



**Civil Society Network**

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# **ALIGNMENT REPORT**

**Civil society alignment in multi-stakeholder  
efforts to scale up nutrition**



# Civil society alignment in multi-stakeholder efforts to scale up nutrition

*A SUN CSN commissioned publication*

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Chris Leather, December 2015



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# 1. Introduction

This paper is an output of a research study commissioned by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Civil Society Network (CSN) Secretariat<sup>1</sup>. The objectives of the study were: to develop an understanding of civil society alignment in efforts to scale up nutrition; analyse existing practices; identify factors enabling or hindering alignment; and to make evidence based recommendations for improved practice. In relation to all of these issues, variations between different types of CSO were explored.

The research was carried out between April – November 2015. It also draws on evidence and findings from the Independent Comprehensive Evaluation (ICE) of the SUN Movement (Mokoro 2015) and the currently ongoing Independent Evaluation of the SUN Movement Multi-Partner Trust Fund (Leather & Norvell 2015). The paper presents the key findings, conclusions and recommendations. Information on the methodology of the research study, including a list of interviewees, is available from the author<sup>2</sup>.

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*“Alignment of all stakeholders behind national priorities is a key principle within the SUN Movement and is widely seen as essential for the successful scaling up of actions to promote nutrition.”*

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the SUN Movement and the SUN Civil Society Network see: [www.scalingupnutrition.org](http://www.scalingupnutrition.org); <http://scalingupnutrition.org/the-sun-network/civil-society-network>; <http://suncivilsociety.net.wix.com/suncsnblog>

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## 2. The concept of alignment in the SUN Movement

### Alignment with national nutrition priorities

Alignment of all stakeholders behind national priorities is a key principle within the SUN Movement and is widely seen as essential for the successful scaling up of actions to promote nutrition. Alignment was central to three of the four strategic objectives of the SUN Movement Strategy 2011-2015 (see Box 1).

#### Box 1: Alignment in the SUN Movement strategy, 2011-2015 (SMS 2012)

**Strategic Objective 1:** Creating an enabling political environment, with strong in-country leadership, and a shared space where stakeholders align their activities and take joint responsibility for scaling up nutrition;

**Strategic Objective 2:** Establishing best practices for scaling up proven interventions, including the adoption of effective laws and policies;

**Strategic Objective 3:** Aligning actions around high quality and well-costed country plans, with an agreed results framework and mutual accountability;

**Strategic Objective 4:** Increasing resources towards coherent aligned approaches.

A strong emphasis on alignment is maintained in the SUN Movement Strategy for 2016-2020 with Strategic Objective 3 being to: Implement actions aligned with national common results frameworks across the policy management cycle and utilise quality costed plans (SMS 2015a).

Civil society participation in national scaling up nutrition efforts is facilitated through Civil Society Alliances (CSAs) that aim to:

1. *Actively contribute to the design, implementation and M&E of effective national policies and plans for scaling up nutrition (multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral, multi-level); and*
2. *Encourage and facilitate coordination among all civil society actors, including academia, international, national and local CSOs and ensure alignment of their strategies, programmes and resources with national nutrition priorities (SUN CSN 2014).*

CSAs are members of, and receive support from, the global SUN Civil Society Network.

Within the SUN Movement, alignment is primarily considered in relation to national policies, plans and results frameworks. However, the research study revealed that stakeholders also consider other forms of alignment to be important.

### Alignment with the interests of people at risk of malnutrition

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in particular, the priority is to align their programmes and advocacy with the interests, objectives and actions of the people most at risk of malnutrition. For some people, this trumps alignment with national priorities and strategies. CSOs may feel unable to align their actions with national policies and plans if they consider that they are not in the interests of people most at risk.

In practice, this form of alignment requires context specific analyses of the causes of malnutrition and the impacts of the policies and actions of different actors.

It implies that civil society engagement in SUN processes should, as much as possible, be led by grassroots organisations and movements<sup>3</sup>, which speak in their own name and represent their own interests and needs in decision making spaces, rather than have others speaking on their behalf.

## **Alignment between and within Civil Society Organisations**

A primary function of national CSAs is to provide a space, in which CSOs can work together in complementary and coherent ways in their programme and advocacy work. Alignment of activities and resources between CSOs is widely considered to be critical in promoting and supporting effective national nutrition policies and actions.

Informants in the research study also highlighted the importance of international non-government organisations (INGOs) being aligned internally, particularly between head office and country offices. As with governments and other stakeholders, interviewees emphasised the need for INGOs to ensure that global level commitments to scaling up nutrition are translated into country level actions.



<sup>3</sup> The term “grassroots” is used in this report to describe organisations and movements that are led by people at risk from malnutrition. For the purposes of this report it includes community-based organisations, small-scale farmer and other producer organisations, social movements, people’s movements etc.

