Scaling Up NUTRITION

Civil Society Network

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Effective civil society coalition building in support of scaling up nutrition efforts in SUN countries

Lessons learnt

Effective civil society coalition building in support of scaling up nutrition efforts in SUN countries – Lessons learnt

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This publication

This piece builds on the comprehensive SUN CSN publication on Enabling Good governance in Civil Society Alliances English | Français | Español and provides insights on effective civil society coalition building in support of scaling up nutrition efforts in SUN countries

Introduction

As of April 2015, over 2100 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) contribute to improving nutrition from grass-roots to national level through participation in **Civil Society Alliances (CSAs) across 34 SUN countries** and the global civil society network (SUN CSN).

SUN **Civil Society Alliances (CSAs)** coordinate civil society contributions to multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral efforts in SUN countries. They work at national and sub-national levels supporting development of CSO capacity in nutrition.

SUN countries with established SUN Civil Society Alliances
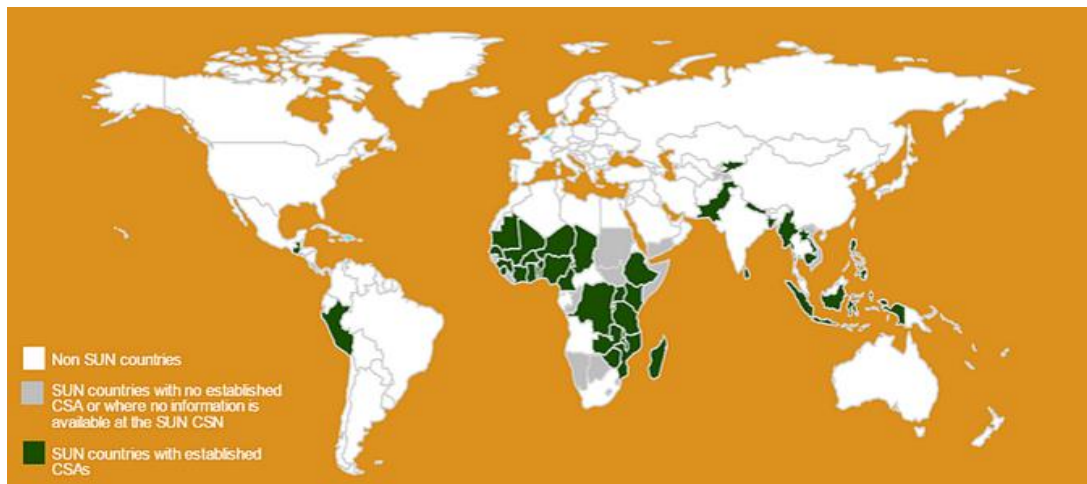
Civil Society – a key stakeholder for advancing multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral nutrition efforts in countries

CSAs ensure the participation of civil society in national platforms for SUN.

26 CSAs * (84%) are **engaging in multi-stakeholder efforts**.

25 CSAs * (81%) are **part of multi-stakeholder platforms** / forums.

CSAs aim to **reflect the voices of populations directly affected by malnutrition. Some are actively engaged with social movements. For example, in Mali, Cameroon and Peru. They also work at both** national and sub-national levels in order to shape policy and programme cycles (development, implementation and review).

* These numbers are based on 31 CSAs - information was not available for 3 CSAs (2014 Survey of CSAs).

Civil society alliances make a valuable contribution to scaling up nutrition sustainably

In some cases, the creation of CSAs and national networks has already impacted the functioning of the SUN Movement in country. For example, the joint efforts of the SUN Movement Government Focal Points and CSA in El Salvador are influencing the shaping and implementation of a food sovereignty law in country. In Myanmar, the launch of the CSA has galvanized government and other stakeholder efforts towards scaling up nutrition. In Sri Lanka, with the recent change in government, the CSA is playing a crucial role in sensitizing the new government and ensuring continuity of nutrition prioritization in country.

"The results of SUN CSA actions have a high chance of sustainability, not least because CSOs themselves generally give high priority to sustainable impacts. For example, many CSAs are placing a lot of emphasis on raising awareness of nutrition amongst the public, media and parliamentarians to ensure that there is long-term demand for scaled up action across electoral cycles." [Extract from the ICE report]

Effective and inclusive coalitions – insights and lessons learnt

Coalitions are effective if they:

1. Invest time in setting up or strengthening foundations for strong and influential CSAs in support of effective and efficient implementation

2. Ensure the consensual establishment of democratic, inclusive and accountable governance foundations (e.g. Kenya, Lao PDR, Madagascar), **including strong coordination arrangements**, with dynamic leadership from Board/Steering Committee members and a functional and supported independent CSA Secretariat. Each CSA has its own governance arrangement to reflect the political cultural and social context in which they are established as well as the diversity of CSOs that are members of alliances and coalitions. Key principles forming the basis of governance arrangements are outlined in *Enabling Good governance in Civil Society Alliances English* | *Français* | *Español*.

