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## ***SUN Civil Society Network briefing learning programmes 2016–17***

### *The role of SUN CSN learning programmes in building civil society capacity to tackle malnutrition*

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#### **The global nutrition challenge and the role of civil society**

Significant progress has been made in the fight against hunger and malnutrition but progress has not been fast enough or inclusive enough. An estimated 795 million people are undernourished; some two billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies and, each year, 3.1 million children still die as a result of undernutrition and nearly a quarter of all children under five – 156 million children – are stunted. While 159 million children under five years are too short for their age and 50 million children are underweight for their height.

Civil society plays a crucial role in driving forward progress. Across the globe, civil society organisations are holding governments to account, raising the voices of the most vulnerable communities, and directly delivering initiatives to end malnutrition.

The SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN) is a critical part of the UN-led Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. The SUN CSN coordinates and amplifies the efforts of Civil Society Alliances (CSAs) in 39 countries, enabling civil society to effectively contribute and accelerate national plans to end malnutrition.

#### **Sharing learning – why is it so important?**

Encouraging the sharing of learning between CSAs is a priority for the SUN CSN. Countries often face similar nutrition challenges and effective approaches that work in one setting can be successfully adapted and applied in another. Peer-to-peer learning is a cost effective way to ensure lessons learned in one country can be quickly spread to others.

The SUN CSN has supported CSAs to exchange learning since it was founded in 2013. Over the last two years, with funding from the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), the network has scaled up these efforts by organising two structured learning exchange visits – one in Africa, and another in Asia

*“We have listened to countries and heard what they are doing, picked a few things we can implement in Nigeria – such as ensuring state committees are functioning.” **Beatrice Eluaka, CS-SUNN, Nigeria, participant in Learning Route Africa, 2017***

*“As a result of our joint advocacy efforts for an increase in the nutrition budget, the local government has agreed to increase it by seven times compared to the previous year.”*  
**Ramendra Singh Rawal, CSANN district Chairperson, Kapilvastu, Nepal**

## SUN CSN’s learning exchange programmes

### Key numbers

- 18 countries participating** in the two learning exchange visits in Africa and Asia
- 70 civil society representatives** from communities, CSOs and INGOs took part
- 11 days of face to face peer-to-peer learning** across the two learning exchanges
- 9 best practice examples** of innovative nutrition interventions documented and studied.
- 9 CSA innovation plans** developed for applying learning in their own countries (Ethiopia; Kenya; Malawi; Rwanda; Sierra Leone; Nigeria; Tanzania; Uganda; Zimbabwe)
- 3 innovations** successfully replicated by Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia ready for scaling up
- 2 regional hubs established** (one for Anglophone Africa, one covering Asia)
- 3 multi-country joint initiatives for knowledge transfer and/or collaboration implemented** among 11 CSAs in the Anglophone Africa.
- >300 stakeholders in two host countries** engaged in the visits during preparatory work, during the visits and in cascading learning afterwards.
- > 200 stakeholders involved in cascade learning and operationalising lessons learned** from face to face and virtual collaboration
- >30 media reports published** on the exchanges in the host countries and internationally
- > 1 SUN CSN Facebook community** active reaching out more than 200 SUN related individuals

## Africa Learning Route, Rwanda

Over the last decade, Rwanda has been one of Africa’s success stories, achieving high economic growth, rapid reduction in poverty and inequality, as well as considerable progress in improving nutrition. Rwanda was an ideal host for a learning exchange, providing strong examples of the important role played by civil society in addressing malnutrition.

In November 2016, the Learning Route brought together representatives from nine SUN Civil Society Alliances in Africa; Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and host country Rwanda. The three-person country delegations included representatives of small community organisations, national CSOs or INGOs who were working in nutrition at a national or subnational level.

### What is a Learning Route?

A ‘Learning Route’ is a specific approach to the sharing of learning, using the following elements:

- **Peer-to-peer learning:** examples of best practice are identified and developed by a host country and used as case studies for participants to explore and discuss.

- **Local ‘champions’:** local actors directly involved the best practice examples are positioned as the experts and knowledge providers.
- **Innovation Plans:** participants developed action-focused ‘innovation plans’ to apply best practice learning in their own country context.

The Learning Route methodology was developed by Procasur Corporation and has been used in more than 35 countries across Latin America, Africa and Asia.

