European Commission

Designing effective multisectoral nutrition collaboration

Insights and lessons learned from **NiPN**

NiPN
National Information
Platforms for Nutrition

International Partnerships

Cover: Group work during NIPN Uganda workshop.
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The frontpage of this report has been updated to reflect
the European Commission Visual Identify Manual while the
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Designing effective multisectoral nutrition collaboration:

insights and lessons learned from the National Information Platforms for Nutrition

This brief identifies lessons learned from the design, set up and early implementation of highly complex multisectoral collaborations of the National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) in nine very different country and institutional contexts. During the design and set-up of the country platforms there was a real effort to take the conditions for successful collaborations into account: leadership, alignment of objectives, roles and responsibilities, equal power balance and adequate capacities. This brief outlines in detail five lessons for the design and set up of platforms, to help them achieve their collaborative advantage; that is, an evidence-based multisectoral policy dialogue.

Key Messages

- A functional National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN) requires a mature nutrition coordination mechanism that has defined what is expected from the NIPN and how the NIPN will be embedded in existing structures, whose mandates align with NIPN functions.

- Multisectoral collaboration platforms are more likely to succeed when three sets of conditions (aligned institutional mandates, logics and capabilities; effective leadership and functional capacities; and trust and credibility) point in the same positive direction.

- A deliberate mitigation plan for any conditions that are not in place must be developed during the setting up of multisectoral collaborations, with assigned responsibilities for implementing mitigating strategies.

- Investment in strengthening leadership skills and the strategic capacity of a core team in the first months of implementation will help avoid early setbacks in any multisectoral collaboration.

- Multisectoral platforms should be flexible and adaptive, learn by doing and make iterative adjustments to how the platform is operating.

- A neutral broker may provide support to the platform's leadership, facilitate learning and help to overcome hurdles between different partners.

- Proactive and continuous risk management must address conditions such as strengthening leadership skills and strategic capacity, to ensure the success of the platforms.

Realising the collaborative advantage

Over the past decade the nutrition field has emphasised collaboration across sectors and stakeholders. This has been driven by the recognition that malnutrition is caused by a complex set of factors that are the remit of not only the health sector, but also of the agriculture, education, industry, social protection and other sectors[1,2,3].

A key objective of any multisectoral collaboration is to realise the collaborative advantage – that is, that what the collaboration is set up to do cannot be achieved by a single institution working on its own[4]. However, collaboration between institutions that differ in their mandates, resources and cultures can prove challenging.

The challenges in multisectoral collaboration have been described in a growing body of literature and include lack of leadership, non-alignment of objectives, roles and responsibilities, power imbalance and lack of capacity[5,6,7,8]. It follows, therefore, that the reverse of these challenges are the conditions needed for success when establishing multisectoral collaboration.

The first condition required for effective collaboration between institutions is close alignment between the original mandate and institutional logic and the new role and responsibilities within the collaboration[9]. In many cases, this is achieved through mandated collaborations governed by a binding agreement for participation. Alternatively, alignment can be achieved by emergent or voluntary collaborations[10].

A second important condition is the presence of institutional and individual leadership capacities that can support the establishment of a new grouping with a shared identity and shared values[11,12,13]. Establishing a collaborative culture requires creating trust and a common understanding and purpose, fostering interdependencies, and leadership skills that prioritise and implement actions to facilitate collaboration. The self-interest of participants must be muted and destructive power imbalances addressed[14,15,16]. In this brief, we refer to these skills as 'functional' leadership and capacities.

A third key success factor is recognition of the need during the design and early implementation stages to pay explicit attention to establishing clear governance structures, transparent processes and rules for collaboration, and distinct roles and responsibilities for each partner[17,18,19]. This will establish and preserve trust between the collaborating partners and will help the collaboration deliver on its objectives and demonstrate its credibility.

Unless these three conditions are fulfilled, there is a risk of 'collaborative inertia' in which the progress of the initiative is very slow or negligible[20]. Despite wide recognition of the complexity of multisectoral collaboration, putting these conditions in place during the design of multisectoral approaches remains challenging.

@KIPPRA-NIPFN project

NIPN: Multilayered collaboration

The NIPN initiative works to create government-led platforms that establish an evidence-based multisectoral nutrition policy dialogue to inform and strengthen strategic policy, programme and investment decisions for preventing and reducing undernutrition.

