5. Joint UN efforts for nutrition capacity strengthening
5.1. STRONG CAPACITY IS PIVOTAL FOR DELIVERING NUTRITION RESULTS AT SCALE

Governments are increasingly acting on the global commitment to end malnutrition in all its forms by enacting policies, strategies and plans that provide a national roadmap for nutrition. Estimates provided in the latest Global Nutrition Policy Review (2018) show that up to 167 countries have either developed a policy, strategy or plan for improving nutrition outcomes and promoting healthy diets across their populace. In spite of these policy commitments, the 2018 Global Nutrition Report noted that less than 50 percent of countries are on track to meet at least one of the nine global nutrition targets and no country is on course to meet all nine. This suggests that countries still face considerable implementation gaps which hinder efforts to combat malnutrition. Without adequate capacity, the effective implementation of nutrition governance frameworks will be compromised at national and sub-national levels, with far-reaching consequences.

To this effect, the third outcome of the UNN results framework (outcome 3) calls for increased human and institutional capacity to support nutrition scale-up at all levels. The UNN, therefore, works closely with governments, including SUN Government Focal Points, as well as other key actors to enhance functional and technical nutrition capacities at the national and sub-national levels. These efforts encompass three dimensions of capacity development, namely: the enabling environment; the organizational level; and the individual level. The 2019 reporting exercise captured efforts undertaken collectively by United Nations agencies and other UN entities to strengthen nutrition capacity within the enabling environment and organizations. Whereas the former encompasses legal frameworks, national policies, action plans, parliamentarians, SUN Government Focal Points and staff in government ministries, the organizational dimension includes operational capacity, information systems, staffing levels/the nutrition workforce and governance platforms, such as nutrition coordination mechanisms.

5.2. SUMMARY TRENDS IN NUTRITION CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

The following sections outline the support provided by the country UNNs as well as through the UNN analytics to enhance nutrition capacities within the government and across United Nations agencies during the reporting period. Overall, the results show that the UN is collectively investing considerable energy and resources into strengthening such capacities, starting with efforts to assess nutrition capacity needs and formulate subsequent capacity development plans. Many country UNNs had also reportedly provided support to government-based nutrition staff, helping to bolster other capacity development activities. The responses to the 2019 UNN country-level questionnaire also indicated that the majority of UNNs had taken measures to strengthen capacity on common nutrition messaging. Furthermore, the UNNs have been increasingly involved in supporting the development of nutrition policies, strategies and plans in countries. High levels were also sustained to foster multi-sectoral/stakeholder engagement for nutrition through the UNN’s support to MSPs, both national and sub-

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33. Adapted from the Nutrition Capacity Assessment guidance package, developed by the UNN Secretariat in collaboration with the five founding UNN agencies.

34. A number of other capacity development activities were pursued by the United Nations agencies on an individual basis, although these were not reported here in view of the collective lens characteristic of UNN’s engagement.
national. The 2019 UNN reporting data also elucidates encouraging trends for strengthening nutrition capacity within the United Nations System. With that said, more efforts are required to strengthen capacity to improve UN coordination, particularly joint delivery of UN nutrition programming in order to reach the UNCT’s full potential. These findings, in turn, serve as helpful inputs to guide future UNN work on capacity strengthening, providing insights for the Nutrition for Growth Summit to be hosted by the Government of Japan.

5.3. A CLOSER LOOK AT GOVERNMENT CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

UNDERSTANDING NUTRITION CAPACITY NEEDS AND HOW TO ACT

Capacity assessments enable countries to identify capacity gaps and bottlenecks in multi-sectoral nutrition actions. They can also inform the subsequent design of a capacity development response that may be integrated into a national capacity development agenda for nutrition. In 2019, 67 percent of country UNNs reported efforts to assist governments in identifying nutrition capacity needs and developing a plan to meet them. This represents an increase from figures recorded in the baseline assessment (2016), where only 45 percent of country UNNs had done so. Many of the country UNNs (55 percent) indicated that intense support had been provided, suggesting that significant UN resources had been devoted to identifying and addressing capacity gaps at the country level. These trends were likely influenced by the fact that the 2016 UNN baseline assessment had revealed that the UNN was undertaking substantial efforts to strengthen nutrition capacity without necessarily assessing the needs.

The 2019 reporting exercise also revealed that many of these efforts were jointly undertaken with the government and other SUN networks, thereby helping to maximize impact. Moreover, nearly 60 percent of the activities undertaken covered both national and sub-national levels so that nutrition capacity gaps at the local and community levels could also be taken into account.

FIGURE 21. UNN efforts to assess nutrition capacity and formulate nutrition capacity development plans (2019)

Support to identify nutrition capacity needs and develop a plan to address those (across 60 countries)

Level of support (across 40 countries)

External partners engaged

Government (39 countries)

Other SUN networks (32 countries)

With contributions to the UN Network Secretariat from:

35. Of the 60 SUN countries surveyed, 40 countries responded to this question in the 2019 UNN reporting exercise.
In Bangladesh, FAO’s Meeting the Undernutrition Challenge (MUCH) policy advisory project provided financial and technical support to conduct an institutional capacity needs assessment for food security and nutrition across selected ministries. The assessment culminated in a set of recommendations that were embraced by the collective UNN, calling for the establishment of organizational development plans, nutrition trainings and strengthening multi-sectoral nutrition policies as well as their respective implementation and monitoring processes. The UNN in Bangladesh is also assisting the government with efforts to implement these recommendations within the Ministry of Food, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

Thanks to the Nutrition Capacity Assessment conducted in Chad (2018) and the ensuing five-year nutrition development plan, the country UNN was able to mobilize funding for a new training project (FORMAT-NUT), which is applying the recommendations and guidelines from the assessment. The UNN-REACH facilitators have temporarily been coordinating FORMAT-NUT activities until the project coordinator is deployed.

