

## 5.2 COORDINATION MECHANISMS

### 5.2.1 Overview

Multi-sector coordination mechanisms provide a forum for discussion among nutrition stakeholders while strengthening their coordination capacities within and across sectors. They help nutrition stakeholders adopt a comprehensive, multi-sectoral vision for reducing undernutrition among women and young children and agree on a common framework for action. This entails raising awareness about the respective roles of stakeholders in addressing the underlying and immediate causes of undernutrition, and clarifying how these roles fit into the comprehensive multi-sectoral response. This, in turn, helps minimise duplication of efforts and gaps in support of more efficient use of limited resources. To this end, REACH supports national authorities in the establishment, reactivation, formalisation and/or strengthening of coordination mechanisms at two levels: the decision-making level and the technical level.

### 5.2.2 Inputs

The following inputs are key to supporting national authorities in establishing, reactivating, formalising and/or strengthening multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms:

- Existing legal<sup>1</sup> or institutional coordination mechanisms for nutrition, both high-level and technical, to build on existing structures<sup>2</sup>
- Commitment of government and counterparts in all relevant sectors
- Involvement of all relevant ministries and sectors as informed by the Nutrition Analysis (See Section 4.2) and Selection of Priority Actions exercise (See Section 4.3)
- Commitment of other institutions (e.g. UN Agencies and other multilateral institutions, NGOs, CSOs, private sector, academic/other research partners, donors) with a mandate or interest in nutrition-related sectors
- Relevant information such as the findings from the Institutional Analysis (See Section 4.4); and
- Mapping of stakeholder's roles, competencies and responsibilities as per the findings of the Stakeholders and Activity Mapping (See Section 4.5)

### 5.2.3 What is involved? An abbreviated "How to"

Coordination mechanisms on nutrition should be in place at two levels: the **policy-making level** and the **technical level**. Coordination mechanisms at the policy level (so-called high-level) can play a pivotal role in elevating nutrition as a priority issue as well as formulating and reforming nutrition policy. At the technical level, they create a space that enables their members to identify and implement new and improved programmatic approaches, including nutrition-sensitive actions. The REACH *Support* Phase offers an opportunity to strengthen the existing technical stakeholder group (e.g. Technical Working Group) by reflecting on how the REACH stock-taking exercises unfolded with a view to further improving the balance of the multi-sectoral approach.<sup>3</sup> REACH facilitators can moderate that dialogue with technical stakeholders.

#### Keep in mind

Presidential decrees, executive orders and/or other laws may be required to officially establish a high-level coordination structure on nutrition in-country. In these cases, REACH facilitators may lend support with the preparation of/guidelines for these "acts". An executive decree was formulated and adopted by the Government of Mauritania to support the founding of the *Conseil National de Développement de la nutrition* (National Council for the Development of Nutrition). Additional information is provided in Section 5.3 on Policy Reform.

<sup>1</sup> Legal in this context means that the national coordinating mechanism has been formally established by act of Parliament or the like.

<sup>2</sup> However, if there is no existing nutrition coordination mechanism(s), REACH can support the national authorities to facilitate the establishment of relevant structures.

<sup>3</sup> The mobilization of an expanded group of technical stakeholders (e.g. Technical Working Group) undertaken during the *Getting Started* Phase may have occurred on an informal basis in the essence of time and need to complete the initial REACH stock-taking exercises of the *Situation Analysis* Phase in a timely manner. While this group may have operated smoothly during the completion of such exercises, it is important to take time to properly formalize the group during the *Support* Phase to support sustained nutrition action/progress.



This dialogue is critical, as decisions may otherwise be made through one or a selected few formal authorities, often advised by agencies with a strong influence on nutrition or through “informal power relationships (e.g. among government actors or between government and international actors)”, where multi-sectoral coordination aspects are inadequate.<sup>4</sup> Decisions made without (or with limited) coordination between sectors risk excluding key nutrition stakeholders, and thus may jeopardize results. Facilitators should work with national authorities to remind country stakeholders of these risks and to help underscore the importance of coordination structures for achieving nutrition successes.