To date, NIPNs have been set up in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kenya, Laos PDR, Niger and Uganda. The NIPN approach is inspired by the Nutrition Evaluation Platforms[1].

NIPNs are embedded in national host institutions and work closely with national multisectoral coordination systems for nutrition. A core NIPN team comprises two components that are jointly responsible for implementing the NIPN operational cycle (Figure 1).

- **Policy component**: host institutions convene and facilitate a multisectoral advisory committee, lead policy-relevant question formulation based on government priorities, interpret the results of data analysis and ensure strategic communication of actionable recommendations based on the findings to decision makers.

- **Data component**: host institutions collate multisectoral data in a central repository and analyse the data to answer the policy-relevant questions.

As such, NIPNs are highly complex, dynamic, multilayer collaborations. Multiple organisations collaborate in the core team to fulfil multiple functions requiring nutrition, data management and analysis, and policy and institutional management expertise. The core team must also collaborate with sector ministries and other partners in the nutrition coordination system to identify the most pressing nutrition policy questions, collect the data needed for evidence on nutrition and ensure uptake of the evidence and recommendations.

The collaboration between the mandated NIPN host institutions is formalised in a contract or memorandum of understanding, linked to a funding agreement with development partners. At country level, most host institutions and technical assistance agencies signed their contracts with the development partners at the end of 2017.

The design of each country platform took an average of 18 months and was supported by a Global Support Facility (GSF). The role of the GSF was to provide coherent technical support, coordinate and monitor progress, coordinate with global stakeholders and capture lessons learned.

Figure 1: The operational cycle of the NIPN initiative
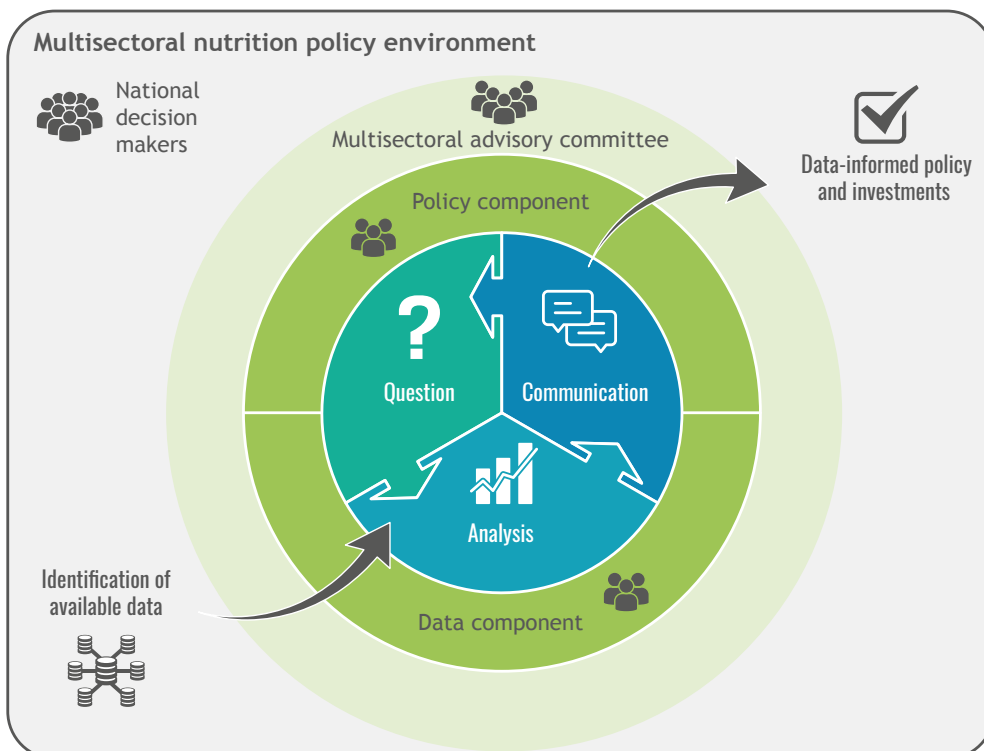
1 Heidkamp R and the NEP Working Group (2017) The national evaluation platform for maternal, newborn, and child health, and nutrition: from idea to implementation. Journal of Global Health Vol. 7(2), doi: 10.7189/jogh.07.020305.

