

Case study

The role of decentralization in a multi-stakeholder platform mechanism for nutrition in the Philippines

Country: Philippines

Date: March 2023

Themes: Coordination of action through improved functional capacities

Sub-themes: Strengthening capacity to better coordinate with sectors or groups



Introduction



Nutrition work spans multiple sectors, including agriculture and health, and involves several roles within each. Nutrition also involves many types of stakeholders, including governments, civil society, United Nations organizations, academia, business and the private sector. All of these sectors and stakeholders are involved in different ways in influencing nutrition outcomes within a country. Recognizing this, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Secretariat has embarked on a journey to document good practices on well-functioning multi-stakeholder/multisectoral platforms.

The case study documentation addresses five key questions:

- What is the local definition of a multi-stakeholder/multisectoral platform?
- What are the governance arrangements for multi-stakeholder/multisectoral platforms across varied settings?
- How are the multi-stakeholder/multisectoral platforms structured at the country level?
- What are key achievements and emerging challenges faced by multi-stakeholder/multisectoral platforms?
- How do we ensure that gains made by well-functioning multi-stakeholder platforms are sustained?

Five countries have been identified spanning different geographic settings, including Anglophone Africa, Asia, Francophone Africa, Latin America and the thematic Convergence Hub. The approach to documenting good practices is summarized in Annex 1.

This case study places a spotlight on the Philippine Multi-Stakeholder and Multisectoral Platform (MSP).



The case of the Philippines - context

The MSP in the Philippines has representation from all key sectors and stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Agriculture, Interior and Local Government; the Ministry of Budget and Management; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Labor and Employment; the Ministry of Science and Technology; the Ministry of Social Welfare and Development; the Ministry of Trade and Industry; and the Ministry of Economic and Development and Authority. There are also members from the private sector, academia, civil society, business and development. The MSP serves as a mechanism for the regular sharing of information and the review and approval of policies and plans for nutrition. It also serves as a venue for the discussion of key issues and the identification of resolutions. Furthermore, the MSP serves as a platform for aligning and collaborating on activities and addressing nutrition-related challenges, including those arising from crises and disasters. A full overview of the structure of the MSP is captured in Annex 2.

To effectively fulfill its mandates, the MSP in the Philippines is institutionalized and operates in accordance with the provisions of judicial law, namely Executive Order No. 234, Presidential Decree 491, and Republic Act No. 11148. Internal policies are in place for the roles

and composition of technical working groups for nutrition programmes, the Philippine SUN Movement Core Group, and the SUN Networks.

The main body responsible for nutrition coordination in the Philippines is the National Nutrition Council Secretariat. The National Nutrition Council Governing Board and its Technical Committee serve as the core of the MSP for nutrition in the Philippines, supported by technical working groups, ad hoc groups and SUN Networks. The National Nutrition Council is committed to promoting inclusivity and fostering collaboration to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition, which serves as the country's blueprint for nutrition action and guides the work of the MSP. It is supported by a results framework that sets out the commitments of agencies, including physical and financial targets, for a six-year period. The Government finances the National Nutrition Council governance system and structures through the General Appropriations Act, which defines the annual expenditure programme of the Government. The National Nutrition Council Secretariat receives annual reports of accomplishments under the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition and shares them with the Governing Board and other stakeholders.



Objectives of the case study

This case study shares the experience of the Philippines in nutrition planning, particularly looking at the role played by decentralized bodies.



Period covered

The MSP has existed in the Philippines since 1987. However, this brief focuses on the period after 2014, when the Philippines joined the SUN Movement.





Decentralized ways of working

The multisectoral and multilevel network for nutrition in the Philippines extends from the national to subnational levels. The decentralization process empowers local government units (provinces, cities, municipalities and *barangays*, or villages) to work through local nutrition committees as key decision makers. They plan, implement, monitor and evaluate nutrition interventions applied at the subnational level to support and strengthen subnational nutrition governance in the MSP (Figure 1).

