

Action Brief:

Mainstreaming nutrition at the subnational level: A focus on the SUN Civil Society Alliance in Ghana

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Country: Ghana

Themes: Social Mobilisation, Advocacy and Communication

Sub-themes: Engaging Civil Society

Date: 2023



Overview



In 2018, several challenges were identified in the coordination and harmonisation of national and sectoral level policies, strategies and plans as Ghana was yet to adopt a holistic approach to tackling malnutrition. Among these key gaps were the inadequate understanding of national policies, strategies and plans by those expected to implement them at regional and district levels. In addition,

there was inadequate capacity at district level, in terms of numbers and quality, for the implementation of nutrition policies, plans and programmes.

With the support from the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Pooled Fund under the leadership of the Hunger Alliance of Ghana, the SUN Civil Society Alliance (CSA) of Ghana initiated a number of activities at the subnational level aimed at building capacity of key policy makers in the effort to support Districts' technical team to mainstream nutrition in the medium-term and annual plans of 20 high-burden districts towards 2024.

Thanks to sustained engagement, nutrition which had been relegated to the background in the planning process at the subnational level became a priority issue from 2019 till date.



Objectives of the action brief

The aim of this brief is to share experiences and lessons that might help other SUN CSAs become more effective in advocating for the inclusion of nutrition in development plans in their respective countries.



Period covered

The activities of the Pooled Fund project undertaken by the Ghana SUN CSA started in 2018 and ended in 2021. This coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a considerable impact on project implementation.



What action was taken?

The Pooled Fund project implemented by the Ghana SUN CSA has created an environment of cooperation among collaborating SUN institutions at national and subnational levels, especially within the SUN Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP). Key stakeholders, including those in the national MSP, supported the Ghana SUN CSA to spearhead its national and sub-national level advocacy to make nutrition a development priority issue in the medium-term development plans of twenty (20) high burden districts. This stakeholder collaboration was achieved through the organisation of several national and subnational nutrition dialogues, forums and learning events at sub-national level.

The SUN CSA in March and April 2021 also partnered with the USAID Advancing Nutrition Team to facilitate learning events in five regions in northern Ghana that helped stakeholders better understand their roles in subnational nutrition planning and implementation ahead of the development of the 2021-2024 medium term planning and implementation period.

These results-oriented events included practical lessons on nutrition planning and implementation for participants – most of whom were key policy influencers. Participants learned how past nutrition and food security projects can feed into regional and district-level planning processes. They were also given lessons on how to mainstream nutrition into the medium-term plans of respective districts, understand current nutrition indicators and develop strategies to achieve desired results.

The learning events focused on key nutrition challenges in the regions and districts in the northern part of Ghana including maternal health challenges, prenatal and postnatal nutrition challenges, critical nutrition issues related to the

first 1,000 days of the child, stunting, wasting and anaemia.

Interventions on appropriate nutrition data and situational analysis on progress and gaps to inform policy were also included in the training module. The learning events as practical as it was also built the capacity of participants in nutrition advocacy, budget tracking, data analysis and the understanding of national development guidelines that was developed by the National Development Planning Commission to guide district policy makers to mainstream nutrition in districts medium term plans in the 2021-2024 medium term period.

Representatives from the various districts, mainly key policy makers, appreciated the need to prioritise nutrition in districts development plans for the 2021–2024 medium term period. For example, they also learned that evidence-based advocacy greatly improves buy-in among national and district-level policymakers and unless advocacy is accompanied by evidence, it is difficult to garner support.

Participating districts have elevated nutrition in the 2021–2024 medium-term plans of selected high burden districts and have outlined clearly the strategies to address critical nutrition challenges such as stunting, wasting, anaemia and maternal health issues in the districts' medium and annual term plans from 2021 to 2024. Some districts have even initiated investment plans for nutrition under the supervision and direction of the National Development Planning Commission.

The Ghana SUN CSA is determined to advocate and monitor the implementation of the respective plans by working closely in collaboration with the National Development Planning Commission in the next three years.





What would the country do differently?

The major external factor that posed a challenge to the implementation of the Pooled Fund project and other notable activities such as the learning events was the low participation of some key stakeholders in some of the national and subnational consultations and dialogues as COVID-19 safety protocols had to be observed. However hybrid online video sessions helped to mitigate this.



Adaptation and applicability

To aid in bringing about the required change, impact advocacy efforts and improve nutrition outcomes, SUN civil society organisations in other countries should focus their advocacy on subnational implementers and policymakers. To do this effectively, there should be partnership and cooperation with the SUN Government Focal Point and with the implementers and policymakers at the district level. District nutrition champions should also be engaged. To enhance advocacy, the Ghana SUN CSA identified and worked with more than 30 nutrition champions in the 20 districts.



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Next steps

Further action at the district level includes advocacy, monitoring and evaluation of budget resources for nutrition, and the effective implementation of nutrition interventions. This is what has informed the development of the current subnational advocacy project of the Ghana SUN CSA from now till 2025.

This Good Practice was developed in collaboration with the SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN). For more information about the SUN CSN, please visit their website: <https://www.suncivilsociety.com/>



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