

# From Science to Action: Academia and Decision-Makers Unite in SUN Countries



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# Introduction

“ One of the most important insights from these country articles is the wide range of ways in which the national academic, research and technical communities can support scaling up nutrition efforts. They emphasise the need for research to support national advocacy, planning, policy and program development and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. ”

**Dr. David Pelletier, Dr. Hanns-Christoph, Eiden and Dr. Emorn Udomkesmalee**

This series of briefings – entitled *Scaling Up Nutrition: In Practice* – presents the experiences of SUN Country governments, and other national stakeholders, as they scale up their efforts to ensure all people enjoy good nutrition. Each briefing in the series focuses on a theme selected by SUN Government Focal Points during the quarterly meetings of their multi-stakeholder platform (MSP).

This is the fifth briefing and it focuses on the use of scientific evidence to inform decision-making on nutrition. Stakeholders from six SUN Countries have contributed their perspectives of how academics and decision-makers are working together to inform policies on nutrition. They have shared the challenges faced and how these have been overcome. Key lessons and the way forward have been identified in each of the country articles in an effort to provide guidance for countries across the SUN Movement.

## The importance of science for effective nutrition decision-making

Since the start of the SUN Movement, it has been evident that countries demonstrating equitable and sustained improvements in people’s nutrition are those with national and local institutions that have the capacity to address the underlying determinants of poor nutrition. These institutions work together, often within a MSP, using research and evidence to improve planning, ensure effective implementation, monitor progress, adjust efforts in light of the results achieved, and mobilise resources needed to scale up impact.

Much of the research needed for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of nutrition is already available. Existing data can be synthesised, analysed and contextualised to produce locally-appropriate cost-effective recommendations for nutrition. This allows policymakers to make evidence-based decisions on nutrition policy and programming. These are especially useful in contexts where resources are scarce.

## The professional nutrition community

### Technical expertise is to be found in a wide range of professionals

**Nutrition scientists** - those who are developing the scientific evidence base for nutrition. Evidence concerns facts (actual or asserted) established through experience or observation. Appropriate use of evidence requires the identification of those facts that form the basis of an opinion, as well as the appraisal of the extent to which these facts support the opinion. Nutrition scientists provide evidence in a range of areas from a food technology orientation to a public health nutrition focus. Nutrition scientists may work for government bodies, private companies, academic or independent institutions.

**Nutrition academics** - those who are based in university or higher education institutions. They usually combine a range of functions including training, research and service delivery to government departments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations through supporting the design of nutrition policies, strategies, programmes, guidelines and monitoring and evaluation systems, and provision of policy briefs and evidence based information.

**Nutrition professionals** - those who are working as full-time nutritionists at national, regional or district level. In some countries, nutrition professionals require to be accredited and/or are part of a nutrition association, which provides a forum to exchange views and update members on advances and new insights.

Evidence based decision making is a systematic process of identifying what decisions-makers' need to know, identifying the evidence to answer their questions using local data and supporting them to make informed choices regarding what nutrition actions to scale up, and how best to do so. This process is dependent on stakeholder engagement and technical capacity. Stakeholders of nutrition policy and programming such as academics, policymakers, donors, health workers and civil society organisations, must work together to identify priority needs for nutrition knowledge and evidence about addressing poor nutrition, to facilitate informed actions. Stakeholders also need the technical capacity to frame their questions, search for relevant evidence, appraise and synthesise evidence, apply local data, conduct cost-analyses, and produce policy briefs.

## How is academia contributing to nutrition policy?

Academic institutions are part of the national MSPs in at least 27 SUN Countries, where they are supporting programming and policymaking for improved nutrition. Their contribution varies from country to country. Contributions can include support for research studies, staff training, program evaluations, developing monitoring and evaluation systems, and disseminating both technical and experiential knowledge. This issue of *Scaling Up Nutrition: In Practice* describes the inter-play between academics and nutrition decision-makers in 6 SUN Countries.

The Ghana SUN Academic Platform is supporting the use of the best available evidence and providing capacity support for nutrition policy and programming. It ensures that all relevant ministries, agencies and departments of government, have the ability to integrate nutrition objectives and strategies into their sector plans. It is actively involved in institutional capacity building processes, and disseminating knowledge through African Nutrition Societies and through nutrition prioritisation criteria for the national nutrition policy.

Meanwhile, Benin's National Council of Food and Nutrition is coordinating all academic actions related to food and nutrition. Academic members of this MSP are providing

the government with useful information to produce concrete program and policy recommendations to tackle malnutrition in the country.

Pakistan has launched an Academic and Research Network to bring together academics and members of other SUN Networks in an MSP. This network is creating an enabling environment for evidence-informed policy formulation, with support from the government in enhancing budgetary allocations and establishing a Centre of Excellence to align actions for nutrition.

A national nutrition coordination body coordinates the nutrition program in Ethiopia. This multi-sectoral body is comprised of nutrition experts from government sectors, partners, civil society organisations, academia and the private sector. Academic institutions are mandated to inform nutrition action by providing evidence-based answers to questions on nutrition programming from decision-makers, and assisting government ministers in program reform.

In Costa Rica, the relationship between the state, academia and society is fostered through a scheme of applied research, which support initiatives that contribute to national nutrition priorities. The University of Costa Rica is working closely with the Ministry of Education and local governments informing them about ways for improving school-feeding, and supporting nutrition education in community-based programmes.

In Tanzania, distinguished academics hold positions in key decision-making bodies, including ministries of agriculture, industry and education. It has become increasingly common for policymakers and academia to meet at various fora where research findings are shared, analysed and discussed.

While the involvement of the scientific and academic community in policy processes and the use of scientific evidence and knowledge for nutrition decision-making varies across countries, there are common features and similar challenges. Dr. David Pelletier with contributions from Dr. Emorn Wasantwisut, Dr. Hanns-Christoph Eiden, and Dr. Patrick Kolsteren describe ways in which countries can overcome their challenges and how the SUN Movement can support country efforts.



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# Country Articles



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# GHANA

## Academics in Ghana go the extra mile to engage policy-makers



*Richmond Aryeetey,  
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*“There is clearly a role for academics, to help generate the evidence, identify existing evidence and support decision makers to make informed policy choices.”*

*Ghana SUN Academic Platform*



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With a high malnutrition burden, low coverage of effective interventions and limited participation of the research community, the Ghana SUN Academic Platform is supporting decision makers to maximise nutrition impact.

### Objectives of Ghana SUN Academic Platform:

- To provide technical support to the SUN Movement by connecting all with the best available evidence and building capacity for scaling up effective nutrition interventions
- To ensure that all ministries, agencies and departments of Government relevant for defeating malnutrition, have the knowledge and capacity to integrate nutrition objectives and strategies into their sector plans.

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>18.8%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>10.0%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>52.3%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>4.7%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>2.6%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>56.4%</b>

*Source: Ghana DHS\*\* 2014 Key Indicators Ghana Statistical Service Accra, Ghana Ghana Health Service Accra, Ghana.*

### Who does the Platform work with?

The Platform is a non-profit network of academics working on nutrition with a passion for contributing to national level action for scaling up nutrition in Ghana. The Platform has been active since 2013 and has a membership of 10 nutrition researchers from various universities both in and outside Ghana. Together, the members of this Platform are working with the SUN Movement Secretariat in Ghana, and with the SUN Movement Secretariat in Geneva.

Members of the Platform are playing key leadership roles in the SUN Cross-Sectoral Planning Group Working Groups (CSPG WGs). A key contribution to the CSPG has been the desk analysis determining government budgeting and spending on nutrition, as outlined in the National fiscal budget for 2014 (Laar et al PNS 2015 (in press)). The findings of this study were presented at the 2014 African Nutrition Epidemiology Conference (ANEC) and have subsequently been published (Laar et al, 2015, Proceedings of the Nutrition Society.;74(4):526-32).

At the global level, the Platform has worked closely with the Global Social Observatory in developing a guidance framework for managing conflict of interest (Col) amongst partners in the SUN Movement. The Platform participated in two Col guidance development workshops, held in Accra (2014) and in Geneva (2015). More recently, the Platform has been working closely with the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) to develop an online platform to facilitate productivity and visibility of the SUN CSPG and its activities. This process is ongoing and is expected to make the CSPG more efficient and overcome communication challenges identified at the last national SUN self-assessment workshop in 2014.

