

STRENGTHENING THE LINKAGES: POLICY AND PROGRAMMES

ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN SUN

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WHAT IS SUN? The Scale-Up Nutrition (SUN) Framework was designed to help Nationsies whose people are at risk of under-nutrition. It was endorsed by more than 100 Government, civil society, academic and business organizations in April 2010. These stakeholders helped to develop a Road Map for advancing the Framework. Scaling up of interventions that have shown evidence of having positive impact in the prevention of malnutrition especially; stunting and under nutrition focusing on the pregnancy 270 days plus 730 days up to the time the child reaches two years. These 1000 days are the most critical for the child's optimal physical growth, mental development and intellectual capacity. The evidence based interventions include exclusive breast feeding from birth to 6 months, complementary feeding 6-24 months, improved hygiene and prevention of micronutrient malnutrition.

Sun Framework is built on action to address under nutrition and partnerships for collective action among key stakeholders from the policy level to the household level..

Key principles : what matters is what happens at the country level. Nutrition strategies and programmes draw on international evidence of good practice to build own country specific needs and capacities. To help scale up evidence-based cost-effective interventions for preventing and treating under nutrition, highest priority is given to pregnancy and first two years of a childs life. This window of opportunity results in highest returns from investments. A multi-sectoral approach is used to integrate nutrition in related sectors, with indicators of under nutrition as one of the key measures of overall progress in these sectors.

SUN Road Map : Gives details of how a country, region and international stakeholders will work together to establish and then pursue an effort to Scale Up Nutrition under three broad areas. (a) Food and Nutrition Security for all. (b) Nutrition-Focused Development and nutrition-Specific Interventions.

Role of Agriculture in Scaling up Nutrition

Agriculture is the foundation of our economy it is also key in addressing SUN objectives. Majority of our people are farmers, who produce food for home consumption and income. No food, no SUN. The agriculture sector needs to deliberately make efforts in responding to nutritional needs of the various gender categories: **Moving along the value chain from research to the table**. Preventing stunting in Malawi depends on the performance of the agriculture sector and the priority that nutrition will be given in the agriculture sector. One of the basis for SUN is the low priority that nutrition has received in national development policy, hence investment – and this has been more so in the agriculture sector. Attainment of SUN objectives in agriculture based economies like Malawi largely depend on bringing the agriculture sector on board and investing in nutrition sensitive agriculture. What are the

opportunities for increasing the role of agriculture in SUN? The agriculture sector needs to make deliberate effort in responding to nutritional needs of the vulnerable groups with an emphasis on the 1000 days by ensuring Nutrition Focused development – nutrition should be integral in agriculture policy as an intended outcome with measurable indicators. Maximizing opportunities for impact on nutrition by applying the value chain approach, ensuring that nutrition objectives and strategies are incorporated at each stage of the agriculture value chain from policy to the mouth. **Table 1 proposes the scope of interventions needed.**

| Area | Focus | Issues being addressed |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Policy | Incorporating areas that are multisectoral. Eg. Micronutrient and Health Project (MICAH) was implemented by MOH in partnership with MOA and MOW | Food alone is not adequate to achieve optimal nutrition, there's need for integrated programmes. Safe water, hygiene and sanitation are prerequisites for normal biological utilization of food. |
| Research | Breeding to address nutrients of public health significance – Biofortification (Vitamin A, Iron, Zinc) – how the food supply can contribute to eliminate deficiencies in these e.g. vitamin A rich orange fleshed sweet potatoes, orange tomatoes and high iron and zinc beans. | Micronutrient deficiency prevention and control Support seed production, multiplication, distribution to farmers and action oriented nutrition education. |
| Production and access | Diversification Crops; staple food diversity, other crops with emphasis on indigenous varieties of fruits and vegetables; small livestock and fish farming ASWAp is an opportunity. | Diversity not to be limited to crops There is evidence that animal food source promotes growth hence, of direct relevance to prevent stunting Nutrition education is vital to guide selection of crops to produce, livestock and promotion of appropriate nutritionally sound eating habits and behaviours; including appropriate complementary feeding |
| Post harvest handling | Processing, preservation and storage, ensuring food safety and sustainable food supplies | Technologies for nutrient retention and improvement eg. use of solar driers for vegetables, fruit juice processing and soya bean processing machines. |
| Food utilization | Diversified nutritious complementary foods | All gender categories focusing on the 1000days and beyond. |
| Gender consideration | Women are key in Infant and Young child feeding and caring | Engaging men as partners in child feeding and caring |

CONCLUSION

Policy should focus on enhancing complementarities and synergies through multisectoral collaboration, participatory approaches using cost effective interventions for continuity. The sectors of agriculture, nutrition and health have to work together including other sectors through public- private partnerships, since this is key in translating policy into action for sustainable results. Interventions such as the **Micronutrient and health project (MICAH)** and **Improving food security and nutrition policies and program outreach project** which address the three - agriculture, nutrition and health therefore need to be emulated.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

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