

The Joint Annual Assessment report

Guidance for countries



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The Joint Annual Assessment (JAA) has been revised in 2021 to align with the new Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Strategy for its third phase (2021–2025). This guidance note aims to support countries and global stakeholders to interpret and optimize their use of the revised JAA.

The SUN Movement Strategy prioritizes country leadership and focuses on supporting systemic change at the country level. All parts of the Movement – member Governments, the four SUN Networks, the SUN Movement Coordinator, the SUN Movement Secretariat, the SUN Movement Executive Committee and the SUN Movement Lead Group – are expected to step up in equal measure and intensify their efforts to accelerate the delivery of nutrition outcomes at scale and to work together to align and focus those efforts on priorities within countries.

The Strategy sets out four strategic objectives:



SO1: Strengthen and sustain strong policy and advocacy environments at the subnational, national, regional and global levels to position nutrition outcomes as a key maker and marker of sustainable development.



SO2: Develop and align shared country priorities for action.



SO3: Build and strengthen country capacities to develop, prioritize, finance, implement and track country actions through strengthened technical assistance and knowledge management.



SO4: Ensure governance of SUN that promotes country leadership and responsibilities of government, aligns the resources of all Movement stakeholders behind country priorities, and strengthens mutual accountability among Movement stakeholders and to those most at risk of malnutrition. Robust mechanisms should be put in place to encourage and ensure that this promotion, alignment and mutual accountability are realized.

The JAA consists of two components: the consultation meeting (see separate guidance) and the JAA report. The consultation meeting feeds into the completion of the report.

The purpose of the JAA is to:

- enable a participatory and transparent review of country advancement in accelerating progress on national nutrition targets, informed by the country's most recently available monitoring information;
- document progress that has been achieved collectively over the past year;
- celebrate success, providing an opportunity for SUN (in-country) networks to discuss progress, successes and areas for increasing collaboration;
- jointly identify continuing or new bottlenecks impacting on progress;
- share information with the SUN Movement Global Support System (GSS) on capacity gaps anticipated in addressing the bottlenecks;
- provide the basis for the development of a country compact with the SUN Movement GSS in relation to technical support;
- share experiences and lessons within the country and with the broader SUN Movement; and
- serve as a communication tool within the SUN GSS, providing up-to-date information in relation to the Strategic Objectives of the SUN Movement and contributing to learning.

The JAA will also:

- enable countries to use the process to build trust and strengthen accountability;
- provide countries with opportunities to contribute to the overall development of the SUN Movement;
- contribute to the overall SUN MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning) system.

The primary focus of the JAA is therefore to strengthen country collaboration and support. It should provide the basis for a discussion on country-level bottlenecks, actions agreed upon by country stakeholders to address those bottlenecks, and the identification of critical capacity gaps and technical support needs of countries.

The secondary focus is enabling the monitoring of progress within the SUN Movement countries. This overview of progress across SUN countries will assist the Movement in identifying common challenges and opportunities and will influence advocacy and support strategies. It will also facilitate sharing and learning in relation to good practices among countries by identifying commonalities in successful practices.

The JAA is an opportunity for:





1. country-level stakeholders to demonstrate their contribution to overall progress, document the alignment of energy and investments with country priorities and model their commitment to accountability as participants in the SUN Movement; and
2. advocacy for nutrition within the country through the inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders and influential senior government leaders and at the global level through the demonstration of the country's ongoing commitment to nutrition and the sharing of pivotal learning, good practices and challenges.

This detailed guidance aims to clarify how each area within the JAA can be useful to the country and how other stakeholders are expected to interact with and respond to it. The guidance also provides information on alignment with the SUN Movement Strategy.

During the Movement's second phase (2016–2020), the JAA emphasized tracking progress markers. This focus has contributed substantially to developing a strong understanding of the overall global picture and has enabled SUN to focus resources on areas of common concern. Substantial progress has been made during the first decade of SUN, and most countries have established the basic systems and structures that are essential to strong governance. As the third phase (2021–2025) focuses on ensuring that those systems and structures are effective in achieving progress, the emphasis on the original progress markers has decreased, and more attention will be paid to very specific country challenges that require support.

The revised JAA comprises four core sections followed by specific sections for networks.

These are:

Section 1: Basic country information (SO1, SO4)	
Section 2: Coordination, alignment and results (SO2, SO3, SO4)	
Section 3: Finance (SO3, SO4)	
Section 4: Knowledge-sharing and learning (SO3)	
Section 5: SUN Networks	

The JAA contains 15 progress markers to ensure a minimum level of continuity in relation to overall monitoring at both country and global levels. These markers allow countries to self-reflect and rank their progress in important areas at the end of each section.



