

Business and civil society working together for nutrition: SUN Movement networks in Zambia

Interview with **Mathews Mhuru**, Country Coordinator for Zambia's Civil Society Organisation (CSO) SUN Alliance, and **Mukela Mufalali**, Zambia SUN Business Network (SBN) coordinator on how their networks are working together. CSO SUN was set up in 2012 and currently has 42 members. The SBN was launched in 2014 and membership has grown to 91 companies, including over 30 local businesses involved in the production, processing and distribution of food.



1. What prompted your SUN Movement Networks to start working together?

Mathews Mhuru: It wasn't a specific issue; rather the result of SUN Networks wanting to speak with the same voice at country level. This can become very helpful when there are shared objectives; for example, working with the private sector on compliance with the [WHO International] Code on the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and pushing for an enabling environment for them to produce more nutritious foods and stop producing unhealthy foods that are branded as nutritious. Working with SBN in the same space helps to create a relationship with the private sector – we don't want just to be seen as that organisation that is always 'talking bad' about business.

2. What are you trying to achieve in this new way of working together?

Mathews Mhuru: Working together means we have a more structured approach when contributing to the same strategy; for example, with the Healthy Diets Campaign developed by SBN in collaboration with government and civil society. From our side, we are working with consumers to create demand for diverse and nutritious foods. Our focus is on the behavioural-change messages embedded in the campaign itself, so it's not just looking at processed foods but talking about access to a more diverse diet to challenge the current maize-dominated food system in Zambia. The Healthy Diets Campaign is also supported by the new Food Based Dietary Guidelines – both networks have helped to develop these, including pushing for locally available fruits and vegetables to be included.

Mukela Mufalali: The private sector is a huge player in the food business: by operating at the business-to-business level, SBN aims to strengthen the private sector's contribution to improving nutrition for Zambian consumers. We're working to increase business awareness on nutrition and to provide a forum for dialogue with the Government, UN agencies, NGOs and, of course, civil society. Food companies can also play a part in addressing the double burden of malnutrition, hence the need to fully engage them in efforts to reduce sugar, salt, trans fats and promote healthy, affordable diets. That's why SBN is working on the Zambia Good Food logo (developed alongside the Healthy Diets campaign) – products will have to be tested to comply with the logo criteria.

3. Are there obvious synergies that you have identified in working together on nutrition?

Both: The two networks have worked hard to identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration, ultimately

promoting network convergence. Leveraging the advocacy strength of CSO-SUN, as well as the business linkages created by the SBN, can be used to navigate and expedite bureaucratic processes. When the Government was dragging its feet on implementing the Zambia Good Food logo, CSO-SUN was able to support the SBN and apply pressure to make it happen.

Another recent example was working together on the Food Safety Bill: CSO-SUN has built strong relationships with parliamentarians and was able to bring SBN to the table to share joint network recommendations on the Bill. Because most issues related to food safety affect the private sector, CSO-SUN extended the invite to SBN to ensure that their members' concerns were incorporated in the submission. Such networking makes it easier to push on the policy side.

4. What processes have you adopted to come together to make the shared opportunities a reality?

Both: It all starts with governance – we are part of the governance structures of each other's network to better support and strengthen collaboration. For example, CSO-SUN is part of the SBN advisory group and SBN is a member of CSO-SUN's Executive Board, which helps to ensure that the strategic direction of networks has the endorsement of the other organisations. We hold formal meetings twice a year, though we are working together on a number of campaigns more informally, and we each leverage strength from the other.

5. Besides the Zambia Good Food logo, could you give some examples of success in working together?

Both: Both networks have focused on consumer protection and conducted joint research to better understand urban consumer awareness and demand for nutrition, including factors linked to consumer decision-making on food. This research has informed programming, including messaging to promote the Zambia Good Food Logo associated with the Healthy Diets Campaign. SBN has been targeting different players in food value chains and more informal markets as key points for disseminating messages and promoting nutritious products, while CSO-SUN is working with local communities and local markets on social behaviour-change messaging aimed at increasing nutrition awareness.

6. Should civil society and business networks do more to support each other? If so, how can they best do this?

Mathews Mhuru: The two networks share a common goal – to fight against malnutrition in all its forms – and a lot needs to be done to achieve that goal. For example, CSO-SUN has a role to

SUN Business Network Manager (in red helmet) with Mount Meru Millers workforce during a SUN Business Members visit in Lusaka, Zambia

Mukela Mufalali



play to ensure that the private sector complies with the code on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes and follow-up foods. The Ministry of Health does not currently take serious action against code violators, but this is something that CSO intends to push on. As yet, the networks have not worked together on this issue, which is disappointing, but this is in our workplan for 2020. We also want it to be a motivating factor for private sector companies to join SBN to improve nutrition in Zambia, but there is currently no push among members to limit unhealthy products or to reformulate products to contain less fat, sugar and salt. Members may have one or two healthy foods, but it should be a goal for them to start producing more nutritious foods.

Mukela Mufalali: One of SBN's main goals is to create an enabling environment for the private sector to improve nutrition. Part of our activities with CSO-SUN is on strengthening policies; for example, regulations on fortification. We also support any information or tools that can improve the transparency of such processes. Learning is a big part of working together – providing guidance and leveraging our knowledge on best practice in other countries.

7. Have you experienced any specific challenges in working together? What are these?

Mathews Mhuru: A major challenge is the decrease in nutrition funding since the SUN Pooled Fund came to an end, which limits our strategic work with SBN and business-to-consumer engagement. Another smaller challenge is that we can't always put out joint statements because of restrictions

due to the hosting of SBN within the UN system. This can be a wasted opportunity, since the Zambian Government is very sensitive to media coverage, and advocacy is a key tool for CSO-SUN. A recent example was a meeting between SBN and the Government, where the private sector made demands for reducing taxes on imported fortificants and buying from local companies, including supplementary foods. CSO-SUN put out a statement, but it would have been stronger to send a message from our joint networks.

Mukela Mufalali: Not that we don't face challenges but the important thing is to provide consistent nutrition information from both networks as we're targeting the same audience - consumers, food processors etc.

8. Have you developed a conflict-of-interest (COI) policy to guide this relationship?

Mathews Mhuru: The two networks are guided by the SUN Movement's Global Civil Society COI policy, but we have yet to sit down and adapt this for the Zambia context. We need to develop a joint COI, particularly in order to help SBN identify who they should be working with in the private sector and remind members of dos and don'ts.

9. If you were advising another SUN Movement country, what lessons have you learned of working together?

Both: Teamwork principles apply in network collaboration because you usually achieve more when you are in collaborative mode. Such synergy may also manifest itself in reduced costs, more flexibility in adapting to changes and increased capabilities. Collaboration in networks and organisations can also offer various perspectives for problem-solving and innovation. We have been able to strengthen each other's networks, particularly through a transfer of knowledge. We also come up with different questions and solutions that supplement areas where the other parties may be lacking.

10. What are your ambitions for future joint working? What are you aiming to tackle, and how?

Both: Our aim is to see strengthened policies and regulations that impact on nutrition being implemented by all stakeholders. We are working together on the launch of the Zambia Good Food logo and running the Healthy Diets Campaign, and looking to get more stakeholders involved – from Government, UN partners and the donor community and, above all, the private sector and consumer engagement.

