What Can the United States Learn from the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement?

Examining Country Leadership in Zambia, Kenya, and Bangladesh

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Acknowledgments

Preparation for this report included a literature review, semi-structured interviews, and case studies in three Feed the Future focus countries: Zambia, Kenya, and Bangladesh. The desk review examined recent literature relating to nutrition policy and planning, political commitment and leadership, multisectoral approaches, capacity, implementation, and impact. Global level stakeholders were interviewed in addition to experts in case study countries. Informants included representatives from national government ministries, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Secretariat and SUN networks, civil society, communities, United Nations agencies, academia and think tanks, and international donors, including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Case studies in Bangladesh and Kenya were conducted remotely, while the Zambia study is based on a country visit.

The authors would like to thank all those who generously provided their time and insights during interviews and particularly government representatives and SUN stakeholders in Zambia who made space in their schedules to meet with the team. A full list of interview subjects is furnished in the Appendix.

Reid Hamel provided conceptual and editorial input from project development through manuscript finalization.
Executive Summary

Country-led political and financial commitments to nutrition goals are widely recognized as critical to reducing malnutrition at scale. This report seeks to examine the relationship between country-level nutrition policy, implementation leadership, donor support and coordination, and nutrition outcomes at a national or subnational level. The analysis focuses on reducing the prevalence of stunting in countries targeted by the U.S. government global food and nutrition security initiative, Feed the Future. Drawing from progress of and lessons learned within the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, it furnishes recommendations for Feed the Future to improve its engagement both with SUN and with broader country-level nutrition policies and aligned resources.

Drawing from emergent scientific evidence of both malnutrition’s social and economic burden and also the documented high returns on nutrition investments, the SUN movement was launched in 2010. From the outset, SUN focused on the harmful impacts of the global stunting burden and on interventions within the critical 1,000-day window from conception to a child’s second birthday. SUN now works in 59 countries to support nationally led strategies to combat malnutrition in a systematic way that accounts for its underlying causes. SUN promotes a multisectoral approach that engages multiple ministries or agencies as likely the most effective and comprehensive strategy to address undernutrition at scale.

During its first phase (2012–2015), the SUN movement sought to create an enabling environment for nutrition by uniting multiple sectors and stakeholders at the country level, with an emphasis on advocacy, partnership promotion, and unified nutrition commitments. The second phase (2016–2020) builds upon this foundation to demonstrate progress in investments and implementation that lead to measurable results.

The United States has a laudable history of tackling global malnutrition and has long been the largest nutrition donor in the world. Between Fiscal Years 2010 and 2016, the U.S. Congress provided nearly $1.5 billion for nutrition-specific activities; funding in 2016 was estimated at $229 million. The reduction of stunting prevalence is one of Feed the Future’s two highest-level goals and 18 of the initiative’s 19 focus countries are also members of the SUN movement. The first ever U.S. Global Food Security Strategy, submitted to Congress in October 2016, includes improved nutrition as one of three primary objectives. USAID has contributed to the SUN movement since its inception and acts as a coconvenor of donor networks at the national level in eight countries.

This report seeks to understand whether select countries that have more fully embraced and championed the SUN strategy have also witnessed greater progress in mounting a scalable and effective response to malnutrition. It explores whether multilateral coinvestments in nutrition policy and planning, in line with SUN aims and objectives, translate into change on the ground that sustains local ownership and leadership.

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The discussion is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 considers nutrition investments following the launch of the SUN movement in terms of policy and leadership, financial commitments, and improved data management. Chapter 2 examines the translation of these investments into multisectoral implementation through national systems, and investigates current evidence of impact. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the role of Feed the Future and its engagement with SUN, including profiles of its work in Bangladesh and Kenya. Chapter 4 presents a detailed case study that examines nutrition investments in Zambia and their subsequent impacts. Conclusions of the comparative analysis are summarized in Chapter 5.

The report suggests the following recommendations to the U.S. government:

At a global level:

- Share Feed the Future country-level financial data with the SUN movement financial tracking system.

- Improve communication of nutrition-sensitive technical expertise in agriculture and in private-sector engagement across donor networks, partner governments, and to the public. Collaborate with other stakeholders to better define what nutrition-sensitive interventions encompass and how their impacts are measured.

- Approach participation within SUN working groups in a systematic way, with particular attention to the SUN business network given the U.S. government’s comparative advantages in private-sector partnerships.

- Refocus attention on nutrition within Feed the Future portfolios. Ensure that activities are sufficiently tailored to translate into improved nutrition outcomes at scale.

At a national level with partner countries:

- Work proactively to break down the stereotype of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) disengagement from national government policies and the donor community.

- Support systems that advance country-level leadership in high-level nutrition research and policy analysis to sustain political engagement and momentum for nutrition. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has led this type of work in countries such as Bangladesh, where it has embedded evaluation capacity within government ministries.

- Consider reinforcing national data platforms and local analytical capacity. Centralized data systems support multiple actors to monitor nutrition and to trace causal pathways that reduce stunting. They simultaneously build local ownership and reduce redundancies. Move beyond a focus on data collection to target deficits that undermine the potential of data-driven decisionmaking.
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The SUN Movement: Investment in Policy and Leadership for Nutrition

The Influential Lancet Nutrition Series

The landmark *Lancet* series on maternal and child nutrition (2008) highlighted the high personal and economic costs of stunting and criticized the failure of a "fragmented and dysfunctional" international architecture to confront them. Multiple narratives around and approaches to nutrition programming have been cited as a barrier to achieving improved outcomes, alongside the political economy challenge of nutrition lacking a natural institutional "home." This dual absence of technical consensus and political champions is a major obstacle in translating momentum for nutrition into sustained results.

The *Lancet* critique, alongside the 2008 Copenhagen Consensus, which bolstered the economic argument for nutrition in its conclusion that nutrition interventions were among the most cost-effective in development, contributed to the birth of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement. The movement highlighted the need to tackle stunting, with a particular focus on the first 1,000 days of life from conception until a child's second birthday. SUN also spearheads country-led, multisectoral strategies to combat malnutrition through nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive approaches that tackle malnutrition's underlying causes. Nutrition-sensitive interventions refer to those implemented within and beyond the health sector that indirectly leverage nutritional impact. A multisectoral approach to nutrition—one that systematically and comprehensively engages multiple ministries or agencies—has been promoted as potentially the most effective way to address undernutrition.

Progress of the SUN Movement

The SUN movement was launched in 2010 with the commitment of four countries; it now comprises 59. During its first phase (2012–2015), SUN sought to create an enabling environment for nutrition and bring together multiple sectors and stakeholders (civil society, donors, UN agencies, and the private sector) at the country level, with an emphasis on advocacy, partnership

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3 This includes agriculture and food security, water and sanitation, social protection, poverty reduction, health, environment and climate change, finance, and trade.
5 Data from the SUN movement website, www.scalingupnutrition.org.
promotion, and a call for commitment on nutrition. The second phase (2016–2020) continues to have multistakeholder and multisectoral approaches at its core, although countries are increasingly expected to demonstrate progress in spending and implementation that leads to results.

The current SUN movement strategy (2016–2020) sets out four objectives:

- Expand and sustain an enabling political environment
- Prioritize and institutionalize effective actions that contribute to good nutrition
- Implement effective actions aligned with common results
- Effectively use, and significantly increase, financial resources for nutrition

The transformational pathway or theory of change of the SUN movement (see Figure 1.1) shows how governments in the movement collaborate with partners to achieve SUN’s vision of a world free from malnutrition in all its forms by 2030.

Figure 1.1.

Scaling Up Nutrition’s Transformational Pathway

Vision: By 2030, a world free from malnutrition in all its forms. Led by governments and supported by organizations and individuals—collective action ensures every child, adolescent, mother, and family can realize their right to food and nutrition, reach their full potential, and shape sustainable and prosperous societies.

*Ending malnutrition contributes to the achievement of all SDGs.*

Women, children, adolescents, and families thrive, leading to the end of malnutrition by 2030.

*Aligned implementation* achieves results far greater than what could have been achieved alone.

*Resources are mobilized* and coverage of locally relevant nutrition-specific actions and nutrition-sensitive contributions are scaled up.

*The actors change their behaviors* and commit to achieving common nutrition results for everyone, everywhere.

*Multiple stakeholders come together* to tackle malnutrition and build an enabling environment for improving nutrition with equity.


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The following sections consider features and challenges in three key areas of nutrition investment that have been core to the first stage of the SUN movement’s theory of change: political and strategic investment in multisectoral systems; financial investment; and investment in data management, monitoring, and evaluation. Examples from original case studies in Bangladesh and Kenya are included, in addition to findings from other key studies.

Global Leadership on Nutrition

As part of the focus on developing the enabling environment for nutrition, the first phase of the SUN movement promoted strong leadership at the global level. A series of global networks was established, including a donor network, civil society network, UN network, and business network, alongside advocacy for similar structures to be established at the national level.

