

OPERATIONALIZING MULTISECTORAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS:

A Nutrition Governance Perspective

Executive summary

Malnutrition continues to be one of the world's most critical health and human development challenges, threatening countries' Universal Health Coverage (UHC) goals and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (WHO 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has further threatened the health, social, and economic gains made for women and children, with the potential of erasing decades of progress in nutrition. Given the complex, multifactorial, and interlinked determinants of nutritional status and well-being, multisectoral nutrition programming that converges on vulnerable populations has been widely promoted as the most effective way to address the direct and indirect determinants of malnutrition and improve nutrition outcomes. Robust governance systems are essential for implementing multisectoral nutrition interventions and creating cost-effective and sustainable programs.

The purpose of this report is to delineate valuable lessons learned on early implementation experiences from seven countries supported by the World Bank and the Global Financing Facility (GFF) in operationalizing large-scale multisectoral nutrition programs that emphasize and strengthen governance. The countries are Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guatemala, Indonesia, Malawi, Nigeria, and Rwanda. In all these countries, despite significant improvements in economic growth, poverty, and maternal and child health outcomes over the past decades, undernutrition remains a significant public health and development concern for women of reproductive age and for children under five. The countries' high rates of malnutrition point to systemic challenges, highlighting that “business not as usual” is required to accelerate progress.

The objectives of this report are to (i) document and synthesize implementation experiences, challenges, and opportunities in selected countries as seen through a nutrition governance lens; and (ii) facilitate cross-country learning. Given that the seven countries used as examples in this report are still implementing their multisectoral programs, the report focuses on implementation modalities and innovations rather than outcomes at this stage.

The report uses a multisectoral governance framework, adapted from Gillespie, Van Den Bold, and Hodge (2019), to synthesize the implementation experiences across the seven World Bank/GFF-financed multisectoral nutrition projects. This report provides lessons learned, organized under three broad categories. These are summarized below:

- 1. Advocacy, leadership, and institutional support for multisectoral nutrition**
 - *Evidence-based advocacy for positioning nutrition improvement within a broader development agenda.* Advocacy is critical to securing and sustaining political will and public support for a multisectoral nutrition agenda. Advocacy can be more successful if supported by quantitative evidence that illustrates the effectiveness of a multisectoral approach at both national and subnational levels. Knowledge-sharing activities such as South-South knowledge exchanges are another valuable method to advocate for and to

learn from successful multisectoral nutrition programming. Defining the composition of delegates for these types of exchanges is critical for obtaining buy-in.

- *High-level leadership, vision, and strategy for a "whole-of-government" approach.* Political commitment and high-level leadership are essential for implementing multisectoral nutrition policies and programs through a whole-of-government approach. The high-level vision needs to be translated into a national multisectoral nutrition strategy and operational plan that provides the foundation for implementing multisectoral actions at national and subnational levels. For the countries included in this report, committed leadership at the highest levels of government led to developing their national nutrition strategies—some of which were designed as “Investment Cases”—a government-led participatory process supported by the GFF to prioritize the key reforms and strategic shifts needed to accelerate progress toward clearly defined nutrition outcomes.
- *Institutional and implementation arrangements for operationalizing the multisectoral strategy.* Coordination mechanisms are essential at national and subnational levels for vertical and horizontal coordination and collaboration and to maximize the impact of multisectoral nutrition programs. In several countries highlighted in this report, the national multisectoral nutrition programs are being managed by a high-level coordination secretariat at the center of government, typically sitting within the Prime Minister, President, or Vice President's Office and coordinating nutrition actions across sectoral ministries. Ideally, multisectoral platforms should be replicated and aligned from the national to the district and subdistrict levels to effectively reach communities and vulnerable households.