In the Philippines, the country UNN has conducted in-depth assessments and research projects as part of efforts to identify nutrition capacity needs and provide evidence-based recommendations for nutrition policies. These were pursued by multiple United Nations agencies amounting to a comprehensive package, including: the Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis conducted by UNICEF and WFP; qualitative research on the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme (based on conditional cash transfers) carried out by UNICEF; the SAM Bottleneck Analysis conducted by UNICEF; the Food Quantification Study undertaken by FAO; and the Integrated Food Security Classification (IPC) undertaken by FAO and WFP, among others.

Yemen’s UNN carried out a multi-stakeholder review, which in turn, led to the development of a nutrition needs assessment and plan. The South Sudan Nutrition Cluster, which comprises United Nations agencies and other partners, identified gaps in the capacities of key nutrition partners. The assessment led to the organization of a series of Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions at both national and sub-national levels to enhance the delivery of nutrition interventions in emergencies.

Rwanda’s UNN supported assessments on maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN) and the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), leveraging UNICEF and WHO expertise and resources. The identified gaps informed the design of a curriculum for community health workers and a review of the counselling tools on MIYCN.

A landscape analysis of IYCF in emergencies (IYCF-E), conducted in 2016 by UNICEF’s Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), in collaboration with Save the Children, revealed inadequate attention to IYCF interventions in crisis situations throughout countries in the region. This coupled with low investment led to poor IYCF practices, exacerbating levels of acute malnutrition and increasing the risk of infant mortality. To address this challenge, United Nations agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, partnered with Save the Children to prioritize IYCF-E in countries within the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes. The efforts focused on enhancing related capacities at both country and regional levels by undertaking capacity gap assessments to identify specific training needs; providing technical support to the Technical Rapid Response teams in country offices; and providing joint statements to give guidance on infant feeding in the context of the Ebola virus disease (EVD). These measures collectively contributed to improving awareness and enhancing government capacity for addressing IYCF-E. They also helped improve collaboration among United Nations agencies and partners, paving the way for a harmonized and complementary approach with wider coverage to prevent acute malnutrition and safeguard recommended IYCF practices in emergency contexts. As a result, an enhanced continuum of care on IYCF-E has been established in the region and a strategic reference document on IYCF-E has been developed to guide future efforts, with a view to supporting nutrition gains among vulnerable mothers, infants and children.

36. The Chad assessment was conducted, through UNN-REACH, just prior to the 2018-19 reporting cycle, as highlighted in the 2018 UN Network Annual Report.

37. SAM refers to severe acute malnutrition.
STRENGTHENING NUTRITION DATA MANAGEMENT CAPACITIES TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING

Adequate data management facilitates country efforts to monitor and report on progress made. It also can guide corrective action to improve nutrition for healthy people and prosperous nations. The collection of nutrition-relevant data in a common repository allows actors to determine where and what nutrition interventions are most needed, helping to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’. According to the findings of the 2019 UNN reporting exercise, the majority of country UNNs (51 out of 60) had worked to improve government capacity in nutrition data management. Of those, 43 UNNs noted that these efforts had prompted key actors to utilize nutrition data in decision-making. These efforts were related to platforms based on DHIS2 in multiple countries, including those directly supported by the UNN Secretariat.

BOX 8. Window for learning
Second round of mapping reveals glaring coverage shortfalls and clarifies nutrition priorities in Niger

The UNN works closely with governments and different stakeholders to increase nutrition data availability, particularly nutrition intervention coverage through its increasingly popular mapping tool. Four years after Niger’s first mapping exercise, completed under the auspices of UNN-REACH, a second round was initiated in December 2018 thanks to funding from FAO (through its Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation [FIRST] initiative) and the SUN Movement Secretariat (through UNOPS). Niger is one of a growing list of countries to repeat the exercise, with a view to monitoring coverage trends on the path to scale-up.

The exercise engaged eight ministries and over sixty stakeholders, capturing their activity right down to the municipality (commune) level. It also expanded the scope of nutrition actions mapped from nineteen to twenty-seven, providing a concrete opportunity to link humanitarian and development workstreams. While this is just one activity, it is a step forward in strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus in the area of nutrition. The idea is that by knowing which interventions have low coverage and which geographic areas are underserved, the government will be better placed to coordinate nutrition actions across stakeholders. The mapping illustrated that intervention coverage varies from region to region. Less than 15 percent of the mapped interventions had a geographic coverage greater than or equal to 50 percent, a sobering wake-up call for many actors. It also revealed that most actions rely on three delivery mechanisms: the health system; community relays; and non-governmental organizations. This underscores the need to explore new partnerships and innovative ways to augment the coverage of these services to vulnerable populations. Consequently, the results have provided a basis for actors to re-frame and better align their efforts to deliver well-targeted packages of prioritized interventions with proven impact across communities.

