes on *Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition in the Context of COVID-19* for health workers in Sierra Leone, and *Questions and Answers on IYCF in the context of COVID -19*, all of which have been distributed through the Directorate of Food and Nutrition. Training has been organized for different stakeholders, such as chiefs, religious leaders and COVID-19 information dissemination officers in each district.

## Next steps: Designing a UN Joint Programme for nutrition

Even before the pandemic, there had been discussion on the need for a UN Joint Programme to reduce stunting among children under two years old, as progress towards global nutrition targets in the country has been very slow. “The pandemic just threw more light on this need as it opens up opportunities not only for integration and synergies for better programming, but can also encourage donors if a much better impact could be realized in reducing the malnutrition burden,” says Marian.

So far, the technical staff from five United Nations agencies (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO), supported by UNN-REACH, have drafted a concept note to be finalized during a UN joint retreat before the end of 2020. This will also be informed by a UN Nutrition Inventory, undertaken with support from the UNN Secretariat, in order to identify gaps in UN nutrition actions to inform programme design. The technical team is planning to pilot the stunting reduction programme model in at least two districts before scaling up. The first step will be to carry out a baseline assessment.



COVID-19 has affected planned UNN-REACH activities in both Lesotho and Sierra Leone. The facilitators have worked with stakeholders, including the UNN, to adjust plans to the context – with positive outlooks for nutrition advocacy and new joint UN programming efforts in both countries.



## UNN PROGRAMMING/ PARTNERSHIPS

*Unconventional  
coordination structures  
in Nigeria yield a stronger  
collective*



Tale 16



As the most populous country in Africa, with an economy that overtook South Africa's in 2019 to become the largest on the continent, Nigeria's breadth can be seen alternately as a challenge or an opportunity. Levels of child stunting (44 percent), child wasting (11 percent) and anaemia (50 percent) among women of reproductive age well-exceed public health thresholds, giving stakeholders a sense of urgency to make progress on these fronts.<sup>72</sup>



One structure for coordinating nutrition support among United Nations agencies, non-profits and donors is the Development Partners Network (DPN), which was formed in 2011 when the country joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. Over the past nine years, the DPN has been able to align priorities, interface with government, and more recently, engage the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), Edward Kallon.

The Network is co-chaired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Kingdom's former Department for International Development (DFID) and includes the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) as members. In 2018–19, the nutrition agenda was sometimes tabled at United Nations Country Team (UNCT) meetings within the context of broader development, providing an opportunity to reinforce its links to other sectors.<sup>73</sup>

72 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Nigeria country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/western-africa/nigeria/>.

73 UN Network Secretariat. 2019. *UN Network Nigeria country profile*. Available at <https://bit.ly/375Z9rp>.

## “10 out of 10”

The long-standing functionality of this Network shows that coordinated UN action on nutrition is possible without a stand-alone UN Network (UNN). In the UNN annual report for 2019, which reviews nutrition coordination structures and UN collective action, Nigeria scored the highest possible rating, 10 out of 10, on an index that assesses a country according to metrics such as: ‘UNN strategy/agenda in place’, ‘UNN workplan developed’ or ‘nutrition joint programming’. This article explores the underlying reasons for their success as well as probing further on how this level of integration translates into action on nutrition indicators such as stunting, wasting and anaemia.

As Nigeria’s UNRC since 2016, Kallon oversees all United Nations operations in the country, aligning the mission and liaising with government. “The subject of nutrition is dear to my heart,” he says. “I worked with WFP for over twenty years, and during that period, I witnessed the devastating effect of malnutrition in many country situations and I’ve seen people suffering.”

As part of the UNICEF team, nutrition specialist Simeon Namana has participated in co-chairing the DPN. Senior Programme Officer for nutrition at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Victor Ajieroh, comes to the network from a third perspective – that of a privately-run not-for-profit organization.



## Success factors

The three stakeholders interviewed identified some common elements that help the network to function, with meetings that serve as a predictable forum for making decisions as a group. Victor from the Gates Foundation characterized the meetings with a series of questions, answering all in the affirmative. “Are we reaching consensus on priorities? Are we apprised of what everyone is doing? Have we formed a common front to support government and address officials? What are concerns that we all share? How do we support the national nutrition council and make it operationalize? How can we strengthen government capacity?”

A prime factor in the network’s high score is the leadership. “We have the platforms that support multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, multi-actor engagement. A rallying point was joining SUN in 2011, and DFID has done a great job bringing folks together,” he adds.



Simeon pointed out the benefit of a shared agenda. “Having this group automatically rules out the possibility of any kind of competition. It ensures the donors and UN speak the same language and that they approach the government [as a unit]. It’s a platform that lets us know what funding goes where, and how that funding can be more targeted to geographic location.”

One joint programme focuses on maternal health and nutrition (UNFPA and WFP) in Jere and Konduga. Another programme targets the critical first 1,000 days of a child’s life, from conception to 23 months of age. WFP provided cash transfers to pregnant and lactating women or other caregivers of children 6–23 months, based on their enrolment in the UNICEF-supported ante/post-natal care and immunization service.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, programmes that implement nutrition-sensitive agriculture are currently active in six states (Adamawa, Borno, Cross-River, Federal Capital Territory, Kaduna and Yobe) but on a limited scale.

For the crucial factor of budgeting, DPN advocates for Federal and State governments to include nutrition when allocating resources from annual as well as COVID-19 funding. From May 2019 to April 2020, the DPN gave financial support to the National Committee on Food and Nutrition and their state counterparts. In addition, the DPN collaborated with the Governor’s Forum, a non-partisan platform to push nutrition scorecards as well as share peer learnings among states.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

## Aligning with government

The ultimate goal of the DPN is to work more efficiently with national government as a united front. Simeon cited a recent example. “When the election took place [in February 2019] and the government was in transition, we drafted a policy note that represented all our interests to point out the priorities we have for nutrition.”

The two-page Policy Note highlighted current figures for quick reference, urging government action. In 2019, 321,300 children under the age of five died because of malnutrition. Almost one-third of children under five (13.1 million) are stunted and 7 percent suffer from wasting. Micronutrient deficiencies, such as anaemia, impact a sizable proportion of reproductive-age women and a whopping 71 percent of children.<sup>75</sup>

The Policy Note recommended the following four steps. With the assistance of the UNRC’s office, here are the outcomes so far.

### 1. Improve and strengthen coordination, leadership and accountability for nutrition

On 28 July 2020, a meeting was held virtually with participation from the Federal Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), the Ministry of Information and the National Primary Health Care Development Agency, among others. In the meeting, government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), who did not have budget lines for nutrition in the past, reported now having dedicated budget lines.

<sup>75</sup> Nigeria Development Partners Network. 2019. *Nigeria Government Transition; Policy Notes Series*. No. 7. Abuja.

## 2. Ensure predictable and sustained funding

As of September 2020, most of the states that have adopted the National Food and Nutrition policy have budget lines for nutrition across various sectors. However, fund releases remain a major constraint.

## 3. Develop a common results framework to track implementation progress

The Nigeria Governors Forum convened multiple government actors to develop nutrition scorecards that will track government commitments and investment in nutrition as well as peer learning among states.



## 4. Strengthen relevant sectoral systems for improved nutrition service delivery

The cost of the National Multi-sectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (2018–2025) is currently being reviewed, with a focus on nutrition components across line ministries to ensure realistic planning, costing and spending by states.

Overall, the impact of the Policy Note has allowed the government to make decisions based on an agreed agenda defined by a multitude of stakeholders.

## Nutrition in the Humanitarian-Development Nexus

The North East region experiences regular conflict which has killed over 37,000 people. “We still have over 10.6 million living in that region. 1.6 million people have started returning to ‘safe areas,’” Kallon reflected. To address this, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) articulates nutrition as a collective outcome of the Humanitarian-Development Nexus (HDN), an important step forward. Currently, FAO and WFP are jointly implementing a nutrition-sensitive agriculture project in the North East to protect nutritional status and build resilience. Additional work is underway to align humanitarian assistance with the government’s health package provided through primary care, a concept that aims to facilitate coordination among the diverse stakeholders.

The Resident Coordinator explains, “For me, the Humanitarian-Development Nexus is about helping affected people to transform their lives from being dependent to being self-sustaining and resilient. It is about finding the opportunities to make people’s lives better while mitigating threats, building on the strengths of the individuals, their communities and their governments, and helping them to deal with any weaknesses that encumber their abilities to be self-sustaining.”

In the longer term, a food-systems approach will be crucial for improving food security, nutrition and the environment concurrently. Kallon also pointed out that “Emergency water supply systems are also being replaced by longer-term arrangements that can be managed by beneficiary communities.”

Promoting peace in the conflict-affected north also ranks high on the HDN agenda. “My approach has been very consistent on this: that we sequence our strategy and look for islands of peace and begin to create hope for people. This has a replicating effect,” says Kallon.



## Challenges ahead

While all three interviewees agreed on the strengths of the coordinating body, all three, in their respective interviews, expressed concern that the DPN could be doing much more. They were frustrated with the speed of implementation of nutrition interventions and pointed out that the translation of policy to action was something that was still in its early stages.

The UNRC's office pointed out that one of the main challenges has been the adoption and implementation of nutrition policies at sub-national level. For example, stunting and wasting co-exist in the same geographic areas, in the same communities, and sometimes, within the same child. In addition to supporting the government to coordinate their approach, there is a need to avoid duplication and promote implementation convergence across geographical areas. Furthermore, these issues persist due to inadequate technical capacity at all levels of government to implement a package of nutrition interventions aimed at reducing stunting and wasting.



Victor was direct in his assessment. “I see progress in discussions and efforts at prioritization. But if you compare this with the slow reduction of malnutrition, it is not keeping up. The conversations are sincere, but the pacing is not up to the challenges in Nigeria.”

“Moving from intention to action at government level [is our main goal],” commented Simeon. “[On a more positive note], four states have released money from their budgets for nutrition.” The four – Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa and Yobe – have released a total of USD 454,000. This is the result of sustained advocacy as well as oversight over the State Committees on Food and Nutrition for timely planning and follow-up.



## Moving forward

While Nigeria scored 10 out of 10 on the UNN's functionality index, nutrition integration among government bodies stands to be improved. The UNRC's office would like to see better coordination among: the Ministry of Budget and National Planning (MoBNP), which oversees implementation of the Food and Nutrition Policy and state-level food and nutrition committees; the National Council on Nutrition (NCN), headed by the Vice President; the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the SUN Focal Point for the Nigeria chapter of the global SUN Movement.

Kallon sees himself as being integral to this process. "My role as the RC is to ensure that the process is streamlined – to make sure nutrition remains a focus. As you know, the underlying causes of malnutrition are multifaceted and not one single agency can address it on its own. My position as the representative of the Secretary-General allows me the enviable privilege to convene a wide array of stakeholders around contentious issues."

Nutrition holds much potential, not only because it is crucial for the health and well-being of Nigerians, but because it is central to so many of these other issues. Getting nutrition right has a number of knock-on benefits. Colleagues in-country are eager to see joint dialogue and collective commitments translated into concrete gains and are actively working towards making that a reality every day.





## UNN PROGRAMMING/ PARTNERSHIPS

# An innovative approach to gender equity in Sri Lanka



HOW NUTRITION-BASED  
COORDINATION TACKLES CULTURAL  
TABOOS AND EMPOWERS WOMEN

Tale 17

From December 2018 to March 2020, the World Food Program (WFP), part of the UN Network (UNN) in Sri Lanka, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), joined forces to launch the Community Health Advanced through Nutrition and Gender Equality project (CHANGE). The program aims to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment through improved nutrition, food security, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and access to health services. Six districts with a total of 8,000 participants took part, thanks to funding from the Danish Government.

Integration across sectors was central to the project design. “This was the first time the issues were connected in a way that was evident to participants,” explains Sarah Soysa, National Programme Analyst for UNFPA. “In the past, nutrition was dealt separately from gender-based violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health, etc. For example, the handbook changed for mother support groups (MSGs), one of the main components of the program. Training changed as well to make the explicit connection between how poor nutrition could affect a pregnancy; how gender-based violence could affect someone’s mental health,” she adds.



