

THE DNCC INITIATIVE APPROACH AND LESSONS LEARNED

Uganda’s Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) Nutrition Secretariat and the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), in collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and with technical support from the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA) and the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, undertook a 2-year initiative to strengthen nutrition leadership and governance at the national and district levels. This effort, called the District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) Initiative, had three objectives:

- To strengthen the national oversight of and support structure for the DNCCs
- To enhance awareness of and commitment to nutrition among local stakeholders, including technical and political leaders, implementing partners, and community members
- To strengthen DNCC capacity to plan, budget, and leverage existing resources for, advocate for, and monitor nutrition activities

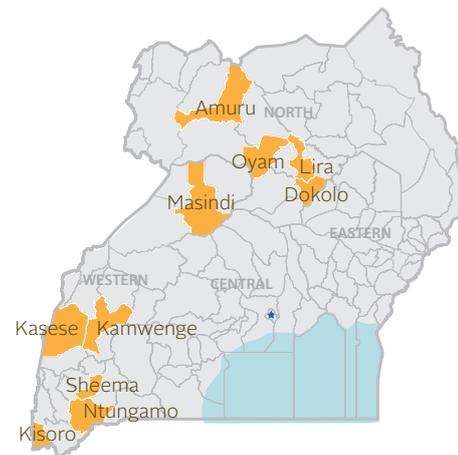
The initiative focused on 10 districts (see Figure 1)—five in the southwest (Kamwenge, Kasese, Kisoro, Ntungamo, and Sheema) and five in the north (Amuru, Dokolo, Lira, Masindi, and Oyam).

Approach

The DNCC Initiative used the multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP) process to bring together Uganda’s nutrition stakeholders, including national and district representatives from health, agriculture, gender and social development, education, planning, water, trade and industry, and administration—as well as development and implementing partners. MSP is an adaptive process that engages different perspectives and points of view, which enables diverse stakeholders to agree on common objectives.

The first year of the initiative concentrated on building consensus among stakeholders about the process of strengthening DNCCs and clearly defining DNCCs’ roles and responsibilities.

Figure 1. DNCC Initiative Districts



Box 1: DNCC Initiative Key Achievements

- Defined DNCC roles, responsibilities, and performance benchmarks through stakeholder consensus building.
- Strengthened the nutrition planning process: integrated nutrition into district development plans, developed and reviewed multi-sectoral nutrition action plans, included nutrition in annual work plans and budgets.
- Developed monitoring and reporting tools, including monitoring and supervision checklists and quarterly reporting templates.
- Conducted joint support supervision visits with government and partners.
- Built in-country capacity of DNCC members and implementing partners to scale up the approach to strengthen nutrition governance, including planning, advocacy, and monitoring and reporting skills.
- Trained technical department staff on nutrition to strengthen nutrition integration and implementation.
- Shared experiences across districts and documented lessons learned.
- Developed guidelines and materials, including the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Toolkit website, to facilitate scaling up the approach.

Activities focused on ensuring that DNCCs were formed in the 10 target districts, met regularly, and started to assume their responsibilities to plan, support, and monitor nutrition activities. Year 2 built on the progress and lessons learned during year 1. Box 1 highlights key achievements during the 2-year initiative.

Lessons learned from the implementation of the DNCC Initiative were used to develop a comprehensive approach to strengthening nutrition governance at all levels of local government including districts, sub-counties, municipalities, town councils, and divisions. The approach can be used by nutrition coordination committees (NCCs) and their stakeholders working at any of these levels. The key components of the approach are described below and presented in Figure 2.