In addition, the mapping identified data gaps and further strengthened data management at both national and sub-national levels. A national mapping team, including government staff, was trained by the UNN Secretariat on the online platform (based on DHIS2 software) and provided subsequent hands-on coaching. The Niger mapping also affirmed the feasibility of integrating mapping data into the National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN), a first for the wider nutrition community. To facilitate this process, members of the national mapping team were invited to participate in NIPN’s Technical Committee. “It was unanimously recognized that the mapping exercise was 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, an Analyst at the UNN Secretariat. It has also created an appetite for data-driven policymaking and the review of the national nutrition governance strategy.
In Lao PDR, the UNN, through UNICEF, WFP and WHO, worked with other partners to develop a nutrition surveillance system. The platform is currently being utilized by all sectors to inform the mid-term review of the National Plan of Action for Nutrition as well as to formulate its next phase. Ethiopia’s UNN, via UNICEF, supported the establishment of a Unified Nutrition Information System, which contains both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive data, using DHIS2. The system enables governments to collect and analyse data from different nutrition implementation sectors, helping it and other nutrition actors (including United Nations agencies) obtain a holistic view of the situation. In the Comoros, the UNN conducted trainings for health workers on data collection and integration into DHIS2, while the UNN Secretariat trained government staff on the UNN mapping tool, based on the same software.

In Burkina Faso, the country UNN is supporting the government’s Department of Statistics to pilot the data capture of nutrition programmes in two districts, using the country’s DHIS2 platforms. Mozambique’s country UNN supported a nutrition scoping exercise to inform the development of an integrated multi-sectoral information system on food security and nutrition. The Network also provided financial and technical support for trainings on nutrition planning and monitoring at both national and sub-national levels. In Myanmar, the Network has collectively funded various nutrition positions in government as well as the UNN-REACH Facilitator, who directly supports efforts to improve multi-sectoral nutrition governance. WHO has funded five nutrition-related staff positions within the government in order to step up the country’s nutrition data management capacity. In addition, UNICEF and WFP have funded other nutrition positions within government, further helping to build a robust nutrition workforce in the country. These efforts attest that country UNNs are actively taking measures to ensure that governments are well-equipped with tools and data management skills to support evidence-based policy and action for improved nutrition outcomes.

In 51 of 60 countries, the UNN provided support to governments in strengthening data management systems for nutrition... prompting the use of nutrition data by relevant actors in 43 countries.

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38. This differed from the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping, conducted through the tool developed and supported by the UNN Secretariat.
BOX 9. Window for learning
Joint UN efforts help integrate nutrition indicators in Guinea’s Health Information System

Like several countries, the Government of Guinea is committed to achieving the global nutrition targets by 2025. Efforts to chart progress were, nevertheless, hampered by the lack of indicators fit for purpose. To strengthen the national nutrition surveillance system, United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, WFP and WHO, partnered with Action Contre la Faim (ACF) and Hellen Keller International (HKI) to provide support to the Ministry of Public Health’s Nutrition Information and Health Information System Department. The support enabled an analysis of the nutrition indicators utilized in the collection of data through maternal and child health services. The analysis also examined data gaps, data quality and data utilization for clinical, programmatic and strategic decisions. Furthermore, it identified opportunities to address these gaps with the aim of enabling the country to monitor the nutritional status of Guinean citizens. A set of key indicators was developed and added to the existing list of indicators, in line with the country’s nutrition profile.

Based on results of the analysis, Guinea’s DHIS2 tool and other data collection tools were revised so that the new indicators could be incorporated into the existing platforms. The agencies also worked together to strengthen the competencies of national staff for undertaking child growth assessments to identify all forms of malnutrition, ensuring data validity during data collection and timeliness of reporting. In addition, trainings were conducted to strengthen the skills of health workers in utilizing nutrition data at all levels. Through this demand-driven and government-led initiative, the TA collectively provided by United Nations agencies engaged in the UNN led to a detailed mapping of healthcare services that collect nutrition data as well as the main indicators collected.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE NUTRITION WORKFORCE

As many as 72 percent of country UNNs reported the provision of financial support to government-based nutrition staff in 2019. This support took various forms, including funding to attend nutrition-related trainings, workshops and events. For instance, the UNN in Cambodia provided financial resources to enable government participation at international trainings and conferences, to hold national workshops and consultations as well as to support the process of developing the national nutrition strategy. Cameroon’s UNN, through UNICEF, seconded personnel to the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Fight against Malnutrition as part of greater UNN efforts to improve multi-sectoral coordination and programme delivery. In Liberia, UNN-REACH along with the various United Nations agencies persuasively advocated for the government to formally nominate a SUN Focal Point, a development that materialized in 2019. The UNN in Indonesia provided financial support for staffing at the national SUN secretariat. In addition, UN staff was seconded to the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as the District Education Office in the Pidie district to support the provision of nutritious school meals at both national and sub-national levels.

In 43 of 60 countries, the UNN provided financial support to government-based nutrition staff.
In Mali, UNN-REACH has provided financial support to the National Nutrition Coordination Unit (Cellule de Coordination de la Nutrition), helping to animate the multi-sectoral approach in the country. Nepal’s UNN, through UNICEF and WFP, has supported two staff positions in order to assist the effective implementation of the country’s Multi-sectoral Nutrition Plan. In Zimbabwe, the UNN funded three national staff positions within the Ministry of Health and Childcare, including a Deputy Director for Nutrition, Nutrition Measurement and Evaluation Officer and a Communications Officer. The Network also provides salary support for 330 Ward Nutrition Coordinators, employed by the Ministry of Health at sub-national level.