### Rwanda exchange visit

The Rwanda visit was structured around five examples of successful civil society initiatives tackling malnutrition. Each case study was explored through a field visit followed by in-depth group analysis of the successes and challenges of the approach. The group visited programmes in Kigali, as well as the rural districts of Nyanza and Gisagara.



Figure 1 Gishubi Community, Gisagara district

#### Best practice case studies:

- **UNREACH, improved multi-stakeholder coordination:** stakeholder and action mapping to provide a clear idea of who is doing what and where in nutrition in Rwanda
- **Urunana and Land O Lakes, communication for behaviour change:** promotion of positive nutrition behaviours through a popular radio soap opera
- **‘Milk Way’ Nyanza District, effective public-private partnership:** establishment of farmer’s cooperatives, providing training to farmers to increase production of high-quality milk, including training of model farmers to cascade learning. Rwanda’s CSA facilitated a partnership between the cooperative, milk collection centres and private sector to open up routes to market.
- **Gisagara district, decentralisation of nutrition plans:** recruitment of District Programme for the Elimination of Malnutrition (DPEM) coordinator to coordinate all nutrition activities at district level. Performance contracts signed with government every year committing local government institutions and line ministries to achieving nutrition action targets.

- **Pro-Poor-Public-Private Partnership on flour fortification:** an example of sustainable approach to the value chain for nutrition through public-private partnership.

*“The performance contract itself made collaboration among practitioners work well. This is one learning I will take home.”*

**Kudakwashe Zombe, Zimbabwe CSO SUN Alliance, Zimbabwe**

### **Innovation and action at country level**

The primary goal of the LR was to facilitate learning and collaboration between CSAs, in order enable the replication of innovative solutions to tackling malnutrition. Following the exchange, each country delegation developed an action-orientated innovation plan which applied learning from the exchange to their country context. Three of these plans were awarded a small grant to enable them to turn these plans into a reality:

- **Sierra Leone: Eat what you grow** – tackling the high rates of malnutrition in Koinadugu district by delivering awareness raising activities promoting good nutrition and tackling food taboos. Central to this was the training of ‘master farmers’ to cascade these messages and reach more communities, the Rwanda Community Champions in Nyanza and Gisagara have been inspirational for this innovation plan.
- **Ethiopia: Increasing nutrition awareness through the media** – learning from the case of Urunana and Land O’Lakes, the alliance in Ethiopia is delivering training to journalists and introducing an innovative media award to increase the quality and quantity of coverage of nutrition issues.
- **Tanzania: Accountable district steering committees** – applying the ‘performance contract’ model used in Rwanda to improve the functioning and accountability of District Nutrition Steering Committees, the body responsible for coordinating nutrition activities in each district.

### **Regional coordination**

The international exchange brought together CSAs from nine different countries in the region for the first time. As a result the group identified the importance of continued regional coordination and collaboration. Following the visit, the alliances formed an East and Southern Africa Regional Group to continue sharing learning between countries. A joint strategy and work plan has now been developed for the region, setting out learning priorities and advocacy opportunities.

### **Continued Collaboration**

Following the Learning Route in Rwanda, three national SUN alliances were awarded with a small grant to enable continued collaboration between alliances in the region. Recognising the knowledge already available within the region, the award provided an opportunity for alliances to share their expertise and to continue to learn from each other. The following collaborative projects were delivered:

- Training for child parliamentarians in nutrition budgeting and planning at a sub national level in Zimbabwe and Malawi.
- Budget advocacy training workshop for civil society alliances in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda and the development of a regional budget advocacy strategy to increase financing for nutrition in the region.

- Development and implementation of a nutrition stakeholder mapping tool in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

## South Asia Regional Learning Exchange, Nepal

South Asia suffers from one of the world's highest malnutrition rates. According to UNICEF, 34 percent of children under five in the region are stunted. Nepal has made significant progress on nutrition, with civil society playing a key role, making Nepal a fertile environment for peer-to-peer learning. The South Asia Regional Learning Exchange was hosted by the Civil Society Alliance for Nutrition Nepal (CSANN) in Kathmandu in July 2017. The exchange brought together advocacy specialists and nutrition experts from nine Asian CSAs: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Nepal.



Figure 2 Namobuddha municipality, Kavrepalanchowk

### Learning Exchange methodology

The aim of the exchange was to share experience between countries in the region and build the foundations for future regional coordination. In advance of the exchange, priority learning areas were identified based on key barriers to reducing malnutrition in the region, existing regional expertise and knowledge gaps.

