

# MQSUN Guidance Note

## How to Estimate the Costs of Nutrition-Sensitive Actions in a Common Results Framework – A Guidance Note

### Introduction

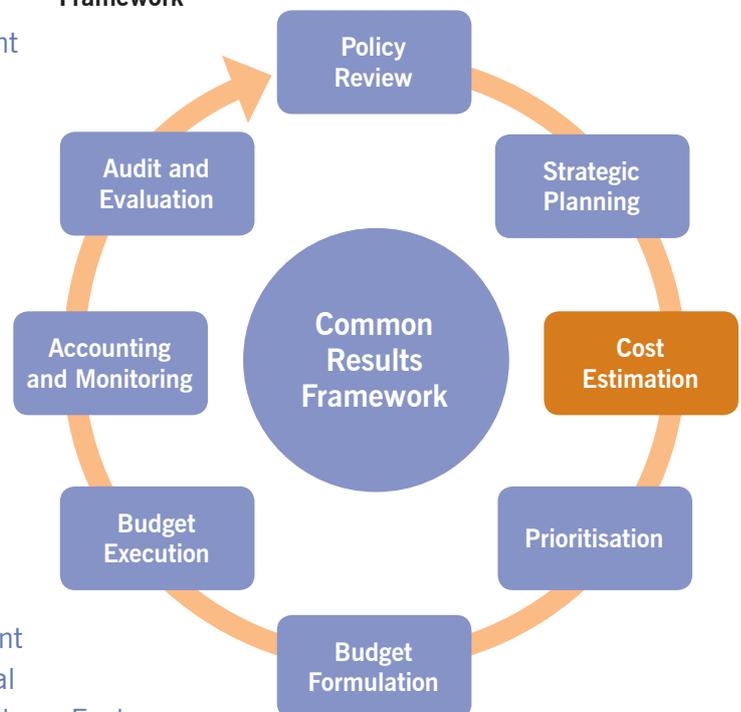
A Common Results Framework (CRF) enables multiple stakeholders – including different government ministries and external actors – to work towards common goals for the improvement of nutrition. Estimating the costs of implementing nutrition interventions is critical to achieving these goals.

### Steps to Developing a Common Results Framework

The development of a CRF is a complex process which includes but is not limited to: agreeing on common goals with sectoral partners; development of operational plans; cost estimation of actions; setting priorities; as well as continuous rigorous monitoring and evaluation (outlined in the diagram). This note presents the basic requirements for estimating the costs of the interventions in an operational plan for nutrition and is meant as a guide for countries engaged in estimating costs and financing multi-sectoral plans.

A comprehensive nutrition plan will include nutrition-specific, nutrition-sensitive, and governance actions. This note focuses specifically on estimating the costs of nutrition-sensitive actions. Each country may take a different approach to cost estimation and non-governmental stakeholders may have their own internal approaches. Each country should build on its strengths and the systems already in place and work to develop in areas where there is room for growth.

**Figure 1: The process for developing a Common Results Framework**



<sup>1</sup> SMS, adapted from World Bank (1998)

<sup>2</sup> An overview of national nutrition plans including examples and a discussion of cost estimation and scale-up can be found in, "Planning and costing for the acceleration of actions for nutrition" (<http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Final-Synthesis-Report.pdf>).

## Box 1. Definitions (Ruel and Alederman, 2013)

**Nutrition-specific interventions** are those that address the immediate determinants of foetal and child nutrition and development—adequate food and nutrient intake, feeding, caregiving and parenting practices, and low burden of infectious diseases.

**Nutrition-sensitive interventions** are those that address the underlying determinants of foetal and child nutrition and development (food security, adequate caregiving resources at the maternal, household, and community levels; access to health services and a safe and hygienic environment) and incorporate specific nutrition goals and actions. Nutrition-sensitive programmes can serve as delivery platforms for nutrition-specific interventions, potentially increasing their scale, coverage, and effectiveness.

**Governance** refers to all interventions aimed at strengthening national and sub-national capacity to bring stakeholders together and enable them to coordinate effectively. This includes coordination and information management, systems and capacity building, policy development, and advocacy.

### Prior to Undertaking Cost Estimation

A fully operational plan with sufficient detail regarding intervention activities, targets, and coverage must be developed. This serves as the basis for cost estimation as well as the monitoring and evaluation framework. Development of this plan will require negotiation around a single set of annual results to support alignment. This does not mean that every sector or stakeholder must have the same set of results but their sectoral results need to contribute to the overall agreed nutrition goals.