Lessons learned

The lessons drawn from the data are divided in three main themes, aligned to the three conditions necessary for successful collaboration set out above.

Lessons 1 and 2 address points on institutional logic and mandates; lesson 3 deals with leadership and functional capacity; and lessons 4 and 5 address what the platforms should do in terms of processes and concrete outputs to build trust.

A women inspects her sorghum field in Makueni County, Kenya.
@IFAD/Edward Echwalu

A women and child in northern Laos.
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Aligned institutional logics and mandates

Lesson 1: A functional multisectoral nutrition coordination structure with high-level political leadership is an essential requirement when setting up and implementing a NIPN in a country.

The nine NIPN countries are all members of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement with its existing multisectoral nutrition coordination system. In all countries, efforts were made to embed the NIPN into this existing system. However, the 'maturity' of these systems varies widely: there were varying levels of functionality of coordination mechanisms; varying levels of capacity and of strategic and collaborative leadership, underpinned by stronger or weaker multisectoral frameworks, such as laws and policies; and different levels of political support.

Respondents in Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala and Uganda confirmed the importance of their platform fitting into an existing institutional framework for nutrition, with functioning structures underpinned by laws and policies to protect those structures against short-term political shifts.

'The most important factor in creating demand for and engagement with NIPN is the institutional framework for nutrition in Côte d'Ivoire. Particularly that it is attached to the Prime Minister's office, it means access to all people and information. When the Prime Minister says come, they all come' said a core team member in Côte d'Ivoire.

The importance of high-level political engagement in multisector nutrition coordination in facilitating collaboration for the platforms was emphasised by respondents from all above-mentioned countries and from Lao PDR. High-level political authority enabled alignment of institutional mandates and structures to accommodate the platform's needs. In addition, it facilitated collaboration between statistical agencies and departments and divisions across the relevant government sectors in obtaining access to, collation and analysis of data for multisectoral purposes.

Not surprisingly, effective collaboration across sectors was found to be associated with the 'maturity' of the multisectoral coordination system for nutrition. In countries with more mature or stronger multisectoral coordination systems, there was faster progress towards a functional platform. In contrast, in three countries where multisectoral nutrition coordination was either newly established or dormant, the platform encountered many challenges in engaging sectors in its activities as it was not equipped to do the work needed to establish adequate levels of sectoral collaboration from scratch.

The relationship between the broader nutrition system and the platform is not one way. It was also observed that the mandated collaboration had the potential to link up statistical agencies with the nutrition multisectoral system, where such collaboration did not exist before. For instance, Niger seized the opportunity to strengthen the capacity and nutrition expertise of its National Statistics Institute by strategically positioning it as the lead institute in the NIPN contract, while the High Commissioner of the 3N Initiative, responsible for national nutrition coordination, led the policy component. In another country, where the nutrition multisectoral coordination system existed but capacities were limited, the platform's design enabled strengthening of the lead institutions' capacities to coordinate the multisectoral collaboration.

Lesson 2: Mandating, mandates and institutional logics are critical for functional platforms.

For a NIPN to function, mandates and technical competences are required in the platform for:

- data collection from multiple government institutions;

- data management;

- nutrition knowledge – and nutrition policy-linked data analysis; and

- convening nutrition-related sectors and partners.

The design phase paid significant attention to the nutrition landscape and the political and institutional context at country level, including alignment between existing mandates and institutional logic[2] and the roles and responsibilities assigned to organisations in the platform. The GSF and external consultants undertook a number of scoping visits to each country to consult with local institutions. The development partner also impacted the identification and selection of the platform's host organisations, as is often the case in mandated collaborations where the initiating institutions play a role in design[21].

In a number of countries, such as Guatemala, Niger and Lao PDR, this worked very well. Country context and protocols, as well as country formal and informal mandates and institutional logics were taken into account. This resulted in high-level political and leadership support and access to the necessary technical capacity, contributing to the platform's progress and success in the early implementation phase.

