

# Assessing the Functional Capacity Needs of SUN Movement and CAADP Focal Points

Strengthening the capacity for multisectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration at all levels is a core objective of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. In 2017, both the SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) independently initiated the development of functional capacity building programmes for SUN and Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Focal Points. Given the complementary goals of their two initiatives, SMS and IFPRI decided to join forces to develop a functional capacity-strengthening programme covering SUN countries, simultaneously offered to SUN and CAADP Focal Points and their teams in participating African countries. DFID-funded Maximising the Quality of Scaling up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+) has been supporting this initiative in partnership with SMS, IFPRI and Nutrition International. This brief highlights the results of a functional capacity gap assessment that was carried out by MQSUN+ to inform this programme.

Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Focal Points are key players in advancing multisectoral nutrition within countries and across the globe ([Box 1](#)). As they do not work as lone individuals but as part of wider networks, functional skills are critical in their efforts to effectively engage across sectors and stakeholders; however, functional capacity gaps exist for these Focal Points.

In response to this need, in 2016, the SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS) started a functional capacity working group with Cornell University, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+), Nutrition International, the African Nutrition Leadership Programme (ANLP) led by North-West University and Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH), amongst others. The group deliberated on how best to support SUN Focal Points to strengthen functional skills pertinent to leading multisectoral nutrition efforts at country level. Similarly, in 2017, as part of Phase 2 of the programme on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health, IFPRI also embarked on a process of identifying leadership capacity gaps for multisectoral nutrition amongst CAADP Focal Points.

Considering the interlink between agriculture and nutrition and overlap in countries, SMS and IFPRI decided to bring these initiatives together to assess the key functional capacity gaps of SUN and CAADP Focal Points and to develop a joint training programme to address them. MQSUN+, with other collaborators, has been supporting this initiative through three phases.

**Diagnostics (Phase 1):** Given that other nutrition partners may have already identified some functional capacity gaps, this phase includes a desk review of existing literature as well as a functional capacity session at the 2017 SUN Global Gathering and key informant interviews.

**Design (Phase 2):** This phase includes the final prioritisation of capacity focuses (building from the Diagnostics phase) as well as the development of an agenda, methodological approach and training materials for the first three-day pilot capacity strengthening retreat.

**Training Pilot (Phase 3):** This phase includes the facilitation of the pilot retreat—followed by an end-of-retreat evaluation and three-month post follow up with the participants. This information will be used to refine the content for subsequent retreats (to be continued in Phase 4).

This brief highlights the results of the capacity gap assessment from the Diagnostics phase.

### Box 1. Who are SUN and CAADP Focal Points?

The **Scaling Up Nutrition Movement**—launched in 2010—promotes a new way of working collaboratively to achieve sustainable and equitable reductions in malnutrition and nutrition justice for all. With governments in the lead, the SUN Movement unites people—from civil society, the United Nations (UN), donors, businesses and researchers—in a collective effort to improve nutrition. The Movement aims to: (1) bring people together through functional multisectoral and multi-stakeholder platforms; (2) put policies and laws into place to establish a coherent policy and legal framework for nutrition; (3) implement and align nutrition-related programmes with common objectives and an agreed framework for results; and (4) mobilise resources from domestic sources supplemented by external assistance. Currently, 61 countries have joined the SUN Movement.

When a country joins the SUN Movement, they nominate a high-level individual to be the **SUN Government Focal Point** who is well placed to unite the nutrition community. SUN Focal Points act as a key driving force for the national movement—ensuring that the country’s multisectoral nutrition efforts engage the whole of government and coordinating external support. They are supported by a multi-stakeholder platform which can include representatives of civil society, donor and UN agencies, businesses and the technical community. The increasingly inter-connected network of SUN Focal Points, supported by their multi-stakeholder platforms, is a core reason why the SUN Movement continues to grow.

Declared as an integral part of the New Partnerships for Africa’s Development in 2003, the **Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme** (CAADP) is Africa’s policy framework for agricultural transformation, wealth creation, food security and nutrition, economic growth and prosperity for all. CAADP aims to: (1) guide country strategies and investment programmes; (2) stimulate and support policy dialogue and review, organisational and capacity development, regional peer learning, private sector engagement and agriculture-related entrepreneurship development and growth; and (3) facilitate greater alignment and harmonisation of efforts of governments, development partners, civil society and the private sector, international and local organisations and research institutions.