The SUN donor network is working to strengthen its coordination role at the country level and on identifying what needs to be in place for increased engagement and exchanges among donors. Competing pressures and priorities often result in difficulty achieving a cohesive level of strategic engagement. Donor convenor structures differ from country to country and a recent study examining the functioning of SUN donor networks in eight countries observed that donors in some countries collaborate within a broader partners’ working group, rather than establishing a separate SUN donor network. This lack of systematic donor structures or protocols makes for unpredictable discussion between donors at the country level. A more systematic approach, in terms of who participates and contributes, as well as more predictable resources, would assist in maintaining donor structures and sustain momentum in terms of galvanizing government involvement.

The SUN civil society network plays an important role to advance cross-sectoral implementation of nutrition-sensitive approaches at a grassroots level and to achieve accountability. It is currently investigating the potential of social accountability mechanisms to monitor the delivery of nutrition interventions and verify the use of funds to implement national policy and strategy at a district level. Civil society can also play an important role in supporting local government to implement programs, to identify and prioritize nutrition-sensitive interventions, to fill funding gaps, and to support mechanisms to spend government nutrition funds appropriately at the local level. Civil society networks define their roles in varying ways in different countries. For example, in both Bangladesh and Zambia, they play a strong role in advocacy and communication on nutrition, holding the government to account for nutrition action and financing. In other countries, civil society can be the primary implementer of nutrition activities, particularly in situations where government capacity or outreach is weak.

The role of the private sector in achieving nutrition security remains a contentious issue. The SUN business network is convened by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the UN

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7 Côte d’Ivoire, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Senegal, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Zambia.
World Food Program (WFP) and further supported by an advisory group of senior business leaders. The network aims to reduce malnutrition in all its forms by mobilizing business to invest and innovate in responsible and sustainable operations. It provides a neutral platform to broker nutrition partnerships and collaboration between business and other actors at national, regional, and global levels to support SUN country plans. The SUN business network has more than 300 members, including both multinational and national companies committed to improved nutrition throughout the world.

National Commitment to Nutrition

A 2012 analysis highlighted 10 key political and institutional determinants of delivering a national multisectoral response, which included framing nutrition as part of the national development agenda, and ensuring that high-level leadership supported by authoritative coordinating bodies are identified—a structure that has been established in several SUN countries. For example, in Zimbabwe the convening authority is the Zimbabwe National Nutrition Council, which sits at the level of the prime minister. In Nepal, the National Nutrition and Food Security Secretariat sits within the National Planning Commission. Positioning the responsibility for multisectoral coordination within a mandated supra-ministerial body means that one sector is not seen as the leader in nutrition, thus avoiding cross-sectoral tensions. The focus of leadership is on governance and effective coordination of sectors in complementary ways.

The Global Nutrition Report 2016 highlights that mechanisms to coordinate actions across sectors must be backed by high-level support and human and financial resources. Other analyses concur, emphasizing the importance of provincial/district-level coordination teams.

Defining clear policy goals for nutrition is an essential prerequisite to take action and enables different sectors and stakeholders (government, donor, UN, civil society, and private sector) to align strategically and to embed nutrition in sector and organizational plans. Funding must align with the action plans.

In Kenya, both the Constitution and “Vision 2030,” Kenya’s National Development Plan (launched in 2008), situated nutrition firmly as a national priority, from which policy and plans could be developed. Key laws, including restrictions on the marketing and promotion of breast milk substitutes and ensuring oil fortification, also define parameters for nutrition commitment.

In Bangladesh, high-level commitment to improving nutrition has been expressed by the country’s prime minister, who chairs the recently revitalized Bangladesh National Nutrition Council. She declared malnutrition “the largest single contributor to physical and mental under-development and disease.” The overarching Seventh Five-Year Plan outlines the country’s commitment to

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addressing nutrition through a multisectoral approach, clearly defining the role of each sector. Where it previously focused on nutrition-specific interventions, the current National Plan of Action for Nutrition (2016–2025) was developed by a team of representatives from different government ministries, including Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Local Government and Social Welfare, and Ministry of Food. It outlines a comprehensive set of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions that draw on existing programs implemented by the different ministries. The second Country Investment Plan (CIP), which complements the National Plan of Action for Nutrition, includes nutrition-sensitive strategies from the Ministry of Food, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. In addition, nutrition is embedded in the policies of each ministry and stunting reduction is a key development indicator.

Finance for Nutrition at the Global Level

The SUN Annual Progress Report 2016 estimates that US$3.9 billion is now spent on nutrition annually from all sources (donor and domestic). The SUN Movement Secretariat has conducted a landscape analysis to identify all funding that is allocated for nutrition, what it is geared toward, and how commitments for nutrition are disaggregated at the country level. This analysis is expected later in 2017. SPRING and the World Bank are coleading consultations to identify best practices and standards in tracking nutrition funding.

Figure 1.2 shows disbursements (combined nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive) from 13 donors for 2012 and 2014. Recent years have witnessed a significant increase in donor nutrition investments. However, the progress report notes that nutrition-specific spending appears to have plateaued between 2013 and 2014.

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Box 1 outlines the global investment required to meet the World Health Assembly target to reduce the number of children under five years of age who are stunted by 40 percent\(^{12}\) by 2025.\(^{13}\)

To date there have been significant challenges to track financial allocation for, and actual spending on, nutrition. This is largely due to nutrition interventions being added onto or subsumed within the work of a variety of sectors, as well as to the diverse ways in which nutrition is financed, with funds committed through both government budgets and through civil society, multilateral agencies, and bilateral donors (referred to as “off-budget”). For nutrition-sensitive allocation, defining the proportion of overall program finances that could justifiably be considered nutrition funding is extremely challenging. National multisectoral nutrition policies and plans play an important role in distinguishing what can be considered nutrition-sensitive in a particular country so that spending can be tracked against agreed parameters.


Box 1: Key Messages from the World Bank Investment Framework for meeting the Global Nutrition Target for Stunting (2017)

- Reaching the stunting reduction target is feasible but large coordinated investments in key nutrition interventions and a supportive policy environment are required.
- Scaling up high-impact interventions in all low- and middle-income countries, along with expected improvements in underlying determinants of undernutrition, would lead to a 40 percent decline in the number of stunted children by 2025.
- Scaling up these interventions to reach this target requires an investment of $49.5 billion over 10 years.
- Mobilizing these additional resources requires governments, donors, and other financiers to work in partnership, with governments investing $2.6 billion and donors an additional $2.1 billion annually, on average, by 2025.
- This scale-up in intervention coverage, along with improvements in underlying determinants, would result in 65 million fewer children stunted in 2025 and, over 10 years, would prevent around 2.8 million deaths among children under age five.
- The scale-up of the key nutrition-specific interventions is estimated to generate about $417 billion in economic benefits. Every $1 invested in stunting reduction will generate $11 in economic returns.

The SUN donor network has developed a tracking tool for global nutrition investment, which collates information on country-level investments by different donors. However, the tracking tool has not yet been universally adopted by donors.

Country-Level Finance for Nutrition

When a government takes a strong lead with domestic resource mobilization, and when good progress in multisectoral plan development is made, donors are under more pressure to align with national priorities rather than following their own agendas. The SUN donor network is working to ensure that all donors coordinate around a country’s common results framework and nutrition plan by 2020.

The creation of a costed national plan for nutrition that highlights government and donor allocations and points out funding gaps can promote the alignment of different actors around it and encourage donors to be more proactive. This has been the case, for example, in Kenya, where the National Nutrition Action Plan has been costed in detail. Seven of Kenya’s counties have also costed their own nutrition action plans in line with the national plan. National Nutrition Action Plans in Nepal and Uganda have positively influenced prioritization of, and financing for, nutrition.14 In both countries, evidence suggests that the plan was well understood and nutrition activities were planned accordingly, with funding allocated and spent on implementation of those activities.

In Zambia, several donors are significantly increasing their commitments to the SUN Fund this year to support the government’s multisectoral stunting reduction plan, while the government itself has made bold commitments in human resources for nutrition. Donors such as the European Union

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14 Pomeroy-Stevens et al., “Pathways to Better Nutrition.”
are working to ensure that funds for agriculture support nutrition-sensitive programming, in alignment with the stunting reduction plan.

Nutrition-sensitive work is being pursued in some countries through creative use of existing funds. For example, funds allocated to agriculture; social protection; or water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) can be channeled to encompass nutrition goals in the absence of new resources. SUN has raised nutrition’s profile, creating a moment of opportunity to boost momentum and to anchor nutrition at the national and subnational levels. Creating demand for nutrition-sensitive approaches alongside the supply of nutrition-specific interventions can catalyze governments and donors to commit new funding.

The SUN donor network is working to ensure that all donors coordinate around a country’s common results framework and nutrition plan by 2020.

Across the 24 countries included in the analysis, actual government budget allocation for nutrition ranged from 9.23 percent in Guatemala to 0.06 percent in Vietnam. Opportunities were identified to increase nutrition spending through agriculture, education, social protection, and health budgets.