### Who needs to be involved?

When undertaking cost estimation, it is essential to include:

- All contributing ministries
- All implementers (e.g., district-level staff, CSOs, NGOs)
- All funding sources (e.g., lead budget-holding ministry, ministry of finance, donors, NGOs)

### Estimating the costs of interventions

The estimates should be based on the true cost of delivering all components within an intervention rather than being determined by the available budget or inputs. The exercise needs to be transparent and replicable so that the findings are clear and can be revised and updated as new information is received or priorities change. This includes presenting all assumptions and calculations used to estimate the costs.

Cost estimation should provide the real cost of implementing the plan in its entirety

SMS, adapted from World Bank (1998)

to achieve the stated nutrition goals in the CRF. It should form a basis for regular prioritisation and budgeting to identify a feasible scale-up plan and to calculate the funding gap. Overall costs may change over time and cost estimation will have to be periodically adjusted.

Regardless of the type of activity (nutrition-specific, nutrition-sensitive, or governance), it is important to rely on the implementers and financial experts from each sector to clearly understand what is involved in implementation and to estimate costs for their areas of responsibility.

The following information is necessary to estimate the full costs of implementing actions in the plan:

- Clear and exhaustive understanding of what each action in the plan entails
  - Include detailed task descriptions for every action
- Implementation targets for specific actions within the plan
  - Ensure they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound
- Target coverage
  - Include baseline, annual, and proposed final implementation target coverage, ensuring that the needs of those most in need are addressed (equity lens)
  - Should be achievable if the action is implemented as designed
- Current implementation and spending
  - Include components of the intervention already being delivered

«Cost estimation should provide the real cost of implementing the plan in its entirety to achieve the stated nutrition goals in the CRF.»

- Understand what components are being delivered by which stakeholders
- Identify the current costs of delivery
- Recurrent and other costs
  - Identify what implementation costs are recurrent and their quantity and frequency in relation to the implementation target
  - Identify what costs occur once or on an irregular basis and when the costs occur in the implementation cycle (includes start-up costs and capital costs)
- Shared (indirect) costs
  - Include costs associated with implementing the activities and actions of the CRF (overheads including planning, coordination, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation)
- Any components that can be directly attributable to an action should be included in the cost of that action (e.g., specific monitoring and evaluation, governance)
- Costs that are shared should be distributed across actions based on a transparent formula with assumptions fully described (e.g., a fixed percentage is added to the cost of all government actions based on an analysis of the proportion of shared costs across the entire government budget)

## Considerations for nutrition-sensitive interventions

While at least partial consensus exists on the approaches to estimating the costs of implementing and scaling-up high-impact nutrition-specific actions, there is much less agreement regarding estimating the cost of nutrition-sensitive actions. Before beginning a cost estimation of nutrition-sensitive actions, it is important to define which part of the intervention(s) should be included as nutrition-related. Generally nutrition-sensitive interventions are realised as one of two types: (1) an identifiable or additional nutrition-relevant component of a larger intervention that does not primarily address nutrition; or (2) a non separable component of a wider/integrated program that has a partial nutrition related purpose.

### *Type 1 – Identifiable nutrition-relevant components in a larger intervention*

The nutrition-relevant sub-component might be an add-on or an activity/task within an existing program where the elements and objectives are clearly delineated. In that case, each element can be reviewed separately and only those elements relevant to the nutrition goals are included in the cost estimation. The assumptions made in deciding how to identify these components should be documented and reported in the final cost estimation. All supporting activities that can be identified (e.g., governance, monitoring and evaluation) should be included as separate elements.

