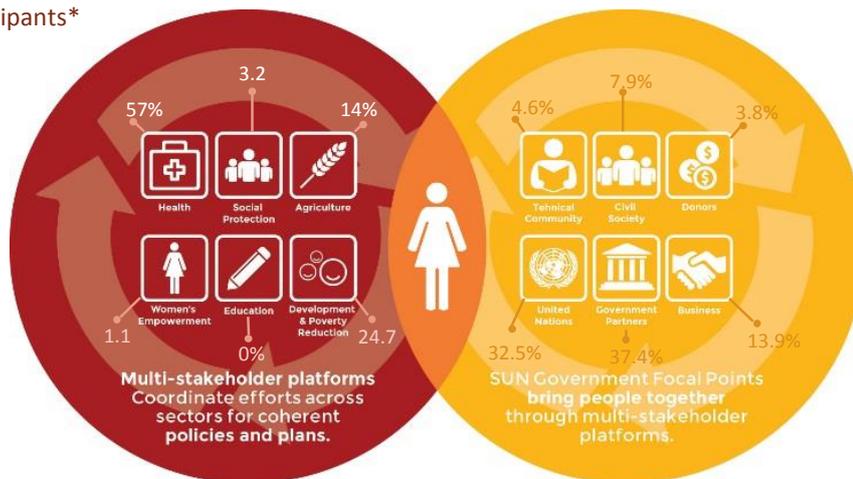


Diversity of Participants*



The 23rd meeting of the SUN Country Network focused its thematic discussion on the experiences of political leaders, policymakers, nutrition champions, program managers and implementers in building political momentum for nutrition and sustaining it through deliberate action.

SUN Countries **Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guatemala, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Senegal, the Gambia and Uganda** were invited to kick-start the discussions. They presented their experiences and stimulated a cross-country exchange on the lessons learned through their efforts to sustain political commitment for nutrition action.

1. Factors in enabling sustained commitment for improving nutrition

Putting nutrition at the centre of society and development

In many SUN Countries, the recognition of the right to food and nutrition in the constitution, has provided the necessary grounding to ensure nutrition is an enduring priority. **Ethiopia, Niger, Uganda and Malawi** all raised its role in being a key basis for subsequent action, recognising a State's duty to improve the nutritional status of its people. The Constitution of **Uganda** recognises the nation's role in encouraging and promoting proper nutrition through mass education and

other appropriate means in order to build a healthy country. This recognition was the result of a national assessment of issues constraining human potential, which impacts employment, productivity and development. This framing of nutrition also made it a national agenda issue of the Prime Minister of Uganda, which was operationalised in the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan (2011-2016).

Malawi: Nutrition enshrined in the constitution, Article 13:

"The State shall actively promote the welfare and development of the people of Malawi by progressively adopting and implementing policies and legislation aimed at achieving the following goals: Nutrition: To achieve adequate nutrition for all in order to promote good health and self-sufficiency. (...)"

SUN Countries highlighted that **emphasising the link between improved nutrition, increased productivity and economic growth** is essential to position nutrition as a priority issue on the national agenda. This has in-turn helped ensure nutrition is politically prioritised and paved the way for its inclusion in **national development plans**. In **Cote d'Ivoire**, nutrition's link with human development was framed in the country's updated National Nutrition Policy (2016-2020), which was then elaborated in both the national Health Policy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (National Development Plan). **Lao PDR** used compelling evidence from the National Economic Research Institute (NERI) in 2013, that the nation was facing an annual loss of 2.4% of Gross Domestic Group due to undernutrition. This helped to position nutrition as a priority in the 8th National Social Economic Development Plan (2016-2020) with engagement beyond health sector.

Governments, supported by country stakeholders have also seized the opportunity to promote the importance of nutrition in the development agenda at the occasion of **crises or food insecurity situations**.

- **Mauritania** has put nutrition as a priority in its development plan, The Strategic Framework to Fight

*Percentages are indicative only and aim to demonstrate diversity of participation. Stakeholder figures represent all participants and sectoral figures represent participants from government sectors.