“In a difficult environment, the continued support from the UN Network has ensured the retention of critical staff for nutrition.”
Government nutrition staff, Zimbabwe

The above efforts attest UN’s commitment to ensuring that there is government capacity to deliver on the national nutrition agenda, while also encouraging governments to allocate increased domestic funding to nutrition.

STRENGTHENING NUTRITION ADVOCACY

Considering the diversity of nutrition’s crowded landscape, it is critically important to find common ground and speak with one voice in order to place nutrition high on the political agenda of countries. Over the years, the UNN, including UNN-REACH, has made concerted efforts help actors establish a common nutrition language and articulate common messaging. These types of exercises often provide a prime opportunity to define targets and clarify how actors will work towards shared nutrition goals. The results from the 2019 reporting cycle show that country UNNs are substantially contributing to nutrition advocacy efforts to attract increased attention to and investment in nutrition. The majority of country UNNs (80 percent) had reportedly taken measures to build the capacity of national and local actors to generate common nutrition messaging in order to inform or strengthen nutrition advocacy. These activities ranged from supporting the development of common nutrition narratives to assisting efforts to establish nutrition advocacy and communications committees and the development of advocacy and communications strategies.

In 48 of 60 countries, the UNN provided support to national and local actors to generate common nutrition messaging.
Evidence suggests that frameworks anchored in legislation are more effective for fostering sustainable improvement in nutrition outcomes. With standing legislative and budgetary powers, Members of Parliament are critical partners in the quest to attain food and nutrition security. Yet, the role of parliamentarians can only be effectively harnessed if they are nutrition savvy. The United Nations agencies in Eastern Africa have therefore worked together to engage parliamentarians in the regional and national nutrition agendas to help address systematic challenges, such as the weak implementation of policy frameworks, and accelerate progress on the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) goals.

FAO, UNICEF and WFP kicked off these efforts by co-organizing a dialogue to sensitize parliamentarians on measures they can take to support the achievement of nutrition targets. The participants were enthusiastic and committed to jointly establish sub-regional platforms to facilitate related experience sharing among parliamentarians. In addition, the agencies jointly supported the participation of parliamentarians in major nutrition events, such as the SUN Global Gathering, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Meeting on Nutrition and the Global Parliamentary Forum on Food Security and Nutrition. The United Nations agencies also carried out capacity building activities for Members of Parliament, supported the development of national alliances for food security and nutrition and provided support to foster strategic partnerships between regional organizations (e.g. the African Union), regional economic communities and academic networks.

Overall, these efforts led to increased awareness of parliamentarians on nutrition issues and their role in tackling them. The efforts culminated in the launch of the Eastern African Parliamentary Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in April 2019, which brings together ten countries and two regional economic communities (e.g. the East African Community and Intergovernmental Authority on Development). Three new parliamentary alliances were also established in Djibouti, Somalia and Uganda, with discussions underway to establish similar ones in South Sudan and the Sudan.

This regional milestone has already contributed to related advancements at the country level. In Djibouti, measures are being taken to consolidate separate but related coordination mechanisms (e.g. nutrition, food security, social protection, child well-being). These developments have also helped address legislative gridlock in Uganda on a food and nutrition bill that had been pending for years. The bill was since revamped and the country’s Food and Nutrition Policy was revised in preparation for its adoption by the Office of the Prime Minister.

Many of these efforts were supported by UNN-REACH during the 2018-19 reporting period, illustrating its high engagement in this aspect of nutrition. For example, the UNN-REACH facilitators in Burkina Faso worked with the SUN Government Focal point, colleagues from the UN agencies and the UNRC as well as other nutrition stakeholders to spearhead the development of a Common Nutrition Narrative. Launched in late 2018, the narrative serves as the bedrock of successive SUN activity in the country from the capital to sub-national areas. The process of developing the common narrative was highly participative, thanks to the neutral facilitators, providing an opportunity to nurture the collective spirit of the SUN Movement and reaffirm commitment among SUN actors in the country. While developed by UNN-REACH, the document outlines a set of recommendations for each of the six SUN networks (including UNN) as
well as for the SUN Government Focal Point, key ministries and decentralized government authorities. Chad’s UNN, including through UNN-REACH, was actively engaged in the development of a nutrition advocacy strategy to bolster the operationalization of the country’s Inter-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan, 2017-2025 (PAINA). In Zimbabwe, UNN-REACH facilitation services also supported the development of the country’s Food and Nutrition Advocacy and Communication Strategy and Plan (2019), which addresses emerging challenges such as rising levels of overweight, obesity and dietary related non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Furthermore, the collective UNN, including UNN-REACH, supported the establishment of Zimbabwe’s Food and Nutrition Knowledge Hub, which provides a one-stop repository for all multi-sectoral activities relating to nutrition and food security. The UNN-REACH Facilitator in Lesotho also played an instrumental role in strengthening government capacity for nutrition advocacy, including efforts to support His Majesty King Letsie III in his activism on the topic. This included the formulation and operationalization of a road map for strengthening the capacity of Lesotho’s Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office (FNCO) in the area of advocacy. The road map has also enriched H.M, The King’s Advocacy Plan on Nutrition. In collaboration with the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN), the UNN Secretariat produced a podcast on the Power of nutrition champions,\(^\text{41}\) leveraging UNN-REACH experiences in Sierra Leone. The podcast explores the tactics that the UNN-REACH Facilitator used to engage parliamentarians and to position nutrition as critical for the nation’s wellbeing and prosperity. These efforts helped transcend nutrition from a technical issue with a narrow following to a political priority for Sierra Leone, paving the way for increased commitments to nutrition. The podcast also interviewed, the UNICEF Country Representative, who was chairing the UNN at the time and a representative from Irish Aid, who praised the facilitator for his ability to couple soft skills with nutrition data, including that generated and visualized through the UNN analytical tools.

