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REPORT: GAPS, OPPORTUNITIES AND KEY MESSAGES**

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Abstract

Purpose: This inception report on the comprehensive assessment through desk reviews and analysis nutrition gaps in policy, political commitment, resource allocation and multi-sectoral coordination to inform the development of guideline and messages. This is as a follow-up of preliminary discussion held and concept agreed with the office of the national coordination for Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), Somalia housed in the Office of Prime Minister (OPM), Federal Government of Somalia. This summary report presents findings from the assessment and a discussion of methodology, challenges and opportunities. By identifying and contextualizing new findings, nutrition advocacy assessment builds consensus in Somalia with a vision and path ahead for improved nutrition messaging and guidelines that various actors will use of advocacy work.

Methodology: 30 documents were gathered and reviewed, including - national legislation, policies, guidelines, strategies and action plans to assess the inclusion of adolescents and current gaps. Interviews were conducted with 20 stakeholders from government, donors, UN, communities and non-governmental institutions in Somalia. The review, analysis and stakeholder interviews assessed the extent to which nutritional aspects were being addressed, any gaps in the policy landscape, commitments, multi-sectoral coordination, advocacy initiatives and recommendations for strengthening the enabling environment.

Findings: It was established that awareness of SUN as a movement in Somalia was rated highly at however participation in SUN activities was very low and was left to nutritionist in the various sector/Institutions. Government has also shown a great political will and commitment to nutrition by ensuring policies and legislative frameworks are sufficient even though multi-sectoral nutrition integration is not optimal to impact desired impact.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: It was recommended that there is need to advocate political and administrative authorities, to further convince them to add nutrition among the top priorities of the governments, translate policies into actions and ensure allocation of funds for nutrition interventions. Also, Government must strongly provide leadership in nutrition policy development, programing and coordination.

Keywords: *Nutrition Advocacy, Health, Nutrition, Gaps, Opportunities and Key Messages*

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), under the leadership of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), office of the national coordination for Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Secretariat is seeking long term strategies to strengthen nutrition advocacy towards reducing the burden of malnutrition across the country. Somalia has continued to suffer from multiple recurring natural and manmade emergencies, including political instability, drought, famine, flood and others for the past three decades.¹ The recurrent multiple crisis has adversely affected household food security, resulted in the internal displacement and external migrations of hundreds of thousands of people. Chronic food insecurity, poor-access to sanitation, diseases outbreak, sub optimal-feeding practices and other factors have resulted in high levels of malnutrition. The impact of the triple threat of floods, desert locusts and COVID-19 has been estimated to have put 5.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020, with an estimated 3.5 million (1 million children) people projected to fall into crisis or emergency food insecurity.²

Somalia experiences a malnutrition burden among its under-five population. As of 2009, the national prevalence of under-five overweight is 3%, which has decreased slightly from 4.7% in 2006. The national prevalence of under-five stunting is 25.3%, which is greater than the developing country average of 25%. Somalia's under-five wasting prevalence of 15% is also greater than the developing country average of 8.9%.³ This inception report on the comprehensive assessment through desk reviews and analysis nutrition gaps in policy, political commitment, resource allocation and multi-sectoral coordination to inform the development of guideline and messages. This is as a follow-up of preliminary discussion held and concept agreed with the office of the national coordination for Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), Somalia.

Office of the national coordination for SUN, Somalia, aims to detail gaps in policy, political commitment, resource allocation and multi-sectoral coordination. The assessment will identify opportunities for advocacy aligned to the SMAC strategy and map out critical actors and engagement within the SUN Movement.