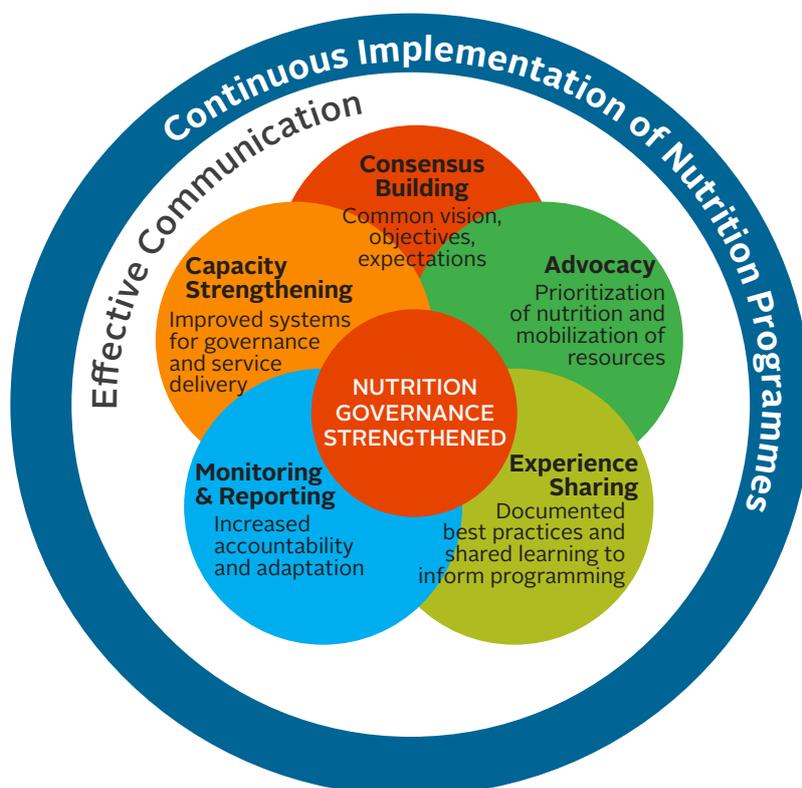
Consensus building to agree on a common vision, objectives, and expectations: The consensus-building process helps stakeholders agree on and define the problem to be addressed, clarify expectations about stakeholder partnerships, and address conflicts that may arise due to differing views and competing priorities.

Capacity strengthening to improve systems for governance and service delivery: Two types of capacity strengthening are required: (1) nutrition governance capacity strengthening for NCC members, through training on planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting; advocacy; and consensus building; and (2) department-specific trainings to strengthen nutrition capacity and technical skills.

Advocacy to encourage prioritisation of nutrition and mobilisation of resources: Effective advocacy helps community members and political, technical, and traditional leadership appreciate and prioritise nutrition. NCC members need advocacy skills to help them secure this buy-in, lobby for councils' approval of multi-sectoral nutrition action plans, and obtain funding for activities.

Monitoring and reporting to promote increased accountability and adaptation: A strong monitoring and reporting system facilitates learning, generates accountability, and ensures that NCCs can respond to the dynamic settings in which they work, adapting strategies and activities or seeking support as needed so that local government nutrition targets are met and results are achieved.

Figure 2. Approach to Strengthening Nutrition Governance



Experience sharing to document and share best practices to inform programming: By sharing district experiences, promising practices, and challenges faced by NCCs in other districts, NCCs and their stakeholders are better prepared to address challenges and conflicts in their own districts. Additionally, national-level stakeholders learn from local government experiences, which encourages institutional changes that are responsive to local needs, such as developing national policies, guidelines, and strategies to facilitate improvements in local government processes.

The approach includes two cross-cutting components. **Effective communication** influences all aspects of the approach and is critical to maintaining stakeholder coordination and promoting learning. **Continuous implementation of nutrition programmes**, by working through and strengthening existing systems, helps avoid the creation of parallel structures.

Lessons Learned

Below are some of the key lessons learned during the two years of DNCC Initiative implementation. These lessons should help inform NCCs and their stakeholders during the application and scale-up of the approach to strengthening nutrition governance, as well as during the development of the second Uganda Nutrition Action Plan.

Stakeholder engagement and advocacy must be continuous

The nutrition stakeholder landscape is dynamic. New partners initiate programs in different parts of the country, political leadership changes during elections, and routine technical leadership transfers. In addition, priorities and needs are always shifting. Because of these factors, efforts to engage stakeholders and launch advocacy activities to keep nutrition high on the agenda must occur on a continuing basis. During the two years of the DNCC Initiative, national elections took place and several new projects and partnerships were formed within the target districts. In response to these changes, the initiative team held refresher orientations on the roles and responsibilities of NCCs and invited new partners to experience-sharing and learning events. As a result, new partners established nutrition governance strengthening activities in their respective target districts. DNCCs and their partners also found it important to periodically reassess their stakeholder group and engage new partners to support common nutrition objectives.