Participating African countries appoint a **CAADP Focal Point** to drive the process within each country and adapt this framework to the specific country context. The CAADP Focal Point—often leading a country team—supports national efforts to critically review a country’s own situation and identify investment opportunities with optimal impact and returns. This includes identifying and facilitating opportunities for dialogue for informed decision-making and government and stakeholder buy-in—ultimately with the aim to reform the agriculture sector to improve food security, alleviate poverty and generate economic growth.

## How is functional capacity defined?

From the literature, there is no universally accepted definition of functional capacity. Different entities have established their own meaning of the term (**Box 2**). Regardless of setting or context, functional capacity refers to the capabilities that are required to make a desired change happen. From a SUN Movement or CAADP perspective, this can be conceptualised as the essential skills or core competencies that facilitate the delivery of technical expertise to drive this change. They can thus be viewed as the essential skills that allow adequate relationship building and team functioning for planning, implementing and monitoring and evaluating multisectoral and multi-stakeholder plans for scaling up nutrition in action. These capacities enable governments to plan, lead, manage and sustain action across different sectors, amongst multiple stakeholders and between many levels and require aligned commitment for a given purpose, as well as effective coordination and collaboration.

Notably, some skills could be technical for one individual and functional for another. For example, effective communication may be a technical skill for a communications expert, but if not technically trained in it, becomes a functional skill for a nutrition expert. From this perspective, potential overlaps in technical and functional capacities exist, and this overlap provides an opportunity for peer-to-peer and experiential learning during capacity-strengthening efforts.

## Box 2. What is functional capacity?

**United Nations Development Programme:** Capabilities for ‘creating, managing policies, legislations, strategy and programmes’. In terms of leadership, this includes the ability to engage stakeholders, to assess situations and create a vision and mandate, to formulate policies and strategies, to budget and manage and to implement and evaluate (UNDP, 2008).

**REACH:** ‘Essential management skills that enable actors to plan, manage, change and sustain technical capacities regardless of the sector or organisation’ (Nutrition Governance Capacity Assessment, 2015).

**Agriculture for Nutrition and Health:** Core implementation competencies needed to complete tasks cutting across three points of entry: individual, organisational and enabling environment (Aryeetey et al, 2018).

**Leadership development framework:** Three core elements: self-management capabilities (self-awareness, ability to balance conflicting demands, ability to learn, leadership values), social capabilities (ability to build and maintain relationships, ability to build effective group work, communication skills, ability to develop others) and work-facilitation capabilities (management skills, ability to think and act strategically, ability to think creatively, ability to initiative and implement change) (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2003).

**SUNLEAD AFRICA:** Soft skills—such as building partnerships and effective coordination; building trust; developing leadership, transparency and accountability; and knowledge sharing—collectively referred to as ‘change leadership’ (SUNLEAD AFRICA, 2015).

## How were functional capacity gaps identified?

A **Functional Capacity Gap session** was held at the 2017 SUN Global Gathering—with the aim of identifying functional capacity gaps that SUN Focal Points and other government representatives face in their role to scale up nutrition in-country. Each of the 60 participants was asked to write down three functional capacity gaps, which, if addressed, would accelerate progress on nutrition under current circumstances. Drawing from these responses, participants engaged in a group discussion to come to a consensus on three priority functional capacity gaps.

A **literature review** was conducted following this session. It started with a consultative scoping of relevant documents from different SUN Movement stakeholders, including SMS, MQSUN+, IFPRI, REACH, SUN Civil Society Network, Nutrition International, ANLP and the African Development Bank. The documents consisted of SUN Joint Annual Assessment reports, workshop presentations, meeting notes and proceedings, annual reports, country-specific capacity assessment methodology and reports and project evaluation reports, amongst others. All documents were assessed for their relevance to functional capacity gaps on a scale of 0 (no relevance) to 4 (most relevant). Less than 10 percent of the 231 included documents provided information related to both the core tasks and functions of the Focal Point and functional capacity gap assessment.

**Key informant interviews** were also conducted not only to triangulate the findings of the desk review and address information gaps on functional capacities but also to obtain the perspective of those working closely with SUN and CAADP Focal Points. The key informants (18 for SUN and 5 for CAADP) included country and regional stakeholders as well as the SUN Civil Society Network, Nutrition International regional staff and consultants, SMS staff that work closely with Focal Points, MQSUN+ consultants and selected CAADP partners. The four key interview questions were:

1. What are the tasks that SUN/CAADP Focal Points find most challenging?
2. What are the key skills that SUN/CAADP Focal Points most need to address these challenges?
3. What are the key functional capacity gaps that would need to be addressed to equip the SUN Focal Points to carry out their tasks?
4. What are the key mechanisms by which those functional capacities could be developed?

