



Zambia Civil Society Scaling Up Nutrition Alliance (CSO-SUN)

CSO – SUN ALLIANCE SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL SUN/1000 MOST CRITICAL DAYS

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I avail this opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of the Zambian Civil Society Organisation – Scaling Up Nutrition Alliance (or the CSO-SUN). I am particularly glad to be able to welcome his Honour Vice President Guy Scott to the launch this morning.

I would like firstly to congratulate our colleagues in the National Food and Nutrition Commission on the launch of its' Strategic Plan 2011-2015 and of the First 1000 Most Critical Days Programme. The Strategy and Programme which we have gathered here to launch mark a significant milestone in Zambia's fight against malnutrition, and one that we should all welcome.

However, my aim in these words is to remind us all that the fight against malnutrition in Zambia is only just beginning. The reality is that malnutrition is one of the greatest challenges facing Zambia today. Currently, nearly one in every two children in Zambia is stunted, or small for their age. In fact, Zambia has one of the highest rates of stunting in children under five years old in the world. At 45.8%, higher than the 42% average rate for Africa, Zambia's rate of child stunting remains higher than the vast majority of its neighbouring countries.

To overcome this worrisome situation, and in line with the Strategy of the NFNC launched here today, we (as civil society) are taking this opportunity to present 10 key recommendations to improve nutrition in Zambia. These recommendations, if adopted and followed through, will ensure that we accelerate progress towards a Zambia in which all children can see their rights to adequate nutrition, and full life potential, fulfilled no matter where they are born, or where they live. These ten recommendations, are proven, scalable approaches that have the potential to push Zambia towards giant strides forward in the fights against malnutrition. They have worked elsewhere, in Africa and other regions, and they are key to Zambia pulling ahead of its peers, and rapidly cutting stunting in children around the country over the next 3 years.

1. We must Build the political will to tackle under-nutrition;

Numerous cross-country studies on the Governance of Nutrition have highlighted the fact that the level of political will given to tackling malnutrition is one of the most critical factors for success in such efforts.

Countries that are achieving most progress have high level political champions – clearly identified with the issue and pushing for progress, usually at the highest political level and for a sustained period of time.

2. We must ensure effective high-level national coordination;

Currently, the responsibility for coordinating efforts to tackle malnutrition in Zambia is assigned to the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC), an organ of the Ministry of Health. However, despite its efforts, NFNC has limited powers and capacities to convene and coordinate among the different Ministries, local authorities, civil society organizations and companies, who must work together to ensure adequate progress in tackling undernutrition. Simply put, NFNC is not currently placed to be able to ensure that the Ministry of Community Development, Mother & Child Health, or the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock, or the Ministry of Local Government & Housing, all play their vital parts, in working together to address this problem.

We propose for the revision of the NFNC's mandate so as to enhance its high level coordination at a national level, including the need to have a strong NFNC Board to oversee the work of the NFNC and increase its accountability.

We also suggest that the Government moves the National Food and Nutrition Commission to the office of the Vice President', from where it will have the authority and capacity to ensure adequate coordination amongst all these stakeholders, and to ensure that each is playing its role as outlined in the National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan (NFNSP) 2011-2015.

3. We must Increase spending to address the nutrition crisis;

In the 2013 budget Zambia will spend between Kr11 – Kr33 per child on addressing undernutrition. This is a tiny amount – less than 4% of the World Bank annual target of Kr745 per child under two years old. GRZ financial resource allocation to nutrition must increase.

There is need to look for innovative sources of financing in addition to aid from traditional bilateral and multilateral donors to bridge the funding gap. It is important also that Zambia increases the domestic resources available to finance nutrition programmes.

4. We must address serious gaps to ensure adequate human resources at all levels;

Zambia cannot realistically expect to address the crisis of under-nutrition without urgently increasing the number of available qualified nutritionists.