\(^{41}\) To listen to the podcast, visit https://www.ennonline.net/medialib/podcast/nutritionchampionsierraleone.
The UNN analytical tools have captured the attention of decision-makers and have raised awareness about the social and economic consequences of malnutrition. They have also identified population groups and geographic areas most adversely affected within a given country, thereby bringing inequities into focus. Results from the recently conducted impact assessment revealed that findings generated by the analytics have assisted efforts to advocate for increased budgetary allocations to nutrition by governments and/or donors, among other uses. The tools had also reportedly enriched efforts to ensure that nutrition benefits from alternative and/or innovative financing, especially in emergency contexts where funding sources are most expedient.

In Ghana, the findings played a significant role in the development of a common analysis of ongoing investments in nutrition as well as in identifying investment gaps. The analytics have also played a critical role in positioning nutrition as a multi-sectoral issue and inspiring new actors to enter the nutrition arena, as observed in Myanmar. Visual outputs from the analyses were also used to sensitize high-ranking government officials in the country, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and ministers, to bolster political support. In particular, the findings from the mapping exercise were instrumental in identifying gaps in intervention coverage. This, in turn, generated demand for the development of a new national nutrition plan that was grounded in context-specific data and launched in July 2018.

There are also examples of how the collective Network supported nutrition advocacy outside the UNN-REACH mechanism. In Nigeria, the UNN supported nutrition advocacy efforts which led to the development and dissemination of national guidelines on community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM), the Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and the government’s zero-water campaign (on exclusive breastfeeding). Other advocacy efforts undertaken by the United Nations agencies in Nigeria prompted government to allocate USD 6.7 million in domestic resources to nutrition. Vietnam’s UNN worked, through UNICEF and WHO, to develop key messages on nutrition with a view to raising public awareness on breastfeeding and proper care for newborns during World Breastfeeding Week (2018).

42. Further information about the impact assessment is highlighted in section 4 on the UNN analytics.
PROMOTING MULTI-SECTORAL/STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN NUTRITION

As previously discussed, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder engagement plays an important role in gathering various actors, resources and ideas to tackle the multiple dimensions of malnutrition. In 2019, nearly all country UNNs (90 percent) reported having provided support to either establish or strengthen effective MSPs for nutrition, both at national and sub-national levels. Approximately half (49 percent) of the countries described the extent of support provided as 'intense', while 40 percent qualified it as 'moderate', indicating that country UNNs had devoted considerable human and financial resources to ensure the establishment and effective functioning of MSPs. Country UNNs have also engaged in the activities of the MSPs, with 93 percent of countries reporting participation. In some countries, such as Pakistan, the UNN's engagement has contributed to building capacity of decentralized MSPs, called provincial SUN secretariats.

The UNN provided support to establish/strengthen effective functional MSPs in 54 out of 60 countries.

FIGURE 23. Extent of UNN support provided to establish/strengthen MSPs (2019)

With contributions to the UN Network Secretariat from:

Additionally, 88 percent of the Networks documented efforts to support the SUN Government Focal Point, who is often directly responsible for establishing and facilitating the activities of MSPs. This support focused mainly on strengthening the capacity of the SUN Government Focal Point to convene different stakeholders in a common nutrition working space. As depicted in Figure 24, most of the efforts undertaken by country UNNs in this regard encompassed both national and sub-national levels.

The UNN supported SUN Government Focal Points or other nutrition authorities and empowered them to bring different stakeholders into a common space in 53 out of 60 countries.

43. 53 out of 60 country UNNs had qualified the level of collective UN support to MSPs in their responses.
44. Further insights provided in section 3 under the subsection on Engagement in MSPs.
FIGURE 24. UNN support extended to SUN Government Focal Points and other nutrition authorities at national and sub-national levels (2019)

BOX 12. Window for learning
UNN analytics are a means for enhancing multi-sectoral/stakeholder coordination

The 2019 impact assessment on the use of the UNN tools revealed that countries, where all five tools had been utilized, had exhibited notable improvements in multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder coordination for nutrition than in countries where only one tool had been deployed. All countries in the former category reported a shift from moderate to great improvement in multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination, as compared to the 80 percent of countries, who reported such impact by utilizing the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping tool alone.