Photo credit: Jessica Alderman, courtesy of PhotoShare

Nutrition should be integrated into existing systems

It became clear during the initiative's work to integrate nutrition into the national planning and budgeting process that integrating nutrition into existing systems is critical to successfully strengthening nutrition governance. Rather than have DNCCs develop a standalone nutrition plan, efforts were made to integrate nutrition into district development plans and ensure that the detailed MSNAPs were formally approved by the district councils, enabling them to be budgeted for through the annual work planning and budgeting process. By including nutrition as part of the broader local government planning process, DNCC members could see how nutrition can support department objectives and national development priorities. The initiative also learned that strengthening the planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation skills of the DNCC members helps strengthen local government more broadly, as these skills can be used for more than planning for nutrition. NCCs should explore additional opportunities for integrating nutrition into existing systems when applying the approach. In addition, nutrition stakeholders, including OPM, sectors, and implementation partners, should provide guidance on further integration of nutrition into local government systems, and include the guidance in the second UNAP.

Strong accountability mechanisms are required to ensure action

A good monitoring and reporting system facilitates learning and creates accountability. The DNCC Initiative learned that the process of building a strong monitoring and reporting system begins with the MSNAP development process, which

includes the development of a monitoring and evaluation plan that tracks progress towards achieving MSNAP targets, objectives, and the overall nutrition goal. From there, quarterly monitoring and support supervision visits and reporting ensure that DNCC members continue to review and evaluate their strategies and activities and identify emerging challenges and areas in need of strengthening. However, monitoring and reporting activities also need to build on one another and require feedback from OPM to ensure proper tracking of progress and accountability. With the number of districts set to increase, providing timely and meaningful support to districts will entail intensive work. The ability of OPM to ensure regular feedback to the DNCCs is an area that requires further strengthening and integration into existing accountability mechanisms. Nutrition stakeholders should consider the possibility of further integrating nutrition into local government reporting mechanisms, such as the inclusion of nutrition indicators in the Performance-based Budgeting System, to help minimize the additional effort required to provide oversight to nutrition implementation.

Nutrition governance strengthening is an ongoing process

While certain actions are required to ensure that local governments are in alignment with national policies and procedures, such as orientation on the roles and responsibilities of DNCCs and MSNAP development, the process of strengthening nutrition governance is an ongoing one. During the initiative, there was a tendency for NCCs and their stakeholders to complete the main tasks but fail to provide

the necessary follow-up actions and support to ensure the institutionalization and sustainability of nutrition governance actions. NCCs must learn to adapt strategies and activities for improving nutrition to local government's changing needs. In addition, DNCCs should use monitoring, reporting, and experience sharing activities to reflect on achievements and challenges, and identify and adapt their approaches to address or improve upon them. Partners supporting the startup of nutrition governance strengthening activities should also be mindful of planning for an eventual transition of activities over to the local government and its departments.

Scaling Up Nutrition Governance

Since the development of the DNCC Initiative approach to strengthen nutrition governance, new local governments and their partners have taken up nutrition governance strengthening activities. The approach has been adopted by OPM for use by all local governments and their partners in an effort to strengthen nutrition governance in support of national nutrition goals. FANTA and OPM have developed the [Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Toolkit website](#), which serves as a resource repository for NCCs and their partners, who are working to strengthen nutrition governance using the DNCC Initiative approach. A summary of how to implement the approach using the resources found on the website is provided in the DNCC Initiative Approach to Strengthening Nutrition Governance in Uganda Implementation Guide.

For more information about lessons learned and the development of the approach visit: <https://nutrition.opm.go.ug>.



Contact Information:

Maureen T. Bakunzi
Assistant Commissioner
Policy Implementation and Coordination (PIC),
Directorate of Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation,
Office of the Prime Minister,
Kampala, Uganda
Tel: +256-414-250-497
Mobile: +256-772-539-113
Email: mbakunzi@opm.go.ug



Dr. Hanifa Bachou
Project Manager, FANTA III
FHI 360
Plot 15 Kitante close
P.O. Box 5768, Kampala
Tel: +256-312-266-406
Mobile: +256-772-509-088
Email: hbachou@fhi360.org

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