



UNN ANALYTICS

Adapting UNN analytical tools to COVID-19 conditions



EXPERIENCES IN LIBERIA, SUDAN AND TOGO

Table 22

Introduction

The UN Network has a portfolio of analytical tools¹⁰⁰ that have helped to catalyze dialogue and collective action on nutrition among stakeholders from various sectors, at both the national and sub-national level. These tools have proved themselves to be effective ‘door openers’ in a number of countries. They have been used by everyone from technical specialists to SUN Focal Points and other government stakeholders in nutrition coordination platforms to policymakers. To date, UNN analytics have been used in identifying nutrition capacity gaps, as accountability mechanisms for national nutrition plans, in building capacity for data management and for better coordinating multi-sectoral nutrition action.

Recap of Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping tool

The mapping tool, developed by UNN-REACH with support from the Boston Consulting Group, identifies which stakeholders are doing what, where and how in order to provide a comprehensive picture of geographic and population coverage. It aims to galvanize a range of actors through generating data on ‘core nutrition actions’ that are implemented through the health, food, education and social protection systems as well as those that foster women’s empowerment. To date, the mapping exercise has been conducted in twenty-six countries and is currently underway in various others.

¹⁰⁰ UN Network Secretariat. 2020. *UN Network Annual Report, 2019. Annex B: Menu of UNN analytical tools.* Rome. Available at <https://bit.ly/3773J8G>.

Conducting on-site training

Remote training has always been a feature for implementing UNN analytical tools. However, there had been a recent shift towards providing on-site training to country teams for the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping exercise. In-country UNN-REACH facilitators supported by international consultants and the UNN Analytics team had launched the mapping exercise through a participatory workshop, where different stakeholders are introduced to the tool and the methodology involved for the preparatory steps.

Following that initial exercise, the Analytics team had led on-site training for data collection and data entry. At the end of the exercise, another on-site visit was usually planned to hold a final workshop at which to present and validate the results. This method of on-site training and delivery of the mapping exercise has been carried out in about eighteen countries to date, between 2016–2019.

According to Farah Sbytte, UNN Analytics Coordinator, being on-site has encouraged involvement by a large group of stakeholders who are intensively involved in the process. “We found that the planned analytical training held in countries helped to build ownership and momentum. It also allows for greater rapport and trust within the country teams, which in turn facilitates the actual implementation of the exercise.” In Madagascar, the training on the mapping exercise included United Nations agencies (primarily the World Food Programme, WFP, and the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF), government ministries and institutions, such as the National Office for Nutrition and the National Statistics Institute, so stakeholders from both the United Nations side and from the government side are part of the technical team. They were working closely with a national consultant on this, with weekly support from the UNN Analytics team.

Shift to a full virtual delivery in the Sudan

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the approach of delivering the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping, which had come to rely heavily on the use of on-site workshops and training.

“The pandemic has forced us to shift our training to a full virtual delivery, made possible only by the dedication of national staff,” confirms Farah. “It has also meant more support throughout the process to ensure the proper implementation of the exercise. We have developed additional materials to help with this, such as guidance documents on preparing the final dashboards in the DHIS2¹⁰¹ platform and on preparing analytical products in the system.”



¹⁰¹ This stands for District Health Information Software, version 2.

Recent training experiences on the mapping tool in Sudan are a case in point. The training process in the Sudan, which began with a face-to-face meeting last year, has been hampered by the political unrest in the country, and had to be adjusted to a fully virtual model following the outbreak of COVID-19. Subsequent training has been carried out remotely with the government team from the Ministry of Health to enable them to start the data collection process, supported by the WFP country office.

According to UNN independent consultant, Matthew Robinson, the initial in-country meeting with stakeholders in the Sudan was important in establishing a relationship prior to remote training. “It really helped to have met the key people before lockdown – to be able to put a face to a name.” However, he also felt that in contrast to previous methods of working, the new model had definitely yielded some benefits.

“With past assignments, we would spend two days with staff to help them prepare the data for the mapping exercise. It was really a hand-holding exercise – we would say what we needed and they would provide it,” says Matthew. “With Sudan, the MoH staff have had to be more proactive and independent in tracking down the data on their own. I’ve made suggestions but they’ve taken ownership of the exercise and found their own solutions and data sources. It really feels as though they better understand the process – and it feels more sustainable.”

