

Improving Multisectoral Nutrition through Targeted Technical Assistance: ZAMBIA

Malnutrition in Zambia has remained high for many years despite increasing economic growth. High disease burden, limited access to health services, poverty, poor sanitation and food insecurity all contribute to child malnutrition. Zambia's food and nutrition security challenges are exacerbated by high dependence on rain-fed agriculture, mono-cropping, a lack of market incentives and a poor, non-diverse diet—which consists of staple foods such as cereal (maize) and starchy roots with few micronutrient-dense foods such as animal-source foods, fruits and vegetables. Furthermore, since Zambia has recently graduated to a middle-income country, development aid is dwindling and the recent copper price crash has resulted in very few government resources to fight high rates of malnutrition.

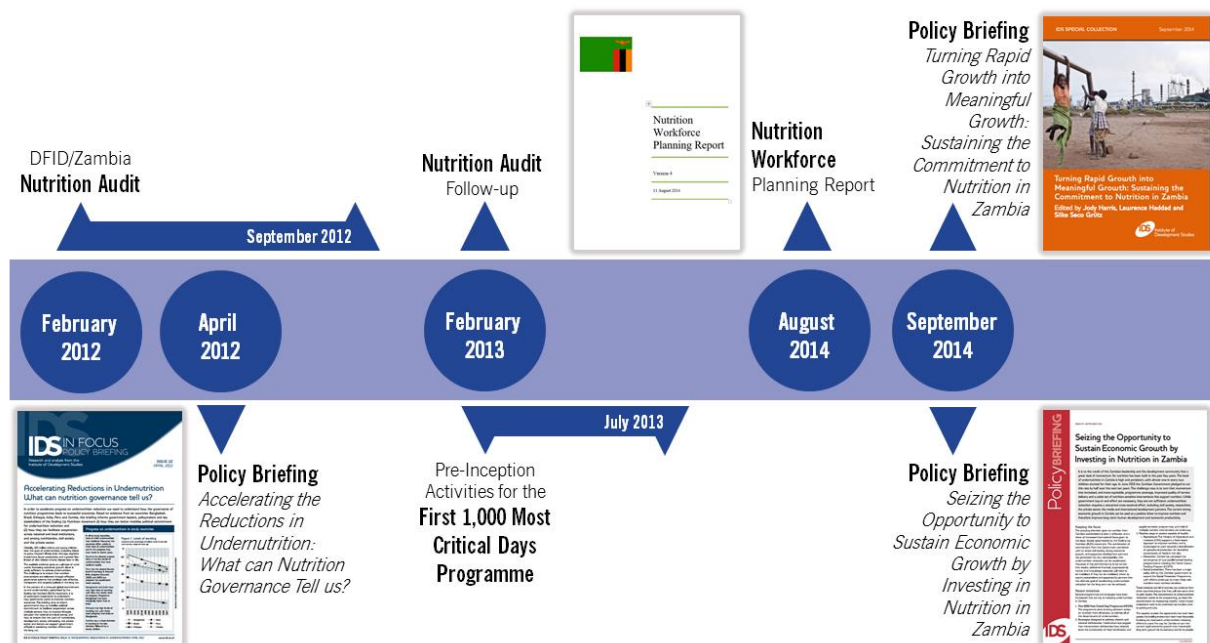
Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition (MQSUN) is funded through the United Kingdom's (UK) Department for International Development (DFID) and provides evidence-based technical expertise to DFID country offices and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement for the design and implementation of effective multisectoral nutrition programming and policies.

DFID provides support to the Zambian government based on their national development plans and the UK's poverty reduction, nutrition and human resources capacity priorities. DFID also supports the global SUN Movement and is a lead SUN co-convenor donor in Zambia. Between 2012 and 2016, MQSUN provided a range of technical assistance to support the scale up of nutrition in Zambia.

