

# What does it take to sustain Scaling Up Nutrition?

03.

Create a movement

A Zambia case study

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**Mary Banda, 37, in her field in May 2014.**  
Mary has received training and a goat from Concern's RAIN programme in Zambia

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# 1. Introduction

The Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) movement was founded on the principle that all people have the right to food and good nutrition. The SUN movement is country-led and encourages national leaders to take the responsibility and ownership of tackling malnutrition in their country through policies and investments. Civil society support of government efforts to scale up nutrition is recognised as critically important and necessary. At the international level, the SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN) forms an important branch of the SUN movement and has helped to create a strong network of civil society alliances (CSAs) across the world. In 2012, the Zambia Civil Society Scaling up Nutrition (CSO-SUN) Alliance was born to help deliver the First 1000 Most Critical Days Programme (MCDP).

Initially funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and Irish Aid, CSO-SUN's mandate was to mobilise, coordinate and build the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to advance and raise the profile of nutrition at national level by campaigning alongside the Government's MCDP. CSO-SUN focuses on the first 1000 most critical days as it is a vital window of opportunity to address malnutrition from conception until a child's second birthday. During this period, good nutrition has the greatest impact on preventing maternal and infant mortality, and developing a child's cognitive and physical capacity. At the national level, CSO-SUN and its members advocate for stronger policies and increased investment in nutrition.

## 2. Learning from CSO-SUN in Zambia

CSO-SUN was the first nutrition advocacy platform for civil society in Zambia, adding great value to the nutrition movement in Zambia. Since its establishment, it has convened 42 members including local CSOs and international NGOs, making it one of the most influential civil society organisations working in any arena in Zambia. CSO-SUN is a highly effective advocacy platform that works across multiple sectors in an effort to end malnutrition. It makes use of various media platforms including radio and television, engages with key stakeholders including parliamentarians and communities and participates in global conferences to highlight the key issues.

It is clear that there is a critical role and demand for such networks that serve as an overarching platform for dialogue and service provision. The presence of many stakeholders across multiple sectors working to end hunger and malnutrition is a great opportunity and improvements in coordination across actors has the potential to improve geographic coverage. It is important to note however, that while the CSO-SUN brand has grown at an unprecedented scale, this growth comes with its own set of risks.



## 3. Achievements of CSO-SUN

**Generating evidence:** CSO-SUN generates evidence and has had excellent access to the corridors of power – both of which have enabled it to engage in, and influence, policy discussions. For example, CSO-SUN advocates for policies to become more nutrition-sensitive - an area in which it was successful in doing for the Social Protection Policy and the National Agriculture Policy. CSO-SUN leads and supports budget tracking and analysis, drawing attention to the low budgetary allocations for nutrition. CSO-SUN members have played a key role in supporting the budget tracking exercise and in 2016, Concern Worldwide worked with CSO-SUN to produce a report “Nutrition matters: opportunities to scale up nutrition in Zambia” which highlights that national budget allocations to nutrition are at a comparatively very low level and have not been improving over time. The report provides recommendations as to how the government can increase investments and the economic returns it could expect. Each year, the findings are presented before the Expanded Committee on Estimates and Expenditure, an important opportunity to influence budget allocations. Additionally, CSO-SUN supported wider advocacy efforts to ensure nutrition was recognised by the government as a cross cutting issue and lobbied for the government to spread the nutrition budget line across the key line ministries, rather than just the one – Community Development, Mother and Child Health – that it fell under before.

**Forming strategic partnerships:** CSO-SUN has formed strong partnerships with key stakeholders in Zambia to undertake research. For example, CSO-SUN worked with the World Food Programme (WFP) on adolescent health and its impact on nutrition. A report titled “Multilevel Barriers to HIV Prevention and Adequate Nutrition among Adolescent Girls” which was produced and launched in December 2016 to inform subsequent advocacy efforts on adolescents. Further to this, CSO-SUN worked in partnership on the Refinement of Nutrition Workforce Planning Recommendations for key sectors such as health, agriculture, community development and social welfare, and training institutions including the University of Zambia and Natural Resources Development Centre (NRDC).

**Working with parliamentarians:** Winning the support of parliamentarians is essential to ensure a sufficiently broad political base which can advocate that decision makers place greater focus and increase investments in nutrition. It also creates an opportunity for key issues to be debated and discussed in parliament. CSO-SUN is regularly invited to make submissions and appear before various committees of the Zambian Parliament. For example, CSO-SUN engages with members of parliament from different political party backgrounds through the All Party Parliamentary Caucus on Nutrition (APPCON) - a committee of Members of Parliament dedicated to food and nutrition development.

**Campaigns and the media:** CSO-SUN has led some campaigns in Zambia to prioritise nutrition in Zambia’s development agenda and have it recognised in the government budget. Political pressure, as mentioned above, is important to get government and ministry buy-in on certain issues. As such, CSO-SUN worked to secure political commitments for nutrition and campaigned with the catch phrase “vote nutrition”. This helped to raise awareness of political leaders and citizens and has created a demand among voters for information about nutrition whilst educating them to make the right decision on the candidates before them. More recently CSO-SUN has partnered with Hivos, campaigning under a project entitled Sustainable Diets for All that aims to prioritise sustainable diets as an integral part of food and nutrition security, with a particular focus on engaging members of parliament.

CSO-SUN has also conducted media training sessions for increased and accurate reporting on nutrition. It hosted representatives from various media platforms including radio, TV and print as an opportunity for networking and advocacy capacity and skill development. As a result of the media training, the media houses have been reaching out to CSO-SUN for stories or comments to any nutrition related topics which has strategically positioned CSO-SUN to continue educating the public and influencing decision makers.



