

MAIN OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SCALING UP NUTRITION (SUN) DELEGATION'S VISIT TO THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

1st -3rd May 2017

BACKGROUND

Lesotho joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement on July 2nd 2014 under the leadership of the Prime Minister. At the time, the Food and Nutrition Council envisaged by a Cabinet Memorandum signed by the relevant Ministries in 1977 had become dormant, leaving the Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office (FNCO), which was envisaged as its secretariat, in sole charge of nutrition. In its joining letter, Lesotho highlighted the need to strengthen the capacities of the FNCO and the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Education and to better coordinate their interventions. Currently, a government liaison person for the SUN Movement is nominated by the director of FNCO, to palliate the absence of the official SUN Focal Point appointment. In May 2017, a SUN delegation met with all stakeholders to collectively take stock on progress to address malnutrition and propose recommendations on a way forward, as outlined in this report.

OBSERVATIONS FROM MEETINGS WITH THE GOVERNMENT

The FNCO is a technical body under the Prime Minister office and is decentralized in all the districts, which puts it in a good institutional space to coordinate and monitor the contributions of various sectors to nutrition. However, as the comprehensive nutrition governance system established through the 1977 Cabinet Memorandum is no longer in place, the results achieved by FNCO are constrained by a lack of strategic guidance, clarity in its mandate, political support and domestic funding. The Disaster Management Authority (DMA) which manages nutrition in emergencies and also depends on the Prime Minister office, has harnessed most of the human and financial resources available for food and nutrition. In the context of recurrent climate-induced disasters such as the latest El Nino phenomenon, the sustainable approach put forward by FNCO, which considers building the resilience of agriculture and within the people, is both more sustainable and cost-effective. **There was a consensus among all the Ministers and Principal Secretaries met that more linkages and a fair split of resources between FNCO and DMA is needed. They also agree that a high level committee operating at their levels should be (re)established, to drive the fight against malnutrition and guide the work of FNCO.** Some of them mentioned that a ministerial taskforce had been established to look at the necessary changes and improve the cogency of His Majesty The King as a Nutrition Champion of the African Union, several months ago.

At present, there are several ongoing interventions that contribute to better nutrition in the health, education and agricultural sectors, including, among others:

The school feeding program funded by the government which has broad coverage and is being redesigned in order to integrate a homegrown supply system that will benefit the wider community. Combined with strong efforts to reduce dropout from girls in the education system, this has led to a constant increase of female secondary education enrollment, which is commendable.

The curriculum of nurses and health workers is being enhanced to better integrate nutrition and the ministry of health encourages breastfeeding including from mothers affected by HIV whenever appropriate. It has successfully integrated a deworming component to its nutrition campaigns in the North.

The ministry of agriculture has many programs and projects that contribute to enhanced food security in the context of climate change and less dependency of South Africa. The existence of a nutrition unit within the ministry has the great potential to harmonize and optimize the impact of these initiatives.

However, it was acknowledged that national investments to scale-up the interventions that strengthen nutrition have been limited, as the majority of them are still financed by the United Nations agencies.

Mentions were also made that some of the public investments, earmarked for nutrition, are often re-allocated to other sectors and activities along the way.

To deliver on the expected results of the existing interventions, **the newly launched Lesotho Food and Nutrition Policy 2015-2025 and its envisaged multi-sectoral strategic plan for nutrition (MSPN) 2016-2020 will provide a conducive framework as they focus on coordinating and rationalizing existing and prioritized sectoral programs that target the 1000 days of the beginning of life and focus on reaching out to communities.** Several ministers and Principal Secretaries have agreed that by rationalizing current spending among interventions (more nutrition for the money) and by allocating more public resources to nutrition interventions and coordination mechanisms (more money for nutrition), **starting financing such a plan through the state budget was possible. All of them agree that investing in nutrition is not a cost but an investment that has the potential to catalyze the economic growth.**

OBSERVATIONS FROM MEETING WITH THE UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

The United Nations Agencies in Lesotho have featured nutrition high in the current United Nations Development Assistance Framework, as a reflection of the prominence of nutrition in the Lesotho National Development Plan 2012-2017. Hence, the United Nations agencies have supported the government to elaborate key policy and advocacy documents and are currently working towards strengthening the capacity of the FNCO. Despite this, **nutrition seems unequally owned and driven by the various agencies. More could be done to mainstream nutrition in a coherent and truly collective UN programming, while a common advocacy approach towards the government's ownership over its own development priorities should be favored.**

OBSERVATIONS FROM MEETINGS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND DONORS

Beyond the United Nations, the mobilization of partners on nutrition issues has proven challenging. Despite disparities and high poverty rates, there is a limited presence of bilateral donors and international non-governmental organizations, mainly attributed to the enclaving situation of Lesotho and its status of lower middle income country.

- Active donors focus their resources on humanitarian relief, predominantly in relation to drought and HIV and they have stated that an **upscale of domestic investment in nutrition might be more conducive for them to mobilize their own resources.**

- Civil society organizations (CSO) are strong in implementing actions at the community level, specifically in relation to research and HIV when it comes to nutrition. **This small but active community of CSO was encouraged to step up and partner with other sectoral coalitions of CSOs, to scale up their reach and results but also to consider the added-value of advocacy in relation to nutrition.** The presence of journalists as well as powerful advocacy tools such as the latest Cost of Hunger report which shows the costs borne by the sectors of health, education and economy amount to around 7% of the GDP of Lesotho, can open up some ways that are currently unexplored.

