



Action brief

Enhancing youth participation in nutrition platforms

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Country: Malawi
Date: 2023

Topics: Social Mobilization, Advocacy and Communication

Sub-topics: Engaging the Youth



Overview



The flagship Youth Leaders for Nutrition programme from the SUN Civil Society Network (CSN) helps teach young people how to engage key decision makers in the nutrition and food sector while adding their own perspectives to advocacy efforts. The programme also helps youth influence policy change at country and global levels, and raise the profile of youth advocacy on nutrition within the SUN CSN and the broader SUN Movement.



Objectives of the action brief

This action brief captures the efforts of Mike Khunga, a youth leader from Malawi, to enhance youth participation in nutrition platforms.



Period covered

This action brief covers 2018 to 2022.



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What action was taken?

In 2018, Youth Leaders for Nutrition were invited to a retreat in Washington, D.C. hosted by the SUN CSN. After participating in nutrition advocacy training at the retreat, Khunga secured a small grant of \$5,000 from the SUN CSN that allowed him to conduct youth campaigns for nutrition.

The first phase of Khunga's efforts was a three-month project to help youth participate in community nutrition committees in Malawi. He spearheaded advocacy efforts to ensure that young people were included in national and in district-level committees. Youth were trained to understand the importance of nutrition in their communities, and leaders were taught the importance of involving youth in nutrition governance structures.

In Malawi, Area and Community Leaders Action for Nutrition structures provide guidance for nutrition interventions in communities and offer lobbying opportunities for nutrition funding in local councils. Khunga worked to ensure that youth were better represented in these efforts, helping them lead community nutrition projects and develop a network of nutrition-minded people.

Khunga also secured \$3,000 from CSN Small Grants for connecting youth clubs and organizations with local and regional decision makers, setting them up for success when he is no longer around. District agricultural and food security professionals trained the young leaders in backyard gardening, livestock rearing and cooking. Radio broadcasters and other members of the media helped showcase these efforts.

Agriculture sector representatives helped youth get started in vegetable gardening, and health sector members helped the youth raise nutrition awareness in the community. The young people making the greatest impact were given the opportunity to participate at the district level. They were recognized in their communities and invited to take part in various government and private nutrition intervention programmes.

The project was so successful that Khunga was asked to present it to the Civil Society Alliance in Mozambique to help them implement the good practices of the project. The project also was published by the United Nations Food System Coordination Hub.

Key lessons learned:

- District decision makers can increase young people's impact in the community through capacity-building and training efforts.
- The bilingual approach is critical. Meetings and presentations were held in English with decision makers and in Chichewa with community nutrition committees. This allowed young people to participate at the community-level in their local language.
- The SUN Movement and its Networks should include and engage youth more meaningfully. Good relationships with the SUN Government Focal Point and national SUN Networks would have helped in the design and implementation of the project. For example, the SUN Donor Network was conducting activities that targeted young people in nutrition, but there were challenges in connecting with them to share resources. Furthermore, there is a need to bring youth into the fold of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform.

Barriers:

- **Governance:** The committees were created under a constitution that didn't specify youth involvement, and this was a barrier to getting them involved. Furthermore, there was resistance to youth taking established committee positions such as Chair and Vice-Chair. An agreement was reached to prevent young people from running for these positions while new members.
- **Funding:** Demand was high, but due to fundraising constraints, few communities were selected. Young people from other communities wanted to participate, but plans could not be scaled up due to a lack of funds.





What would the country do differently?

- Involve the media in the first phase of the project to expand the reach to more communities, build more relationships with external stakeholders, and generate more funding sources.
- Invite other organizations to participate in the project.
- Ask for constructive feedback from representatives during the inception phase.



Further information



Young people can play a role in building food systems during crises like COVID-19 – UN Food Systems Coordination Hub



Better accountability will improve nutrition in Malawi – The Maravi Post



Civil Society Organization Nutrition Alliance



Africa's Youth Finds its Power in Transforming Food Systems – allAfrica.com



Adaptation and Applicability

When translating these activities to different settings, there is a need to:

- **Conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise:** During the project design phase, identify others who are conducting similar activities.
- **Engage in a consultative process:** Before implementing activities, host a meeting with everyone identified during the mapping exercise to get feedback and guidance on your next steps.
- **Engage the media:** Whenever you implement activities or engage with policymakers, the media needs to be there to capture commitments and provide accountability.
- **Identify limitations:** Identify governance restraints and look at how government committees are composed.
- **Get buy-in at the national level:** This project was implemented in just two of the ten districts in Malawi. By connecting with and presenting at national-level nutrition committees, especially those that fall under the Ministry of Health and Nutrition, you may be able to get additional support, guidance and access.



This Good Practice was developed in collaboration with the SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN). For more information about the SUN CSN, please visit their website: <https://www.suncivilsociety.com/>

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