



UNN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING



*A spirit
of collaboration
in Nepal*

UNN-REACH PROVIDES A BOOST

Tale 10

From the beginning, the partnership between Nepal and the UN Network's country support mechanism, UNN-REACH³⁴ was symbiotic. The Nepali government has made steady progress on the nutrition front since 1970, when the National Nutrition Policy Coordination Committee and the institution of the Joint Nutrition Support Program (JNSP) were established.³⁵ This history, along with a willingness to develop more robust nutrition governance, would set the stage to make the UNN-REACH intervention a productive endeavor.



*Training of trainers workshop
NNFSS/Sagar Shrestha*

Nepal made a significant leap in reducing child stunting between 2001 and 2011, dropping about 15 percentage points.³⁶ Even so, the 2011 figures were still daunting, roughly one year before UNN-REACH entered the country. According to the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 41 percent of children under five years of age were stunted and 11 percent were wasted. By 2016, the end of UNN-REACH's tenure in the country, 36 percent of children under age 5 were stunted and 10 percent were wasted,³⁷ still exceeding prevailing thresholds that signal a public health problem.

³⁴ REACH refers to the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition inter-agency initiative, established in 2008.

³⁵ Pomeroy-Stevens, A., Shrestha, M.B., Biradavolu, M., Hachhethu, K., Houston, R., Sharma, I., and Wun, J. 2016. Prioritizing and Funding Nepal's Multisector Nutrition Plan. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, Volume 37(4) Supplement: S151-S169. Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0379572116674555>.

³⁶ Ministry of Health and Population (Nepal), New ERA & ICF International Inc. 2012. *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011*. Kathmandu & Calverton. Available at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR257/FR257%5B13April2012%5D.pdf>.

³⁷ Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Nepal country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/southern-asia/nepal/>.

The above statistics do not evenly reflect impact on both indicators although the declines in stunting are encouraging. Furthermore, the kind of institutional change UNN-REACH supports typically takes time to translate into impact. Stunting is a more long-term indicator, not only reflecting nutrition gains but also broader development. What is harder to measure is how various structures have been designed and operationalized that help the government monitor and chart their progress on this issue, bringing together a wide spectrum of players to contribute to continuous improvement.

Initial steps

UNN-REACH was first established in 2008 by FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, and repositioned under the broader UN Network (UNN) in 2015. As it was in Nepal in 2012, the initiative continues to be a support mechanism for improving nutrition governance, working in close collaboration with SUN networks, including the UNN.

Along with the National Planning Commission, UNN-REACH led the SUN Joint Annual Assessment in Nepal, galvanizing networks that included the Civil Society Alliance, academia, development partners and others. In 2014, they organized a meeting on resource mapping and costing with participation from all national stakeholders.

“The REACH facilitator played an important role in bringing the senior government officials from the relevant ministries together to plan and implement nutrition activities in Nepal,” commented Dr. Geeta Bhakta Joshi. As a member of the National Planning Commission, he is recognized for his outstanding achievements in promoting nutrition in his country.



Dr. Geeta Bhakta Joshi participates in a regional nutrition budgeting workshop as part of efforts to improve nutrition governance in his country, April 2016
NNFSS/Sagar Shrestha

The objective of the National Nutrition and Food Security Secretariat (NNFSS) was to support policymaking and improve the food security and nutritional status of the Nepali people. According to the UNN-REACH Facilitator Ingo Neu, an international professional in NNFSS, government was so proactive about multi-sectoral planning because a member of the Secretariat was a ‘champion of nutrition’, who pushed the nutrition agenda for this body, coordinating the five ministries from a common platform.

Savita Malla, a Nepali nutrition expert who worked on communication strategy during this period and now serves as a policy specialist at the global SUN Movement Secretariat, reflected, “REACH’s most important contribution was to help the Government of Nepal establish the multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder platforms. We were part of the implementation of the multi-sectoral nutrition plan (MSNP)-I (2013–2017) and development of MSNP-II (2018–2022), both of which were costed. Without REACH, it would not have developed as quickly or in such an organized way.”



The power of collective action

Generation one REACH tools³⁸ were less standardized and automated than the current versions. As a result, the multi-sectoral mapping exercise did not capture coverage data for beneficiaries or geography as it did in other countries. Nevertheless, the process of collaboration was so participatory that it yielded this collective action, even without sophisticated data. In fact, Nepal was an ideal setting for the development of the UNN tool on nutrition capacity assessment.³⁹



The successful integration of the programme was largely due to local ownership of the tools, which were used as a means of building government capacity in nutrition governance. According to Neu, what mattered most was not the coordination of the United Nations within its various offices, but the extent of collaboration with local government. Neu elaborated, “In Nepal, the government wanted REACH to establish a NNFSS within the government. They decided it should be staffed by eight people in total and tasked with coordination for all actors and stakeholders. Five ministries, along with projects, NGOs and broader society, including academia and civil society took part.”

³⁸ In response to popular demand, the analytical tools initially developed for UNN-REACH have been rebranded as UNN services open to all countries. To learn more, visit the [UNN website](#).

³⁹ For further information, see <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/tools/nutrition-capacity-assessment>.

Scaffolding local nutrition governance architecture

Referring to how meetings were organized, Neu explained, “you can’t just mix them all up – government, NGOs and academics, or it will become a waste of time. We focused on structure, objectives, outputs and deliverables and a workplan. Groups were organized according to technical areas, with terms of reference.”