In Myanmar, the full set of tools was deployed, motivating additional sectors and stakeholders to engage in nutrition and resulting in enhanced collaboration among them from government ministries to United Nations agencies and CSOs. The analytical exercises were spearheaded by the country’s nutrition committee (the NNC) with close support from both the UNN-REACH facilitators and the UNN Secretariat. In many ways, the analytical exercises provided an entry point for multi-sectoral/stakeholder discussions and powered the nutrition coordination engine. This helped to operationalize a well-functioning NNC as well as the Nutrition Sector Coordination Group established in 2017. In addition, the findings from these analytics served as key inputs for the development of the country’s first Multi-sectoral National Plan of Action on Nutrition (MS-NPAN), formulated through a stepwise participatory process led by NNC, engaging this wide group of nutrition stakeholders. The new nutrition plan includes a stream on nutrition coordination and governance, among the document’s three streams, with a view to supporting continued improvement in this area. See Box 3, Window for learning for further information about how the UNN supported these efforts in Myanmar.

45. The Nutrition Sector Coordination Group is overseen by the Development Assistance Coordinating Unit under the Ministry of Planning and Finance. Chaired by the Ministry of Health and Sports, the group involves three other ministries vested in nutrition (Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation; Education; and Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement). This arrangement fosters multi-sectoral engagement while leveraging the Ministry of Health and Sports’ nutrition capacity, where the National Nutrition Committee (NNC) is housed.
STRENGTHENING CAPACITY TO FORMULATE MULTI-SECTORAL NUTRITION POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND PLANS

In addition to active engagement in MSPs, 97 percent of country UNNs reported efforts to support the development of multi-sectoral nutrition policies, strategies or plans, leveraging the technical expertise of two or more United Nations agencies. This represents a slight increase from figures recorded in 2016, whereby 94 percent of the countries had reported undertaking such efforts.46 Additional information about the nutrition governance frameworks supported by the country UNNs during the 2018-19 UNN reporting period is outlined in Table 3. In some cases (Eswatini, Guinea, Madagascar and Malawi), the UNN support entailed a mix of both technical and financial assistance. Other SUN countries (Guatemala and Peru) benefitted from receiving UNN support for nutrition planning at decentralized levels. In Guatemala, the UNN assisted the development of municipal plans to address acute malnutrition in various regions of the country, while in Peru, the United Nations agencies collectively helped to strengthen nutrition plans in several provinces and districts.

97%

In 58 of 60 countries, the UNN supported the development of multi-sectoral nutrition policies and/or plans.

46 Only 47 countries responded to this question in 2016. As a result, the 94 percent noted here represents 44 out of 47 countries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Multi-sectoral nutrition policies, strategies and plans developed with UNN support (2018–19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eswatini</td>
<td>Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>National Food and Nutrition Policy and Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Response Plan for the Fuego Volcano Emergency, with an emphasis on food security and nutrition Municipal plans to address acute malnutrition in multiple regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>National Nutrition Policy Multi-sectoral Strategic Plan on Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>Food and Nutrition Strategy and costed action plan with M&amp;E framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>A costed implementation plan and a corresponding M&amp;E plan to complement the National Nutrition Action Plan (PNAN-III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>National Nutrition Multi-Sectoral Policy and Strategic Plan (2018–2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>Regulatory text/provisions for implementing the Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Multi-Sectoral National Plan of Action for Nutrition, 2018–2022 (MS-NPAN)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Multi-sectoral plan for addressing anaemia Provincial and district nutrition plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The Philippines | National policies, plans and guidelines on:  
• Nutrition for Women of Reproductive Age  
• Micronutrient Supplementation  
• Guidelines on Dietary Supplementation  
• Strategic Plan for IYCF  
Various legislation and regulations:  
• Health and Nutrition of the Mother and Child Act regarding the first 1000 days and accompanying regulations  
• Universal Health Care Law/Policy  
• Maternity Protection Law  
• National Feeding Law  
• Tax on Sweetened Beverages |

*Further insights about how the UNN supported the development of this plan are reported in Boxes 3 and 12.
BOX 13. Window for learning
UNN’s multi-sectoral TA facility advances efforts to foster policy coherence in Liberia

As mentioned in Section 4, UNN-REACH supported the initial preparations for the MNO and PPO in Liberia (April 2019) just as the 2019 reporting cycle was coming to a close. While the full MNO results became available at a later stage, a preliminary situation analysis dashboard was prepared, which repackaged existing nutrition data in a more comprehensive, yet summarized format. Actors also set out to take stock of the country’s nutrition-related policies, strategies and plans through the PPO. These tools helped provide a clearer picture of Liberia’s nutrition landscape, including how it is reflected in various governance frameworks, thus creating fertile ground for increased policy coherence and subsequent parliamentarian engagement.

Additionally, the above efforts helped build momentum for a review of the National Nutrition Policy undertaken by the government. The review drew upon UNN-REACH’s neutral facilitation services and technical support from the United Nations agencies, involving the Ministers of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry, Education and Health, among others. The outcomes of the review inspired various ministries to commit to multi-sectoral approaches which give due consideration to nutrition.

5.4. IMPROVING NUTRITION CAPACITY WITHIN UN ENTITIES

UN JOINT PROGRAMMING TO ACHIEVE INCREASED CONVERGENCE ON NUTRITION

UN joint programming on nutrition, including UN Joint Programmes, brings different United Nations agencies together to execute projects that address malnutrition. The 2019 reporting exercise asked country UNNs to assess UN capacity to pursue joint programming along different phases of the programme cycle, namely: project formulation; implementation; and monitoring and reporting.