Sustainable methodologies and structures at the country level are important for tracking funding for nutrition. Nepal is an example of a country that has made great progress in improving nutrition finance tracking of both domestic and donor resources; on- and off-budget spending is clearly documented. However, although several countries self-report nutrition funding, the cross-national comparability of data across sources (government, donor agencies, civil society, etc.) is not always clear.

A further difficulty in financial tracking is that, while data on funds allocation are increasingly available, the proportion of allocated funds actually spent on nutrition is much harder to pin down. Systems challenges, such as budget release timelines and procurement delays, can make spending problematic and insufficient detail in financial reporting can often blur budget lines. Although there is minimal evidence to date on the relationship between nutrition expenditures and outcomes, performance-based financing and similar rigorous tracking mechanisms have recently been established in countries such as Peru and Guatemala to further illuminate these linkages.

In Kenya, as in many countries, nutrition financing from development partners exceeds the amount of finance provided by the government. There have been increases in national and county-level human resource allocations for nutrition and the Ministry of Health has a dedicated budget line for nutrition, although it represents just 0.5 percent of the overall health budget.

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15 It should be noted that different methods were used to define budget allocations for nutrition across these countries.
The Ministry of Agriculture has allocated some budget for nutrition and is completing guidance on nutrition-sensitive agricultural programming. An activity costing exercise is ongoing, with support from the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the SUN business network. The World Bank has produced key messages on the rationale for nutrition investment in Kenya, with the aim of equipping the government and donors with the knowledge to make decisions and advocate for funding. These messages are summarized in Box 2.16

**Box 2: The rationale for investment in nutrition in Kenya: Key messages**
- Scaling up 11 key nutrition-specific interventions in all counties of Kenya would cost $76 million in public and donor investments annually, save 5,000 lives, and prevent almost 700,000 cases of stunting.
- The investment could increase economic productivity by $458 million per year over the productive lives of the beneficiaries.
- Every dollar invested has the potential to result in $22 in economic returns.
- Focusing scale-up on 10 cost-effective interventions in counties with stunting prevalence above 20 percent would require $48 million annually.

In Bangladesh, the budget line for nutrition currently goes through the Institute of Public Health and Nutrition, although these resources will eventually be channeled through the National Nutrition Council once fully operational. However, nutrition receives a small component (around 1 percent) of the national health budget. The National Plan of Action for Nutrition and the Country Investment Plan have been costed (around $1 billion and $15 billion, respectively), but data on the proportion of government allocation to these plans was not available at the time of writing.

**Investment in Data Management: Setting Goals, Targets, and Indicators to Gauge Impact**

Defining common goals for tackling malnutrition is an essential step in committing to its reduction. Of equal importance is the identification of indicators and targets by which their achievement will be measured.

**Working Toward Malnutrition Targets**

The World Health Assembly17 target, of a 40 percent reduction in the number of children under five years of age who are stunted by 2025, represents an attempt at global measurement standardization. However, collective agreement has not yet been reached on indicators and process or on the constituents of a good surveillance system.

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Empowering district nutrition committees to use data in their planning is vital. Incorporating indicators from national nutrition plans into local health information systems is one method of systematizing this process. Improved data sharing across sectors can help district-level actors to better understand multiple localized causes of malnutrition and to use this learning to improve planning of complementary multisectoral interventions. The use of data to monitor district-level performance is an essential tool for district leadership to demonstrate commitment to nutrition goals. “Monitoring and evaluation systems that can demonstrate achievement of objectives and results and consolidate results across sectors are required, which include sufficient flexibility to be responsive to different local realities.”  

The SUN Common Results Framework

The SUN movement is a strong advocate of the “Common Results Framework,” a single and agreed set of expected results generated through the effective engagement of different sectors of government and the multiple nongovernment actors who have capacity to influence nutrition. This set of results should be based on the national goals and targets for nutrition (which are often based on the global World Health Assembly targets) and reflect the ways in which different actors can best contribute to the achievement of these targets through their individual and collective actions. In reality, it is taking countries longer than anticipated to develop and implement results frameworks due to the lengthy process of galvanizing political support, engaging stakeholders, and securing resources, as documented in the previous section. Three countries among those that have made progress—Nepal, Peru, and Madagascar—dedicated focused human resources to lead the development of Common Results Frameworks.

The Need for Good Data at Subnational Level

Ongoing data collection plays a key role in terms of analysis and reporting, to track impact on reduction of undernutrition (and proxy indicators), demonstrate success of interventions, highlight problems, and provide evidence around what works. “The timeliness, credibility and persuasiveness of data presented in accessible ways can help governments and other stakeholders to be responsive to changing circumstances and enable accountability.”

Historically there has been an overreliance on Demographic and Health Surveys as the main provider of national nutrition information. There is now a push to improve the quality of national nutrition information systems and a consensus that these form a critical part of a nutrition response. Data disaggregated at the subnational level are essential to comprehend the nutritional context and ensure nutrition programming appropriately targets the right people with the right interventions. Stunting rates can vary dramatically across regions of a country, which is often

18 Walters et al., Understanding the SUN Movement CRF.
19 Ibid.
masked by national survey data. In 13 SUN countries, stunting rates in the wealthiest quintile of society exceed 20 percent,\(^{21}\) contrary to the commonly held idea that wealth is associated with good nutrition. The causes of stunting in one wealth group or region may also be quite different to those in another. Understanding factors that affect levels of stunting in a given context is essential to enable consideration of priorities within a multisectoral strategy.

### National Information Platforms for Nutrition

The National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) initiative is a four-year project launched by the European Commission in 2015. It aims to strengthen the capacity of countries in the SUN movement to understand and interpret trends in the different sectors and how these may have contributed to reductions in stunting, by looking at cross-sectional relationships and factors that influence nutritional outcomes. NIPN gathers existing data from policies, programs, and investments across various sectors, including agriculture, climate, population, water, and health, and examines how they can explain changes in population nutrition and health status. Analysis of the data seeks to better understand how malnutrition can be prevented, with a view to informing national policies and improving programs.

A greater collective responsibility for monitoring nutrition-related indicators across sectors increases accountability for nutrition as an outcome. NIPN also seeks to build capacity in the understanding and analysis of data, noting the current disparity in capacity for data collection, analysis, and reporting within countries, and the necessity to devolve responsibility and support for data analysis from central government to local data collection units.

The initiative is in its early stages and focuses on Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Laos, Niger, and Uganda, but other countries may join. It is anticipated that NIPN could potentially generate evidence to promote and measure the multisectoral approach and confirm that it is working.

Kenya has an elaborate monitoring and evaluation plan, with a clear system for collecting and monitoring nutrition-specific programs. This includes Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) surveys on an annual basis at regional and county level, Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Studies (MICS), and District Health Information Systems that collect data from health facilities. However, data collection across the different sectors is generally not connected or coordinated. The only exception is the food security and nutrition data collection systems, where there are efforts to link the two, with biannual meetings to discuss and compare findings. The NIPN initiative will work to improve analysis across these data streams.

Although Bangladesh has an abundance of nutrition-related datasets, there is a lack of capacity to convene sectors and to analyze and compare indicators across sources. The responsibility for monitoring nutrition-related programming across all ministries lies with the Ministry of Planning.


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In 13 SUN countries, stunting rates in the wealthiest quintile of society exceed 20 percent.
and detailed monitoring and evaluation frameworks have been developed and budgeted for in both the National Plan of Action for Nutrition and the Country Investment Program. The NIPN should help to strengthen the process of cross-sectoral data analysis to record impact on nutrition outcomes.

Other initiatives that are working to improve the availability of data on nutrition and related indicators include Johns Hopkins’ work on National Evaluation Platforms in Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, and Tanzania; and the Gates Foundation’s pilots in Nigeria and Ethiopia to examine data value chains, from upstream investment to impact, and their use to influence decisionmaking.

A SUN Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system is under development, which aims to measure impact pathways from the multisectoral approach. This system relies principally on secondary data and aligns with globally agreed monitoring frameworks and initiatives. Results of the first round of MEAL analysis are expected to appear in the SUN Progress Report 2017.
From Policy to Implementation to Impact

Translating Plans into Action

In 2012, insights from studies in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, and Vietnam\textsuperscript{22} highlighted the importance of sustained efforts once political commitment for nutrition is achieved, the difficulties experienced by mid-level actors in translating political commitment into operational plans; common disagreements over ownership, roles and responsibilities, and appropriate interventions; and weaknesses in human and organizational capacity.

The second phase of the SUN movement has increased its focus on coordinated implementation, linking national plans to monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The movement has produced a checklist\textsuperscript{23} that highlights five fundamental investment areas to ensure that plans translate into appropriate interventions and impact on the ground:

1. Situational analysis
2. Stakeholder engagement and political commitment
3. Costs and budgetary framework
4. Implementation and management arrangements (including at subnational level)
5. Monitoring, evaluation, operational research, and review

A multisectoral approach can strengthen nutritional outcomes in three main ways:\textsuperscript{24} a) by accelerating action on determinants of undernutrition; b) by integrating nutrition considerations into other sectors that may be substantially larger in scale; and c) by increasing "policy coherence" through government-wide attention to policies or strategies and to tradeoffs that may have positive or unintended negative consequences on nutrition.