Lakmini Perera, a gender programme officer at WFP, agrees that one of the project's main achievements was collaboration. "Materials, partners and conversations around gender [were cross-pollinated]. It was also new for the government to collaborate across sectors – gender, health, and nutrition." This kind of model presents opportunities for a multiplier effect.

Innovative aspects of this program abound. A mobile phone application (app) was developed to track progress. Videos were made for 9th graders, designed to be shown to both boys and girls, during a class on life skills. Finally, cooking demonstrations were held with an added twist, (described below).

## A new app for mother support groups

Originally, these groups were formed through a collaborative project between WFP and UNFPA to raise awareness on nutrition, with the potential to address more sensitive issues like SRH and gender inequities. As many as 1,250 MSGs meet regularly in six districts, and the programme touched on many of these during 'Training of Trainers' sessions that targeted medical officers and other community volunteers in 78 Ministry of Health areas.

To keep track of the frequency of MSG meetings as well as who is leading the discussion and what topics they covered, an app was developed. "Note-taking on meetings was not systematic," Sarah reflects. She elaborates by explaining that, "the app acts as a monitoring tool to put everything in one place. Pictures and stories can be uploaded. It helps groups connect with other groups. On a national level, program managers can access data, [and] see the progress in topics."

Still in its infancy, trainings on how to use the app had begun just before the COVID-19 pandemic shut the country down.

## Videos that model new gender norms

Lakmini anticipates that the most valuable tools for participants will be the video series for schools, developed for the CHANGE programme. Two social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) videos have been produced in local languages. The series is based on life skills and incorporates nutrition as well as SRH, addressing topics such as puberty, menstruation and positive body image, to name a few.

“In the videos, we model a boy talking to the girl about some of these taboo subjects, to normalize these kinds of discussions,” says Lakmini. “It comes with a teacher’s guide to make sure the right messages are shared. We don’t have sex education [as part of the curriculum], so teachers don’t usually touch on these sensitive issues. Pending approval by the Ministry of Education and other government agencies, we think this series will be a useful tool, especially concerning gender norms and inequities.”



The videos also feature a section on ‘making healthy food choices’. The importance of consuming nutrient-dense food during adolescence is explained, emphasizing that healthy food choices ensure better concentration and productivity. It also touches on the long-term effects on immunity levels, obesity and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Another section reviews the benefits of being physically active.



UNFPA and WFP Country Representatives during a joint field visit for the CHANGE programme  
UNFPA Sri Lanka

## Multipurpose cooking demonstrations

Cooking demonstrations, led by WFP, started with food, but encompassed broader issues of gender equity. “The trend towards buying unhealthy, processed foods has been growing in impoverished communities. So, one purpose was to talk about the nutritional value of some of these foods, such as biscuits, [which are not healthy] and to promote healthier alternatives. Not only to mothers but also community leaders. The demonstrations bridge this knowledge gap,” Sarah clarifies and also help to build confidence among participants.

From there, topics extended to more delicate areas around decision-making in households. *How do families decide what to cook and serve? Where should various seeds be planted? Why do women serve the food but eat last? Who gets second helpings at the family table?*

Taboo topics, such as menstruation, were also touched on in these demonstrations, which aimed to include men in the conversation. The sessions functioned as a 'Training of Trainers'; group leaders from the MSGs were invited, along with midwives and health inspectors. Cooking techniques as well as these sensitive conversations would then go back to communities with the participants.

## Looking towards the future: Phase 2

Both organizations, WFP and UNFPA, would like to build on the achievements of Phase 1 in another 18-month project cycle, especially after the first phase was interrupted by elections and COVID-19. Here are some of the goals they would like to incorporate, including those that will help the programme reach out to other sectors.

### Climate resiliency

With increased frequency and severity of flooding, landslides and droughts, creating more resilient communities in the face of climate change is high on their list. Cooking demonstrations and other outreach materials will advocate for nutrition-sensitive agriculture, including the production and consumption of drought-tolerant varieties that are rich in micronutrients and locally available. Furthermore, Phase 2 could provide opportunities to promote biodiversity, including neglected and underutilized species, recognizing that the nutrient composition of different crop varieties can vary dramatically.





## Bringing more men into the fold

The program provides a platform to actively engage men and boys to become advocates to tackle gender disparities related to nutrition and change discriminatory practices and behaviours. Scaling up this activity will encourage male participation in a more meaningful and systematic manner. “We’ve largely worked with mother support groups, and as a result, there was some involvement of men, but it was minimal. We would like to run a second phase where more men are engaged,” says Lakmini.

## *Involving youth*

**T**he desired Phase 2 will have a stronger focus on school-age children – both boys and girls – receiving the Life Skills Programme. A participatory approach will be used to ensure their input feeds into the development of project materials, thereby helping to maximize the prospects for the desired change.

## *A new approach to gender-based violence*

**T**he program officers are also looking forward to piloting behaviour change communication techniques to address this pressing issue in Sri Lanka.

Improving the nutritional status of girls, adolescents and women is a win-win situation. Innovative programs, like CHANGE, enable girls to perform better in school and boost their lifetime earnings, which further supports gender equality and women's empowerment. The collaboration between WFP and UNFPA in Sri Lanka puts gender equality front and center and has the potential to halt the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. Incorporating metrics to measure nutritional impact will be key to guide future efforts and impart learning to other countries.



UNN PROGRAMMING/ PARTNERSHIPS

Unleashing the 'power of  
we' in Southern Africa



REGIONAL SUPPORT CAN HELP

Table 18

At a quick glance, the regional level appears to be invisible within the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, yet recent conversations with UN colleagues in Southern Africa paint a different picture. From senior management of the United Nations agencies to technical specialists servicing the region, UN joint programming is embraced as a means to improve effectiveness and achieve shared results, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Understanding the triggers (and bottlenecks!) is crucial to pursuing UN joint programming on a larger scale. That means more joint projects in more countries and strengthened capacity of United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) to do so. Here's where the UN Network comes onto the scene.

For the regional colleagues, the UN Network (UNN) is a platform that is helping to change the nutrition narrative at country level, and along with it, stakeholder behaviour so that UN nutrition support increasingly takes the form of collective action. The COVID -19 pandemic, a vivid reminder of the interconnected nature of today's world and the importance of acting together in a coordinated manner, is giving further impetus to joint approaches, including nutrition-related programming.



## The UN Network as an enabler

A team of three WFP nutritionists working at the regional level in Johannesburg unanimously agreed that the UNN was a motivating force for UN joint programming. Nutritionists from UNICEF were of that same school of thought, noting that this is particularly evident at the country level where UN colleagues rally around the SUN Government Focal Point and when funding is allocated to joint work. The word is out. UNN is helping actors – UN colleagues, government officials and other development partners – understand what multi-sectoral nutrition really means. Its portfolio of tools,<sup>76</sup> such as the UN Nutrition Inventory and Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping, and UNN knowledge products, such as the Compendium of Actions for Nutrition, unpack the nutrition landscape in its entirety and identify opportunities for increased synergies. Both the inventory and mapping exercises have been conducted in four countries in the region<sup>77</sup> and a fifth has recently come forward expressing interest in the latter.



<sup>76</sup> For further information, visit <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/unn-analytics>.

<sup>77</sup> The UN Nutrition Inventory has been completed in Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, while the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping has been conducted in Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

What do countries stand to gain? Rose Craigue, former Senior Regional Nutrition and HIV Adviser, says “It’s really about showcasing the value add in the different UN agencies coming together.”

UN joint programming has the potential to confer a situation whereby increased operational efficiencies and investment in nutrition triumph, as actors see the comparative advantages and the benefits of collaboration. This, in turn, can lead to heightened impact directly improving the lives of women, children and other vulnerable populations. “Jointly delivering essential sexual and reproductive health services, such as antenatal care, supplementary feeding in maternity waiting homes, together with nutrition information and services to pregnant women in food-insecure regions, as we have witnessed in Zimbabwe, is a sure win for better pregnancy outcomes for mothers and their babies,” said Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, UNFPA Regional Director for East and Southern Africa.

Others acknowledged that UNN-REACH in Lesotho<sup>78</sup> and Zimbabwe has also been a uniting force, helping to foster increased convergence among the United Nations agencies and bring new members into the UNN circle locally. For example, UNFPA opted to join the UNN in both countries thanks to the encouragement of the UNN-REACH facilitator and UN Nutrition Inventory exercise, which helped colleagues see how their work in sexual and reproductive health was linked to nutrition outcomes.

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<sup>78</sup> See Tale 3 for further information about how UNN-REACH is helping to advance the nutrition agenda in Lesotho.

## Backing from UN leadership is essential

UN reform along with encouragement from the Regional Directors of individual United Nations agencies, United Nations Resident Coordinators (UNRCs), country-level Heads of Agencies and the UNN chair also factor into the equation. Christiane Rudert, UNICEF's Nutrition Adviser based in Nairobi, indicated that technical specialists from FAO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO in the region recently agreed to issue a single briefing note, which will be shared with UNRCs and UN country teams, to accelerate the prevention and treatment of wasting on the ground. The "involvement of the RC as an advocacy platform is helpful, but we don't yet have a lot of experience [doing so]" says Christiane. The note will highlight how the implementation of the Global Action Plan (GAP) on Child Wasting, a priority for the United Nations Secretary-General, is supported by the above five agencies, what is different from business as usual and how it contributes to the SUN agenda in the front-runner countries, such as Madagascar and Malawi.



For Nuha Ceesay, UNAIDS Country Director in Malawi, the Heads of Agencies also have an important role to play, a view shared by the regional nutritionists at UNICEF and WFP. “The bulk of the work on joint programmes is carried out at the technical level, but the technical level is basically translating the vision of UN leadership,” explains Nuha. For this reason, identifying inter-agency collaboration as an organizational priority is key to empowering UN joint programming in the future.

WFP Regional Director, Lola Castro, is another advocate for joint action. When speaking about nutrition, she spoke about the “need to go a bit beyond to ensure that we are working multisectorally and working in an integrated manner, paying attention to gender and climate change.” Lola was also quick to point out that “we are not starting from zero. At country level, there are a number of joint programmes, such as resilience activities in Malawi with FAO, IFAD and UNICEF.”

### **Snapshot of the Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Empowered Resilience programme**

#### *Written contributions provided by the WFP Regional Bureau for Southern Africa*

Since 2019, FAO, UNICEF and WFP are part of a consortium implementing a UKAID-funded programme called Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Empowered Resilience (PROSPER). The programme targets 900,000 vulnerable people in four districts over a 52-month period, supporting the Government of Malawi in reducing extreme poverty and breaking the recurrent cycle of crises and humanitarian assistance. This multi-stakeholder programme also aims to mitigate the impact of climate shocks, respond to seasonal consumption needs, support the design of social safety nets and generate evidence to inform government policy.

Under the auspices of PROSPER, the three United Nations agencies have collaborated in many areas, including: the development of a joint standard operating procedure (SOP) as a reference document; joint training of agriculture and nutrition extension workers; and community-level social and behaviour change communication (SBCC), especially in care groups and farmers field schools. The current plans foresee an independent project evaluation in 2023 through which the impact on nutrition will be measured.