## What functional capacity gaps were identified?



### Leadership and management

Key functional capacity gaps identified from the Global Gathering, desk review and key informant interviews were leadership and management. Supervision and on-the-job mentorship of nutrition activities were identified in West Africa as inhibitors of sufficient achievement of nutrition sector activities (Sodjinou et al., 2014). These skills of supervision and mentorship are a functional aspect of leadership—which is particularly true for leadership that produces change. Change leadership is a complex process, and the capability to lead change is a functional skill that can be developed in individuals (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2003). The ability to identify a vision to guide the nutrition agenda in a country is a functional capacity of leadership that is essential for moving such an agenda forward. This includes having a purpose that goes beyond self-interest and that motivates the leader to keep focus on the vision, even in environments with weak systems.

For the SUN Movement, this capacity refers to the ability of the Focal Point to lead the nutrition agenda for the country—including implementing activities, managing relationships and fostering commitment and alignment to a common purpose across stakeholders. There is a need for leaders to be visionaries—proactively seeking to do better even under current circumstances—and for leaders to understand what is required to scale up nutrition. For CAADP, the ability to lead the agenda for agriculture as a key nutrition stakeholder and to build effective teams for this is also critical, as well as the ability to manage challenges brought about by staff mobility so that progress is not negatively impacted.



### Advocacy and communication

Other functional capacity gaps identified from the Global Gathering, desk review and key informant interviews were advocacy and communication. This includes skills around building and maintaining relationships; engaging with government, donors and other stakeholders; negotiating and reaching a consensus; and mobilising both vertical and horizontal support for agriculture and nutrition.

Related to advocacy, a noted capacity gap for both SUN and CAADP Focal Points was the ability to package messages according to specific audiences as well as to deliver messages effectively. Therefore, it is important for Focal Points to know their audience and to package messages for each audience appropriately. These skills are needed for stakeholders at all levels, including senior government officials, donors and those in other sectors. Progress can be lost through poorly framed messaging. From a coordination perspective, Focal Points can struggle with being able to communicate in such a way as to motivate others to collaborate towards common goals.

As a whole, effective communication means being able to successfully engage with a variety of stakeholders, including both state (national and subnational level) and non-state actors (donors, UN, private sector), and communicate the needed efforts to the right stakeholders who can respond. For the SUN Movement, having advocacy skills refers primarily to advocating to government leadership on the nutrition agenda but may also include other non-state actors, such as development partners. For CAADP, this refers to the ability to bring relevant stakeholders on board to effectively and practically contribute to better diets (i.e. getting leaders in agriculture to think beyond productivity).



## Effective coordination

Another functional capacity gap identified from the Global Gathering session, desk review and key informant interviews was effective coordination. Coordination is a functional capability that is required for delivering on the activities of the nutrition sector (Aryeetey et al., 2018)—including developing and keeping relationships with stakeholders from different sectors, organisations, donors, political and government officials and the private sector. These relationships are an anchor for coordination and collaboration for multi-stakeholder platforms. The issue of coordinating different personalities from different sector ministries was noted as one that can hinder progress and relationship building if not adequately strengthened. A key point of being able to effectively coordinate nutrition efforts in-country is understanding the Focal Points' core mandate and have clarity on their role in facilitating multi-stakeholder activities and setting a vision for the national nutrition or agriculture agenda.

The ability to build and maintain relationships and/or leverage partnerships—which is also connected to capacity around leadership/management and advocacy/communication—is crucial to effective coordination. This capacity includes understanding another person's perspective and added value to the process, being clear about the country/programme objectives and fostering aligned planning and actions. Sustaining relationships is important whilst also being able to diffuse differences by emphasising the importance of common goals. This is a key capability that is required by Focal Points and helps in dealing with conflicts of interest, competing agendas amongst stakeholders and related difficulties around coordination and collaboration.



## Managing conflicts

Conflict management was also identified as a functional capacity gap from the Global Gathering, desk review and key informant interviews, including:

**Managing conflicts of interest.** The multi-stakeholder platform requires continuous recognition of potential conflicts of interest and the ability to resolve them. This can refer to internal conflict experienced by the individual Focal Point and external conflicts expressed by multiple stakeholders involved in SUN Movement and CAADP processes. The Focal Point needs the ability to recognise all types of conflicts of interest and be able to manage them effectively.