As illustrated in Figure 25, more than half of country UNNs (52 percent) declared having ‘strong capacity’ to design joint nutrition projects/programmes. Most networks also specified that they had drawn on a broad range of tools and/or resources to catalyse these efforts, such as the UNSDCF, CAN, IPC as well as results generated from the UNN analytical tools, such as the UN Nutrition Inventory and the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping. With that said, joint programming capacity was notably weaker for the other two phases, with ‘strong capacity’ dropping to 38 percent and 26 percent in implementation and monitoring/reporting, respectively. Many country UNNs reportedly had ‘moderate capacity’ for these latter two programming phases.

Together, these results show that while most country UNNs are well-equipped to align nutrition programme priorities at the formulation phase, there may be a shortfall in capacity (or other impediments) with regard to joint implementation and monitoring. This suggests that there is scope for joint implementation and monitoring/reporting to be encouraged and perhaps incentivized, with UN leadership playing a key role in such. It also indicates that UNCTs would benefit from further measures to strengthen capacity for joint programming in these phases across United Nations agencies in the coming year. In addition to proving useful in expanding UNN membership, the UN Nutrition Inventory tool identifies gaps and overlaps in UN nutrition support, highlighting concrete opportunities for increased synergies. This has the potential to spark UN joint programming on nutrition, as demonstrated in some countries during prior reporting cycles (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mali, Rwanda).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Limited capacity</th>
<th>Moderate capacity</th>
<th>Strong capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project formulation/Programming design</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring &amp; reporting</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With contributions to the UN Network Secretariat from:

48. Of the 60-participating country UNNs, fifty-eight responded to this question in the 2019 UNN reporting questionnaire.
BOX 14. **Window for learning**

Joint UN nutrition project helps secure a healthy future for mothers and children in Madagascar

Following the El Niño crisis in 2016, Madagascar experienced a three-year drought, which led to a rise in malnutrition levels. The country recorded an annual loss of up to USD 1.53 billion in GDP as a result of child malnutrition, with 45 percent of its children under two years old afflicted by stunting and 8.2 percent from wasting. In both cases, these levels exceeded prevailing WHO thresholds, indicating a problem of public health significance. This prompted the United Nations agencies involved in Madagascar’s UNN, including FAO, UNFPA, WFP and WHO, to pilot a joint project, named the *Miaro Demonstration Model for Stunting Prevention*. The project aimed at providing TA to the government in tackling widespread malnutrition among mothers and children, particularly focusing on the first 1,000 days from conception to a child’s second birthday as well as on lactating women.

The project combined livelihoods support with comprehensive nutrition and health packages for these target groups in view of their physiological and social vulnerabilities. Essentially, the United Nations agencies worked together to promote breastfeeding and other care practices such as good hygiene behaviours, improvements in water and sanitation, adequate health services, nutrition-sensitive agricultural development and nutrition capacity strengthening for government departments. Every month, women and children received specialized foods (e.g. Nutributter, Super Cereal) to improve their nutritional status. The Project also successfully trained over 200 community workers on growth monitoring, nutrition counselling, home visits and cooking demonstrations on a monthly basis to support sustained nutrition gains. Not only did pregnant and lactating women have the chance to benefit from nutrition counselling, which highlighted the importance of a diverse diet and adequate IYCF practices, but so did men. This helped to support behaviour change in the wider community. Furthermore, the project included measures to safeguard the productive assets of communities, while also contributing to the diversification of their food sources. Through the Miaro project, support was provided to approximately 13,000 children and 7,500 pregnant and lactating women.

The effects of the project were felt in Fotadrevo a small town in southwestern Madagascar. According to findings from an impact evaluation, the project had supported a slight reduction in stunting (approximately 3 percentage points) over a two-year period. The evaluation also revealed improvements in dietary diversity and in the number of women who gave birth in health facilities, the latter up from 17 percent in 2014 to 26 percent in 2016. Inspired by these promising results, the United Nations agencies signed an agreement with Madagascar’s National Nutrition Office (ONN) and Ministry of Health to scale-up the Miaro project in other areas of southern Madagascar from 2017 to 2019. The results of the Miaro project have also since contributed to the formulation of a national stunting prevention approach, which will be included in the next phase of the country’s nutrition action plan. This will help to achieve further improvements in dietary diversity, health-seeking behaviours, etc. to support further declines in stunting and economic prosperity for the island nation.

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49. The statistics presented here are those submitted by UN colleagues in the country case study as part of the 2019 UNN reporting exercise.
ENGAGING THE UNRC AND THE UNCT IN THE NATIONAL NUTRITION AGENDA

Recent calls for stronger UN ‘delivery as one’ have led to the elevation of the UNRC’s role through UN reform, which went into effect in early 2019. As the official representative of the UN Secretary-General in each country, the UNRC is responsible for coordinating the operational activities of the United Nations development system in support of national efforts towards realizing the 2030 Agenda. The UNRC provides leadership and creates an environment where inter-agency collaboration is valued within the UNCT. This makes the UNRC uniquely positioned to champion collective UN action on nutrition, as embodied by the UNN platform.

It is also vital for ensuring that the big nutrition players within the United Nations System harmonize their work with other United Nations agencies and work in partnership. Similarly, it is important in that the UNRC is a lever for promoting the participation of other United Nations agencies in the country UNN, and thus in the national nutrition agenda. In addition, the UNRC can advocate for the inclusion of nutrition in the political agenda among the highest-serving members of government, while supporting its visibility within the UNSDCF to enable a holistic approach to nutrition. These efforts help to ensure that nutrition spans across sectors, the portfolio of work of different United Nations agencies and the humanitarian-development continuum, leveraging the UNRC’s capacity as Humanitarian Coordinator in many countries.