9-13 May 2016
345 participants
11 teleconferences
7 x English, 3 x French and 1 x Spanish
49 Countries and the Indian State of Maharashtra participated.
SUN Countries:
Bangladesh; Benin; Botswana; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cambodia; Chad; Comoros; Congo Brazzaville; Costa Rica; Cote d'Ivoire; Democratic Republic of Congo; El Salvador; Ethiopia; Ghana; Guatemala; Guinea-Bissau; Guinea-Conakry; Haiti; Indonesia; Kenya; Kyrgyz Republic; Lao PDR; Lesotho; Liberia; Malawi; Mali; Mauritania; Mozambique; Myanmar; Namibia; Nepal; Niger; Pakistan; Peru; Philippines; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Somalia; South Sudan; Swaziland; Tajikistan; Tanzania; The Gambia; Uganda; Vietnam; Yemen; Zambia; and Zimbabwe.

Against Poverty (2010-2015), because of the recurrent crisis of the Sahel region

- In **Guinea Conakry**, the Nutrition Cluster set up at the time of Ebola crisis in 2014 has enabled collaboration between nutrition actors in the country's post-Ebola efforts
- In 1995, **Senegal** prioritised nutrition following the economic crisis which erupted from the CFA Franc devaluation.

High level positioning of nutrition

The positioning of **national coordination mechanisms for nutrition** (multi-stakeholder platforms) and the nomination of **SUN Government Focal Points at a high-level** was considered as two major success factors in sustaining political commitment for nutrition. This has helped support the development of nutrition policies and integration of nutrition in sectoral policies, which has advanced multi-sectoral implementation and mobilisation of funds. In **Sierra Leone**, the national SUN Secretariat is directly supervised by the Presidency with its operationalisation handled by the Office of the Vice President. This structure reportedly allows coordination and helps synergise the actions of nutrition stakeholders. **Benin** also stated that a Supra-Ministerial placement of nutrition coordination has helped identify and mitigate tensions when working with different ministries. However, it was noted that high-level positioning can also bring risks, such as loss of momentum and focus following changes of government or coordination challenges with institutions traditionally responsible for nutrition. For example in **Malawi**, the coordination of nutrition has recently moved from the Office of the President and Cabinet to the Ministry of Health, however multi-sectoral coordination and implementation is continuing despite a shift to a sectoral ministry.

The commitment of **high level political leaders** such as the President and the Prime Minister was considered as an inspiration to keep nutrition as a priority on the agenda and to ensure widespread engagement. For example, the National Nutrition Program was launched by the President in **Zimbabwe**. The Prime Minister of **Uganda** recently launched a National Nutrition Advocacy and Communication Strategy and **UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon** launched the Cost of Hunger Study in **Madagascar** bringing widespread attention to the issue.

"Malnutrition is the largest single contributor to physical and mental under-development and disease. Personally I am committed to taking up these challenges at all levels."

Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina.

Sustaining commitment through policy, programmes and legislation

A demonstration of commitment and a key way to sustain it is through the development and approval of **nutrition-focused decrees or laws**. In **Indonesia**, the National Action Plan on Food and Nutrition has been in place since 2001, as mandated

by the Food Law No. 18/2012. Article. 6 that states "Food and Nutrition Action Plan to be formulated by the central and local governments every 5-year period". Supporting this is a Presidential Decree No 42/2013 on Scaling Up Nutrition. Stakeholders in **Vietnam** recently advocated for new legislation on children that includes nutrition examination, counselling and treatment for malnutrition. Vietnam also highlighted that it is essential to link advocacy for nutrition with the legislative duties of policy makers as it is part of their mandate to oversee the ratification of laws.

Commitment at the global and regional level

A key feature of discussions centered on the importance of global and regional initiatives to help sustain commitment, inspire country level action and their role in helping to create an environment where commitments can be translated into results. Several of the participating countries specifically referred to their membership in the **SUN Movement** as a key means of sustaining their national nutrition agendas. The **International Conferences on Nutrition 1 and 2 (ICN)** have helped galvanise attention, as has the ratification of key regional strategies and declarations, such as the **African Union Malabo Declaration**, or the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** strategy for food fortification and salt iodisation, or the **UEMOA (Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine)** strategy on food fortification and mass consumption. The ushering in of the **Millennium Development Goals** prompted the development of national targets in some countries. In 2015, the adoption of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** has also encouraged countries such as **Congo Brazzaville, Nepal** and **Mozambique** to set ambitious new nutrition objectives.

2. Actions leading to secured commitments for nutrition

SUN Countries demonstrated through the discussion that political commitment can be secured through deliberate action. The tactics discussed included building on what is already in place and improving institutional structures, undertaking pro-active and strategic advocacy and outreach and building effective nutrition leadership at all levels.