The crisis of malnutrition is complex. Addressing it requires technical competence across multiple sectors. Presently, Zambia has very limited numbers of trained nutritionists and dieticians to provide the necessary guidance in addressing this challenge, both at policy and programme levels (either for preventive or curative interventions). In health facilities, there are no trained Dieticians or Clinical Nutritionists to guide the therapeutic management of conditions and diseases.

Zambia must develop the human capital to address under nutrition.

5. We must create transparent financial mechanisms to protect nutrition funding;

Addressing the crisis of under-nutrition in Zambia will require the allocation of sustained and significant resources over the long term. Zambia must find ample, innovative and (ultimately) Zambian sources of funding to address this critical issue, or child under-nutrition will fall back into the scale of a national crisis, and all progress towards addressing it will be lost.

6. We must Reform existing programmes to increase their effect on nutrition;

In addressing the malnutrition crisis, it is important to realize the emphasis placed on the various sources of nutrients in the Zambian diet. The role of Maize in the promotion of optimal health for the Zambian population is an area of contention. The “agriculture policy” in relation to the “maize debate” in Zambia has been pursued without due consideration to nutrition and development. While the debate focuses on removal of the subsidy to correct market forces, limited attention has been paid to the negative consequences of high maize consumption (75% Kcal.) - or the opportunities to use existing programmes and resources better, to promote more diverse, protein-rich diets.

7. We must provide clear public data and information on emerging evidence and strategy;

Zambia must do more to ensure that data on progress in tackling child malnutrition, funds spent (by province) and actions that will be taken to address future problems is made available publically.

Frequent data observations on nutrition outcomes to monitor progress are needed, to track progress on nutrition indicators.

It is important that we understand and communicate the progress that we are making in tackling under nutrition in Zambia.

8. We must ensure effective decentralized coordination at Provincial and District Level;

Delivering nutrition services to the local level tends to work better in countries that have adequate decentralised structures. Factors that facilitate service delivery include donor or government capacity to provide technical support at **all** levels and the availability of relevant and reliable nutrition data and performance indicators at local levels.

Effective decentralised structures can also contribute to improved capacity of government offices at the provincial and local levels, through training programmes as well as professional incentives and salary rewards.

9. We must provide financial incentives to engage the private sector to join the fight against undernutrition;

A number of relevant commodities are currently exempt or zero rated under the VAT. We support this policy and we urge government to further exempt or zero rate additional nutritious foods that could be used to prevent stunting, which are traditionally purchased by poor individuals, especially poor women. To this end, it is fair and appropriate for government to give incentives to companies producing highly nutritious foods so that they are more affordable to the poor communities.

10. We must engage Civil Society as a partner in the fight against undernutrition,

Civil Society has the potential to make the challenges of Malnutrition visible and to improve the scope and quality of service delivery through research and advocacy.

Civil society groups have actively campaigned on behalf of nutrition issues in Brazil, Peru and India. In Brazil however, CSOs influenced and shaped nutrition policies more effectively because they directly engaged with political parties, government ministers and local governments, to turn nutrition campaigns into government policies.

By working together with Government, and other development partners in Zambia, civil society can play its role in the fight against malnutrition.

These ten recommendations represent the cornerstone of our proposed approach to addressing nutrition in Zambia. I might list them one final time so that we all are left in no doubt:

- Build the political will;
- Ensure effective high level coordination;
- Increase spending
- Address Human resource gaps;
- Protect nutrition funding;
- Reform existing programmes that affect nutrition outcomes;
- Provide clear data and information on the problem;
- Ensure effective decentralized coordination;
- Provide financial incentives to the private sector to play its part; and
- Engage civil society to play its role.

These ten steps hold great potential to increase the effectiveness of our fight against undernutrition. In the coming months we, as civil society, will do everything we can to ensure that they are adopted and implemented.

Once again, we are greatly encouraged to be with our colleagues in the National Food and Nutrition Commission today at the launch of its' Strategic Plan. We are confident that together, with the right stakeholders fulfilling their roles, we can overcome the issue of malnutrition in Zambia, forever.

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