A key U.S. government implementing partner in Bangladesh and Nepal highlights that "national endorsement of nutrition plans does not in itself result in desired outcomes, hence the allocation of resources has to be based on rigorous evidence."25 Evidence of the impact of nutrition-specific actions is set out in the 2013 *Lancet* series: scaling up 10 nutrition-specific interventions to 90 percent coverage in 34 high-burden countries would reduce stunting by 20 percent globally.26 This assessment underscores the need for complementary, nutrition-sensitive interventions that address malnutrition’s underlying causes. To date, the scale-up of nutrition-specific programs has been slow and inequitable.27 While evidence on the effectiveness of nutrition-sensitive interventions through different sectors has been scarce, it is now emerging.

In Bangladesh, the Common Narrative on Nutrition,28 facilitated in 2014 through the REACH29 partnership, brought development partners together to support the government. This document is based on joint analysis and interpretation of the country’s nutrition profile and data, with prioritized recommendations. The Common Narrative’s purpose was to assist the government, development partners, civil society, and others in setting clear policy and program goals and in monitoring progress toward common targets. It has been used as a basis for discussions among development partners and the government at different levels and across sectors as well as with other stakeholders, including media and the private sector. It is widely recognized as an instrumental factor in recent nutritional gains within the country.

Although governments and other stakeholders need to think and to plan multisectorally, governments are not organized in a multisectoral manner; budgets flow through line ministries and accountability lies within them. Therefore, multisectoral coordination must be complemented with well-designed and, ideally, convergent programmatic actions by the different sectors.30 Analysis of the degree and manner of cross-sectoral integration to achieve greatest impact continues to be an area of experimentation and research.

Recent research has documented bottlenecks within systems and successful approaches to overcome them. Tackling malnutrition can benefit from a systems approach that pays attention to interactions among sectors, disciplines, and determinants of nutrition31 and that supports long-term processes to strengthen organizations. Despite a long tradition of designing good

 Scaling up 10 nutrition-specific interventions to 90 percent coverage in 34 high-burden countries would reduce stunting by 20 percent globally.

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25 S. Lamstein et al., “Optimizing the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Policy Cycle.”
31 Lamstein et al., “Optimizing the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Policy Cycle.”
multisectoral policy in Nepal, implementation success has been varied. Between 2014 and 2016, understanding of the plan had improved at national level and in focus districts but it had not yet reached the level of Village Development Committees.

However, challenges in linking local planning and budgeting to central structures remained. The importance of both top-down and bottom-up perspectives has now been recognized in Nepal, leading to increased community engagement while simultaneously addressing delays and obstacles further up the chain.

Financial management ensures that discretionary funding is available and used effectively to address nutrition needs at the ground level. However, since nutrition interventions are embedded within broader systems (e.g., the health system, social protection mechanisms), the capacity of those systems and existing human resources to deliver interventions is a critical factor.

In countries where decision making is decentralized (e.g., Kenya and Pakistan) and where there is a strong central policy and lead on nutrition, attention must be paid to ensuring sufficient capacity at a local level: targeting geographically, with a focus on vulnerable low-income populations, is critical to ensure an equitable approach.

In Kenya, a devolved governance system was introduced by the new administration in 2013. Each of the 47 counties is now responsible for developing its own plans, budgets, and monitoring systems in line with overarching national policy and plans. Despite the significant successes in stunting reduction documented at a national level, some counties have witnessed far greater progress than others.

Seven Kenyan counties have completed, costed, and disseminated their nutrition plans to date, while many others are working toward this goal. Some counties, such as Turkana and Garissa, have also invested in significant numbers of additional nutrition staff. Leadership on nutrition at the county level is highly variable and advocacy is required to build awareness of national-level commitments and the importance of prioritizing nutrition. Investments in more visible interventions, such as infrastructure development, are often preferred to “soft” options such as capacity building for health workers. However, the rollout of a recently developed nutrition costing tool to county level has greatly improved planning and budgeting for nutrition. The costing tool has also aided advocacy for nutrition resource allocation at the county level.

In Bangladesh, despite high-level political commitment and multisectoral planning processes, translation of national plans into action at the community level has been slow. This has been attributed to factors including poor coordination between sectors, a “silo” approach at both national and subnational level, a lack of human resources, and insufficient funding. Much of the community-level nutrition progress to date is attributed to the highly active and motivated civil society.

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32 Pomeroy-Stevens et al., “Pathways to Better Nutrition.”
Examining the Impact

Although much work has been done to identify successes and best practice to translate political commitment for nutrition into implementation, evidence of impact is not yet readily available given the age of the SUN movement. Furthermore, despite the consensus for a multisectoral approach, there is an intrinsic difficulty in demonstrating the success of such an approach given that causal pathways are difficult to isolate.

A study in Uganda \(^{33}\) describes a strong governance structure for nutrition, led by the highest levels of government, and notes subsequent improvements in child-related nutrition indicators. The District Nutrition Coordination Committee of one study district with notable gains demonstrated effective stakeholder coordination to improve multisectoral program implementation.

Setting targets appears to expedite stunting reduction. When nutrition is prioritized in policy documents, donors and governments spend more on nutrition, \(^{34}\) while strong nutrition governance is associated with improved outcomes. \(^{35}\) To date, indicators of commitment and capacity have been used by the SUN movement to monitor progress. Tracking changes over time and in relation to strength of governance on the ground is the next step. A challenge remains in defining measures of good governance.

Policy implementation has been successful at the subnational level in some countries. Household survey data in Uganda \(^{36}\) have informed policymakers of the Nutrition Action Plan’s local progress against set food security and nutrition indicators. Further study \(^{37}\) aims to identify intermediate outcomes, for example in the use and control of income derived from agriculture and in changes in women’s roles and empowerment.

Successful nutrition approaches are those that have recognized and addressed gender and social inequalities and sought to address them. For example, the USAID-funded SHOUARDO \(^{38}\) project in Bangladesh demonstrated increased impact on stunting reduction when the most vulnerable groups were targeted.

Two studies on the determinants of stunting are ongoing, which seek to influence and refine policy. The first, commissioned by UNICEF New York with the University of Erasmus in the Netherlands, \(^{39}\) examines Demographic and Health Survey datasets from countries with notable reductions in stunting, aiming to distinguish between the contributions of proximal determinants of nutrition, such as breastfeeding and micronutrient intake, and the contributions of distal determinants, such as sanitation and maternal education. Results are expected by the end of 2017.

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\(^{33}\) Ibid.
\(^{34}\) IFPRI, *Global Nutrition Report 2016*.
\(^{35}\) B. Sunguya et al., “Strong nutrition governance is a key to addressing nutrition transition in low and middle-income countries: Review of countries’ nutrition policies,” *Nutrition Journal* 13, no. 65 (2014).
\(^{37}\) Pomeroy-Stevens et al., “Pathways to Better Nutrition.”
\(^{39}\) University of Erasmus, study title: What accounts for reduced child undernutrition in sub-Saharan Africa?
The second, led by the Kenya Medical Research Institute, is using novel spatial temporal techniques to analyze large household survey data and conduct detailed local studies in selected urban and rural settings to measure and map malnutrition and better understand its determinants. Findings are expected in early 2018.

Actors are increasingly “coalescing” around a common nutrition goal, but there remains a need to ensure that commitment at a higher level is reflected at subnational levels as well. Following the momentum and mobilization spurred by the *Lancet* series, the launch of the 1,000 Days initiative, and the SUN movement, concerns about the sustainability of nutrition prioritization emerge as progress is inevitably slow and results, measured in decades, are not immediate. The framework remains fragile.

**Stunting Reduction Successes in Bangladesh and Kenya: What Can We Learn?**

Although rates remain high, the prevalence of stunted children in Bangladesh has declined significantly, from 51 percent in 2004 to 36 percent in 2014.42

Supported by gains in poverty reduction and economic growth, this decline in stunting has also been linked to factors within the SUN multisector approach, including the scale-up of nutrition-specific activities delivered through health platforms alongside efforts to reduce birth rates; improved food security in terms of production, distribution, and access to food; and improved sanitary and hygiene conditions, especially reduction of open defecation.

The prevalence of stunted children in Kenya has recently fallen by over a quarter: from 35 percent in 2009 to 26 percent in 2014.43 Contributing factors across sectors are linked to improved governance with investments advocated by the SUN approach. These include high levels of (nutrition-sensitive) social protection spending and the introduction of free maternity care in 2013. A (nutrition-specific) breastfeeding campaign nearly doubled the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months, from 31 percent to 61 percent of infants in just five years (2009–2014). Additional measures include investments in nutrition information systems to improve data availability and

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quality and in improved nutrition capacity within devolved health services, with up to six-fold staffing increases in some counties.