MQSUN provided strategic assistance to support the development of DFID's nutrition portfolio, planning of the pre-inception activities for Phase I of the national *First 1,000 Most Critical Days Programme* (MCDP), and the national Zambia nutrition workforce planning. MQSUN and DFID also commissioned a special series of academic studies, titled *Accelerating Undernutrition Reduction in Zambia*, to analyse the nutrition evidence base and commitments and provide recommendations to scale up the national response. Figure 1 summarises the MQSUN technical assistance to DFID/Zambia.

« MQSUN supported Zambia to scale up the country's multisectoral response to address malnutrition. »

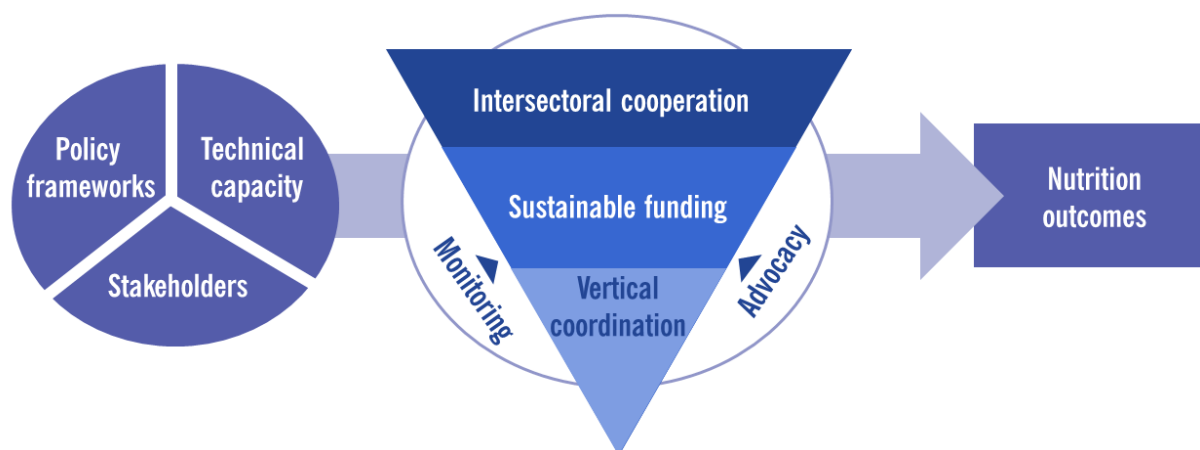
Figure 1. MQSUN Technical Assistance Timeline for Zambia.



What Can Nutrition Governance Tell Us?

In 2012, DFID commissioned a review of evidence on nutrition governance based on six countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Peru and Zambia. This review and brief informed government leaders, policymakers and key stakeholders of the SUN Movement about how they can effectively mobilise political commitment and facilitate cooperation for undernutrition reduction. The brief highlights key aspects of effective nutrition governance: intersectoral coordination, monitoring and advocacy, sustainable funding, accountability and responsiveness. Figure 2 presents a nutrition governance framework and summarises the key findings.

Figure 1. Nutrition Governance Framework.



Governance Area	Key Findings
Intersectoral coordination	Multiple government sectors and nongovernmental agencies must cooperate to achieve national undernutrition reduction.
Sustainable funding	Nutrition programmes need sustained funding with effective funding mechanisms to encourage policy coordination and implementation. Funding will be strengthened when national governments mobilise and manage their own funding sources.
Vertical coordination	Multiple subnational levels of government must cooperate to fight undernutrition. It is important for national and local governments to have the legal frameworks, technical capacity and incentives to transfer resources that will facilitate the sharing of information and accountability with one another.
Monitoring and advocacy	To maintain political commitment for nutrition, civil society and other stakeholders need to advocate and monitor national nutrition programmes for improvements. This includes regularly reported nutrition indicators, targets and budget estimates.

Haddad L, Acosta M, Fanzo J. *Accelerating Reductions in Undernutrition: What Can Nutrition Governance Tell Us?* Institute of Development Studies; April 2012.