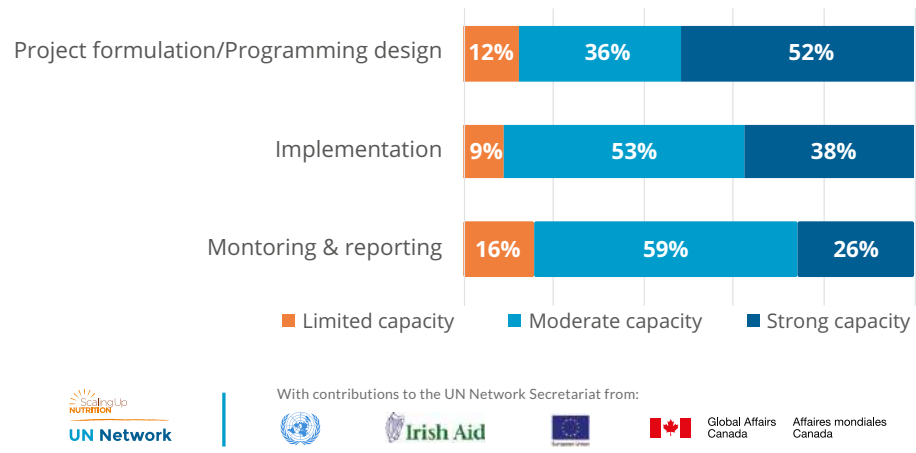
Partnership can also be promoted through agency-specific guidance. At UNICEF, nutrition partnerships are encouraged to extend across sectors and embrace multiple systems (e.g. education, food, health, social protection) with clear rules of engagement. In some cases, guidance is developed jointly such as the guidance note formulated by FAO, UNICEF and WFP on *Mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition of schoolchildren*<sup>79</sup> (April 2020). Colleagues from the UNICEF and WFP Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Offices later built on this foundation and a newly developed Framework for Reopening of Schools (June 2020), likewise developed by multiple agencies,<sup>80</sup> by

79 FAO, UNICEF & WFP. 2020. *Mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition of schoolchildren*. Available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/mitigating-effects-covid-19-pandemic-food-and-nutrition-schoolchildren>.

80 UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and The World Bank.

formulating a *Multisectoral checklist about school re-openings and school-based nutrition in the context of COVID-19*<sup>81</sup> (July 2020). The document underscores the importance of multi-sectoral considerations for nutrition, child protection, education, WASH and health services, while outlining recommended measures to take both prior to and after school re-openings. “The joint nature adds a lot more oomph” and helps improve uptake of guidance materials, acknowledges Kudakwashe Chimanya, a nutritionist at the UNICEF East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO). The push at WFP is towards colocation, which is echoed in its nutrition-sensitive programming materials. Still, further efforts are needed to enhance capacity for joint programming, particularly their implementation, monitoring and reporting, as shown by 2019 UNN global reporting data (see Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6.**  
Capacity of United Nations agencies to pursue joint programming on nutrition (2019)



81 UNICEF & WFP. 2020. *Multisectoral checklist about school re-openings and school-based nutrition in the context of COVID-19*. UNICEF and World Food Programme Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Offices. Available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/joint-wfp-and-unicef-multisectoral-checklist-school-reopening-and-school-based>.

## Unpacking the role of regional offices and platforms

The role of UN regional bureaus and offices is multi-tiered. In smaller offices, such as Eswatini and Lesotho, the regional colleagues tend to be more involved in country-level activities, including the formulation of UN Joint Programmes. Clearly, the line of support does not stop there. The regional offices can play a catalytic role in strengthening ties between United Nations agencies. For example, regional engagement enabled UNICEF and WFP to come together in Zimbabwe to promote increased complementarity between the two agencies, including measures related to the COVID-19 response. UNICEF and WFP teamed up on SBCC regarding maternal, infant and young child feeding, which now includes COVID-19 related messaging and is disseminated through lean season food distribution points in twenty-three districts. UNFPA is also using this channel to distribute sexual and reproductive health commodities, drawing upon WFP logistics support.

With that said, collaboration takes effort and a willingness to compromise at times. The regional colleagues are also mobilized when there are challenges and the agencies 'don't get along', encouraging country-level colleagues to work through the issues and resolve misunderstandings. Furthermore, UN regional staff can serve as matchmakers, connecting their nutrition colleagues in countries to the UNN Secretariat for technical assistance (e.g. on UNN analytics).

Regional platforms, such as the Food Security Working Group and Regional Nutrition Group in Southern Africa, co-led by UNICEF and WFP, also help foster increased collaboration between the agencies. This has ensured that partners in the region have a harmonized approach to nutrition in the COVID-19 response and are updated on the latest guidance. In addition, the working group has fueled nutrition advocacy, having developed a Call to Action in late July that highlighted the potential impact on nutrition outcomes in Eastern

and Southern Africa due to the pandemic. Experience has also shown that these regional platforms can serve as incubators for new ideas, such as mother-led MUAC assessment in the face of COVID-19, which was conceived in this forum. As a result, a number of country offices, including Zimbabwe, have minimized malnutrition screening performed by Community Health Workers and are having mothers do it themselves. The underlying premise is that this adaptation is one way to reduce contact, and thus minimize risk to the virus.



## Joint action during the age of COVID-19

While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a series of new challenges from how UN staff communicate to programming delivery, it has also increased the appetite for joint approaches. At the regional level, UNICEF and WFP have used the COVID-19 as a window of opportunity to develop a list of indicators for which it is relatively easy to collect data in order to get a snapshot of the situation without going to the field. This limits potential exposure to the virus.

The two agencies have also joined forces at the country level to safeguard nutrition during the pandemic. In Malawi, UNICEF developed jingles with key messaging on the prevention of COVID-19 that are being used by WFP and other partners to strengthen SBCC and awareness activities across different programmes. The two agencies are also providing joint support (technical and financial) to the government for district teams on ensuing programmatic adaptations from the use of personal protective equipment to revisiting frequency of distributions to curtail contagion. As part of these efforts, UNICEF and WFP supported the revision of the national standard operating procedure (SOP) on managing acute malnutrition in the context of COVID-19 as well as its implementation. Colleagues from both agencies were quick to point out that these measures built on a rich history of inter-agency collaboration in support of the national nutrition emergency response from October 2015 to June 2017. This might suggest that collaboration breeds collaboration or that it is easier to execute where there is already a precedent.

A larger group of United Nations agencies (ILO, UNAIDS, WFP and WHO) are working together to strengthen nutrition education and advocacy, targeting people living with HIV and tuberculosis patients to help ensure that their vulnerabilities are not further exacerbated in light of COVID-19. The UNAIDS Country Director, Nuha Ceesay, recognizes that “the willingness of the government to push for the UN to work together makes a huge difference.” He explained that the National Planning Commission continuously guides stakeholders in how they work together and support agreed programmes, setting the tone for collaboration.

## *Bottlenecks exist but can be overcome*

Funding and personalities were identified as the main bottlenecks to UN joint programming in the area of nutrition. “Having a formal structure, like UNN, will help spur the individual technical leads to overcome personalities issues and make sure those collective objectives are met. One obstructive personality should not hold up collective action,” says Christiane at UNICEF.

It’s about changing mindsets and being willing to see things from different perspectives. Nuha has a deep appreciation for this after years of joint work through UNAIDS. In his view, “It has to be a coalition of the willing. It requires a lot of patience and understanding and continuous engagement.” Training can also help people “look at the collective glory rather than individual success,” he adds. Potentially, the nutrition community can learn from the joint UN experiences accrued over the decades to combat HIV/AIDS. His colleague Narmada Acharya Dhakal, Regional Programme Adviser for Eastern and Southern Africa, unpacked this and pointed to the importance of coming together from the inception. “We have to be in a joint team mode and try to accommodate the team agenda, putting off our agency hats and defining the agenda together.”

The funding environment also influences the extent to which United Nations agencies come together and collaborate on nutrition. In Kudakwashe’s experience, joint funding proposals can help show the comparative advantages of the respective agencies and are one way to mitigate some of these challenges, including different donor conditionalities and modalities to disburse funding. Recalling an example from Madagascar, Rosalyn Ford, WFP Nutritionist, noted that some donors want to see more collaboration between the United Nations agencies, which prompted the development of a joint proposal by FAO, UNICEF and WFP for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), blending nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive actions to reduce the country’s high stunting levels.

Sometimes, it’s more complicated. Rose appreciates, that “We all have different priorities and interests and there is a small pot of money. [It] can be a struggle in trying to find convergence.” What can happen is that “a donor prioritizes a few districts which might align to the primary recipient agency but sometimes the other agencies are not really present there, so they need to look for supplemental

funding,” she explains. This can lead to programming delays, which can directly affect the impact of the programme.

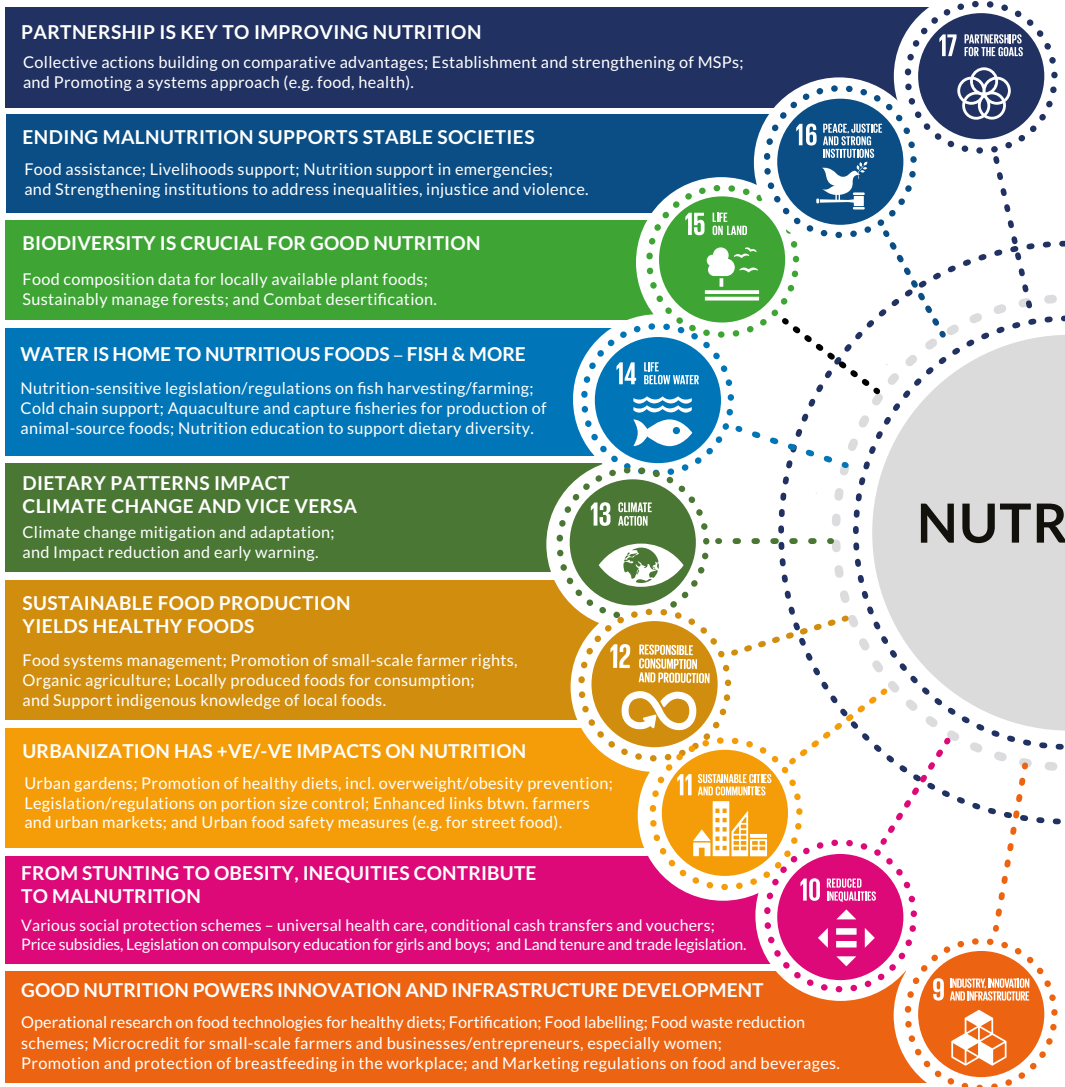
## Leveraging the SDG framework to galvanize UN collective action

The SDGs have raised the profile of nutrition, including among senior government officials in Member States. “The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals provide the framework for a collective response to: accelerate reduction in the numbers of malnourished children across the region; for a pathway to recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; and opportunities to build resilience in nutrition to respond to future shocks”, says Mohamed M. Malick Fall, UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa. Likewise, the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition, the SUN Movement and the Global Nutrition Report (GNR) have called attention to the subject.