In these two countries, the diverse range of identified factors that have contributed to stunting reduction lends credibility to the multisectoral approach. Stakeholders in both countries anticipate that effects will be further enhanced by greater coordination and synergy across sectors, underpinned by strong leadership and a common plan of action to address continuing nutritional challenges.
Feed the Future and SUN

The United States has a long history of supporting global efforts to improve nutrition and is currently the largest nutrition donor in the world. Between Fiscal Years 2010 and 2016, the U.S. Congress provided nearly $1.5 billion for nutrition-specific activities; funding in 2016 was estimated at $229 million. Estimates show that the U.S. government provided $2.6 billion in resources for nutrition-sensitive activities in 2014.

Feed the Future Focus Countries and Objectives

Feed the Future, the U.S. government’s global hunger and food security initiative launched in 2010, supports partner countries through inclusive agriculture sector growth and improved nutritional status to address the root causes of hunger, poverty, and malnutrition. Eighteen of the 19 countries where Feed the Future works are also SUN countries and reducing stunting is one of the initiative’s two highest-level indicators. The first ever U.S. Global Food Security Strategy, submitted to Congress in October 2016, places nutrition as one of three top objectives. The strategy states that it will improve nutrition by focusing on women and children, particularly during the 1,000 days—with a long-term aim of improving educational attainment, productivity, lifetime earnings, and economic growth rates.

The strategy’s results framework includes many aspects of the nutrition-enabling environment, such as improving the effectiveness of policies and institutions. Feed the Future funding is predominantly channeled through implementing partners, rather than bilaterally allocated to government budgets. However, investment priorities are carefully aligned with national priorities and goals to ensure that allocation and spending are in line with government policy and strategy.

Table 3.1 provides a comparative overview of authorized Feed the Future funds by country in 2016, together with U.S. government nutrition-specific investments in these countries in 2015. Note that data are drawn from diverse sources and precise tracking of both funding obligations and disbursements has proven challenging for many analysts. Funding derived from Feed the Future may overlap with what is also designated as funding for nutrition-specific programs.

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**Table 3.1. U.S. Government Feed the Future and Nutrition Funding in 19 Focus Countries**

(millions of U.S. dollars, most recent available data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feed the Future Focus Country</th>
<th>Feed the Future funding 2016 (millions)*</th>
<th>U.S. government funds for nutrition-specific programs 2015 (millions)**</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Cambodia</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<td>Ghana</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Zambia</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

**Feed the Future and Its Engagement with SUN**

At a global level, the U.S. government has been involved in the SUN movement since its inception in 2010, principally through USAID’s Global Health Bureau, but increasingly with the involvement of its Bureau for Food Security.

USAID is involved in a number of national SUN donor networks and acts as coconvenor in eight countries, including Bangladesh. In these countries, it is leading the adoption of a multisectoral approach, ensuring that nutrition outcomes are identified within funded activities.

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46 The others are Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Uganda.
Feed the Future in Kenya

Feed the Future in Kenya has an overarching mission to facilitate inclusive agriculture-sector growth through value chains; to increase resilience and economic growth; and to improve the nutritional status of rural farming families, especially women and children under five years of age. Selected value chains include maize and drought-tolerant staple crops, dairy, and horticulture. Feed the Future currently targets semi-arid and high-rainfall areas, both of which have great potential for increasing agricultural productivity and also encompass the highest concentrations of malnourished children, female-headed households, and rural poor.

USAID/Kenya supports nutrition integration within each of its Feed the Future activities rather than funding a standalone nutrition program. A dedicated USAID nutritionist aims to ensure that nutrition is integrated in agriculture as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs. All programs share a common goal, working toward dietary diversity and a minimum acceptable diet with an emphasis on the promotion of highly nutritious crops. Nutrition-sensitive activities include kitchen gardens; nutrition education; cultivation of nutrient-dense and diverse crops; and training farmers in food processing, preparation, and preservation. All Feed the Future activities in Kenya also employ nutritionists and track dietary diversity among beneficiaries.

USAID/Kenya is a member of the SUN donor network. Although it has not actively sought to align its activities with the National Nutrition Action Plan or Food and Nutrition Security Plan, it considers that its programs fall within identified national policy objectives and that its activities support their achievement. It is engaged in capacity-building activities at national and county levels with the working group on food and nutrition linkages and the Nutrition Inter-Agency Coordination Committee. It supports training for nutrition staff on nutrition-sensitive programming, leadership skills, and multisectoral work, especially within the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Education. Feed the Future is also supporting and collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to develop a community manual on linkages between nutrition and agriculture.

Feed the Future contributes to Kenya’s national dialogue around nutrition-sensitive agriculture, developing training materials and supporting the Ministry of Agriculture to track nutrition indicators.

Feed the Future in Bangladesh

USAID has a strong partnership with the government in Bangladesh and works across ministries to ensure multisectoral approaches on nutrition. USAID is coconvenor of Bangladesh’s SUN donor network, along with the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It supports the SUN focal point and the multistakeholder platform and contributes to reporting to the SUN Movement Secretariat. USAID further supports the SUN movement through its implementing partners, many of whom are involved in the formulation and implementation of nutrition policy and strategy. Some partners are also members of the SUN civil society network in Bangladesh, which plays a key role in nutrition advocacy.
Feed the Future has a large program in Bangladesh, with a broad portfolio of around 30 activities in its zone of influence in the south-west of the country, working with around 2.4 million farmers. These activities include mechanization of land preparation, improved access to agricultural inputs, conservation tillage, demonstration plots, and facilitating access to markets.

All activities include a “nutrition pathway”: increased incomes to improve access to diversified diets; improved diets through diversified agricultural and livestock production; expanded education on consumption of protein-rich foods; and broadened agricultural extension services to improve maternal, infant, and young child feeding. Research activities generate evidence on how different models of these multisectoral approaches have impacted population nutrition status.

USAID and the European Union are jointly funding (through FAO) a $20 million program, Meeting the Undernutrition Challenges in Bangladesh (MUCH). The program advances the national Country Investment Plan and builds government capacity in food and nutrition security, working with the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit within the Ministry of Food and with other relevant ministries to ensure cross-sectoral approaches.

Perspectives on Feed the Future’s Coordination with SUN

It can be challenging for external stakeholders to understand the whole-of-government nature of Feed the Future and some suggested that a single focal person at the country level could represent the U.S. Global Nutrition Coordination Plan to improve coordination and communication lines with external agencies. This is consistent with the coordination plan’s own aspirations.

Partners and stakeholders perceive that USAID tends to operate unilaterally and “do their own thing” and, although their cooperation and coordination with implementing partners is commendable, coordination and coherence within the wider landscape, including among government and civil society actors, has room for improvement.

Observers noted a lack of clarity on how different U.S. agencies engage with SUN, which makes it difficult to understand their priorities. Increased engagement in global and country-level SUN discussions would allow USAID and initiatives like Feed the Future to better understand priorities beyond its own programming and to determine how it could best use tools and leverage strengths to fill gaps.

Greater support and collaboration between donors, including USAID, and national civil society alliances would be welcomed. The desire for increased engagement pertains not only to funding, but also to work plans and dialogue that seek to avoid duplication, identify promising practices, understand bottlenecks at implementation level, and recognize the unique role of civil society actors to engage national and local governments.

Overcoming USAID Financing Challenges for SUN Contributions

The global funding priorities of donors influence country-level allocations, which can lead to challenges in coordination and alignment with national priorities. It is increasingly recognized that the donor community must come together around one central plan with a national government
(see the example of Zambia’s SUN Fund in Chapter 4). Donors must identify coordinated priorities rather than “pulling governments in different directions.” Strengthening government systems (including financial and planning systems) is a clear priority, promoting longer-term programming with pooled funding rather than disjointed individual projects. USAID’s general inability to provide direct bilateral financing to host governments is a recognized constraint, but it could be addressed through parallel financing to the same plan, as piloted in Zambia.

Feed the Future program funding is reported in the OECD Development Assistance Committee
Creditor Reporting System to be included among donor contributions, but the extent to which its nutrition investments systematically appear in national budget analyses is not clear. Improved tracking systems that compare the alignment of donor and national budget spending on nutrition with policy priorities would prove valuable.

USAID has not shared country-level funding data with the SUN movement’s global financial tracking system. The system seeks to track disaggregated funding by district and program, in order to benchmark project-level nutrition investments. This information will be used to review how donors could better complement government initiatives.

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A Case Study in Zambia

In Zambia, 40 percent of children under five are stunted.\textsuperscript{48} Stunting has traced a gradual downward trajectory since a 58 percent prevalence was recorded in 1999,\textsuperscript{49} but this rate must accelerate if Zambia is to meet its 2025 World Health Assembly target of 20.3 percent.

At the Nutrition for Growth summit in 2013, the Zambian government committed to reducing stunting by 50 percent within 10 years through improved governance and coordination mechanisms, increased direct support to communities, and increased government nutrition expenditures by at least 20 percent each year.\textsuperscript{50} Although it has begun to deliver on these goals, finance commitments are already lagging. Despite political shifts since 2013, commitment to nutrition goals among senior government officials persists but a recent economic crisis has constrained resources across sectors.