In some cases, however, the design was more challenging and not all the required roles received the appropriate weight. Firstly, interviewees indicated that the appropriate political and institutional lines of authority and power relations in some countries were not fully recognised or were ignored during selection of host institutions and individuals. As stated by one actor:

'It would be very important from the sponsor to have the recipient government to commit to have those who are coordinators given a full mandate to coordinate'; and another:

'There are lines of communications in government. Information on the project should have come through these lines.'

In hindsight, these issues during the design phase lingered on during implementation, with lower levels of support from the political and administrative leadership and host institutions demonstrating lower levels of accountability for platform activities.

Additionally, in some countries, host institutions were not always able to assume their platform role fully. For example, in five of the nine countries, the data component was led by a national statistical agency. Although most statistical agencies have the responsibility to manage national databases, not all of them have the mandate to routinely undertake socioeconomic analysis, or engage in analysing data collected by another organisation. This might impede their NIPN function to build a central nutrition data repository from different data sets and analyse these data to answer policy-relevant questions.

In Lao PDR the data unit is not placed with a statistical body but with a public policy research institute, operating under the Ministry of Planning and Investment. This was because the Ministry's political mandate and strong leadership in multisector coordination could be combined with the mandate and institutional logic for policy research, analysis and influencing, and data collection across sectors. To ensure access to the right capacities, the participation of the statistical agency and nutrition unit in the NIPN was formalised.

Similarly, the platform's nutrition policy units in four of the nine countries have strong policy expertise but no or limited experience or mandate in multisectoral practices, whereas others have multisectoral mandates, but no specific nutrition expertise. This makes leading a multisectoral nutrition advisory committee more challenging than for nutrition units that already have a multisectoral mandate.

'If I would not know who might give some very important information on nutrition, or which information is important in nutrition, then I'm sort of incapacitated. You need a person with a passion for a project, and of course the technical aspects of it', said a representative from a host organisation without nutrition experience.

In short, where host organisations have the mandate and competencies for only some of the roles required for a NIPN, additional institutional partners should be assigned during the design or implementation phase. Alternatively, technical support could be contracted in for the early years to help build capacity of host organisations. As one lead organisation said:

'In the end, placement [e.g. choice of a host institution] could be criticised, but then a different placement would not have had access to the nutrition committee and political support; it is about how you manage the placement you've got.'

2 A mandate is an official authorisation to act and defines roles and responsibilities of an organisations. Institutional logic refers to the set of practices, cultures, assumptions, values and beliefs by which organisations and the individuals in them organise their daily activity, time and space (Thornton P, Ocasio W and Lounsbury M [2013] The Institutional Logics Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure and Process. Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Effective leadership and functional capacities

Lesson 3: Strengthening of functional leadership and strategic capacity is key to foster collaborative working within the platform.

The mere existence of a multisectoral coordination body, and alignment between mandates, institutional logics and platform roles, may not be sufficient to support the setting up and implementation of a platform. Bryson et al (2015) and Popp et al (2014) stated that the right leadership skills and functional capacities are needed to manage effective multisectoral collaborations. The following findings from the nine countries unpack this statement further[22,23].

Political and high-level leadership is key to the platform design but daily leadership with adequate functional skills is equally important for implementation of the platform's activities. In this context, functional skills refer to the attitudes, competencies and social skills that facilitate people, organisations and systems to effectively collaborate. The skills for integrative working, strategic capacity to involve and influence stakeholders, management of consensus and conflicts of interest, and teamwork across organisational boundaries are all needed for successful multisectoral collaboration[24,25,3].

Respondents in all nine countries valued these leadership functions as fundamental to the design and implementation of the platform's activities. When asked what functional leads commonly did (or, in some cases, did not do), they identified:

- creating shared commitment to the platform's objectives and strategies:

    '[The host] plays a key coordinating role; he gets people together and lets them see the importance of the project for nutrition';

- building trust and cooperation and establishing the collective identity and interest:

    'Rivalries and competition for funds are common; communications is challenging; (the host) manages the funds and has an own agenda; he needs to work more closely with us and solve the problem'; and

- the abilities to use strategic capacity to strengthen the platform and to organise, plan, coordinate and track progress:

    'It is important for those who are involved in the project to have both public service experience and knowledge of project cycle processes.'

Further analysis of these abilities in relation to whether the platforms made progress or not, led to the identification of important functions of the leadership.