# 3. Extent of civil society alignment

## Alignment with national priorities, plans and common results frameworks

The SUN Movement 2014 Annual Report states that there is limited evidence of CSOs aligning their actions with nationally agreed plans and common results

frameworks at country level (SMS 2014). However, this research study suggests that there are examples of CSO alignment with national multi-stakeholder processes and at least some elements of national policies and frameworks in many SUN Movement countries. Some examples are presented in (Box 2).

### Box 2: Examples of civil society alignment with national priorities and processes

The CSA in Kenya is recognized by other stakeholders (from government and UN agencies) as having successfully advocated for a stronger nutrition component in the national health policy. The policy was revised based on their input. (Source: <http://blog.results.org.uk/2015/02/02/sun-movement-success-in-kenya/>)

In Madagascar SUN CSA – Hina's advocacy efforts granted them a private audience with the Prime Minister and a commitment to hold a workshop with all ministers and donors to start discussing increased investment in nutrition. This commitment was reaffirmed by the Minister of Agriculture of Madagascar during the closing plenary of the 2014 SUN Movement Global Gathering (SMS 2015: 79).

In Mozambique, the SUN Civil Society Platform is considered by the SUN government focal point to have been influential in the development of the government position on the role of nutrition in the post-2015 development agenda (Source: research study interview).

In Nepal, members of the CSA for Nutrition in Nepal support the implementation of the national Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (2013-2017) (MSNP) by organizing programs for hospital staff to promote breastfeeding (Source: <http://scalingupnutrition.org/news/37424#.VmZLSgBW-DR>).

The case of Peru illustrates how the roles of CSOs, and the nature of alignment, evolve over time according to the stage of development of national plans and programmes.

*In Peru, CSOs initially played an awareness raising and lobbying role to ensure that nutrition became a government priority. The next step was to provide technical assistance to the government in the development of the national strategy. Once the strategy was agreed, the focus shifted to support implementation. When there was a change of government in 2011, to some extent, the process started again to ensure that nutrition remained a political priority. Now that national programmes are being implemented, a key function is to monitor progress, evaluate impact and identify lessons learnt and good practice. A main priority is to advocate*

*for and support the collection of improved nutrition data, including at sub-national level and to monitor budgets, in order to track progress (Source: research study interview with Peru CSA Chair).*

The research study highlighted how CSAs are increasingly placing emphasis on supporting and aligning with multi-sectoral process and plans at sub-national level by raising awareness and building capacities. This is seen as essential for turning national policies and plans into actions to improve nutrition at community levels. The SUN CSN blog provides an overview of activities of 35 CSAs at sub national level<sup>4</sup> and illustrative examples are presented in Box 3.

<sup>4</sup> <http://suncivilsociety.net/wix.com/suncsnblog#!decentralization/cis4t>

### Box 3: Examples of civil society efforts to promote and align with sub-national processes

In Mozambique, the CSA is considered by government and UN officials to be reaching out well to local CSOs in order to raise awareness of national policies, develop provincial levels CSAs and to support local CSOs to advocate for scaled up action at this level (Source: research study interviews).

In Mali, members of the CSA are reviewing the implementation of nutrition activities and regional alliance advocacy efforts, establishing regional civil society alliances for the SUN movement and developing an advocacy plan for strengthening regional nutrition activities (Source: <http://scalingupnutrition.org/news/nutrition-mission-in-mali-helps-define-new-civil-society-advocacy-plans#.VmZRI9BW-DR>)

In Malawi, the civil society alliance (CSONA) is promoting the discussion of nutrition issues in district level CSO platforms in order to maximise the impact of CSOs in District Nutrition Coordination Committees (Source: field work for SUN Movement MPTF evaluation)

In Niger, the United for Nutrition Alliance (TUN) is establishing branches in 3 regions in three regions – Maradi, Zinder and Diffa – and building the capacity of CSOs to carry out advocacy at this level. (Source: <http://scalingupnutrition.org/news/civil-society-in-niger-establishes-3-new-branches-for-effective-nutrition-action#.VmbrotBW-DQ>)

In Nepal, Civil Society Alliance on Nutrition in Nepal (CSANN) has established chapters in 3 districts (Saptari, Kapilvastu and Achham), which help to bring nutrition issues from the community to the national level. (Source: <http://suncivilsociety.net.wix.com/suncsnblog#!decentralization/c1s4t>)

To ensure sustainability in Peru, the CSO Alliance is strengthening existing consultation mechanisms between local governments and citizens (like the consensus-building forums for the fight against poverty)\*

*\* Mesa de Concertación de Lucha Contra la Pobreza in Spanish – see more here. The MCLCP is an existing space for multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration, between Government, civil society and the private sector, established in 2001, out of a joint conviction that tackling problems of poverty and exclusion needed the shared participation of both the public and private sectors.*

Some informants consider that the alignment of CSOs with national priorities and the achievements of CSAs have been lower than expected. They feel that the expectations of SUN stakeholders, including donors, have been unrealistic and in some cases CSAs received too much money for what they could achieve in the time available. CSO interviewees emphasised that it takes time to establish an alliance, as members of Alliances need to develop trust and common understandings regarding the purpose and functioning of CSAs. (SUN CSN 2014b & SUN CSN 2015a)

A strong expectation of some donors, government representatives and the SMS, is that CSOs will scale up nutrition specific and sensitive programmes that have a direct impact on the lives of people at risk of malnutrition. Some informants expressed frustration that CSOs are not doing this as much as they expected.