2. Management capacity and financing

- *Management capacity and accountability systems at the subnational level.* For many countries, there are gaps in translating national Multisectoral Nutrition Plans to the district level. Given that more countries are decentralizing service delivery to the local level, national governments must establish a coordinated approach to improve subnational capacity to manage their multisectoral programs from the district to the community level. Some national programs include results conferences and performance contracts to ensure commitment and build management capacity and accountability at the subnational levels. Technical assistance, knowledge platforms, and financing are also being provided in some countries to strengthen the subnational capacity to work multisectorally.
- *Integrating multisectoral nutrition programming into regular planning and budgeting processes to ensure sustainable financing.* To ensure that priority interventions identified in the Multisectoral Nutrition Plan (MNP) are adequately financed, the MNP needs to be linked to government planning and budgeting processes. To monitor the implementation of MNP priorities and ensure that the funds are allocated efficiently, tracking multisectoral nutrition spending is crucial, as countries cannot manage or improve what they do not measure even if coordination efforts are in place. In recent years, there have been efforts to better capture nutrition spending across sectors. Institutionalizing budget tracking and budget evaluation requires strengthening the public financial management system.
- *Leveraging results-based financing to drive results.* Results-based financing (RBF) has emerged as a promising approach to incentivize multisectoral coordination and accountability for improved nutrition and stunting reduction. Several countries highlighted in this report use innovative RBF mechanisms at the central and subnational levels to incentivize governments to manage and implement multisectoral nutrition interventions.

3. Results measurement, monitoring, and accountability

- *Strengthening performance monitoring systems and promoting the use of data to improve program implementation.* Improving the availability of quality and timely nutrition data and performance monitoring systems is key to enhancing program implementation, informing decision making, enabling course correction, and enhancing the accountability of multisectoral programs. The governments of several countries highlighted in this report invest in interactive, interoperable, and agile monitoring systems that routinely collect quality outcomes, output and input indicators, and track the convergence of priority nutrition services. Furthermore, the monitoring data are being used for program implementation and course correction.
- *Citizen engagement, community mobilization, and social accountability.* Community-based engagement models should be part of the national multisectoral strategy and its coordination platforms. Communities need to be integrated into a larger Social Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) effort that works at all levels of government and uses multiple delivery channels. Numerous World Bank/GFF–cofinanced projects actively engage communities in their multisectoral nutrition interventions and are encouraging local participation in setting nutritional goals, demanding accountability through community data and scorecards. Projects are also implementing SBCC to positively influence knowledge, attitudes, and norms to improve nutrition behaviors and outcomes.

The report concludes with a “Looking Ahead” section that focuses on the continued need for investment in data quality and data systems. High-quality data are the foundation for better understanding of (i) the impact of multisectoral governance approaches on delivery and quality of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive services; (ii) financing sustainability and financing efficiency; and (iii) the impact of interventions on nutrition outcomes. Investments to improve monitoring and evaluation (M&E) include the following:

- Strengthening routine data systems that enable continuous feedback on the population's nutritional status, service coverage/utilization, and quality of care.
- Improvement of national Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS) to enable tagging and tracking of nutrition spending across sectors and levels of government (national and subnational).
- Investments in technologies that improve the collection and availability of high-quality nutrition data, including those that enhance the interoperability and/or consolidation of different sectoral and regional data systems (e.g., through digital dashboards and platforms such as mobile phones).
- Implementation research to measure programmatic and implementation processes including the following:
 - *The impact of the governance interventions on process outcomes* such as improved knowledge, skills, and coordination among management to operationalize multisectoral programs and improved nutrition-related services.
 - *Sectoral capacity to implement multisectoral interventions at national and subnational levels* and factors or implementation arrangements that enhance different sectors' abilities to maintain minimum quality standards.
 - *Diagnostic analysis to identify suitable entry points to enhance convergence*, including integrated planning and budgeting, targeting, delivery platform, monitoring systems, community mobilization, and peer learning.

- *Budget evaluations review* to improve the methodology for robust budget evaluations to generate recommendations on efficient resource allocations for nutrition, including a clear theory of change as a basis for assessing spending against performance.
- *Citizen engagement and social accountability* to strengthen community-level decision-making and accountability processes to strengthen the demand for quality services and enhance program course corrections.
- Impact evaluations on the following:
 - *Impacts of efforts to enhance the quality of nutrition services*: Analyze the effect of efforts and mechanisms to improve the quality of multisectoral nutrition interventions. Outcomes include improved health, competent health care providers, positive user experiences, equity of care, and economic benefits.
 - *Mix of nutrition interventions for convergence*: Conduct impact evaluations to understand better which combination of nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions can impact nutrition and its immediate determinants in different contexts.

Lastly, the report recommends improving the use of data to achieve the following:

- Strengthen the alignment of multisectoral programming priorities with country planning and budgeting processes to improve oversight of nutrition budgets across sectors, secure financing from domestic resources, and course-correct program implementation.
- Enhance the capacity at all levels to understand, analyze, and use data for decision making.
- Improve documentation and dissemination of data from routine M&E systems, including through improved multisector nutrition planning and programming practices to enhance knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning.