

Action brief

Mainstreaming nutrition into municipal-level development plans with local funding

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Country: Benin**Themes:** Review relevant policy and legislation documents**Sub-themes:** Mainstreaming nutrition into local development policies**Date:** December 2022

Overview



In 2009, the Government of Benin established a Permanent Secretariat for the Food and Nutrition Council (SP/CAN) under the auspices of the President of the Republic. This council comprises ministerial sectors involved in nutrition, civil society actors, consumer associations, non-governmental organizations, agricultural producers' federations, university researchers, and private-sector actors. The SP/CAN is responsible for the multisectoral coordination of nutrition and advocates for the mainstreaming of nutrition into local policies. Given the impacts of malnutrition on a country's economic development and human capital, it is essential that clear actions be put in place that can help overcome malnutrition at both central and decentralized levels.

The decentralization of the institutional framework for nutrition was included in the Strategic Plan for Food and



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Nutrition Development. From 2017 on, all stakeholders worked to mainstream nutrition into municipal-level development plans. Nutrition must be addressed not only at the local policy level but also through tailor-made programmes with funding intended to bring about sustainable change in communities.



Objectives of the action brief

- To demonstrate expertise of Benin in mainstreaming nutrition into its municipal-level development plans
- To explain the efforts made by the mayors of Benin in favour of the local financing of nutrition



Period covered

Discussions on the decentralization process in Benin first took place following the National Conference of Active Forces of the Nation, held in 1990. It was not until 2003–2004 that this decentralization actually took place, however, with the first deliberative local assemblies established. In total, 77 municipalities have been established and 12 departments created. The transfer of responsibilities has taken place across seven areas, including health and nutrition. In 2007, the Guédévy Consensus brought together all nutrition stakeholders in Benin and resulted in the creation of the Food and Nutrition Council. Advocacy aimed at mainstreaming nutrition into local development policies has been ongoing for 12 years.



What action was taken?

Benin succeeded in mainstreaming nutrition into the third-generation municipal-level development plans of 40 of the country's 77 municipalities. This was made possible through the Multisectoral Food, Health and Nutrition Project, implemented with funding from the World Bank.

Several steps were taken to convince local authorities to take aspects of nutrition into account:

- Training workshops were held on the issues of nutrition, decentralization, the impacts of malnutrition on development, and the importance of improving nutrition financing and the mainstreaming of nutrition into local policies. These workshops were held for consultants responsible for producing the municipal-level development plans, prefects, mayors, local authority planners, representatives of associations of municipalities and partners.
- The road map was adopted by all actors.
- Work was undertaken to follow up on the new road map.

After nutrition was mainstreamed, advocacy continued for municipalities to effectively implement the plans, with dedicated funding. A monitoring mechanism was established with the National Association of Benin Municipalities (ANCB), and remote monitoring and missions were conducted to verify the actual disbursement of municipal-level development plan funds.

In addition, municipalities made commitments to villages to ensure that certain community actors would participate in managing malnutrition at the community level. Nutrition assistance groups were set up in all villages covered by the intervention. This involved voluntary work, with one nutrition assistance group member supervising 12 to 15 households.

Success was achieved through the cooperation of multiple actors, including the World Bank, civil society actors, international non-governmental organizations, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Multi-Partner Trust Fund and others.

The sustainability of the process relies on partnerships with mayors and the mobilization of communities, who remain stakeholders and voluntarily commit to supporting actions in the municipalities.



What would the country do differently?

A process aimed at mainstreaming nutrition into the fourth-generation municipal-level development plans is underway, in partnership with the World Bank, CARE Benin/Togo and the ANCB.

Certain preconditions have been implemented by the SP/CAN:

- The raising of awareness among prefects, mayors, deputy mayors and local councilors on nutrition and early childhood development issues so that they will ask for nutrition to be taken into account in the municipal-level development plans.
- Exchanges with the World Bank and CARE Benin/Togo on the status of the process implemented in 2017 and the production of an action plan for the process.
- Validation (in progress) of the action plan, which could lead to the signing of an official agreement with the ANCB, as a strategic decentralization actor in Benin.

Changes that could be made to the process of supporting the production of the fourth-generation municipal-level

development plans in the light of lessons learned are as follows:

- Involve financial officers in training and awareness-raising sessions. The field assessment revealed difficulties in terms of disbursements for implementing nutrition interventions.
- Build the capacities of various actors (governors, prefects, mayors, any decision-making body involved in producing the municipal-level development plans, etc.) at the regional and community levels on multisectoral approaches to nutrition and the challenges related to governance and accountability for nutrition.
- Continue to communicate on the multisectoral dimension of nutrition to ensure ownership of this approach by all nutrition actors across the different sectors.
- Provide monitoring of the municipal-level development plan process by SP/CAN actors at the regional level to ensure that nutrition is effectively addressed.





Adaptation and applicability

Practical advice for other countries:

- **Be patient and take the time needed to produce an initial assessment of the level of decentralization in the country and to analyse the possibilities for mainstreaming social issues into development plans. The process in Benin has been ongoing for 12 years, but the team is nevertheless continuing its advocacy, as all the previous municipal-level development plans have expired and a fourth generation is being drafted. The mainstreaming of nutrition must remain a given in these policy documents.**
- **Analyse the current level of mainstreaming of nutrition in the different sectors in the country before launching mainstreaming at the decentralized level.**
- **In collaboration with all stakeholders, propose the most appropriate approach to achieving results.**
- **Train consultants and policymakers on the importance of nutrition and the impacts of malnutrition on development.**
- **Initiate a process of advocacy and awareness-raising among mayors and be available to actively participate in local policymaking sessions.**



Next steps

- Resume collaboration with the ANCB to influence future development plans.
- Continue training the actors responsible for financing in the municipalities.
- Maintain in-depth collaboration with technical and financial partners, such as the World Bank, CARE Benin/Togo and ANCB.



Further information

Another approach to mobilizing local funding for nutrition activities has been the setting up of mutual community nutrition funds. These are community savings systems based on the principle that a share of each member's contributions goes into a solidarity fund. These funds are used to:

- Fund the malnutrition and primary health care actions for children aged 0–59 months.
- Mobilize local food resources and organize cooking demonstrations in order to share best practices and food processing techniques.

As part of an empowerment approach, the credit union provides loans to its members to enable them to engage in income-generating activities.



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NUTRITION

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