

Investing in the data value chain for nutrition in West Africa

By Roos Verstraeten

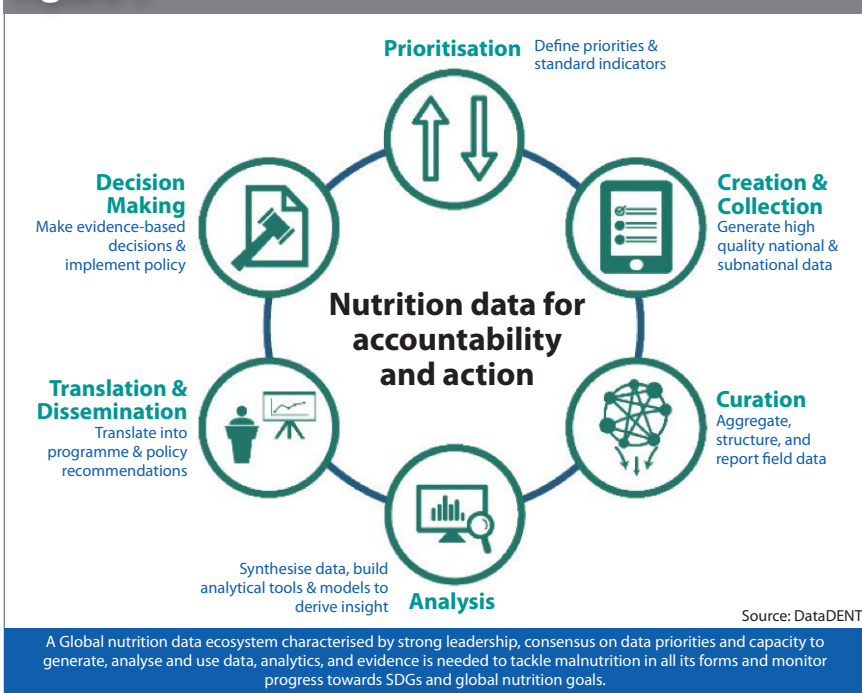


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Data and the building of country-level data-related capacity is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In 2014, the Global Nutrition Report called for a “Nutrition Data Revolution” (IFPRI, 2014). Various actions, investments and initiatives were subsequently shaped that focus on advancing nutrition data at country, regional and global level (Kim, 2016). These include consensus building on sets of standard indicators (e.g., Global Monitoring Framework on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition¹) and the inclusion of new indicators in demographic and health surveys, the use of innovative analytic modelling tools to prioritise investments in nutrition (e.g., Nutrition Modelling Consortium²) and the synthesis and translation of nutrition data and evidence to inform decision-making for policies, programmes and advocacy (e.g., Transform Nutrition West Africa,³ Data for Decisions to Expand Nutrition Transformation⁴ and National Information Platforms for Nutrition⁵). The Nutrition Data Value Chain (Development Initiatives, 2017) introduced a blueprint for a common language and action around data and information systems to ensure that better data and information is used in decisions (Figure 1). It highlights the need for significant investment in capacity throughout the entire data value chain as well as strong leadership and coordination to promote the use of data to inform decision-making at all levels and across nutrition-relevant sectors.

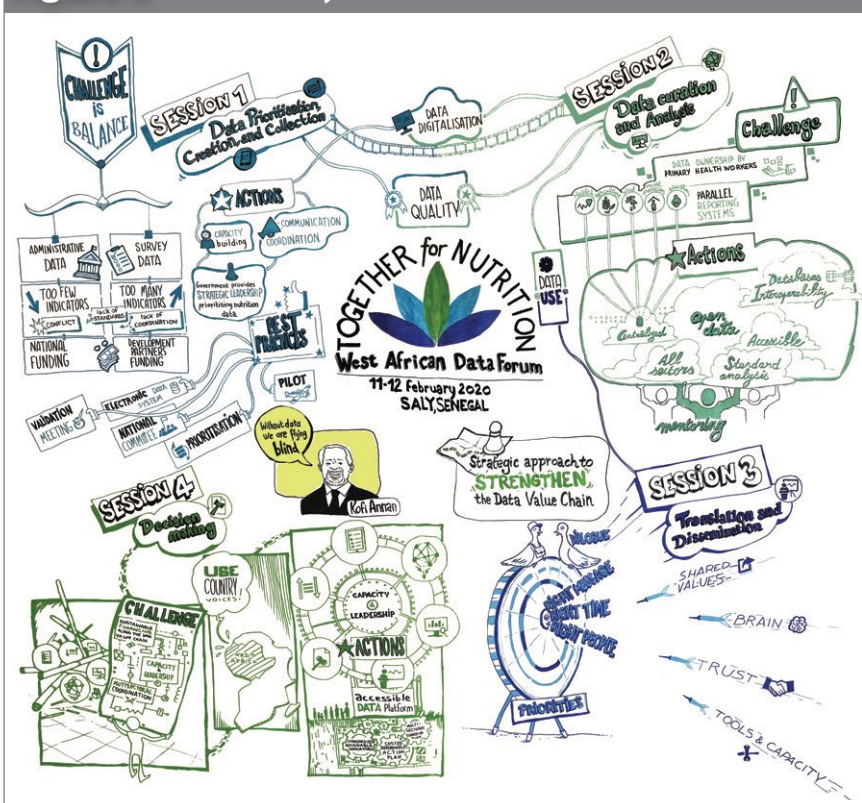
Despite these investments, gaps remain to fully understand the nature and complexity of malnutrition in all its forms (Development Initiatives, 2018) and challenges exist at each link in the nutrition data value chain. In the face of these gaps, it remains challenging for in-country decision-makers to effectively monitor and track their nutrition priorities. In response, a group of regional and global partners convened the Together for Nutrition: West African Data Forum in Senegal in February 2020. The forum brought together 93 participants⁶ from key national and regional institutions across 15 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that generate and/or use nutrition-related data. The objectives of the forum were to i) share national and regional achievements and challenges in operationalising the data value chain for nutrition, ii) strengthen connectivity, coordination and collaboration on data-driven nutrition action, iii) formulate a call to action to strengthen the data value chain for nutri-

Figure 1 Nutrition data value chain



A Global nutrition data ecosystem characterised by strong leadership, consensus on data priorities and capacity to generate, analyse and use data, analytics, and evidence is needed to tackle malnutrition in all its forms and monitor progress towards SDGs and global nutrition goals.