CSO informants argued that this is possible for some larger, well-funded CSOs. However, most CSOs do not have the resources and many consider that their primary role is to advocate and help build capacity for the delivery of scaled up and more effective public services.

Case studies being conducted for the evaluation of the SUN Movement MPTF reveal that CSOs are scaling up community level nutrition activities in collaboration with other national stakeholders and supported by donors. For example, in Malawi CSOs are supporting the implementation of the Government led Support for Nutrition Improvement Component (SNIC) Project, which aims to reducing stunting through improved ante natal care, breast feeding and infant feeding practices. The five-year project is receiving USD 22 million from the World Bank and Canadian Development Agency.



As noted during the ICE and reiterated during this study, CSOs are keen to ensure that alignment does not compromise their autonomy and ability to play effective advocacy and accountability roles (Mokoro 2015). Yet, there were a number of reports of feeling under pressure from other stakeholders not to be too critical. Different views were expressed, even amongst CSOs, regarding the appropriate approach when CSOs are in disagreement with policies and practices of other stakeholders. Some interviewees (notably from within civil society as well as donors, the SMS, government) emphasised the need for a constructive approach. However, there are some CSOs (many of them remaining outside of the CSAs and the SUN Movement) who argue for a more confrontational approach, particularly where there are serious human rights violations.

The predominant view is that the approach of CSOs will vary from context to context, depending upon levels of agreement with policies and actions and the willingness of other stakeholders to acknowledge limitations in the appropriateness and effectiveness of actions in relation to malnutrition. Generally, it is agreed that constructive approaches should be used first but if this does not work and there are serious infringements of human rights and violations of the Breast Milk Substitute code, then more critical approaches may need to be adopted.

## Alignment with the interests of people most at risk

Some informants feel that the positions and actions of some CSOs and CSAs are not adequately informed by a context specific analysis of the causes of malnutrition, or by adequate consultation with grassroots organisations. The same critique was voiced in relation to some national policies and plans. Concerns were expressed that advocacy activities of INGOs are often driven by global agendas and campaigns, and are inadequately informed by local analysis and strategies.

In Kenya, members of the CSA recognise that there is a need to broaden participation of CSOs involved in nutrition sensitive sectors, not just those focussed on nutrition specific interventions. Whilst participation at national level is dominated by INGOs there is good participation from local CSOs at county level. Kenya CSA does not yet prioritise local CSOs in constitution. (Source: research study interviews)

There is widespread acknowledgment amongst CSOs in the SUN Movement that the participation and leadership of grassroots organisations in CSAs is inadequate. This is often due to the limited number of local CSOs working on nutrition specific interventions. Participation is stronger in the realms of food security and public health, with a strong emphasis on addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition. In some circumstances, the limited participation of grassroots organisations is because they are critical of processes that they consider to be too open to corporate interests.

The absence of strong, credible local and national voices risks limiting the impact that CSOs have on policy making and monitoring at national level, as governments are often less inclined to listen to INGOs. Consequently, many CSAs are actively trying to enhance the capacities and participation of grassroots organisations through the type of sub-national activities described above.

## Alignment within civil society

The extent to which CSAs are being effective in promoting the alignment of CSOs with each other varies from country to country. However, the evidence from the ICE, the alignment research study and the on-going evaluation of the SUN Movement MPTF, suggests that most CSAs are making good progress.

In Mozambique, government and UN representatives considered that the civil society platform is playing an effective role in facilitating the alignment of ideas and objectives of CSOs, sharing learning and coordinating work geographically. There is good participation both from INGOs as well as smaller national and local CSOs. (Source: research study interviews)

At least 20 of the 34 SUN CSAs<sup>5</sup> have developed common advocacy plans which are guiding the collective work of member CSOs (SUN CSN 2015).

There is perhaps less progress in the coordination of scaled up programmes. Some CSAs are undertaking a mapping of the programmes of members. However, there is sometimes reticence to share information amongst CSOs or with other stakeholders. CSAs have the potential to facilitate joint programme plans and funding proposals but are not yet playing such a role.

<sup>5</sup> Number accurate as of April 2015

Opinions vary amongst CSO representatives regarding the role of CSAs in administering funds for joint programmes. The majority believe that CSAs should only play a facilitation role with donors providing funds directly to members of consortia rather than through CSAs.