Key governance features of existing civil society alliances

Many civil society alliances are developing key processes and structures to enable good governance. The infographic below demonstrates the proportion of CSAs with the listed features. These features are not the only indicators of governance processes but they are a few key areas where civil society alliances can improve the way their internal governance functions.

27 Constitution
23 Steering Group or Executive Committee
20 ToR for Steering Group or Executive Committee
10 Memorandum of Understanding between CSA and host organisation
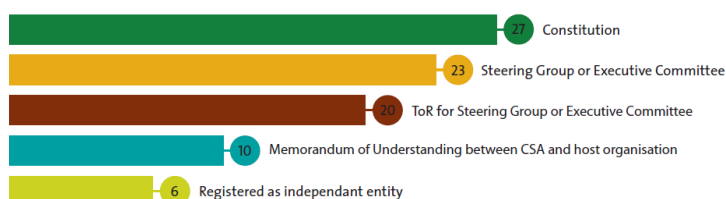6 Registered as independant entity

Figure 1. number of civil society alliances with the above governance features
(based on 29 countries providing information in a survey conducted by the SUN CSN in November 2014 on status of national SUN CSAs)

Extract from Enabling Good governance in Civil Society Alliances English | *Français* | *Español*

"Full time CSA coordinators help to 'bind' coalitions

Nearly all of the civil society alliances have found it necessary to appoint or elect a dedicated coordinator to take responsibility for organizing and harmonizing activities of the alliance. The role of the coordinator is crucial in 'binding' the coalition. Especially in the initial phase, when roles and governance structures need to be established as quickly as possible, CSA coordinators need to possess the following skills/capacities:

- ➢ Strong facilitation and negotiation skills

- ➢ Strong communication and knowledge management skills

- ➢ Strong networking and relationship building and nurturing skills

- ➢ Strategic methods to resolve conflict, achieve consensus and prioritize tasks

- ➢ Ability to facilitate interaction between central and district level civil society efforts and priorities

The coordinator should ideally be appointed as quickly as possible in order to capitalize on the momentum, commitment and urgency created during the initial in-country discussions to establish a CSA." *Extract from the MPTF 2013 Annual Report*

Remaining challenges:

- - Brain drain - CSA coordinators moving onto more senior and high level roles as a result of their experience and skills

- - Unfavourable working environments can be created and impede on effective CSA coordinator work as a result of internal tensions and sometimes micro-management from line managers.

- - Experience suggests that one full-time staff may not be sufficient for effective functioning of the alliance, with portfolios often unmanageable.

Key lessons:

- - Recruitment of the right CSA coordinator recruitment is essential

- - Through their positions as coordinators they have become key nutrition champions in SUN countries with several coordinators moving on to more senior and high level roles given the right environment

- - A conducive working environment for CSA coordinators to grow in will enable more effective coalition building and improve cohesion of the CSA

3. **Build leadership and champions**. For example, through identifying key individuals such as first ladies, members of parliament, community leaders, traditional and faith leaders media figures, and celebrities to provide increased public visibility for nutrition issues and encourage nutrition to be prioritised by government

4. Build internal credibility and legitimacy among civil society actors, formalize relationships with CSO members of the alliance and ensure members engagement and commitment

Learning exchanges facilitate CSA legitimacy building

Following the participation of the Lao PDR national delegation, including CSA representative, in the Peru based learning route and in country visits, the CSA reported that these opportunities had made a big difference in helping to shift the perspective on how to include civil society in the fight against malnutrition in Laos. As a result the Laos National Nutrition Centre is now prioritizing civil society and has expressed their confidence that civil society is a good partner with whom to address malnutrition. They plan to include the CSA in future discussions.

CSA members engagement is an ingredient for successful establishment of CSAs

Several CSAs have encountered the challenge of members' engagement. Poor engagement can be due to a number of factors including, already very busy workloads, lack of prioritisation of SUN institutionally or organisational representatives without delegated decision-making, availability for meetings and joint activities (including Lao PDR, Uganda, Malawi CSAs). This has been particularly challenging to CSA coordinators who have found creative and tailored ways of addressing it, through:

- Building ownership with a decision-making process that builds consensus among multiple partners and stakeholders;

- Building relationships with CSA and CSN members. This process is time-consuming but can be a fruitful process to improve members' engagement. This is the case with the SUN CSN now seeing increased engagement of network members in supporting CSN efforts and alignment to national priorities;

- Establishing smaller nimble working groups focused on specific strategic and operational efforts can be a great means to support coordinated advance on urgent and thematic issues (e.g. Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, SUNCSN) and critical in ensuring delivery of CSA mandate with optimal use of an array of expertise among members.

