

MQSUN Guidance Note

Multi-Sectoral Planning for Nutrition

All member countries of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement are committed to developing a single set of nutrition results also called a Common Results Framework (CRF). This enables multiple stakeholders, including different government ministries and external stakeholders, to work towards common goals for the improvement of nutrition and to agree how responsibility for implementation and achievement of results will be shared by different sectors. The active engagement of all relevant sectors in the planning stages is critical to achieving these goals. For this reason, developing and implementing a CRF is a process which takes time.

Developing a common results framework

The development of a CRF is a complex process which includes but is not limited to; agreeing on common goals with sectoral partners; development of operational plans; cost estimation of actions; setting priorities; as well as continuous rigorous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) (outlined in figure 1¹). This note presents the basic requirements for estimating the costs of the interventions in an operational plan for nutrition and is meant as a guide for countries engaged in estimating costs and financing multi-sectoral plans.

Figure 1: The process for developing a common results framework



This note focuses on the basic requirements for effective multi-sectoral planning towards common nutrition results, as highlighted in red in the diagram. The process involves determining common pathways for sectoral strategies and aligning sectoral plans to nutrition targets. This note is meant as a reference for countries engaged in developing multi-sectoral plans. It is not a blueprint to be followed step by step, rather it highlights key aspects to consider in starting the process based on the experiences of Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition (MQSUN). It is important to note that the terminology may differ from country to country. Each country may take a different approach and should build on its strengths and the systems already in place.

¹ SMS, adapted from World Bank (1998)

Preparing for the multisectoral planning process

Before beginning the planning process, ideally the following components should be in place:

- An acknowledgment of a nutrition goal in the National Development Plans (or similar overarching development strategy)
- SUN Launch
- Designated time and commitment from the relevant sectors, including personnel.
- A high level multi-sector platform for leadership and co-ordination with a committed Focal Point/leader who has the ability to convene all the relevant sectors and ensure accountability
- An appointed person (usually the focal point/technical focal point) or group to lead and drive the planning process

When beginning this process it is important to recognise that the most important element is gaining the commitment to nutrition of all sectors and stakeholders; therefore the planning process is as important (if not more so) than the final CRF document.

Learning from previous experiences²

Reflection is a key element of any planning process. Multi-sectoral plans for nutrition were first introduced in the 1970s, followed by a drive in the 1990s to develop national plans of action for nutrition. Whilst these two drives largely failed to deliver the intended results, their review and evaluation has highlighted many lessons to learn.

Weaknesses of past multi-sectoral approaches include:

- Insufficient appreciation of the need for high level political commitment
- The belief that a single budget line for nutrition was enough
- Not recognising the role and need for support by nutrition champions/strong leads to coordinate stakeholders
- A top-down approach with government departments being coerced into collaborative activities
- Limited guidance on how to prioritise activities
- Poor designation of responsibilities
- Poor co-ordination between the sectors
- Poor availability of quality nutrition data
- Lack of human capacity in nutrition

Key actions to facilitate effective multi-sectoral planning

The following steps are examples of activities which can help in the process of bringing stakeholders together to align around nutrition and set common targets. These steps are not necessarily followed in a linear fashion, but can be drawn upon, depending on where in the process you are starting from and what is already in place in your country.

Build political will and commitment

It is essential to build high level political will and gain commitment to nutrition from all levels of government and external actors (donors, civil society, private sector, UN agencies etc.). From MQSUN experiences, the following actions have been effective:

a) Situating the focal point in a central location:

experience has shown that planning discussions and development of a CRF are most effective when facilitated by a neutral party, rather than from within a particular ministry and especially under the authority of the highest level of government. Therefore, situating the focal point centrally, for example, within the prime minister's office, or ministry of planning, can help facilitate unbiased representation from all ministries involved and provide clear directions to all relevant sectors.

b) Identifying nutrition champions within different sectors to advocate for nutrition. Approach individuals who are, or could be supportive of nutrition and are well placed or influential.

c) Inviting ministers to global SUN meetings: some countries have encouraged ministers from other sectors (for example, the Minister for Agriculture from Bangladesh) to attend these meetings, where member countries come together to discuss priorities, challenges and best practices. This can be a key event which helps to gain commitment from that sector.