SUN in Zambia

The Republic of Zambia joined SUN in December 2010 following the development of its multisectoral National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan (2011–2015). The National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) is the convening body for nutrition, based within the Ministry of Health, and leads the national program to address stunting, the First 1000 Most Critical Days Program (MCDP), 2013–2015, launched in April 2013. The program is based on a set of 14 priority interventions and has targeted 14 districts across seven provinces in its first phase, aiming to "strengthen and scale up selected priority interventions from different sectors based on global and national evidence of cost effectiveness thereby reducing stunting in children." It works across five strategic areas:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Policy and coordination
  \item Priority interventions
  \item Institutional strengthening and capacity building
\end{enumerate}

4. Communication and advocacy

5. Monitoring, evaluation, and research

A special Committee of Permanent Secretaries on Nutrition, comprising 10 line ministries, was set up at Cabinet level, with the NFNC as its Secretariat. The committee meets on a regular basis and its role is to feed pertinent nutrition issues into the Cabinet. Six of the engaged ministries\(^5\) have designated nutrition focal points to help coordinate multisectoral approaches under the MCDP. The permanent secretaries for health and agriculture cochair a multistakeholder platform for SUN in Zambia, bringing together the United Nations, donor and business networks, Civil Society Organizations (CSO)-SUN, and representatives from the media and academia every six months.

The SUN business network, cochaired by WFP, comprises 64 members, including the Zambia Bureau of Standards and approximately 30 local small and medium businesses. The network strategy includes supporting business investments in nutrition, driving consumer awareness and demand for nutrition, and strengthening the regulatory environment for nutrition.\(^6\) One current work stream is a logo campaign for government regulatory approval of healthy foods, aimed at addressing the double-burden of malnutrition. Experts explained that 20 percent of stunted children in Zambia have an overweight mother.

CSO-SUN has engaged substantially in advocacy, including a campaign to elevate the National Food and Nutrition Commission to a more influential, supra-ministerial political level. Formed in 2012, CSO-SUN has 75 members, 30 to 40 of whom are active at any one time. Its partnerships with the media have been strong in ensuring nutrition activities and campaigns are prominent across radio, the press, and television so that nutrition messaging reaches the population at large. In 2014, CSO-SUN partnered with members of Parliament to spearhead an all-party consensus on nutrition. It has since engaged in nutrition budget tracking and presented its findings to the government budget committee.

The SUN Fund: A Unique, Coordinated Approach

An innovative “pooled”\(^5\) funding mechanism, known as the SUN Fund, was set up by the donor community to support the MCDP, led by the UK Department for International Development. It was initially planned as a joint funding mechanism into which both government and donors could contribute funds for nutrition activities. However, the SUN Fund to date has been solely funded by three donors: DFID, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and Irish Aid. CARE was appointed management agent for the SUN Fund, with Concern and the Nutrition Association of Zambia as subcontractors. Ministries apply for funding at the district level, in

\(^{5}\) Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Community Development and Social Services (formerly Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health), Local Government, and Education.


\(^{5}\) SUN Fund is currently a pooled fund in the sense that each contributing donor is putting money toward support for the 1000 MCDP; however, DFID has a contract with CARE; Irish Aid puts money through DFID; and SIDA funds CARE directly. CARE supports NFNC.
accordance with the interventions agreed in the District Action Plans for Nutrition. National institutions and nongovernment organizations can also apply for funds to support the MCDP.

Development partners have played an effective role in advocacy and dialogue with government and the SUN Fund resulted in improved donor alignment that built government confidence. Even donors allocating resources outside the SUN Fund are aligned with the approach. For example, the EU supports the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock and Fisheries to mainstream nutrition in agriculture through its PEP2 Performance Enhancement Program.

The SUN Fund has received $27 million over three years (2013–2016); plus a bridge of $6 million for 2017. Sixty percent of those funds were allocated to the government. New donors will join SUN Fund 2.0 in 2018, including the EU and KfW Development Bank. USAID plans to support the NFNC outside of the SUN Fund by financing complementary technical support aligned with the MCDP and SUN Fund and a robust program evaluation and research component. New donor commitments in the second phase of Zambia’s SUN engagement are expected to result in a doubling of the resources available during the first phase.

The program suffered from slow fund disbursements in its first years, as the administrative structure was overwhelmed. The system, whereby each sector prepared a separate proposal and budget for its activities within each District Nutrition Action Plan, resulted in a small fund management unit attempting to review and manage approximately 90 project proposals. In addition, strict donor reporting required funds from one three-month period to be reconciled prior to a second tranche of funding for the subsequent three-month period being released. This caused significant challenges for the accounting function at the district level, which had not been prepared or capacitated for this new level of financial management. A lack of communication after proposal submission compounded frustration at the district level and resulted in further delays. The process of harmonizing the financial systems of different ministries has also taken time.

**Domestic Nutrition Financing in Zambia**

Over the last four years CSO-SUN and Concern have tracked public-sector nutrition budgets. Little expenditure data is released, so the exercise is limited to budget allocation monitoring. The NFNC has identified development of a tracking mechanism for both nutrition budget allocation and expenditure as a future priority.

Following the 2013 Nutrition for Growth commitments, ministries were directed to include a budget line for nutrition. While several did so, many were for negligible amounts. Funding for the NFNC increased by 35 percent in 2014 but has subsequently increased by just 0.7 percent—far from the overall 20 percent annual target. The domestic nutrition budget peaked in 2015. However, estimates suggest that the Zambian government spent just US$0.50 per child under five on nutrition-specific interventions in 2015.54

The proportion of the overall budget dedicated to nutrition has since decreased, and budget allocation was stagnant in 2016 due to fiscal challenges: according to the Global Nutrition Report 2016, 0.14 percent of the public budget was allocated for nutrition activities (sensitive and specific).

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54 CSO SUN Alliance Zambia and Concern Worldwide, “Nutrition Matters.”
No ministry has increased allocations to nutrition and several have reduced their budgets in 2017. Planned investments for 2017 stand at just $3.1 million, with at least a further $25 million committed by donors.\(^5\)

However, the budget analysis does not include significant investments in human resources, the proportion of salaried time staff spent engaged in nutrition, and the Social Cash Transfer program, which increased from 75 million kwacha in 2013 to 500 million kwacha\(^5\) in 2017.\(^6\)

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Estimates suggest that the Zambian government spent just US$0.50 per child under five on nutrition-specific interventions in 2015.

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**Moving from Policy to Implementation: Convergence of Sectors**

The vision behind the MCDP was to strengthen the coordinated response of ministries and to scale up existing interventions to cover 80 percent of targeted districts, with multisectoral approaches converging at the household level.

The first step toward MCDP implementation was the establishment of District Nutrition Coordination Committees (DNCCs) in each of 14 districts. This involved significant time and advocacy at the national level to orientate ministries on the need to intervene as a team. Now that stakeholders are convinced that DNCCs are strong and viable structures, Provincial and Ward Nutrition Coordination Committees are being activated.

Ministries are working on a framework for nutrition actions within each sector, which will guide government funding strategy. In recognition of the need to harness existing resources and initiatives at district and community level, collaboration between sectors in activities such as training sessions and referral is encouraged by each ministry. For example, a health training can benefit from a session from an agriculture extension officer.

The position of the NFNC, a statutory body created through an Act of Parliament in 1967 to advise the government on improving nutrition, is the subject of much discussion. It is currently seated within the Ministry of Health but much advocacy work has focused on placing it either in the Cabinet or the Ministry of Finance to increase its political weight. On a technical level, it is deemed to be a strong and productive multisectoral convenor. The NFNC has its own board, and thus some independence. Several stakeholders expressed a view that the NFNC’s quality of relationships and clarity of ambition are more important than its positioning in the political hierarchy. The 1967 NFNC Bill is currently under revision and the commission is also working on an institutional strategic plan, both of which will define the future role and structure of the NFNC.

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\(^6\) From approximately US$14,450 to $96,250.

Progress in rolling out the MCDP has been slower than expected due to limited district capacity. In combination with systems challenges of the SUN Fund detailed above, this has contributed to seven districts beginning implementation only at the end of the second year. Full implementation in all 14 selected districts was achieved at the end of year three.

This is the first program in Zambia to support a multisectoral approach and, despite these challenges, strong commitment to collaborative work remains. Many ministry focal points at national, district, and ward levels reflect on progress very positively despite emergent challenges. Community-level outreach and activities will be further priorities in SUN Zambia’s next phase.

Building Capacity in Nutrition: Investing in Human Resources

The Zambian government recently created around 500 new nutritionist positions at national and district levels but recruitment has been a challenge. About one-third of positions remain vacant, largely due to the limited number of trained nutritionists within the country. The Ministry of Health has recruited 124 nutritionists in 2017 for deployment at the district level. Despite government commitment to place one nutritionist in each district within the agriculture sector, many of the positions remain vacant and nutritionists report a preference to work in the health sector.

To address the shortage of qualified nutritionists in Zambia, the University of Lusaka has now established master’s and bachelor’s degree courses. Previously, only one diploma course was available to aspiring nutritionists within the country. Relationships have been established with visiting academics from the United Kingdom, with support from the Tropical Health and Education Trust, and the SUN Fund is supporting a Ministry of Agriculture nutritionist to complete the master’s course. Current work seeks to reinvigorate the Nutrition Association of Zambia as a professional body to build the skills of a national network of nutritionists.