To support the implementation of the MSNP, high-level committees were established in addition to technical multi-sectoral groups that focused on capacity development, monitoring and evaluation as well as advocacy and communications. The participation of academics, the private sector and donors was an integral part of the process. “Multi-stakeholder architecture brought about a massive change in how nutrition governance progressed,” Neu added. There were monthly meetings that provide a regular forum for three working groups. “A capacity development master plan led the way to implement parts of the advocacy strategy. For the first time, partners had one guiding document for this,” Neu recalled.

UNN-REACH always adapts tools to the local context, but in Nepal this was taken one step further. When the mapping exercise was conducted in 2013, data points were connected to other government policies and strategies, not just nutrition. Furthermore, the Nepal Policy Overview⁴⁰ included additional rating streams, such as one that looked exclusively at government commitment and funding. These additions were made at the request of the NNFSS.

40 Findings available at <https://bit.ly/37QyDkX>.

FIGURE 2.

Excerpt from the Policy Overview in Nepal (2014) conducted through UNN-REACH

UNN-REACH Policy Overview ascertains the extent to which nutrition is covered by policy and strategy frameworks (Nepal)



Document	Period covered	Next revision	Responsible institution	Partners	Nutrition	Remarks
NARC's Strategic Vision for Agriculture Research	2011-2030	TBD	Nepal Agricultural Research Council	FAO		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reform and reinforcement of the agricultural research system is required to overcome food & nutrition insecurity New varieties/hybrid crops & improved breeds of animals & fish have the potential to provide more nutrients
Agriculture Biodiversity Policy	2007	TBD	Ministry of Agricultural Development	FAO, WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 1 direct reference to nutrition Agrobiodiversity is the backbone for the sustainable development of agriculture, food security, & poverty alleviation
National Agriculture Policy	2004	TBD	Ministry of Agricultural Development	FAO, WFP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 2 direct references to nutrition Nutrition is recommended to be a component of extension services provided to farmer's groups in support of agricultural production and productivity
Nepal Biodiversity Strategy	2002	TBD	Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation	Global Environment Facility, UNDP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biological diversity in Nepal touches upon human health and nutrition Nepal has a wealth of non-timber forest products; this diversity can provide marginalised farmers with a valuable nutritional resource
National Strategy on Maternal Undernutrition	2013-2017	TBD	Ministry of Health & Population	UNICEF, WHO		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low BMIs among adolescent girls (25.8%) are worse compared to women of reproductive age (18.2%) The majority of women in Nepal have anaemia & other micronutrient deficiencies

Findings indicate opportunities for better integrating nutrition into agriculture policies and strategies

● Maternal & child nutrition receives significant attention ○ Maternal & child nutrition receives is not addressed at all



UNN-REACH on the frontlines after earthquake Gorkha

The extent of UNN-REACH's value became clear when the Gorkha earthquake struck in April 2015, and the government asked Neu, the international facilitator, to play the role of inter-cluster coordinator. Drawing on the relationships he had forged with the United Nations, civil society, donors, ministers and more, Neu oversaw clusters for nutrition, health, protection, food security and others. His appointment was a vote of confidence that not only attests the value of the UNN-REACH facilitator, but also how UNN-REACH helped to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus. "Since we were the neutral body that worked within the government, we had a certain 'clout' that helped us organize other agencies for the relief effort," Malla commented. "REACH staff were on the ground in the immediate aftermath. We also helped the government develop their National Disaster Assessment report."

A new way to share information

One of the most significant outcomes of UNN-REACH's intervention was the establishment of a web-based portal that all stakeholders could use for reference: the Nepal Nutrition and Food Security Portal (NNFSP). This included updated contact information, reports, mapping and other outputs from the analytical tools. Every organization working on nutrition would enter information about their projects, including what groups they were targeting and what types of interventions they were providing. From there, all uploaded information was mapped so data could be visualized. The portal was user-friendly, so stakeholders could upload their information in less than 45 minutes.

Looking back, Malla reflected on some of the challenges the group faced. “At first, the portal was difficult to develop, because different organizations were committed to their own websites, but after it was up and running, the UN and NGOs noticed this was one platform where all resources were available, as a government-owned initiative. Sometimes, when documents were not available, people would contact us, asking for them.” This portal was key in supporting knowledge brokering among a wide range of actors and fostering a climate of trust and transparency.

Milestones

As a knowledge broker – a person or organization who facilitates the access, interpretation, adaptation and utilization of information to meet the needs of implementers or policy makers⁴¹ – Neu was able to establish strong ties with government from the start, and move capacity building quickly towards concrete outcomes.

Here are some of them, across a range of sectors:

- On the **communications** front, jingles, a nutrition logo, talk shows and more were developed. Journalists were trained in twenty-one districts and created a Media Network. The National Advocacy and Communication Strategy was endorsed and launched.
- The nutrition **monitoring and evaluation** framework was updated and implemented with ownership by all relevant ministries.
- To improve **capacity**, a pool of trainers from various public institutions were deployed to spread their new skills. Six districts were supported in developing annual, costed multi-sectoral plans, with additional allocation of funds.

⁴¹ UN Network Secretariat. 2019. *UNN-REACH Facilitator as Knowledge Broker: Summary of a 2018 Study by the Society for Implementation Science in Nutrition*. Rome. Available at <https://bit.ly/39Ms5Xl>.

Joyce Njoro, former Senior Programme Officer at the UNN Secretariat, who oversaw the UNN-REACH engagement in Nepal, commented, “What was unique in Nepal was that the Secretariat was headed by Ingo Neu, whereas in many other countries, the Secretariat would be headed by local staff. The bigger concern was, how do we sustain this?”

Four years later, the NNFSS is still operational and a model that other countries can learn from and emulate. The sustainability of the ‘governance architecture’ such as NNFSS and the portal is further testament to the trust-building, facilitation and incremental capacity development that UNN-REACH undertook while in-country.