The Ghana SUN Academic Platform has also benefited from close collaboration with the African Nutrition Society (ANS) and the Federation of African Nutrition Societies (FANUS). Both ANS and FANUS are affiliates of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) and have been working together with other nutrition societies from the global north on a joint nutrition eLearning project (eNutritionacademy.org). These partnerships are important to the Platform as they provide an opportunity to contribute to quality improvement among nutrition researchers and for the whole continent.

## How does the Platform work?

The Platform has been involved in various nutrition policy and programming activities. It has been instrumental in the drafting, finalising and validating the National Nutrition Policy. Following this validation process, the Platform has helped drive institutional capacity building processes. To support these actions, the Platform is developing various concept a paper on on behalf of the NDPC including papers on nutrition and social protection. The Platform also supports a process to disseminate and communicate what the SUN Movement is doing in Ghana through development of web pages hosted by the NDPC. The assessment of national financing tracking efforts for nutrition was also led by the Platform and started its own commissioned research. The Platform also contributes to the dialogue with other SUN country partners through the SUN Country Network teleconferences.

## Current challenges

Since its inception, Ghana's SUN Academic Platform has identified a number of key challenges:

- 1. There is a significant pool of research capacity and experience within academia capable of delivering evidence and capacity building to the SUN Movement, and to inform nutrition policy in Ghana. However, many of these experts have not yet engaged with the Movement nor with policy-making in Ghana.**
- 2. While there are 10 academics with relevant experience that have expressed their willingness to participate and contribute to the activities of the Ghana SUN Academic Platform, only five of these are currently actively involved with the Platform.**
- 3. In most developed country settings, health and nutrition policy briefs are based on the best available evidence. Such a systematic process for nutrition policy formulation and implementation does not presently exist in Ghana.**
- 4. Resource limitations (technical and financial), lacking passion for policy engagement, and the limited engagement of graduate students who help with the work, have restricted the activities of the Platform.**



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To address these challenges, Ghana's SUN Academic Platform hopes to become better equipped at actively recruiting and engaging more academics in contributing to the SUN Movement. This could be achieved by:

- **Building capacity to engage with policy makers**
- **Empowering and strengthening the Ghana Nutrition Association to which most of them affiliate**
- **Advocating for universities and other research institutions to recognise and reward community service and extension in a similar fashion to peer-reviewed journal publications**
- **Creating opportunities for multi-institutional research**
- **Creating an enabling environment that will incentivise researchers to engage with policy and program implementation**
- **Leveraging technical and financial resources to facilitate capacity building.**

In light of this, the Platform has connected itself with EVIDENT (Evidence-informed Decision-making in Health and Nutrition, [www.evident-network.org](http://www.evident-network.org)). This network has recently trained two members of the Platform on systematic reviews, which can be used to advise policy. We look forward to transferring this capacity to other academics across Ghana and hopefully encourage them to contribute to nutrition policy implementation.

Through experiences with EVIDENT, the Platform will also seek to work with relevant agencies on the SUN CSPG to advocate for the introduction of a system that promotes demand for evidence-based policy briefs. These briefs will guide decision-making for nutrition policies and program implementation in Ghana. In partnership with the Ghana Nutrition Association, the Platform will also seek opportunities to advocate for recognising the value of academic output in the form of community extension and services to ongoing nutrition programs.

We anticipate that more academic platforms from SUN Countries will spring up across Sub-Saharan Africa. This will create new opportunities for networking and sharing experiences. We also look forward to North-South partnerships that will complement existing South-South partnerships, which support our capacity for improving nutrition.

## Key Lessons

- **Capacity building of local nutrition experts is essential.** While there are many nutritionists working on policy-relevant issues, they do not yet know how to influence policymakers.
- **No matter how well research studies are designed, they should be informed by programs and programmatic gaps.** Much of the research currently being done by local nutritionists does not fit into the current program or program needs.
- **Nutritionists do not have to wait for an invitation letter from policymakers to engage with them.** Ghana's Academic Platform 'voted with our feet' to engage. This sometimes involves going into meetings without an invitation, even if it is to be rapporteurs. Eventually, policymakers will take notice and recognise the contribution of nutritionists to the ongoing policy discussions and in bringing evidence to the table.
- **Policymakers sometimes make decisions without reference to evidence for a number of reasons:**
  - The evidence is not locally available, or accessible
  - They have made decisions in the past without referring to evidence
  - There is no structured system for using evidence for policy decision making.

**There is clearly a role for academics, to help generate the evidence, identify existing evidence and support decision makers to make informed policy choices.**



# BENIN

## Building an inclusive platform to help guide nutrition policy



*The National Council of Food and Nutrition has a responsibility to advocate and position nutrition at the heart of the national development agenda and ensure effective engagement of policy makers for sufficient investment in nutrition.*

*Ségla Wilfrid Padonou, Researcher, Full member of the National Council of Food and Nutrition, representing research institutions.*

“Research and development improves nutrition and establishes the foundation for reliable community interventions. Nutrition deserves the attention of policy makers at the national, regional and local levels.”

**Joseph Dossou Hessou,**  
Coordinator of Core Nutrition Group, Benin

Researchers and academics are more committed than ever in developing nutrition programs in an inclusive way, through participation in the National Council of Food and Nutrition (CAN) – a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder platform for improving nutrition.

The fight against malnutrition has been a concern of successive governments of Benin for decades. However, many initiatives since the 1960’s have suffered from a lack of harmonisation and clashes between stakeholders. Compounding this was the lack of coordination between the political sphere and academic and research actors. Government institutions responsible for nutrition planning and supply did not cooperate sufficiently with academic and research institutions. Therefore, support for researchers and academics was not continuous or centered on national priority areas.

As the general budget of the government does not cover a specific national research program for nutrition, research institutions moved toward the support of external donors to exist and function. Therefore, directions of research programs were not dictated by national priorities.

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>34.0%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>12.5%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>41.4%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>4.5%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>1.7%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>49.6%</b>

Source: MICS\*\*\* 2014, Bénin.

Another factor reducing the scope of the research (although conforming to the highest academic standards) was the discrepancy between the calendars of researchers and policymakers. To support their decisions, policy makers often need evidence on the spot. However, the compilation of evidence carried out by scientists and researchers naturally takes time – creating challenges with providing scientific evidence in time for effective decision making.

To meet these challenges, since 2007, Benin has undertaken political and economic reforms in the field of food and nutrition with the support of the World Bank. In 2011 this reform process led Benin to join the SUN Movement and establish the National Council for Food and Nutrition (Decree No. 2009-245 of 9 June 2009, adopted by the Council of Ministers). The institution is a multi-stakeholder platform (MSP), attached to the Presidency of the Republic, which brings together many different sectors involved in nutrition. Currently, the National Council of Food and Nutrition (CAN) is the center of decision making where nutrition research and the academic world have a prominent place.

## CAN: An inclusive platform where scientists and academics help guide nutrition policy

With a Permanent Secretariat (PS), executive arm and interdepartmental subcommittees, CAN is responsible for:

1. **Defining the National Food and Nutrition Policy**
2. **Developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Strategic Development Plan for Food and Nutrition (PSDAN) and the National Program for Food and Nutrition focuses on the results (PANAR)**
3. **Coordinating actions for improving food and nutrition security.**

The creation of CAN is the first success in fostering synergies between the policy and research environments in developing nutrition programs. This MSP allows:

- **policymakers to directly inform researchers of their data needs**
- **researchers to participate in the identification of the most appropriate responses to national nutrition problems**
- **researchers to produce evidence that addresses these national priorities and needs**
- **direct delivery of results to the relevant ministries**
- **researchers to engage directly with government officials to obtain the necessary financing to generate data**
- **researchers to obtain scientific results and then translate them into concrete recommendations as a basis for policy documents and public policy.**

Within CAN, academics and researchers help identify research topics on nutrition, develop national or regional survey protocols, validate and compile the results obtained, develop publications (such as the food guide of Benin -a ranking of foods adapted to the urban environment and availability of local food culture) and organise capacity building activities in academic institutions.

A concrete example of the culmination of the political and scientific collaboration to improve decision-making based on nutrition facts, has been the emphasis placed on systematic reviews of the literature on nutrition.

## Systematic nutrition literature reviews

These reviews, organised nationally, are made available to CAN for political decision-making. The review currently in progress aims to identify relevant nutrition interventions that can significantly reduce the high prevalence of stunting in children over 2 years of age in Benin.

In December 2015, the first part of the course *reviewing nutrition literature to inform policy* will commence for researchers, academics, PhD students and staff of key institutions. This course will be organised by the FINSA (International Training in Nutrition and Food Science of the School of Nutrition and Food Sciences, University of Abomey - Calavi) and will be integrated into conventional training provided by FINSA.