### *Type 2 – Nutrition-relevant components of a wider/integrated program*

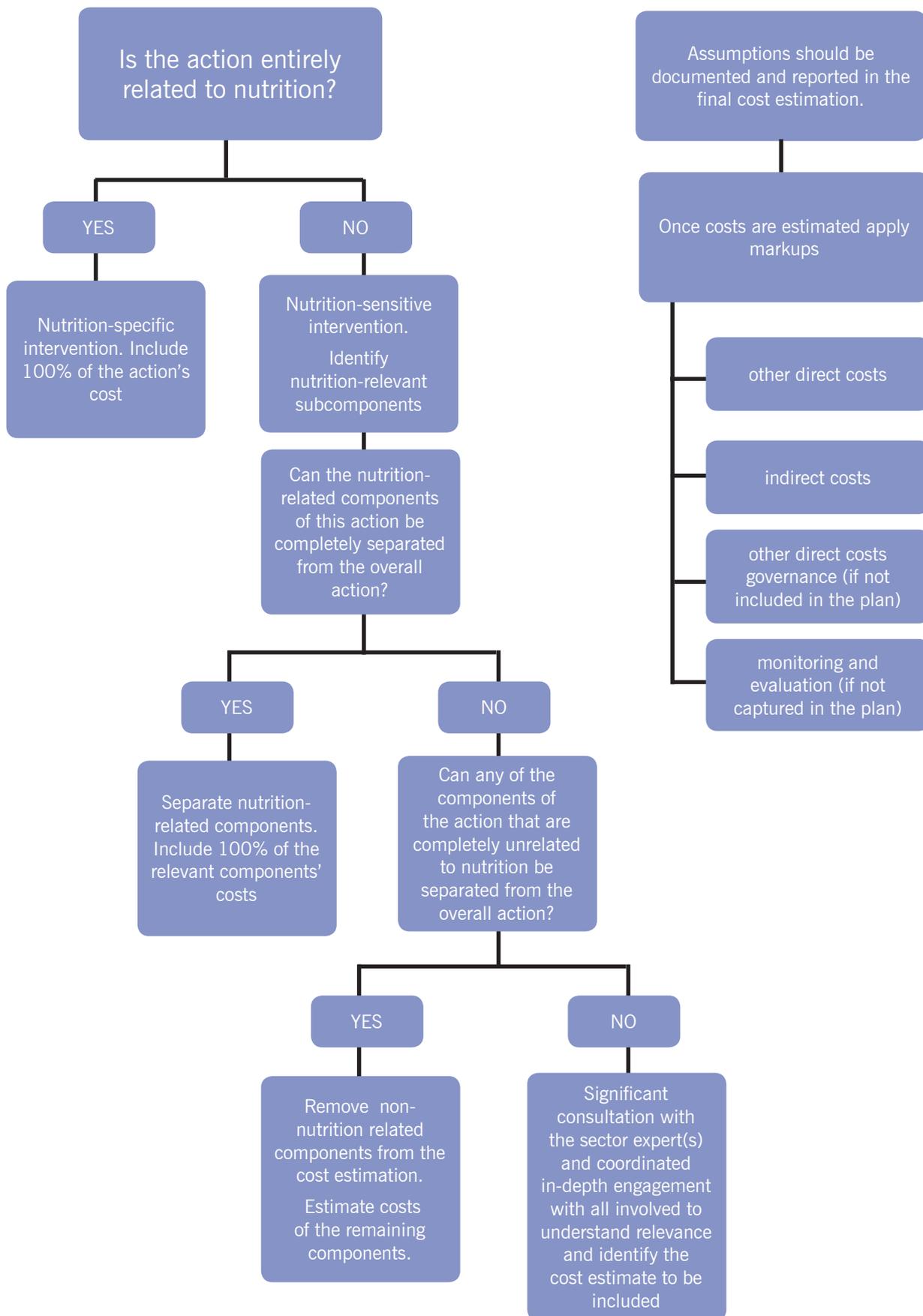
When dealing with wider/integrated programs, the nutrition-relevant cost is estimated by identifying the activity or task breakdown. Adding a sub-component to an existing program might additionally require a redesign and an estimation of new costs. Understanding the nutrition-relevant costs requires significant consultation with the sector expert(s) to understand why that activity or that task is relevant to the identified nutrition outcomes and what should be included in the cost estimate of the nutrition operational plan. This involves in-depth engagement with all involved stakeholders and takes coordination and time, but it also results in a more precise estimate of the true costs attributable to nutrition. Again, the assumptions made in deciding how to identify these components should be documented and reported in the final cost estimation.

Regardless of the type of intervention, the identification of the “nutrition-sensitive” component is linked to the definition of target beneficiaries and measurable outcomes that are relevant to nutrition status outcomes and identified priorities for nutrition.

Regardless of the method(s) used, fully document the approach and decisions so that the exercise is transparent and replicable.

**«Before beginning a cost estimation of nutrition-sensitive actions, it is important to define which part of the intervention(s) should be included as nutrition-related. »»**

**Decision Tree:** Sample process outlining the steps and considerations in the process of identifying, categorising, and assessing the nutrition relevance of sectoral interventions.



## Concluding Remarks

The determination of cost estimates needs to be an iterative and consultative process. Costs should be refined throughout the cycle of planning, implementation, and tracking. Careful development of the operational plan to clarify components of activities relevant to nutrition will simplify the process of identifying and estimating nutrition-relevant components of actions in the CRF.

In order to properly identify the costs relevant to nutrition, stakeholders need to come to an agreement about how to define relevance and clarify all assumptions that have been used in determining the final figures. As the nutrition plan is implemented and there is a greater understanding of the elements involved, plans can be updated and adjusted to highlight the nutrition-related components of the activities and costs can be refined to better reflect actual cost.