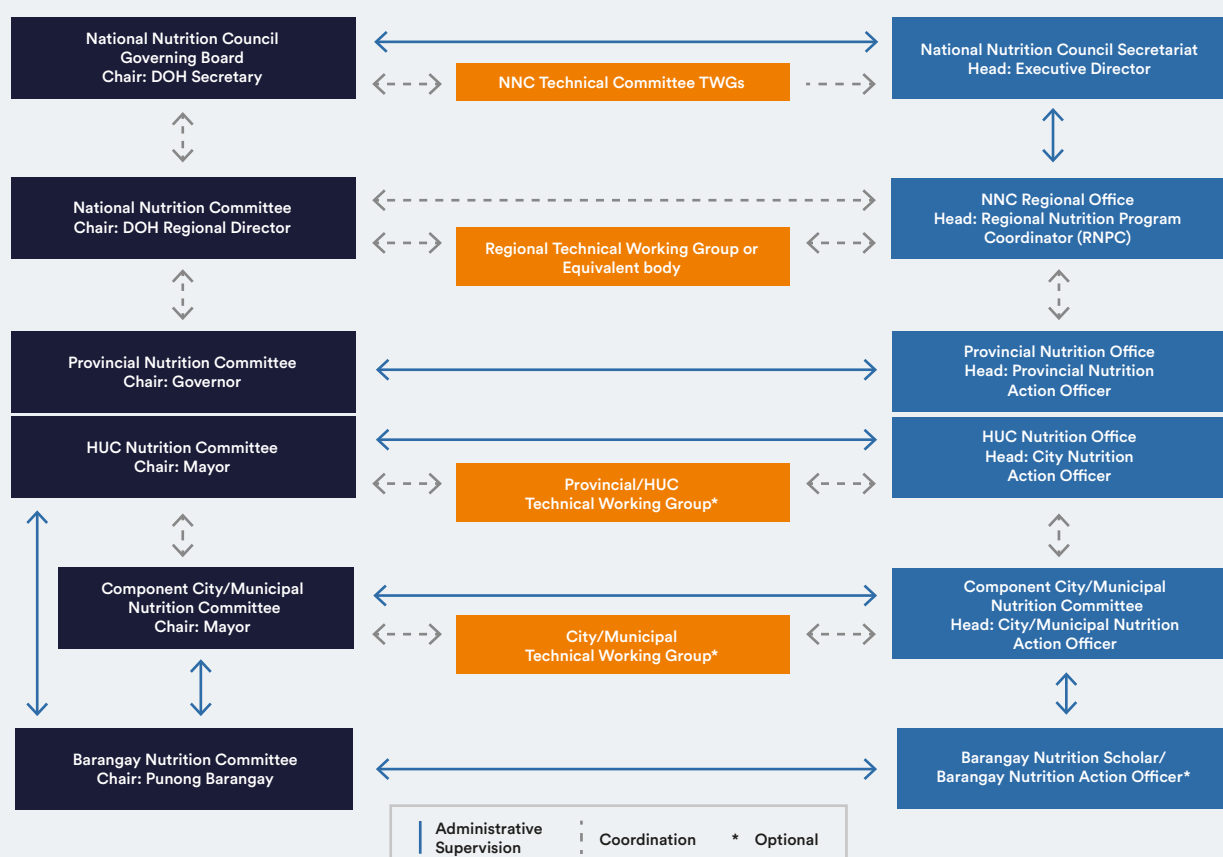
The director of the regional office of the Department of Health usually serves as the chair of the regional nutrition committee, while the vice chair positions are filled by the Department of the Interior and the Local Government and the Department of Agriculture, following the structure at the national level. At this level, subnational nutrition committees include members from various offices of the local government unit and representatives of non-governmental organizations and civil society. Subnational SUN Networks were established in 2021 and 2022. A Nutrition Action Officer, designated from among the heads of local departments or hired as a staff member for nutrition coordination, serves as the focal person on nutrition for the local government unit. While Nutrition

Action Officers are usually present at the provincial, city and municipal levels, a few *barangays* (the smallest administrative division in the Philippines) also have designated officers. At the *barangay* level, volunteer “nutrition scholars” monitor the growth of young children and malnourished people and connect them with service providers. This programme of recruiting, training, deploying and supervising scholars is administered by the National Nutrition Council in collaboration with local government units. At this level, the extent of financing for nutrition and related interventions varies depending on the priorities and interests of local chief executives. In 2022, the National Nutrition Council launched a Nutrition Champions Programme to facilitate building stronger governance for nutrition at the local levels.