Raise awareness and understanding about nutrition

Awareness and understanding of nutrition issues is often limited, especially in sectors not traditionally engaged with nutrition. There is a need to explain the nutrition challenges of the country to actors from various sectors to clarify why they are essential to the process and to discuss and identify the roles each sector should play in addressing the issues. Some useful tools to help raise awareness include:

a) A contextual analysis which reviews the current nutrition situation, the burden of malnutrition and its determinants and trends. This can be used as a tool to explain the relationship of nutrition to other sectors, using the UNICEF Conceptual Framework of Determinants of Child Nutrition. It should also include an analysis of the political environment for nutrition (commitment and policy environment). The process of contextualising nutrition problems helps promote and develop individual understanding as well as a common knowledge base.

² Independent Comprehensive Evaluation of the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement: Final Report. 2014. http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SUN_ICE_FullReport-All%281-5-15%29.pdf

b) A gap analysis which explores the national and subnational programming strengths and weaknesses. This may take the form of a review of available documentation and a series of stakeholder interviews.

c) Review of the existing budget for nutrition, for example, focusing on questions such as, is there a budget and what does it cover.

Note: availability of relevant, current and disaggregated nutrition information are essential to the process.

d) Stakeholder mapping and interviews on understanding and awareness. This is a useful process which helps identify areas where advocacy for nutrition is required.

e) Development of tailored messages. Nutrition challenges should be communicated to different stakeholders in different ways, depending on the priorities of each sector. For example, economic cost-benefit analyses can be helpful in engaging with the ministry of finance whereas an outline of the effects of good school feeding on the attendance and retention of girls and boys in schools has more relevance for the education sector.

f) Multi-sector workshops to bring together relevant stakeholders, share concerns and priorities. Dissemination of findings from the contextual analysis can be used as a platform for raising awareness of the problem, engaging stakeholders, identifying roles and prioritising actions within the local context.

g) Identify opportunities to bring people together to discuss nutrition. For example, the SUN launch, World Breastfeeding Day etc.

Align stakeholder interests and prioritise actions

To agree how responsibility for implementation and achievement of results will be shared by different sectors, all stakeholders need to align with a nutrition goal/target and prioritise appropriate actions and interventions towards achievement of that goal in their plans. Strong and effective multisector nutrition platforms need to be in place to support planning, co-ordination, M&E and ensure accountability. The following is a set of actions which can help to facilitate these processes:

a) Develop clear terms of reference for the multi-sector platforms: these should include action plans with timeframes and a named individual from each sector who is a member of the platform and acts as focal point for his/her sector/ministry.

b) Prioritisation sessions: during workshops, create space for group work where each sector can work together to develop and agree the overall priority actions. Dissemination of findings from the contextual analysis process is a good starting point for knowledge sharing. During this process, different sectors should develop an understanding of their potential contributions. Multi-sector discussions can reveal surprising information, for example:

- i. Agricultural extension workers may already be delivering nutrition messages

- ii. Highlight any previously unknown overlap of activities of different ministries

- iii. Some ministries have decentralised planning whilst others do not

Whilst nutrition specific actions can be clearly demarcated to a single ministry others, including complementary feeding, may cover more than one sector. For example; if the quality and/or quantity of water is an issue in particular areas or locations, such as health centres, then discussion should determine which ministry is responsible for each role.

c) Assess stakeholder strategies and policies with current nutritional thinking to ensure alignment.

d) Develop an action plan for each sector: ensure co-ordination with the local planning cycle, involve the local authorities and ensure that nutrition issues are included in the overall local development plans. Plans will need to be costed, budgeted and submitted to the ministry of finance or appropriate structure for funding.

e) Ensure resultant plans are realistic and achievable: prioritising actions helps to prevent the plans becoming overly complex and difficult to follow through. Focus should be on what is already in place and how that can be improved as opposed to radical changes. Factors such as staff capacity (ability and numbers), geographic targeting, resource and funding availability need to be taken into account.

f) Start small: some countries begin with just two or three interventions per sector or target a package of activities to selected districts in the country in the first stages and then build upon these in the next planning phase.

g) Align implementation plan with M&E, and cost estimation: bring these pieces together to ensure that implementation targets match the M&E targets and everything can be mapped. This makes it easy to follow and evaluate.

