

Operations Group Working Group on MEAL, Knowledge Management and Learning Report

7 May 2021

Introduction

Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) is a Movement with a membership of countries, donors, civil society organisations, philanthropies, UN organisations, and small, medium, and large-sized enterprises. The actors are growing, thinking, learning, and moving together towards a common vision to create a world free from malnutrition, in all its forms, by 2030.

Since 2010, SUN actors and stakeholders together have achieved considerable progress in positioning nutrition on the agenda of governments, at country, regional and global levels. They unite a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

The SUN Strategy 2021-2025 (SUN 3.0) wants to harness this knowledge and expertise, as well as the lessons being learned every day across the Movement to support countries in effectively implementing priority multisectoral nutrition actions; inform decision making at all levels and across stakeholders; and strengthen accountability of all actors, from the Global Support System (GSS) to national and sub-national multi-stakeholder platforms.

Scope

In SUN 3.0, members of the SUN Movement committed to help capture the knowledge and experience of SUN Countries, to support other countries to pave their own paths towards the elimination of all forms of malnutrition. Also, to work with partners to fill knowledge gaps and build consensus that will enable SUN Countries to advance their multisectoral national nutrition priorities.

The Working Group (WG) on Monitoring Evaluation Accountability Learning (MEAL) and Knowledge Management (KM) has based its work on these premises, linking them back into the four strategic objectives of SUN 3.0. The WG looked at the characteristics and the role of the MEAL system and KM that would be useful at all levels of the SUN Movement. It defined the contours of success by the end of the strategy timeframe, and the associated accountability framework and indicators needed to measure this success.

Methodology

The Working Group has based its work on the review of existing documents and relied on the MEAL and KM expertise within the SUN Movement. The Working Group was composed of representatives of the SUN networks and constituencies (see Annex 1), to benefit from the diversity of perspectives within the SUN Movement and to understand KM needs and uses across the Movement.

The WG members worked on a voluntary basis and met virtually each week during a six-week period in March-May 2021. The WG was co-chaired by Asma Lateef, Civil Society Network (CSN) representative in the SUN ExCom, and Mohamedcheikh Levrac, member of the UNN at regional level. The WG has drawn on specific expertise on an *ad hoc* basis during the process, and invited guest speakers to explain ongoing parallel processes or existing resources and systems in place, in order to avoid potential overlap and to integrate them into the deliberations. Separate bilateral conversations took place as needed and WG members were invited to provide written input in

between working sessions. The Working Group made an effort to incorporate learning from country examples and experiences into the proceedings. The WG worked in English and French as necessary and appropriate.

The main limitations for the Working Group were three-fold: first, the compressed timeframe to produce meaningful recommendations for the SUN Movement; second, WG members could not be present at all meetings; and third, limited time was available to review outputs between meetings and for some important issues to be fully fleshed out.

Therefore, the recommendations are not as comprehensive as they could be but focus on some key elements that have been prioritised by the WG. The WG is conscious that the given time period did not allow for full-fledged consultations to happen. Therefore, it considers some of the WG deliverables as interim outputs that should be validated further through a regional consultation process as outlined in the recommendations. Furthermore, some cross-cutting issues were brought to the fore and are highlighted wherever possible, but they merit further work. Finally, this report will feed into the Ops Group's consolidated report to the Lead Group, and thus further adjustments may be needed to contribute to a coherent set of recommendations.

Challenges and Gaps

The SUN Movement has an elaborate MEAL system with 79 indicators that reflects the **complexity of nutrition**, including the multisectoral, multi-stakeholder action at sub-national, national, regional and global level. The current system includes, among other elements, a MEAL dataset and country dashboards of key qualitative and quantitative nutrition indicators. These are meant to inform the decision-making processes of the global management and leadership team, to improve support to countries in a needs-based manner.

As the focus of SUN 3.0 shifts to accelerating impact and capacity strengthening at the country level, it is important to support countries in using their MEAL systems for national and sub-national decision making where they already exist, and building MEAL systems where they don't. It is also important that the Global Support System (GSS) and SUN Movement governance (Coordinator, ExCom, Lead Group) make it a priority to use the information and data coming from countries as a basis for decision making on provision of support, and response to needs. This may require additional capacities and expertise.

