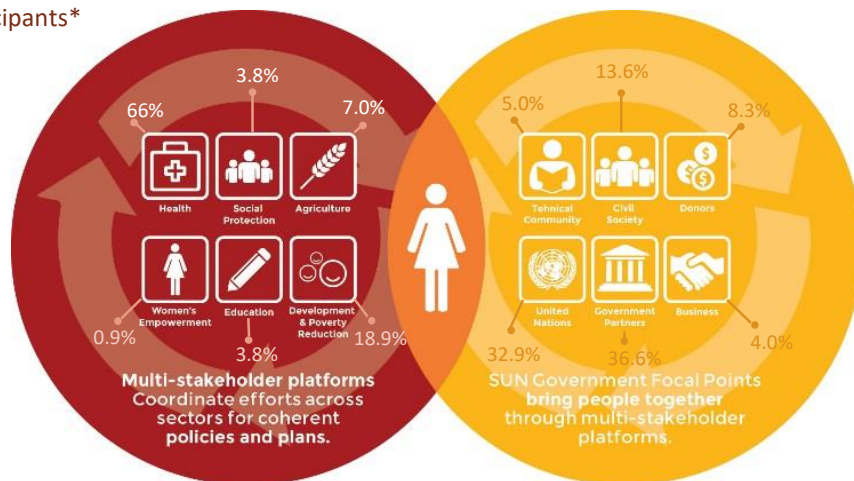


Diversity of Participants*



The 24th meeting of the SUN Country Network focused its thematic discussion on successes, lessons and challenges in aligning multiple stakeholders behind national nutrition priorities. The discussion was organised around for main areas: 1) factors and mechanisms facilitating alignment of stakeholders at country level, 2) ways to assess alignment; 3) challenges in aligning stakeholders 4) the SUN Movement's support to country efforts towards better alignment and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stimulus to guide and reinforce alignment.

The SUN Movement emphasises the importance of alignment of all stakeholders who have a role to play in fighting malnutrition: governments, civil society, the private sector, United Nations agencies, donors and academia. The SUN Movement Strategy and Roadmap 2016-2020 encourages stakeholders to review how they contribute to nutrition at country level and to foster alignment behind government policies and plans and coordination with other stakeholders. Indeed, improved alignment has the potential to optimise the reach and coherence of nutrition actions and therefore improve results and impact.

An overall key takeaway from the discussion is how variedly SUN Countries define alignment. For some countries such as Uganda, alignment means ensuring different actors have the same attitudes and beliefs, with actions such as establishing a breastfeeding corner in the Parliament to set an example for the general population. Other countries like

Bangladesh underlined that alignment means being efficient, for instance when they identified and streamlined two parallel initiatives to develop National Dietary Guidelines. Countries like Sudan understand alignment as making sure the right people are entrusted with the right tasks, aligning tasks with competencies, for instance when a Ministry transferred funds to the Ministry of Health to implement nutrition specific actions. Other countries such as Mali stressed the alignment behind regulations, with all actors respecting and abiding by norms, standards and laws, for example when it comes to Food Quality and Hygiene Standards. Guatemala stressed alignment of stakeholders behind the national common results framework for nutrition.

1. Factors facilitating alignment of stakeholders

An overarching key factor mentioned by SUN Countries that leads to increased alignment behind national nutrition priorities is the recognition of nutrition as a fundamental driver for human, societal and national development. This understanding facilitates the rallying of all actors in society behind national nutrition priorities. For instance, in Peru the President's commitment to nutrition elevated it as a "state issue" beyond being a responsibility of any one line ministry.

Such understanding needs however to be articulated by the Government into a common and shared vision of what a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition is, and a key aspect is then to ensure that there is an authority or mechanism to guide, put in practice and sustain such approaches. In the Côte d'Ivoire, the Prime Minister oversees nutrition at a political level, because, according to the Constitution, he is the coordinator of government action. This high level anchorage allows for political synergies, as the Prime Minister brings together 14 ministers with nutrition-related actions under the National Nutrition Council. When conflicts of competencies and interest arise, the framework for conflict discussion and resolution is under the Prime Minister, in order to overcome conflicts of jurisdiction. In terms of mechanisms, SUN Countries indicated that having a

functioning **Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) for nutrition at national level** helps facilitate discussion and alignment of stakeholders behind national nutrition priorities.