Additional decisions need to be made around:

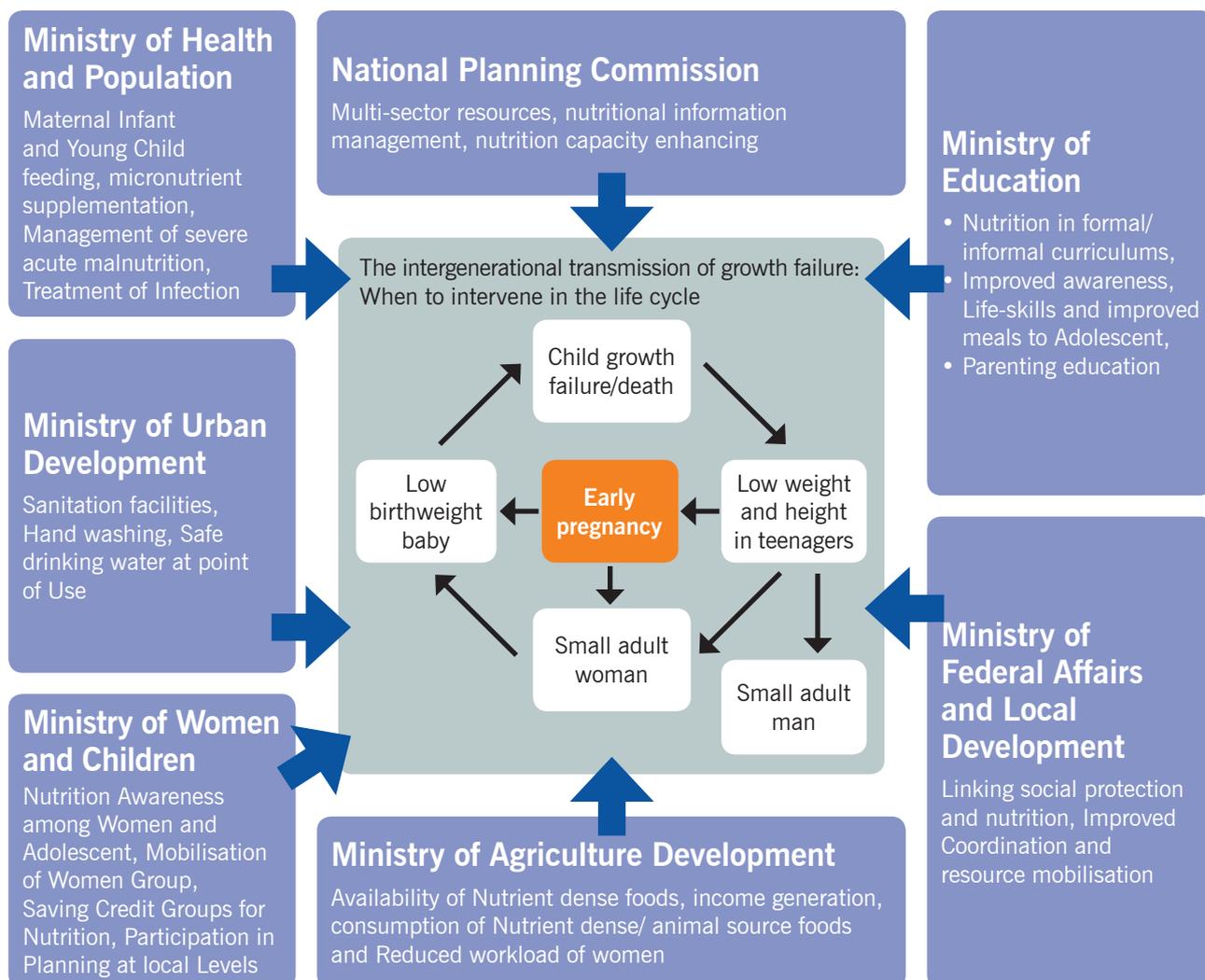
- The use of a common mark-up for government costs in key sectors (to standardly include overhead and general administrative costs such as labour, recurrent, and capital costs).

- The use of a common mark-up for governance costs (stewardship of nutrition) and monitoring and evaluation, if not separately identifiable.
- The involvement of the private sector in estimating the costs from a market perspective.

The assumptions and processes used for determining what components of actions in the CRF are nutrition-relevant, what mark-ups to include at what levels, and the prices to be used are dependent on many factors and may differ by sector and stakeholder. Determinants may include varying levels of detail in the operational plans and bundling of interventions. All assumptions and decisions should be well-documented and reported in the final cost estimation.

<sup>3</sup> Work is ongoing to estimate private sector costs. This includes estimating the private sector contribution to staple fortification

**Figure 2: Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan Framework**



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