The biggest strength and challenge is the **diversity of the SUN Movement**. This means there are different, context-specific MEAL systems at country level, and the global MEAL system must be useful to and used by the members of the SUN Movement, including its management and leadership, at the sub-national, national, regional, and global levels. For several reasons, the current MEAL system is not being used as intended by the GSS or SUN countries. In SUN 3.0, the MEAL system must be more user-friendly, and we must help stakeholders analyse the data and use it to inform decision making.

Much data is already available in the global MEAL system, at the national level or collected through other entities. In this next phase of SUN, a further challenge is to streamline **data collection** to ensure its usefulness and its alignment with SUN's Strategic Objectives and future definition of success. An updated MEAL and KM system should:

- take into consideration the political economy of the country context;
- integrate and translate country-delivered data into decision-making processes;
- track the responsiveness of the GSS to countries' needs, including feedback mechanisms; and
- strengthen MEAL and KM capacity.

The **network structure** is a unique feature of the SUN Movement, giving a voice to the different constituencies within the governance of the Movement. SUN 3.0 aims to reduce the silos between the networks, improve coordination and build synergies. An efficient and sustainable MEAL system and KM that aligns indicators, and measures the unique contribution of each network towards shared

objectives and country-level priority actions, can strengthen accountability within and across networks and improve transparency to the wider Movement.

Recommendations

Defining Success

SUN 3.0 outlines that “SUN will be judged a success if the Movement can demonstrate how its collective efforts clearly contribute to accelerating the improvement of nutrition outcomes and systemic change at the national and subnational levels.” (SUN Strategy 2021-2025: 41). These efforts consist of different dimensions that are aligned with the four Strategic Objectives.

Recommendation 1: Members of the SUN Movement should agree on the dimensions of the collective effort needed to define and achieve success, as attached in Annex 2 and simplified in Table 1. Further regional consultations should be held between June–August 2021 to verify and validate these key elements of success and to further fine-tune as required. These consultations would also serve the purpose of further outlining how this success can be achieved across all levels of governance.

Table 1: Defining Success - Summary

Deeply embedding a multistakeholder & multisectoral way of working in support of countries						
SO 1 Acceleration towards nutrition outcomes						
Achieving sustainability of SUN activities at all levels with nutrition high on the (political) agendas of countries & country priorities guiding the engagement of the SUN Movement						
IMPACT Success is to show the impact of the SUN Movement and the change it triggers within a larger ecosystem.	FINANCING Success is when national priorities are financed through diversified financing sources.	ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS Success is to harness new partnerships, collaboration and championing role from outside the nutrition sector.	NETWORKS Success is when the SUN Networks are well integrated and cross-network activities take place, leading to more cohesive and effective approaches for countries and removing silos between networks.	KNOWLEDGE SHARING Success is when best practices and lessons learnt bear fruit and evidence is used to inform decision-making at all levels;	CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT Success means that capacities in countries are enhanced	GOVERNANCE Success is good governance practices, characterised by inclusion, transparency, accountability, & collaboration, at all levels.
SO 1		SO 2		SO 3		SO 4

The MEAL system & KM

The primary role of the MEAL system and KM is to support countries through enabling timely, evidence-informed decision making at all levels, that opens up the space for further action. They therefore contribute to better governance; in particular fostering transparency and accountability. Through the gathering and processing of information and best practices, the MEAL system and KM help to measure change and to enable learning, peer exchanges, feedback loops, and dissemination.

Recommendation 2: SUN governance and stakeholders at all levels should recognise the multi-faceted role and key characteristics of the MEAL system and KM, as illustrated in Graphic 1 and

Graphic 2, respectively. They should also invest in, strengthen and utilise the system at different levels.

Graphic 1: Role of the MEAL system and KM



Graphic 2: Key characteristics of the MEAL system and KM



Recommendation 3: Building on the role and the characteristics of the MEAL system and KM, the WG should hold consultations to co-create with the SUN members an updated MEAL system that builds on the currently existing system and other initiatives, such as the CSN SUN Labs. This would not only help to strengthen MEAL capacities but also to start building a community of MEAL

practitioners who can feed into the system at different levels. This co-creation process will take place over a period of three months and results will be fed back to the Ops Group.

This co-creation process aims to build ownership and to result in a MEAL system that is applicable, achievable, relevant and rational; and will be used at different levels without reproducing other data collection processes. In particular, this would:

- Inculcate a data-driven culture & improve data literacy at all levels.
- Better broker knowledge and data needs through the GSS.
- Build capacity to nurture and use a MEAL system at all levels, including through annual peer-to-peer learning exchanges.
- Provide regular updates to the SUN Coordinator and the ExCom on MEAL system progress that can support decision making and accountability.