There are instances in which there are tensions between CSOs and alliances at country level. In Guatemala, several alliances of civil society co-exist and the creation of an alliance funded by the SUN Movement MPTF created tensions in the civil society nutrition landscape. These tensions could have been avoided by better research before approval of grants. The situation is improving but the tensions resulted in slow progress and a need to build relationships across the civil society actors in country.

Various informants in the study highlighted the importance of alignment within CSOs. Typically they were referring to INGOs and the need for a consistent approach to engagement in SUN efforts at different levels within the organisation. The expectation is that an INGO that has made a commitment at global level to scale up its nutrition related activities would do so in most, if not all, countries where it is active, in coordination with other CSOs and in alignment with national multi-stakeholder plans and processes. However, concerns were raised that some INGOs were not adequately increasing their own investments in nutrition. Some see this as potentially affecting the credibility of organisations that are advocating for others to increase their investments.

On the other hand, there are numerous instances in which INGOs are playing effective roles in supporting the establishment and functioning of CSAs and building the capacity of local organisations. One amongst many examples is Action Contre la Faim's regional support to CSAs in West Africa that is widely recognised as a good model of alignment and effective support to SUN efforts. Their support includes:

- Dedicating 20-30% of the time of the Regional Advocacy Coordinator to provide technical support to CSAs
- Facilitating the creation of CSAs, e.g. Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone
- Allocating resources to support CSA activities at country and regional levels, e.g. the organisation of a regional workshop in June 2015 to build capacity of CSAs to influence national policies and actions and helping to develop national advocacy strategies
- Fundraising with other INGOs for regional cross-learning and capacity strengthening efforts, including funding for a person linked to the global CSN Secretariat to play the role that the ACF regional coordinator has been playing until now.

Concern Worldwide is another example where regular calls between global and country offices take place to share experiences, troubleshoot and ensure country office nutrition efforts are linked to CSA efforts and input into global efforts and processes.



## 4. Factors enabling or hindering civil society alignment

The research study showed that civil society alignment with national priorities requires other forms of alignment, i.e. CSOs consider that national policies and frameworks are aligned with the interests of people at risk of malnutrition and that CSOs are aligned internally and with each other. The study identified a range of factors that collectively enable or hinder these types of alignment. These factors can be categorised as internal and external to civil society.

### Factors within civil society

#### A common analysis and strategic framework

The alignment of different stakeholders with national priorities and common results frameworks requires a shared understanding of the nature and causes of malnutrition and agreement on appropriate policies and actions.

The need to demonstrate a strong evidence base is highlighted as critically important for the effective influencing of policies and plans. According to some informants during the research study this is not always apparent in civil society advocacy positions.

A key factor in bringing a diverse range of CSOs together in Peru was the adoption of a common conceptual framework, based upon that of UNICEF. One of the requirements for joining the alliance is sign on to the framework. It has proven to be a useful tool in agreeing that malnutrition is a multi-sectoral problem requiring different problems to be addressed simultaneously and coherently. (Source: interview with CSA Chair)

A pre-requisite for civil society alignment is awareness of national policies and plans. Awareness tends to be good amongst INGOs and other CSOs with a strong presence in capitals and capacity to engage with government and UN officials but much lower amongst local CSOs. Participation in policy forums is also key to ensure policy shaping is a reflection of the reality of those suffering directly from malnutrition.

A key tool identified by interviewees for facilitating the alignment of CSOs with each other is the development of a common strategic framework, identifying shared programming and advocacy priorities and outlining divisions of responsibilities geographically and thematically. This process needs to be inclusive and participatory and coordinated by functional multi-stakeholder platforms. The hope is that individual members will use the common framework in the development of their own organisational strategies and programmes.

#### Legitimacy and power relationships between CSOs

Key to CSOs aligning with each other is the relationship between different types of CSO, particularly between INGOs and grassroots organisations and other local CSOs. One key informant in the research study argued that:

*“one of the biggest risks to the SUN Movement is the relationship between INGOs and southern CSOs”.*

At the national level the Bangladesh CSA mostly consists of INGOs. However, there is growing participation from local CSOs, at sub national level. It is felt that the CSA could be doing more to facilitate the participation of local CSOs at national level, by building their capacity and providing them with technical support to participate in national level meetings and in leadership of the CSA. (Source: research study interviewee)

CSOs consisting of people most at risk of malnutrition often have the greatest credibility and legitimacy to speak on nutrition issues but also tend to have limited opportunities and capacities to influence decision makers. Tensions often arise when NGOs speak on behalf of grassroots people and organisations and dominate participation in multi-stakeholder platforms or in CSAs. Consequently, some CSAs such as Nepal and Zambia have policies limiting the participation of INGOs in governing bodies but encourage their active participation, particularly in providing technical support to national organisations.



## CSA governance and administrative arrangements

The governance arrangements of CSAs are fundamental to their effectiveness in promoting alignment between member organisations and with national priorities and plans. There is a need for agreement between members on the objectives of the CSA and how it should operate, reflected in a clear Terms of Reference or Constitution.