The four-day exchange was built around these four learning areas. Each learning session was developed and led by CSAs in the region, providing case studies and designing practical learning activities. The learning areas identified were:

- 1) Decentralisation of civil society coordination – improving the reach and coordination of nutrition interventions in districts, villages and communities.

- 2) Citizen engagement and bottom-up nutrition advocacy – experience of public hearings and the ombudsman model.
- 3) Effective nutrition budget advocacy – using analysis of national and sub-national budgets to increase funding for nutrition.
- 4) The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes – implementing and monitoring the code at a national and sub-national level.

A field visit to Namobuddha municipality, Kavrepalanchowk district was also organised to demonstrate the multi-sectorial approach to scaling up nutrition. Participants learnt from the health workers, farmers and mothers groups about their best practices for effective nutrition intervention and sustainable and healthy livelihood.

### **Learning in action at national and regional level**

CSAs used the learning sessions to expand or strengthen their national CSA strategies and workplans; considering how the approaches studied could be applied in their own country. This included plans to develop sub-national SUN CSAs in Pakistan and organise community hearings in Kyrgyzstan.

*“We will incorporate the principle of decentralisation in our working modality in Pakistan”*

**Muhammad Irshad, CSA-PAK, Pakistan**

*“We are going to start with multi-sectoral platforms at province level using public hearings as a form of engagement for participants.”*

**Gulmira Koshobergenova, SUN CSA, Kyrgyzstan**

A regional work plan was also developed, laying out the priorities for the region going forward; implementation and monitoring of the BMS code, improving civil society coordination at a sub-national level and increasing financing for nutrition in the region.

### **Key outcomes from the learning exchanges**

**Host countries benefit:** In the two host countries, commitment to tackling malnutrition was strengthened: government and nutrition actions at all levels participated and reiterated support for national policies and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms; host civil society alliances and their partners benefited from access to learning from eight countries in their region, as well as focused reflection on their own efforts. Media coverage ensured nutrition was in the news. Among all involved in working to end malnutrition, civil society’s key role was showcased.

*“The most important change is the togetherness that leads to a better coordination. We now enjoy working together more and bringing efforts together, because we share.”*

**Laurien Kubwimana, SUN Advisor for Education, Pentecostal Church of Rwanda**

**Visiting countries benefit:** Representatives from the 16 visiting national CSAs returned to their countries with learning from their host, from their peers, and from reflecting on their existing and planned efforts. They developed practical, feasible and sustainable innovation plans to put what they have learnt into immediate action.

**Regions benefit:** SUN CSN's regional coordination platforms for Anglophone Africa and Asia were formalised and strengthened, with strategies for future work agreed. Several CSAs launched partnership projects with their peers in different countries following the exchanges, aligned with the priorities set out in these regional plans.

**Communities benefit:** In both host countries, local champions and communities were at the centre of the learning exchanges, through field visits and development of best practice case studies. Having the learning exchanges rooted in the communities suffering from malnutrition and giving voice to local people are key principles for SUN CSN. At the same time, the communities had the responsibility to lead the learning of the visiting participants – demonstrating that they are empowered, proud and ready to fulfil their role as “champions” even after the learning exchange.

*“Parents of malnourished children taking part in the intervention groups have decided to do something about the malnutrition so that they are no longer visited as a case study of malnutrition.”*

**Musabyimana Innocent, Gisagara DPEM Coordinator, Rwanda**

**Value for Money:** Through two short, low-cost exchange visits involving 70 participants from 18 countries, key examples of effective practice were presented, analysed and discussed. Delegations from each country worked out how these approaches could be made to work in their own context. In this way, the spread of learning between countries facing similar challenges was fast-tracked. In addition, the relationships developed between the countries and the knowledge to source expertise led to follow-on collaborative projects. Regional coordination platforms were also formalised to sustain the momentum and to continue to share learning.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

**Sharing of learning within the SUN CSN network has rapidly accelerated following our two recent peer-to-peer structured learning visits: CSAs in Africa and Asia are now applying lessons they learned back in their own countries; regional coordination has been strengthened; and several CSAs are already involved in multi-country collaborative projects as a direct result.**

### **Find out more:**

Read about Sun CSN's learning programmes here: [www.suncivilsociety.com/en/about](http://www.suncivilsociety.com/en/about) |r

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