

Tracking Government Investments for Nutrition at Country Level

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1. Introduction

Having reliable data is essential to policy makers to prioritise, to plan, and to make decisions on resource allocation, as well as to monitor and evaluate policy implementation. Resource tracking is an important way of promoting transparency and can be used for advocacy purposes.

A flexible framework can be helpful to provide a starting point and be used as guidance by Governments planning to establish a financial tracking system for nutrition. The framework should be adaptable to countries based on data and capacity available in each system.

The purpose of this note is to discuss an approach on how financial resources on nutrition can be tracked using on-line published national budgets as the data source. The main aim is to get an **historical trend of budget allocations for nutrition within a country**.

2. Data source

The **national budget** is a comprehensive statement of Government financial plans including expenditures, revenues, deficit or surplus, and debt. The national budget is the Government's main economic policy document, indicating how the Government plans to use public resources to meet policy goals.

A team of two consultants conducted a three-week desk-review to search for the national budget in the Ministry of Finance website or the Treasury of the relevant government. In parallel, a number of finance experts and SUN Focal Points were contacted to assist with the search. The team was able to review 28 national budgets out of 51 countries (55%).

For the 28 national budgets reviewed, it was possible to identify the **ministries** which could potentially contain expenditures on nutrition. The health, education and agriculture sectors appear to have their own ministries in the 28 budgets reviews. In addition, each of the following functional areas appears in the title of ministries in at least one country, and for some areas in various countries: water resources, family, gender, children, women affairs, social welfare, community development, youth, environment, labour, local government, rural development, culture, sports, and fisheries.

A **nutrition department or equivalent** (e.g. cost centre) was found in six countries, either within the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture or the Offices of the Prime Minister or of the President.

For 21 national budgets it was possible to have the budget broken down to the **programme level**. Out of them, only 10 countries were identified as having a clear programme targeted towards fighting malnutrition.¹ These programmes are found in their majority within the Ministry of Health, although in some cases they were found in the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture,

¹ These have been identified from the programme name with a rapid *key word* search for the word "nutrition", 21 out of the 28 countries reviewed were found to have a budget broken down to programme or project level (at least medium level of detail of functional classification). These would need to be validated by countries. Reference Picanyol and Misgar, 2014.

a Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs or a Ministry of Community Development, Mother, and Child Health.

About nutrition budget line: this is sometime used by countries to refer to a line in the budget that concentrates nutrition-specific interventions. This makes the tracking a much easier and straightforward process. However, how nutrition interventions are reflected in national budgets depends on the format of the budget. Governments may choose to reflect nutrition-specific investments at the department level, at the programme level or at the activity level. Similarly, for those Governments that provide information on targets or outputs linked to budget allocations, information on nutrition interventions might be provided at the purpose level linked to numerous budget lines for different items.

3. Data users

Tracking of budget allocations will require at least **one or two national person to gather data** from the national budget and related relevant documents. The duration of the task would depend on the budget structure and level of details. The person engaged in this exercise should be familiar with the national budget and public finance system of the country. Ideally this person could be from the Ministry of Finance or from a planning unit within the Government. Considerable time would be required for the person to retrieve programme documents from relevant ministries.²

Once the preparatory work is completed (i.e., preliminary analysis and identification of potential nutrition related investments in the published national budget, see Step One below), this will need to be discussed with representatives from the sectors, who are familiar with the programmes that have been included (or excluded) from the data-gathering exercise. The results from this exercise should be discussed within the national Multi-Stakeholder Platform for nutrition. Indicatively, a **one day technical meeting** could be envisaged to validate the finance information prior inclusion in the annual reports and before public dissemination.

4. Proposed approach

4.1 *Putting the national budget in context*

A preliminary analysis using a set of parameters is recommended to put the national budget in context before going into a more in-depth review of programmes.

We suggest the following four parameters to introduce the national budget:

1. **Per capita government budget allocation:** this provides a straightforward overview of the government budget allocation per capita based on the total amount indicated in the national budget.
2. **Percentage of overall budget allocated to key ministries for nutrition:** this can show how much of the national budget is allocated to key ministries that are perceived as nutrition-sensitive. Key ministries would include the common ones: health, education and agriculture. Additional sectors (e.g. gender, water supply, social protection, etc.) will be included based on representation of specific ministries in the SUN multi-stakeholder platform.