Tensions often arise within CSAs when there is a lack of clarity regarding the governance arrangements of the CSA, with one or a small number of CSOs dominating the process and inadequate participation of member organisations. The research study identified at least three countries in which the INGO administering CSA funds was dominating decisions on how funds should be used, as well as managing Secretariat staff. This contradicts guidance provided by the global CSN that emphasises the importance of strategic decisions being made by a representative executive body, which also oversees the work of the secretariat (SUN CSN 2013a, SUN CSN 2014b & SUN CSN 2015a).

A case study undertaken for the SUN Movement MPTF evaluation in Zimbabwe, reveals a CSA in which there are harmonious relationships between the member organisations, with a strong sense of collective ownership and participation. Member organisations are coordinating their activities at sub-national levels, sharing good practices and are actively engaged in advocacy processes at national level. A steering group oversees the work of the secretariat and facilitates the work of members. The INGO administering funds and hosting the secretariat plays a treasurer role, deferring to the steering group on strategic decisions.

A key factor in the success of the Mozambique civil society platform is the selection of ANSA to administer funds and host the Secretariat. The fact that it is a national NGO is seen as advantageous as they have good working relations and trusts with other CSOs. They are considered to have strong technical knowledge, efficient and do not change priorities easily. Some CSAs, e.g. Zambia, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Malawi and Kenya have established or are establishing themselves as legal entities. Reasons for this include:

- a desire to ensure that decisions are fully made by the governing body of the CSA
- to make the administration of funds more efficient
- a need to increase the legitimacy of the civil society voice
- a need to fundraise and be a direct recipient of funds

Other CSAs such as Nepal, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Peru have chosen to maintain a 'loose network' where funds are administered and the Secretariat is hosted by a member organisation. In some CSAs this decision was motivated by a concern that there would be too much competition for membership of the governing body and increased bureaucracy impeding a focus on activities. A fear that the CSA will compete for scarce funds with members is also cited by some CSOs.

## Senior management commitment to scaling up nutrition through aligned ways of working

The opinion of some SUN stakeholders that some INGO members of the SUN Movement are not doing enough to scale up and align resources and actions has been noted above. There is recognition within some NGOs that organisational commitment exists at a technical level but not necessarily amongst senior management. The situation within governments is reflected in some civil society organisations. Furthermore, global level commitments do not necessarily get promoted through the management chain to country level. Interviews suggest that there is still pressure from senior managers to compete with others for resources and to ensure visibility for the organisation.

## The role of the global SUN Civil Society Network

All informants recognised the strong role that has been played by the CSN collectively and by individual members in promoting alignment of CSOs through national CSAs, and advocating for higher-level political commitment.

Many called for the CSN to do more, whilst recognising that it has resource constraints and that sometimes there is a lack of awareness of support tools which it has already developed (see Box 4) and a perception that they often do not get used.

#### Box 4: Examples of guidance and resources produced by the CSN

SUN CSN cross learning tool on the CSN blog covering the following issues: <http://suncivilsociety.net/wix.com/suncsnblog#!cross-learning-landing/cs4h>

Guidance Note: Establishing a Civil Society Alliance in a SUN Country

<http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/SUN-CSN-Establishing-a-CSA.pdf>

Enabling Good Governance in Civil Society Alliances [http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SUN-CSN\\_Enabling-Good-Governance-in-CSA\\_EN\\_FinalWeb.pdf](http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SUN-CSN_Enabling-Good-Governance-in-CSA_EN_FinalWeb.pdf)

SUN CSN Post-2015 advocacy tool-kit

<http://suncivilsociety.net/wix.com/suncsnblog#!post2015-tool-kit/cw1t>

Ensuring CSAs have equitable access to opportunities available at

[http://media.wix.com/ugd/a1d6d9\\_g0a870d1f93c470dbeb4a27d014fbbd9.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/a1d6d9_g0a870d1f93c470dbeb4a27d014fbbd9.pdf)

A SUN CSN Process For Claims And Log When Internal Tensions Arise In SUN CSAs

[http://media.wix.com/ugd/a1d6d9\\_adb2352f1bd44d7cb11aed4802d7oda7.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/a1d6d9_adb2352f1bd44d7cb11aed4802d7oda7.pdf)

Civil society successes in scaling up nutrition

[http://media.wix.com/ugd/a1d6d9\\_e3db0fd63f204c2d99d41ea228a2735f.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/a1d6d9_e3db0fd63f204c2d99d41ea228a2735f.pdf)

Civil Society Network process for submitting request for support from the SUN CSN

<http://suncivilsociety.net/wix.com/suncsnblog#!supporting-csas/cbq5>

Some believe that the CSN Steering Group should be more interventionist in order to help resolve problems at country level, particularly when CSN guidelines are not being followed. There is a feeling that CSN guidance is too general and overly-avoids being prescriptive. Similar concerns were expressed about SUN Movement guidance in general. It was recognised that many priorities and approaches need to be context specific. However, it is believed that on some issues there are some universally applicable principles that should be adhered to, e.g. ensuring that a representative CSA executive body, in consultation with members, is setting strategic priorities, deciding on the use of funds and overseeing the work Secretariat, irrespective of whether or not the CSA is a legal entity.