OBSERVATIONS FROM MEETING WITH HIS MAJESTY, THE KING LETSIE III

His Majesty, the King Letsie III, who is both the African Union's champion for nutrition and the FAO ambassador for food security and nutrition, recognizes the role of nutrition in the development of people and the nation and offered to use his role of advisor to the **Government to advocate for its recognition and the need to invest in it, as well as to take up some of the challenges discussed with the current and the next governments.**

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The **government recognizes nutrition** as a key driver for the development of the nation and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is not yet fully the case for the donors and civil society. The long-standing and high level commitment from the government to address malnutrition has led to the presence of many **promising elements in relation to nutrition planning, coordination and prioritization. However, the overall approach is still characterized by fragmentation and under-investment.** If Lesotho is to realize its 'Vision 2020' and implement Agenda 2030, it needs to **strengthen the existing framework and**

turn its focus from commitment to actions, by allocating more and better national funds to nutrition, so that the current system fulfils its potential by delivering on tangible results and impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The SUN Movement delegation, based on their observations in Lesotho and experiences drawn from other SUN countries, would like to **encourage the highest levels of the government of Lesotho and other stakeholders to consider focusing their collective efforts on the following priorities**, as practical ways to deliver tangible and sustainable results:

- Allocate funds from the 2018 budget onwards (being negotiated) to the development and implementation of the MSPN 2016-2020 and ensure a fair share between humanitarian and developments funds for nutrition.
- Develop a resources mobilization strategy starting with domestic funds to leverage donors/investors' contributions.
- Integrate the envisaged MSPN 2016-2020 at the heart of the next National Strategic Development Plan (under development) and the 2030 Agenda implementation plan.
- Reactivate high level governance to ensure leadership and ownership at government level, over nutrition matters in sectoral ministries and appoint the highest executive position for a focal point to steer the collective efforts and foster accountability across sectors.
- Strengthen the authority and the capacity of the FNCO so that it is equipped with enough and well trained staff to carry out its mandate. Implement the multi-sectoral strategic plan for nutrition with a focus on reaching out to communities, by ensuring agricultural extension workers, schools in rural areas and communities themselves are capacitated to deliver services, education and behavior change communication that contribute to better nutrition in the 1000 first days of life.
- Call upon the United Nations, civil society, donors and private sector, to play their roles, by reaching out and mobilize their constituencies to contribute to the scaling up nutrition efforts, while respecting country ownership and aligning with the government's strategy and direction.

ANNEXES

SUN Delegation Composition:

Ms. Gerda Verburg, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations and SUN Movement Coordinator

Ms. Thuy Nguyen, Communication and Digital Media Advisor, SUN Movement Secretariat

Ms. Fanny Granchamp, Policy advisor, SUN Movement Secretariat

Agenda:

Monday 1 st May 2017		
1400	Arrival of the delegation in Maseru	
1400 - 1500	Briefing with UN Agencies in Lesotho	PARTICIPANTS - UNRC ad interim and WHO Representative, Mrs. Cornelia Atsyor, - UNRO Coordination specialist, Asel Abdurahmanova - UNAIDS Country director: Alti Zwandor - FAO country director: Yves Klompenhouwer - WFP Dep. Director M. Mangoni - WFP Nutrition & HIV Ms. Chapfunga - UNICEF Nutrition officer, Lineo Mathule, - UNDP deputy country director, christy ahenkora
1530 - 1630	Meeting with staff of Food & Nutrition Coordinating office (FNCO)	PARTICIPANTS All FNCO members including FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa FNCO Regional coordinating officer and SUN FP a.i : Tiisetso Elias
Tuesday 2 nd May 2017		
0800 – 0845	Meeting with the Prime Minister office	PARTICIPANTS - Minister in the Prime Minister office, Hon. Palo Leteetee - Principal Secretary in the PM office, Mr. Makalo Theko - FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa
1000- 1045	Meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture and food security	PARTICIPANTS - PS of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nchemo Maile - Head of the nutrition unit - FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa
1100- 1145	Meeting with the Ministry of Education and training	PARTICIPANTS - deputy PS of education - EECD (early child care and development) officer - School feeding officer - FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa
1150- 12.30	Meeting with the Ministry of Finances	PARTICIPANTS - PS of the ministry of finances, Tom Mpetla - FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa
1300 – 1400	Lunch with civil society	PARTICIPANTS Clinton Health Initiative Lesotho service of aids, Lesotho nutrition dietetic association; NGO specialized in delivering nutrition services at the community level. Universal Research Company; Assist – for the quality improvement of science in health (work with HIV) World Vision - FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa
1400 – 1500	Meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations.	PARTICIPANTS - Minister Hon. Tlohang Sekhamane

1505 – 1545	Meeting with the Ministry of Planning	PARTICIPANTS - PS of the Ministry, Majakathata Mokoena Thakhisi
1600 – 1700	Meeting with Donors	PARTICIPANTS - Head of cooperation, European Union delegation, Theodorus KASPERS - Deputy head of Mission of the US Embassy, Elizabeth A. Pelletreau - Nutrition officer in USAID
Wednesday 3 rd May 2017		
0800- 0845	Meeting with the Ministry of health	PARTICIPANTS - Minister of Health - FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa
1000- 1045	Meeting with His Majesty, Letsie III	PARTICIPANTS - King Letsie III - FNCO director: Dr. Sebotsa
1100- 1145	Debrief and Press conference	