- In those countries where lead(s) promoted commitment to improving nutrition outcomes and created a shared understanding of the NIPN objectives, the platform teams had more clarity about their respective roles and responsibilities.

- In countries where lead(s) were able to motivate host institutions and partners to collaborate, good teamwork was observed and actions were put in place to build credibility more rapidly.

- Where platform lead(s) identified windows of opportunity and developed strategies for bringing key stakeholders on board, it was easier to kick-start the evidence-informed policy dialogue.

- In countries where platform lead(s) had the capability to organise, plan and track progress, timely implementation of the operational cycle and delivery of concrete outputs was observed.

- When the platform lead could demonstrate transparency in his or her actions, there was a positive impact across the collaborations.

Moreover, the GSF observed that it was crucial for the mandated host institution(s) to have one dedicated person able to fulfil these functions. In some countries, certain individuals demonstrated these skills and took the lead during the design phase. In other countries, the platform lead delegated the role after the contract was signed, ensuring these functions were fulfilled. For instance, in Guatemala, the lead functions were delegated to an external non-governmental institution while, in Niger, the institutional leader(s) co-opted national technical assistance.

Finally, the strengthening of functional skills and strategic capacity early in the platform's implementation was not always integrated in the capacity development plans. It was observed across the nine countries that technical skills, such as statistical analysis, came first to mind during the capacity assessment and were well represented in the plans. In general, country teams may have had less exposure to and thus less experience in development of functional skills.

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3 Based on the outcomes of this study and other observations, the GSF started planning leadership and functional skills training for key members of the core NIPN team.

Build trust and credibility through transparent processes and concrete outputs

Lesson 4: Trust is a key element for effective collaboration within a NIPN and its external stakeholders. It requires transparent rules and processes and establishing mutual benefits.

By the end of the first quarter of 2019, 18 months after the contracts had been signed, eight of the nine countries had begun to produce relevant outputs, strengthen the capacities of the platform teams and partners and engage with sector stakeholders.

Although at the time of this research no country had gone through the full operational cycle, experience to date included valuable findings on the need for clarity, transparency and trust.

The need for explicit governance structures, definition of mutual accountability and inclusive and transparent project management processes may seem obvious to experienced managers. This requirement is even more vital when confronted with the complexity of mandated multisectoral collaboration between institutions with different systems and procedures. Common tools are needed, such as planning and reporting frameworks, project implementation trackers, rules for accessing resources and rules for communication on behalf of the platform[26]. Not all NIPN host institutions had this capability from the start and, unintentionally, this led to mistrust or disruptive tension between platform partners in certain countries.

In Guatemala and Niger, establishing the structures and associated project management procedures were among the early actions taken by the NIPN host organisations with the support of technical advisers.

These clear structures and procedures contributed to building trust among all host organisations, providing transparency on budget allocation, clarifying work programmes and responsibilities, joint problem solving and mutual accountability.

Formal representation from, and standardised communication to, each core partner in the platform also contributed to transparency. Although all NIPN countries have formal project steering committees, some are not functional, with very few platform-wide face-to-face meetings, leading to partners having bilateral discussions. Where left uncorrected, this has contributed to mistrust regarding the motivation of partners, or decisions not being accepted as joint platform decisions.

Similarly, establishing trust and transparency is not only a prerequisite for the NIPN core team, but is also required for effective collaboration with the actors of the extended multisectoral nutrition system. The added value of NIPN may not always be immediately obvious for actors in other government sectors and the country platforms need to be strategic and demonstrate the mutual benefit of collaboration to their sector partners.

The obvious entry point for engaging various government sectors is working with nutrition focal points in those sectors, as happens in Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Lao PDR. Although the focal points are often actively involved

Children on their way home after school, southern Ethiopia.
©IFAD/Petterik Wiggers

in the platform's activities, such as question formulation workshops, their influence in their respective ministries is not always sufficient to ensure full collaboration.

Additional strategies are required to engage sectors and build trust. Some country platforms have formalised the engagement in formal agreements and memorandums of understanding. For instance, many sectoral data owners are legitimately hesitant to share data without understanding why and how the platform will use their data. To overcome this barrier, the platforms in Niger and Guatemala, among others, provided the sectors with a clear commitment that any administrative data from the sectors would be anonymised and that only the data and indicators needed for the platform's purposes would be extracted and used in ways that had been agreed.