Benefits of the policy and coordinating body structures at the subnational level include:

- Formulation and approval of national and subnational nutrition action plans that are consistent with the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition and tailored to the specific nutritional circumstances and other relevant factors of the regions and localities

Structure for policy formulation and coordination for nutrition from national to subnational levels in the Philippines





- Establishment of a platform for the regular approval, monitoring and evaluation of plans and policies
- Development of guidelines for monitoring and evaluating local programme implementation, recognizing outstanding local government efforts, formulating local nutrition action plans, and other efforts
- Sharing of good practices and innovative nutrition interventions

Through the years, the MSP has improved in several areas. Meetings are held more regularly, the number and quality of attendees have improved, the governing policy is better adhered to, and the policy approval process has sped up. Among the efforts made to achieve these improvements have been regular refresher courses for

members, orientations for new members on the roles and responsibilities of the MSP, and regular follow-up meetings with stakeholders during the consolidation of resolutions and guidelines. Proper documentation is in place to ensure that all agreements made during the meetings are carried out.

Other key achievements include the development of the new Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition, the assessment and identification of a priority agenda through the SUN Joint Annual Assessment, and the establishment of plans for joint activities and projects of the SUN Civil Society Alliance and SUN Business Network.

At the subnational level, local government units that have shown exemplary performance in nutrition are recognized and awarded with a cash prize during annual awards ceremonies.



What the country would have done differently

For a better, stronger and more ethical MSP, it may be imperative to suggest that terms of reference be developed for any involvement, covering proper decorum in the MSP and meetings (e.g. having the same members and representatives attend every meeting, for continuity), the nomination and election processes, and issues of conflict of interest for Technical Committee and Governing Board members. Conflict of interest forms may be given to members to ensure that they are within the ethical boundaries of the board or committee. Compliance with the terms of reference should be monitored and evaluated.

With the expanding roles, responsibilities and nutrition needs to be addressed, it may also be beneficial for the National Nutrition Council to strengthen and broaden its reach. This would address the need for more funding and the hiring of additional people to help facilitate nutrition coordination and policy development. This also would expand capacities in policy and programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The rigorous implementation of the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition local government unit mobilization strategy has drawn the commitment not only of local government units but also of the leagues of local governments. There is a need, however, to put in place processes, policies and tools to attain and sustain the impact of the mobilization strategy.





Adapting and applying the interventions in other settings

As a member of the MSP, the National Nutrition Council is committed to promoting inclusivity and fostering collaboration to contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition and the Sustainable Development Goals. The National Nutrition Council also regularly participates in the meetings of the subcommittee on the Sustainable Development Goals convened by the National Economic and Development Authority.

It is imperative that the MSP be well represented across sectors, including private-sector representatives from various industries. It also is imperative that national plans and policies be well implemented at the subnational level. This is why capacity-building among nutrition officers and local government officials in the area of nutrition programme management is crucial. Technical assistance needs should be identified, and an understanding of the availability, accessibility and abundance of food in an area may provide a way to link food, nutrition and food availability.



The role of the SUN Movement in supporting this good practice

The SUN Movement tools and guidelines for MSP formulation supported the Philippines in strengthening its MSP. In addition to the strong engagement of the national SUN Networks, support from the SUN Global Support System also had a positive impact, including work by the SUN Civil Society Network Secretariat

to form the network, build capacity among network members and develop action plans.

Access to global events and engagements – within the network and the SUN Movement as a whole – helped strengthen the networks and their roles in the MSP.





