

Executive summary



OVERVIEW

The UN [nutrition] Network carried out an annual reporting exercise in 2019, which covered three domains. The first measured the functionality of the UN Networks in 60 SUN countries, using a ten-indicator index, called the functionality index+.¹ A second aspect ascertained the extent to which the country UN Networks were collaborating with other SUN networks. A third component took stock of nutrition capacity strengthening activities carried out by United Nations entities in line with outcome 3 in the UN Network results framework. Qualitative data about the UN Network analytical tools was also solicited by the annual reporting instruments, which was supplemented with other monitoring data and a related impact assessment on the tools, likewise conducted in 2019. Furthermore, the reporting exercise explored challenges and forward-looking priorities, as disclosed by the respective country Networks.

The decision to zoom in on outcome 3 follows a strategic decision made in 2017 to focus on one of the five UN Network outcomes in the annual reporting exercise, in addition to the UN Network functionality metrics.

Outcome 3: Increased human and institutional capacity to support the scaling up of nutrition actions at all levels

It was chiefly driven by feedback received in previous years to lighten the reporting requirements so as to reduce the reporting burden on countries. It also enables the UN Network annual reports to delve into selected themes, helping to sharpen the Network's activity in the given area. Subsequently, the 2019 reporting exercise provided an opportunity to explore joint UN efforts for strengthening nutrition capacity, recognizing that enhanced capacity will be crucial for achieving national nutrition targets and the Sustainable Development Goals in the final decade of the 2030 Agenda.

1. Honduras was not included in the exercise, as it joined the SUN Movement after the reporting period.

KEY FINDINGS

PART 1: UN NETWORK FUNCTIONALITY AT COUNTRY LEVEL

Overall, 90 percent of country UN Networks were classified as being highly functional based on the data obtained through the 2019 reporting exercise. The following are some additional highlights regarding functionality:

Membership, leadership and arrangements

- **Sixteen United Nations agencies were engaged in country UN Networks** up from the twelve agencies recorded in the 2018 reporting exercise.
- 97 percent of country UN Networks reported having **nutrition focal points appointed from at least three of the United Nations agencies** engaged in the Network.
- 93 percent of countries reported the presence of a **UN Network chair/co-chair**, with UNICEF and WFP frequently fulfilling that role.
- Most country UN Networks reported utilizing a **rotational or co-chairing system**, allowing for equity in leadership among participating United Nations agencies.
- UN Networks are **taking other forms beyond formally established country UN Networks** *per se*. In 2019, some countries reported the presence of combined UN-Donor Networks, Development Partners Groups and nutrition working groups, within which United Nations agencies have worked together to advance the national nutrition agenda.

Facilitating the collective nutrition agenda

- In 2019, all country UN Networks inferred the presence of a **collective nutrition workplan, strategy and/or agenda** irrespective of the network arrangement, thereby fostering increased collaboration, including UN Joint Programmes or projects on nutrition.

→ The majority of countries (73 percent) reported having presented the **nutrition agenda at United Nations Country Team (UNCT) meetings** during the reporting period, with varying frequency.

Joint United Nations frameworks

→ According to the findings from the 2019 UN Network reporting exercise, 55 out of 60 country UN Networks (92 percent) supported efforts to **either develop or update the nutrition content of joint United Nations frameworks**, including United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs). This constitutes a twelve-percentage point increase with respect to the previous reporting cycle.

Joint UN Programmes/programming

→ 68 percent of country UN Networks indicated having taken efforts to **implement joint UN nutrition programmes or programming** in 2019. Over 100 examples of joint nutrition programming were reported, covering thematic areas such as: food consumption practices for healthy diets; infant and young child feeding (IYCF); and the management of acute malnutrition.

→ 62 percent of the reported **joint programmes/programming exclusively covered development actions**, 21 percent covered **humanitarian interventions** and a final 17 percent covered a **combination** of both.

Engagement in multi-sectoral platforms and technical support to SUN Government Focal Points

→ 92 percent of country UN Networks reported having provided **technical assistance to the SUN Government Focal Point**, with the majority of such efforts taking place at both national and sub-national levels.