The value that coordination mechanisms can bring to nutrition work in-country goes beyond their mere existence. Multi-sectoral undernutrition problems are more easily addressed when **formal** and **functional** coordination mechanisms are in place<sup>5</sup>. This may require officially determining the composition of such bodies, establishing protocol (e.g. governance, meeting protocol, etc.) as well as a time commitment for attending relevant meetings and any required preparatory and follow-up work. It may be helpful to hold meetings whereby “comments are incorporated but are not attributable to any particular organization<sup>6</sup>” to help promote the joint-spirit of multi-sectoral nutrition action. REACH facilitators can help country stakeholders with these matters, leveraging the findings from the REACH Institutional Analysis and building on current mechanisms and procedures.

At the central level, coordination mechanisms will assume both political and technical roles. Countries also need coordination mechanisms at sub-national levels (e.g. regional and district level), which provide valuable contributions to the REACH nutrition analysis, identification of priority actions (particularly adapting them to local needs) as well as joint-planning, implementation and monitoring, given their close proximity to intervention/programme sites and recipients.

**Table 16: Supporting National authorities through facilitation of the Establishment, Reactivation, Formalisation and/or Strengthening of Nutrition Coordination Mechanisms**  
*Outlining the tasks and/or roles to guide the establishment, reactivation, formalisation and/or strengthening of nutrition coordination mechanisms*

Tasks and/or Roles	Description
Guidance and stewardship	Support national authorities to facilitate the establishment, reactivation, formalisation and/or strengthening of nutrition coordination mechanisms, defining the objectives, expected results, outcomes and deadlines/timeline.
Data collection	Compile key information including findings from the REACH Institutional Analysis including the summary table of findings and identified representational gaps (See Section 4.4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a.) If a country experiences regular emergencies, IASC emergencies clusters (e.g. nutrition and food security) may be considered to temporarily carry out an expanded coordination function. Other sectoral clusters or sectoral coordination groups should likewise be considered (e.g. water, gender, etc.) as these also have ties to nutrition. Be sure to clearly identify who leads existing coordination mechanisms (e.g. government, if so, which ministry; donors; UN agency; or others).</li> <li>(b.) Check to see whether the UN Network has been mobilised in the country and how REACH can support the network.</li> <li>(c.) Present the challenges and opportunities for the improved functioning of coordination mechanisms, as revealed by the Institutional Analysis in a synthesised, visual manner (if not already prepared through the Institutional Analysis) to guide brainstorming discussions.</li> <li>(d.) Solicit guidance from and coordination with the national SUN focal point so</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Pelletier DL, Frongillo EA, Gervais S, Hoey L, Menon P, Ngo T, Stoltzfus RJ, Shamsir Ahmed AM and Tahmeed Ahmed (2011). “Nutrition agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation: lessons from the Mainstreaming Nutrition Initiative.” *Healthy Policy and Planning*, doi:10.1093/heapol/czr011.

<sup>5</sup> IFPRI (2008). “Improving Nutrition as a Development Priority; Addressing Undernutrition in National Policy Processes in Sub-Saharan Africa.” Research Report 126, Benson T. Washington D.C.

<sup>6</sup> Shepherd-Barron J (2009). “Clusterwise; Everything you wanted to know about cluster coordination but were afraid to ask.” Clustercoordination.org.