Figure 2 Visual summary of sessions



Source: Transform Nutrition West Africa

¹ https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/indicators_monitoringframework_miy_cn_background.pdf?ua=1
² <https://www.nyas.org/programs/nutrition-modeling-consortium/>
³ Transform Nutrition West Africa (TNWA): <https://westafrica.transformnutrition.org/>
⁴ Data for Decisions to Expand Nutrition Transformation (DataDENT): <https://datadent.org/about-us/>
⁵ National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN): <http://www.nipn-nutrition-platforms.org/>
⁶ The group was led by Transform Nutrition West Africa, an initiative of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and included the following partners active in the West African region: UNICEF, DataDENT, Countdown to 2030, Alive & Thrive, USAID, WHO, WAHO, and NIPN. <https://westafrica.transformnutrition.org/>

tion at country and regional level and iv) identify stakeholder groups to take up and support the call to action.

Through a mix of plenary and breakout sessions that included panels, discussions, training exercises, networking and visual notetaking, participants took stock of the data value chain for nutrition in West Africa. Country and regional experiences were shared related to each step of the nutrition data value chain by researchers, policymakers, implementers, donors and international agencies. Breakout groups refined the various calls to action, synthesised lessons learnt for each stage of the chain and identified promising practices and the support required for implementation (Figure 2).

Drawing on these lessons and opportunities, participants developed a common Call To Action (CTA) for strengthening actions across the nutrition data value chain directed to national and regional governments, donors, UN agencies, implementing partners and researchers. This CTA reflects the priorities of individuals and institutions working on nutrition from the 15 ECOWAS countries and has been endorsed by the West

African Health Organisation (WAHO). In addition, participants suggested various ways to adapt and use it in their specific contexts. For example, at regional level, the CTA could be adopted during the session of the ECOWAS Assembly of Ministers of Health. At national level, it could be referenced during national policy development to support priorities for action and investment by government agencies and donors.

The Data Forum catalysed uptake by countries such as Liberia which has adapted the CTA to its own context. To accelerate uptake throughout the region, the WAHO organised a webinar that

aimed to share some of these experiences with all West African countries (February 2021). This regional-driven approach to put into practice the Nutrition Data Value Chain brings to life a quote from Piwoz *et al.*, “*What gets defined gets measured. What gets measured gets done. What gets costed gets financed.*” (Piwoz *et al.*, 2019).

The meeting report and all other outputs from the Forum are available on the event page at: <https://westafrica.transformnutrition.org/event/together-for-nutrition-west-african-data-forum>

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UNICEF and WFP partnership framework to address wasting in children globally



A mother and child at a nutrition centre in Yambio South Sudan eating ready-to-use therapeutic food

© UNICEF/Helene Sandbu/Ryang, South Sudan

UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) have launched a new partnership framework to support the work of both agencies to enact a paradigm shift that places emphasis on prevention, while accelerating actions for the early detection and treatment of wasted children.

In 2015, countries committed to eliminating all forms of malnutrition by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including child wasting, with a global target to keep the prevalence of wasting below 3% by 2030. However, progress towards meeting this target has been hindered by fragmented approaches and unpredictable financing. UNICEF and WFP are now pursuing a more purposeful, systematic and accountable collaboration that leverages their collective strengths more effectively. Both agencies will play a key role in supporting national governments to reach global targets, with UNICEF serving as the lead coordinating agency and WFP as an essential partner, particularly in fragile con-

texts. The Partnership will focus on fragile contexts where UNICEF and WFP have a unique opportunity to streamline their operations and achieve greater impact, scaling up operations in selected countries from the Sahel and Horn of Africa regions. These include Ethiopia, Chad, Mali, Niger, Somalia and South Sudan. Ways of working are detailed in a partnership framework matrix.

The new framework represents a paradigm shift, placing emphasis on early prevention so that children never become wasted. To this end, WFP and UNICEF will identify context-specific actions to support sustainable and resilient systems and related capacity building of national institutions to ensure that wasting is prevented from pre-conception throughout the life cycle. For when prevention fails, UNICEF and WFP will accelerate actions to support the integration of early detection and treatment services for wasted children into primary health care and other routine and community-based services. This will aim to make treatment easier, shorter, less costly and more

effective and will include the generation and use of evidence on simplified treatment approaches

The UNICEF-WFP Partnership Framework coincides with the launch of the Global Action Plan (GAP) on Child Wasting, and as such, it offers a unique opportunity to build on the country-level, government-led agendas being developed under the GAP. The Partnership Framework is thus a distinct but inter-connected part of UNICEF and WFP's work on the prevention, early detection and treatment of child wasting. The Global Action Plan Roadmaps are being developed under the leadership of national governments. The role of UN agencies is to support the development of these Roadmaps, and to identify their distinct contribution to support their implementation. As they identify these opportunities, UNICEF and WFP teams will be guided by the Partnership Framework to support the efforts by national governments.

Read the partnership agreement here: <https://www.enonline.net/unicefwfpchild-wastingframework>