Questions arose during the study regarding the extent to which the CSN can or should enforce alignment of its members. One approach suggested is for the CSN to encourage alignment and create processes built into the membership application process that will ensure tracking of commitments and transparent reporting on those over time.

Concerns were expressed that some of the NGOs on the global CSN Steering Group are not very active at country level and are therefore not in the best position to make decisions on how to support national CSAs. This could be due to the fact that members sit on an individual basis, as opposed to institutional, on

the Steering Group. The incoming Steering Group as of October 2015 has 53% of country representation compared to the previous 46%.

The CSN Secretariat is widely recognised as playing an effective role in supporting CSAs, sharing learning and facilitating the activities and functioning of the global CSN. It is also appreciated that capacity is inadequate and increased resources are justified. However, there is little appetite amongst donors to fund a large CSN Secretariat. It is recognised that a small expansion is justifiable.

Donors appreciate in principle the emphasis that the CSN is placing on regionalisation of technical support, along the ACF West Africa model. It is commonly agreed that there is a need for a focal point to coordinate regional support and for this person should be a part of the CSN Secretariat. However, there are different perspectives on the best way of providing support.

The CSN Secretariat is proposing that one member of the CSN in each region should dedicate a percentage of a staff members time to such a role. For the purposes of this work, the staff member would be considered as a member of the global CSN Secretariat, which would be mostly virtual with in person meetings during key moments such as the annual SUN Global Gathering, SUN CSN annual meetings, regional meetings and learning routes.

## External factors

### Political leadership on nutrition

Where leadership on nutrition is located within government is considered to be a key factor for effective SUN efforts, including the participation and alignment of civil society. The predominant opinion is that political leadership should sit in the office of the president or prime minister in order to ensure a multi-sectoral approach across government ministries and departments. Where leadership on nutrition sits within one ministry, CSOs working in other sectors find it difficult to engage on nutrition issues and encourage the adoption of nutrition sensitive policies and programmes. In many countries CSOs and UN agencies believe that there is strong commitment at technical levels but there is still inadequate high-level political commitment to ensure the scale up of investments and actions required at a local level. It was also felt important that the autonomy and self-organisation of CSAs be explicitly recognised by government focal points and MSPs.

### The functioning of multi-stakeholder platforms and quality of plans and frameworks

SUN government focal points are a critical determinant of the ability of CSOs to participate in multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) and effectively influence the development and implementation of policies, plans and programmes. MSPs that are considered by research study informants to be functioning well include: Niger, Mali, Senegal, Rwanda, Nepal, and Tanzania. However, the overwhelming impression conveyed during the research study is that many MSPs are not functioning as well as intended or as sometimes portrayed. MSP meetings are not taking place as often as they should. Informants in this study reported that MSP meetings were often not well organised, with agenda and background information not sent out sufficiently in advance and a feeling that meetings are intended to rubber stamp decisions.

### The role of UN agencies

REACH is seen as having an important role and responsibility in supporting CSO participation and alignment, given its relationships with government focal points and aims to promote legal frameworks for inclusive national multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms. REACH aims to conduct an inventory of UN efforts for nutrition in each of the 55 SUN countries

by 2016, including a self-assessment of UN agency alignment with national processes.

In Peru, the CSA includes five UN agencies. CSOs recognise that they would not have achieved what they have if they had not joined with UN agencies. UN agencies have access to high-level government officials and can facilitate dialogue with CSOs. The Peru CSA developed messages and UN agencies organised joint meetings. The World Bank aligned behind the nutrition targets laid out by civil society and supported CSO dialogue with the President.

However, the research study revealed one example where a UN agency played a negative role in relation to SUN. It was seen to have resisted the leadership on nutrition being positioned in the Office of the President rather than the Ministry of Health. The agency argued against the establishment of a civil society alliance at national level arguing that the multi-stakeholder technical working group was adequate, as well as against the establishment of CS platforms at sub-national level, saying that there should only be one platform. The agency was reported to be highly interventionist in civil society affairs, influencing the decision over which NGO was selected to administer CSA funds. They argued that the government should approve CSA communications whilst the SUN government focal point rejected this.

## Funding

There is a lot which can, and is, being achieved by CSOs, CSAs and the global CSN with limited resources, including through financial and in-kind support from INGOs. However, as within the SUN Movement as a whole, additional resources need to be mobilised in order that CSOs can scale up their actions. All informants recognised the need for increased and longer-term funding as key to sustained and aligned civil society participation.