The View from the District Level

In Kasama there was clear consensus that SUN has strengthened multisectoral coordination at the district level: “it’s the first time we’ve worked as a team across sectors to implement a project.” The District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) meets regularly and sector representatives appreciate the opportunity for mutual learning. SUN focuses on 7 of 17 wards in the district, despite ubiquitous demand. Previously small-scale nutrition activities are now being scaled up: “With SUN we have been able to reach out further and increase coverage of interventions.” SUN program information is disseminated through radio messages and by sector extension workers. Solar-powered radios have been distributed to 14 “listening groups” in the district, with prerecorded programs comprising the full package of nutrition messages.

In many places, SUN activities and meetings engage the whole community, not just the targeted pregnant women and children under two; men provide labor for digging fishponds and gardening and join women for cooking demonstrations. However, the design of interventions has largely

58 With funding from the Canadian International Development Agency.
been top-down to date and more could be done to encourage communities and districts to identify their own specific priorities.

Some improvements attributed to the SUN approach in Kasama include: mainstreaming nutritional messages during visits to social cash transfer beneficiaries; the drilling of 10 new boreholes in areas of need, such as health centers and schools; and the placement of two new nutritionists within the Ministry of Health who will train others on infant and young child feeding and management of acute malnutrition. Their monitoring and evaluation skills have facilitated district-level data analysis, thereby increasing ownership. Community members also listed numerous inputs that stemmed from SUN interventions, such as chickens, vaccines, fishponds, diverse crop and vegetable seeds, and improved nutritional awareness to accompany them.

Zambian government staff working across sectors at district and ward levels demonstrated an impressive degree of knowledge, understanding, and commitment to stunting reduction. The majority of government staff described newly enhanced capacity to take MCDP activities to scale, reaching more communities and households with improved support through coordinated action. Women’s groups shared what they had learned about nutrition through the program and how they have adapted practices within their households. They also noted improvements in their children’s health and nutrition, such as reductions in low birthweight and improvements in their eyesight and skin condition. Shifts in the household food basket were reported, with better utilization and preparation of local foods.

Zambia’s Achievements to Date

A recent report commissioned by DFID noted four areas of achievement: multisectoral coordination, program influence in non-SUN districts, acceptability and uptake of messages, and improved understanding by mothers and caregivers. Other MCDP evaluation findings concur with observations from Kasama and outline a set of practical steps to improve efficiency of SUN Fund systems, to tighten up coordination and communication mechanisms, and to enhance training and sensitization activities to consolidate and improve outcomes.

Development partners consider that the MCDP and SUN Fund have made significant achievements in terms of raising the issue of nutrition up the public agenda. Stunting is considered by many stakeholders in Zambia to be a problem of awareness as much as of access to services, and discussion is now being facilitated from the national to the household level. A committee of MPs even recently raised nutrition issues during general parliamentary budget discussions.

SUN is credited by stakeholders with shifting nutrition policy in Zambia. One stated that “SUN moved it from a sleeping dog to a place where even our President talks about it,” noting that the president has spoken publicly about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and good infant nutrition. Multisectoral coordination did not happen prior to SUN and the NFNC has since improved its capacity and presence; it has been “transformed” into an organization of 46 staff plus 14 district coordinators.

The reach of the MCDP has extended beyond focus districts and created demand throughout the country. The 14 districts in SUN’s first phase were prioritized in the face of limited resources but pressure for national scale-up is increasing. Initiatives to mainstream nutrition-sensitive approaches are treated as national initiatives wherever possible within the limited funding environment and knowledge is shared with all districts. Capacity development often takes the form of cascade training and this can reach well beyond the 14 priority districts. For example, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare is introducing a package of nutrition information into the cash transfer program, and has included nutrition material in its adult literacy classes. There is firm interest among ministry nutrition focal points to embed SUN activities in their programs to enrich their work. One noted: “People need to feel that it’s part of their job.” Some districts outside of the selected 14 have independently formed their own DNCCs based on the SUN activities they observe elsewhere.

The SUN Fund has enabled the Ministry of Local Government to establish additional water facilities, improving targeting through establishing new water sources close to vulnerable populations, schools, and health facilities. The program has resulted in 15 to 20 percent activity increases in SUN districts as well as increased collaboration with other ministries.

In the agriculture sector, discussion has moved from the concept of food security to that of nutrition security. Ministry of Health officials noted that there is now political pressure for the Ministry of Agriculture to expand nutrition work into new districts as quickly as possible. The Ministry of Agriculture works with farmers’ groups to create awareness on issues of food and nutrition security and to encourage households to diversify crops. The ministry employs two nutritionists at national level and three nutritionists are supported by the SUN Fund at field level. Agricultural extension officers are now trained in nutrition. Yellow maize is being promoted in place of white, alongside iron-rich beans, yellow-fleshed sweet potatoes, and fish farming. Small livestock farming (chickens and goats) is promoted and facilitated through pass-on schemes.

Feed the Future currently works in five districts of eastern Zambia, two of which are also targeted by Zambia’s stunting reduction program, MCDP. The USAID/Feed the Future Mawa project to improve livelihoods and nutrition of vulnerable women promotes a care group model that has shown strong results and has been replicated by other nutrition implementers. USAID’s Production, Finance, Improved Technologies Plus (PROFIT+) activity works in nutrition-sensitive ways with community agro-dealers who help distribute information and diverse, nutritious seeds. A learning event is planned in 2017 to share recent findings.

Feed the Future has been focused on nutrition-sensitive interventions and was described as a “strong program, focused on well-identified critical issues” within Zambia, with its approach including value chain promotion, private-sector engagement, advocacy, research, and evaluation.
PROFIT+ intends to add nutrition-specific activities going forward. USAID/Zambia\textsuperscript{61} is in the process of internal restructuring to better engage with multisectoral mechanisms, while its food security and health representatives have already been active within the SUN donor network. USAID is poised to award an 18-month project that will provide direct support to the National Food and Nutrition Commission for community-level behavior change activities, implemented through the Ministry of Health. This will be the first government-to-government support provided by USAID.

Moving Forward

A 2016 case study\textsuperscript{62} concludes that “if its organizational challenges can continue to be addressed in an open and inclusive manner, and its big picture challenges factored in systematically, Zambia has a good chance of continuing to see declines in stunting and heading off the worst of dietary change in the nutrition transition.” A new National Nutrition and Food Security Strategic Plan should be released before the end of 2017. Planning is underway for the second MCDP, a five-year program to be supported by the SUN Fund 2.0, which aims to expand coverage within the prioritized 14 districts prior to adding additional districts.\textsuperscript{63} The NFNC is currently mapping other district-level nutrition interventions with a view to strengthen linkages and leverage other available resources.

Despite limited domestic investment to date, donors see their role in demonstrating what works and in order to pressure the government to adopt and invest in successful nutrition interventions.

One SUN 2.0 priority is a review of the package of interventions to ensure that the right set is prioritized to address stunting. At the district level, DNCCs need to better identify appropriate approaches for their communities that address their specific challenges. The first District Action Plans for Nutrition relied heavily on national statistics, rather than consolidating and analyzing local data. This resulted in the rollout of “one size fits all” implementation approaches. For example, chlorination chemicals were distributed across districts, while local analyses in Kasama now prioritize alternative means to provide safe water to communities that are more appropriate. Going forward, three important steps were outlined by stakeholders:

1. Identification of local problems: using district and ward statistics.

2. Improved planning capacity: district-level capacity building is needed to plan and budget around local problems and to deliver priority interventions.

3. Improved inter-ministerial coordination: action does not have to occur simultaneously to achieve convergence, but it does need to focus on the same households. Ministries need to continue to address the challenge of how to develop coordinated strategies at the district level.

\textsuperscript{61} Unfortunately the research team had very limited time with USAID and Feed the Future staff in Zambia, hence only brief highlights of their approach are presented here.


\textsuperscript{63} There are currently 107 districts in Zambia, following some realigning of borders.
A monitoring and evaluation system supported by the University of Zambia is being rolled out in the 14 pilot districts to harmonize data-capturing tools at community and district levels across sectors. The Health Management Information System currently includes few nutrition indicators. Current work is assessing methods to include height in growth monitoring activities or other forms of nutritional surveillance.

In summary, significant progress has been achieved across all engaged sectors, from national to community level, in districts targeted to date. Improved knowledge has created demand for services and facilitated effective systems development led by motivated government actors. Clear policy, plans, and collaborative structures enable the rollout of effective, coordinated interventions tailored to local needs.
Conclusions and Recommendations

Malnutrition, often heralded as an invisible crisis, has gained visibility and ascended political agendas to become a national priority in several SUN countries. Knowledge of the nutritional challenges a country faces, and potential approaches to address them, is increasingly widespread. Evidence of programming that has successfully driven down stunting is beginning to emerge from countries such as Zambia, Uganda, Nepal, and Peru. Primary conclusions of this analysis highlight the critical role of improved nutrition governance:

- In countries where nutrition has gained political prominence, evidence of nutrition coordination and success is a powerful advocacy tool for increased investments. Unified donor and stakeholder support for national nutrition policy and planning (as seen in Zambia and Nepal) is a powerful catalyst for increased government engagement. It also facilitates the consolidation of donor (and domestic) funding behind one strategy or plan, which means that nutrition action can be prioritized and a concerted effort made toward achieving progress.