Mary Banda, 37, at her home and with her children in May 2014. Mary has received training and a goat from Concern's RAIN programme in Zambia  
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## 4. Challenges & breaking point

These achievements happened against a background of rapid growth and scale up with a range of activities happening at the national and international level with a significant amount of donor funding. Despite the successes, the Alliance faced an institutional challenge at the end of 2015. At an Emergency General Meeting (EGM) called to address the issues, the CSO SUN membership turned out strongly, however the anticipated commitment from the Board was missing and none of the members attended the meeting.

How did an Alliance with such committed members, doing influential advocacy work and becoming a reputable brand in Zambia reach this point?

There is a large amount of learning about the functioning of advocacy platforms, in particular those linked to the SUN movement, to be drawn from this experience. This case study draws on the study done by Q Partnership in 2016<sup>1</sup> which was commissioned by the Zambia SUN Fund to document the key successes and challenges of CSO-SUN as part of a wider consultation on the impact that SUN has in Zambia. It also draws on the inputs and reflections of the current interim Board and membership. The key challenges and issues are explored in more detail on the following page:

## The key challenges and issues:

**Governance was weak:** The board was formed around agreed criteria to provide strategic direction and oversight. However, it was found that this oversight was weak when direction and decisions were needed the most. There were a number of cases of the Cooperating Partners, INGO Partners and the Secretariat undermining the Board, by-passing them in material decision making. Strategic decisions relating to governance practice, senior recruitment, capital expenditure, financial investments and new projects, should be routed through the Board, to ensure they can provide the direction and oversight they are mandated with.

**The business model design had some unreasonable expectations:** CSO-SUN was defined around a narrow 'advocacy for improved nutrition' mandate, with clear deliverables and a work plan. However, creating a 'little NGO', that fundraises around a project model, rather than a strong 'movement of members', may have been a design error from the start.

**Insufficient focus on tracking organisational development:** The focus on the success of the advocacy and programmatic interventions took attention from tracking the parallel development of the emergent organisational infrastructure. The strategic plan developed in 2015 was not reviewed and CSO-SUN progress reports were very activity and success-story focused – articulation of challenges was scarce. More structured M&E and performance analysis against an agreed dashboard of indicators (program, management and finance) is a critical feature of an effective organisation along with more deliberate oversight of results, risks, variances, explanations and corrective action.

**Little deliberate capacity building:** There was little systematic and well planned capacity building for both the members and the Secretariat and as such, CSO-SUN quickly drifted from a coalition of members into a heavy reliance on the Secretariat to drive activities and strategy. There was a strong emphasis from funders and some influential members on driving CSO-SUN's success and growth and less so on supporting capacity building efforts. This was of particular importance since a divide was noted, between members based in Lusaka and those based in other parts of the country, in their ability to coordinate with each other, and their current roles in civil society. Alliances are delicate structures and need attention to institutional strengthening as well as strengthening capacity to develop and deliver effective advocacy and campaigns.

**Insufficient sharing of information:** CSO-SUN was highly effective in sharing persuasive information with the media and political leaders but there was less emphasis on internal communications. An agreed communications policy, ensuring frequent, accessible and inclusive information, to a diverse and dispersed membership is a key feature of an effective alliance.

## 5. Building CSO-SUN Back

Following the July EGM, a small working group of committed members formed, meeting regularly and planning the recovery. There was a clear message from this EGM that the Alliance was very much worth saving. Q Partnership note "Almost all stakeholders agree that CSO-SUN adds value to the nutrition movement in Zambia with voice, thinking and influence. The 'movement' belongs to Zambian civil society, and it is them that should demonstrate that they are prepared to drive the recovery and the renewal". Subsequently, from this group an interim Board was elected in December 2016 by a second EGM.

With a new mandate, the interim Board have been tackling the institutional issues, leveraging the CSO-SUN Alliance brand in Zambia and attracting new donors. An AGM is planned for late 2017 to elect a new permanent Board who will be supported through better induction and clearer guidance on how to operate. This also provides an opportunity to rally and confirm the membership, requesting engagement and commitments to support the Alliance moving forward. Building on the commitment that has been expressed by the members throughout this challenging period, two sub-committees to the Board are planned to work on technical (national budget tracking, nutrition, agriculture, media, district administration) and operational (Finance, HR, Procurement & Compliance) issues. The Strategic Plan will be revitalised and a business plan developed to put in place a funding base for the future, learning lessons from the past about the need to address institutional strengthening concurrently with other work. Most importantly, it has been the commitment of the members of the Alliance that have driven it forward through some difficult times. New plans and a strategy should be those of a membership organisation rather than an NGO that implements projects; efforts should be directed at the grass roots, building membership capacity and driving change around nutrition behaviours and investments in Zambia..

## 6. Looking to the future

The interim Board, with a new Coordinator, has flagged important areas to focus on moving forward. This includes the work related to advocacy on adolescent nutrition; lobbying for increased investment to nutrition through the national budget tracking; continued engagement with Parliamentarians; building champions for Nutrition; and strengthening media partnerships to increase nutrition awareness and behaviour change in Zambia. The institutional challenges have not diminished the potential of the Zambian CSO SUN Alliance to have an impact and in fact has demonstrated the commitment of the member organisations to work together to address the challenge of malnutrition in Zambia.

## References:

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## Acknowledgments:

The author would like to thank all who in one way or another contributed to the completion of Part Three of the Zambia case study. Particular thanks goes to Scott Kaluba, Chenai Mukumba, Mathews Mhuru and the CSO-SUN board; Marjolein Mwanamwenge formerly of Concern and CSO-SUN; Danny Harvey of Concern Worldwide; Oliver Wakelin, Dorothy Namuchimba, Mary Chibambula and Reginald Ntomba of CARE.

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