This desktop review (Section I) and accompanying stakeholder interviews (Section II) describes the current national policy/strategy landscape, political commitments and resulting enabling environment for nutrition in Somalia, and details the extent to which adolescent nutrition and services are addressed. The information gathered here will be used to inform discussions with stakeholders at the national level on potential challenges, implications and opportunities for strengthening the inclusion of nutrition in Somalia's policy landscape. It will also reveal existing gaps that need to be reflected in forthcoming reviews of policies, guidelines, strategies and action plans to improve nutrition visibility and outcomes. Finding of the assessment will be used to develop nutrition advocacy guideline and messages for Somalia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conducting the assessment adopted a participatory approach involving both qualitative methods of data collection. A desktop review of policies, legislation, guidelines and strategies

that address nutrition was conducted. Documentation was searched through ministry, international organizations’ and agency websites, along with standard search engines that included Google and Google Scholar. Keywords were used to obtain relevant documents, and further sharpen the online search. To expand our search, we also pulled from references listed in available documents (policies/guidelines/action plans/strategies). The broader methodological aimed to describe and analyze the context, gaps and processes of nutrition policies, political commitment and multi-sectoral coordination; record the SUN Network representatives, community, youth and women key informant perspectives on the critical gaps on nutrition that are that require advocacy; and make appropriate and necessary recommendations for advocacy actions.

Process and Scope of the Analysis

The Office of the national coordination for SUN, Office of Prime Minister led the nutrition advocacy assessment in Somalia from preliminary discussion, inception and through to final dissemination in November 2020. This was supported by a team of technical support from the consultants at the SUN Coordination secretariat. The assessment was embedded in a targeted in-depth stakeholder interviews process involving government ministries (Planning; Health; Agriculture; Livestock, Fisheries and Marine Resources; Labor and Social Affairs;), UN system (UNICEF, WFP, FAO,) World Bank, EU, civil society (BRCiS consortium, Action Against Hunger, World Vision International, Mercy Corps, Concern Worldwide, IRC), academia and communities including women and youth groups. Two multi-stakeholder meetings were held during the Joint Assessment and strategy development and provided opportunities for diversified responses. The Key informants were drawn from the SUN Movement Networks in Somalia and key actors in the nutrition space. A total of 23 key informant interviews were conducted as detailed in table below gathering information on the gaps in nutrition policy, political commitment and multi-sectoral coordination.

Table 1: Distribution of qualitative respondents

Category	Target	Total
State actors	MoP-Planning	1
	MoF – finance	1
	SUN Focal Person-State	1
	MoA (Agriculture)	1
	Parliamentarians- food and Nutrition Committee	1
Donors	WB	1
	EU	1
UN Network	UNICEF	1
	WFP	1
	FAO	1
CSO Network	ACF	1
	SCI	1
	CARE	1
	NRC	1
	Concern Worldwide (CWW)	1
Communities Academia Network	SNU	1
	Mogadishu University	1
	University of Hergeisa	1
	Puntland State University	1
Total		23

Data Analysis

Data analysis encompassed qualitative techniques. Qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus group discussions was be transcribed, verified, categorized, summarized and compiled according to source, thematic areas and objectives after which descriptive texts was be developed. Qualitative information was then triangulated and integrated in the report with verbatim reporting where necessary.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

All legislation, policies, strategies, guidelines, national guidelines and action plans that addressed nutrition-sensitive and specific issues were included in the assessment. Only reports, policies, strategies, national guidelines and action plans formulated or produced from 2010 to 2019 were included. Also, policies, strategies, national guidelines, and action plans which were going beyond 2019 were also included. A few previous versions of reviewed or updated policies, strategies, guidelines or action plans were included. Documents spanned various sectors, 14 including health, agriculture, water and irrigation, and education due to the multi-causal nature of malnutrition and multi-sectoral authorship of documents.

Exclusion Criteria

Policies, strategies, action plans and guidelines that did not mention nutritional components were excluded. Undated documents were not included except nutrition policy since there is no new policy. Policies, strategies, and guidelines produced/formulated before 1990 were not included in this review.