- Significant opacity remains around nutrition expenditures at both national and global levels. Much work is still needed to improve financial tracking systems for nutrition. A lack of standards around what constitutes nutrition-sensitive programming hinders budget organization, cross-sectoral finance data compilation, and analysis.

- Quality data collection and analysis at the local level are paramount to successful planning and implementation. Nutrition intervention needs must be defined at the subdistrict level to design the effective multisectoral responses. Bangladesh, for example, has developed maps to show the relative prevalence of different types of malnutrition at the subnational level, and has combined these with data on localized potential contributing factors. This data granularity enables plan development tailored to specific community needs and priorities. Without such local information, countries can inadvertently neglect important local conditions, resulting in an inefficient, overly standardized approach.

  Good data are a critical advocacy tool for galvanising political and financial momentum. Investment in information systems is required to fine tune indicators collected across sectors. Analytical capacity at national and subnational levels is required to interpret and to communicate data. Civil society can play an instrumental role in promoting and informing community demand for such analysis.

- Raising broad-based awareness of malnutrition and building cross-sectoral capacity is a priority to move plans forward. Case studies show that raising awareness of malnutrition at the subdistrict level can drive increased demand for services and investments.
Developing additional skills in leadership, coordination, and advocacy among technical nutrition staff at national and subnational levels is important to ensure that they are effective influencers when both the determinants of undernutrition and demands on finite resources are numerous.

- The United States is well-positioned to contribute to global efforts and add value through its comparative advantages. There are clear opportunities for USAID, through Feed the Future and the Global Health Initiative, to increase its engagement in SUN donor and business networks at both global and national levels. USAID’s expertise in private-sector engagement, value chain development, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture is valuable to the SUN community. These areas of comparative advantage are already leveraged in some SUN countries, including Zambia and Bangladesh. But there and elsewhere, the potential of USAID and its partners to make unique contributions to the SUN movement could be better tapped.

USAID’s general inability to pool funds with other donors or to provide direct support to host governments should not impede SUN participation. It can identify portions of national government and donor strategies and assume leadership with conventional funding mechanisms. For example, it might identify gaps in funding for rigorous evaluation of national plans, for nutrition-sensitive agriculture programs, or for private-sector engagement. At the same time, it could improve its focus on sharing nutrition-relevant learning from Feed the Future activities.

Recommendations for the U.S. Government to Enhance Global Nutrition Investments

At a global level:

- Share Feed the Future country-level financial data with the SUN movement financial tracking system.

- Improve communication of nutrition-sensitive technical expertise in agriculture and in private-sector engagement across donor networks, partner governments, and to the public. Collaborate with other stakeholders (such as government ministries, IFAD, and FAO) to better define what nutrition-sensitive interventions encompass.

- Approach participation within SUN working groups in a systematic way, with particular attention to the SUN business network given the U.S. government’s comparative advantages in private-sector partnerships.

- Refocus attention on nutrition within Feed the Future portfolios. Ensure that activities are sufficiently tailored to translate into improved nutrition outcomes at scale, for example with geographical or socioeconomic targeting to reach households most vulnerable to malnutrition.
At a national level with partner countries:

- Work proactively to break down the stereotype of USAID’s disengagement from national government policies and the donor community. Participate in collaborative approaches prioritized by SUN.

- Support systems that advance country-level leadership in high-level nutrition research and policy analysis to sustain political engagement and momentum for nutrition. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has led this type of work in countries such as Bangladesh, where it has embedded evaluation capacity within government ministries. Incorporate SUN work streams within such research on a standardized basis. In Zambia, USAID will provide technical assistance to improve research and implementation quality during SUN’s second phase. This model should be considered for replication elsewhere.

- Consider reinforcing national data platforms and local analytical capacity. Centralized data systems support multiple actors to monitor nutrition and to trace causal pathways that reduce stunting. They simultaneously build local ownership and reduce redundancies. Move beyond a focus on data collection to target deficits that undermine the potential of data-driven decisionmaking.
Appendix: Informant Interview Subjects

Mohsin Ali (UNICEF Bangladesh)
Lalita Bhattacharjee (UN Food and Agriculture Organization Bangladesh)
Tresphor Chanda (Ministry of Education, Zambia)
Simmy Chapula (Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare, Zambia)
Anne Chele and Angela Chimani (UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Kenya)
Mary S. Chibambula (CARE International, Zambia)
Mwandwe Chileshe (Civil Society Organization and SUN Alliance, Zambia)
Mr. Chinda (Kasama District Social Welfare, Zambia)
Helen Khunga Chirwa, Anafrica Bwenge, Jessica Healey (USAID Zambia)
Gwyneth Cotes, Amanda Pomeroy-Stevens, Heather Danton (Strengthening Partnerships, Results and Innovations in Nutrition Globally - SPRING)
Cara Flowers (SUN Global Civil Society Network coordinator)
Patrizia Fracassi (SUN Movement Secretariat)
Rukhsana Haider (Training and Assistance for Health and Nutrition Foundation, Civil Society Network Coordinator, Bangladesh)
Andrew Hall (National Information Platforms for Nutrition)
Danny Harvey (Concern Worldwide, Zambia)
Robert Hughes (Department for International Development Zambia)
Mildred Irungu (Feed The Future Kenya)
Jane Kalimina (Nutrition Association of Zambia)
Emily Heneghan Kasoma (World Food Programme Zambia)
Chris Leather (Consultant, SUN Donor Network Country Review)
Maren Lieberum (SUN Global Donor Network Coordinator)
Marion Michaud (European Union Delegation to Zambia)
Musonda Mofu (National Food and Nutrition Commission, Zambia)
Grainne Moloney and Sicily Matu (UNICEF Kenya)
Gladys Mugambi (SUN Focal Point / Ministry of Health Kenya)
Robinah Mulenga-Kwofie (National Food and Nutrition Commission, Zambia)
Mwiya Mundia (Irish Aid, Zambia)
Mr Mwansa (Kasama District Community Development, Zambia)
Audrey Mwendapole (SUN Focal Point, Zambia)
Mataa Nyambe (National Food and Nutrition Committee, Zambia)
Anne Peniston and colleagues (USAID)
Abigail Perry (Department For International Development, UK)
Iftekhar Rashid, Chris Chibwana, Matt Curtis (Feed The Future / USAID Bangladesh)
Nalukui Sakala, Rose Silyato, and Charles Sondashi (Ministry of Agriculture, Zambia)
Meera Shekar (World Bank)
Jillian Waid (Helen Keller International, Bangladesh)
Jane Wanjiru (Ministry of Agriculture Kenya)
Patrick Webb and Eileen Kennedy (Tufts University Nutrition Innovation Lab)
About the Authors

Rebecca Brown has 24 years of experience in nutrition and food security policy and program work in both humanitarian and development settings. She has worked extensively in Africa, eastern Europe, and central and south Asia supporting national governments, UN agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the delivery of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. She has more recently been involved in an advisory capacity to the development of regional and global nutrition policy for agencies including the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), Global Alliance for Nutrition (GAIN), the World Food Programme (WFP), and UNICEF, as well as supporting SUN processes at the country level. She holds a master’s degree of medical sciences in human nutrition.

Tamsin Walters is a nutrition and food security specialist with 18 years of experience working in the humanitarian and development sectors, providing strategic and technical assistance to UN agencies, governments, donors, and NGOs at both global and country levels. She has worked in more than 25 countries in Africa and central and Southeast Asia. Over the past four years, Walters has worked closely with the SUN Movement, providing broader strategic thinking and support to multisectoral policy frameworks and programming approaches in SUN countries. She holds a bachelor’s degree of science in anthropology and a master of science in human nutrition.

Jane Keylock has 15 years of field-level experience in nutrition and food security, including significant time in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as across Africa. With expertise in managing and implementing emergency nutrition programs, she has supported national governments, UNICEF country offices, and NGOs to deliver nutrition services. More recently, she has supported UK Department for International Development (DFID) country offices to design multisectoral approaches and Scaling Up Nutrition policy and programming processes at the country level. She has also been working closely with World Vision to examine the integration of nutrition and agriculture. She holds a master’s degree in dietetics, food security, and sustainable agriculture.

The authors are partners at NutritionWorks, an international public nutrition resource group. NutritionWorks strives to ensure continuity and coherence in its work and to foster long-term engagement with governments, agencies, and other institutions. It also engages in collaborative lesson learning and public dissemination of findings from its work and uses its own resources to fund public dissemination and advocacy of findings that will help reduce the global burden of malnutrition. For additional information, visit www.nutritionworks.org.uk.
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