- Signing of commitments by CSO members of the alliances. For example in Mozambique and Kenya, can support harmonised engagement with the CSA secretariat.

- Open, transparent and regular communications.

5. Engage social movements to ensure community ownership, an essential foundation for sustainability;

6. Resolve conflicts and establish mechanisms and systems to prevent or manage conflicts. For example, in e.g. Kenya and Madagascar.

The internal relationships between members of CSAs, especially between INGOs and local/national organisations can be challenging. It is important for INGOs to be sensitive to power dynamics and encourage local and national CSOs to lead. [adapted from the ICE report]

Conflict resolution

Outlining the principles by which conflicts will be resolved early on will help to ensure there is a framework for tackling any disputes at a later stage as well as building trust and mutual accountability. There are many guidelines on how best to undertake conflict resolution but some initial useful principles are outlined below:

- Prioritise good relationships: Treat everyone with mutual respect. Agree to remain constructive under pressure.
- Keep people and problems separate: By separating the problem from the person, real issues can be debated without damaging working relationships.
- Listen first; talk second: To solve a problem effectively you have to understand where the other person is coming from before defending your own position.
- Set out the scene: Agree and establish the objective, observable elements that will have an impact on the decision.
- Explore options together: Be open to the idea that a third position may exist, and that you can get to this idea jointly.

Extract from Enabling Good governance in Civil Society Alliances [English](#) | [Français](#) | [Español](#)

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7. Combine forces of individuals, agencies, and organizations and minimize duplication. Identify a coalition specific common goal together in response to needs on the ground that is complementary to and strengthen existing efforts (e.g. Zambia, Mali, Mozambique)

The degree of clarity on respective roles of members vis-a-vis the CSA Secretariat is essential. CSAs are more effective when individual CSOs are committed to contributing to collective action and aligning their own programmes with a common CSA strategy. [adapted from the ICE report]

8. Secure funding to coordinate efforts and conduct key activities (e.g. through the SUN Movement Multi-Partner Trust Fund, Bilateral donors, UN agencies, CSO members, …)

9. **Build trust, legitimacy and credibility.** This enables CSAs to be recognized for their successes and added value by other stakeholders (e.g. El Salvador, Ghana, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe). Coalitions thus gain access to key platforms and policy shaping forums that ensure national and subnational efforts are a reflection of the needs on the ground and thus building the foundations for alignment of nutrition efforts.

Sometimes, lack of openness and supportiveness of governments and others to CSO participation, remains a challenge. In some countries, national governments and even UN

agencies are either resistant to civil society participation or slow to organise it. [adapted from the ICE report]

10. Actively contribute to multi-stakeholder efforts and broader SUN discussions on key issues like conflict of interests' prevention and management (Uganda, Lao PDR, Ghana, and Sri Lanka), advocacy for nutrition prioritisation (e.g. Uganda) and increased investment in nutrition (e.g. Malawi, Zambia).

11. Commit to **transparent and open communication** within the alliance and with the broader nutrition field. **Knowledge sharing** through newsletters, regular publications, media, etc… should be integral to effective coalition efforts. Some great examples from Uganda, Bangladesh, el Salvador and others exist. In addition, [CSAs are extremely effective at advocating for nutrition](#).

These experiences from civil society are extremely valuable for inspiring effective multi-stakeholder working and can bring great added value to the SUN Movement efforts on *Coordination of relevant action across sectors, among stakeholders, and between levels of government through improved functional capacities*.

Power dynamics – a factor influencing coalition building

This section is a reflection from the SUN CSN based on support provided to CSAs over the last two years.