	as to ensure harmonised action and avoid the creation of parallel structures.
Analysis	<p>Facilitate discussions with technical stakeholders to:</p> <p>(a.) Finalise the recommended composition of formal coordination structures for both the high-level and technical level groups. In general, the following stakeholder groups are directly involved in nutrition actions at country level: technical focal points from key ministries (Director level or their appointees); UN Heads of Agencies and focal points; NGO representatives/technical focal points (international and national); civil society organization representatives; academia; and the private-sector, where appropriate.</p> <p>(b.) Define the roles, objectives and goals of the coordination mechanisms, drafting or updating terms of reference (ToR), as needed. These ToR should reflect the differing levels of functions (e.g. high-level political, technical or other). Moreover, the ToR should articulate the reporting lines/feedback loops between the political and technical levels as well as between the central and sub-national levels.</p>
Consensus-building	<p>Promote continued consensus among the larger nutrition community on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nutrition problems (magnitude and severity) in-country</li> <li>• The selected priority interventions</li> <li>• Inclusion of selected priority interventions in the relevant policies, strategies and action plans</li> <li>• Coverage for each priority intervention</li> </ul>
Communications and advocacy	<p>Advocacy efforts for the establishment, reactivation, formalisation and/or strengthening of formal coordination mechanisms for nutrition, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government, high-level coordination mechanisms;</li> <li>• Government, decentralised coordination mechanisms; and</li> <li>• Multi-stakeholder technical coordination mechanism.</li> </ul> <p>The RCC and UN Resident Coordinator may be engaged in these advocacy efforts, as needed.</p> <p>Advocate and identify – if needed -funding for the coordination structure.</p>
Operationalisation	<p>Support the development of a workplan to guide the operationalisation of the coordination structures and facilitate accountability. The workplans should be updated annually, taking into account country achievements and priorities. It should include objectives, expected outcomes, activities, responsibilities, resources needed (national/partner) and duration of activities/deadlines. Encourage stakeholders to include the activities mentioned in the REACH CIP in the respective coordination mechanism workplans.</p>
Knowledge-sharing	<p>Liaise with other REACH facilitators and the REACH Secretariat to explore how nutrition coordination mechanisms were founded and function in other countries. Formalise knowledge-sharing mechanisms.</p> <p>Document this country experience, being sure to capture key successes and challenges to help guide similar efforts in other countries.</p>

**See Annex 2 for generic ToR for coordination mechanisms**

**5.2.4 Practical guidelines**

Varying levels of coordination management support may be extended by REACH facilitators according to the country context. Where **no formal coordination mechanisms** are in place, facilitators should provide close coordination management to the national authorities to support and enhance the functionality of the mechanism(s), spanning a range of duties that help improve:

- (a.) Regularity with which meetings convene;
- (b.) Meeting attendance (e.g. sending gentle reminders to participants);
- (c.) Efficiency/Effectiveness of meetings such as the preparation of meeting agendas and background materials;
- (d.) Balanced participation/discussion;
- (e.) Note-taking and dissemination of meeting notes;
- (f.) Identification of follow-up measures with designated person(s)/parties responsible; and
- (g.) Other tasks, as needed.

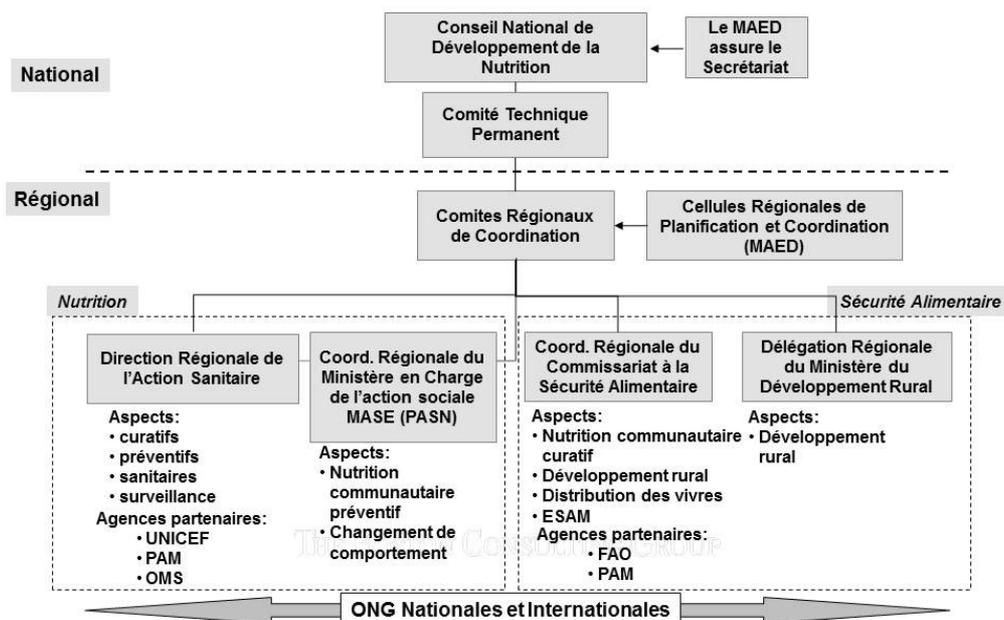
This support helps advance the change agenda and continue the momentum of the comprehensive REACH Situation Analysis.