Special Collection: *Accelerating Undernutrition Reduction in Zambia*

From 2012 to 2014, MQSUN developed a special collection series of open access bulletin briefs focusing on *Accelerating Undernutrition Reduction in Zambia* to raise the profile of undernutrition in the development agenda for use by policymakers and implementing partners. This series was based on a combination of the nutrition evidence base along with the implementation experience of stakeholders working in-country, and describes some of the opportunities and threats in Zambia to reduce undernutrition. It looks at the commitment to scaling up nutrition in Zambia thus far, whilst providing guidance to increase advocacy and commitment to raise and allocate more resources. Several gaps were identified that inhibit scale up, including poor stakeholder coordination, low capacity, minimum funding and a weak evidence base on nutrition in Zambia. Table 1 summarises the key findings.

Table 1. MQSUN Series of Papers on Key Issues Affecting Undernutrition in Zambia.

Article Title	Key Findings
<i>Impact of Rising Food Prices on Child Nutrition in Zambia</i>	The estimated results show an increase in cereal prices and other commodities—chicken, beans and eggs—which are rich in proteins and energy and negatively affect child stunting.
<i>Does Exposure to Aflatoxin Constrain Efforts to Reduce Stunting in Zambia?</i>	Zambia has both high consumption of groundnuts and high levels of aflatoxin contamination of this commodity; there is an association between stunting and aflatoxin exposure. To address aflatoxins, there needs to be multisectoral political will, agricultural and health sector action to perform rigorous monitoring of aflatoxin contamination and child growth.
<i>The Role of Fish in the First 1,000 Days in Zambia</i>	Despite limited data in Zambia, small fish are important for providing essential nutrients in the first 1,000 days of life; this can be accomplished through targeted behaviour change communication for healthy growth and use in complementary foods.
<i>The Impact of an Unconditional Cash Transfer on Food Security and Nutrition: The Zambia Child Grant Programme</i>	Cash transfers improve household food consumption, dietary diversity and food security. There were positive but not statistically significant impacts of cash transfers on weight; however, there are strong and significant impacts on reducing stunting amongst children who have access to clean water or more educated mothers.

Article Title	Key Findings
<i>Cash or Food? Which Works Better to Improve Nutrition Status and Treatment Adherence for HIV Patients Starting Antiretroviral Therapy</i>	The provision of cash or food to clients starting antiretroviral therapy yields similar results in improving clients' nutrition and health; however, providing cash is likely to be more cost-effective.
<i>Spirulina Effectiveness Study on Child Malnutrition in Zambia</i>	This study added to the evidence base that spirulina intake reduces stunting.
<i>Rainbow Project: A Model to Fight Child Malnutrition in Zambia</i>	Holistic approaches are needed to address malnutrition in Zambia. Community initiatives require functional collaboration between government and civil society organisations, especially at the district level.
<i>Interventions and Approaches that are Proven to Work in Reducing Child Malnutrition in Zambia</i>	The objective was to improve child growth by applying locally identified positive feeding, hygiene, health-seeking and caring practices. Behaviour change around feeding (e.g. using taboo 'round' foods) and caring practices (e.g. involving men in childcare) were observed. Increased technical support, collaboration with line ministries and supervision of community volunteers may increase adoption of positive local behaviours to reduce child malnutrition.
<i>The Role of Civil Society in Spotlighting Nutrition</i>	Civil society has a unique role in creating demand and building awareness for nutrition, and should develop political will and ensure effective high-level national coordination with nutrition champions.
<i>Intersectoral Coordination for Nutrition in Zambia</i>	Creation of a the District Nutrition Coordination Committee for multisectoral collaboration has been useful and is important for long-term sustainability.
<i>Reflections on the Role of Donors in Scaling Up Nutrition in Zambia, 2010-2013: Successes, Challenges and Lessons Learnt</i>	Donors play a key role in aligning resources and coordinating behind one evidence-based national multisectoral nutrition plan for policy development, programme design and implementation. Donors also play a key role in advocacy and strategic lobbying for political commitment and mobilising resources and support for scaling up nutrition.