SUN Countries highlighted that a critical factor to facilitate alignment of stakeholders is the inclusion of **nutrition within national development plans** as well as the existence of **overarching national nutrition policies, strategies and plans** that define the role of different Government sectors and non-state actors in the planning and implementation of actions. Such overarching documents facilitate **“alignment in programming”**. Malawi highlighted the importance of having a quality plan that has been developed in a participatory and inclusive manner. This is the case of the new Malawi nutrition strategic plan, which was developed with the participation of various stakeholder groups, which are now more likely to align in its implementation.

“As countries are planning for the SDGs it will be a missed opportunity if we do not have inclusive data collection for all the indicators by involving all stakeholders”

Gerda Verburg, SUN Movement Coordinator

Various countries stressed that the process of revising national development plans to be **aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, ongoing in many countries, offers a unique opportunity to further strengthen nutrition’s position at the heart of development. Both **Sierra Leone** and **Cote d’Ivoire** mentioned in this regard that nutrition has been integrated in the national development plans, which are aligned with the SDGs, further positioning nutrition as a cross-cutting development issue – helping to mobilise a broader range of stakeholders in a coherent manner.

SUN countries were clear in distinguishing between **“alignment in programming”** and **“alignment in implementation”**. In relation to **“alignment in implementation”**, most countries stressed the importance of **coordination mechanisms at sub-national level**, as fora where all stakeholders implementing activities in a given region, district or community can meet to discuss, coordinate and align interventions and assess results. This is the case for instance of **Tanzania** with the Council Steering Committees in Nutrition and the **Uganda** District Coordination Committees for Nutrition. Alignment at local level occurs more easily, as it is the space where Government and partners have closer working relationships and are more action-oriented.

Participants recognised that having **established networks of stakeholder groups** is another important factor for alignment, as the network encourages the alignment of members’ strategies, programmes resources and implementation efforts with country plans for scaling up nutrition. The network also acts as mechanism to **“speak with one voice”** when discussing alignment with the Government, instead of multiple stakeholders discussing individually with the Government and other stakeholder groups. **Chad** shared that, in order to maximise alignment, an inter-network workshop to validate the action plans of the networks, which are to be aligned with the multi-sectoral nutrition action plan is scheduled for autumn 2016.

The discussions also emphasised the need for **adequate funding to support the functioning of the nutrition coordinating structures**, as these are key to maintain a continuous dialogue and monitor alignment within the Government and with non-state actors. The need to **build the capacity and vision across** stakeholders to understand nutrition as a cross-cutting issue and the consequent need for alignment was also underlined. For instance, **Senegal** indicated that they are currently working to build technical capacities to define and agree the parameters of alignment.

A number of SUN Countries such as **Tanzania, Malawi and Nepal** underlined that having **information systems that gather data on nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive interventions** of government and non-state actors is an instrumental aspect for alignment. Such information systems allow the Government and partners to have a clear and up-to-date picture of nutrition interventions across the country and assess the degree of alignment (or non-alignment) within the Government and with various stakeholders. It was stressed that a critical factor is for the data collection and interpretation to be inclusive and transparent, involving Government and other stakeholders. This facilitates accountability and social audit processes at all levels of governance, for instance when civil society has access to up-to-date information on the interventions and disbursed budget.

Countries in state of fragility, humanitarian situations, conflict and post-conflict situations, such as **Somalia** and **Yemen**, stressed the **importance of aligning humanitarian and development interventions**. A better alignment of priorities, planning, capacities and resources will ease the bridging between humanitarian response and long term development, therefore limiting the disruption of actions responding to people’s needs.

2. Assessing alignment at country level

Overall, SUN Countries confirmed that there is **not much experience and tools to assess alignment of stakeholders at country level**. In some countries there are annual reviews that assess joint progress like the **Tanzania** Annual Joint Multi-sectoral Nutrition Review and the **Guinea Conakry** annual evaluation. In the case of Tanzania, the reviews are convened by the Prime Minister’s Office and bring together key ministries, UN Agencies, Development Partners, Regional Nutrition Officers and District Councils to review the implementation of the National Nutrition Strategy, the coordination systems at national, regional and district levels and to jointly identify priorities and relevant actions for scaling-up nutrition.