In Guatemala, the platform developed protocols to standardise quantitative information in the central health database, thus helping sub-national partners access better and more disaggregated nutrition data on populations in their jurisdiction. In Niger, the platform leveraged its expertise and capacity to clean the existing databases of certain ministries. Alongside the cleaned data, they provided the data-cleaning protocols to those ministries, thus enabling sectors to undertake data analysis by themselves.

'We had to demonstrate early on that collaboration with NIPN will make their lives easier. It is a strategy of "you give and I give back",'

was a comment made during a focus group with data component staff from Niger, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. This support helped to overcome the sector partners' fear of losing control of their data when allowing the platform data access.

Country respondents also mentioned that offering capacity-building opportunities to sectoral stakeholders helped to enhance their understanding of the platform's objectives as well as their engagement in future platform activities. In Ethiopia, the host institution has deliberately included staff from sectors other than health in its technical trainings. These trainings inducted the participants to the platform and forged solid interpersonal relationships between participants and the platform's core team.

'NIPN offers them something, training on statistical analysis, training on how to use the household survey data, substantive training on nutrition issues and training on skills and approaches. They benefit from their participation in NIPN activities… It is starting to work to make some feel they are part of NIPN', said a core team member in Ethiopia.

Lesson 5: The platform's credibility and the interest of all partners and stakeholders depends on high-quality early outputs.

Bringing data and policy actors together in a multisectoral platform was inevitably going to be a complex and lengthy process. Awareness raising during the design phase also raised expectations in the multisectoral nutritional system and created a momentum for the platforms. In countries where this was followed by a long period of silence due to delays in implementation, the platform lost credibility and stakeholders lost interest.

In contrast, in other countries, the implementation of early activities to kick-start dialogue with nutrition policy makers helped to build the credibility of the platform and maintain the momentum with the stakeholders until the platform was fully functional.

For instance, in Guatemala, the platform worked on an assessment of the monitoring framework for the implementation of the national nutrition strategy, following a request from the national nutrition coordination committee. It turned this into a concrete output, together with protocols for sectors to undertake the enhanced monitoring. All the outputs were co-branded by the Food and Nutrition Security secretariat and the platform.

In Ethiopia, the platform's team established themselves as knowledge brokers in the national nutrition landscape by organising thematic nutrition seminars at which existing or new research was presented and the policy implications explored. The invite list for the seminars was deliberately aimed at key partners in the nutrition system and wider stakeholders involved in collaboration on nutrition. In Niger, and to some extent in Burkina Faso, the team established an online data depository that brought together nutrition data from various sectors, demonstrating that the NIPN adds value through collaboration between actors.

Although actors in the extended multisectoral nutrition system may not immediately recognise the added value of a NIPN, concrete outputs from the platforms that are of benefit to them may trigger further interest.

'Talking about strategy and approach may not be enough. Our partners and stakeholders want to see an output from NIPN. We need to act proactively.'

Women from a tube-well user group, Bangladesh.
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Implications for future multisectoral information platforms

This brief describes how known conditions for multisectoral collaboration have been taken on board during the design and set up of NIPNs and what can be learned from the process.

Across the nine study countries, there is a huge variation in the setup of the platforms and the context of multisectoral nutrition coordination, each with strengths and limitations. Even when known conditions for collaboration are taken on board during the design phase, in reality the perfect scenario is rare. A number of conclusions can be drawn, which would apply to any nutrition information platform.

- Based on the lessons learned, information platforms should only be set up in countries with a 'mature' nutrition coordination mechanism and where nutrition is a high priority on the country's socioeconomic development agenda.

- The platforms are more likely to succeed when three sets of conditions (aligned institutional mandates, logics and capabilities; effective leadership and functional capacities; and trust and credibility) point in the same positive direction earlier rather than later. A decision by consensus for the choice of host institutions should be based on the analysis of these conditions and the advantages and limitations of different options. Taking such a decision with main stakeholders would be the first step towards a shared perspective and a sense of ownership and accountability for the platform, even more so when there is high-level endorsement.