CAN also engage with the EVIDENT partnership, a global network of North-South partners aiming to enhance evidence-informed decision-making and policy driven research in health and nutrition. This engagement will further support CAN to strengthen the link between policy makers and researchers and identify the most appropriate responses to current nutritional problems, based on the existing evidence.



## Challenges

Since its inception, the fundamental challenge of CAN has been mobilising financial resources from government authorities. Politicians from the community level to the highest levels of government, tend to design development programs with significant infrastructure. The CAN has a responsibility to advocate and position nutrition at the heart of the national development agenda and ensure effective engagement of policy makers for sufficient investment in nutrition.

Since 2013, through its advocacy efforts, CAN has managed to secure a small specific budget line for nutrition as part of the state budget. Complimenting this, CAN is working to support the integration of a subsidy program into municipal development plans. In light of this, the National Association of Municipalities of Benin and the National Commission of Local Finance - which controls the Support Fund to the Municipalities development – are mobilised.

## Key Lessons

- **Research programs should be determined by national priorities**
- **For this, policy makers and researchers need to agree on how to communicate their needs:**
  - i. First, policymakers must continuously express their data needs.
  - ii. On the other hand, researchers must present the results of their work in a form that can guide recommendations and policy guidelines.
- **The allocation of resources for the production of evidence must be decided jointly by policy makers and scientists.**
- **Decision-making based on context specific evidence will guarantee success in the fight against malnutrition.**





# PAKISTAN

## Linking academics through a dedicated network in Pakistan



*“Improving nutrition is transformational—families become healthier, wealthier and better educated. Addressing malnutrition is one of the best investments Pakistan can make for its future.”*

*Dr. Tausif Akhtar Janjua, Director, Micronutrient Initiative, Pakistan*

### Background

Despite recent economic and technological progress, conditions for children and vulnerable populations remains a serious challenge. They are not getting sufficient amounts of iron, iodine, vitamin A, folic acid and zinc in their diets, causing illness including infections, blindness, mental disorders and an increased risk of mortality.

According to the National Nutrition Survey (NNS) 2011, almost half of Pakistan’s children and mothers suffer from malnutrition. With pregnant women affected by a lack of essential nutrients, their babies are also at risk of disease and death.

Pakistan recognises that addressing malnutrition is key to national development and joined the SUN Movement in April 2013. It has since established a multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) to bring together the different actors in a common space. While a number of different networks have already been established under the SUN Movement, including donors, United Nations agencies, civil society, and business, the academia & research network is still under development.

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>45.0%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>25.0%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>37.7%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>10.5%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>4.8%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>51.1%</b>

Source: Pakistan DHS\*\* 2012-13. DHS\*\*s. Islamabad, Pakistan, and Calverton, Maryland, USA: NIPS and ICF International, 2013 (and additional analysis).



Launching the SUN Movement in Pakistan

## Establishing an Academia & Research Network in Pakistan

Academics play a pivotal role in developing evidence-based guidelines and policies for cost-effective nutrition interventions. The Academia and Research Network in Pakistan is a new initiative launched under the SUN Movement in the country. The Network was conceived and put into practice under the direction of the SUN Government Focal Point, the Micronutrient Initiative and other key stakeholders, including the Higher Education Commission (HEC), which is the central coordinating agency of academic and research institutes. It was formally launched through a kick-off meeting, chaired by the Federal Minister for Planning Development & Reform/ Deputy Chairman Planning Commission. 70 participants from various universities, research institutes, other SUN Networks and the HEC actively contributed.

The Minister urged the newly formed Network to play their part in supporting an enabling environment for formulating effective policies that address malnutrition. The Minister also assured the government's full commitment to mobilise resources by enhancing budgetary allocations for research and to establish a Centre of Excellence where nutrition research can be carried out. Under the guidance of the SUN Government Focal Point, the Centre will align its actions for nutrition and aim to bridge the gaps through the MSP. Academics and researchers valued the formation of this Network which has uniquely brought the leaders of nutrition together in sharing their expertise and putting it into practice.

The Network aims to promote sustainable improvements in the nutrition status of the people of Pakistan by creating a strong, coordinated and vibrant research and academic forum which will support the implementation of the country's nutrition agenda. The Network will also facilitate sharing of best practices and nutrition relevant information, advance scientific knowledge and promote knowledge transfer as mandated by the SUN Networks in Pakistan.

## Key Objectives of the Academia & Research Network in Pakistan:

- To organise the existing research and academic institutions working in nutrition and nutrition-related sectors to maximise their impact and influence on nutrition governance and policies
- To support research that develops the evidence-base for guiding policies in nutrition
- To strengthen members' capacities in nutrition, food security, research and advocacy
- To establish and sustain links with international research and academic institutions in developing capacities and conducting operational research
- To monitor the implementation and progress of government's commitments and application of policies in the field, and present the results in a transparent way
- To advocate for the integration of nutrition in the educational curriculum.

## Current Challenges

- Bringing together the diverse groups from academia and research institutes despite their different priorities and areas of expertise is challenging
- Most of the policies are formulated on the recommendation of academia and research institutions, however this is done informally as there is no specific forum to coordinate evidence-based policy-making
- There is a lack of an effective strategy on communication and implementation at the national level to ensure efficient utilisation of the existing in-country expertise
- There is a need to bridge the gap in the transformation of successful research into influential policy documents
- There is also a lack of targeted resource allocation to support specific interventions and there is the need to institutionalise allocation of resources as envisaged in the national strategy, Pakistan Vision 2025
- The role of the coordinating body at the federal level (HEC) in relation with provincial institutions needs to be better defined.

## Key Lessons

- **There should be more and better stakeholder consultation to bring together researchers and academics from diverse groups and efforts to foster shared responsibility in the Network.**
- **A focus on capacity building of the researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders of the Network is essential for the effective functioning of the Network and for sustained progress.**

## Way Forward

The formation of a Secretariat for the Academia & Research Network is under process and will be housed in the Micronutrient Initiative Country Office in Islamabad. A full-time Coordinator will be recruited for the Network to ensure that the Secretariat is fully functional.

The Coordinator will form an advisory group to provide strategic guidelines and develop a roadmap for the Network; Reach out to institutions to bolster membership; Set up an Executive Council to run the affairs of the network; Prepare an implementation strategy and set out to sensitise researchers on determining the gaps in nutrition-related policies and how to best provide guidance for evidence-based policy research.



A meeting Of the SUN Academic and Research Network in Islamabad, Pakistan

EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING, LEADERSHIP, TRAINING AND EDUCATION

**Shaping** research agendas, conducting systematic reviews and building national capacity for this

**Developing** curricula for pre-service and refresher training of staff in various line ministries

**Reforming** and implementing pre-service training at university level and participating in a variety of national capacity-building activities

**Providing** technical support to the design, implementation, interpretation and validation of national or special purpose surveys, reporting systems, progress markers and M&E systems

**Conducting** stakeholder mapping exercises and capacity assessments at national and sub-national levels

**Providing** leadership for forming and strengthening national professional societies and promoting their greater engagement in scale up efforts

**Co-drafting** policy documents and policy or program implementation guidelines and tools

**Participating** in global initiatives, forums, advisory groups and activities

**Writing** policy briefs and concept papers, participating in or facilitating policy and program discussions, deliberations, planning and validation and serving on multi-sectoral platforms

Scientists, academicians, professionals, practitioners or knowledge-translators



## Examples of collectives helping bring together SUN Country policy makers and researchers, to utilise evidence for impact

E

### Evidence-informed Decision-making in Health & Nutrition (EVIDENT)

EVIDENT is a network that enhances evidence-informed decision-making and policy-driven research in both health and nutrition. The network provides a platform for local stakeholders to work together and identify their information needs. These are then defined into questions for which existing evidence is found and appraised, before making a context-specific recommendation that decision-makers can implement. Activities of these projects are being thoroughly documented to provide a transparent view of experiences on the field. These experiences are feeding into the development of practical guidance which will allow stakeholders to carry out the step-by-step process of evidence-informed decision-making themselves. [www.evident-network.org](http://www.evident-network.org)

A

### Alliance for Health policy and Systems Research (HPSR)

The Alliance for HPSR aims to promote the generation and use research to improve health and health systems in developing countries. It does this by: i) stimulating the generation and synthesis of policy-relevant health systems knowledge, ii) promoting the dissemination and use of health policy and systems knowledge, and iii) strengthening capacity for the generation, dissemination and use of HPSR knowledge among researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders. [www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/en/](http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/en/)