Yemen, Lao PDR, Benin and **Chad** all mentioned that the **SUN annual Joint-Assessment** is the main moment for nutrition stakeholders to assess coordination and alignment. Participants stressed that the Joint-Assessment is used as

part of the country's tools to assess alignment of stakeholder contributions toward national nutrition priorities.

Burkina Faso and **Benin** indicated that a useful step towards building the experience and tools to assess alignment of stakeholders at country level is to develop a **mapping of stakeholders** active in nutrition, with their intervention areas, priorities, coverage, etc. This mapping is a basis against which alignment can start to be assessed. Burkina Faso noted that the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger (REACH) supported the Government in undertaking the stakeholder mapping, depicting the status of nutrition interventions in the country, as the basis for developing scale-up strategies.

Other countries such as **Ghana** mentioned that it is also useful to rely on a **“soft assessment”**, which consists of comparing the stakeholder priorities with the Government priorities, and that the different **multi-stakeholder platforms can serve as mechanisms for assessment**, to discuss joint progress and priorities.

El Salvador mentioned that the **response to the El Niño** crisis also provided an opportunity to assess the alignment of multiple stakeholders. The response was coordinated between Civil Society, UN Agencies and the Government through the “Inter-sectorial Table” that, at the end of the response, promoted a reflection space to analyse the implementation of the response.

3. Challenges in aligning stakeholders

Most SUN Countries agreed that the main challenge in aligning stakeholders behind national nutrition priorities is the **difficulty in overcoming sectoral and individual ways of working**. This approach still dominates the planning, budgeting, implementation and information flows within Government and among non-state actors.

Various countries also indicated that they are still in the process of setting up nutrition multi-stakeholder platforms as well as developing their multi-stakeholder nutrition plans. They argued that the **lack of such established nutrition governance structures and guiding strategies**, hinders the alignment of stakeholders.

Another limiting factor is the **limited Government funding** for nutrition activities as well as the **limited human resource capacity** for those structures and staff working to ensure coordination and alignment. Linked to this, some countries indicated that often times the Government priorities are not necessarily the same as those of Development Partners, and that in countries with limited funding, donors can use their funding as leverage to orient interventions towards a direction that is not necessarily aligned to Government priorities. To avoid this, it is important to strengthen coordination mechanisms between Government and Development Partners. **Burundi** shared in this regard the existence of a national committee on aid coordination to discuss, assess and correct the alignment of interventions.

Participants underscored that the **lack of awareness of nutrition as a cross-cutting development issue** is a challenge for stakeholder alignment and, linked to this, the **absence of**

high level political commitment to promote nutrition as a cross-cutting issue.

Finally, in some countries the challenge in alignment is **specific to a stakeholder group**, particularly the businesses, as they have not yet assumed their potential role and contribution to national nutrition priorities. This was linked to the non-existence or limited functionality of the network representing that group.

4. How can the SUN Movement support and how can the SDGs help reinforce alignment?

- The adoption of the **SDGs has generated or refreshed public attention on development issues**, which needs to be capitalised on to increase the awareness on the importance of nutrition among the population and decision-makers. An added value of the SUN Movement is the continuous **high level political advocacy at global and country level of nutrition** as a fundamental driver for human capital development.
- The SUN Movement is a **unique space for sharing and learning**, that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and practical experiences among countries and stakeholder groups. In this sense, learning about the factors and mechanisms used in other countries to facilitate alignment of stakeholders is extremely valuable.
- The need for technical assistance in **developing and adopting monitoring and evaluation systems** as well as capacity building on aligning national priorities to the SDGs was solicited during the discussions. It is not only the capacity to develop these systems but also to support its implementation.
- The SUN Movement can also support countries in the **establishment and consolidation of networks** representing the various stakeholder groups, as these networks are a useful mechanism to facilitate alignment in programming and implementation.
- Lastly, the SUN Movement can support in the **development of information management systems for nutrition as well as mapping of stakeholders**, be it through technical assistance or sharing examples from other countries, since having such information and mapping of stakeholders is crucial to facilitate alignment.

This summary was developed by the SUN Movement Secretariat for the SUN Movement. More information about SUN Country Network Meetings and the presentations can be found at <http://scalingupnutrition.org/sun-countries/sun-country-network-meetings/>. 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.