

**A**s the 2015 deadline for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, the poor countries of the world have already made considerable progress toward reducing maternal and child undernutrition. From 1990 to 2008, the prevalence of stunting in children under five years of age declined dramatically, from 40 to 29 percent, with countries such as Eritrea, Bangladesh, and Mauritania seeing reductions of 42 to 52 percent. UNICEF estimates that 63 countries are on track to achieve the MDG-1 target of a 50 percent reduction in underweight prevalence. This progress shows that political commitment, coupled with the right approach to addressing undernutrition, can be successful in improving nutrition despite poverty.

Yet more needs to be done, as progress toward the MDGs has been uneven. Improvements in many African countries remain modest, and nearly one in four children under five years of age in the developing world remains underweight. Food and nutrition security is increasingly recognized as being critical to broader economic, social, and human development. There is also growing awareness of the costs of ignoring undernutrition: it heavily impacts infant and young child mortality and morbidity; has largely irreversible effects on intellectual, physical, social, and economic development; and contributes to noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some types of cancer. In recent years, fortunately, there has been widespread agreement on the set of evidence-based and cost-effective interventions that can protect the nutrition of millions of individuals. Against this backdrop, a wide range of stakeholders have come together to launch the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement.

### What is SUN?

SUN is a multistakeholder movement aimed at supporting national leadership for nutrition, focusing and aligning financial and technical support behind nutrition-sensitive national plans, and ensuring broad ownership of nutrition and development goals. Since its launch in 2010, SUN has built up a global coalition of more than 100 partner organizations and secured high-level political commitment to nutrition in 26 high-burden countries. The long-term development objective of the movement is to support SUN countries in realizing their national nutrition goals and targets, including the MDG-1 target. Many countries have also developed specific nutrition targets for the years beyond 2015.

The SUN framework employs a dual approach to reducing undernutrition. The first approach champions direct, nutrition-specific interventions such as promoting good nutritional practices, increasing intake of vitamins and minerals through supplementation and fortification, and therapeutic feeding for severe malnutrition. The second approach incorporates specific pro-nutrition actions into other sectors and development areas such as health, food security and agriculture, gender, social protection, education, and water and sanitation. Both approaches focus on the thousand-day window from the start of pregnancy to a child reaching two years

of age, during which better nutrition can have a life-changing impact on the development of a child and the basis from which he or she can become a well-nourished, healthy, and productive adult. SUN also recognizes the importance of involving socially excluded populations, especially women, throughout all processes. Improvements in nutrition have been shown to be inextricably linked to investments in the education and health of women and girls. They are linked as well to efforts to improve women's empowerment, including control over assets, social status, and decisionmaking power.

SUN partners align behind SUN countries' national policies, programs, and investments in nutrition. SUN focuses on some of the factors that are critical for scaling up nutrition actions successfully at the country level. Once a government signs up to the movement, it commits to

- identifying a high-level governmental focal point that can work across ministries;
- appointing a donor convener who can coordinate other donors behind national plans;
- conducting a nutrition stock-taking exercise;
- developing or revising national nutrition plans that explicitly aim to reduce undernutrition; and
- strengthening existing nutrition multistakeholder platforms.

### What has SUN achieved so far?

To date, 22 SUN countries have updated and approved their national nutrition plans, 16 have identified donor conveners, 20 have established multistakeholder platforms, and some, such as Mozambique, have effectively engaged civil society and the private sector. SUN countries have also set bold nutrition goals and targets:

- Lao PDR has committed to reducing child stunting from 40 to 34 percent by 2015.
- Niger has pledged to reduce low birthweight by 30 percent by 2021.
- Uganda has committed to increasing exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months from 60 to 75 percent by 2015.

While SUN countries are in charge of their own nutrition destinies, SUN has assumed a global role in key strategic areas. One of its major roles has been to strengthen political commitment to nutrition by governments in high undernutrition countries, as evidenced by the movement's growing membership. SUN is also undertaking global and local advocacy efforts to increase understanding of the importance of addressing undernutrition. Alliances are forged with international stakeholders to broaden membership, ensure collaboration on common ground, and maintain SUN's identity as an inclusive movement. New global networks of donors, civil society, business, the United Nations, and national

governments, and a possible network on science and knowledge, will provide coherent support to national plans. Performance and evaluation indicators will encourage harmonization and mutual accountability. Donors are working toward developing consistent mechanisms for measuring aid flows, while many development partners are working to align their existing contributions to national plans and incorporate nutrition into their development strategies. Finally, SUN is putting into place global leadership, stewardship, and organizational arrangements to help maintain momentum.