The government must agree to the use of any structure for nutrition coordination outside of the mechanism’s previously defined functions. The ToR of the existing mechanism should be updated accordingly with the facilitator providing support, as needed.

Once **formal coordination mechanisms** are in place, facilitators are advised to reduce their level of participation to a more facilitative role (e.g. level 4 or 5 participation, see Section 2.2.3 on Participatory Approaches). Under these circumstances, facilitators may provide coordination backstopping, as required. This will, in turn, foster greater empowerment among country stakeholders, and hopefully sustainability.

**Figure 22: Composition of the National Council for the Development of Nutrition (Conseil National de Développement de la nutrition) and key partners in Mauritania**

*An example of a formal, high-level, multi-sectoral coordination mechanism called the National Council for Nutrition Development (Conseil national de développement de la nutrition) in Mauritania that operates at the national level*





The Mauritanian government created the *Conseil National de Développement de la nutrition in Mauritania* or National Council for the Development of Nutrition (NCDN) to serve as a high-level nutrition coordination mechanism following the recommendations and lobbying efforts of the REACH technical working group. The Council is comprised of the key Ministers involved in nutrition, and the Technical Permanent Committee (a technical body in charge of technical decision-making) which supports the NCDN. The Council's structure and key partners at national and sub-national levels are depicted in Figure 22 above to provide an illustrative example of high-level, nutrition coordination structures.

**Table 17: Common Coordination Challenges and Potential Solutions**

*Understanding and penetrating the barriers to effective multi-sectoral nutrition coordination*

Challenges		Problems	Possible Solutions
1	Facilitators are not perceived as an independent broker	Supporting the government and competing for funding is perceived as compromising impartiality, independence and neutrality	Be sure to facilitate the collective effort, not take-over and/or act unilaterally. Be neutral and low-key
2	Agency autonomy is threatened	Individuals and organisations fear that collective efforts will reduce their visibility and freedom to make decisions	Demonstrate that collective problem-solving leads to consensus on programming and results while allowing freedom of action within programmes
3	Knowledge is assumed	Not all agencies will have the same or requisite knowledge on which to base their decisions; technical language may differ	Provide technical input from respected third parties and seek out knowledge from different sources
4	Understanding of language is assumed	The UN language is not the mother tongue of all participants	Remind participants that there will always be linguistic misunderstandings; Work towards common language and verify comprehension regularly
5	Domain Consensus is challenged	Differences among organisations/institutions in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic coverage</li> <li>• Sectoral &amp; sub-sectoral responsibilities</li> <li>• Target groups</li> <li>• Prioritisation of needs</li> <li>• Programmatic approaches</li> </ul>	Stimulate dialogue, knowledge-sharing and collective analysis
6	All organisations are not equal	Certain organisations dominate both the agenda and the ensuing decision-making process	Moderate discussions to ensure balanced participation, prevention domination of the 'usual suspects'
7	Decision-makers do not attend meetings	Decision-makers do not consider nutrition to be a priority area	Be sure to engage decision-makers from the beginning of the process, clarify the multidimensional causes of undernutrition, tailor communication and advocacy messages (See Section 2.4)
8	Data incompatibilities and access limitations	Organisations use different sampling methodologies, indicators, data collection frequency, precluding comparisons	Work towards standardised data requirements and a comprehensive info mgt system; Capitalise on planned 'regular' assessments to add indicators; Make and document assumptions, where applicable
9	Credit for success is diffused	Acknowledgement of individuals and agencies gets lost through the collective approach	Collective successes are arguably more powerful than individual successes
10	Lack of trust	Participating agencies/institutions have a history of strained relations	Facilitate effectively. Listen, learn, employ participatory approaches, foster transparency, be neutral, conduct team-building exercises, celebrate successes, etc.
11	Antagonism	Participating agencies/institutions see each other as competitors	Demonstrate how REACH can break down tension and strengthen individual and collective efforts
12	Absence of Sanction	Agencies/institutions and individuals do not do what they say they are going to do	Monitor contributions, solicit as needed. Give positive feedback to high-performing individuals and/or groups in public.
13	Intimidation/sensitivity	Will not say what they really think in	Instil an atmosphere of trust and



