



Breaking the 'cycle of vulnerability'



AN INTERVIEW WITH
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There are some striking parallels between the work that UNN-REACH does and the work of the UNRC since UN reforms were implemented in January 2019 that moved the position to the Secretariat. While the mandates are not the same, the qualities necessary for the job are similar; both roles require neutrality, trust-worthiness, an ability to connect diverse interests towards a common goal. Both parties look at what activities are already being implemented and find ways to coordinate their efforts.

Ms. Metsi Makhetha is responsible for coordinating nineteen UN entities in a country that is among the poorest in the world. Among the multitude of development issues for the country are nutrition obstacles that lead to a 9 percent wasting prevalence for children under 5, and a stunting prevalence that ranges from 6 to 39 percent from region to region, according to Ministry of Health figures from 2018. These figures are compounded by poor maternal nutrition and anaemia among adolescent girls as well as non-exclusive breastfeeding practices that further exacerbate a precarious first six months for babies.

Despite these obstacles, Ms. Makhetha is full of optimism and determination.

In October 2018, a Common Narrative on Nutrition,¹ was compiled by five UN agencies and the six SUN networks. Ms. Makhetha was engaged in the process and provided feedback on the document, which gives an analysis of the nutrition situation and the challenges faced, drawing largely upon UNN-REACH analytics and insights. It outlines actions being taken by FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO – UNN agencies – to improve nutrition and includes specific nutrition targets.

1 Visit: <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/Common%20UNN%20Narrative-Burkina%20Faso-18Apr2019%20%28Final%29.pdf>.

With over 20 years of experience in sub-Saharan Africa, Ms. Makhetha has overcome a wide range of challenges, including unexpected changes in government and emergencies. Originally from South Africa, she has a vision for the continent.

Recently, she was interviewed about how she has used her role as UNRC to advance nutrition targets in Burkina Faso.

What's your approach to the role of UNRC?

I have always figured if we are to make a difference it's not going to happen in the spaces where we have been. The world where it is today is not exactly where it should be. As the RC, what are the instruments I have to mobilize differently and address chronic challenges? Surely there has to be a way to progressively reduce humanitarian assistance for families [caught in] the same cycle of vulnerability.

[This is] an opportunity to advance collective leadership and demonstrate that the UN can engage beyond the ways we have traditionally engaged; to make it clear that the capacity of the country lies beyond the traditional structures we have been working with.

How do you help various actors work together?

When I came to Burkina Faso in 2016, I was coming from a context where we had been formulating Humanitarian Response Plans for the past 15 years or more, and I had seen that everyone was doing their best. The development partners were doing what they were meant to be doing; the humanitarian community was responding – but the two were not talking to each other. They each had ideas about what the other was supposed to be doing.

One of the first things I did was create a space where people could see we're all in the same boat. We're all concerned for the welfare of the people. We're concerned that communities in the Sahel region are reached and that they have access to basic services. We are concerned about the same mother who has to feed the child every morning. We talk about hope and dignity. How do we, through joint effort, make that a reality?

How is Burkina Faso progressing towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030?

The multi-sectoral aspect of [the government's nutrition] plan requires that you continually engage with other networks [such as humanitarian non-profits, private sector, etc.]. UNN-REACH provided the platform for the UN to stay connected to the rest of the actors, with the SDGs as a collective goal. What will it take to get to SDG2, Zero Hunger, for Burkina-Faso? UNN-REACH kept us focused on this.

How did UNN-REACH support you in this process?

UNN-REACH was integral to this process. It was like a lever for us, because it supported the [UN] Network for Scaling Up Nutrition. You need somebody that checks the plan. How we are going to execute the plan, whether we leverage resources to address and prevent malnutrition. Importantly, whether we work with the country in a manner aligned with its overall priorities.

To prevent malnutrition this past year, we had to act very quickly, a choice reflected in our planning documents after we did a joint analysis with humanitarian and development actors. This year, we engaged government and partners to ring the alarm bells much earlier than usual.

FIGURE 1.

Excerpt from the Policy and Plan Overview (2016) conducted through UNN-REACH

Decentralized development plans cover nutrition to varying degrees, with scope to further integrate nutrition into many of them

UN Network REACH

	Commune Development Plans	Period covered	Next revision	Responsible Ministry	Partners*	Nutrition	Remarks
Communa	Kantchari (PCDK)	2015-19	2017	Territorial & Decentralization Administration	WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4/27 core nutrition actions, 4/27 relevant core nutrition actions • Acknowledges existing gender inequalities, that make women more physiologically vulnerable • While it recognises & includes nutrition-sensitive interventions, it does not mention nutrition-specific interventions
	Manni (PCDM)	2015-19	2017	Territorial & Decentralization Administration	FAO & WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6/27 core nutrition actions, 6/27 relevant core nutrition actions • Acknowledges that children 0-5 yrs. old and pregnant women are susceptible to chronic malnutrition • Doesn't further elaborate on the importance of good nutrition, including links between poor maternal nutrition & chronic malnutrition
	Tibga (PCDT)	2015-19	2017	Territorial & Decentralization Administration	WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5/27 core nutrition actions, 5/27 relevant core nutrition actions • Recognises links bwn animal husbandry & food security, but doesn't acknowledge malnutrition as a problem • Doesn't mention the importance of school feeding to nutrition & community development beyond noting their presence as an entry point
	Gayeri (PCDG)**	2010-14	2017	Territorial & Decentralization Administration	WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4/27 core nutrition actions, 4/27 relevant core nutrition actions • Acknowledges the importance of the agriculture sector to food security, but not nutrition
	Thion (PCDTH)	2015-19	2017	Territorial & Decentralization Administration	WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4/27 core nutrition actions, 4/27 relevant core nutrition actions • Doesn't include nutrition-specific interventions (e.g. optimal breastfeeding) in spite of mentioning that children < 5 yrs. & pregnant & lactating women are more susceptible to malnutrition • Underscores the importance of multi-sectorality & includes a plan for mobilising & training actors in order to achieve its objectives
	Bani (PCDB)	2014-18	2017	Territorial & Decentralization Administration	WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4/27 core nutrition actions, 4/27 relevant core nutrition actions • Focuses on the most vulnerable people in society & the food insecurity they are experiencing. • Only includes nutrition-sensitive interventions without necessarily labelling them as such

Opportunities to better reflect nutrition in the community development plans for Tibga, Gayeri, Thion & Bani

*For simplicity's sake, only UN partners working with UNN-REACH, which were indicated in the document, were listed as partners on this page.
 **Formulated before Burkina Faso joined the SUN Movement in 2011.

What are some of the challenges you face when building coalitions?

The challenge is for each of the partners to go beyond what they consider their mandate to be. Everyone is doing an excellent job based on their own mandate. 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? The response is often, 'It's not my responsibility.' People are not supported to reach out to others. There have to be incentives for reaching out and creating bridges.

Who is the partner, who will create the incentive to get to a collective outcome? There is no easy answer to this as it is also about resources and flexible financing.

What's the way forward?

Resources should not be looked at from an agency perspective but guided by what results or outcomes they will contribute towards.

Keep actors engaged. In discussions with development partners, I always remind [them] that we have a commitment towards collective outcomes for nutrition and food security. I do the same with humanitarian actors.

Work towards clearly defined, measurable collective outcomes, in support of country priorities. We have seen a positive shift in government leadership and commitment. This is reflected in budgeting processes and resource allocation for nutrition and food security outcomes.