- SUN Government Focal Point or specific UN agency sometimes favour a CSO thus negatively influencing power dynamics and discouraging democratic decision making;
- Some networks existing before joining SUN feel legitimacy to lead efforts which can compromise promoting inclusivity and open, transparent, democratic process.
- Some countries have multiple alliances co-existing in the same space and have difficulties coming to an agreement on working together towards a common cause;
- CSAs evolving in political contexts with limited or non-existent democracy can be subject to limited civil society space for expression or be perceived as politically threatening.
- CSAs in humanitarian, fragile and conflict affected contexts face additional challenges in coordination and cooperation particularly in relation to existing international coordination structures such as the UN Cluster system.
- Dynamics between international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), national CSOs, networks and social movements can sometimes be difficult to manage. This can be overcome by agreeing on common vision and complementarity of efforts – INGOs often play a supporting and capacity strengthening role.
- A process for claims and log when internal tensions arise in SUN CSAs is being set up by the SUN CSN to support CSAs manage some internal conflicts. It is hoped to assist country CSAs in addressing some of these challenges. - http://media.wix.com/ugd/a1d6d9_adb2352f1bd44d7cb11aed4802d70da7.pdf

In-depth understanding of national and local contexts is necessary for effective CSA establishment

It is important to have an in-depth understanding of national contexts in order to establish strong and influential CSAs built on solid governance foundations

Building legitimacy within the CSA and with external stakeholders is key to effective CSAs

In some countries, CSAs have taken time to establish their legitimacy within the CSA and with other stakeholders. Lack of interest by donors or governments due to competing funding priorities for other development programs was also a challenge faced by some CSAs. Evidence-based advocacy for integrating nutrition and food security into future development plans and programs is essential. This process can be time consuming but essential to multi-stakeholder multi-sectoral, multi-level efforts.

One model does not fit all – decentralization efforts demonstrating the need for flexibility informed by cross-country learning

As clearly stated in the ICE report, flexibility and context specific efforts are key. CSA decentralization efforts is a good reflection of this principle with country CSAs choosing a number of and diverse models for effectively addressing malnutrition in decentralized structures of their country – from formalized local alliances (e.g. Mali and Malawi) to lead CSO members (e.g. Malawi) and relays (e.g. Niger). One model does not fit all and flexibility informed by cross-learning from other countries need to underpin efforts.

Cross-country learning accelerates progress

Cross-country learning through different seminars, global meets, workshops, national and international summits, field learning and exchange visits is one of the best means of supporting CSAs in their coalition building efforts, inspires efforts and unlocks innovation potential. In fact, some of the later established CSAs seems to experience good progress in general in part due to an increasingly strengthened learning network between SUN Countries.

Funding – an important factor towards active and effectively functioning coalitions

Most of the active coalitions have received outside funding, have governance systems established and have full time paid staff to coordinate efforts. These play an important role in active and effectively functioning coalitions / CSAs.

Recommendations for strengthening functional multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral efforts in SUN 2.0 (2016-2020):

The below recommendations are based on experiences of coalition building of civil society alliances in 34 countries of the SUN Movement.

- Fostering cross-learning to accelerate progress
    - o The SUN Movement wide Community of Practice on *Coordination of relevant action across sectors, among stakeholders, and between levels of government through improved functional capacities* needs to be leverage to support cross-learning

- o Cross-country learning should continue being strengthened with the SUN CSN Secretariat being key to facilitating this process.
  - o Guidance documents pulling on country experiences with some level of analysis are helpful to CSAs and should continue being developed
  - o CSA coalition building experiences can be useful for multi-stakeholder efforts and some tools, resources and experiences adapted in support of improved functioning of multi-stakeholder platforms in SUN countries
- Some principles to guide multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral working in SUN countries
  - o Governance and coordination:
    - ▪ Building strong foundations for effective coalitions should not be rushed and in-depth understanding of national and local contexts is necessary for effective CSA establishment
    - ▪ Flexible, adaptive governance should be promoted for effective coalition building and multi-stakeholder working
  - o Participation of civil society (social movements and communities) should be central to all multi-stakeholder efforts
    - ▪ To effectively enhance the shift from rhetoric to action in promoting multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches in fighting malnutrition, CSAs and the SUN CSN need to continue broadening their membership and engaging social movements.
- The principles of engagement of the SUN Movement need to remain a compass for all nutrition efforts.
- Challenges ahead
  - o Mutual accountability will need to be strengthened in support of improved multi-stakeholder working.
  - o Conflict of interests' prevention and management processes and mechanisms in SUN countries need to be strengthened, both within and across stakeholder groups. The SUN Movement wide consultation provides guidance for countries to develop and adapt to their context.
  - o Resource mobilisation is key to ensuring sustainability - Resources and sustainability of the coalitions remain a major challenge threatening the sustainability of all nutrition efforts
    Resource availability, from INGOs, donors and MPTF. Resources are typically insufficient for achieving the potential impacts that CSOs can have in sustaining political commitments and ensuring that they are turned into scaled up actions that achieve nutrition outcomes. [Extract from the ICE report]