

EXPERIENCES IN PLANNING FOR NUTRITION AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

Nutrition Planning in Uganda: A National Mandate

The Government of Uganda recognizes nutrition as a key contributor to the country's social and economic transformation. Reflecting the government's understanding of malnutrition's complexity, the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan 2011–2016 (UNAP) was developed to provide a multi-sectoral framework to improve the country's nutrition situation. The nutrition of children under 5 years and women of reproductive age is a priority of the Uganda Vision 2040 and the Second National Development Plan 2015/16–2019/20 (NDP II). In addition, the NDP II, the Local Government Development Planning Guidelines 2014, and the Sector Development Planning Guidelines 2015 all mandate that nutrition be included as a cross-cutting issue in national, sector, and local government plans and emphasize the need to coordinate nutrition programming at all levels of government.

This brief describes how Uganda's nutrition planning process was strengthened through the efforts of the DNCC Initiative, a partnership that worked with district nutrition coordination committees (DNCCs) in 10 districts in the north and southwest of Uganda from 2014 to 2016. An important outcome of this partnership was an approach that can be used to scale up nutrition planning to nutrition coordination committees (NCCs) at all levels of local government, including districts, municipalities, town councils, sub-counties, and divisions.

Strengthening the Nutrition Planning Process

To be in compliance with the NDP II and planning guidance requirements, local governments needed more detailed guidance on how to integrate nutrition into their plans and budgets. Outlining a clear nutrition planning process was particularly important because Uganda does not have a budget line item for nutrition; funding for nutrition activities must be covered within sector and department budgets. In response, the



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National Planning Authority (NPA), with support from USAID and FANTA, developed the National Nutrition Planning Guidelines 2015, which detail the process of integrating nutrition into national, sector, and local government 5-year development plans and annual work plans.

NCCs are responsible for ensuring that nutrition is integrated into the local government 5-year development plans as well as for preparing a 5-year Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Action Plan (MSNAP), which provides greater detail on the nutrition objectives outlined in the 5-year development plan. Both plans, which must be formally adopted by the local government council, are used to inform the local government's annual work plans and budgets. This planning process is illustrated in Figure 1.

To support and guide local governments through the multi-step planning and development process, the DNCC Initiative developed and tested a Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Action Planning Training Module. An important aspect of the training module is that it brings together all NCC members to collaboratively identify nutrition priorities, jointly plan and budget for interventions, and develop monitoring and evaluation plans to track progress. The DNCC

Figure 1. Uganda Nutrition Planning Process



Initiative also developed an MSNAP template that provides an outline for the NCCs to use when writing the MSNAP; this ensures the MSNAP will include all the required components. The training module and template follow the national planning processes established by the NPA and the best results are achieved when the training is facilitated by individuals familiar with the national and local government planning processes and the local nutrition situation.

To ensure that nutrition activities are included in department plans, NCC members should set nutrition priorities before the department planning process begins so that NCC members can share them with their respective departments. The National Nutrition Planning Guidelines 2015 recommend that nutrition planning occur at least one month before the department and other local government planning processes begin.

Using these nutrition planning resources and tools, the DNCC Initiative strengthened the capacity of the 10 target districts to integrate nutrition as a cross-cutting issue in their development plans, produce MSNAPs, and integrate nutrition into their annual plans and budgets. Integrating nutrition in the local government development plans and developing an MSNAP allows local governments to effectively allocate and mobilise resources for nutrition activities, guides implementation of nutrition interventions, and enhances coordination of departments and partners to achieve a common nutrition goal. Coordinated planning across departments also prevents gaps and overlaps in nutrition activities.

Key Considerations for Nutrition Planning

The DNCC Initiative identified four key considerations that had an effect on the planning process and should be considered when scaling up nutrition planning nationally: ongoing engagement and advocacy, collecting local government

nutrition data on which the 5-year plans are based, identifying nutrition activities at the local level, and mobilising resources for nutrition.

Ongoing Engagement and Advocacy

Engaging local government political and technical leadership early and throughout the planning process is critical to ensuring that MSNAPs are adopted by local government councils. The DNCC Initiative built DNCC members’ lobbying and advocacy skills through district-level advocacy workshops. During the workshops the DNCC members also developed advocacy implementation plans that targeted critical audiences for nutrition advocacy—such as the district council, technical planning committee, politicians, media, and partners—and they outlined specific calls to action. With these plans in hand, DNCC members developed talking points to gain buy-in and approval from each audience segment. The MSNAPs of the 10 DNCC Initiative districts were approved by their district councils.

Another effective engagement and advocacy strategy employed by DNCC Initiative districts was to form a team of two to three people to coordinate all activities related to MSNAP finalization and approval. This included holding one-on-one meetings with technical leadership, identifying an appropriate sectoral committee to present the MSNAP to the District Executive Committee, and preparing MSNAP summaries and presentations for technical leadership to use when presenting the MSNAP to their respective council. Teams also used district data, liaising with the district biostatistician and partners, to reinforce their case for the importance of nutrition.

Engagement and advocacy continued after local government plans were finalized and approved to ensure that nutrition activities outlined in the MSNAPs were included in annual work plans and budgets.

Collecting Local Government Nutrition Data

Insufficient local government nutrition information is a major challenge to the planning process. Information available to local governments is often limited to Health Management Information System (HMIS) data on maternal nutrition, infant, and young child feeding practices, or disease burden. As a result, the data are often not representative of the entire population and only capture those accessing health services. It can also be difficult to interpret the data provided by the production, community development, water, and education departments because it does not always specify whether an activity is nutrition-sensitive. For example, a department might track the number of trainings provided but not capture details on whether nutrition-related content was included. To overcome these barriers, the MSNAP training module systematically guides local governments through a process to identify specific drivers of malnutrition in their local governments and to prioritize areas of action based on their experiences and knowledge of the local context.