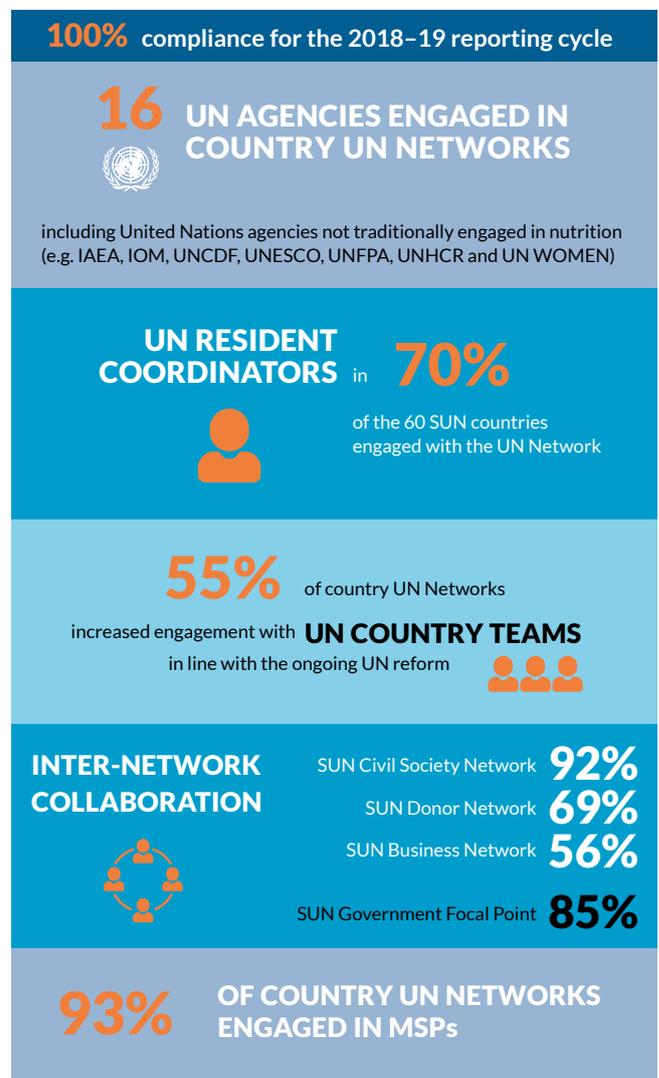
→ Similarly, 93 percent of country **UN Networks engaged in multi-stakeholder/sectoral platforms (MSPs)**, helping to plan, review and coordinate nutrition actions during the reporting period.

Collaboration with other SUN networks

→ In 2019, a sizable proportion of country UN Networks reported **collaborating with other SUN networks**, as follows.

- 56 percent with the **SUN Business Network (SBN)**
- 92 percent with the **SUN Civil Society Network (CSN)**
- 69 percent with the **SUN Donor Network (SDN)**
- 67 percent with **other entities or networks** beyond the three main networks of the SUN Movement, such as Parliamentarian Networks

FIGURE 1. UN Network functionality at a glance



ScalingUp NUTRITION UN Network

With contributions to the UN Network Secretariat from:

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PART 2: UN NETWORK ANALYTICS

- UN Network tools continued to be a **means for enhancing UNN functionality** and **strengthening nutrition capacity** at the country level.
- Five country UN Networks cited the **Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping and UN Nutrition Inventory as one of the top three achievements** during the reporting period.
- **Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping** was the most utilized tool by countries during the 2018-19 reporting cycle.
- Five countries successfully completed the **mapping, where it enhanced nutrition governance processes and informed decision-making**.
- One country (Sudan) successfully executed the **Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview**, helping to establish a common language and rally diverse actors for the mapping exercise. In addition, the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview and **Policy and Policy Overview** was initiated in Liberia, helping to sensitize actors on their respective roles in nutrition and foster policy coherence.
- Two countries (Burundi and Lesotho) undertook the **UN Nutrition Inventory**, inspiring additional United Nations agencies to join the UN Network.

PART 3: UN JOINT EFFORTS FOR NUTRITION CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Nutrition capacity strengthening plays an important role in enabling the achievement of global nutrition targets, as articulated within national frameworks, as well as fostering sustainable development. This third aspect of the reporting exercise encompassed both efforts to build the nutrition capacity of government and that within the UN System, including among UN leadership.