Section 1. Basic country information

This section responds primarily to SO1 and SO4 of the SUN Movement Strategy.



SO1: Strengthen and sustain strong policy and advocacy to position nutrition outcomes.



SO4: Ensure SUN governance promotes country leadership and government responsibilities, aligns resources and strengthens mutual accountabilities.

Each country or State that has committed to being part of the SUN Movement provides information on the existence of country infrastructure for the overall planning, management and coordination of nutrition (governance structure). It is well understood that each country or State has designed its nutrition governance architecture at national and subnational levels in ways that work best in each individual circumstance. The purpose of this initial series of questions is to document adjustments to the country governance system, demonstrating how systems evolve as countries strengthen their overall structures. It also allows for reflection on the intensity of MSP activity outside the annual JAA meeting and the existence of an annual workplan for the MSP.

Given the SUN Movement's emphasis on engaging with humanitarian, resilience and disaster risk reduction stakeholders, as well as women and youth, countries are asked to share whether the MSP membership includes these groups.

- The term “multi-stakeholder platform” (MSP) refers to the main coordination mechanism for nutrition in use at the national level in the country and generally consists of multiple government ministries, stakeholders representing various interests/networks (e.g. civil society, private sector, United Nations, donors, academia) and multiple sectors.
- The SUN Focal Point/Country Coordinator has an opportunity to share concerns related to challenges, which will provide valuable information to the SUN GSS on areas potentially in need of additional support.



Section 2. Coordination, alignment and results

This section responds primarily to SO2, SO3 and SO4 of the SUN Movement Strategy.



SO2: Develop and align shared country priorities for action.



SO3: Build and strengthen country capacity with technical assistance and knowledge management.



SO4: Ensure SUN governance promotes country leadership and government responsibilities, aligns resources and strengthens mutual accountabilities.

Section 2 refers specifically to this year's JAA consultation meeting in the country. The SUN Movement Strategy recognizes the progress made in establishing systems and structures for nutrition governance and now places heavier emphasis on the functioning of these systems and structures. This section therefore focuses on the progress towards achieving common goals over the past year, the agreement among stakeholders on challenges and bottlenecks and, most importantly, the agreement on the shared priorities and actions for the coming year.

2.1 This year's JAA participation

This subsection allows countries to record and communicate the multisectoral and multi-stakeholder nature of the JAA meeting. Countries have an opportunity to recognize contributing stakeholders and networks (including networks not formally established) providing helpful information for the overall Movement to inform advocacy and other supportive actions.

Countries also have an opportunity to share their experiences on how meetings are organized and facilitated, which contributes to the overall learning of the Movement and supports internal learning to inform the subsequent year's JAA process.

Experiences in working with high-level influencers, particularly where this has had a tangible result, also can be shared as an inspiration to other countries.

2.2 Country reflects on own progress in achieving targets in the past year

This subsection relates to discussions during the JAA meeting in which the SUN Focal Point/Country Coordinator and participants reflect on the latest country reports on nutrition, with reference to country targets. It is likely that annual reports from the national nutrition plan and other information resources will be used to frame the discussion. This question is aimed at country discussion and reflection, using available sources of evidence from the preceding year. For example, country stakeholders might consider whether they are moving in the right direction, engaging in a more qualitative analysis than a simple examination of the published data, such as Global Nutrition Report statistics.

2.3 Review last year's priorities

This subsection presents an opportunity to reflect on whether last year's actions addressed the bottlenecks identified last year, thus potentially leading to strengthening the design of actions and commitments for the coming year. Stakeholders will share progress on their support of the country's nutrition priorities over the course of the past year, and this also will be an opportunity to discuss alignment and reflect on accountability.

Some example questions to reflect on include:

- Have stakeholders honoured commitments to support and implement last year's priorities?
- Did last year's priority actions enable progress to be made in the country, particularly in addressing any major bottlenecks?

2.4 Coming year's priorities

This subsection seeks to summarize stakeholder consensus on the priorities for action in the year ahead.

Stakeholders will discuss the availability of action plans for achieving the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) and United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) commitments. They will reflect on how these commitments relate to the coming year's priorities.

Countries are asked to share up to six of their top priorities for the coming year. These priorities demonstrate what the MSP considers as feasible to achieve as they work together.

The report will also summarize some of the key bottlenecks and challenges being experienced in country. Stakeholders will share how they plan to contribute to addressing those bottlenecks.