Conclusion and next steps

The National Nutrition Council has been lobbying legislative representatives to strengthen its governing scope within the Philippines via a bill, which has not yet been approved.

The Government of the Philippines will continue to support the functioning of the MSP and sustain its gains in various ways, including:

- Continuous coordination with stakeholders to encourage them to attend and actively participate in the MSP
- Provision of regular refresher courses to members and orientations to new members regarding the roles and responsibilities of the MSP, especially during changes in administration
- Development of terms of reference regarding proper decorum in the MSP and during meetings
- Further promotion of collaboration and joint activities to leverage funds
- Strengthening and broadening the reach of the National Nutrition Council to address financial and staffing needs to expand the capacities of the workforce related to policy and programme planning and implementation
- Better implementation of national plans and policies at the subnational level through the building of capacity among nutrition officers and local government officials



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References



Presidential Decree (P.D) 491



Executive Order (E.O.) 234 and its IRR



Roles and Responsibilities of NNC Governing Board and Technical Committee Members (page 18-21 of the RA 11148 IRR)



Form on the Declaration of Conflict of Interest



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Annex 1: Documentation questionnaire

A number of key informant interviews were conducted alongside a review of various national documents. The SMS [good practices action brief template](#) was used to document the study. Tailored questions on the functionality of the MSP included:

- **Area 1: Local definition of the MSP:** What does MSP mean in your context? What do you see as the key components of a well-functioning MSP? What do you hope to gain as a member of the MSP?
- **Area 2: Governance of the MSP:** Who is the current coordinator/convenor of your MSP? Is there an action plan available for the MSP? Is there an operating framework/guidance guiding the work of the MSP? What are the reporting lines of the MSP? In which ministry is the SUN Government Focal Point located? Where is the MSP anchored and at what level? What is the engagement of the subnational level in the MSP, and how does the MSP function at the subnational level? How is the MSP funded? What accountability mechanisms exist within the MSP? What communication channels are available in the MSP?
- **Area 3: Structure of the MSP:** Who are the members of the MSP, and what sectors do they represent? What is the level of frequency for MSP meetings? How many representatives are there from each stakeholder group? What is the process for including additional members? How often are new members invited?
- **Area 4: Achievements/challenges:** Have there been any notable achievements as a result of good MSP collaboration? What are some of the challenges that you have faced as an MSP, and what steps did you take to overcome them?
- **Area 5: Looking ahead/MSP sustainability:** What is needed to further improve the functioning of the MSP? What is needed to sustain the gains made by the MSP?





Annex 2: The National Nutrition Council

The National Nutrition Council Governing Board consists of the secretaries of ten national government agencies:

- Department of Health
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of the Interior and Local Government
- Department of Budget and Management
- Department of Education
- Department of Labor and Employment
- Department of Science and Technology
- Department of Social Welfare and Development
- Department of Trade and Industry
- National Economic and Development Authority

The Secretary of Health chairs the Governing Board, while the secretaries of Agriculture and of the Interior and Local Government are the vice-chairs. The board also includes three representatives from the private sector, selected and appointed by the President for a two-year term.

The National Nutrition Council also has an interagency technical committee composed of the heads of major bureaus and agencies involved in nutrition, as well as appropriate non-governmental organizations to provide technical advisory services to the board and the National Nutrition Council Secretariat and to facilitate intra- and interagency coordination, supervision, monitoring and implementation of nutrition policies and programmes. Technical committees include the various technical working groups for Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition programmes and the SUN Networks. Furthermore, a Philippine SUN Movement Core Group comprises chairs and convenors of the SUN Networks.

The Governing Board meets quarterly, while the Technical Committee holds at least six meetings per year. Both groups follow an annually formulated agenda. Additionally, there are ad hoc committees and programme technical working groups that hold regular meetings based on agenda forecasts.

To expand the membership of the Governing Board, Executive Order No. 234 must be amended, since the body was institutionalized through legislation. However, those interested in being a member of the Technical Committee are approved through a governing board resolution. For the ad hoc committees and programme technical working groups, the process is easier, as it is local and internal.