Similarly, the SDGs are helping to promote a wider understanding about nutrition so that it is perceived as a driver of sustainable development, not a mere technical intervention. The UNN Secretariat developed an infographic that depicts the links between nutrition and the respective SDGs to help bring those into focus, particularly for UN leadership and colleagues working in other technical areas (see Figure 7). Pointing to that graphic during her travels in the region, the UNN Director/Global Coordinator has helped more United Nations agencies engage in the national nutrition agenda, such as IOM, UNDP and UNFPA in Zimbabwe.

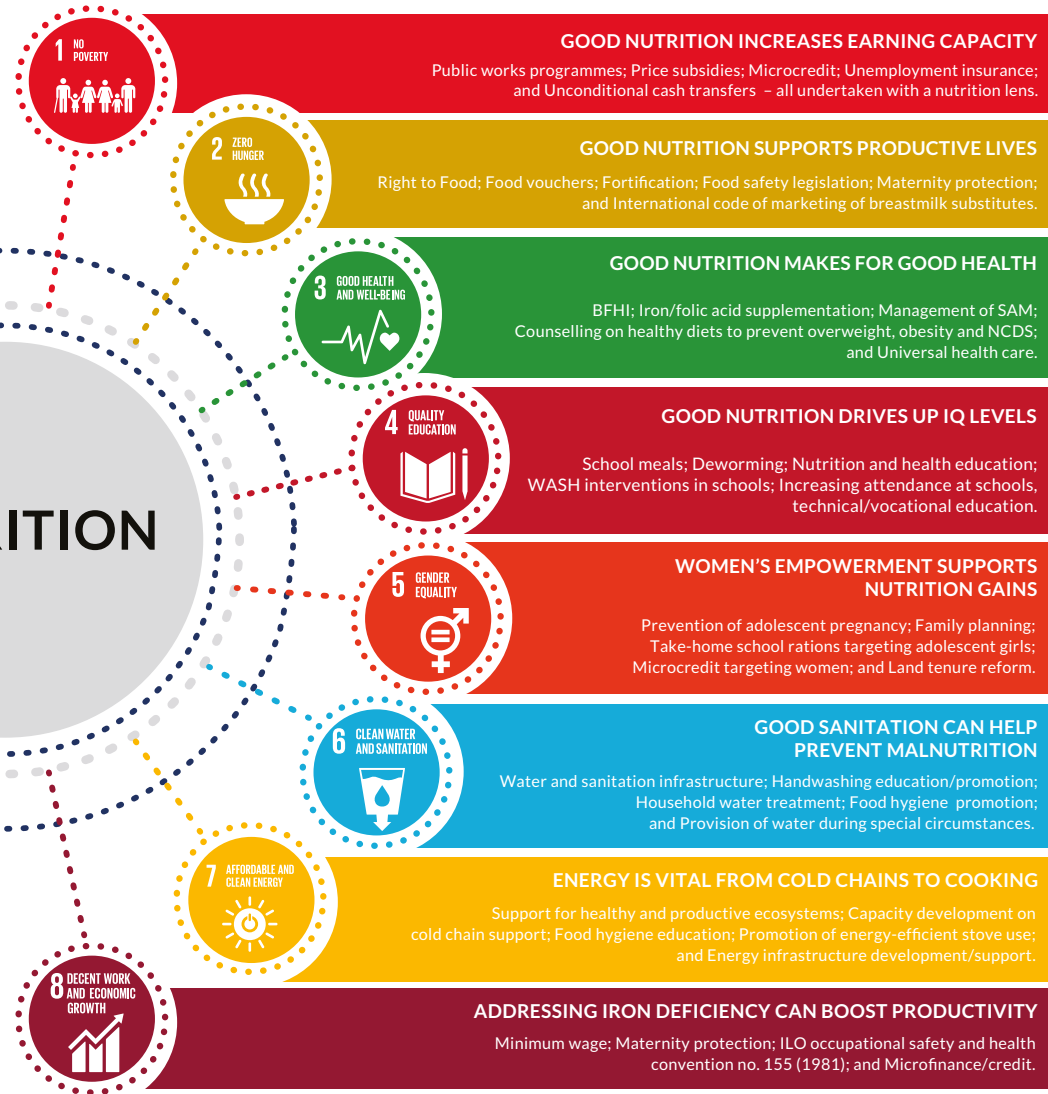
Increasingly non-nutritionists are talking about nutrition, the GNR, etc. with the understanding that “we won’t achieve the other SDGs if we don’t address nutrition,” says Rose. There is a place for everyone, and everyone must do their part. Rufaro Musvaire, WFP Nutritionist, summed it up well with a striking metaphor: “It’s like a car made up of different parts; some may appear more prominent than others. If one of them fails, you can’t move whether you have no fuel or your tire is flat.” Keeping this imagery in mind may help UN colleagues overcome institutional differences and other challenges to ensure that they are marching towards the same goals, particularly during these exceptional times.

**FIGURE 7.**  
Leveraging the power of nutrition to achieve the SDGs



**UN Network**





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UNN ANALYTICS

Second round of  
mapping in Niger reveals  
shortfalls and clarifies  
nutrition priorities



Table 19

Five years since the first mapping exercise took place in Niger (2014) under the Office of the High Commissioner for the 3N Initiative<sup>82</sup> and the umbrella of UNN-REACH,<sup>83</sup> a second round of mapping was conducted with a series of enhancements. Government actors looked to the mapping as a means to fortify nutrition coordination mechanisms – national and sub-national – and to promote mutual accountability among stakeholders in an effort to drive down soaring levels of child stunting and wasting. According to a SMART survey, under five stunting and wasting was estimated at 47.8 percent and 17.1 percent in 2018, respectively. This sounded alarm bells as such figures well exceed public health thresholds, defined by the World Health Organization (WHO).

“It was unanimously recognized that the mapping is not only a reference tool for monitoring the implementation of the national nutrition plan, but also for advocacy and decision-making at all levels,” observed Sarah Cruz, a former analyst at the UN Network Secretariat. Furthermore, it enabled actors from different stakeholder groups to identify gaps along Niger’s journey to scale up.

## A participative approach

The second wave of mapping was launched in December 2018, using an upgraded version of the UN Network (UNN) tool, initially developed for UNN-REACH. With government in the lead, the UNN Secretariat provided training and coaching to National Nutrition Cell<sup>84</sup> (*Cellule Nationale de Nutrition*) and other members of the national mapping team throughout the process from tool customization to data analysis and the presentation of findings at a stakeholder workshop in June 2019, where the results were validated. This

82 This stands for *Nigériens Nourishing Nigériens*.

83 This refers to Renewed Efforts Against Children Hunger and undernutrition initiative, which is part of the UNN’s multi-sectoral technical assistance facility.

84 This body is positioned under the Office of the High Commissioner for the 3N Initiative.

time, the mapping was funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and European Union, via the FIRST<sup>85</sup> initiative, as well as a contribution from the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Secretariat, signalling buy-in from the UN and donor community alike.

The actions were selected via a participative exercise that engaged a range of stakeholder groups from different sectors, such as agriculture, education, health, social protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Actors took into consideration the provisions of the national nutrition plan, the feasibility of collecting data as well as other technical factors. Overall, the mapping exercise encompassed more than 70 stakeholders, including nine ministries, and culminated in aggregate coverage statistics, by intervention. Emergency and development workstreams were combined, strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus (HDN), which facilitates greater collaboration, coordination and coherence between the two spheres of activity.



85 This stands for the Food and nutrition security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation programme.

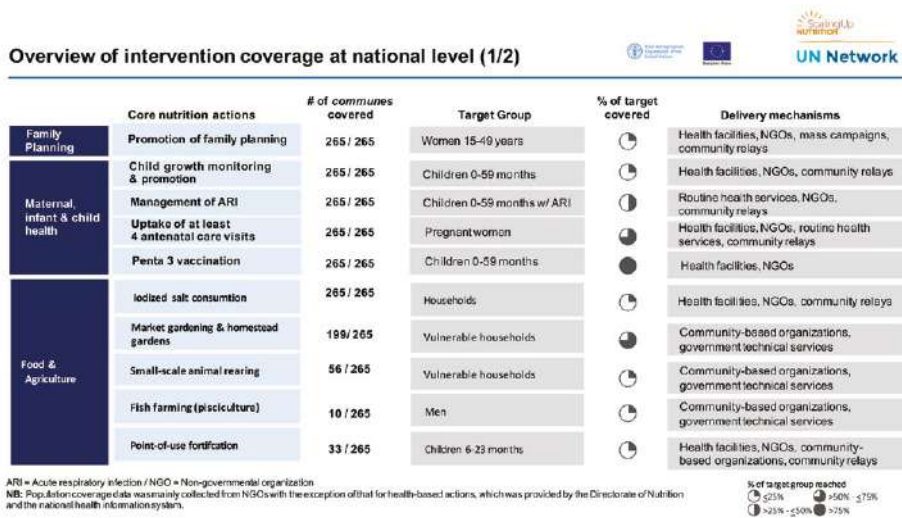
## New features

While the landscape of implementing partners remains dominated by humanitarian actors, this second wave of mapping was an opportunity to go deeper and to connect with other ongoing initiatives in the country. The 2018–19 mapping enlarged the scope of interventions from nineteen to twenty-seven, enabling decision-makers to move forward with data-based policy in more areas. This, in part, stemmed from a desire for additional specificity, reflecting an evolved understanding of nutrition-sensitive approaches. For instance, local food production was broken down into the following three family farming actions in round two: (1) the promotion homestead gardening and market activities; (2) the promotion of small-scale animal husbandry; and (3) the promotion of small-scale fish farming. A similar trend was observed for nutrition-sensitive social protection. The increase in the number of actions mapped was also due to a decision to map additional interventions, such as point-of-use fortification, immunization and prenatal care (the uptake of a least four visits), which can have a positive effect on nutrition outcomes (e.g. stunting).

In addition, the second wave of mapping expanded the scope geographically, showing data by ‘commune’ or municipality. This was a step forward from the 2014 mapping, which stopped at the regional level. As many as 265 municipalites were engaged in 2018–19, demonstrating the strong sub-national flavour of the endeavour. The rationale was that this would enable corrective action to be taken at a more local level, with the aim to reduce time lags and better serve vulnerable populations. It also confers a more equitable approach so that actors can shift targeting strategies to support communities that were previously insufficiently covered. In this sense, the mapping becomes an operational tool as opposed to a static analysis, a chief factor contributing to its popularity among governments.

For the first time, actors manifested interest in integrating the mapping data into the National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN). The process will be facilitated by the participation of some members of the national mapping team in NIPN’s technical committee. Two main dynamics made this possible. First, the direct engagement of government officials in the mapping exercise, who were familiar with both efforts and keen to connect them. Secondly, the mapping was completed using a web-based application built on District Health Information Software, version 2 (DHIS2). This facilitates interfaces with other information systems, such as NIPN, and offers the potential to maximize technical assistance being provided by multiple actors.

**FIGURE 8.**  
Excerpt from the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping (2018–19) in Niger



## Key findings

The exercise revealed specific data, broken down by region, as well as broad patterns. This enabled stakeholders to see where coverage was low and for which interventions. An average of nineteen interventions (roughly 70 percent) were implemented in each region. While that sounds encouraging, the mapping also uncovered vast geographic disparities in some actions. For example, support for exclusive breastfeeding, one of the most important life-saving interventions, reached a small proportion (25 percent or less) of pregnant and lactating women in four regions (Agadez, Diffa, Zinder and Niamey), up to 50 percent in Dosso and over 75 percent in two regions (Tahoua and Tillabéri). This begs questions about what is driving these regional disparities. Implementation barriers? Insecurity and conflict? It could in part be due to the limited presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in some of these regions, particularly Agadez and Zinder.

Additionally, the mapping illustrated that regions most adversely affected by stunting (e.g. Maradi and Zinder) are also those where geographic and population coverage is considerably low. This illustrates a direct relationship between intervention reach and malnutrition, further underscoring the need to step up coverage. Since less than 15 percent of the mapped interventions had a geographic coverage greater than or equal to 50 percent, it is not surprising that the country is contending with extremely high levels of stunting, wasting and anaemia. Maimouna Doudou, former SUN Government Focal Point and WHO consultant in the country, believes that the “mapping is an essential tool for monitoring the coverage of nutrition interventions” so that actors can come together to move the needle and plug coverage gaps.

