

What does it take to sustain Scaling Up Nutrition?

02.

Invest and cooperate

A Zambia case study



Mary Banda, 37, cooks food at her home in May 2014. Mary has received training and a goat from Concern's RAIN programme in Zambia

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1. Introduction

In 2010, Zambia signed up to the global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, signaling to the world its determination to end malnutrition forever. As the most stubborn form of malnutrition in Zambia, stunting remains at 40%ⁱ. The cost this exacts on the Zambian economy and society is well established. Over a 10 year period, a reduction in stunting of 1% per year, a reduction in maternal anemia of one third, and the elimination of iodine deficiencyⁱⁱ could result in an increase in economic productivity of as much as USD1.5billion. As the legacy of low copper prices and the impact of El Nino persist, investment in these areas – which could yield such productivity growth - is a compelling proposition.

Stunting itself is a development challenge which will only ever be tackled by coordinated action that extends across Government and is implemented in cooperation with all of the relevant development partners and civil society. The past five years has seen such action in Zambia, with the implementation of the Government's First 1,000 Most Critical Days Programme (MCDP), the aim of which is to reduce stunting and put in place the foundations for a coherent and sustainable nationwide response to undernutrition. The programme was developed by the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) in collaboration with its development partners, whose shared commitment had already encouraged the Government of Zambia (GRZ) to become an 'early riser' in the SUN movement and to make important commitments at the Nutrition for Growth Conference in 2013ⁱⁱⁱ.

Established in 1967 by an Act of Parliament, NFNC is the advisory body to the Government on all matters concerning food and nutrition in Zambia, promoting and overseeing nutrition activities primarily focusing on vulnerable groups including women and children and driving all efforts to scale up nutrition in Zambia. While currently placed within the Ministry of Health, the NFNC has a recognised mandate to coordinate and facilitate planning multi-sectorally to further the nutrition agenda.

2. The SUN Fund

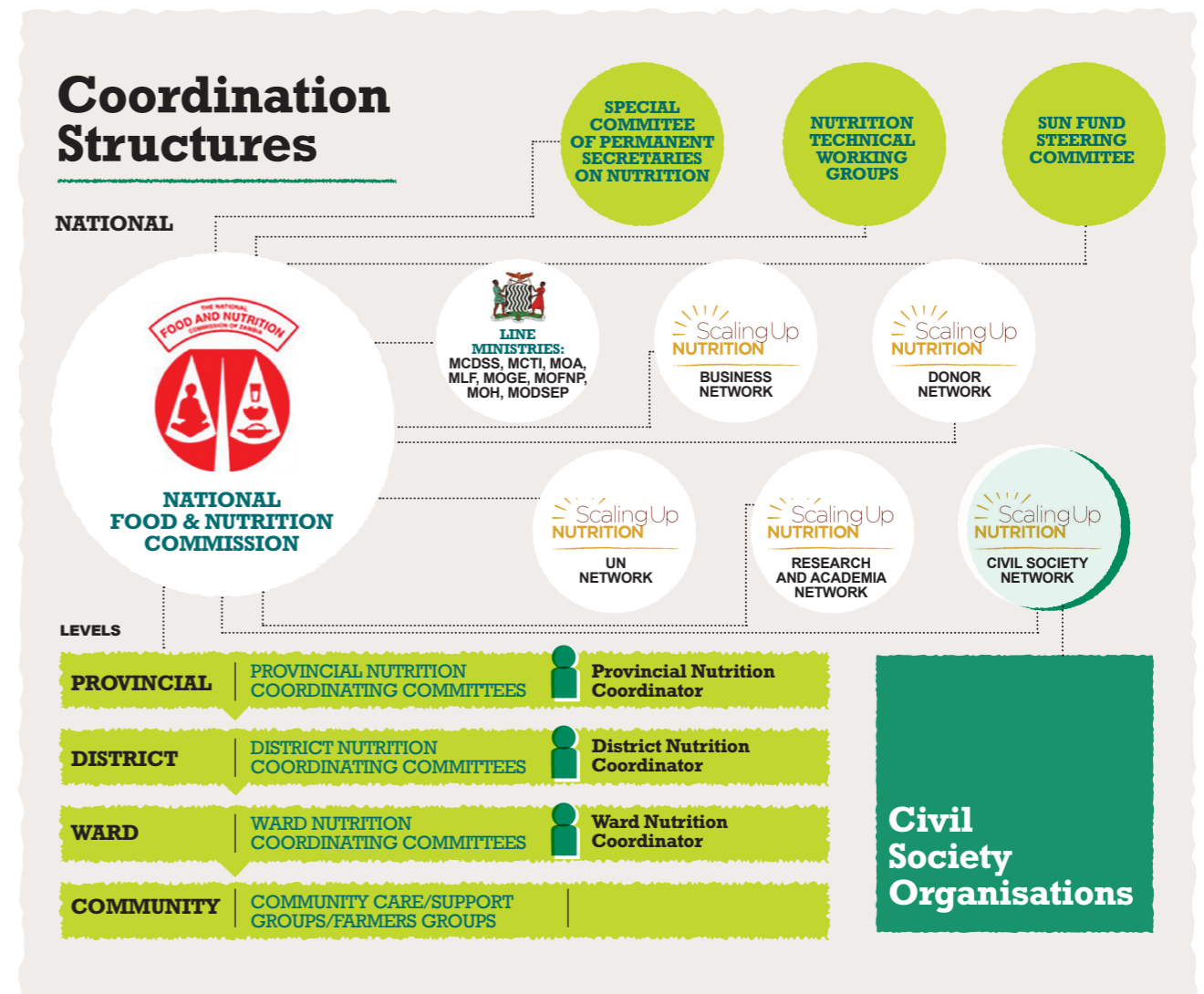
The SUN Fund was conceived as a catalytic mechanism to mobilise financial resources in support of Zambia's MCDP. Established in 2013, the Fund pooled USD27million from DFID, Irish Aid and Sida, cooperating partners who had the capacity and means to collaborate in this way. These donors were members of a wider SUN donor group that included WFP and UNICEF at the time, latterly the EU, and more recently USAID, all of whom are working to support the Zambian Government in its efforts to tackle stunting. The Fund was new and innovative but the name belies its depth, breadth and complexity.