Recommendation 4: The ExCom should consider adding a position for a MEAL expert. The MEAL advisory group should be expanded to include KM in its mandate, to support the translation of knowledge and learning. It should include experts from SUN countries and academia.

The Accountability Framework

SUN 3.0 stresses the importance of a mutual accountability framework that reinforces good governance and fosters transparency at all levels. SUN countries are already held accountable at the country level through their participation in the UN system; through their relationship with financing partners and donors; through the Joint Annual Assessment (JAA) process; and through their populations and civil society. Without putting further burdens on countries, the need for accountability should be extended to all levels of governance across all constituencies.

Recommendation 5: SUN 3.0 emphasizes mutual accountability across all components of the SUN Movement, in particular SUN Countries, the Global Support System (GSS), the Executive Committee, the SUN Coordinator, and the Lead Group. The existing draft of the *Unified Accountability Framework* (Annex 3) should be revisited by the Ops Group and its WGs, taking into consideration the ongoing JAA review process and the results of the Functional Review. It should outline in particular:

- The accountabilities and responsibilities of the collective GSS to work together to support SUN countries to implement plans, understand and identify needs, and to respond to requests from SUN countries.
- The accountabilities of the SUN networks towards each other, towards SUN countries, and towards the ExCom members.
- The accountabilities of global governance, including the SUN Coordinator, the ExCom, and the Lead Group, towards the members of the SUN Movement.
- The accountabilities of SUN countries to prioritise nutrition and to develop and implement strategies, with the support of the GSS and the multi-stakeholder mechanisms, to reach communities most affected by malnutrition.

Indicators

To be able to measure success, inform decision making, and ensure accountability within the SUN Movement, process, outcome, and output indicators, both of qualitative and quantitative nature, need to be defined. The existing 79 indicators allow a flexible selection and application of indicators according to the country context and country needs.

Recommendation 6: Drawing from the existing indicators where possible, a set of **core indicators** should be defined, as outlined in Annex 4. This should be further refined through the consultation process in recommendation 3. This should result in specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, time-bound or time-sensitive (SMART) indicators that are manageable, comparable, and allow for measurement of success of the Movement as a whole as well as of all its components.

Recommendation 7: The MEAL Advisory Group should explore the feasibility of working with partners to develop a one-stop-shop dashboard of nutrition data for SUN countries and for the GSS. This could build on the existing MEAL indicators and the GNR country profiles, and would include new information as developed through this Ops Group process, keeping in mind that data should be freely and widely accessible.

Annexes

ANNEX 1: List of Abbreviations

CSN	Civil Society Network
ExCom	(SUN) Executive Committee
FP	Focal Point
GNR	Global Nutrition Report
GSS	Global Support System
JAA	Joint Annual Assessment
KM	Knowledge Management
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, Time-bound
SMS	Sun Movement Secretariat
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
WG	Working Group

ANNEX 2: List of Working Group Members

Name	Stakeholder Group	Role
CO-CHAIR: Mohamedcheikh Levrac	UN Nutrition	UN REACH Regional Facilitator Senegal
CO-CHAIR: Asma Lateef	ExCom Member - CSN	Advisor, Bread for the World
Shahira Malm	Support to LG CHAIR	UNICEF
Freddie Mubanga	SUN GOV - Zambia	Head-Research and Planning Unit, National Food and Nutrition Commission
Georges OGOUEDJI	SUN GOV - Benin	Assistant Technique du Secrétaire Permanent du CAN (Conseil de l'Alimentation et de la Nutrition)
Naveet Mittal	SBN	Regional Advisor South and Central Africa
Manata Sadykova	CSN - YOUTH Kyrgyzstan	Youth Leader for Nutrition
Emily Movice-Oro	CSN – Philippines	
Hanns-Christoph Eiden	SDN - Germany	President Federal Office for Agriculture and Food
Debora Di Dio	SMS	(Country Results and Financing Team)- Senior Nutrition and Strategy Adviser – Leads on MEAL and KM
Cecilia Ruberto	CSN	CSN Secretariat KML specialist
Kate Ogden	UN Nutrition	Technical Officer
Ruth Situma	UN Nutrition	UNICEF Ghana (Participation in the consultation process)
Monica Kothari	WG Member	PATH, MQSUN/MQSUN+
OPERATIONAL SUPPORT: Renee de Jong	SMS	Policy Support Officer

ANNEX 3: Draft Defining Success

WORK IN PROGRESS – FOR CONSULTATION by the OpsGroup with Movement stakeholders

OUTCOME 1: GREATER PRIORITY GIVEN TO NUTRITION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

S1: STRENGTHENED POLICY AND ADVOCACY ENVIRONMENTS FOR NUTRITION

according to SUN 3.0

COUNTRY FOCUS

Success means deeply embedding a multisectoral and multi-stakeholder way of working in support of countries. It means achieving sustainability of SUN activities at all levels, with country priorities guiding the engagement of the SUN Movement and nutrition being high on the national (political) agenda, well resourced, and recognising its interlinkages with other sectors.