Interventions provided through the health sector (e.g. Vitamin A supplementation) typically covered a larger proportion of communes than other actions. Furthermore, most actions rely on the same three delivery mechanisms: the health

system, community relays and NGOs. For example, Vitamin A supplementation was carried out in all 265 *communes*, reaching the vast majority of children under five years old through mass campaigns, routine health services and community relays. This compares to the twenty-seven communes (out of 265) that benefit from in-kind social transfers, which at best reached 25 percent of vulnerable households through NGOs, targeted distributions and government technical services. These findings prompted discussions about what measures can be taken to increase synergies and expand coverage in other sectors.

## Tracking progress over time

Between 2014 and 2018, the situation slightly improved although a significant proportion of under5s are still not receiving the full package of interventions required for their development. Just four interventions were able to increase coverage over this time interval, namely: exclusive breastfeeding; complementary feeding; distribution of insecticide-treated bednets; and hand-washing with soap. Fortunately, the first two (exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding) are high-impact, essential nutrition actions.<sup>86</sup> Another encouraging trend that emerged from the mapping was that more stakeholders are involved in the agriculture-related actions than in 2014 to help mitigate climate change and its consequences on nutrition. Development partners are increasingly bringing new technologies to help farmers adapt to changing environmental conditions and build their resilience. Since these actions were more specific than the initial wave of mapping, it is difficult to discern whether the presence of additional stakeholders involved has translated into heightened intervention coverage. The findings suggest a possible increase in homestead gardens although coverage for small-scale animal rearing and fish farming was considerably low and more in line with the levels of local food production observed back in 2014 (see Figure 9).

86 WHO. 2013. *Essential nutrition actions: Improving maternal, newborn, infant and young child health and nutrition*. Geneva. Available at [http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/essential\\_nutrition\\_actions/en/](http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/essential_nutrition_actions/en/).



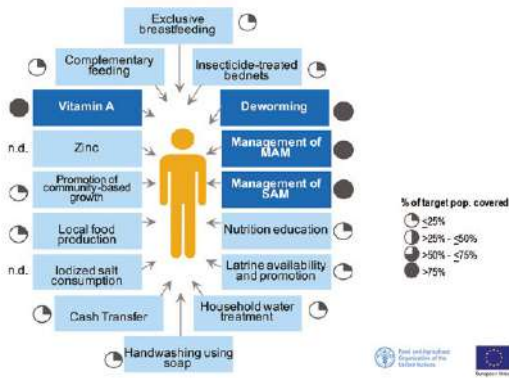
**FIGURE 9.**

Excerpt from the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping (2018–19) in Niger

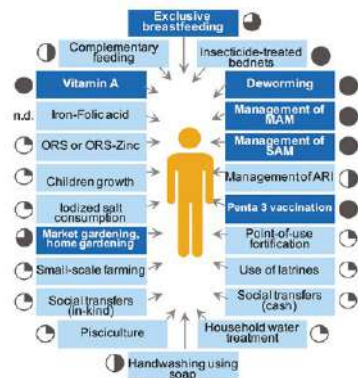
**Niger: Comparative analysis of the coverage of key interventions for a child at the national level**



**Coverage of interventions targeting children under 5 years old in 2014**



**Coverage of interventions targeting children under 5 years old in 2018**



There were also a host of other actions for which coverage remained virtually unchanged (e.g. child growth monitoring and promotion, support for latrines, household water treatment). This revealed an urgent need to rethink the national nutrition strategy and the delivery of prioritized interventions, as many of the same actors are in the same places, carrying out the same interventions. “Scaling up the full package of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions with sufficient coverage and strong stakeholder engagement is necessary to reverse malnutrition trends,” says Amina Idrissa Bagnou, mapping expert in the Office of the High Commissioner for the 3N Initiative.

## What's on the horizon?

Beyond the direct utility of ascertaining intervention coverage, the mapping is a lever for strengthening nutrition governance. “By providing an overview of the stakeholder landscape and coverage levels of a package of priority interventions, the tool has been used to inform the development of nutrition advocacy materials, the National Nutrition Security Policy (PNSN) 2017–2025 and its budgeted Action Plan. In addition, the tool, together with the situation analysis (Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview), the overview of food and nutrition security policies (Policy Overview) and the profile of stakeholders, all conducted under the auspices of REACH, were the main advocacy mechanisms that made it possible to include nutrition in Niger’s Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES) 2017–2021,” explains Mahamadou Aboubacar, Coordinator of the 3N’s Nutrition Cell. This sentiment was shared by others, with all stakeholders recommending that the mapping be repeated on an annual basis. To date, Niger is one of three countries to undertake multiple rounds of mapping, joining Senegal and Tanzania. Mali will soon follow suit with a second round, cognizant of the benefits of the tool.

Since the completion of the mapping, the results were presented at the 4th FANUS Conference on Nutrition in Action for Sustainable Development in Africa, which took place in Kigali, Rwanda on 26–29 August 2019. The presentation was so well-received that, following the conference, the members of the national mapping team were contacted by the *Journal of Food Science and Engineering* to publish an article in the next issue.

But, how can we be sure malnourished people in Niger gain from these experiences? What safeguards are being put in place to disrupt the *status quo*? Interest was expressed by various stakeholders to create profiles which provide an overview of the main nutrition actors in the country. The underlying premise is that this will facilitate linkages between actors for increased convergence of nutrition services. Furthermore, these efforts will be

complemented by additional sectoral and regional analysis undertaken by key ministries, with support from the national technical team and UNN Secretariat, to further pinpoint implementation obstacles. In parallel, there are also plans to extract key findings from the mapping exercise for parliamentarians to help them reorient stakeholders and interventions where they are most needed.

UNN support with these next steps will be crucial. The government has also made a formal request for the reinstatement of UNN-REACH to help facilitate continued multi-sectoral dialogue and diagnostics, both key ingredients for instigating outside thinking and innovative solutions. As the data shows, business as usual is failing vulnerable Nigeriens and new shocks (e.g. climate change, pandemics) will only exacerbate an already delicate situation.





UNN ANALYTICS

# Conducting the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping in Peru



A 'WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY'  
TO STRENGTHEN PRIORITY ACTIONS

Tale 20

## Introduction

**P**eru is one of the first countries in Latin America to conduct a Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping<sup>87</sup> exercise, one of the UNN analytics designed to guide countries in strengthening nutrition multisectorality and scale-up. The tool gives stakeholders a comprehensive picture of who is doing what, where and how, illustrating geographic and population coverage. The mapping exercise aims to galvanize a range of actors (including government, United Nations agencies, civil society, academia and the private sector), generating qualitative and quantitative data on 'core nutrition actions' that are implemented through sectors, such as health, agriculture, education and social protection and their respective systems.



87 For further information about the UN Network's Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping tool, visit <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/tools/nutrition-stakeholder-action-mapping>.

“For me, the exercise [stakeholder mapping] has been like a puzzle: every time we thought we had all the pieces, we kept finding another one, then another one...,” says Emilia Villanueva, consultant with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Peru. “I thought it would be a puzzle with only one face, but then we discovered it was more like a Rubik cube with lots of faces.”

## Impetus for mapping

Peru has been part of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement since 2010. The country has a population of approximately 32 million and is divided into twenty-five regions, which are further divided into provinces and districts. Peru is currently classified as an upper-middle income country, and has made some impressive gains in combatting malnutrition. For instance, stunting among children under five (CU5) has dropped from 31.3 percent in 2001 to 12.9 percent in 2017 while wasting affects less than 1 percent of the same age group.<sup>88</sup> The national prevalence of stunting, however, masks geographic disparities, with three regions reporting stunting levels of 31 percent.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, overweight and obesity touches nearly one-third (32 percent) of children aged 5-9 years old.

The country’s adult population also faces a malnutrition burden: 24.2 percent of women and 15.2 percent of men are obese.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, a recent study showed that 37.2 percent of people under 15 years old had obesity, high blood pressure or diabetes. This was higher in urban populations (39.6 percent, rising to 43.0 percent in Lima) than in rural populations (27.5 percent).<sup>91</sup>

88 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Peru country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/latin-america-and-caribbean/south-america/peru/>.

89 National Institute of Statistics and Informatics. 2018. *Demographic and Family Health Survey*. Lima. Available at <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/record/peru-demographic-and-family-health-survey-2018>.

90 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019.

91 National Institute of Statistics and Informatics. 2018.

There is also a serious challenge with anaemia in Peru. Nationally, over 40 percent of infants aged 6–35 months are anaemic, a statistic that climbs to a high of nearly 70 percent in the Puno region. Women of reproductive age also have elevated levels of anaemia (18.5 percent), even if they are affected to a lesser extent.<sup>92</sup>

## Catalyst for action

United Nations agencies in Peru utilize the nutrition working group to harmonize their efforts and exchange related information and experiences. The agencies represented in the group include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Pan American Health Organization-World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), with the latter taking the lead. Different actors in the group, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia as well as United Nations agencies, had been looking at different ways to give the government ‘a push’ on tackling malnutrition. At the same time, the Government of Peru had decided to focus on reducing rates of anaemia.

All these efforts coincided with the arrival of a new director at WFP Peru, Tania Goossens, who had previous experience working with UNN analytics in countries such as Mozambique. “When I arrived in mid-2018, anaemia was on everyone’s agenda, starting with the highest levels of government but despite the numerous efforts and investments, the numbers were just not coming down.”

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92 *Ibid.*



“This made me think that a good place to start would be to do a comprehensive mapping to better understand who is doing what and where, identify gaps and do that analysis to better guide those efforts and investments. Not just of anaemia, but of all key nutrition interventions, given that some regions continue to have high levels of stunting, while obesity and overweight among children has increased significantly. It just seemed like such an opportune [exercise], especially in a country such as Peru where there is genuine interest in tackling malnutrition, high levels of capacity and funding,” says Tania.



The objectives of the mapping were twofold: (1) to inform, sensitize, define and agree on the opportunities to improve the nutritional situation in the country; and (2) to promote coordination between the government, United Nations agencies, private sector, civil society and academia to improve the coverage of nutrition actions. A technical working group was specifically formed for the mapping exercise, comprising: the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion; a private sector group (Peru 2021); CARE (representative of the NGO group Peru Prevention of Chronic Malnutrition); FAO; IFAD; UNICEF; and WFP.

## Getting government on board

The government structure in Peru is decentralized so that each region can make their own decisions, although the policy direction is given at national level. According to Emilia, this works in theory, but not necessarily in practice. “Lima has more than 30 percent of the population, which means that most of the action happens here. The challenge is how to improve this kind of practices in the other regions with poor and extremely poor people, for example in the Amazonia region.”

For years, Peru had good support from donors in terms of technical assistance and budgets, through the NGOs in most cases. As the country experienced economic growth over the last decade, traditional donors started to focus their efforts elsewhere. The UNN mapping was used as a rallying point to stimulate participation within the nutrition arena and to ensure that all voices were heard.

The lifecycle approach towards nutrition in Peru ensured that stakeholders from five ministries (Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation; Ministry of Economy and Finance; Ministry of Housing, Construction and Sanitation; Ministry of Health; and Ministry of Production) took part. A total of approximately 100 stakeholders, from national government, civil society, private sector and international NGOs were involved in the mapping exercise.

The information-gathering stage, which began in October 2019, involved over thirty face-to-face meetings and numerous emails and calls until there was consensus on a final twenty nutrition actions mapped. The process involved several steps, starting with a review of country guidelines as well as national sectoral and multi-sectoral plans. A preliminary list of actions was then prepared, based on a situation analysis, specifying their respective target groups and delivery mechanisms. WFP Peru continued to work closely with UNN analyst, Farah Sbytte, to adapt the tool to country-specific aims and objectives.