The complexity of SUN Fund is best described graphically (Fig1) and its scope is expansive; from scaling up priority interventions across 14 districts to providing support to key areas which need to be strengthened in order to address stunting. These range from institutional strengthening and co-ordination at all levels to communications, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation; from the provision of grants for the development of innovative projects to the support of operations research. Since inception, the Fund has been managed by CARE International in consortium with Concern Worldwide and the Nutrition Association of Zambia (NAZ).

The SUN Fund has to date been implemented in 14 districts, which were selected based mainly on their levels of stunting but also on the potential for synergies across existing programmes. The Fund has established coordinating mechanisms at the National, Provincial, District and Ward levels designed to support and align implementation of nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive interventions. Convened by NFNC, the five line ministries with the greatest influence on nutrition are encouraged and supported to work together at all levels towards improved nutrition outcomes.

Their work is bolstered by five SUN networks^{iv} and a Multi-stakeholder Forum which comprises 10 Ministries, academia, business, civil society, donors (cooperating partners) and media. A Committee of Permanent Secretaries ensures high level oversight of both planning and implementation, while the CSO SUN Alliance has sought to build commitment beyond those stakeholders already invested in Scaling Up Nutrition, not least through extensive media communication and engagement with Parliament.

Possibly most unique in the governance structures of SUN Fund is the establishment of a District Nutrition Coordinating Committee (DNCC) in each of the 14 districts. This committee structure replicated a successful pilot^v modelled initially by Concern Worldwide and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) as part the Realigning Agriculture to Improve Nutrition (RAIN) project in Mumbwa^{vi} District.



3. From pilot to scale up

Sun Fund 1 to Sun Fund 2

Four years on from its inception, Zambia is looking to significantly scale up its MCDP expanding the programme nationwide across all 106 districts, 32 of which will be funded by SUN Fund 2. It is an ambitious scale up but one which has broad support across Government and others who will invest in its delivery, including an expanded group of cooperating partners who are committing to a second SUN Fund. There is momentum behind this next phase of expansion and demand coming from districts who were not part of the first phase.

The policy environment has become more nutrition sensitive too, with notable consideration given to nutrition within the 7th National Development Plan^{vii}. The Government has recently recruited 120 additional Nutritionists. An MCDP Implementation Guide and Field Workers Reference Guide in addition to a wide range of manuals been developed and new Finance Guidelines have been put in place. Training has been rolled out at field level on specialist topics such as Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) and Maternal Infant and Young Child Feeding (MIYCF). NFNC has led in developing Nutrition Profiles which use locally available data to show current coverage and the potential impact of various interventions and investments. The Commission has also carried out a country-wide mapping which details exactly who is doing what in regards to nutrition in each district. Zambia seems ready for MCDP2. There has also been considerable reflection on the lessons learnt during the first phase^{viii}, and equal effort in designing the second phase to build on the successes and address the challenges^{ix}. So what are the lessons that are now informing the design of the new SUN Fund? How is the design likely to change? What characteristics of the Fund have been so critical to its success? And perhaps most importantly, what will it take for Zambia to secure and sustain sufficient reduction in stunting right across the country?