A strong focus on policy and advocacy is also central to progress in nutrition. While substantial progress has been made in relation to the development of policy and legislation at country level, challenges in implementation and enforcement are significant. This subsection concludes by providing an opportunity for countries to articulate a summary of the key issues prioritized by stakeholders for their joint advocacy efforts in the coming year.



Section 3. Finance

This section responds primarily to SO3 and SO4 of the SUN Movement Strategy.



SO3: Build and strengthen country capacity with technical assistance and knowledge management.



SO4: Ensure SUN governance promotes country leadership and government responsibilities, aligns resources and strengthens mutual accountabilities.

Slow progress on increasing financial allocations and expenditures on nutrition was identified as a continuing challenge for all SUN countries at the end of the second phase (2016–2020). To promote action, understand challenges and inform advocacy approaches, the third phase (2021–2025) JAA includes a more detailed focus on finance. This section prompts the country to examine and record actual progress in ensuring the availability of costed plans and the means of tracking increased investment and spending for nutrition more closely.

This section includes a focus on how well both Governments and external stakeholders are aligning resources with national nutrition plans and priorities and how advocacy is being used to engage further sources of financing (including innovative financing opportunities).

The questions aim to prompt discussion during the JAA that supports stakeholders in identifying gaps and successes within the country's financial framework and financing strategy and to review and agree on approaches to address them. This section also provides information to the SUN GSS on progress among countries in strengthening financial frameworks and, moreover, it ensures that each country has the opportunity to raise any challenges and concerns for support from across the Movement.



Section 4. Knowledge-sharing and learning

This section responds primarily to SO3 of the SUN Movement Strategy.



SO3: Build and strengthen country capacity with technical assistance and knowledge management.

One of the primary objectives of the SUN Movement is to ensure country capacity is built through the exchange of knowledge and good practices, technical assistance and other approaches, primarily through interactions among stakeholders in the country. This section offers an opportunity to share a lesson learned or case study, confirm capacity gaps identified in earlier section discussions, and hold a discussion on ensuring that capacity gaps are addressed. The SUN Movement Strategy encourages the exploration of multiple options for technical support, which might include scheduled and time-bound mentoring, exchange visits among countries, in-country support through networks, engagement of academia, and international technical expertise provided remotely or within the country. In this subsection, countries have the opportunity to indicate current and critical technical assistance needs where support could not be found despite an active search for partners.

A question on the uptake and utilization of material resources and online opportunities is included here to identify which resources are useful to countries. It also serves as an advocacy and dissemination opportunity by ensuring that all countries are fully aware of the resources available to them and, especially, of new resources developed over the course of the preceding year. This list is updated annually.

The section summary invites countries to reflect on the effectiveness of previous technical support received.

SUN countries are expected to be both beneficiaries and contributors of knowledge and learning. In this section, and throughout the tool, countries are invited to share lessons on their experiences.



Section 5. Networks

This section, which is broadly similar for the four existing networks, will aim to provide basic information about the networks' functionality in the country. A form is also provided for academia networks, where these exist, as well as for any other existing SUN Network (e.g. youth, media or parliamentarians). Information in this section may complement separate assessments undertaken by SUN Networks. It is expected that the Civil Society Network will include national, community-based and international organizations as well as representatives of young people.

The information provided will help the networks and the SUN GSS monitor the level of network engagement across SUN countries. It will also offer Governments insight on the contributions of each network.

Thematic and subnational review and reporting

Unlike in the 2020 JAA format, separate sections for subnational and thematic reporting are not presented in the new tool. Critical areas are, however, incorporated, where they can be linked to specific information needs or specific actions. They may also be integral to JAA discussions prompted throughout the tool concerning programming, coordination, financing or policy bottlenecks and successes.

Subnational coordination (where it exists) varies significantly among countries, both in structure and functionality. The SUN Movement does not therefore propose the use of a generic tool, given the diversity of situations in which it will be used. Instead, it is anticipated that national SUN platforms or subnational coordination mechanisms themselves will select the sections of the tool or lines of enquiry that are most relevant to them, focusing on a critical review of progress and the identification of bottlenecks and the means through which stakeholders will aim to address them.



Glossary

Advocacy for nutrition: Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic and social systems and institutions. Advocacy for increased resources, improved policies and better accountability in nutrition is vital to creating the change that is needed. By collectively telling the stories of people affected by malnutrition and calling for enhanced political will, advocates are building a movement to end hunger and malnutrition once and for all.

Breast milk substitutes: The term describes any food marketed or otherwise represented as a partial or total replacement for breast milk, whether suitable for that purpose or not.