## Agreeing on nutrition actions

There were some key criteria for selecting the priority nutrition actions. They had to be: based on evidence; within the framework of the budgetary and results management programmes, led by the Ministry of Economy and Finance; and have secondary data collected at the district level. Ministries and some United Nations agencies, such as IFAD and UNICEF, as well as civil society organizations contributed to the selection process.

## Adapting tools to address the double burden

As in all countries, nutrition practices have changed in Peru, particularly in the main cities. The increasing consumption of ultra-processed food and decrease in physical exercise has led to a sharp rise in overweight/obesity, particularly among children and teenagers.<sup>93</sup> The mapping results

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93 *Ibid.*

suggest that this indicator could be substantially improved through a greater number of prevention and early detection actions with adequate coverage. Recent data has also linked higher mortality from COVID-19 to regions with higher prevalence of overweight/obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).<sup>94</sup> “We wanted to use the stakeholder mapping tool to open people’s eyes about the causes of overweight/obesity,” claims Emilia.

**FIGURE 10.**  
Excerpt from the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping (2019-20) in Peru



94 Ministry of Health. 2020. Minsa: Consumo de comida “chatarra” aumenta el riesgo de agravar los casos de Covid-19. Lima. Available at <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/minsa/noticias/212299-minsa-consumo-de-comida-chatarra-aumenta-el-riesgo-de-agravar-los-casos-de-covid-19>.

“We couldn’t find strong indicators to address this, although there are at least three actions [from the final twenty] that focus on obesity/overweight, including: promotion of physical activity in the community; training teachers in promoting healthy lifestyle practices; and evaluating [healthy eating in] school canteens.” However, coverage is low and there needs to be more action and budget for such interventions. There is currently not enough data to evaluate outcomes, such as behaviour change or building teacher capacity.

According to Tania, the mapping was an opportunity to advocate for the development of policies and implementation of actions to address the double burden, given the alarming increase in overweight/obesity. “Having worked with the UNN mapping tool in other countries, I also thought Peru could be one of the first countries to expand this to address the double burden, and could thus be of help to other countries similarly affected.”

## Key findings

The mapping data brought to light a number of interesting findings, including the generally low coverage of nutrition actions, particularly in the Amazon regions. The highest coverage of an intervention was iron supplementation for infants at 4 months, with a national average of 63.5 percent. This contrasts to a child health services package (growth and development monitoring, vaccination, haemoglobin measurement and iron supplementation) for 0–11 month-olds that reached just 27.8 percent nationally, although this has been improving over time.

When the findings were presented to stakeholders, including Government, via a number of virtual presentations in September 2020, the aim was to emphasize the bigger picture. This meant highlighting positive ways for how the government could self-reflect on the whole nutrition situation, rather than

focusing on low coverage. It also meant looking beyond health data when it comes to nutrition.

“We are really proud that the tool was such a participative process – all of the data sources came from the ministries, so it has been fully validated... One key piece of advice for others using this tool is don’t just ask for data but review it and give guidance. In our experience, the data doesn’t always fit the tool – we kept going back to them and made sure that everything was signed off by them for each action,” says Emilia.

According to Christian Garay, M&E Director from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MINAGRI), the process of building a system of indicators in favour of nutrition from the different government institutions gave decision-makers the information they needed to check if interventions are on the right track. “The mapping is an extremely valuable tool that clearly shows how MINAGRI’s interventions contribute to a large food and nutrition security policy, and it seems that the efforts are not enough. We need to use the tool not only for managing actions with the information, but also for articulating them in policies related to agriculture and nutrition,” he says.

This next step has become a reality for the Ministry of Production’s ‘Eat Fish’ Programme. “Thanks to the discussions held with WFP for collecting information for the mapping study, we realized the need to restructure ourselves, so that we can demonstrate the impact we achieve on the population we serve”, confirms José Otero, Lima regional manager of the ‘Eat Fish’ Programme. “We now plan to expand the target population to pregnant women and mothers who care for children under the age of three, in coordination with the health facilities of the Ministry of Health.”

The private sector is another set of stakeholders to be presented with the mapping findings. Ten companies were involved in the exercise, yet few

businesses were found to contribute to the twenty actions mapped. With that said, stakeholders in Peru view the private sector as a key ally in nutrition, which has already formed some important alliances with the Government in anaemia prevention. Beatriz Quispe from the Health Promotion Directorate in the Ministry of Health stressed that the mapping results are important for private sector companies seeking more guidance to define their path to join efforts for improved nutrition. Furthermore, “the findings emphasized that Peru has resources and professional people working in the ministries, and in the private sector and civil society, with a lot of really good plans but they need to be better articulated,” remarks Emilia.

## Challenges

A number of challenges were encountered in gathering data, such as the lapse of time between the launch of the mapping in October 2019 and the data collection process itself, which took place in June 2020. This was primarily attributed to the impact of COVID-19 in Peru, which brought in new national priorities and paralyzed the ministries and organizations for almost four months, in terms of managing information related to the selected nutrition actions. Other issues included the high turnover of key personnel in ministries; the extension of response time by organizations; the weakness of the government’s information management system; and the lack of information at the district level of some priority actions. Nevertheless, María Elena Ugaz, Early Childhood Development and Nutrition Officer with UNICEF, highlighted the usefulness of the mapping exercise in providing excellent data in a condensed way to inform decision-making, especially at the regional and district level with a focus on children and adolescents.

## Next steps

Emilia at WFP concludes that “Peru has very interesting data but not everybody knows about it. This is a challenge because to put it simply, if you have the information you can act more effectively. But if you have both information and budget, you can make rapid progress.”

The mapping information corresponds to the 2019 period, so it could be used as a baseline for decision-making regarding the impact of COVID-19 on nutrition and food security in Peru, one of the worst affected countries in the world. WFP estimates that as many as four million people are severely food insecure.<sup>95</sup>

“This food insecurity, combined with months of limited to no access to basic health services as a result of lockdown measures, could result in the country regressing in terms of gains made in the last few years and a rise in all forms of malnutrition,” says Tania. “This really highlights the need for food security and nutrition to be front and centre of the COVID-19 response and for United Nations agencies in-country to expand joint efforts and to increase their collaboration.”

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95 WFP. *Forthcoming*. Remote web-based survey conducted in August 2020.



UNN ANALYTICS

*UNN analytical tools  
make their mark*



*Tale 21*



A picture is worth a thousand words. This old saying has made a comeback, as data visualization and infographics populate essentially every facet of life in today's world. The UN Network analytical tools subscribe to this school of thought and help stakeholders take off their respective 'institutional hats' to see the situation in its entirety.

Developed as digitalization went mainstream, primarily under the auspices of UNN-REACH,<sup>96</sup> the tools were later expanded to the greater UN Network (UNN) in response to popular demand. Their ability to paint the full picture, literally, with colour-coded maps, charts and dashboards, and cater to non-technical audiences (e.g. parliamentarians) has set them apart from other instruments and enabled them to endure the test of time. Over 34 countries have used one or more of these tools, some multiple times, recognizing their utility in establishing consensus among diverse stakeholders and coordinating the vast spectrum of nutrition actions. While anecdotal evidence had suggested this all along, the UNN Secretariat carried out an impact assessment<sup>97</sup> in 2019, confirming this sentiment and shedding light on additional applications of the tools.



96 UNN-REACH refers to the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition initiative, which is the intensive support arm of the UNN's multi-sectoral technical assistance facility.

97 This assessment documented the qualitative impacts of the UNN analytical tools as reported by countries rather than measuring it *per se*.

## The ABCs of the UN Network tools

As part of the UN Network’s multi-sectoral technical assistance facility, the UN Network Secretariat manages a portfolio of analytical tools to bolster multi-stakeholder coordination, strengthen national capacity and scale up multi-sectoral nutrition actions. There are five tools<sup>98</sup> that countries can opt to use either as a complementary set or on an individual basis. These include: (1) the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview; (2) the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping; (3) the Policy and Plan Overview; (4) the Nutrition Capacity Assessment; and (5) the UN Nutrition Inventory.

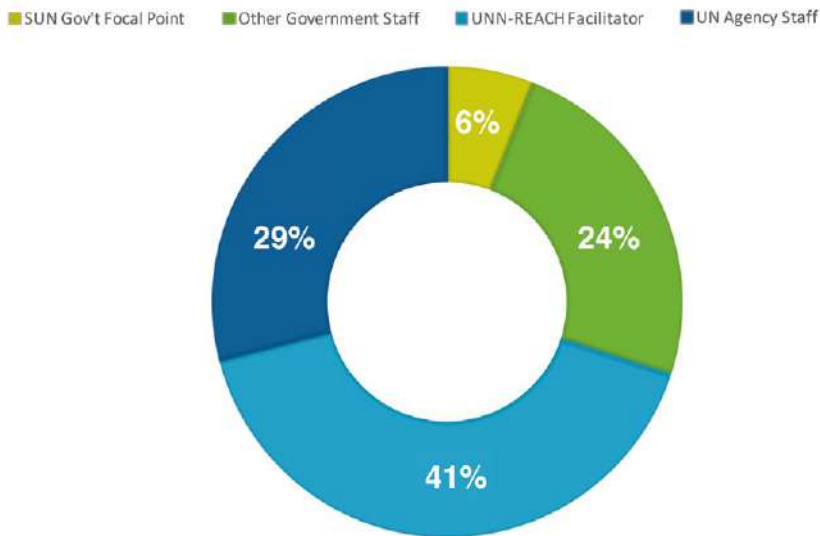
The tools draw on the technical expertise of the member United Nations agencies, such as public health thresholds established by the World Health Organization (WHO), dietary diversity indicators developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme and frameworks developed by the United Nation’s Children Fund (UNICEF). Furthermore, the tools identify the roles and contributions of different actors across the multi-sectoral nutrition landscape and illustrate how things sum up to a greater whole. They also generate data, including intervention coverage at sub-national levels, for the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system and the respective country dashboards, helping to foster mutual accountability within the SUN community.

<sup>98</sup> UN Network Secretariat. 2020. *UN Network Annual Report, 2019. Annex B: Menu of UNN analytical tools.* Rome. Available at <https://bit.ly/3773J8G>.

## Methodology

The impact assessment explored the uses of the UNN analytical tools at the country level. All countries who had ever used the tools had the opportunity to participate through an online survey that was sent to national teams after having been piloted in two countries. Ultimately, nineteen people from twelve countries replied of varying profiles, including SUN Government Focal Points (see Figure 11). These countries include: Burkina Faso; Burundi; Chad; the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); Ghana; Guinea; Lesotho; Mali; Myanmar; Nepal; Sierra Leone; and Zimbabwe. All but two countries (Burundi and DRC) had employed the tools in concert with UNN-REACH facilitation support.

**FIGURE 11.**  
Profile of respondents



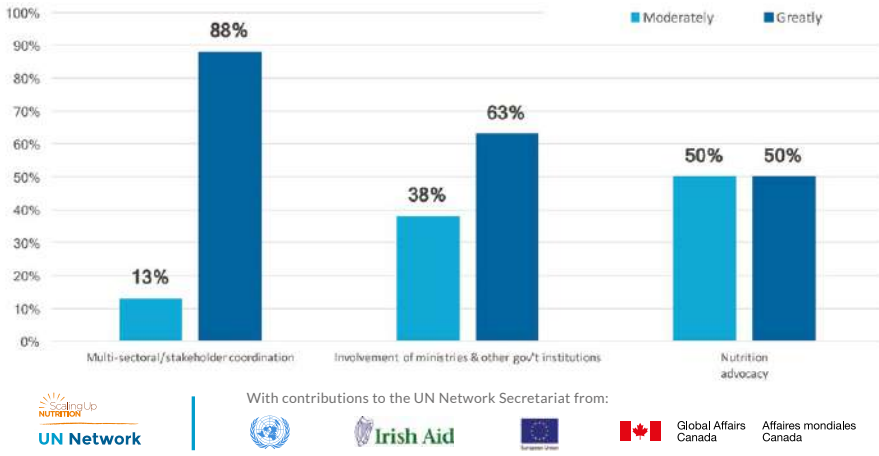
The first part of the questionnaire explored the use of the full ‘toolkit’ whereas the second section included questions pertaining to the use of each tool on an individual basis. Participants indicated the extent to which the tools had impacted nutrition governance processes and systems through the following rating scale: greatly; moderately; minimally; or not at all. They also had the opportunity to supplement their responses with qualitative feedback. This helped to contextualize the findings and maximize the learning acquired through the assessment. Nearly half of the respondents (47 percent) provided insights about all five tools, while 41 percent provided information about one singular tool and the remaining 12 percent provided answers on a sub-set of them. Almost all respondents (94 percent) had been engaged in the mapping exercise, making it the most documented tool in the assessment.