Using existing structures to institutionalise nutrition

The **existence of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder platforms** were highlighted as essential elements to facilitate dialogue and action across sectors. For example, since 2001, the **Peru National Roundtable for the Fight Against Poverty**, a State-Civil Society decentralised platform, has been key in facilitating political dialogue and fostering agreement. The Roundtable has promoted "governance agreements at local and regional level" that include nutrition commitments, and has also been pivotal in promoting social auditing through specialised groups between representatives from State and Civil Society.

The **creation of a permanent structure** that convenes representatives of relevant sectors, has an implementation role and is based at a high level, has helped sustain commitment. This is often reinforced by **decentralisation** of the platform. In 1998, **Mozambique** approved by decree the creation of a multi-sectoral coordination structure, the Technical Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security, which has since been decentralised to 11 country provinces since 2005 with approved action plans for 10. In **Pakistan**, existing governmental structures were used in each of the Provinces to host nutrition cells and local health chiefs were nominated to become decentralised SUN Government Focal Persons.

In several **West African countries**, the **'communes'** roles has grown in importance. The 2012 ECOWAS forum on nutrition reinforced this trend in emphasising the role of local authorities, communities, civil society and the private sector in scaling up nutrition. The Association of Municipalities in **Benin** has been created and is actively involved in advocacy activities at the community level and in **Burkina Faso**, the communes were identified as critical actors in the implementation of decentralised plans for nutrition.

Using evidence and being strategic in advocacy

Amongst the different advocacy actions to influence decision-makers, at least three participating countries stressed the importance of **informal contacts and networks, to reach high level leaders**, especially in hierarchical contexts. In **Burkina Faso**, one Member of Parliament made direct contact with the President to advocate for the creation of a specific budget line for nutrition. This action was held up as a success and also led to the creation of a **Parliamentarian Network** for nutrition.

Participants recognised that **gathering evidence to support the advocacy process was essential**. At least half of the participating countries stated that evidence gathered from scientific research, economic analysis and national nutrition and health surveys made a difference. **Swaziland** stated that the results of the 2013 Cost of Hunger study created political awareness and facilitated the engagement of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Planning. **Malawi's Cost of Hunger study** built momentum for political and donor support, whilst generating debate that resulted in increased budget allocations for nutrition. This economic advocacy makes the investment case for nutrition evidence based, urgent and compelling. **Senegal** also emphasised the need to use a results-based approach, and use positive changes from pilot projects to communicate to leaders the need for longer term programs.

The **development of advocacy and communication strategies** was recommended by participants as they allow multiple stakeholders to align behind a common vision, set joint advocacy objectives, establish advocacy targets and speak in a common voice. While different stakeholders will have different strengths in terms of advocacy, working

toward a common narrative can rally nutrition stakeholders behind the change they wish to see. In different SUN



Nine questions for strategic advocacy

1. Who can make it happen?
2. What do they need to hear?
3. Who do they need to hear it from?
4. How can we make sure they hear it?
5. What do we have?
6. What do we need?
7. How do we begin to take action?
8. How do we tell if it's working?

Developed by Jim Schultz, founder and executive director of The Democracy Center

Countries, this process has been led by the Government or by civil society coalitions.

Mobilising and organising nutrition leadership at all levels

Most participating countries attributed the responsibility for change to the effectiveness of government bodies, with the support and advocacy of different actors – particularly civil society, parliamentarians, United Nations (UN) Agencies, donors, academics, business, the media and local and religious leaders.

The discussions emphasised the essential role of **development partners**. The presence and pro-activity of donors and UN agencies often helped mobilise political leaders and funding. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the World Bank (WB) advocated for the adoption of a strategy to fight poverty along with a development plan that includes nutrition. Their role was key in encouraging the participation of the Ministry of Finance. The in-country presence of **UN initiatives such as the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger (REACH) partnership** between WFP, UNICEF, WHO, FAO and IFAD, were reportedly instrumental in supporting programming, advocacy and resource mobilisation at different levels. In **Chad**, stakeholders organised a high level forum to disseminate the nutrition policy and action plan. REACH helped secure funding by writing to the Prime Minister of Chad directly.