	meetings	transparency. Work to achieve quick wins during the early stages of activity to help incentivise further joint-action.
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There are a number of **other coordination mechanisms and/or platforms** which seek to promote integrated nutrition action with more than one operating and/or involved in activities in a given country in some cases. These include: SUN, SCN, MDG-F, UN Joint Programming, IASC Emergency Clusters, AAHM, etc. This can cause confusion for REACH facilitators and other country stakeholders. A brief description of these mechanisms is provided below in an effort to clarify the differences and complementarities between them<sup>7</sup>. It is important to recognize that REACH aims to build sustainable capacities to improve governance and management for scaling-up nutrition action. The focus of REACH support in this arena should be directed towards formal government-led coordinating mechanisms at both the policy and technical levels. The REACH facilitator should use existing structures, as needed, but with a long-term vision of establishing/strengthening the appropriate government-led structures and mechanisms. Facilitators are also tasked with strengthening UN coordination so as to promote a coherent UN Network at the country level. At present, there is no pre-established way for REACH facilitators to engage with these mechanisms. Rather, these linkages are very much emerging areas. It is important for REACH facilitators to reach out to and familiarise themselves with the other mechanisms/platforms in place in the country, to engage these actors as appropriate, and to regularly update them on REACH progress/developments.

- The **UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN)** is the official **forum for global discourse on UN food and nutrition policy**, boasting a broad network (e.g. UN agencies and representatives of the Bilateral and NGO/Civil Society constituencies). It addresses under- and over-nutrition, and organises thematic consultations/mobilises thematic working groups to discuss emerging technical issues. It plays a considerable role in knowledge-sharing, facilitating access to a broad range of resources among nutrition policy specialists and practitioners.
- The REACH has been very active in the **Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)** movement, both at the global and country level. Broadly speaking, REACH is considered to be a vehicle for promoting the commitments pledged through the SUN movement. The REACH facilitator in Bangladesh coordinated early SUN activity in-country though this arrangement may not be suitable or appropriate in other countries, or in later phases of SUN activity. At a minimum, facilitators should work closely with the national SUN focal points. In many SUN countries, the CSO and Donor Networks are currently strengthening their in-country dialogue and are working to operate as joint networks; these networks can be used by REACH facilitators to establish effective linkages to CSO and donor nutrition partners.
- A concept note has been drafted to explore linkages between REACH country engagements and **IASC country clusters**. In countries where IASC clusters are active, REACH facilitators should ask the UN Nutrition Team to call a meeting with the relevant Cluster Coordinators to establish contact and introduce REACH as early as operationally possible.
- **MDG-F programmes** on thematic window on Children, Food Security and Nutrition have been undertaken in twenty-four countries. While the majority of them concluded in December 2012, others have continued into 2013. Efforts have been undertaken to distil the main lessons learned through these experiences, which provide valuable insight for REACH facilitators and other technical country stakeholders (see <http://www.mdgfund.org/content/childrenfoodsecurityandnutrition>).
- **Alliances Against Hunger and Malnutrition (AAHM)** are established in many countries, offering a space where governments and CSOs can build/strengthen working relationships

<sup>7</sup> FAO's team on Inter-institutional nutrition collaboration has prepared a technical brief which highlights additional information about these nutrition collaboration platforms, why multi-sectoral collaboration is needed and a matrix illustrating where (in which countries) these platforms are active.

(<http://www.theaahm.org>). These country partnerships may be strategic in promoting REACH-related advocacy and strengthening the agriculture and food security elements of country-level nutrition action as part of a greater multi-sectoral approach.

### 5.2.5 Outputs

Supporting national government in the establishment, reactivation, formalisation and/or strengthening of Nutrition Coordination Mechanisms leads to following outputs. The second output is outside the direct control of the REACH facilitators, and thus is marked by grey text. Nevertheless, the idea is that the REACH support will help facilitate the completion of this output.

- ✓ Terms of Reference (ToRs) drafted for the respective nutrition coordination mechanisms (national high level, national technical level and decentralised)
- ✓ Executive decrees and/or other laws formulated and enacted, as needed, to support the establishment of official government coordination structures for nutrition
- ✓ Nutrition coordination mechanisms (national high-level, national technical level and decentralised) established, reactivated, formalised and/or strengthened