Harris J, Haddad L, Grutz SS. *Turning Rapid Growth into Meaningful Growth: Sustaining the Commitment to Nutrition in Zambia*. Institute of Development Studies; 2014.

Nutrition Audit for Zambia

MQSUN conducted the initial Zambia nutrition audit from June to July 2012 to assess and identify which DFID/Zambia activities and programmes contribute to the reduction of undernutrition in Zambia and to recommend nutrition indicators and baseline/monitoring data. This included a literature review, programme documentation, key informant interviews and stakeholder visits. In 2013, MQSUN provided support for an audit follow-up to review the Community Health Assistants national nutrition curricula, support training-of-trainers on these modules and review the essential medicines list and the Essential Medicines Logistic Improvement Programme. This contributed to national scale up of nutrition planning, especially to the development of MCDP Phase I.

Scaling up Nutrition and the *First 1,000 Most Critical Days Programme*

Zambia has a unique multidonor SUN Fund, a joint donor financing mechanism established to support scale up of the national First 1,000 MCDP (currently in Phase II, 2017-2021).

This pooled donor funding promotes the harmonisation and alignment of one national response to nutrition implemented through key international and government implementing partners and stakeholders. In 2013, MQSUN helped with the pre-inception activities for MCDP Phase I, including a mapping of current interventions to highlight service provision gaps. MQSUN then supported a district gap analysis and planning process for the First 1,000 MCDP in Zambia, making recommendations for key interventions for Phase II (1).

In 2016, in preparation for the MCDP Phase II planning process, MQSUN produced a second report—*Development of a Scale up Plan for the 1,000 Most Critical Days Programme in Zambia*—with an additional cost and investment analysis based on MCDP Phase I nutrition interventions and recommendations to support planning and costing of MCDP Phase II. The report recommended raising the profile of nutrition-sensitive agriculture, including increasing dietary diversity (excluding biofortification of maize) (1,2), which reflects the global evidence that increasing children’s dietary diversity reduces stunting (3). It also estimated that scaling up the ten MCDP Phase I nutrition-specific costed interventions would cost between US\$500,000 and \$700,000 per district per year, or a minimum of US\$15 million per year for 30 districts (4). Recommendations include continued decentralisation through development and strengthening of district-level multisectoral nutrition plans and orientation.

Nutrition Workforce Planning

In 2013 and 2014, MQSUN conducted a workforce planning exercise to support Zambia’s commitment to scaling up nutrition through human resources. The existing workforce situation was reviewed and documented across ministries to assess the needs for nutrition programming whilst reviewing the capacity of education and training facilities to deliver qualified staff. The final report is a combination of a literature review, an analysis of available workforce statistics and nutrition workforce recommendations (Table 2). Under the second phase of MCDP, this workforce report will be aligned with the training needs of the Zambian government in line with the revised workforce model included under MCDP Phase II and the needs of the National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan 2017-2021.

Table 2. Recommendations for the Nutrition Workforce in Zambia.

Increase the number of nutrition-focused public sector positions: prioritising decentralised provincial/district positions across sectors.
Strengthen nutrition workforce planning and evaluation: including sharing of national- and subnational-level workforce data, creating standardised human resources reporting, developing a costed workforce implementation plan and tracking progress against targets.
Improve staff effectiveness, retention and training: including streamlining supportive supervision and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, training a cadre of public sector staff to manage the cascading of multisectoral nutrition professionals and planning continuous learning.
Strengthen nutrition pre- and in-service training: investing in strengthening pre- and in-service training, including harmonising higher education for nutrition to provide oversight and implementation of national nutrition training, focusing on innovations for short-term and distance learning.

MQSUN Zambia Technical Assistance Key Findings & Recommendations

A number of key findings and recommendations that emerged from MQSUN's targeted technical assistance in scaling up the national nutrition response in Zambia are summarised in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Key Findings on Scaling Up Nutrition in Zambia.