National and local government, in partnership with sectors and departments, need to work together to strengthen the mechanisms for collecting and reporting local government multi-sectoral nutrition data. Additionally, partners collecting nutrition information within local governments should be encouraged to share this information with NCCs. Identifying multi-sectoral nutrition indicators as part of the MSNAP development process will help ensure that key nutrition data are collected by departments and made available for ongoing monitoring of MSNAP implementation and for future planning.

Identifying Nutrition Interventions by Department

Local governments receive their funding through department-specific central government grants. Because there is no specific nutrition department at the local government level, each department has to identify funds from its department-specific grant to implement nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive activities. In addition, if nutrition is not included in the local government development plan, then activities cannot be included in annual work plans and funding will not be allocated for implementation.

At the start of the DNCC Initiative several challenges to integrating nutrition activities into department plans were encountered. Departments found it difficult to focus their proposed

development activities so that they would contribute to the local government's nutrition goals and objectives. Some departments resisted including nutrition in their sections of the local government plans because they thought nutrition was “owned” by a few key departments, namely health and production.

As a result of the Initiative's work with the 10 districts during the MSNAP development process, the DNCC members gained an understanding of how multi-sectoral nutrition programming contributes to nutrition outcomes, which helped them see how nutrition fits into their goals and priorities and reinforced their buy in to the planning process.

Examples of department interventions to include in development plans and MSNAPs are provided in Table 1. More examples of department nutrition interventions and activities can be found in the National Nutrition Planning Guidelines annexes. Figure 2 illustrates how department activities contribute to common MSNAP objectives, the MSNAP goal, and the overall local government development plan vision.

Mobilising Resources for Nutrition

While departments were generally willing to add nutrition activities to their plans once they understood how they could contribute to nutrition goals and outcomes—and how good nutrition can benefit their departments—many were concerned about potential additional costs and the need to find adequate resources. The absence of a budget line item for nutrition in the national- and local government-level budgets poses a challenge to allocating funding for nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions; if each department does not proactively fund nutrition activities, a local government may find itself without the necessary resources to carry out nutrition activities. This can be compounded by the departments' perception that nutrition activities are primarily funded through the support of implementing partners or specific departments, such as health and production. Multi-sectoral department ownership of nutrition activities is key to successful implementation and must be strengthened among local governments and their stakeholders.

While departments may require additional funds, or need to re-allocate funds to cover some nutrition activities outlined in their MSNAPs, it is also possible to invest in nutrition with

Table 1. Examples of Nutrition Strategies and Activities by Department

Department	Strategies and Activities
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train community and facility-based health workers to deliver nutrition services • Promote proper infant and young child feeding practices • Conduct biannual child health days and community outreach for nutrition
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish school gardens to support the school feeding program • Hold community engagement meetings on nutrition in schools with School Management Committees, parent-teacher associations, and parents • Establish school nutrition clubs
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to and use of safe water • Improve access to safe sanitation • Mobilize and train communities on good sanitation and hygiene practices
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct quarterly nutrition coordination committee meetings • Plan and budget for nutrition annually • Incorporate nutrition issues into routine joint support supervision • Enact district ordinances and sub-county by-laws on food security
Community Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create nutrition awareness through community dialogues with various leaders • Guide youth livelihood projects in selecting nutrition-sensitive enterprises • Promote village savings and loan associations to improve household incomes
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen extension workers' capacity in nutrition • Promote agriculture technologies that support production of vegetables, fruits, legumes, and small livestock, and that support fish farming • Promote production and consumption of indigenous foods • Promote post-harvest handling practices that protect, preserve, and improve safety of food
Trade and Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote production, sale, and consumption of bio-fortified food crops and nutrient-enhanced products • Promote proper post-harvest handling/storage of products for sale

Figure 2. Example of Department Contributions to Common MSNAP Goal and Objectives



modifications to existing activities. For example, agricultural extension workers are funded to promote the production of sweet potatoes. By changing the activity to promoting orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, which are more nutrient-dense, nutrition objectives could be met with little additional cost to the production department.

Once department ownership of nutrition activity implementation is achieved, ongoing engagement and advocacy for nutrition, as described earlier, should ensure that resources are identified and secured during the annual work planning and budgeting process.

To access the resources mentioned in this brief, visit the Plan and Budget section of the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Toolkit website:

<https://nutrition.opm.go.ug/index.php/plan-and-budget/>.



The DNCC Initiative

Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) Nutrition Secretariat and the Ministry of Local Government, 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 (CDI), undertook a 2-year initiative to strengthen nutrition leadership and governance at both the national and district levels. This effort, called the District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) Initiative, had three main objectives:

- To strengthen the national oversight 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, leverage existing resources for, advocate for, and monitor nutrition activities

The DNCC Initiative focused on 10 districts in the southwest (Kamwenge, Kasese, Kisoro, Ntungamo, and Sheema) and north (Amuru, Dokolo, Lira, Masindi, and Oyam). The initiative engaged stakeholders from many government sectors at the national and district levels—including health, agriculture, gender and social development, education, planning, water, trade and industry, and administration—as well as development and implementing partners. For more information on the DNCC Initiative visit: www.fantaproject.org/countries/uganda/uganda-district-nutrition-coordination-committee-initiative

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