### CSO funding needs

The research study scoped out the broad funding needs of CSOs in the SUN Movement, namely:

- to scale up nutrition specific and sensitive programmes aligned with national and local plans (including capacity building and technical support, as well as direct implementation)
- to scale up advocacy and accountability activities at local, national, regional and global levels
- to coordinate CSO actions at all levels (i.e. core costs for CSAs and the global CSN).



Whilst CSOs are largely dependent on institutional donor funding for programme activities, other sources of funding are being utilised to support advocacy, accountability and coordination activities.

### **INGO contributions**

The value of INGO resource contributions is difficult to estimate, especially for in-kind assistance. The CSN Secretariat is attempting to make estimates. However, the scale of support, in terms of capacity building, hosting of CSA Secretariats, sharing of nutrition education materials, appears to be under appreciated by many SUN stakeholders. Contributions from larger NGOs have been a key factor in sustaining the CSA in Peru. Some CSAs, such as Zambia, are exploring the possibility of charging membership fees. Yet, it also appears to be the case that some INGOs could increase their contributions using unrestricted sources of funding, if there were to be increased senior management commitment. There were calls made for INGOs engaged in the SUN Movement to ensure that nutrition is maintained as a long-term priority and not change focus according to “latest fashions”.

### **Donor funding**

As reported in the Global Nutrition Report 2015, donor investments in nutrition programmes in different sectors have increased in recent years, even if they still fall well below requirements. Consequently the amount of programme funding channelled through CSOs has also increased. A critical gap in donor support identified during this study is in relation to building the capacity of grassroots organisations. Some donors like in Tanzania have actually supported the CSA strengthening to become a direct recipient of funds by providing 6 month funding with that focus.

Whilst there are some reports of donors making funding conditional on alignment with national policies and plans (e.g. in Mozambique), many interviewees expressed concern that donors are not adequately aligned themselves. There is a risk that CSOs are forced to align more with donor priorities than with people at risk or national plans.

Country level donor networks and convenors are considered to have a key role in mobilising resources and promoting the alignment of stakeholders. However, in many SUN countries, there is still no donor convenor. In others, there is not a regular exchange of information between CSAs and donor convenors. There are often contacts with individual CSOs but not representatives of CSAs. Responsibility for this is shared between donor and civil society representatives.

Donors are increasingly advising that funds should be accessed at country level but there is recognition that funding at this level is inadequate. A number of informants, including from within the donor community, believe that there are not yet serious conversations within the Donor Network about how to finance the 2016-2020 SUN Movement Strategy, including CSAs and the CSN. However major gaps remain in terms of country level donor presence for nutrition funding in many countries.

### **The SUN Movement Multi-Partner Trust Fund**

Apart from donor funding of CSO programmes, the major source of funding for CSO activities has been the SUN Movement Multi-Partner Trust Fund. The MPTF with funding from the Irish, Swiss and UK governments has allocated over US\$7.5 million to support 24 CSAs between 2012-2016 and just over US\$1 million to support the work of the global CSN. The vast majority of these funds have covered CSA and CSN core costs, i.e. Secretariat staff salaries and other costs. They have, therefore, played an important role in facilitating coordination between CSOs at country and global levels. Funding has proven to be effective not only in the establishment of new CSAs but also supporting existing platforms to expand their activities. For example, MPTF funds helped the Peru CSA to decentralise activities to sub-national level.

### **National governments**

In general, informants saw limited opportunities for national governments to fund CSO participation (e.g. through contribution to Secretariat costs, participation in multi-stakeholder events, etc). However, there are some examples where this is happening (e.g. Brazil – outside of SUN). In the Republic of Congo, it was reported that government is contributing to UN coordination costs. There were differences of perspective on whether funding from national governments would compromise the independence of CSOs. The Mozambique National Focal Point believes that it will not in their country because there is a strong government commitment to the role of CSOs. Everyone agreed that there needs to be a very democratic system in place for CSOs to be able to access funds from national governments for advocacy activities. Some informants suggested that a key role that national governments could play is the integration of costs for CSO programmes and coordination costs into national costed plans.

## 5. Conclusions

There is wide agreement that alignment of civil society actions with national priorities and multi-stakeholder common results frameworks is key for scaling up actions to sustainably eradicate all forms of malnutrition. However, it is also clear that alignment is not unconditional and makes sense to CSOs only when they believe that the plans and frameworks are aligned

with the interests of people at risk of malnutrition and have been developed in an inclusive and participatory manner.

The validity of the approach described during the ICE by CSN Steering Group and Secretariat members (Box 5) was reaffirmed during this research study.

### **Box 3: The key functions of CSOs in the SUN Movement**

**(Source: Mokoro 2015, informed by CSN Steering Group and Secretariat perspectives)**

- *To ensure that policies and priorities are rights based and in the interests of malnourished and at risk people;*
- *To inform and align their programmes and activities with such policies and plans;*
- *To advocate where there are gaps or policies and actions of different stakeholders go against these interests.*

Although much remains to be achieved, the research study reveals that CSOs are leading stakeholders within the SUN Movement in aligning their activities with national processes, policies and programmes.