Overall, the findings from the 2019 reporting exercise illustrate an increase in measures undertaken by country UN Networks to strengthen nutrition capacity in Government and the United Nations, as compared to the baseline assessment in 2016.

Opportunities remain for stepping up such efforts especially with regard to the implementation of joint UN programming on nutrition as well as the engagement of United Nations Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams in the national nutrition agenda. These efforts will not only make for a stronger UN Network, but may also serve to increase buy-in from other sectoral actors and create pathways for increased nutrition-sensitive programmes across governments, United Nations agencies and other key actors.

Additional key findings from this part of the 2019 UN Network reporting exercise are highlighted below.

Capacity strengthening for Government

- 67 percent of country UN Networks supported governments with **identifying capacity needs and developing plans** to address those needs. Almost 60 percent of these efforts covered national and sub-national levels, reflecting increased attention to the latter.
- 85 percent of country UN Networks reported having taken measures to **build data management capacities** on nutrition in 2019. These efforts enabled key actors to utilize nutrition data in decision-making processes in as many as 43 countries.
- 72 percent of country UN Networks provided **financial support to government-based nutrition staff**, helping to develop institutional capacity for delivering on the national nutrition agenda.
- 80 percent of country UN Networks reported having undertaken efforts to build the capacity of national and local actors to **generate common nutrition messaging** in order to inform nutrition advocacy.
- 90 percent of all country UN Networks indicated that they had supported the **establishment and/or strengthening of MSPs** at national and/or sub-national levels.

- 80 percent of the UN Networks **supported the SUN Government Focal Point or other nutrition authorities** by strengthening their individual skills, equipping them with tools (including UNN analytics) to coordinate nutrition actions, sharing related guidance and coaching them (e.g. through UNN-REACH facilitation support) to bring different stakeholders into a common nutrition space.
- 97 percent of country UN Networks reported efforts to support the **development of multi-sectoral nutrition policies, strategies and plans**, leveraging the technical expertise of two or more United Nations agencies/entities.

Enhancing capacity within the UN System

- **UN joint programming on nutrition:** About half of the country UN Networks (52 percent) indicated having strong capacity to formulate or design joint nutrition projects/programmes. With that said, lower percentages of strong capacity were observed for joint implementation (38 percent) and joint monitoring and reporting (26 percent), suggesting a need to further strengthen capacity for UN joint programming on nutrition, particularly the operational dimensions.
- 70 percent of country UN Networks reported efforts to **engage the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC)** in the nutrition agenda, helping to elevate nutrition to the highest level and foster increased collaboration among the United Nations agencies.
- 55 percent of country UN Networks undertook efforts to **strengthen the capacity of UNCTs** in order to address nutrition issues, in more holistic and integrated manner.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 UN Network reporting exercise demonstrated an increase in the country UN Networks with high functionality scores, from 85 percent (2018) to 90 percent (2019). These high scores affirm that the UN Network is a viable platform for multi-sectoral nutrition dialogue and action among United Nations entities. In addition, the 2019 reporting exercise illustrated that UN Networks exist in different forms, not always as discrete bodies. In some countries, United Nations agencies contribute collectively to national nutrition priorities through other arrangements, such as Development Partners Groups and nutrition working groups. This shows collaboration between United Nations agencies and other actors in efforts to address malnutrition as well as the use of context-specific mechanisms to advance harmonized and coordinated UN nutrition actions. More efforts were also undertaken by country UN Networks to engage the senior leadership of United Nations agencies and UNRCs in the nutrition arena. This, in turn, raised the profile of nutrition, helping to both place and sustain it on national development agendas.

Similarly, positive trends were observed in nutrition capacity strengthening at the country level, with more UN Networks reporting efforts to support the development, maintenance and strengthening of such capacities in the 2019 reporting exercise than in previous years. The 2019 findings also illustrated that United Nations agencies are taking strides towards scaling-up multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder engagement in the context of a systems approach for enhanced nutrition outcomes. UN reform and the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda have helped give impetus to these efforts and reinforce the values of the UN Network. Finally, the findings suggest that the UN Network will continue to be an important part of country support mechanisms for advancing the nutrition agenda in view of its strategic ties to UNRCs, SUN Government Focal Points and other nutrition authorities as well as its increasingly popular analytics that are helping to build capacity for multi-sectoral/ stakeholder coordination and guide decision-making on nutrition.