

Case study

Developing and maintaining a multi-stakeholder platform within a challenging operating environment in Tajikistan

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Country: Tajikistan

Date: 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 multiple roles within each. Nutrition also involves multiple different types of stakeholders, including government, civil society, United Nations agencies, academia 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 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 Multi-Stakeholder and Multisectoral Platforms (MSPs) in Tajikistan.



The case of Tajikistan

The structure and operation of a well-functioning MSP can vary from country to country, but the common denominator is that it should be a platform that unites stakeholders in working towards achieving nutrition gains. Nutrition is a multifaceted issue that requires collective efforts from various stakeholders, including Governments, United Nations partners, donors, civil society and businesses. The MSP is an avenue for countries to bring together partners to discuss nutrition, breaking the silos that often exist within ministries and development partners with unique mandates and multiple activities.

In Tajikistan, the MSP is used to exchange ideas, develop synergies and find solutions. It also acts as a platform for tracking progress and monitoring the implementation of the Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan and other nutrition interventions. The MSP structure in Tajikistan is unique, adapted according to the resources available, including a technical secondment by the German Agency for International Cooperation.

The MSP in Tajikistan operates within a challenging environment, particularly due to multiple competing priorities at the Government's end due to which nutrition is not a top priority. Despite this, the country has managed to introduce and implement the MSP and ensure its functionality.



Objectives of the case study

This case study describes how Tajikistan has created a well-functioning MSP despite limited support from the Government and how the country has developed coordination structures that foster a multi-stakeholder approach to nutrition.

The case study also will shed light on the regionalization of the MSP and the development of country-specific coordination mechanisms.



Period covered

Tajikistan joined the SUN Movement in 2013. However, the regionalization of the MSP took place in 2022, and the specific coordination mechanisms came into play in 2021. This case study covers the period 2021–2023.



What was done?

Governance

A well-functioning MSP is led by the SUN Government Political Focal Point with the convening power, usually placed above the ministerial level. It should include relevant ministries, United Nations partners, donors, civil society organizations and academic institutions. In Tajikistan, the SUN Government Political Focal Point is part of the Ministry of Health and is one of the four Deputy Health Ministers.

While the placement of the SUN focal point is not ideal in terms of convening power, Tajikistan has an active MSP with representation from the government, donors, civil society and the UN. The MSP has been able to foster interactive discussions between partners and bridge the gap due to competing government priorities. This has been made possible by the secondment of technical staff by the German Agency for International Cooperation within the Ministry of Health to support the SUN focal point.

The secondment of a technical staff member who coordinates SUN activities is an excellent example of capacity augmentation for the government. This person plays a key role in coordinating activities at national and regional levels and has bolstered ministry capacity.

Given the limited Government capacity, competing priorities that have allowed limited attention to nutrition and the significant language barriers (Russian is not an official SUN language and is not spoken by most development partners), this staff member bridges that gap and ensures that the MSP functions in both languages.

Key interventions applied to ensure MSP functionality in Tajikistan

Overall, approximately 16 Government ministries, departments and agencies are part of the MSP. Participants at quarterly meetings include ministry and United Nations representatives, donors and, on occasion, members of civil society. The SUN MSP, as an overarching nutrition coordination platform, was mirrored at the regional and district level, enabling the establishment of subnational nutrition structures.

The regionalization of the MSP, which exists at both national and regional levels, has been a key achievement. District and regional authorities are apprised of key national programmes and have learned how to integrate programme activities into district-level work plans. The regionalization also has spurred the involvement of local governments and the population.

Tajikistan has also developed platforms that provide contextualized solutions. For instance, the United Nations and SUN Donor Network have merged to form a network of development partners chaired by the United States Agency for International Development and co-chaired by UNICEF. This is the only platform in the country where multi-stakeholder discussions on nutrition take place and where efforts are made to synergize activities and avoid duplication.

Similarly, the secondment of a technical staff member in the Ministry of Health has boosted the capacity of the Government and united partners under one platform. The multifaceted nutrition work requires strong collaboration and taking into account capacity constraints of the Government staff, development partners in Tajikistan have found a solution that works in their context.





What the country would have done differently

Financing and the consequent sustainability of programmes remain a key issue. Currently, there is no budget line for nutrition; funding goes into various ministries, and it is up to their discretion whether they allocate money for nutrition-related activities. In addition, the Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan is not costed, and there is heavy reliance on external donor funding for all nutrition-related interventions.

Nationally, Tajikistan has a budget deficit that has led to limited focus on social development. There is precedent for

domestic funding, as the Government is now supporting school feeding. For the Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan, however, Government agencies are not requesting funding for nutrition issues.

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Adapting and applying the interventions in other settings

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For countries facing frequent political instability, high government turnover and overall vulnerability, a number of the above interventions can be applied, with some adaptations:

- Nutrition champions and well-placed SUN Government Focal Points are critical. A higher-level SUN Government Focal Point placed above the ministry level would have the convening power to get multiple stakeholders on board to address nutrition issues. A nutrition champion – ideally someone who is not a part of the Government but who is well known and respected by the population – could help advocate for nutrition. This would help mitigate the challenges arising from frequent changes in personnel,

achieve more buy-in from stakeholders and raise awareness of nutrition issues among the population.

- Similarly, coordination mechanisms can vary from country to country. The unique solution in Tajikistan has been shared with other countries that don't have networks, including Kyrgyzstan and Yemen, and they have expressed interest in picking up this model.
- It is important to ensure MSP representation at the regional level. This is critical to achieving real nutrition gains, especially in countries where most of the population live outside urban areas. For a country to make real strides in nutrition, it is critical that policies, plans and activities are undertaken at both national and subnational levels. Without the latter, there will be no meaningful change.



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Conclusion and next steps

Greater engagement and leadership from the Government would improve MSP functionality. MSP members in Tajikistan have unequivocally agreed on the need for the SUN Government Focal Point to be placed at a high level – ideally, within the Office of the Prime Minister. Because line ministries have their own plans and actions, there is limited incentive for ministries to collaborate unless convened by a senior official.

Efforts are under way to locate the SUN Government Focal Point in a higher office and to make a senior Government official – ideally, the Deputy Prime Minister – a nutrition champion. An exchange mission to the Philippines is planned to help Tajikistan learn about interministerial coordination.



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