## Key findings from the assessment

This article highlights the main takeaways from the impact assessment as well as more recent efforts to make the tools better known to prospective users. Additional insights are discussed in the full impact assessment report, prepared by the UNN Secretariat.

This multi-country review was able to identify comparative trends, considering temporal and geographic differences. Overall, the findings demonstrated that tools had a notable impact on: (1) nutrition advocacy; (2) national information systems; (3) the engagement of government institutions in nutrition; and (4) multi-sectoral/stakeholder coordination. In contexts where the full suite of analytics had been utilized, all respondents reported substantial improvements in multi-sectoral coordination and nutrition advocacy as well as increased involvement of government institutions in the national nutrition agenda (*see Figure 12*).

**FIGURE 12.**  
Impact of full UNN analytical portfolio



The impact assessment was also helpful in documenting a series of knock-on effects, such as supporting data-driven planning and mainstreaming nutrition across sectors. According to 90 percent of the respondents, the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview (MNO) had increased nutrition knowledge, especially among government authorities from parliamentarians to ministry staff and district officers. These secondary impacts have further helped to advance the nutrition agenda in the countries surveyed, demonstrating that their utility transcends the initial four themes.

“The most remarkable thing about the UNN analytical tools is their flexibility and ability to be adapted depending on the country needs. The same tool following the same methodology can be used and employed differently depending on the context and on the audience. This feature is what makes these tools so requested by country teams,” says Farah Sbytte, who coordinates the analytics workstream at the UNN Secretariat.

## Urqing people in power to take action

The outcomes of the assessment affirmed the UNN analytics are powerful advocacy tools that have helped raise awareness on malnutrition in the given country and its dire consequences, among high-ranking politicians. The tools were reportedly ‘easy to understand’ and enabled decision-makers from different sectors to use them for advocacy purposes. Over 80 percent of respondents reported improved nutrition advocacy efforts for awareness-raising, planning and resource allocation stemming from the tools. While considerable impact on nutrition advocacy was observed across the board, it was most pronounced where the full set of tools was adopted. In the latter scenario, all respondents reported that the tools had moderately to greatly informed nutrition advocacy at national and sub-national levels. Impact was, nevertheless, also high for individual tool usage. For example, the vast majority (82 percent) of respondents reported that the mapping results significantly informed advocacy for awareness-raising and budgeting for nutrition.

When surveyed on the main impacts, the responses varied by tool. Half of the respondents reported advocacy and resource mobilization as a main impact for the MNO exercise which increased to 70 percent for the UN Nutrition Inventory. Various participating decision-makers described the MNO as a ‘solid advocacy tool’. In Myanmar, the MNO was both indispensable and catalytic, bringing evidence to substantiate the need for a multi-sectoral national nutrition plan as the historic new government got its feet on the ground. Similarly, the mapping exercise equipped the country’s multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) with data to inform nutrition advocacy efforts that further shaped the emerging nutrition agenda. Advocacy took a different angle in Chad, where the Policy and Plan Overview (PPO) enabled stakeholders to advocate for placing the national food and nutrition council at the presidency level as well as establishing sub-national nutrition coordination mechanisms.

Advocacy and resource mobilization often go hand in hand and the UNN analytics are no exception. The assessment revealed that the tools helped to attract domestic and foreign investment in nutrition and even to identify innovative resource mobilization schemes. In Ghana, the findings generated by the tools were crucial for prompting the sectors to develop a common analysis of ongoing nutrition investments. The Nepal PPO informed advocacy to prioritize the establishment of a common pool of resources dedicated to nutrition.

## Generating data for informed decision-making

The UNN analytical tools are also addressing data gaps and strengthening national information systems. According to the impact assessment, two thirds of the respondents reported a considerable improvement in the availability of nutrition data, when the full toolkit was used. For many respondents (at least half), increasing data availability was considered to be a main impact of the five respective tools. They are also helping to inform national M&E frameworks and monitor the nutrition situation, including the implementation of national nutrition plans. In particular, the mapping tool was recognized for its utility in generating data to guide scale-up and identify which geographic zones to prioritize. For instance, the mapping findings were primarily used at sub-national levels in Ghana to prioritize sector activities. Regional decision-makers, furthermore, expressed interest in integrating mapping data into sub-national information systems, which in turn, feed into biannual planning processes. Sometimes, these types of applications spilled over into the UN sphere, helping to identify potential areas for joint programming and M&E mechanisms (Ghana, Mali and Zimbabwe), particularly the Inventory tool.

Respondents also valued the wide breadth of actions that the analytics encompass – both nutrition-specific and sensitive – and the ability to bridge those two tracks. In Zimbabwe, multi-stakeholder engagement throughout the UNN analytical exercises enabled the harmonization of an integrated food and nutrition information system that now serves as a central repository for nutrition data. This systematic change will, in turn, help to simplify decision-making at national and sub-national levels to ensure that no one is left behind.

## Enlarging the nutrition circle

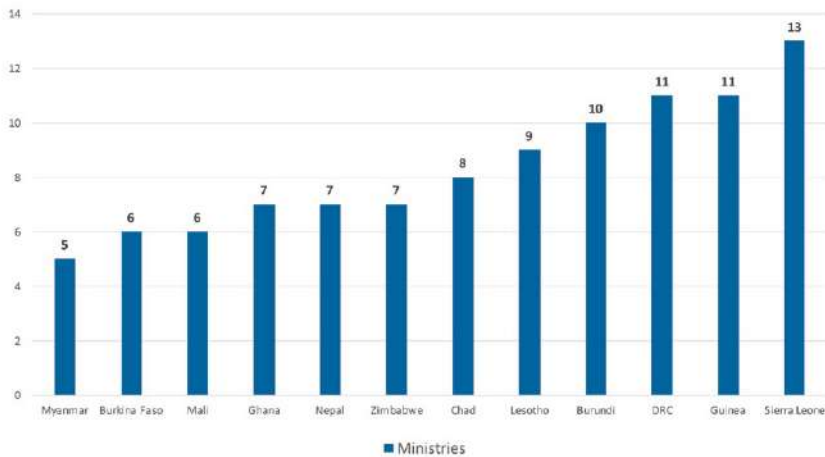
Addressing malnutrition involves mobilizing different sectors and hardwiring nutrition into their respective plans and activities. A whopping 94 percent of respondents noted that an increased number of government institutions, such as ministries, had become active in the nutrition arena thanks to the tools. The same assessment further revealed that an average of eight ministries were involved, with varying intensity, in the implementation of the UNN analytics at the country level (*see Figure 13*). This number was slightly higher for the mapping tool (nine ministries on average), which has generally been launched through a multi-stakeholder workshop and thus helped galvanize stakeholders. The numbers speak for themselves but are even more impressive, considering that nutrition has historically been perceived as a health issue. As a result, the findings from the impact assessment confirm that the UNN analytics have served as door openers for engaging additional sectors, thereby broadening nutrition beyond the health constituency.

The tools went a step further. The findings also demonstrate that they have notably strengthened capacity in the vast majority of cases (90 percent), including in data management, a priority identified in the 2018 Global Nutrition Report. Involved personnel, including SUN Government Focal Points, ministry representatives and different SUN networks, were actively engaged in the different stages of the analytics. This reportedly increased both their individual technical skills as well as

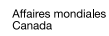


institutional capacity at national and sub-national levels. Capacity strengthening is the primary focus of the Nutrition Capacity Assessment, whereas for the other tools, it is pursued through the engagement process. Not surprisingly, 80 percent of respondents cited capacity development as the top impact of the tool. In Chad, the capacity assessment informed the development of a capacity strengthening plan and resource mobilization to support its implementation, while the tool was used in Myanmar to assess existing capacities at sub-national levels to implement the new national nutrition plan. The mapping exercise, led by national actors with the support of the UNN Secretariat, also lent itself to capacity strengthening (Nepal). Overall, the UNN tools have equipped national teams with the means to be able to replicate the exercises in the future and to extract data for the MSPs and other decision-making, as needed. With that said, the respondents voiced interest in having periodic refresher trainings.

**FIGURE 13.**  
Number of ministries involved in the implementation of the UNN analytical tools



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## *Working together more effectively in a crowded landscape*

Actors in the nutrition community are often highly specialized in one aspect of nutrition, approaching the subject from one sector or even one intervention. The tools provide a rallying point and enable diverse stakeholders to find the least common denominator upon which to ground collective action and coordinate efforts, particularly the mapping exercise. In this manner, the participatory processes behind the tools are of paramount importance to the findings that are generated by them.

Overall, more than half of respondents reported major improvements to multi-sectoral nutrition coordination through using UNN tools. When the full portfolio of tools was adopted, this figure went up to 100 percent. The tools also provided a means to strengthen the links between national and sub-national coordination mechanisms. Most respondents identified enhanced coordination as the main impact of the tools, with 90 percent exhibited for the MNO and 87 percent for the mapping. The impact assessment, furthermore, affirmed that the analytical tools provided an entry point to establish, operationalize and progressively strengthen the functionality of MSPs. Not only did those platforms become more dynamic, they were empowered to improve national oversight of nutrition actions across stakeholders (e.g. Mali<sup>99</sup> and Myanmar). In Zimbabwe, the inventory tool was able to identify shortfalls in UN coordination, spurring corrective action that increased equity in nutrition actions implemented in rural and urban areas. These trends suggest that the UNN tools are integral for scaling up nutrition, and a need to make them increasingly available to SUN and non-SUN countries alike.

<sup>99</sup> Read an exclusive interview with the SUN Government Focal Point in Mali to learn more about how the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping has improved coordination across sectors. Available at <https://bit.ly/3qLHzAS>.

## Making the UNN tools more accessible to countries

Demonstrating impact and learning about country experiences has prompted others to come forward. The DHIS2 Symposium, held between 1–17 September 2020, is a prime forum for participants to ask questions and share insights, particularly among countries who already use the District Health Information Software, version 2 (DHIS2). Thanks to UNN-REACH funding from Irish Aid, Abu Mortay Kamara, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at Sierra Leone’s SUN Secretariat, and Farah Sbytte, from the UNN Secretariat, participated in the virtual symposium, where the UNN tool for Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping was demoed for participants, including decision-makers in government ministries.

The UNN presentation placed an emphasis on how countries have undertaken the mapping exercise and thus applied the DHIS2 software outside the health sector. Examples from Burkina Faso, Lesotho, Mali and Niger were highlighted to show how the findings are being used to guide decision-making at the sub-national level (see Figure 14). Migrating what was formally an Excel-based tool to the DHIS2 platform conferred a series of benefits, particularly automated functions for customization and data analysis. This facilitates efforts to tailor the tool to the country context in terms of which interventions are mapped and at what geographic level. It also expedites the completion of successive rounds of mapping (e.g. annual reiterations) to track progress over time, thereby reducing the financial burden on countries associated with replication. In addition, the tool enables countries to store data on national servers. This means that Government is the custodian of mapping data, further increasing ownership in the exercise as well as related follow-up.