FINDINGS

Gaps in Policies, Guidelines and Strategies Addressing Nutrition in Somalia

- Awareness of SUN as a movement in Somalia was rated highly at however participation in SUN activities was very low and was left to nutritionist in the various sector/Institutions.
- Government has shown a great political will and commitment to nutrition by ensuring policies and legislative frameworks are sufficient even though multi-sectoral nutrition integration is not optimal to impact desired impact.
- Most documents discuss nutrition broadly with Somalia presenting a more nutrition policy enabled environment however implementations remain slow and lack the push to generate better nutrition outcomes.
- The various networks were not fully formed and functional as most respondents were not aware of networks other than the SUN Focal Person at the OPM. Focus on sub National SUN platforms remains a need and is will play a critical role in decentralizing awareness and participation.

- Policies and strategies outlined that key health and nutrition challenges facing adolescents include – micronutrient deficiencies (largely iron-deficiency anaemia), stunting and acute malnutrition and persistently high rates of teen pregnancy.
- Nutritional interventions that were commonly promoted for adolescents, included - micronutrient supplementation (WIFAS), nutrition assessment and counselling and dietary diversification.
- Most of the strategies and action plans aligned with WHO guidelines, SDGs and global commitments but the implementation at the national level is still yet to be achieved.
- There was no clear mechanism or framework that effectively ensured coordination of the nutrition actors. Most platforms were thematic led e.g. nutrition cluster, Social protection, Resilience and Cash platforms were some of the few mentioned. There was a general indication that development partners had a lot of influence on the establishment of clusters.
- Participants were happy with the positioning of the SUN Coordination at the OPM and recommended strengthening to ensure stronger coordination of all sectors.
- The private sector role was recognized however almost all respondents agreed that their involvement was minimal.
- Consortium approach was seen to be replacing the traditionally recognized MSP approaches including the SUN MSP
- There was a recognition of political leaderships and nutrition was prioritized by political leaders and high-level government decision makers however KII respondents reported awareness and acknowledge better commitment with the current political leadership as compared to the previous. There was inconsistency between awareness and actions related to uptake reported by most respondent interviewed.
- The parliamentary committee and political champions on nutrition were reported as the most notable examples of political commitment.
- Financial resource constraints and low priority on nutrition investment hindered the effective implementation of nutrition policies and strategies. Respondents interviewed confirmed that most financing for nutrition was short term and humanitarian focused and did not resonate with the Somalia humanitarian development nexus. There was a general consensus among respondents on the need for multi-year –funding.
- Respondents reported increased donor spending for nutrition during Covid 19 however this could not be confirmed due to lack of data as budget analysis and expenditure tracking was not done.
- Nutrition integration was weak in all sectors. There was need for review of policies to ensure nutrition is integrated in all sectors.

- There was lack of policy to guide development programming as most policies focused on emergency as compared to development work. Policies were seen to be more visible and applicable at the national level and did not little tricked to the sub national.
- Nutrition integration was weak in all sectors. There was need for review of policies to ensure nutrition is integrated in all sectors.
- Only NGOs engaged in advocacy activities especially campaigns in Somalia with priority on ICCM plus, pipeline, nutrition integration, domestic resource allocation, sensitization of political leadership and actors and accountability – watchdog and healthy diets. Advocacy on long term financing was required.

CHALLENGES: Policy Review and Stakeholder Interviews

- Nutrition prioritization was low and lacked national attention.
- Focus on nutrition specific (treatment) Policies do not prioritize nutrition sensitive – humanitarian focus.
- Lack of engagement of private sector.
- Lack of data for budget allocation and expenditures.
- Frequent system changes – political leadership.
- Capacity for advocacy was not adequate in Somalia to raise the profile of nutrition.