I

### International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

3ie is an international grant-making NGO promoting evidence-informed development policies and programmes in low- and middle-income countries. It funds impact evaluations and systematic reviews that generate evidence on what works in development programmes and why. It also carries out policy influencing activities to stoke interest in decision-makers in using of impact evaluations. Recent announcements from an active 3ie include requests for qualifications for impact evaluations, new blogs about voluntary medical male circumcision and the role of microcredit in empowering women. 3ie co-authored impact evaluation briefs with UNICEF and released a systematic review on farmer field school interventions. [www.3ieimpact.org](http://www.3ieimpact.org)

M

### Management Sciences for Health (MHS)

MSH is a global health non-profit organisation helping leaders, health managers, and communities in developing countries build stronger health systems. The organisation has its headquarters in the U.S.A and has worked in over 150 countries. It responds to priority health problems such as HIV & AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, non-communicable diseases, reproductive health, and maternal, newborn and child health. [www.msh.org/about-us](http://www.msh.org/about-us)

C

### Collaboration for Evidence-based Healthcare in Africa (CEBHA)

CEBHA facilitates the provision of patient care based on evidence-informed decisions using context-specific current best evidence. It builds capacity and sustainable structures of evidence-based health care in Africa. CEBHA's activities include collaborations for sustainability, capacity building and training, developing curriculums for development and integration, evidence development (systematic reviews, clinical guidelines, policy briefs), providing access to evidence-based resources, dissemination and implementation of evidence and, communication, advocacy and networking. [www.cebha.org](http://www.cebha.org)

I

### International Decision Support Initiative (iDSI)

iDSI supports low- and middle-income governments in making resource allocation decisions for healthcare. iDSI aims to identify practical ways to scale peer-to-peer process and technical support for more systematic, fair and evidence informed priority setting in healthcare. This is done by driving funding towards the clients' genuine needs, working with leading priority-setting institutions, applying insights from research to drive real policy impact at different healthy system levels, and producing influential research themselves. [www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/nice-international/nice-international-projects/international-decision-support-initiative](http://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/nice-international/nice-international-projects/international-decision-support-initiative)



# ETHIOPIA

## Disseminating evidence for informed action in Ethiopia

*“Knowledge gained through research can improve policies, programs and practices within a nutrition service delivery system. This will contribute towards significant improvements in the nutritional status and nutrition equity of a country and beyond.”*



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### The coordinating mechanism

The National Nutrition Coordination Body (NNCB) is the primary mechanism for leadership, policy decisions and the coordination of Ethiopia’s National Nutrition Program (NNP). The implementation of this program began in 2008, using a multi-sectoral and life cycle approach. The NNP’s five-year plan was revised in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the years 2013-2015. The MDGs were also used for the development of the country’s second five-year plan (NNP 2016-2020).

The NNCCB includes government sectors, partners, civil society organisations, academia and the private sector. Under this body is the National Nutrition Technical Committee (NNTC) composed of senior nutrition experts from the same sectors. This committee is divided into three sub-committees:

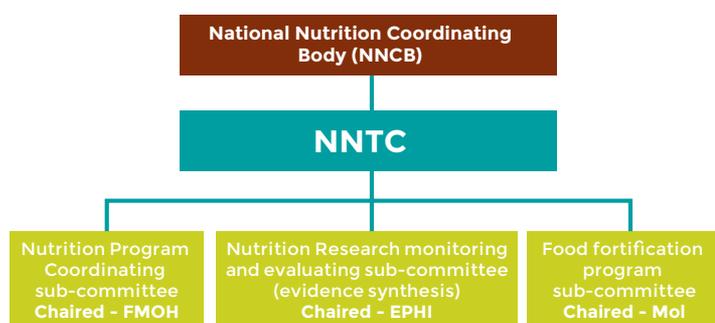
- **Nutrition Program Coordination Sub-Committee** chaired by the Federal Ministry of Health
- **Nutrition Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-Committee** chaired by the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI)
- **Food Fortification Program Sub-Committee** chaired by the Federal Ministry of Industry.

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>40.4%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>10.8%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>52.0%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>8.7%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>2.6%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>19.2%</b>

*Source: Ethiopia mini DHS\*\* 2014. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2014.*

While these committees function at a national level, there are other similar multi-sectoral nutrition coordination program implementation arrangements in place at regional, district (woreda and kebele) levels, using the decentralisation structure. The terms of reference, membership, frequency of meetings and roles and responsibilities of sectors are detailed to ensure transparency in conduct.



## Delivering evidence

The Nutrition Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-Committee is led and coordinated by EPHI. Members of the Sub-Committee access the research agenda of EPHI, and generate, translate and deliver evidence to decision-makers to answer their questions.

For example, Ethiopia is currently planning a national food fortification program, which will begin within the next five years. To ensure appropriate fortification, decision-makers assessed the existing evidence summarised by EPHI and invested in context-specific research. This entailed a National Food Consumption Survey and the National Micronutrient Survey, which collected data on Ethiopian food intake and micronutrient status, respectively. EPHI is also reviewing existing data, including recently published systematic reviews, to produce policy briefs on the relevance of zinc fortification to Ethiopia. EPHI also conducted the National Nutrition Survey in 2015. The results of this survey were reported to the Federal Ministry of Health to help set targets for the NNP of 2016-2020.

## Information dissemination

While nutrition academics from EPHI are mandated to inform nutrition actions, various other academic institutions have also linked with the Department of Food Science and the Nutrition Research Directorate, specifically to provide evidence-based answers to questions on nutrition programs from decision-makers. Evidence produced by these institutional capacities is shared across academia through annual conferences and is subsequently compiled and presented to appropriate government ministers to aid program reform. A website is also used to disseminate research outputs.

## Barriers to overcome

Despite the ongoing efforts to use evidence in making decisions about nutrition programs, there are still a number of gaps and barriers to the process of decision-making in Ethiopia. These include:

- ➔ Poor use, and integration of research outputs in program and policy change
- ➔ Insufficient personnel trained to work on producing systematic reviews to inform policy
- ➔ Poor use of health economic evaluation papers
- ➔ High attrition rate of trained nutritionists into government sectors
- ➔ Difficulties in finding synergies between the agendas of different partners in development
- ➔ Poor linkages at the regional level.

Some of these gaps can be addressed through:

- ➔ Short- and long-term training of personnel in performing systematic reviews and full health technology assessments
- ➔ Developing methodological tools and processes on identifying and setting priorities in nutrition, with decision-makers
- ➔ Establishing a national nutrition database of previous and ongoing research and programs performed within Ethiopia by the different entities (NGOs, donors, universities, EPHI, etc.)
- ➔ Evaluating the systematic process of decision-making, from priority-setting to the implementation of evidence-informed policy briefs.



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## Collaborating with global initiatives

These activities will be facilitated by a number of well-established and sustainable institutions that are already carrying out priority-setting and evidence synthesis. Ethiopia's experiences with the SURE collaboration<sup>1</sup> (Supporting the Use of Research Evidence) and its readiness to accept evidence for better implementation of programs to improve the nutrition outcomes of the country are also vital assets.

Thus far, Ethiopia has mapped the stakeholders involved in evidence-informed decision-making in nutrition, identified priority research topics by talking to these decision-makers and various other key stakeholders, and built the capacity of some researchers in nutrition academia on evidence synthesis. The government has also acknowledged and recognised the importance of evidence in policy-making. Many of these actions have taken place due to Ethiopia joining the EVIDENT Network<sup>2</sup>. The network is facilitating Ethiopia in bridging the gap between science and policy and has therefore become an integral part of EPHI's nutrition research agenda and the next five-year (2016-2020) National Nutrition Plan (NNP).

## Key Lessons

- It is helpful to have a good governance structure in the country as this will make it easier to facilitate the acceptance of evidence-based policies, and accept the concept of evidence-informed decision-making and what it entails.
- A readiness by policy-makers to accept evidence to inform their decision-making is key for better implementation of nutrition programs.
- Strengthening institutional collaborations and experience sharing within Ethiopia institutions, between African and global partners for useable and reliable evidence generation is essential.
- Developing systems to translate knowledge and evidence into policies and programs and establish clear decision making process in the country.