The main investors in the implementation of SUN's nutrition-specific interventions, a task estimated to cost US\$11.8 billion, are national governments. Ghana, Nepal, and Tanzania, for example, have already tripled national resources dedicated to nutrition. All SUN country governments are encouraged to improve the measurement of their flow of resources to nutrition, which will help ensure long-term sustainability and accountability by national governments.

### What are the opportunities and challenges for SUN?

The pathway to scaling up is often influenced by spaces that can help foster the process and drivers that can help it overcome political or financial inertia. SUN has been able to strengthen existing political, cultural, and partnership spaces by working through national, global, regional, and provincial platforms. These platforms serve to amplify stakeholders' voices. High-level national leadership drives the process by serving as a compass for nutrition activities and helping diverse stakeholders negotiate common directions and priorities. External catalysts, such as donors and regional and international organizations, can also serve as drivers but such actors must be willing to operate within the space of each national plan.

For all the accomplishments of SUN since its launch, challenges lie ahead. The incentives for governments to incorporate nutrition into their national strategies must be aligned with their capabilities and the nutrition targets they have set. Governments must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant sectors within their countries and set pragmatic goals within realistic time frames while building capacity within and across sectors. Operationalizing the second component of SUN's dual approach—developing and strengthening nutrition-sensitive programs—is another formidable undertaking. SUN countries need more information on the cost and value-added of incorporating a nutrition lens into complementary sectors and development areas and a process for selecting the most promising sectors to engage for nutrition. Institutional arrangements, whether through a whole-of-government focal point or sectoral coordinating bodies, and incentive structures need to be in place to support nutrition actions, track nutritional outcomes, and foster collaboration among sectors.

In the end, accountability for the accomplishment of SUN's mission lies with each participating country, though external actors can help strengthen know-how and collaboration processes if national authorities request it.

### What lies ahead?

The long-term success of the SUN movement depends on the ability of member countries to convert political will into effective action on the ground. The incorporation of nongovernmental stakeholders, including the private sector where desirable, into SUN platforms can help create broader ownership of the process and develop an incentive structure for implementing nutrition-sensitive interventions in complementary sectors.

Building a systematic learning agenda around SUN experiences, outcomes, and impacts is essential. SUN countries need to partner with research organizations and to strengthen research capacity to evaluate policy processes, delivery, and scaling up of SUN interventions. Areas to focus on include multisectoral approaches and tracking progress, improving outcome monitoring, identifying optimal institutional arrangements, and assessing the movement's impact and cost-effectiveness. Documenting the obstacles that countries encounter and the "wins" they secure as they move through the SUN process, and distilling these into global and contextually specific lessons, will help establish common knowledge systems, frameworks, and processes for accelerating progress in reducing maternal and child undernutrition.

Improving nutrition is a critical development need. The SUN movement has the potential to yield tremendous benefits for current and future generations of adults and children around the world. Securing high-level commitments to SUN requires convincing national leaders that bold nutrition targets can be met within a finite number of years. As the MDG deadlines near, one can expect an even greater drive to operationalize SUN within countries and at the global level and to scale up combined nutrition approaches.

**For further reading:** Scaling Up Nutrition: A Framework for Action, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NUTRITION/Resources/281846-1131636806329/PolicyBriefNutritionScalingUpApril.pdf>; A Road Map for Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN), [www.unscn.org/files/Announcements/Other\\_announcements/FINAL\\_SUN\\_Road\\_Map\\_FINAL\\_dn.pdf](http://www.unscn.org/files/Announcements/Other_announcements/FINAL_SUN_Road_Map_FINAL_dn.pdf); Scaling Up Nutrition: Progress Report from Countries and Their Partners in the Movement to Scale Up Nutrition (SUN), [www.scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/111006-ENGLISH-SUN-Progress-Report-ROME-VERSION.pdf](http://www.scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/111006-ENGLISH-SUN-Progress-Report-ROME-VERSION.pdf); Scaling Up Nutrition: Compendium of Country Fiches, [www.scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/compendium-of-country-fiches-ROME-VERSION.pdf](http://www.scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/compendium-of-country-fiches-ROME-VERSION.pdf).

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