Joyce, eight, holds a chicken that was provided as part of Concern's RAIN programme to her mother Lillian Shachinda.

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4. Lessons for sharing

1. Change takes time - the first 14 districts are not 'there' yet

Multi-sectoral coordination across multiple line ministries and at multiple levels is possible and can result in improved nutrition outcomes but it involves a lot of change and change happens slowly. SUN Fund put a lot of emphasis on establishing and building the capacity of DNCCs. Committees have subsequently been established at the Ward and Zone levels (WNCCs and ZNCCs) to ensure better convergence of the multisectoral interventions at the level of the household and family. More recently, coordination at the Provincial level has come into focus in order to ensure the DNCCs receive the technical support they require. Some of these structures are still nascent and as the programme expands to new districts, the initial 14 will need continued support to arrive at a point where the cross-sectoral planning and implementation is well established, properly resourced and can sustain itself into the future.

2. Capacity Building - a constant challenge

In all efforts to scale up nutrition, there is a significant challenge that arises from the nature of the structures of Government. GRZ staff (Ministry focal points or District Nutrition Coordinators for example) funded by SUN Fund are generally on a two year, or even shorter, contract. This turnover, coupled with the rotation of other district staff such as senior technical officers who sit on the DNCC, has an impact on building and sustaining shared understanding, buy in and commitment to scaling up nutrition in any one district, ward or zone. Capacity building – whether in relation to technical assistance, financial management or coordination - is not a 'start up' activity but a function to be relentlessly pursued. Financial provision should be sufficient to maintain and deepen capacity building but also to consolidate the learning over time.

3. Positioning matters

Established under the District Development Coordinating Committee, the DNCC has a position of authority on nutrition and the ability to convene representatives from across the key line ministries. Being under the DDCC and having the District Administration Officer as its Chair, confirms the priority that must be given to working across functions. The capacity and skills of the District Nutrition Coordinators to coordinate and lead has also emerged as an important ingredient for success at the district level. These attributes and organizational arrangements are necessary in order to sustain commitment amongst people whose day to day responsibilities are tied to quite different sectors.

4. Strengthening the investment case - the need for more evidence

Nutrition has not, in recent times, made headlines in Zambia and the comparatively low and static level of Government investment suggests the case may need to be stronger and delivered differently at a National level. Evidence of impact is critical but the results of MCDP1 will be limited with a SUN end line planned for just 2 districts. The ambition of MCDP2 and the levels of investment necessary in the medium to long term point to the need for more robust M&E and evidence generation from MCDP2. This is essential to establish the impact of and priorities for investments. Coordinated advocacy across CSOs, CPs, UN bodies and others drawing on this and global evidence is equally critical in the next phase. This is important in order to encourage Government to put in place its own growth plan, laying out how GRZ investment in nutrition will be scaled up in the medium to long term in line with national and international commitments.

5. Making the contribution of Government more visible

The Joint Financing Agreement to accompany MCDP2 should make clear the contributions not just of the SUN Fund donors but of Government as well. The principle of shared investment is important, while the sustainability of MCDP beyond SUN Fund is dependent on plans which drive progress towards reaching the Nutrition for Growth



commitments. The budget tracking work of recent years^x can continue to serve as a basis for dialogue about how best to increase the transparency and the scale of nutrition investment in Zambia.

6. The role of NFNC

As the driver of Government actions to end stunting in Zambia, the role of NFNC in convening and building shared commitment to nutrition across a range of Ministries is unquestioned. Its mandate, authority and leadership is clear and its achievements over the years are many. The ambition of MCDP2 is a significant credit to the Commission and to all its partners. At this juncture, it is important that its own capacity grows in proportion to the task ahead, that it ultimately subsumes all those functions of the SUN Fund and that the process of transformation sees it deliver sustained and sustainable impact far into the future.

7. The role of CPs and the UN

The longstanding commitment of CPs and the UN to addressing stunting in Zambia should be recognised and commended. The groundwork laid by UNICEF and DFID, which encouraged GRZ to join the SUN movement, set the country on a path which others have since joined. The support of NFNC in developing MCDP, the trust of DFID, Irish Aid and Sida in creating the SUN Fund, the investment in a myriad of programmes to scale up nutrition across the country, the time committed to the Multi-stakeholder Forum and the encouragement of others to join the fold, all represent an immense and increasingly unified effort around a single Government programme.