Budget analysis for nutrition: A budget analysis for nutrition, also often referred to as a budget tracking exercise, is a review of how much money is allocated to nutrition in a given country through the various sectors contributing to the national nutrition plan (or equivalent). Budget analysis is an instrument for financial tracking of nutrition investments. It is a way of seeing whether resources that have been pledged are actually disbursed. The budget analysis can cover resources that are part of the official national budget (“on-budget” resources), which can include both government and donor funding, and “off-budget” resources, though these are harder to track.

Climate action: Climate action can be described as efforts aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen both resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-induced impacts. Efforts to reduce malnutrition can, at the same time, be climate actions.

Common Results Framework (CRF): The term describes a set of expected results agreed upon across different sectors of government and among key stakeholders through a negotiated process. The existence of agreed-upon common results would enable stakeholders to make their actions more nutrition driven through increased coordination or integration. In practice, a CRF may result in a set of documents that are recognized as a reference point for all sectors and stakeholders that work together for scaling up nutrition. Elements of a CRF include: the title of the CRF; implementation plans, with defined roles of stakeholders in key sectors (e.g. health, agriculture, social protection, education, WASH, gender); specific targets and indicators; defined capacity strengthening needs and priorities; cost estimates of included interventions and cost estimates for advocacy; coordination; capacity strengthening; monitoring and evaluation; and operational research.

Crisis: Countries and areas in conflict or post-conflict and those at particularly high risk of natural disasters.

Disbursement: Disbursement is the payment of money that has been pledged (promised) towards a given cause.

Double or multiple burdens: These terms are applied to countries or groups of people to describe the situation of facing more than one serious nutritional problem at once. They are also described as overlapping and coexisting burdens of the various forms of malnutrition and include, for example, anaemia and overweight.

Food insecurity: The term “food insecurity” describes a situation in which people do not have secure access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development. Food insecurity may be at the level of the household or across a geographical area.

Food security: The term “food security” describes a situation in which people have secure access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and to lead an active and healthy life.

Food systems: Food systems are the sum of actors and interactions along the food value chain. Food systems also include the enabling policy environments and cultural norms around food. They exist at various scales (global, regional, national and local) and are very diverse and location specific.

Funding gap analysis for a costed national nutrition plan: A funding gap is defined as the national nutrition plan (NNP) cost minus the committed financing (includes funds committed but not available yet) from Governments and external stakeholders. For plans that are already in implementation, committed funding might also include funding already spent on planned activities. Knowledge of the funding gap will permit the Government and its nutrition partners, including donors, to improve planning and prioritization of key nutrition interventions, advocate for and support resource mobilization for the plan and increase accountability for the implementation of the plan.

Gender equality: Unlike sex, gender is socially constructed, can vary from society to society and from time to time, and is based on socially acceptable norms and behaviours. Addressing gender in nutrition is critical, as addressing gender inequalities can result in larger improvements in malnutrition than if gender inequalities are not tackled. Without addressing the core issue of gender (e.g. decision-making, access to resources, power), we may not make as much progress as is needed to improve nutrition. Addressing gender can also help put an end to intergenerational malnutrition.

Humanitarian assistance: Humanitarian assistance is intended to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after human-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards. It also is intended to prevent and strengthen preparedness for when such situations occur. Humanitarian assistance should be governed by the four key humanitarian principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Legal frameworks: Legal frameworks are a system of legal documents (constitution, laws, regulations) that describes the rules, rights and obligations of Governments, companies and citizens on a given topic (on nutrition and food security, in the case of the Joint Assessment, but also on maternity protection, breast milk substitutes and others).

Malnutrition: Malnutrition means having too little or too much to eat. In more technical terms, it's a condition caused by having not enough – or having too many – macronutrients and micronutrients. Here we discuss types of malnutrition such as micronutrient malnutrition, child undernutrition and adult nutritional problems associated with excess eating. Malnutrition is universal; at least one in three people globally experience malnutrition in some form.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework: A monitoring and evaluation framework is a tool describing the indicators used to measure whether a programme is a success. Ideally, there should be one associated with the national nutrition plan. It can also be part of an M&E plan.

MEAL: An acronym that stands for: monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning.

» Monitoring is the routine, ongoing collection and review of information on a programme's activities, outputs and outcomes that provides programme managers and other stakeholders with indications of progress against programmes plans and towards objectives. This regular collection of information shows

whether or not the programme is performing as expected or if adjustments are necessary. Well-planned and timely monitoring allows problems to be quickly identified and programme activities to be adapted in order to optimize their impact. Monitoring is more effective when it is a continuous process, included in the design of a programme and part of our day-to-day work.