IMPACT

Success is to show the impact of the SUN Movement and the change it triggers within a larger ecosystem. This means identifying and disseminating effective solutions and results, generating and documenting learning, and acting as a broker to translate a vision into action and to ensure multi-directional feedback loops.

ALIGNMENT

Success is when nutrition outcomes are accelerated in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This requires the creation of an enabling environment in which national policy and legal instruments are aligned with international instruments, all SUN stakeholders and networks are resourced, and are positioning and acting together to support national plans, and public authorities are working across sectors.

OUTCOME 2: COUNTRIES' PRIORITIES SCALED UP

S2: DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED COUNTRY PRIORITIES

according to SUN 3.0

COUNTRY FOCUS

Success is when nutrition is integrated in National Development Plans and translates down to community-level impact. This requires agile, effective, and functioning national coordination of multi-stakeholder mechanisms and the strategic positioning of SUN Focal Points. It also means that the SUN Movement serves the most vulnerable people and groups, and applies a Whole-of-Government approach.

ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Success is that the SUN Movement is able to harness new partnerships and collaboration, and has a championing role from outside the nutrition sector, also to ensure sustainable financing and investment. It requires increased involvement of the private sector in nutrition, beyond corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, and increased engagement with media institutions.

FINANCE

Success is when national priorities are financed through diversified financing sources, and overall finance for, investment in, and spending on nutrition is increased. Ultimately, success is to achieve sustainability of SUN activities at all levels.

S3: STRENGTHENED COUNTRY CAPACITY THROUGH EFFICIENT PROVISION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

according to SUN 3.0

NETWORKS

Success is when nutrition networks exist at country level, are well integrated, and cross-network activities take place. These lead to more cohesive and effective approaches for countries and remove silos between networks, building on their complementarity and focussing together on nutrition outcomes at sub-national, national, regional, and global levels. This requires that networks are integrated into the country multi-stakeholder mechanisms, and thus boost their functionality. Success also means that networks have a presence at sub-national level for greater impact.

MULTISECTORAL APPROACH

Success means the use of structured and innovative multisectoral and multi-actor approaches that are implemented at all administrative levels and programmes.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Success is when the wealth of best practices and lessons learned bear fruit for all SUN countries and inform decision-making processes at all levels. Information is used at country level systematically and feeds into the global level. Cross-country learning, especially peer learning and exchange, is facilitated. The role of networks as knowledge brokers is essential, and their engagement in facilitating knowledge management and exchange contributes to success.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Success means that capacity in countries is developed as an ongoing process. This may require that once gaps are identified, technical assistance is deployed to build capacities to fill these gaps.

S4: STRENGTHENED GOVERNANCE OF SUN THAT PROMOTES COUNTRY LEADERSHIP AND MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

according to SUN 3.0

GOVERNANCE

Success is good governance practices, characterised by inclusion, transparency, accountability, and collaboration, at all levels. The leadership role of public authorities is vital. Success also means that public authorities are actively involved in leading multisectoral action for nutrition and financing, following good governance practices. This may require that capacities of public authorities be strengthened.