8. The role of civil society

Civil society has an important and necessary role to play in national and international efforts to scale up nutrition, from programming, M&E and capacity building at local level to social mobilisation, advocacy and campaigning. Accountability work, including budget tracking and further accountability initiatives, at national and international levels is equally important. The past work of CSOSUN Alliance^{xi} in Zambia - in engaging with Government officials, parliamentarians, policy makers and the media, strengthened significantly the awareness of stunting and support for SUN efforts and spanned political, policy and public realms. This role continues to be a key ingredient for a successful SUN movement and, as the Alliance emerges from a period of significant challenge and change (see part 3), it is important that the lessons from past experience form the basis for CSO collaboration in the future. All partners need the dialogue on how best to restore support for the collaborative work of CSOs, building on past experiences and finding innovative ways to coordinate and galvanise greater grass roots support in the future.

9. Harmonisation: a work in progress

While the SUN Fund enables implementation of a Government programme, it still exists outside Government structures, an arrangement which can be challenged under the Aid Effectiveness principles^{xii}. There are practical reasons for this, given the novel arrangements of institutions, and it has functioned well. However, the challenge will be to ensure that during the period of the second SUN Fund, the capacity of NFNC and the investment of Government is scaled up sufficiently so that it can sustain the progress and scale up further when the Fund comes to an end.

10. There is no silver bullet

The mechanics of the SUN Fund are challenging but the scope of change is also substantial. It needs structures that support collective planning and implementation at the right levels, and transparency and accountability at all levels. Issues under SUN Fund around delays in reporting from and disbursement of funding to the Districts have been interrogated and seem well understood^{xiii}. Separating the fund management from the technical assistance functions in the next phase is intended to ensure sufficient clarity and capacity in both domains. This separation brings risks too and their coordination by NFNC will be critical in the success of this new arrangement.

5. How is the design likely to change?

The final design of SUN Fund 2 is not yet public but some attributes are already clear, amongst which:

- An increase in the number of donors, reflecting a substantial and shared commitment to align behind the Government's implementation of MCDP2. DFID, EU, KFW, Sida, Irish Aid and USAID are all in discussions regarding potential support;
- A corresponding increase in investment in the order of up to USD150 million over the next five years, reflecting the ambition in MCDP2 to widen the coverage of districts, to deepen the impact within districts and to reduce stunting by 25% in the targeted Districts by 2022;
- An increase in geographic coverage which will span a total of 32 districts by 2022 with an increased reach at community level to be designed and rolled out;
- A greater focus on nutrition sensitive interventions and less emphasis on supplementations and CMAM;
- Separation of two core functions - Technical Assistance and Fund Management – reflecting an intention to ensure sufficient clarity and capacity in both domains;
- Building increased financial capacity at District level – reflecting the need to address the capacity constraints which became clear during phase 1;
- Greater investment in communications, advocacy and behaviour change, and a separation of those functions too – reflecting the need for differentiated scale up of activity in both areas;
- Focus on M&E and knowledge management – reflecting the critical requirement for greater evidence of impact which in turn should feed the influencing work and subsequent investment decisions at all levels.

6. Sustaining success into the future

Zambia is on the brink of a new and ambitious chapter in its scaling up nutrition efforts. As it faces this new challenge, some of the core elements of SUN Fund which enabled its success are clear and can be shared with other SUN countries travelling on a similar path. This includes the willing coordination amongst stakeholders, the openness to collaborate and learn, the readiness to pool sufficient resources, the existence of a mandated government body who can convene across sectors and the opportunity to develop the MCDP (a GRZ programme that the Government can fund). The existence of RAIN and other pilots provides evidence and learning from an emerging multi-stakeholder nutrition community which collaborates and translates commitment into practice.

Sustaining core elements will be important in moving from MCDP1 to MCDP2 and from SUN Fund 1 to SUN Fund 2. Practical continuity, ensuring there are no significant 'breaks' in funding between these phases, will also be crucial. Much has been achieved and learnt under the first SUN Fund which will inform and improve the next phase. The levels of cooperation, commitment and ambition already shown in the next phase of Scaling Up Nutrition is truly impressive. The challenge which lies ahead is to further strengthen the evidence base, the case for investment, the political commitment of GRZ and ultimately the level of domestic resources invested in this shared endeavor to end forever the scourge of stunting in Zambia.

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