- Even when the three conditions are not fully met, appropriate risk assessment and proactive risk management can overcome the challenges encountered. Some country platforms were able to be agile and flexible when things did not go as planned. They reflected, learned and adapted their collaborative approach as circumstances unfolded. If too many challenges can be foreseen in fulfilling these conditions or overcoming hurdles, the chances of success for the platform are slim.

The lessons and these conclusions have a number of implications for future nutrition information platforms and other multisectoral collaborations.

Risk assessment should not only be a pro forma activity during set up, but must be followed by proactive and continuous risk management as an integral part of the management of any multisectoral collaboration. Collaboration partners have a shared responsibility to mitigate risks that threaten the success of their collaboration. Particularly when the abovementioned conditions are not fulfilled early on, appropriate mitigation measures, such as those discussed below, need to be taken as each unmet condition can become a strong impediment to the progress and effectiveness of the platforms.

The need for functional leadership and strategic capacity strengthening of the host institutions must be included in a capacity-building plan. Organising trainings and workshops on these topics for the core team members in the first months of the collaboration will create common understanding, strengthen individual and team capacities and help to avoid common early setbacks in any multisectoral collaboration. Investment by, and the assistance of, a global support mechanism such as the Scaling Up Nutrition movement may be required[27].

As the results demonstrated that flexible and adaptive platforms seem to fare better, **it is crucial that platforms learn by doing and reflect on what works and what does not, so that adjustments can be made with relative ease and iteratively**. This requires leadership and a work environment that aspires to improve through critical and creative thinking, understands the complexity of the system and stimulates collaborative inquiry and action. Senge (2006) calls this a learning organisation[28].

To facilitate learning, a knowledge broker may assist the partners in a multisectoral collaboration, occasionally or permanently. In some of the national information platforms, this role was successfully taken up by a technical assistance agency. Such a neutral broker or a 'boundary-spanning actor' has successfully provided the glue between the different partners in multisectoral nutrition collaboration in certain settings[29].

Setting up a NIPN offers strong potential for member countries of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement who wish to monitor and progress their National Action Plans for Nutrition. Furthermore, the lessons discussed in this brief are applicable to other forms of complex multilayer collaborations to deliver on public policy purposes. Investing in the hard work of creating effective multisectoral collaboration and ensuring that the three sets of conditions are at least partially met will pay off in terms of progress towards achieving national and global nutrition objectives.

Methods

Data for this brief were collected in two stages by an external research team.

1. The first data collection round in 2018 was for a mid-term review that assessed the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and sustainability of the national platforms and the global support structure. Data were collected through interviews with selected NIPN country teams, the GSF, global and country donor representatives and global nutrition experts. Focus group discussions were also held with all NIPN country teams. Fieldwork was conducted for two in-depth case studies of the platforms in Guatemala and Bangladesh. This allowed a wider set of actors in each country's multisectoral nutrition network to be interviewed or consulted through focus group discussions, such as sectoral ministries, managers of NIPN host institutions, donors, academics and civil society representatives.

2. The second round of data collection took place in 2019 to allow comparative analysis to identify lessons relevant to mandating and setting up future NIPNs, including which preconditions mattered and why; what institutional issues hampered or helped collaboration between host institutions of the NIPN core team; what worked to build country demand for and commitment to the platform in the NIPN core team and beyond in government; and what capacities were needed at the systemic, organisational and individual levels to implement and sustain a NIPN. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with NIPN technical advisers, staff of NIPN core teams and stakeholders from countries other than Guatemala and Bangladesh, and GSF staff who supported countries in the design and set up phase.

3. In total, the researchers engaged with 120 informants, 98 of whom were country-based actors.

Additional information and qualitative data were gathered via a desk review of NIPN global and country documents, operational plans, guidelines, and process, progress and technical reports.

Data were analysed using an exploratory analysis process. The qualitative primary interview and focus group notes from both rounds were analysed in two steps. A priori qualitative coding was used to identify the country and the main themes for which data were relevant before the grouped data were analysed using grounded coding to identify emerging themes and patterns. In this step, the data from the second interview round were reviewed to triangulate findings from the first round of interview and focus group data. A final comparative analysis was undertaken to identify how the identified themes and patterns applied differently to the country platforms, depending on whether more or less progress was made in implementation.

The results were used to distil a series of lessons, as described above, which were then regrouped according to identified meta-themes.

Acknowlegements

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