**FIGURE 14.**

Excerpt from UNN presentation at the DHIS2 Symposium (2020)

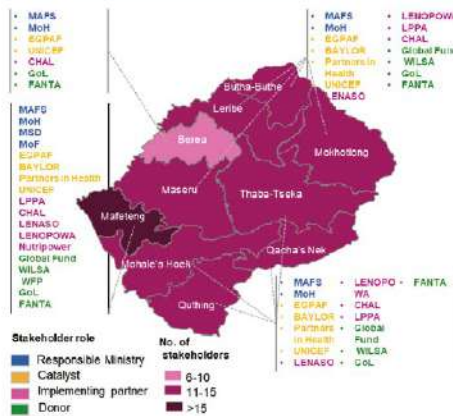
**The Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping**

**Data-driven, decision-making at sub-national level**

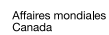
Overview of the nutrition landscape at sub-national level

*Who is doing what where for nutrition? What are their roles?*

**In most districts, more than 10 partners are present, except in Berea, where only 3 partners work on Nutrition Assessment**



With contributions to the UN Network Secretariat from:



A two-way flow of knowledge. Farah's participation at the symposium also enabled the UNN Secretariat to keep abreast of new developments and other applications of the DHIS2 software, which could potentially shed light on future enhancements/upgrades for the UNN tool, such as the ongoing integration of budgetary data. Additional colleagues involved in the country mappings will be able to attend the annual DHIS2 conference later this month, organized by the University of Oslo. This event attracts a more technical audience, particularly web developers, and will also help spread the word about the UNN mapping tool and its various uses.

## Looking ahead

The impact assessment provided valuable information about the effectiveness and utility of the UNN analytical tools. It also unveiled other striking insights. Among these, the UNN tools were found to have triggered increased commitment to joint efforts, including at sub-national levels. This alone is a positive outcome and merits further exploration. Similarly, the assessment identified areas for improvement, such as leveraging nutrition data that is stored in existing health-related DHIS2 systems for the mapping to further streamline processes and enhance information management. Continued demand, both from countries looking to embark upon these exercises for the first time and those looking to conduct successive rounds to track progress over time, are further testament to their popularity and usefulness. The challenge lies in mobilizing resources to help countries benefit from them. However, with the country-driven ethos of SUN 3.0 and the elevated role of knowledge management, the skies look promising.





UNN ANALYTICS

# Adapting UNN analytical tools to COVID-19 conditions



EXPERIENCES IN LIBERIA, SUDAN AND TOGO

*Table 22*

## Introduction

The UN Network has a portfolio of analytical tools<sup>100</sup> that have helped to catalyze dialogue and collective action on nutrition among stakeholders from various sectors, at both the national and sub-national level. These tools have proved themselves to be effective ‘door openers’ in a number of countries. They have been used by everyone from technical specialists to SUN Focal Points and other government stakeholders in nutrition coordination platforms to policymakers. To date, UNN analytics have been used in identifying nutrition capacity gaps, as accountability mechanisms for national nutrition plans, in building capacity for data management and for better coordinating multi-sectoral nutrition action.

### Recap of Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping tool

The mapping tool, developed by UNN-REACH with support from the Boston Consulting Group, identifies which stakeholders are doing what, where and how in order to provide a comprehensive picture of geographic and population coverage. It aims to galvanize a range of actors through generating data on ‘core nutrition actions’ that are implemented through the health, food, education and social protection systems as well as those that foster women’s empowerment. To date, the mapping exercise has been conducted in twenty-six countries and is currently underway in various others.

<sup>100</sup> UN Network Secretariat. 2020. *UN Network Annual Report, 2019. Annex B: Menu of UNN analytical tools.* Rome. Available at <https://bit.ly/3773J8G>.

## Conducting on-site training

Remote training has always been a feature for implementing UNN analytical tools. However, there had been a recent shift towards providing on-site training to country teams for the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping exercise. In-country UNN-REACH facilitators supported by international consultants and the UNN Analytics team had launched the mapping exercise through a participatory workshop, where different stakeholders are introduced to the tool and the methodology involved for the preparatory steps.

Following that initial exercise, the Analytics team had led on-site training for data collection and data entry. At the end of the exercise, another on-site visit was usually planned to hold a final workshop at which to present and validate the results. This method of on-site training and delivery of the mapping exercise has been carried out in about eighteen countries to date, between 2016–2019.

According to Farah Sbytte, UNN Analytics Coordinator, being on-site has encouraged involvement by a large group of stakeholders who are intensively involved in the process. “We found that the planned analytical training held in countries helped to build ownership and momentum. It also allows for greater rapport and trust within the country teams, which in turn facilitates the actual implementation of the exercise.” In Madagascar, the training on the mapping exercise included United Nations agencies (primarily the World Food Programme, WFP, and the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF), government ministries and institutions, such as the National Office for Nutrition and the National Statistics Institute, so stakeholders from both the United Nations side and from the government side are part of the technical team. They were working closely with a national consultant on this, with weekly support from the UNN Analytics team.



## Shift to a full virtual delivery in the Sudan

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the approach of delivering the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping, which had come to rely heavily on the use of on-site workshops and training.

“The pandemic has forced us to shift our training to a full virtual delivery, made possible only by the dedication of national staff,” confirms Farah. “It has also meant more support throughout the process to ensure the proper implementation of the exercise. We have developed additional materials to help with this, such as guidance documents on preparing the final dashboards in the DHIS2<sup>101</sup> platform and on preparing analytical products in the system.”



<sup>101</sup> This stands for District Health Information Software, version 2.

Recent training experiences on the mapping tool in Sudan are a case in point. The training process in the Sudan, which began with a face-to-face meeting last year, has been hampered by the political unrest in the country, and had to be adjusted to a fully virtual model following the outbreak of COVID-19. Subsequent training has been carried out remotely with the government team from the Ministry of Health to enable them to start the data collection process, supported by the WFP country office.

According to UNN independent consultant, Matthew Robinson, the initial in-country meeting with stakeholders in the Sudan was important in establishing a relationship prior to remote training. “It really helped to have met the key people before lockdown – to be able to put a face to a name.” However, he also felt that in contrast to previous methods of working, the new model had definitely yielded some benefits.

“With past assignments, we would spend two days with staff to help them prepare the data for the mapping exercise. It was really a hand-holding exercise – we would say what we needed and they would provide it,” says Matthew. “With Sudan, the MoH staff have had to be more proactive and independent in tracking down the data on their own. I’ve made suggestions but they’ve taken ownership of the exercise and found their own solutions and data sources. It really feels as though they better understand the process – and it feels more sustainable.”

## Launch workshop in Liberia

The mapping launch and training in Liberia, in October 2020, has been a learning experience as it is the first mixed approach, with participants in one room and UNN analytics facilitators joining online. A total of 44 stakeholders took part, from both national level (mapping team members are from the Ministry of Health, the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, civil society and the Liberia SUN Secretariat); and sub-national level (representatives from fifteen counties). Other participants included the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education; non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Concern Worldwide and Save the Children; and United Nations agencies, such as UNICEF, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO).



Although the usual connectivity issues were challenging, it was the national consultant, Julius Lekpeh, who played a starring role in ensuring success by leading sessions whenever the connection went off and keeping participants engaged. Participatory approaches also proved effective, with volunteers taking

turns in demonstrating some District Health Information Software 2 (DHIS2) features directly to colleagues. Participants were also divided into smaller groups, each group containing one person with prior experience in DHIS2 to help others complete the practical exercises.

“We’ve noticed in particular that MoH support [for the mapping] has been very high during this workshop,” confirms Kou Baawo, the UNN-REACH Facilitator in Liberia. The Director of Nutrition and the DHIS2 expert for the ministry were also supportive during the planning and implementation stages, allowing the use of the MoH information system for the activity. “Interest is continuing to grow in using the [mapping] tool as it is being introduced,” she notes.

The next steps are for sub-national staff to begin data collection back in their respective counties. These stakeholders will also be supported via virtual interactions with the national mapping team, alongside local support for the mapping process with the involvement of United Nations agencies and other partners. Data collection is expected to be completed within one month, with results to be presented by the end of 2020.

## Togo - plans for future progress

**P**lans for using the mapping tool in Togo are still in the preparatory stage. Farah from the UNN Secretariat confirms that the task of customizing the tool is taking longer than it would during an on-site visit, due to the need for additional technical guidance and follow-up support. Nevertheless, countries like Togo have assumed a larger responsibility in ensuring that all the preparatory steps are completed and that the final products will be delivered. “Before we were working together [UNN and country teams] but we [UNN] were definitely leading the process.

Now the country actors know that this information will be used to calculate the nutrition indicators they have selected, so the exercise is really linking things up for them.”

Future training for Togo will involve remote training on tablets for mobile data collection and adapting the tool to include data on COVID-19 for the first time. The plan is to have a national consultant in the training room together with all of the regional data collectors, but with the UNN Secretariat doing the training remotely to provide the ‘best of both worlds’. “This type of quasi-remote training means that everyone can be in same room to look over each other’s shoulders to see what other people are doing, under the guidance of a national consultant,” says Farah.



## *Challenges in remote training*

Challenges related to connectivity and maintaining focus throughout remote trainings might be obvious obstacles, according to Farah. Both have an effect on the training process. While connectivity issues are harder to overcome, training days have been reduced to half days and delivered over a longer timespan, with a focus on one specific topic per session in place of longer, full-day training sessions. “The shorter virtual training sessions have enabled us to deliver digestible amounts of information, which has been better for those being trained,” confirms Farah. “It’s also given us more time to ensure the information has been well understood.”

However, the new mode of working has meant that the different stages of the process do take more time to finalize. There have obviously been less ‘hands on’ activities and support to the country technical teams as well.

## *Building national and sub-national capacity*

In addition to encouraging increased ownership of the UNN tool at the national level, the virtual approach has allowed for better mobilization of country-level human resources due to the need for national technical experts to be involved on-site rather than the previous involvement of external consultants. This has been achieved through identifying key technical focal points to ensure the tools are functional and customized to the country specifications. In the Sudan, the UNN has brought on board MoH staff already working with the DHIS2 data system. This should also build the capacity of key personnel, where they are available, to enable national actors to replicate the exercise on a periodic basis without the need for extensive external training and support.



## Next steps for training in a post-COVID-19 era

Future implementation of the mapping tool will definitely use the mechanisms that have enabled increased ownership, such as involving more technical experts from national ministries and institutions. This will also allow for more responsibility to be given to the country teams through engaging them from the early stages in the preparatory steps. This new phase of remote training has allowed the UNN to identify key stages where on-site support might be crucial, while also looking at where remote support is as efficient, thereby reducing the cost of the mapping exercise and the burden on country budgets.





# Conclusion

These tales show the dynamism of UNN's contributions to the SUN Movement as it has embarked upon the final half of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025). They are also testament to the mounting momentum of the UNN at country level on multiple fronts. Starting with UNN people from UNRCs, to UNN-REACH facilitators, UNN chairs and other colleagues from the United Nations agencies, the UN is fortifying joint action in pursuit of shared results and greater impact. UNRCs are increasingly recognizing the UNN as a platform for collaboration on nutrition at the country level and seeing how it can trigger joint UN action in other areas thanks to its horizontal breadth.

Other stories have shed light on how the UNN is working to strengthen government capacity for improved nutrition coordination between different sectors and stakeholders and to secure (and maintain!) nutrition a prominent place on the political agenda. In addition, UNN analytics continue to delineate the path to scale up and provide a stepping stone to new ways of working together.

Looking ahead, 2021 will be an intense year with golden opportunities to bolster commitment for nutrition. The United Nations Food Systems Summit, including the country dialogues leading up to it, and the N4G Summit, will be crucial rallying points and avenues for the UN voice in nutrition to be heard. But nothing is a given, particularly during this COVID-19 era and its immediate aftermath. The United Nations cannot be complacent. Resources will be constrained, and yet, there will be more vulnerable people, requiring unprecedented support worldwide.

With SUN 3.0 and changing UN institutional arrangements on the horizon and questions about what the future may hold, one thing is clear. Knowledge management will play a foremost role. Both the documentation and curation of country stories will continue to be important mechanisms for peer learning and replicating good practices. Likewise, efforts to measure the impact of joint action to learn more about what works on the ground in different types of settings and to substantiate requests for new nutrition investments, amidst competing interests.

The UNN celebrates the ‘we’, and the knowledge it has accrued over the years can provide rich soil for building back better together.



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<https://bit.ly/2Jb4ksN>

The time is now. The UN Network is calling upon all United Nations agencies at country level to bolster integrated action, leveraging nutrition as an enabler to achieve the SDGs.

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