ANNEX 4: Simplified Accountability Framework

Draft: SIMPLIFIED ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

WORK IN PROGRESS – FOR CONSULTATION by the OpsGroup with Movement stakeholders

Mandate	National Governments targets ¹ National Nutrition Plans and Policies	SUN Strategy 3.0 (2021-2025); individual SUN Network Strategies for SUN 3.0	Terms of Reference	Terms of Reference	Terms of Reference
Key Accountabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to prioritize nutrition; - to develop and implement strategies, with the support of the GSS and the multi-stakeholder mechanisms; - to reach communities most affected by malnutrition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To work together collectively to support SUN countries to implement plans and respond to needs; - To be pro-actively responsive to requests from SUN countries; - To reach communities, esp in FCAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to reach communities, esp in FCAS - to use voice, influence and advocacy to ensure nutrition is a growing priority among all SUN stakeholders - to contribute to the coordinated, collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to reach communities, esp in FCAS - to foster a trusted, transparent and accountable environment in which all SUN members and networks work together to support country led nutrition priorities - encourage a data driven culture and decision-making - to report regularly on progress on SUN 3.0 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to reach communities, esp in FCAS - to use voice, influence and advocacy to ensure nutrition is a growing priority among all SUN stakeholders - to provide strategic guidance to the ExCom - to review progress on SUN 3.0??
Accountable to	Communities, parliamentarians, citizens	Their members, Steering Committees, SUN Coordinator and the Executive Committee	The UNSG, Lead Group and working closely with the Executive Committee	The entire SUN Movement and the Lead Group	The entire SUN Movement

¹ For example, country specific WHA and SDGs targets

		SUN networks to each other, to SUN countries, and to the Network EXCOM members; SMS to ??			
Results tracked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nutrition impact - Spending for Nutrition - Functionality of Country Coordination Team - Alignment of stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Response to countries' requests - Capacity to deliver SUN 3.0 strategy objectives - Functionality of Networks and SMS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Country visits - Advocacy opportunities (national/regional/global) - Media coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual commitments - Annual self-assessment - Active championing of nutrition and the Movement approach - Media coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual commitments - Active championing of nutrition and SUN - Media coverage
Tracking mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint Annual Assessment - National Information Systems - N4G Commitment Report (GMR) - Financing for nutrition (tracking, expenditure etc) - Functionality index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 360 degrees survey - Periodic GSS calls/meetings - Annual workplan performance review - Annual Progress report - Functionality index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 360degrees survey - Country visits reports - Briefs - Annual Progress report - Functionality index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 360degrees survey - Commitments tracking - Periodic meetings - Meetings minutes and actions - Functionality index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 360degrees survey - Commitments tracking - Periodic meetings - Meetings minutes and actions - Functionality index

ANNEX 5: List of Indicators

WORK IN PROGRESS – FOR CONSULTATION by the OpsGroup with Movement stakeholders

S01: Strengthen and sustain strong policy and advocacy environments

Process Indicators

- Level of mobilisation of high-level advocates (champions, parliamentarians, media)
- # of government ministries and # of other stakeholders involved in nutrition action at national level
- Level and # of support given by SUN Leadership and GSS within their mandates to encourage and support a strong policy environment and prioritisation of nutrition in countries

Outcome Indicators

- # of actors reached through advocacy action (or media??)
- # of high-level policy meetings in countries, including finance ministries, with support of ExCom and Lead Group

Output Indicators

- Existence, composition, functionality and collaboration of multi-stakeholder mechanism / networks / alliances (UN agencies, CSOs, business)
- Existence of policy or legal frameworks that favour multi-stakeholder collaboration within government
- Level of political anchoring of the coordination of nutrition

S02: Develop and align shared country priorities for action

Process Indicators

- SUN countries (government and MSPs) work towards aligning and implementing their multisectoral national nutrition policies

Outcome Indicators

- Level of alignment of ministries with the nutrition plans outside the health sector
- Existence and level of integration of nutrition in National Development Plans
- Level of alignment of donors with nutrition plans
- Level of satisfaction of SUN countries with the support received by the global support structures

Output Indicators

- Existence of workplans by the different networks aligning with country priorities

S03: Build and strengthen country capacity to develop, prioritise, finance, implement and track country actions

Process Indicators

- Level of pro-active engagement of the GSS with SUN countries following the JAA
- Relevance, depth, and number of capacity development actions in special field of expertise, e.g. finance and MEAL

Outcome Indicators

- Existence and level of utilisation of information systems for nutrition
- Level of newly received expertise in financing at country level

Output Indicators

- # of high-impact nutrition actions at sub-national level
- Existence of mapping of actors involved in nutrition action

S04: Ensure SUN governance promotes country leadership and government responsibilities, aligns resources and strengthens mutual accountabilities

Process Indicators

- Use of available data to inform decision-making at all levels
 - Sub-national, national, regional and global

Outcome Indicators

- Level of financing, investment, and technical assistance for nutrition through multiple stakeholders, both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive
- Level of flexibility and responsiveness to country requests by different partners, including donors, UN agencies, and the GSS

Output Indicators

- National budget spending for nutrition