

Thematic Discussion

Equity and Gender

Inequities associated with lack of access to early opportunities and adequate nutrition can undermine children's health and development¹ depriving them of the **right to attain their full potential**, thereby compromising their productivity and societal contributions. Equity can be defined² in terms of two basic principles: the first is **equal opportunities** - that a person's life achievements should be determined primarily by his or her talents and efforts, rather than by pre-determined circumstances such as race, gender, social or family background. The second principle is the **avoidance of deprivation** in outcomes, particularly in health, education and consumption levels.

Financial, social, structural, and cultural barriers to services and interventions are common in the most marginalised and isolated subnational populations (gender-based, age-based, ethnicity-based, livelihood-based, residence-based, etc.). **Improving access** to and use of the services (such as equal access to education, public health services, agricultural services, legal rights, employment and wage, political decisions, etc.), in these deprived populations, requires identification and overcoming of entrenched bottlenecks. An **equity-focused approach** could result in sharper decreases in child mortality and stunting and **higher cost-effectiveness** than mainstream approaches, while reducing inequities in effective intervention coverage, health outcomes, and out-of-pocket spending between the most and least deprived groups and geographic areas within countries (Lancet, 2012)³.

One of the **most commonly deprived groups include women and girls**. As a part of the quest to achieve gender equality, empowering this population group has increasingly been the focus of many development interventions. There is enough evidence that **women empowerment can contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition**. Investing in women is considered beneficial for improving human capital formation especially in terms of child nutrition, health and education.

In response to the recommendations of the **Independent Comprehensive Evaluation (ICE) of the SUN Movement**, to assess the value it adds to efforts to scale up nutrition – SUN Countries stated that in order to practically contribute to strengthen the focus on equity and gender:

- National plans need to be revised to include issues of women empowerment and nutrition;
- Existing principles need to be implemented at the sectoral level, and equity- and gender-sensitive indicators need to be tracked;
- Plans and programmes inclusive of women and marginalized groups need to be monitored and evaluated regularly; and
- Capacity building is required for all participating actors to be more gender-sensitive in their actions.

¹ Black, M. M. and Dewey, K. G. (2014), Promoting equity through integrated early child development and nutrition interventions. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1308: 1–10.

² World Bank. (2005). *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development*. Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/5988> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

³ Carrera, C., *et al.* (2012), The comparative cost-effectiveness of an equity-focused approach to child survival, health, and nutrition: a modelling approach, *The Lancet*, Volume 380, Issue 9850, 1341 - 1351

Taking this into account, **one of the six key priorities for the SUN Movement during the 2016-2020 period** identified by the SUN Movement's Lead Group is to **more effectively address the gender- and equity-related drivers to malnutrition**, and pursue opportunities to contribute to broader gender- and equity goals through nutrition.

As SUN Countries are accelerating progress towards the **Global Targets 2025⁴** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, it is vital for policy makers and in-country practitioners to seek to achieve equity as it is of intrinsic importance as a development goal in its own right. That is why the **21st SUN Movement Country Network Meeting (14 – 18 September 2015) will be an opportunity for SUN Countries to explore the in-country evidence with a critical lens on the impact of national efforts to address inequity and to support the right to good nutrition**. The aim of this meeting is for SUN Countries to examine and discuss the bottlenecks that prevent the most deprived groups (in specific women and girls) from equal access to services and opportunities in the country, and subsequently identify the evidence-based strategies that has been used to overcome these issues.

The following questions are intended to facilitate the discussions during the upcoming meeting. Participants are encouraged to provide their inputs during the meeting and are also welcomed to provide written feedback on the below questions or other efforts related to addressing the inequities.

1. Have you undertaken a situational analysis to identify the presence of the most vulnerable population groups in the country and why they are considered as the most vulnerable groups in gaining equal access to opportunities for adequate nutrition?

*If **YES**, please elaborate on the results of the analysis.*

- *How was the analysis undertaken?*
- *Who are the most deprived groups?*
- *Where are these groups present?*
- *In which fields do you find the largest inequities (access to education, public health services, agricultural services, legal rights, employment and wage, political decision, etc.)?*
- *What are the challenges in reaching out to these groups?*
- *Have you been able to overcome these challenges?*
- *If yes, how did you overcome them?*

*If **NO**, please elaborate on if you would like to undertake such an analysis.*

- *How would you like to do it?*
- *What are the in-country resources that can be used for such an analysis (existing geo-spatial data, national surveys, other sectoral expertise, etc.)?*
- *What external support would help you strengthen these in-country resources?*

2. As women and girls are one of the most commonly deprived groups, what are the successful concrete actions in place that have proven to be effective in empowering this population group? Please elaborate on why this was a successful action. How was this concrete action implemented and who were the actors involved? What are the significant outcomes of this success story and what is the difference that it has created since its implementation?

⁴ In 2012, the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly in resolution WHA65.6 endorsed the comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition, which included six global targets to be achieved by 2025 and five corresponding actions. See more: <http://www.who.int/nutrition/global-target-2025/en/>

- 3. How was the impact of these successful actions on improved nutritional status measured? What are the monitoring tools used?**

Please elaborate on the effectiveness of these successful actions. How is the impact measured and how frequently? And how are the results used to inform better actions?

- 4. What are the lessons learned from the in-country experiences and what are the current challenges in addressing the identified inequities? How can the SUN Movement support SUN Countries to overcome them?**