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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.who.int/evidence/sure/guides/en/>  
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.evident-network.org/>



# COSTA RICA

## Translating nutrition science, into community nutrition transformations



*“Extension is a method for strengthening the relationship between universities and society, where the teaching capacity and research experience directly serves the social demands of communities and public institutions. One of the biggest current nutrition concerns in Costa Rica is the increased incidence and prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents. The Póngale Vida model reflects the progress and challenges in connecting academia with the political decision-making processes for improving food and nutrition security.”*

*Xinia Fernandez Rojas, Ph.D. Health Behaviour / Science and Nutrition, Professor and Researcher at the University of Costa Rica*

### Strengthening the relationship between university and society

The University of Costa Rica (UCR) is a state institution, which has a Competitive Fund for Strengthening the University Relationship with Society. The Fund is run by the Vice Presidency of Social Action, and uses public financed development projects with the aim of encouraging innovative collaboration with other stakeholders in finding solutions to national problems, and especially targeting the most vulnerable.

The goal of teaching extension is to allow the use of University resources to carry out special programs to meet the specific demands of communities and public institutions, as well as disseminating knowledge from academic and research units.

According to the latest National Nutrition Survey, conducted between 2008-2009, 21.4% of children between 5 and 12 years old in Costa Rica suffer from overweight and obesity. This is an increase of 6.5 % compared with the results of 1996. Data from the 2015 School of Nutrition at the University of Costa Rica (UCR) shows that the prevalence is now higher than 30%. To contribute to the prevention of childhood obesity in Costa Rica, in early 2009 UCR developed the model for the prevention of childhood obesity, “Póngale Vida®”. This programme promotes healthy eating and physical activity for children of any nutritional status, through a culturally and socially responsible approach.

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>5.6%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>7.2%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>18.7%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>1.0%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>8.1%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>19%</b>

Source: Encuesta nacional de nutricion 2008-2009. San Jose, Costa Rica, 2011.



Community awareness events for nutritious meals



A physical activity class for school children underway

## The Póngale Vida® model

The model considers all scenarios that may affect the ability of children to make decisions about their diet and physical activity. It includes strategies for the classroom, the school, family and community, and aligns seamlessly with the Ministry of Education through its local offices, schools, boards of education, nutrition committees in each school, teachers and families, as well as municipalities and organised community groups.

School interventions include food and nutrition education and growth monitoring, feeding practices and physical activity. The model has collected data on weight, size and feeding habits of more than 4,000 school and preschool children, which helps give a big picture view of the nutritional status, dietary practices and physical activity in schools as well as disaggregated data by age, grade education, gender and school.

The model has identified a growth in the spatial distribution of food retailers, and a lack of recreation areas around schools. As a result of this process, local governments can consider the location of these places when granting operating permits to businesses. This analysis has been a significant contribution to informing the Ministry of Education's response.

The data has indicated over-consumption in schools and preschools, which instigated the review of the National Programme of School Feeding. This has allowed a technical approach to report changes in school dining menus and areas, budget allocation and equipment as well as prioritisation of the schools and age groups which the Ministry should focus on, or, alter its contribution toward supplementary feeding, improved safety, staff training, empowerment of boards of education and school staff.

So far the programme has covered more than 7000 school children and preschoolers, trained more than 600 teachers and administrative staff of schools and school canteens, 75 community leaders and more than 30 mothers and female champions for preventing childhood obesity. It has also helped strengthen community leadership in eight districts in the Canton Union through the empowerment of their leaders, who are now taking action to promote healthy eating and physical activity – reaching more than 10,000 families.

## Lessons learned

This initiative has helped to demonstrate to the Ministry of Education that the school feeding program should be updated. This program was born to alleviate undernutrition and stunting and now it must adapt to meet the growing number of overweight children and adolescents.

Since 2013, the school meals program has ensured that all children receive at least one meal and in some cases two meals at school a day. This means that a good percentage may not need the extra meals received from the feeding program that may be contributing to the obesity epidemic. Thus, there is a need for a selection system.

Further to this, schools are mostly oriented to provide resources for cognitive development but many schools do not have space for recreation activities.

The obesity epidemic is urging the Ministry of Education to provide nutrition education at schools and to transform spaces for promoting healthy lifestyles, not only for the students but for all working in the educational system. It is also mandatory to monitor their nutritional status, which can provide information on the changes and needs.

The program requires the inclusion of professional nutritionists in order to guarantee the management, food safety, nutritional value, education and optimisation of administrative processes. Currently the administration of the program is in the hands of the education boards formed mostly by parents, teachers and food service workers.



A parent and teacher information session underway

## The way forward

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A pilot study with a representative sample of schools is recommended to evaluate the current status of the school feeding programme and finding ways of strengthening the program.

Negotiations have been initiated by the School of Nutrition of the University of Costa Rica and the Program Officers of the Ministry of Education.

**This program is a key for social protection and requires a new structure in order to support the need of those suffering from hunger and poverty and to prevent childhood obesity.**

The Póngale Vida® model offers a methodological framework to promote healthy eating, physical activity and nutritional surveillance within the new proposed structure. **Improving this important program will contribute to the prevention and control of the most chronic diseases related to nutrition** and will help to save millions of dollars in health care services to the country.



© Received from the University of Costa Rica

A physical activity class for school children underway



# TANZANIA

## Data Driven Programming



*“The relationship between academia and policymakers has improved markedly over the past few years. Most notable has been the involvement of various distinguished academics in some of the key policymaking bodies.”*

*Dr. Joyceline Kaganda, Acting Managing Director, Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre*

### Background

In 2011, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and its UN partners (WHO, UNICEF, UNREACH, and WFP) donor partners (USAID, Irish AID, DFID, DANIDA, CIDA, Micronutrient Initiative, World Bank and Children’s Investment Fund Foundation) and non-government organisations under the umbrella of The Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania (PANITA see Fig.1), developed the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS). The strategy contains eight priority areas and has a substantial focus on research, monitoring and evaluation, as they are essential to evidence-based decision-making and enhancing accountability.

Although the importance of research in facilitating effective decision-making is widely acknowledged, this recognition has not yet translated into ample investment including the allocation of budgets to research. After three years of implementing the NNS, over 80% of the budget has been used for nutrition services and capacity building. At all levels, much of the work carried out to improve nutrition is consultative. Forty-eight percent of the total budget has come from development partners that have a limited focus on research itself (Public Expenditure Review, 2014) (see Fig.2). It therefore begs a question as to whether decision-makers fully comprehend the essence of research activities to inform decision-making.

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>34.7%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>8.4%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>41.1%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>3.8%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>5.2%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>39.6%</b>

Source: Tanzania National Nutrition Survey, 2014; and Tanzania Demographic Health Survey, 2010.