² For information only: The international researcher that conducted the desk review spent two working days on the Ghana National Budget and four working days on the Nigeria National Budget only to identify potential nutrition related investments at the programme level using a key word search. The desk-review was based on publicly available information as no request was sent to countries to obtain more detailed information.

3. **Percentage of total budget allocated to personnel costs in each of the key ministries for nutrition:** this would show how much each ministry is investing in human capability. This provides only a crude indication because majority of national budgets do not show a breakdown of personnel costs by types. This indicator might be presented as *per capita government budget allocation on personnel in each of the key ministry*. In most countries personnel costs are likely to be covered at the ministerial level and not imputed against specific programmes.
4. **Percentage of national budget transferred to sub-national levels:** this will provide a very quick indication of how the budget allocations functions in different countries. In decentralized countries, all it might be available at the national level is a list of transfers to sub-national governments, without a breakdown of how those transfers will be utilised there. This is the case of Nigeria for example, where about 50% of the national budget is transferred to sub-national government (state and local governments) and scarce information is provided on how those monies are allocated across sectors.

4.2 Framework to track Government resources for nutrition at programme level

The review of the 28 published national budgets shows that in the best case scenario, the public information available on domestic resources for nutrition is limited to: 1) a **programme name**, 2) a brief generic **programme description**, 3) an **'oversight' agency** (or the agency with the authority to incur expenditures for the programme) and; 4) a **total amount** allocated to the programme. Only in very few cases, it might be possible to have a breakdown of the programme by activities and by funding source.

Based on this review, a three-step methodology is emerging as the most acceptable and feasible way for countries to track resources for nutrition at programme level. This data gathering exercise, to enable governments to track historical trends on budget allocations, will be most effective if it follows a commonly agreed methodology and categorization framework so that all steps taken are documented in detail and specific data sources are provided. The presentation of results need to be clear on what the estimated figure covers and what it does not cover.

- **Step One** (See Annex A for details): Identify the relevant programmes through a key word³ search
- **Step Two** (See Annex B for details): Assess whether the programmes found fall under the category of “nutrition-specific” or “nutrition-sensitive” investments. “Nutrition-specific” budget allocations would be those that are within a nutrition department or a nutrition programme or a so-called nutrition budget line. To be “nutrition-sensitive”, a programme would need to address underlying causes of malnutrition and especially be beneficial to the most vulnerable population including children and women. The existence of a Common Results Framework can effectively help sectors to decide which programmes to include or not.
- **Step Three:** Attribute a percentage of the allocated budget to nutrition. 100% of the amount would be allocated in the case of programmes that have been categorized as “nutrition-

³ A list of key words was tested by the consultants and is currently being finalized.

specific” while 25% of the amount would be allocated in the case of programmes that have been categorized as “nutrition-sensitive”.⁴

Step One would be part of the preparatory work exercise while Step Two and Step Three would require close consultation with sector representatives that are familiar with the programmes. Ideally, step three would need to be validated through a technical meeting with participants from the SUN Multi-Stakeholder Platform.

5. Limitations of the approach

At global level, the effort will be to agree on a methodology and common categorization framework that can be used as reference by countries and can be easily applied taking into account the limitations of the current systems.

This of course has a high cost in terms of accuracy but the information will serve towards the ‘tracking’ purposes. We suggest that the efforts on tracking investments on nutrition focus on countries being able to **make comparisons over time within a country** using a methodology and a categorization framework that allows for transparency and replicability. In this regard, as budgets are tracked on a regular basis, these will be more closely scrutinised and accountability will improve.

The review of the national budgets revealed the difficulties on obtaining allocations which are directly comparable across countries, due to the different formats and definitions used to capture allocations by economic and by functional classification. **Direct comparison across countries could lead to misinterpretation and should be avoided.**

6. Way-forward

- By November 2014: final consensus on the methodology and categorization framework to enable Governments in SUN countries to track their budget allocations for nutrition and better coordinate with efforts undertaken by non-state partners.
- By December 2014: selection of the consultancy company to support Governments in SUN countries to conduct the data gathering exercise.
- January – May 2015: data gathering and analysis exercise in countries within the SUN Movement
- June – July 2015: data presentation and sharing through the 2015 SUN Progress Report, the SUN website and the 2015 Global Nutrition Report.

7. Reference documents:

Annex 1: Detailed document on tracking Government resources on nutrition at country level.
Annex 2: Access to data on Government resources for nutrition (results from the desk-based review of published data sources)
Annex 3: Matrix country by country
Annex 4 and Annex 5: details for Ghana and Nigeria

⁴ This is consistent with the attribution agreed by the Donor Network for programmes categorized under ‘nutrition-sensitive’.