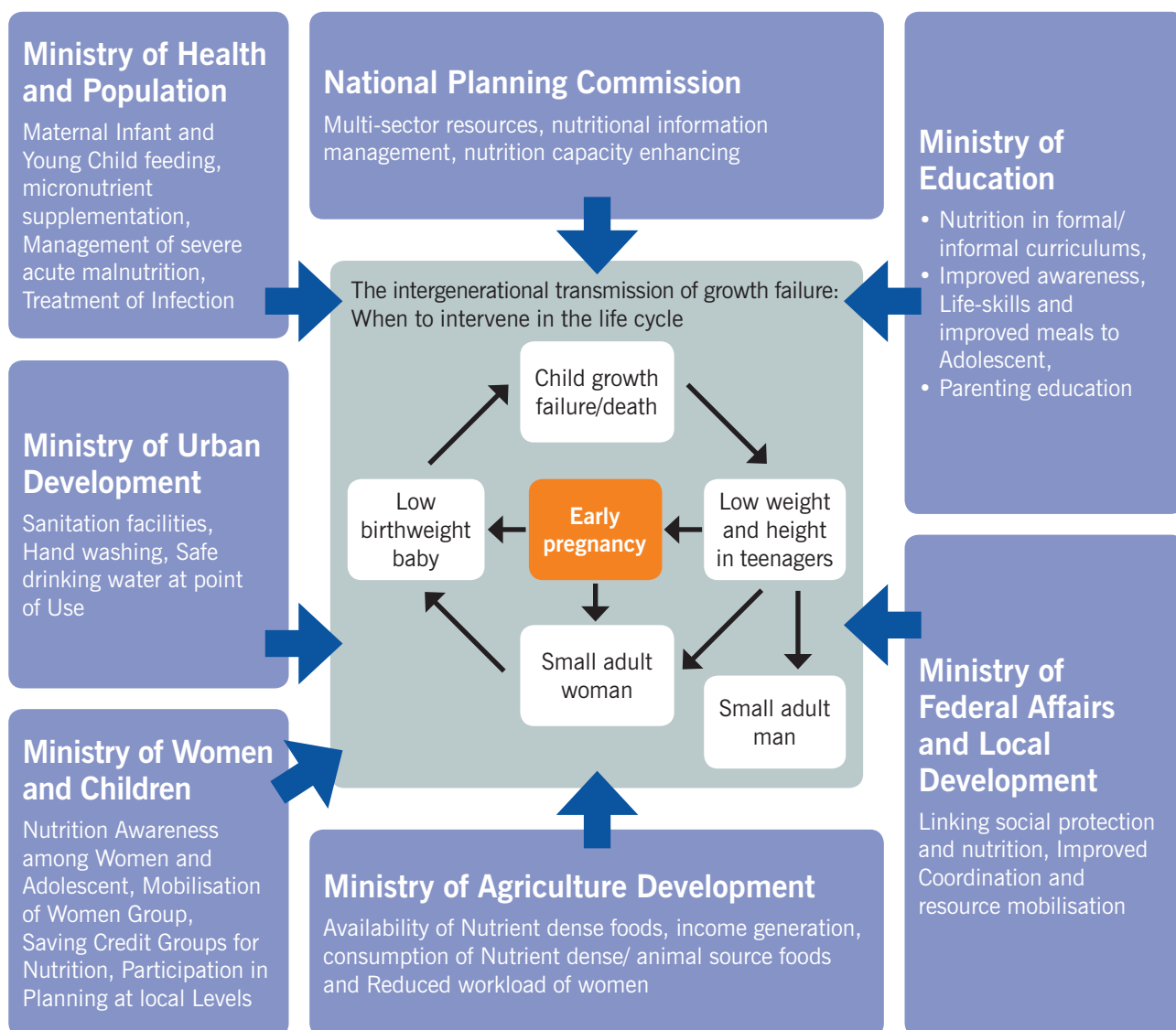
Concluding remarks

Multi-sectoral planning for nutrition results is an early step in the development of a common results framework. Continued multi-sectoral collaboration is needed throughout the different stages of CRF development, and is an ongoing and integral part of the process that builds ownership and commitment.

The resultant plans must be clear and complementary; for example the CRF should guide the operational plan which will in turn guide the M&E plan. The M&E plan will be expected to clearly outline the main activities for the cost estimation. Hence the implementation of the operational activities will be clear and easy to monitor linked with the costed plan as well as the M&E plan.

Ultimately the CRF is a conceptual process that directs action towards the identified common goal – typically a reduction in stunting. The process cannot be prescriptive and should be tailored to the specific nutritional needs and the existing policy and strategy context in a country. It should be viewed as an iterative responsive process.

Figure 2: An Example of a Common Results Framework



MQSUN provides technical assistance and knowledge services to the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and its partners in support of pro-poor programmes in nutrition. This note was produced by the MQSUN partners with input from the SUN Movement Secretariat.

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