The actions of **civil society** were also stressed as key for sustaining political commitment, especially during periods of political transition. In **El Salvador**, after a new government was elected in 2014, civil society lobbied with new national and local authorities to keep nutrition targets, policies and plans on the agenda. In **Peru**, **Parliamentarians**, social media (Twitter and Facebook) and personal networks were leveraged by the Initiative against Child Undernutrition (IDI) to ensure that all presidential candidates would sign a letter of commitment for nutrition.

Champions for nutrition

The nomination of Champions has proven to be a key tactic for effective advocacy. **Chad** has nominated political and sectoral champions across relevant ministries and **Mozambique** has elected five high-profile public figures comprised of First Ladies (current and former), famed musicians, government ministers and religious leaders. The nomination of regional champions for nutrition has also shown to be a strong strategy to raise high level awareness. The former President of **Cape Verde**, Mr. Mascarenhas Monteiro, has been a Champion for the West Africa region between 2011 and 2014 and the former first lady of **South Africa**, Mrs. Graça Machel, has been actively advocating for women's rights and nutrition over the last years.

In **Tanzania**, leading up to the 2015 elections, the Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania (PANITA) advocated for the inclusion of nutrition in political manifestos. In **Zambia**, the Civil Society Alliance (CSOSUN) organised Parliamentarians through the formation of the All Party Parliamentary caucus on Food and Nutrition, which unites Parliamentarians across political parties to have a coordinated voice for nutrition on the floor of parliament. These efforts culminated with a workshop with political parties who presented their commitments to the public during a press conference (read more about the Vote Nutrition Campaign). Participants in the country calls emphasised that taking the time to engage Parliamentarians can be impactful and a key tactic in ensuring nutrition thrives as a political priority. More than half of the SUN Countries already have **Parliamentarian Networks** in place.

The involvement of **business** in supporting commitment was also noted. In **Senegal**, the private sector was involved in discussions on the enforcement of food fortification laws, as part of their corporate social responsibilities activities. As a result, they now work in collaboration with the Government's decentralised services for nutrition.

The **Academia and research** sector was constantly affirmed for their role in informing nutrition decision making and generating the evidence that can be used by advocates and politicians in making nutrition a priority. A SUN Research Network was recently created in **Guinea Conakry** and **Pakistan** to reinforce the unique contribution of academia. Engaging with **journalists** was also highlighted, noting their role in generating public debate, creating mass awareness

and holding decision makers to account. For example, civil society actors in **Ghana** engaged journalists to hold politicians to account on the implementation of their National Nutrition Plan. In **Uganda** and **Bangladesh**, time has been taken to build the capacity of journalists to report on nutrition (see reporting handbook and media engagement guide).

As highlighted by participating countries, coordinated efforts of **these stakeholders** that support advocacy, awareness raising and practical activities for nutrition has supported efforts. In **Burkina Faso**, the UN and civil society networks organise joint meetings, identify their roles and responsibilities and target decision-makers on agreed themes. In **Benin**, a Communication Task Force was created, composed by representatives of government, civil society, along with technical and financial partners. A joint communication strategy for nutrition is being developed, with the aim of changing behaviors of decision makers, right to those at the community level.

Recommendations from SUN countries

- ✓ The integration of nutrition into national development plans is helpful to sustain political commitment (Mozambique)
- ✓ Advocacy efforts must be sustained since arrangements can be changed due to political transitions (Cote d'Ivoire)
- ✓ High level national events involving all key stakeholders helps maintain momentum and commitment for nutrition (Lao PDR)
- ✓ Continuous reporting through the media helps high level people to keep engaged (Uganda)
- ✓ Individual interest, passion and commitment lead to better communication and advocacy (Kyrgyzstan)
- ✓ Identify key opinion leaders (politicians, artist, and parliamentarians) and make them a nutrition champion (Uganda, Malawi, Ghana).
- ✓ Work on a common understanding and framing of nutrition with a set of core sectors (start small and target crucial ones), explain the rationale behind the setting up of a high level platform, and adopt a participative approach for strategy elaboration and implementation, respecting the power and autonomy of the actors (Senegal)
- ✓ Organise exchange visits or ask for training from countries that demonstrate good practices (Vietnam)

This summary was developed by the SUN Movement Secretariat. More information about SUN Country Network Meetings and the presentations can be found at <http://scalingupnutrition.org/progress-in-the-sun-movement/country-network-call-notes-updates>.

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