



Senegal's nutrition agenda moves front and center



UNN-REACH PLAYS
AN IMPORTANT ROLE
IN SHIFTING THE DIALOGUE

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In West Africa, Senegal has led the nutrition sector over the past two decades, with relatively low levels of malnutrition across the country, and institutional strengths. The government established the Fight against Malnutrition Unit (*Cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition* or CLM) to oversee policy implementation from the vantage point of the Prime Minister's Office since 2001. The UNN's intensive support arm, REACH (UNN-REACH), spent four years in Senegal, from 2014 – 2018. During this term, UNN-REACH's interventions made a sweeping impact in a country that had already established a nutrition governance architecture but lacked tools to manage and coordinate across sectors and stakeholders.

One of the first changes that happened after UNN-REACH arrived was the way nutrition was discussed. "UNN-REACH pushed the government dialogue. Now we 'speak' nutrition," says Aminata Ndaiye, the UNICEF focal point for UNN from 2014 to 2018. "Instead of talking about coverage and prevalence data of such as wasting, stunting, anaemia – we started to talk instead about mainstreaming, multi-sectors, situation analyses and integrated management," explains Abdoulaye Ka, the National Coordinator for CLM and the current SUN Government Focal Point, who describes UNN-REACH as "a learning network".

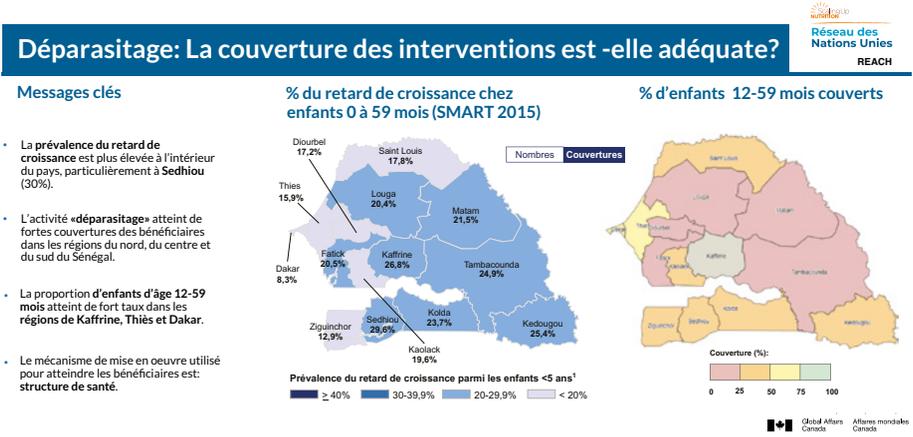
Another intervention was expanding UNN membership to other UN Agencies such as IFAD, UNFPA, UN WOMEN and UNOCHA. Multiple factors set this in motion, including the UNN Director/Global Coordinator's mission in July 2018, which emphasized how the work of UN agencies beyond the four REACH agencies support nutrition outcomes. "It's a question of understanding the mindset, understanding their needs," explains Sophie Cowpply-Boni, the international facilitator who worked closely with government from 2015 – 2017. Successes were perceived as shared and any UNN-REACH support put government in the lead.

Instead of a health-based approach guided by one ministry, Senegal employed a multi-sectoral approach engaging thirteen ministries. UNN-REACH facilitators asked how others, such as Agriculture, Education and Women, Family and Gender, were integrating nutrition into their sectoral policies and plans – or ‘mainstreaming nutrition’ – in concert with the CLM. Broader explorations about education, female decision-making, sanitation, obesity, breastfeeding and other cross-cutting issues were posed. “This was the main role of REACH, to help the government change their thinking and renew policy,” says Aminata Ndaiye.



FIGURE 10

Excerpt from the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping in Senegal (2018) conducted through UNN-REACH



To ensure all newly invested parties were working from the same set of data, UNN-REACH offered action-oriented, custom-made tools designed to interact with the government’s M&E nutrition platform. Mapping reveals patterns in visual form that otherwise would not emerge, contextualizes data and exposes gaps so that stakeholders can act on them. For example, this tool generated two colour-coded maps to illustrate how deworming coverage interacts with stunting.

The findings from the analytical exercises fed into key nutrition governance processes. In contrast to other countries, Senegal assembled The Multi-sectoral Strategic Nutrition Plan (*Plan Stratégique Multisectoriel de la Nutrition* or PSMN) from the bottom up. Individual sectors prioritized their contributions, and each chose two or three interventions that would contribute to the overall plan. This helped instill government ownership and built momentum because there was buy-in from each ministry.

In 2015, the first round of mapping included some nutrition stakeholders and led to the drafting of a new policy document, the National Policy for the Development of Nutrition, that grew from a series of workshops and discussions with twelve participating ministries. In 2017, a second round of mapping was requested by the government, including data from an additional thirteenth ministry as well as from national and international civil society organizations, UN agencies, other multi- and bi-laterals. Mapping provided a baseline for a range of nutrition actions – such as literacy for women, flour fortification or planting multi-purpose gardens – which has been embedded in the new M&E nutrition platform.

A new problem arose from this kind of strategic, multi-sectoral planning: one of implementation. In order to carry out the PSMN, staff across the country had to understand the new framework and how to use the tools. A joint UNN-REACH/ World Bank team, under the leadership of a technical coordination committee, including CLM, ran a comprehensive capacity assessment, completed in June 2018. The study found that some sectoral focal points, for example, were not given enough decision-making power, while others needed more training on how to gather and analyze data – or what questions to ask. Overall, the report concluded that “the shortage of human resources specializing in nutrition is a problem that affects all units of analysis at both central and decentralized levels.” With the capacity baseline established, improvements can now be measured as the PSMN for 2017 – 2021 is implemented.

Reframing the terms, applying custom-made tools and analyzing human resources were essential to this process. With UNN-REACH’s guidance, this multi-pronged approach brought about cross-cutting institutional change in Senegal. Abdoulaye Ka, who took part in this process and continues to oversee the CLM, reflected that this “tailored approach” sets UNN-REACH apart from other nutrition actors.