

Setting up SUN Networks in Fragile and Conflict Affected States



ENN's SUN Knowledge Management team

The SUN Movement is “a collection of national movements led by governments committed to scaling up nutrition impact and results, along with partners who are aligned to support their goals” (SUN Road Map 2016-2020). A unique characteristic of the SUN Movement model is the SUN Networks devised to formalise the multi-stakeholder approach of the Movement. At a country level, four networks are recommended – a Civil Society Network, a Business Network, a UN Network and a Donor Network – to bring together key actors who are able to influence nutrition outcomes. Having networks aligned behind government is seen as critical to institutionalising, funding and supporting government commitments on nutrition. The Movement has taken root in diverse country contexts; thus, the Networks are also operating differently, and to differing degrees in these widely varying settings. In addition to country-level chapters of the SUN Networks, there is a global support structure with host organisation(s) for each of the four Networks.

Between March and June 2018, ENN completed a Network Mapping exercise, led by ENN’s team of regional knowledge management (KM) Specialists in the 17 SUN countries in which ENN works under the Technical Assistance for Nutrition (TAN) programme. Work was carried out through discussions with the Network leads and others working at a country level, utilising ENN’s existing networks in SUN at country level. Around 50 people (mainly Network convenors, but also other key stakeholders) from the 17 countries were interviewed about the progress of Networks on the ground to obtain examples of success and good practice, as well as an overall picture of how the Networks are evolving across all the countries. ENN’s focus in its TAN work is on 17 fragile and/or conflict affected states (FCAS), as it is not yet clear how well the SUN Movement architecture can meet FCAS needs, and work in tandem with the humanitarian architecture to achieve longer-term nutrition gains.

The Civil Society Alliance (CSA) network in Myanmar: Making strides

In 2014-15, the CSA in Myanmar was formalised with support from Save the Children. The Network was set up with a steering committee of 10 members, seven of whom are international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and three local NGOs. The SUN CSA is run with three dedicated staff based in Save the Children’s country offices, whose main focus is on the CSA work. Activities have included: supporting the Government to develop the Multi-sectoral National Plan of Action on Nutrition and promoting the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and reporting ‘Code’ violations.

An important recent development of the CSA is the establishment of the first subnational chapter in the Ayeyarwady (Delta) region. This sub-national CSA platform has brought together not only different nutrition-implementing NGOs in this district, but also the regional government, parliamentarians and other high-level officers working in nutrition.

According to the CSA convenor, a key learning from their experience at both national and sub-national level is the power of speaking with one voice as a stakeholder group, which gets listened to and taken seriously in a way that any individual agency would not. This has been a great incentive for many of the CSAs to continue to be involved.



Community planning of joint livelihoods activities

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The Academia and Research Network in Pakistan: Clarifying roles

The Academia and Research Network, formed in May 2016, aimed to harmonise research on nutrition and bridge the gap between academia and policy formulators and practitioners. Initially, organisations were reluctant to engage with the platform as their role was not clear. However, this concern was reduced through meetings with the SUN Academic Network coordinator, who detailed how the platform would connect research and academic bodies at a country and global level. As a result, 40 academic institutions and research organisations signed up and developed an operational plan.

Work has included: national research prioritisation exercise; securing funding for research (for example, the Higher Education Commission in Pakistan also provided funding for 104 different research studies); developing activities jointly with the SUN Business Network (for example, in Peshawar where a fortified noodles programme led by a university has been linked to the one of Pakistan's largest food manufacturers (Knorr)); and conducting trainings on nutrition research. A knowledge management centre is planned, where all studies and relevant documents will be archived and accessible through a web portal.