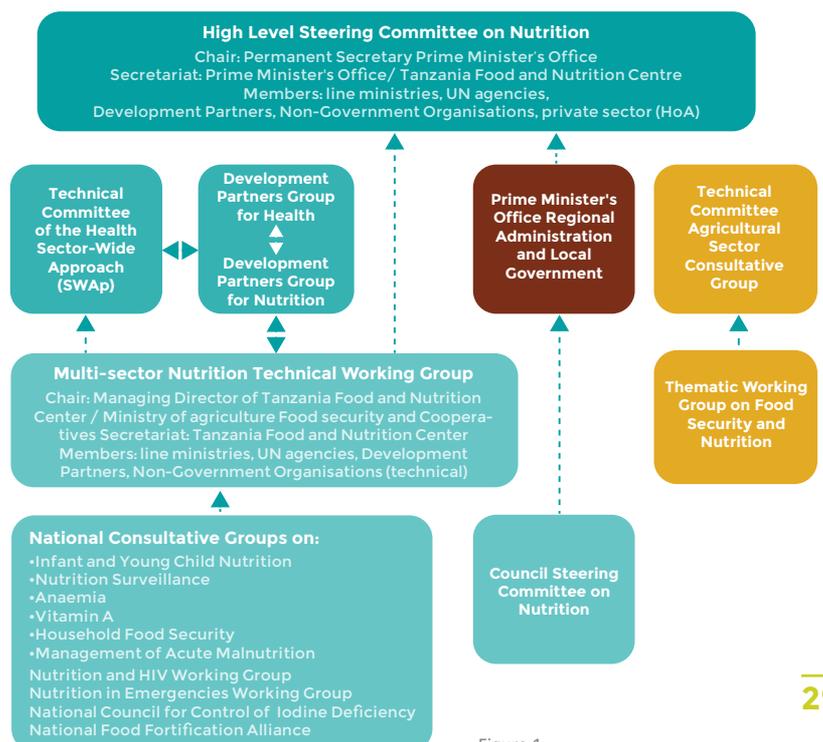


Figure 1

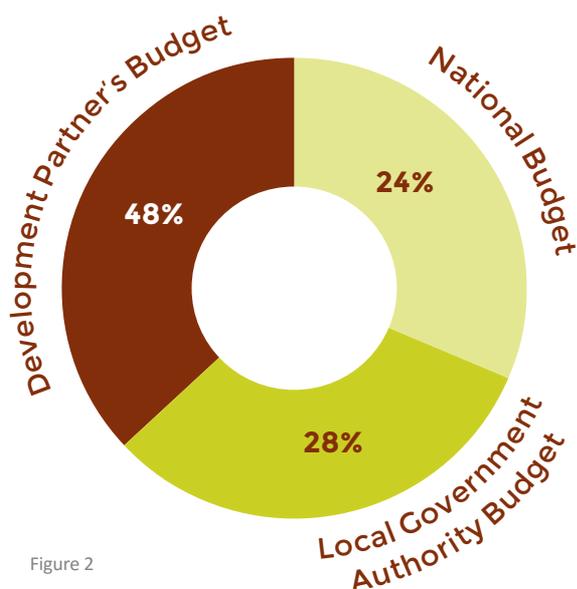


Figure 2



An advocacy workshop underway in Tanzania

## Engagement

The Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) is the primary coordinator of research activities in Tanzania. The COSTECH is a parastatal organisation responsible for co-coordinating and promoting research and technology development activities in the country. It is the chief advisor to the Government on all matters relating to science and technology and their application to the socio-economic development of the country. Established by Act of Parliament No. 7 of 1986 as a successor to the Tanzania National Scientific Research Council, COSTECH became operational in 1988. The Act provides for a structural framework of the Commission, which brings together the top leadership of the scientific and technological institutions in the country in one forum.

In some cases, however, nutrition research is coordinated and undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) through the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC) and various other institutions and organisations, which are not directly linked to either COSTECH or TFNC. These include universities, research institutions and NGOs.

The relationship between academia and policymakers has improved markedly over the past few years. Most notable has been the involvement of various distinguished academics in some of the key policymaking bodies. Several members of academia from the Sokoine University of Agriculture also serve in decision-making bodies such as the Ministry of Agriculture/Livestock Development, Ministry of Industries, Tanzania Bureau Standards (TBS), Ministry of Education and Ministry of Natural Resources/Forestry, among others. It has also become increasingly common for policymakers and academia to meet at various fora where research findings are shared, analysed and discussed. These include the technical coordination meetings for major nutrition problems in Tanzania, such as control of Vitamin A deficiency, Infant and Young Child Nutrition, Social and Behaviour Change Communication, Food Fortification Alliance and review meetings for the health and nutrition sector.



© Government of Tanzania

High level delegation during Presidential call for action to nutrition

## Examples

Below is a list of surveys and evaluations carried out through the NNS for nutrition programming. Data collected through these surveys and evaluations were used to inform programming decisions. The Tanzania Demographic Health Survey is conducted by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Other surveys are conducted by TFNC in collaboration with the NBS, donor partners and other learning institutions.

- *Landscape analysis of Tanzania's readiness to accelerate action in nutrition (2012) by TFNC, with the support of WHO.* The analysis identified gaps, constraints and opportunities for scaling up nutrition interventions and in doing so facilitated an analysis of existing capacities and resources. From these studies, guidelines were developed or reviewed, on specific issues, such as Infant and Young Child Feeding, HIV, International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, Vitamin A and cassava processing. Development of planning and budgeting guidelines, and strategies and standards for food fortification were also prioritised.
- *Nutrition institutional capacity assessment (2011).* This looked at the nutrition institutions from structure to services to identify gaps for better implementation of nutrition services across Tanzania. The results helped accelerate the deployment of nutrition officers nationwide and strengthen coordination mechanisms.
- *An assessment of capacity needs of nutrition focal points and nutrition officers.* From this assessment, skill-based modules were developed and are currently being used. These modules include: i) The nutrition situation in Tanzania, ii) Integrating the National Nutrition strategy into district plans, budgeting and procurement, iii) Monitoring of the nutrition situation, and iv) Resource mobilisation, advocacy and capacity building skills.
- *The Public Expenditure Review for nutrition (2014) including a policy brief* were used to advocate for increasing resource allocation at both the national and local government levels.
- *The NNS is conducted using the SMART Methodology* (see Fig.3). Results revealed that national average of stunting rates declined from 42% to 35%.

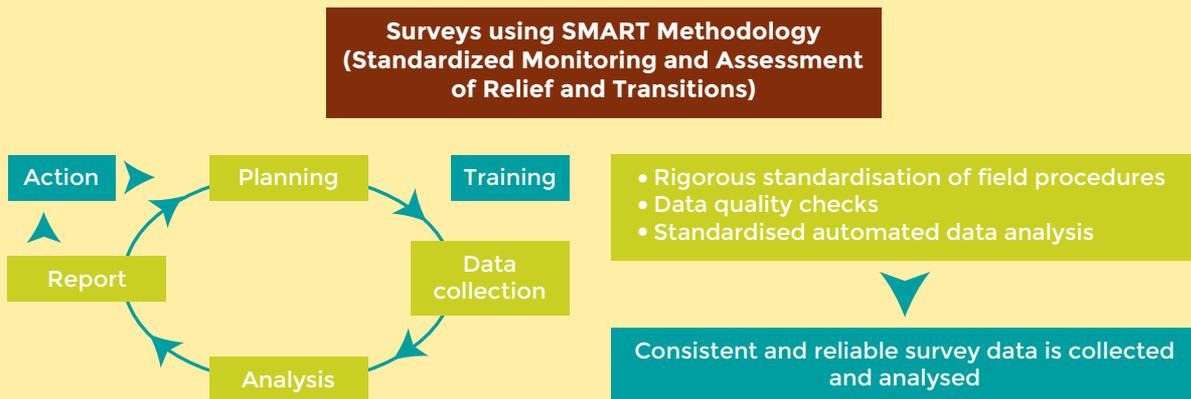


Fig. 3

- *Micronutrient biomarkers surveys were conducted in 2010 as part of the Demographic Health Survey.* Data from these surveys accelerated the formation of the food fortification alliance and the development of policy guidelines for micronutrient fortification in the country.
- *Assessments of food security at the household level, including cassava added value addition project development of universal salt iodisation regulations to address the prevalence of goiter determined from surveys conducted in the 1980s.*
- Recent evidence gathered on aflatoxin contamination in major grain reserves found that a potentially toxigenic species of fungi was present in significant quantities in stored maize grains. These results stimulated the formation of the National Steering Committee for Control of Mycotoxin in the country, which is continuing the research in assessing the mycotoxin levels of other staple foods.
- *Preparation of children's foods using germination and fermentation technologies were promoted using studies conducted in the 1980s based on the factors contributing to growth faltering in weaning aged children.*

Although Tanzania has been concerned with the nutrition status of its population since its independence, particularly with its success story of the Iringa Joint Nutrition Support Program (one of the major nutrition programmes aimed at reducing high impact of malnutrition and mortality in 1980s), it is only after joining the SUN Movement that the country has experienced an increase in interventions combating malnutrition. It has since received increased support from various development partners and observed a visible impact at all levels in the country. Despite these gains, the emergence of many players in the field of nutrition has posed a challenge to establishing a coordinated multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder nutrition response.

## Challenges

- There is insufficient local data to inform policies and programs – research studies are scattered across Tanzania and have limited geographic coverage
- There is a lack of institutional capacity for analysing, synthesising and applying research to decision-making, including minimal use of local data for contextualised decisions, poor understanding of policy briefs and lack of sufficient tools to facilitate the analysis
- There is limited opportunities for joint priority-setting among partners
- There is inadequate financial resources to generate policy-relevant evidence.