OPPORTUNITIES – Policy Review and Stakeholder Interviews

- Donor interest was sufficient to ensure the nutrition is adequately financed.
- Parliamentary committee on FNS was an impetus to review and adoption of applicable and context fit policies and legislation.
- Current Nutrition champions will remain critical in advancing nutrition agenda
- The political good will with the current leadership may embed nutrition in the current governance structures.
- The national development plan has a pillar on nutrition.
- The private sector responsiveness is critical and engagement needs to be strengthened.
- The media for Somalia remains an outreach platform for information dissemination.
- The establishment SUN Movement leadership is very important.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the governance structure of Somalia, the sub nationals coordination units at state level -in Puntland and Somaliland and Jubaland- hosted in the Office of Vice-President remains a visible example of how functional and progressive coordination with national with other sectoral players can support and enhance coordination between the two levels of co-ordination. Sub-national coordination offices are functional in Puntland and Somaliland. Therefore, nutrition is progressively finding its profile raised amongst the targeted sector strategies. Moreover, sub

nationals lack expertise in designing nutrition-sensitive interventions and advocacy programs hence the need for capacity development on advocacy to raise the profile of nutrition under the SUN coordination secretariat must be supported by all actors.

Nutrition is an outcome of complex processes and other sectors have direct impact on household resilience including food security, malnutrition, income and health. There is a great emphasis on decentralized policymaking which has shifted to the states. Most policies and plans have however not paid much attention to nutrition or even ensure integration. The facts, that to date 2020 Somalia lacked a national nutrition policy and the National Nutrition Strategic Plan is also in question and this clearly reflects that the respective governments in Somalia is slow towards ensuring commitment to any nutrition specific funds. In 2020, government allocated (only spent 3% of general government allocation) on nutrition was much less than the allocation of other sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Review and Stakeholder Interviews

- There is need to advocate political and administrative authorities, to further convince them to add nutrition among the top priorities of the governments, translate policies into actions and ensure allocation of funds for nutrition interventions.
- Government must strongly provide leadership in nutrition policy development, programing and coordination.
- Advocacy for Increased resource allocation by government and increased spend by donors including multi-year funding.
- The SUN Movement focal person must take responsibility and ensure visibility of the platform across all the stakeholders in Somalia at national and sub national levels.
- Review existing policies and processes to ensure that nutrition is mainstreamed and included comprehensively.
- Policies and strategies should include more data-driven targets and indicators to track progress on strategic objectives or proposed activities, and budgets.
- There is a need for more robust data for nutrition to track the impact of current policies and strategies.
- Policies and strategies must be more comprehensive and promote a package of both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive approaches.
- Enhance monitoring and accountability in institutions that oversee the design and implementation of programs involving communities and raising their voices.
- There is a need for effective resource mobilization and budget allocations that would prioritize nutrition interventions and programs.
- Ensure that communities' voices and perspectives are considered and included when designing policies and programs targeting them.

- Strengthen multi-sectoral stakeholder platforms to ensure more inclusivity, collaboration and coordination both at national and subnational level in line with sustainable development goals, efforts should be directed to develop multi-sectoral nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive development programs with the involvement of Health, Social Welfare, Education, Food, Agriculture, and Public Health departments.
- The government, donors and development partners should focus at building capacities of respective departments in provision of trained staff and of personnel in understanding, planning and implementation of nutrition related interventions, at federal, provincial and district levels.
- The governments should establish mechanisms to monitor policy interventions and financial commitments. Technical and financial assistance should be provided to federal and provincial governments in establishing such mechanisms.
- Structured and well-planned efforts should be directed to raise Scale Up Nutrition Movement awareness and understanding among the legislators, policy makers, academia, business sector, media, implementers, public and communities.
- SUN SCA should advocate Federal and Provincial Governments for nutrition sensitive and nutrition specific projects and improving the financial commitments.
- Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance at federal level has the potential to influence the monitoring mechanisms of policies and financial mechanisms. This should be achieved through taking concrete steps to influence the financial commitments at provincial level through continued advocacy for financial allocation.
- The capacity of CSOs should be enhanced for developing and implementing effective advocacy programs and nutrition sensitive interventions

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Data availability

The data used and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was approved by the Office of the Prime Minister, Somalia. Informed verbal consent was sought and obtained from all key informants.

Consent for publication

Not applicable

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