The UNN Secretariat has, therefore, stepped up its outreach to UNRCs, helping to mobilize a growing list of them and make them nutrition savvy, as discussed in section 3. Fourteen countries are benefitting from strong UNRC engagement in UNN activities, including: Bolivia; Burkina Faso; Burundi; the Comoros; Indonesia; Lesotho; Liberia; Mali; Nepal; Nigeria; the Philippines; Sierra Leone; Zambia; and Zimbabwe. The efforts are starting to bear fruit with a sizable proportion of country UNNs (70 percent) noting that they had taken measures to engage the UNRC in the nutrition agenda. In addition to UNRCs being formal members of the Network (e.g. Congo, Costa Rica), other countries have different ways of involving this pivotal UN figure. In the Comoros, the UNRC’s Office hosts the UNN-REACH facilitator, who leads the Network. Other tactics adopted have been to systematically include nutrition considerations in the UNRC’s talking points for meetings with high-level government officials as pursued in Lao PDR. Rwanda’s UNN, including the chair and the other agency representatives, had regular encounters with the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator about nutrition issues, which culminated in the development of a UN Joint Programme.

These developments are encouraging not only from a strategic perspective but also from a results-based standpoint. Further analysis of the 2019 UNN reporting data illustrated that UNRC engagement in the Network had a positive effect on UNN functionality at the country level. This was exhibited when comparing the average overall UNN functionality index+ score of countries with UNRC engagement (9.5) to the average of those countries without UNRC engagement (8.4). While this did not necessarily alter the category of UNN performance, which was high in both cases, the analysis did indicate the difference was statistically significant.
BOX 15. Window for learning
UNRC in Burkina Faso waves the nutrition flag and embraces UNN-REACH support in promoting collective action

The UNRC in Burkina Faso, Ms. Metsi Makhetha, is hailed as a UNN champion thanks to her efforts to create a common space and her commitment to joint action on nutrition. In an exclusive interview with the UNN Secretariat, Ms. Makhetha underscored the need to transcend traditional ways of working in order to achieve shared results. She oversaw the nominations of the UNN chair and vice-chair in the country and validated the UNN workplan, soliciting regular updates on its implementation. She also acknowledged how "UNN-REACH provided the platform for the UN to stay connected to the rest of the actors, with the SDGs as a collective goal."

In addition, Ms. Makhetha actively partook in the process to develop a Common Narrative on Nutrition, developed under the auspices of UNN-REACH. The narrative covered six SUN networks and largely drew upon UNN-REACH analytics and insights to frame joint approaches. Her engagement undoubtedly helped bring momentum to the process, through which the actions being undertaken by the five UNN member agencies in-country (FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO) were articulated along with specific nutrition targets.

She is also deeply committed to building bridges between humanitarian and development actors/assistance. Later in the interview, she went on to say that, “In the context of connected outcomes, we need to meet others halfway. It could be that you are seeing the gap in infrastructure for WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene]. Can you reach out to a partner on the development side?” Cognizant of the challenges, she realizes that incentives are needed, but also that collective action calls for increased flexibility in resourcing, including finances. Aspiring to the day when “resources should not be looked at from an agency perspective but guided by what results or outcomes they will contribute towards,” she is skilfully doing her bit in creating a climate for more collaborative action, seizing the UNN platform as a means to that end.

FIGURE 26. UNN leverages the UNRC and UNCT to advance the nutrition agenda (2019)

Efforts to engage UNRCs in the nutrition agenda 70%

Capacity strengthening of UNCTs to address nutrition 55%

With contributions to the UN Network Secretariat from:

50. The full interview was recently published in the UNN’s Tale Be Told, Series 1 (2019), which is available at https://bit.ly/36BtUGn.
Led by the UNRC, the UNCT is another leverage point for building robust nutrition capacity within the United Nations System, understanding that it is the primary inter-agency mechanism for UN coordination and decision-making at the country level. In 2019, 55 percent of country UNNs had reportedly undertaken efforts to strengthen the capacity of the UNCT to address the nutrition agenda or challenges in the country. As previously discussed, the UNN in Burundi supported the development of a UN Nutrition Agenda for the 2019–2023 period, which encompasses as many as eleven agencies in the UNCT. Another example is Costa Rica, where the country UNN has engaged the UNCT by promoting joint activities on nutrition through joint meetings and joint planning. In El Salvador, the country UNN sensitized the UNCT on the impact of drought on the nutritional status of smallholder farmers to capture the attention of non-traditional UN actors. Namibia’s approach is most impressive in that nutrition is a standing agenda item for UNCT meetings for which technical staff are required to provide updates. As part of the North East Emergency Response in Nigeria, the UNCT is regularly updated on the nutrition situation in the region, particularly noting challenges and resource gaps.

Together, the engagement of the UNRC and the UNCT in nutrition are crucial for attracting increased attention to nutrition, including the integration of nutrition indicators in joint UN frameworks, such as the UNSDCF, as well as within the individual programme documents of agencies. The UNN Secretariat will continue to encourage UNRC engagement in nutrition, while working towards expanded UNN membership in more countries in order to harness the full potential of the UNCT.

51. These United Nations agencies include: FAO, IFAD, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, WFP and WHO.