## What needs to be done to overcome the challenges?

- **Strengthening capacity in data collection and analysis, interpreting evidence, data synthesis and identifying gaps in existing research. Develop the capacity of TFNC to undertake operational research and monitoring and evaluation**
- **Develop tools and channels to facilitate advocacy and the implementation of a system for consolidating and communicating information on nutrition to relevant actors, including the dissemination of research findings**
- **Link with relevant institutions to improve the quality and evidence-base for planning, budgeting and tracking progress**
- **Set up a joint forum for setting research priorities and responsibilities amongst stakeholders**
- **Mobilisation of resources, both financial and technical, for research and advocate for the inclusion of nutrition research in national budgets**
- **Evaluate the performance of policy makers, including political leaders, using clear concise measurable performance indicators. For example, the inclusion of nutrition improvement in society as an indicator for evaluating the success or failure of a leader at all levels.**

## Key Lessons

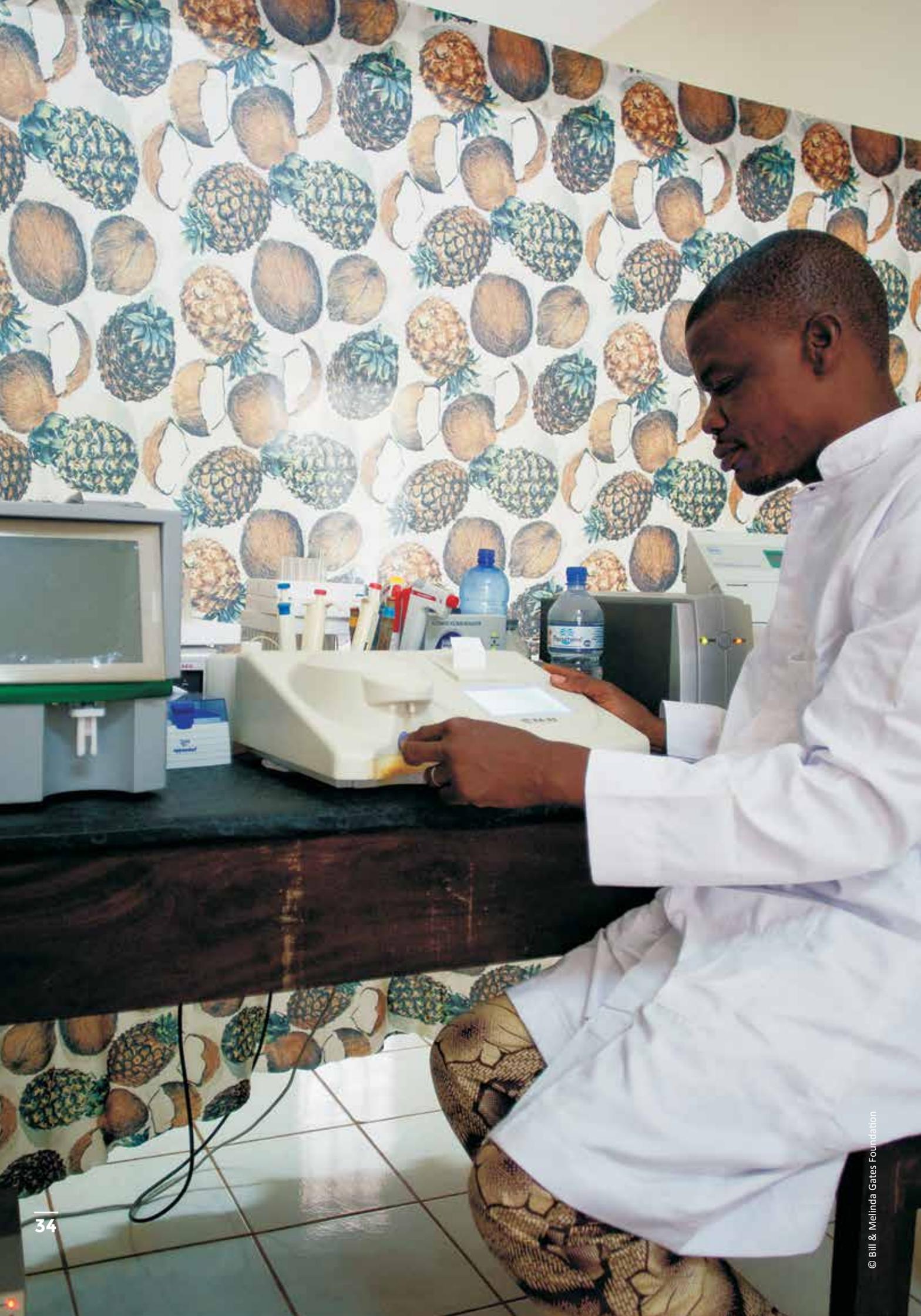
- **High-level political commitment is key to enhancing action for improved nutrition for all**
- **Advocacy to ensure leaders commitment to efficient action, multi-sectoral collaboration and effective coordination is essential**
- **Creating common and clear roles of key sectors, parties and the nation on making nutrition everyone's responsibility and a call to accountability and good governance in nutrition is also crucial.**

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# What has been learnt?



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# Scientific Evidence to Inform Decisions and Implementation: What has been Learnt



*Observations by Dr. David Pelletier, with contributions from Dr. Hanns-Christoph Eiden and Dr. Emorn Udomkesmalee*

The country contributions to this Scaling Up Nutrition *In Practice* brief provide a wealth of valuable insights, as well as inspiration, on ways to strengthen the creation, accessibility, adaptation and utilisation of scientific evidence in national efforts to scale up nutrition.

As happens repeatedly in the SUN Movement, countries themselves are finding ways to strengthen their own multi-sectoral nutrition efforts and providing lessons for other countries and the global community. Simultaneously, these countries shine light on some difficult and systemic challenges that inhibit further progress in this area and require attention from many stakeholders moving forward.

## SUN Countries making great strides

One of the most important insights from these country articles is the wide range of ways in which the national academic, research and technical communities (the scientific nutrition community) can support scaling up nutrition efforts. The most obvious, the one that comes most quickly to mind and the one that perhaps has been most rewarded within academic institutions, is field research. These articles note the importance of field research but they caution against an over-reliance on narrow research agendas that fail to meet the needs of country stakeholders. They emphasise the need for research to support national advocacy, planning, policy and program development and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

The scientific nutrition community can play a diverse and vital role in national efforts (see the middle feature of this brief). It is through these diverse venues and activities that scientific evidence and country experience becomes integrated, accessible, adapted and utilised in very pragmatic and contextualised ways. It is not simply or primarily by serving as a platform. The extensive but diffuse nature of these contributions suggests a metaphor of “the invisible hand of knowledge translation”. However, this in itself has been distilled and aggregated from the total set of country articles and other country experiences. It is unlikely that the entire set of activities is taking place within any one country, nor that the individual activities are consistently being conducted with optimal scale, intensity and quality. Indeed, the experiences in these countries and others reveal a host of systemic barriers and constraints that need attention if the professional nutrition community is to contribute to its full potential.

## Obstacles to overcome

The systemic challenges in this area fall into several categories: national policies, norms, demands and venues for engagement; human resource constraints within the professional nutrition community; the sometimes competing needs, norms and practices within the donor, partner and global research communities; and institutional structures and incentives within academia. In roughly half of the 56 SUN Countries, there is at least nominal academic representation on national multi-sectoral platforms (MSP) but the experience and functionality (e.g. attendance, role and contributions) within this system is not yet known. As suggested by the extensive contributions detailed in this brief, it is clear that most of the contributions are made outside of such platforms. A related challenge is that few countries have established a formal platform for the professional nutrition community to engage with its own members, such that there is no formal mechanism for the representative from the scientific community on the MSP platform to report back to this larger community or communicate its availability, interest, resources and needs to the MSP itself. The typical pattern, as seen in some of the countries reporting here, is that a relatively small sub-set of members from the professional nutrition community are highly engaged in various knowledge translation activities, but this is not sufficient to meet the needs. The ability of these members to meet the extensive needs of the national (i.e. government) stakeholders is further constrained by their finite time, competing demands and opportunities from the international donor, partner and research organisations and (for those in academia) their “core” responsibilities in their own academic departments. Those latter responsibilities, in turn, typically are more highly recognised and rewarded within those settings.

## Strategies for success

The challenges noted above represent an interlocking set of institutional norms, conditions and practices that have the effect of inhibiting the professional nutrition community from contributing to its full potential. This means it is unlikely that any one or few actions will be sufficient to facilitate knowledge transfer with the scale, intensity and quality needed for meeting national nutrition goals and aspirations. Many of the actions being taken by the countries reporting here are pointing in the right directions. For example some of these countries are engaged in capacity-building for knowledge synthesis and systematic reviews, prioritising research agendas, forming national nutrition societies or creating a national platform for the professional nutrition community. However, at present few countries are actively engaged in these examples and an even broader set of actions is needed in all countries. While the specifics will vary across countries there are certain broad actions that likely would be helpful in all countries. These include:

- ➔ **Conducting a formal situation analysis for the status of knowledge translation activities, capacities, gaps and constraints in the country**
- ➔ **Developing a prioritised roadmap with active involvement of government, partners, the professional nutrition community and the private sector; and creating clear expectations, timelines and accountabilities within and among these sectors and institutions concerning the roles each will play.**

Meanwhile, the numerous initiatives emerging at the global level (see Further Reading at the end of this publication) should ensure that their strategies, investments and country engagements are supportive of these national roadmaps and national capacity-building efforts.