Coordination challenges exist for nutrition programme implementation at both the provincial and district decentralised levels.
Limited district multisectoral nutrition guidance for policy and programming is available to guide implementation.
Managing the national response to malnutrition is demanding. The National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) is rapidly evolving and adapting to its new role with considerable flexibility; however, there are still some challenges with administration to keep up with rapid scale up.
Maintaining commitment to the nutrition national response will be difficult. The NFNC has been successful in coordinating the national launch of the First 1,000 MCDP, demonstrated by high levels of participation, ownership and commitment. However, once resources dwindle, the challenge for the NFNC will be to maintain these levels of commitment.
Policymakers and managers have limited nutrition knowledge and awareness, translating to lack of action against malnutrition.
Zambians have limited dietary diversity. The country's population relies heavily on staple foods, and there is a need to increase vegetables, protein and fats in diets.
A strong enabling environment exists at the national level, led by NFNC and the SUN donor group. Zambia is currently scaling up Phase II of the First 1,000 MCDP and the national nutrition plan.
There is weak financial tracking and resource mobilisation for nutrition from various government, donor and implementing partner sources. This prevents the scale up of nutrition interventions based on the on-the-ground evidence.
Nutrition capacity is lacking in the workforce. There is a critical shortage of public sector positions for nutrition, including nutritionists with higher education at all government policy and programme levels across key sectors.

Table 4. Recommendations Based on the Key Findings.

Increase advocacy for nutrition: It will be important to increase continuous dialogue for policy advisors, managers, implementing partners and beneficiaries, and to advocate for additional human resources.
Promote cash transfers coupled with nutrition education: Targeted nutrition messages should be included at points of cash transfer collection/voucher redemption, along with cooking demonstrations.
Promote dietary diversity: There is a need to diversify staple foods, focused on increasing animal-source foods, pulses, fruits and vegetables. Incentives for livestock production and food diversification are also encouraged.
Strengthen district planning and orientation: Advanced preparation, guidance and documentation, including costing of relevant activities, should be required. A minimum of five days of district planning training is needed in addition to orientation.
Develop district guidance for nutrition planning: This is especially pertinent to correct completion of work plans and to provide an illustrative menu of costing/cost estimates of activities, predetermined targeted beneficiary numbers (by districts), coverage targets and actual targeted population size (by district) to help with planning.
Integrate family planning and nutrition: Nutrition messages should be integrated into family planning services to increase uptake of lifesaving behaviours, reduce unwanted pregnancies and support birth-spacing. Birth weight should be monitored as an indicator for maternal outcomes.
Prioritise a minimum package of nutrition interventions: This package should be implemented in all districts (now outlined in First 1,000 MCDP Phase II).
Integrate nutrition into community health assistant training: The current curriculum should be reviewed to incorporate current evidence on nutrition.
Increase coverage of water, sanitation and hygiene services to complement nutrition services.

Strengthen empowerment of women: Women should be enabled to take a greater part in household decision-making and improve care and feeding practices for their children.

Expand stakeholder orientation and trainings: The NFNC should use their orientations, training materials, workshops and meetings as opportunities to inform people on the undernutrition context in Zambia and how it impacts their constituencies.

Streamline monitoring and evaluation for the national nutrition response: Data collection should be included wherever possible, restricting coverage data to the programme level. The NFNC should ensure adequate levels of data and (quantitative and qualitative) statistical analysis skills.

Track and coordinate human and financial resources across ministries.

Based on MQSUN's initial technical assistance, the following areas are recommended for further technical assistance:

- **Continue to provide technical assistance to scale up nutrition workforce planning:** This includes looking at both pre- and in-service training for nutrition, which involves supporting pre-service training at higher learning institutions as well as national, standardised in-service training for frontline multisectoral public-sector employees implementing or managing the nutrition response.
- **Decentralise training in scaling up nutrition:** Provide technical assistance in the development of provincial and district multisectoral nutrition training and orientation materials for planning, managing and scaling up MCDP Phase II.
- **Provide support for monitoring and evaluation:** Provide targeted support for monitoring and evaluation of nutritional outcomes at the decentralised level in line with scaling up nutrition through Phase II of the First 1,000 MCDP.

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