Nutritional product development in Pakistan is a model for other countries and plays an important role in decreasing child malnutrition throughout the region

WFP/Rein Skutlerud

The Network mapping exercise revealed a number of areas that are useful to consider when setting up Networks in FCAS, including:

1. *Ensure government support for Networks:* Stakeholders noted that government support and leadership of the Networks is essential. Networks do not simply grow organically; rather, government support is needed to support the initial set-up and bedding in of new Networks. As a first step in this, governments need to be convinced of the 'value add' of Networks. Furthermore, it is important that Networks can maintain independence to promote accountability. The most effective network-

government relationships observed seemed to be where there is a constructively critical relationship and strong communication around activities and priorities. The findings reflect those noted in the 2015 Independent and Comprehensive Evaluation (ICE) of the SUN Movement report, which stated: "... country level ownership and leadership are the single most important determinants of success: buy in... by governments... was critical for ensuring the higher prioritisation of nutrition, a clear commitment to results and enhances capacity to deliver." It is down to governments to ensure that the Networks get 'a seat at the table', with the government-appointed



A farmer at a WFP-FAO project in Tshikapa, Democratic Republic of Congo

WFP/Marco Fratini

The UN Network in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Improving alignment and working together

The UN Network in the DRC brought together eight UN agencies working on nutrition in the country (namely FAO, WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNDP and UNHCR). It initially aimed to develop a joint multi-sector strategy on nutrition in the most vulnerable regions of the country. During a network retreat in 2016, agencies spent time considering their individual and collective role in tackling malnutrition in the country, and finalised a Road Map that aimed at increasing the coherence of actions and support joint planning around nutrition.

Work subsequently focussed on conducting a nutrition inventory in which UN nutrition interventions were mapped – in places where more than one agency was present, the UN Network group examined complementarity, gaps, opportunities for improved collaboration and optimisation of delivery mechanisms. This was seen as a useful tool by the Government as it provided visibility on nutrition programming beyond the work of the cluster in the country. Additional activities included: developing a common narrative for nutrition, developing joint funding proposals, conducting a policy review and supporting provincial nutrition committees, and the development of three provincial-level nutrition plans. Many factors have facilitated the success of the DRC UN Network, such as: ensuring all actors had a thorough understanding of using a multi-sector lens for nutrition, having strong technical people at all levels and having a good facilitation process.

SUN Focal Point playing a critical role as the formal leader of the SUN Movement in each country.

2. *Build on what is already existing in country:* One essential difference between Networks is those that bring stakeholders together for the first time, compared to those that are built into or on existing coordination structures and nutrition architecture that is already active. In many FCAS countries there is already a vibrant Nutrition Cluster Coordination Mechanism that can be adapted to SUN. Where there weren't already active coordination platforms in place, SUN is viewed as having brought something new to the country (for example, in Chad and Myanmar). However, in some countries where there were existing mechanisms in place, the Networks were sometimes seen as duplicative, and therefore not adding value. In other cases, SUN Networks have effectively built on existing mechanisms including humanitarian architecture (for example, Somalia and South Sudan).
3. *Avoid stop-start Networks:* It was noted by multiple interviewees that a lack of continuity of Networks at country level has limited the ability of Networks to become established players within the national nutrition architecture and to deliver on plans. As a result, a number of countries have been in a state of 'getting Networks

off the ground' for several years, rather than being able to reach an implementation phase to meet their goals and objectives. Changeover of leadership, stop-start funding, and "double hatting" of convenors with a full-time job were all reasons cited for this challenge around continuity. Stakeholders recommended additional funding for FCAS countries to ensure dedicated Network convenors and resources to ensure success and continuity. The example of Pakistan also shows the value of an initial investment and set-up period to embed and establish Networks and secure government buy-in.

4. *Take lessons from the Civil Society Network (CSN) mechanisms:* The CSN appears to be the most visible and most established of the SUN Networks in the 17 countries of focus. The mapping exercise revealed that the CSN in FCAS countries is often impressive in the size and range of membership, with robust processes of governance. Other Networks, it was noted, could take lessons from the CSN on how to establish themselves.
5. *No one size fits all:* Across the 17 FCAS countries there is enormous variation between Networks, while at global level a "blueprint" exists for how Networks operate; it is probably more appropriate for countries to base Network set-up and implementation on a mapping of existing mechanisms in-country and through a contextual analysis.

A mother feeds her young son in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh



WFP/Shehzad Noorani