Annex A

Step One: Key words (tentative list)

The SUN Movement provided an *initial* list of key words to test the methodology. The first step is to identify key sectoral domains and secondly, within each domain, identify relevant programmes. This determines the universe of investments that can potentially contribute to nutrition.

1. Identify key sectoral domains (and/or line ministries) or stand-alone national programmes
 - a. *Key words* (examples) to identify sectoral domains (and/or line ministries): health, education, agriculture (and fishery and natural resource management), infrastructure, employment, governance, gender, social protection, water supply, private sector.
2. Within key sectoral domains (and/or line ministries) or stand-alone programmes, identify relevant sub-programs, themes, focus areas, policy objectives. *Key words* (examples):
 - a. **Health:** nutrition, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health, non-communicable diseases, healthy lifestyles, hygiene, micro nutrients, feeding practices, malnutrition, family planning or reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and TB.
 - b. **Agriculture:** staples, non-staples, fruits and vegetables, animal sources, fishery sources, extension services, cooperatives and smallholders, food aid, relief, family farming, food, food security, hunger, rural development, bio fortification, food-safety. If possible extract only what is done to enhance domestic markets (vs. what is done for exports).
 - c. **Infrastructure:** drinking water, environmental sanitation, ICT for rural areas, roads in rural areas.
 - d. **Education:** female education, rural education, female secondary education, school feeding, early child education
 - e. **Social protection and safety net:** could be under specific sectoral domains or as stand-alone.
 - f. **Governance:** local governance, decentralization, civil society participation, transparency, women empowerment, income inequality reduction, equity gaps reduction, accountability, rights of women and children, public safety, evidence-based
 - g. **Employment:** human resource development at national, district, community levels, maternity leave, family friendly work places.
 - h. **Private sector:** pro-poor, good corporate governance, domestic oriented, small-medium enterprises
 - i. **Food fortification:** could be under specific sectoral domains

Annex B

Step Two and Step Three: Determine what to include as “nutrition-sensitive” and what to exclude as “not nutrition-sensitive”

This further categorization requires: 1) close consultation with sectoral stakeholders, who know the content of the identified programmes through the key word search and/or; 2) provision of the programme description to get a better understanding on how the programme contributes to nutrition-sensitive outcomes, which are explicit in the design through activities, indicators, expected results or target populations.

Nutrition Sensitive Outcomes⁵

These outcomes, used to gauge the degree of nutrition sensitivity, are drawn from the nutrition conceptual framework (UNICEF 1990), the Reference Document “Addressing Undernutrition in External Assistance” (EC 2011) and the SUN Movement Strategy 2012-2015.

A. At individual level (children or adolescent girls or women):

- Increase purchasing power of women (examples: safety nets, cash transfers)
- Improve access to nutritious food of women, adolescent girls and/or children (examples: agriculture/livestock diversification, biofortification, food safety, increased access to markets)
- Improve the diet in quality and/or quantity for women, adolescent girls or children (examples: promotion of quality/diversity, nutritious diets, quantity/ energy intake in food insecure households, stability, micronutrient intake, vouchers, access to markets)
- Improve access of women or adolescent girls or children to primary healthcare (examples: maternal health care, child healthcare, reproductive healthcare, supplementation, therapeutic feeding, support to breastfeeding)
- Improve access to childcare (i.e. childcare not supplied through the health services)
- Improve women or adolescent girls or children access to water, sanitation and hygiene (examples: access to latrines, access to safe water, improvement of hygiene)
- Improve access to education/school for adolescent girls
- Improve knowledge/awareness on Nutrition for relevant audiences (examples: inclusions of nutritional education in the curriculum for primary and secondary education, TV and radio spots addressing vulnerable households and decision makers, nutrition awareness campaigns ...)
- Improve empowerment of women (examples: access to credit, women based smallholder agriculture, support to women’s groups)

B. National level:

- Improved governance of nutrition (examples: increased coordination of actors and policies for nutrition, establishment of budgets specifically contributing to nutrition, improvement of institutional arrangements for nutrition, improved nutrition information systems, integration of nutrition in policies and systems)
- Increase nutrition sensitive legislation (examples: food fortification legislation, right to food, legislation for the implementation of the Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes, food safety)

C. Research

- Increased research with nutrition objectives

⁵ SUN Donor Network (December 2013): Methodology and Guidance Note to Track Global Investments in Nutrition