» Evaluation complements ongoing monitoring activities by providing more in-depth, objective assessments of a programme’s design, implementation and results at particular points in time. Where monitoring shows general trends, evaluations generally help explain “why” things are happening the way that they are. Programme evaluations may be undertaken at any point in the programme cycle at which there is a need to learn more about how the programme is working or to ensure accountability for the resources received.

» Accountability is the process through which an organization balances the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making and activities and delivers against this commitment. Accountability is based on four dimensions – transparency, feedback mechanisms, participation and learning and evaluation – that allow the organization to give account to, take account of and be held to account by stakeholders.

» Learning is part of the programme’s roadmap to implementing MEAL-related activities as intended, in a timely and efficient fashion, and to ensure continuous learning throughout the programme cycle. Learning includes best practices, success stories and lessons learned for future improvement.

Multi-stakeholder platform (MSP): In the context of SUN, the term “multi-stakeholder platform” (MSP) designates a coordination body that brings together various stakeholders working on nutrition (including government institutions, civil society organisations, United Nations agencies, the private sector and academia). These platforms should also be multisectoral and include representatives from the key sectors that can contribute to scaling up nutrition (e.g. health, agriculture, rural development, women’s affairs, social protection, education, etc.). Platforms can vary in their structure and governance systems according to the institutional situation in each country.

National nutrition plan (NNP): A national nutrition plan is usually a document endorsed by the Government that describes the planned priority actions aimed at achieving nutrition impacts in the country. In the Joint Annual Assessment exercise, alternative documents can be accepted (such as a national development plan or national nutrition policy) as long as nutrition is clearly embedded in the document and relevant nutrition actions to be taken are identified, with clear responsibilities outlined in the document.

Nutrition for Growth (N4G): Nutrition for Growth is a global pledging moment to drive greater action towards ending malnutrition and helping ensure that everyone, everywhere, can reach their full potential.

Nutrition governance: Nutrition governance is the ability of institutions and other structures to uphold the principles of participation, responsiveness and accountability in the realization of the right to food and the achievement of optimal nutrition for all citizens.

Nutrition-sensitive interventions: Nutrition-sensitive interventions are funded interventions into sectors other than nutrition that address the underlying causes of nutrition, thereby indirectly addressing nutrition. Sectors include agriculture, health, social protection, family planning and gender equality, early child development, education, and water and sanitation. The causes they address include poverty, food insecurity, scarcity of access to adequate care resources, and health, water and sanitation services. (Source: Global Nutrition Report).

Nutrition-specific interventions: Nutrition-specific interventions are those that have a direct impact on the immediate causes of undernutrition (inadequate food intake, poor feeding practices and high burden of disease), such as breastfeeding, complimentary feeding, micronutrient supplementation and home fortification, disease management, treatment of acute malnutrition, and nutrition in emergencies.

Pledge: A pledge is a formal promise. In the context of the Joint Assessment, financial pledges refer to the resources that the Government or donors have promised to dedicate to implement the national nutrition plan.

Policy: A policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented through a strategy, procedure or protocol. Policies can be adopted by different organizations, but in the context of the Joint Assessment, the focus is on government policies related to the field of nutrition and food security.

Programme: A programme refers to a set of projects managed in a coordinated manner to implement policies.

Regional organization: Regional organizations are international organizations characterized by boundaries and demarcations characteristic to a defined and unique geography (such as continents) or geopolitics (such as economic blocs). They have been established to foster cooperation and political and economic integration or dialogue among States or entities within a restrictive geographical or geopolitical boundary. Examples are the African Union, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the European Union.

Resource mobilization (RM) strategy: Resource mobilization is the process of getting resources from the resource provider, using various mechanisms, to implement an organization's predetermined goals. A resource mobilization strategy outlines how an organization will organize the processes of prioritizing, planning, selecting projects, and broadening resource channels for mobilizing and effectively utilizing resources.

SUN Networks: SUN Networks include UN Nutrition (sometimes called UN Network for SUN, or UNN), Civil Society Alliances, SUN Business Networks, SUN Donor Networks, parliamentary networks, media networks, youth networks or academic networks. They are driven by the needs of SUN countries to deliver the ambitions of the Movement. Some networks (UN Nutrition, Civil Society Network, Donor Network, Business Network) are coordinated, at the global level, by a facilitator and team to mobilize, align and scale up nutrition efforts. In SUN countries, members of the SUN Networks work in support of Governments by participating in the multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) and by aligning their activities behind national nutrition goals, targets and activities. SUN Networks – alongside the SUN Lead Group, Executive Committee, Secretariat and Coordinator – comprise the SUN Movement Global Support System.