Launch workshop in Liberia

The mapping launch and training in Liberia, in October 2020, has been a learning experience as it is the first mixed approach, with participants in one room and UNN analytics facilitators joining online. A total of 44 stakeholders took part, from both national level (mapping team members are from the Ministry of Health, the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, civil society and the Liberia SUN Secretariat); and sub-national level (representatives from fifteen counties). Other participants included the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education; non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Concern Worldwide and Save the Children; and United Nations agencies, such as UNICEF, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO).



Although the usual connectivity issues were challenging, it was the national consultant, Julius Lekpeh, who played a starring role in ensuring success by leading sessions whenever the connection went off and keeping participants engaged. Participatory approaches also proved effective, with volunteers taking

turns in demonstrating some District Health Information Software 2 (DHIS2) features directly to colleagues. Participants were also divided into smaller groups, each group containing one person with prior experience in DHIS2 to help others complete the practical exercises.

“We’ve noticed in particular that MoH support [for the mapping] has been very high during this workshop,” confirms Kou Baawo, the UNN-REACH Facilitator in Liberia. The Director of Nutrition and the DHIS2 expert for the ministry were also supportive during the planning and implementation stages, allowing the use of the MoH information system for the activity. “Interest is continuing to grow in using the [mapping] tool as it is being introduced,” she notes.

The next steps are for sub-national staff to begin data collection back in their respective counties. These stakeholders will also be supported via virtual interactions with the national mapping team, alongside local support for the mapping process with the involvement of United Nations agencies and other partners. Data collection is expected to be completed within one month, with results to be presented by the end of 2020.

Togo - plans for future progress

Plans for using the mapping tool in Togo are still in the preparatory stage. Farah from the UNN Secretariat confirms that the task of customizing the tool is taking longer than it would during an on-site visit, due to the need for additional technical guidance and follow-up support. Nevertheless, countries like Togo have assumed a larger responsibility in ensuring that all the preparatory steps are completed and that the final products will be delivered. “Before we were working together [UNN and country teams] but we [UNN] were definitely leading the process.

Now the country actors know that this information will be used to calculate the nutrition indicators they have selected, so the exercise is really linking things up for them.”

Future training for Togo will involve remote training on tablets for mobile data collection and adapting the tool to include data on COVID-19 for the first time. The plan is to have a national consultant in the training room together with all of the regional data collectors, but with the UNN Secretariat doing the training remotely to provide the ‘best of both worlds’. “This type of quasi-remote training means that everyone can be in same room to look over each other’s shoulders to see what other people are doing, under the guidance of a national consultant,” says Farah.



Challenges in remote training

Challenges related to connectivity and maintaining focus throughout remote trainings might be obvious obstacles, according to Farah. Both have an effect on the training process. While connectivity issues are harder to overcome, training days have been reduced to half days and delivered over a longer timespan, with a focus on one specific topic per session in place of longer, full-day training sessions. “The shorter virtual training sessions have enabled us to deliver digestible amounts of information, which has been better for those being trained,” confirms Farah. “It’s also given us more time to ensure the information has been well understood.”

However, the new mode of working has meant that the different stages of the process do take more time to finalize. There have obviously been less ‘hands on’ activities and support to the country technical teams as well.

Building national and sub-national capacity

In addition to encouraging increased ownership of the UNN tool at the national level, the virtual approach has allowed for better mobilization of country-level human resources due to the need for national technical experts to be involved on-site rather than the previous involvement of external consultants. This has been achieved through identifying key technical focal points to ensure the tools are functional and customized to the country specifications. In the Sudan, the UNN has brought on board MoH staff already working with the DHIS2 data system. This should also build the capacity of key personnel, where they are available, to enable national actors to replicate the exercise on a periodic basis without the need for extensive external training and support.



Next steps for training in a post-COVID-19 era

Future implementation of the mapping tool will definitely use the mechanisms that have enabled increased ownership, such as involving more technical experts from national ministries and institutions. This will also allow for more responsibility to be given to the country teams through engaging them from the early stages in the preparatory steps. This new phase of remote training has allowed the UNN to identify key stages where on-site support might be crucial, while also looking at where remote support is as efficient, thereby reducing the cost of the mapping exercise and the burden on country budgets.