## Way forward within the SUN Movement

The SUN Movement is deeply committed to facilitating a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to improving nutrition, and is therefore the right place to promote the broad exchange between the different scientific communities both in-country and among fellow SUN Countries. This exchange should take place not only among nutritionists but also among the other scientific communities concerned, such as agriculture, social sciences and health. The SUN Movement is also well positioned to build coherence between actions at national and at global level. And above all, the SUN Movement could catalyse the interaction between academia and practitioners, which is necessary when it comes to developing truly innovative solutions and approaches.

## Round up of lessons from SUN Country contributors

In Ghana, the SUN Academic Platform is working to building the know-how of the scientific community for engaging with policy makers to support decision-making. They've found that:

- Capacity building of local nutrition experts is essential
- No matter how well research studies are designed, they should be informed by programs and programmatic gaps
- Nutritionists do not have to wait for an invitation letter from policymakers to engage with them

In Benin, stakeholders are working to ensure that there is widespread recognition that nutrition receives the attention of policy makers at the national, regional and local levels – and the academic community have a key role to play.

- Research programs should be determined by national priorities
- For this, policy makers and researchers need to agree on how to communicate their needs
- The allocation of resources for the production of evidence must be decided jointly by policy makers and scientists.

In Pakistan, the recent creation of a SUN Academic Platform has led to important learning that:

- There should be concerted efforts to bring together researchers and academics from diverse groups and efforts to foster shared responsibility
- Capacity building of the researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders of the Network is essential for sustained progress.

In Ethiopia, it was noted that having a strong governance structure in the country will help make it easier to facilitate consensus building around evidence-based policies. This can pave the way for:

- Openness from policy makers to accept and integrate evidence into the decision-making process
- Strengthening of institutional collaborations and experience sharing within Ethiopia institutions, between African and global partners for useable and reliable evidence generation.

In Costa Rica, the challenge of confronting the double burden of undernutrition and obesity, urged the updating of its school feeding programmes.

- The role of professional nutritionists and scientists in order to guarantee the management, food safety, nutritional value, education and optimisation of administrative processes was key for assisting the Ministry of Education.

In Tanzania, strengthening capacity in data collection and analysis, interpreting evidence, data synthesis and identifying gaps in existing research has been critical.

- This allowed for the development of tools and channels to facilitate advocacy and the implementation of a system for consolidating and communicating information on nutrition to relevant actors.

## Challenges and opportunities for the SUN Movement<sup>i</sup>

- The capacity of those providing evidence to translate and communicate their findings in a format that speaks to policy makers needs strengthening
- The definition of research agendas can improve:
  - Users of evidence need to improve the way they ask for information and define research needs, to make sure researchers can address those questions effectively
  - Stakeholders need to understand better what questions researchers can answer and which ones are too broad
  - Mechanisms to define and agree research priorities could be set up based on the key requirements of a country for scaling up nutrition, and involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders
  - Research topics are often too academic, focused on publications, rather than policy- and programme-oriented.
- There is a lack of coordination between government, planning institutions, and research institutions:
  - Frequently, formal processes and structures don't exist wherein policy decisions are informed by data and systematic reviews
  - Support to government tends to be 'one-off' rather than sustained and built around key priority areas
- Different groups have different interests and needs, advocating for agendas and competing for resources
- Scientists and academics are part of the MSP in most countries, but researchers and academics also interact with policy-making in diverse ways, often outside of formal structures and processes
- Research is not coordinated across regions and partners, and coverage is patchy
- Formal platforms for the nutrition community to engage with its own members often don't exist.
- While a critical mass of academics and professionals exists, their availability to participate is frequently a constraint, and a relatively small sub-set of members of the nutrition professional community are highly engaged:
  - Professions have significant obligations to their institutions, which don't recognise or reward their participation in MSPs
  - Some countries highlight a lack of human resources in general
  - Financial resources, from governments and their partners, are insufficient to support local research
  - Existing international research funds do not take into account the contextualized needs of countries.

<sup>i</sup> noted during SUN Country call (November 2014), FANUS Conference 2015 and SUN Movement Global Gathering Parallel session (2015)

## Further Reading

### 1. Centre for Global Development (CGD)

Through rigorous research and by working closely with policymakers CGD aims to reduce global poverty and inequality by providing independent research for practical solutions to global development. The Centre conducts research and analysis on topics such as aid effectiveness, climate change, debt relief, economic growth, education, food and agriculture, global health policy, governance/democracy, inequality, migration, population and development, poverty and technology. With regards to food and agriculture, CGD focuses on the role of agriculture and food security in economic development and how rich countries' agricultural policies affect the economic developing of poorer, low-income countries.

More information available at:  
[www.international.cgdev.org](http://www.international.cgdev.org)

### 2. Compact2025

IFPRI has launched a compact to end world hunger and undernutrition by 2025. This is a new global knowledge and innovation hub to support countries, institutions and other initiatives by identifying pragmatic, action-oriented strategies to address challenges on the ground while learning from stakeholders at all levels and from multiple sectors, including agriculture, nutrition, and health.

Compact2025 will provide evidence and tools for countries to develop and implement context-specific, practical road maps to accelerate the elimination of hunger and undernutrition. This will help fill gaps to weed out ineffective policies and prevent a duplication of efforts and will also contribute to ensuring accountability and tracking progress toward food security and nutrition.

More information available at:  
[www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/compact2025cn.pdf](http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/compact2025cn.pdf)

### 3. Evidence-based Research Network (EBRNetwork)

Recently launched, this international network focuses on evidence-based research. This refers to reviewing existing literature and identifying the knowledge gaps prior to investing in any further research. New research projects should generate data to address the gaps and subsequently be interpreted within the totality of the research that already exists.

More information available at:  
[www.ebrnetwork.org](http://www.ebrnetwork.org)

### 4. Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition

The Global Panel is an independent group of influential experts with a commitment to tackling global challenges in food and nutrition security. It aims to provide effective guidance to decision-makers, particularly governments, on generating nutrition-enhancing agricultural and food policy and investment in low and middle-income countries. They will do this by stimulating a stronger evidence-base for how changes in agriculture and food systems can improve nutrition, by promoting an understanding of the role and future potential of agriculture and food systems in improving nutrition and by catalysing collaboration in agricultural and food systems that will improve diets and nutrition outcomes.

More information available at:  
[www.glopan.org](http://www.glopan.org)

### 5. Supporting the Use of Research Evidence (SURE): Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) and the Region of East Africa Community Health (REACH) Policy Initiative

SURE was set up by the WHO to support and build on Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) in Africa and the Region of East Africa Community Health (REACH) Policy Initiative. Together the 3 groups strive to improve universal and equitable access to high quality health care, use health care resources wisely by making well-informed policy decisions, access and use reliable evidence to inform decisions about African health systems and learn how best to improve the use of research evidence to inform health policy decisions across different contexts in low- and middle-income countries.

More information available at:  
[www.who.int/evidence/sure/guides/en/](http://www.who.int/evidence/sure/guides/en/)  
[www.global.evipnet.org/en](http://www.global.evipnet.org/en)  
[www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/evidenceinformed/reach/en/](http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/evidenceinformed/reach/en/)

### 6. The Society for Implementation Science in Nutrition (SISN)

The SISN is a professional and scientific society founded to support a vision that effective and context-appropriate nutrition interventions, programs and policies should be available, accessible, and appropriately implemented everywhere. It is an organization devoted to advancing research on implementation of nutrition interventions that address over- and undernutrition. The Society, which is in its initial stages, currently consists of dedicated Founding Members, who are leaders and experts in the field of nutrition and program implementation. In the coming months the Society seeks membership from individuals who are active in implementation research, actively implementing nutrition programmes, or working at the interface of policy and program planning and/or operations.

More information available at:  
[www.implementationsciencesociety.org](http://www.implementationsciencesociety.org)



“ The forces that create malnutrition are very powerful, to overcome malnutrition we need equally powerful alliances and forces. ”

**Lawrence Haddad,**  
Senior Research Fellow,  
the Institute of Development Studies

The SUN Movement Secretariat is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

**WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?**

Go to [www.scalingupnutrition.org](http://www.scalingupnutrition.org)  
for more information about the SUN Movement.