

6. Discussion



6.1. MAIN CHALLENGES AT COUNTRY LEVEL

As captured in the earlier sections of this report, the UNN demonstrated strong performance during the 2018–19 reporting period. From the Network’s functionality to its analytical services and nutrition capacity strengthening, it made concerted efforts to deliver on its overarching objective and boost collective action towards shared nutrition results. Challenges, however, remain that influence the rate of progress.

Nearly all the country UNNs surveyed (57 out of 60) shared information about the main challenges they faced as a network. Although specific dynamics vary from country to country, recurring challenges are highlighted below in an effort to discern patterns and inform follow-up. The lack of sufficient human and financial resources was by far the most frequent barrier cited (39 countries) with regard to advancing the nutrition agenda over the course of the reporting cycle. This is very much consistent with the challenges discussed within the wider nutrition community. It is also likely linked to the limited capacity of implementing partners reported by some of the countries (9 countries), further underscoring the need to strengthen implementation capacity in order to achieve results at scale.

Other challenges concerned stakeholder dynamics, such as inadequate coordination among United Nations agencies and other actors (14 countries or nearly 25 percent) and competing priorities between humanitarian and development agendas (9 countries). Moving forward, increased UNRC engagement in nutrition and expanded UNN-REACH support are two ways to address these bottlenecks. Low government commitment to nutrition was also cited as a challenge, a striking finding given the considerable efforts undertaken by country UNNs to place and sustain nutrition on the political agenda, including the

sensitization of parliamentarians and mobilization of senior UN leadership at the country level. Additional countries may benefit from similar and/or intensified support in the future. To a lesser extent, country UNNs reported a lack of up-to-date nutrition data and the limited availability of nutrition (UNN) focal points as main challenges encountered during the reporting period. The UNN-supported mapping exercise is helping to address data gaps in intervention coverage, as more and more countries look to the Network for these types of action-oriented, decision-making tools. As the UNN continues to gain recognition and the UN reform gains traction, UN nutrition focal points may be more apt to allocate time to the collective UN nutrition agenda, particularly where improved results can be directly attributed to increased UN collaboration. The UNN Secretariat is committed to addressing this knowledge gap to help impart learning and replicate good practices in other countries, including those who have not joined the SUN Movement.

6.2. CONCLUSION

The 2019 UNN reporting exercise measured the functionality of country UNNs. It also was an opportunity to document UNN collaboration with other SUN networks as well as the collective efforts of United Nations agencies to strengthen capacities for nutrition-relevant governance processes, frameworks and actions within Government and the UN System. The overall results from the UNN functionality index+ illustrated that 90 percent of the 60 country UNNs were highly functional in 2019 up from 82 percent in the previous year. This improved performance indicates that United Nations agencies are paying more attention to nutrition at the country level and working more collaboratively in this area. The results also show that United Nations agencies and entities are progressively utilizing the UNN as a mechanism for increasing UN coordination and convergence on nutrition.

In addition, the reporting exercise revealed that there are different forms of the UNN beyond formal 'country UN [nutrition] Networks'. Alternative arrangements frequently took the form of Development Partners Groups or nutrition working groups, which in many cases, constituted either a combined UN-Donor Network or a rallying together of technical experts from different institutions on the nutrition agenda. This suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach is not feasible or necessary in order to carry out collective UN action on nutrition. These findings are consistent with those of the SUN Strategic Review, which noted that "Given that the SUN Movement is time limited, and given the importance of country ownership and sustainability of nutrition action, merging SUN structures into country structures is essential."⁵² Furthermore, these other arrangements can also be useful for expanding multi-sectoral/stakeholder engagement in nutrition, serving as a platform to engage other key stakeholders beyond the United Nations agencies.

Other impressive findings from the 2019 reporting exercise include the UNN's increasing levels of engagement with UNRCs (70 percent) and United Nations agencies (e.g. FAO, IAEA, IFAD, IOM, UNAIDS, UNCDF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN WOMEN, WFP, WHO and the World Bank), who have become members, sometimes even chairs, of the country UNNs. The UNN analytical tools, particularly the UN Nutrition Inventory, have catalysed this expanded membership (e.g. Burundi, Myanmar), helping to unpack the full spectrum of the nutrition actions. The broader suite of analytics has proved to be effective for enhancing UNN functionality – beyond increasing its membership base – and collective action on nutrition, in general. As in previous years, the UNN analytics and their visuals outputs are continuing to help countries

get a grip on multi-sectoral nutrition action in the complicated, crowded and competitive nutrition landscape. Government-led MSPs and SUN Focal Points continue to request this analytical support to inform decision-making and improve coordination across sectors and institutions. Similarly, countries are also continuing to request support from the UNN Secretariat and UNN-REACH to coach them through participatory nutrition processes.

The functionality gains of country UNNs has also likely transpired into the observed rise in collaborative UN measures for nutrition capacity strengthening, targeting both government staff and institutions as well as UN colleagues. This support ranged from financial to technical and catalytic actions. The 2019 reporting data also illustrated that, in many cases, these efforts are reaching sub-national areas closer to the people who need nutrition support most. This is in line with the SUN Movement's interest in promoting decentralized action. It will also be critical for translating advocacy, policy and planning milestones into concrete actions and results. To this end, more efforts are required to strengthen capacity on the implementation of joint UN nutrition programming and the engagement of UNRCs. This will leverage their influence to help ensure that nutrition is a political priority and encourage domestic investment.

In conclusion, the 2019 UNN reporting exercise has demonstrated that country UNNs are generally on track with promoting a systems approach and ensuring increased multi-sectoral/stakeholder engagement for better nutrition outcomes. It also affirms the UNN's commitment to partnership with other SUN networks in pursuit of shared results as well as the need to be flexible to ensure that countries get the support they need.

52. Independent Expert Team. 2020. Strategic Review of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, 2019-2020. Final report. Available at https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SUN-Strategic-Review-Final-Report_ENG.pdf.

6.3. THE WAY FORWARD

In 2020 and beyond, the UNN will:

- Intensify engagement with UN leadership at the country level, including UNRCs, with the aim of bolstering political support for nutrition and enabling integrated action and partnerships in line with the SDGs and UN reform.
- Increase participation of non-traditional United Nations agencies in the UNN in more countries to strengthen multi-sectoral engagement, using a systems approach and fostering UN joint programming on nutrition.
- Increase collaboration with other SUN networks (Business, Civil Society, Donor and others) at the country level, leveraging UNN-REACH facilitators where present.
- Continue to provide support (including on UNN analytics) to countries upon request, through its multi-sectoral TA facility to strengthen nutrition governance and coordination processes and tackle all forms of malnutrition.
- Take measures to ensure that UNN analytical tools are used effectively to inform decision-making at the country level.
- Continue to support to SUN processes at global and country level, including the SUN MEAL, SUN task forces as well as SUN platforms (e.g. MSPs).
- Engage with UN regional nutrition advisors to explore pathways for enhancing inter-agency collaboration on nutrition at the regional level.
- Share global knowledge and other resources with UNN colleagues on the ground and link global issues with country experiences/applications as part of ongoing measures to enhance country– global feedback loops.