Alignment of CSOs requires a common understanding between stakeholders of the context specific causes of malnutrition and the appropriate policies and actions required. The starting point for developing consensus on appropriate, context specific actions must be the experiences and opinions of the people most at risk. There is strong recognition of this within the CSN and

many of the CSAs, with concerted efforts to promote partnership and leadership by grassroots organisations. Yet, there is also recognition that more needs to be done.

It is vital that the principles of autonomy and self-organisation of CSOs are respected by all SUN stakeholders in order that they can continue to constructively influence policies and actions and ensure that they are effective in promoting the right to food and nutrition for all.



# 6. Recommendations

The recommendations presented below are targeted at CSAs and the global CSN. Whilst it is recognised that other SUN stakeholders at national and global levels have an important role to play in promoting civil society alignment, CSOs need to encourage them to play these roles. The research study suggests that many CSAs and the global CSN are already working on these issues. In this sense, the recommendations are an encouragement to enhance existing efforts. The preliminary recommendations from this report have already been taken into consideration in the SUN CSN strategy and contribution of civil society to the SUN Movement strategy and road map in SUN 2.0 (2016-2020).

## Civil Society Alliances

### Governance and administrative arrangements for internal alignment

- CSAs governance & administrative arrangements should be guided by the following principles:-
  - Executive committees, boards, steering committees etc should be the strategic decision making body
  - Priority should be given to the participation of grassroots organisations and other local CSOs in multi-stakeholder platforms and the governing bodies of CSAs
  - CSA Secretariats should play a support role to executive bodies and to the wider membership
  - CSOs administering funds on behalf of CSAs and / or hosting Secretariats should recognise that the CSA executive body is responsible for deciding on how funds are spent and managing Secretariat staff, whilst fulfilling legal obligations to ensure funds are spent appropriately
- Increasing the capacity, participation and leadership of grassroots organisations should be a high strategic priority of CSAs. The establishment of sub-national CSAs is important in this respect, as well as for advocating that national policies and plans are translated into local level actions
- Evaluate the pros and cons of establishing the CSA as a legal entity and share experience through the CSN online cross learning tool

### Funding

- Advocate within multi-stakeholder platforms for CSA core costs and activities to be included in national costed plans
- Explore opportunities for better-resourced members making contributions to CSA cost as well as encouraging members to integrate a contribution towards CSA costs into their funding proposals
- Lobby national level donors for funding and monitor their alignment with national policies, plans and common results frameworks
- Work with donor convenors to develop more specific, clearer responsibilities in their ToRs regarding funding for CSAs.

### Influencing the policy environment

- Encourage high-level government leadership and coordination to ensure a multi-sectoral approach
- Hold government focal points to account for adherence to SUN Principles of Engagement
- Encourage the strengthening of capacity of SUN government focal points as necessary, including a supporting team
- Advocate for the autonomy and self-organisation of CSAs to be explicitly recognised by government focal points and MSPs
- Advocate for multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder platforms to be established at sub-national level
- Further scale up efforts to raise awareness and commitments of parliamentarians to nutrition, together with awareness raising for journalists

### Influencing and aligning with national policies and plans

- Place high priority on collating evidence on effective and ineffective policies and actions and share with other stakeholders through MSPs, technical working groups and global SUN networks and events (e.g. supporting local level nutrition surveillance, causal analyses, monitoring of programmes and budgets etc)
- Raise awareness and promote the use of relevant evidence based, international policy guidance produced in inclusive settings, e.g. Committee on World Food Security - CFS



- CSA executive bodies should facilitate broad consultation with members on issues being discussed in MSPs and encourage members to align their own activities and resources with CSA strategies and priorities
- Monitor and support technical capacities to scale up nutrition actions at sub national level
- Local CSOs and grassroots organisations that are implementers of nutrition programmes, should have their nutrition technical capacities strengthened through in-service, pre-service or other sorts of training, including those led by CSAs.
- Review and revise the following documents to give a stronger steer on governance and administrative arrangements for CSAs:
  - Guidance Note: Establishing a Civil Society Alliance in a SUN Country
  - Enabling Good Governance in Civil Society Alliances
- If funds are secured for an additional CSN Secretariat staff member, consider a focus on documenting and sharing of examples of effective practice
- Discuss how to establish regional technical support capacity, using the ACF approach in West Africa as a starting point
- Propose agenda items on civil society contributions to scaling up nutrition in a future Lead Group and SUN Executive Committee meetings
- Improve communications of tools and resources.

## Civil Society Network

- Consider establishment of national CSAs in “non SUN countries”, (e.g. in order to lobby other governments to align their policies and cooperation) and consider making CSN membership exclusively for CSAs rather than individual organisations
- CSN steering group members should encourage responsibility for “scaling up nutrition” to be integrated into the job descriptions of senior managers of INGOs who have signed up to the SUN Movement



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