**Prioritising and managing conflicting demands.** This was identified as the ability for SUN Focal Points to prioritise which activities to focus on and which sector to work with for maximising impact, as well as to ensure ongoing communication and activities to maintain momentum. The ability for CAADP Focal Points to manage conflicting demands and sometimes conflicting agendas of needed stakeholders—both within and across sectors—is also important.

**Managing nutrition agendas in conflict settings.** It was noted government capacity is constrained to support nutrition efforts during ongoing conflicts, which can impact both national and regional public sector management as well as international support. Strengthening functional capacity in conflict-sensitive management is key for Focal Points in countries affected by conflict or fragility.



## Building trust

A functional capacity gap identified from the desk review and key informant interviews was building of trust. This was noted as a functional need during a SUN Movement workshop for 'Strengthening Effective Engagement to Scale Up Nutrition in Action' held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2015 (SUN, 2015). It was mentioned that competing priorities and agendas and competition for resources often create mistrust between

stakeholders. Trust building is critical for creating strong multi-stakeholder platforms for sharing information. The way in which Focal Points conduct themselves in stakeholder relations and other circumstances is important to building trust and confidence.

There is a need for further dialogue to develop a common language for and better understanding of respective roles and responsibilities. This can be addressed by being transparent, through frequent dialogue and negotiation, as well as through effective coordination as a platform for building trust. At the same time, the Focal Point should be able to communicate clearly and honestly about the prevailing situation to gain the trust that is required to spearhead a specific nutrition agenda. Transparency, accountability and individual behaviours and attitudes are key components of trust building, which are key attributes for Focal Points to use for effective multi-stakeholder engagement and for increasing donor confidence that would facilitate fundraising. Building trust at the individual level can enhance trust at the organisational level. The capacity to work in a collaborative environment and with stakeholders across sectors requires a trusting environment (SUN, 2017).

### Other key competencies

In addition to the key capacity gap areas identified by the Global Gathering session, desk review and key informant interviews, there were other notable competencies highlighted.

 <p>Clarity on the role of Focal Points</p>	<p>In some countries, there is a lack of clarity on the mandate of SUN Focal Points due to an absence of a structured induction upon appointment. As well, although the majority of CAADP Focal Points reported participating in the national multi-stakeholder platform for nutrition, not all indicated this link. This noted gap calls for greater clarity on the role of both SUN and CAADP Focal Points as well a need for documented guidance on the essential attributes of a Focal Point for countries to refer to when making appointments.</p>
 <p>Resource mobilisation / financial tracking</p>	<p>Understanding these key topics for nutrition is useful knowledge for Focal Points to have. This includes: understanding the mechanisms of available resources, including domestic resources; being able to sufficiently define ‘nutrition’ for various funding parties; understanding the necessary indicators and evidence on financing for nutrition, especially at decentralised levels; and having adequate technical and financial cooperation from international organisations which can advance actions to promote nutrition.</p>
 <p>Nutrition competency</p>	<p>It was noted non-technical Focal Points sometimes lack understanding of global nutrition guidance with limited ability to translate it to their context. It is important that Focal Points are able to present technical nutrition data and information to people at high levels of government to frame an agenda for nutrition at that level. Having a clear understanding of the technical areas of nutrition or agriculture will demonstrate their competency during meetings with stakeholders and thus enhance their credibility and ability to advance nutrition action.</p>
 <p>Accountability</p>	<p>It was noted that accountability is not always consistent across Focal Points. Documenting and communicating updates can be improved, and reporting lines are not clear at national and subnational levels—indicating a need for better documentation so people know what is happening. In some cases, SUN Focal Points also struggle with harmonising SUN Movement processes with those that already exist in-country. Within CAADP, the need and ways to foster accountability in nutrition by agriculture is also a noted challenge.</p>
 <p>Monitoring and evaluation</p>	<p>Another noted capacity gap is related to monitoring and evaluation. Understanding how nutrition evidence and data is collected, analysed and interpreted is crucial for Focal Points, especially as it relates to sharing information on the nutrition situation, advocating for specific nutrition objectives and making informed, evidence-based decisions.</p>

## What capacity strengthening approaches are suggested?

Beyond identifying capacity gaps, the Global Gathering session and key informant interviews provided perspectives on possible capacity-building mechanisms, including, amongst others:

- Exchange visits across SUN/CAADP countries for experience-sharing and peer-to-peer learning.
- Workshops or training retreats where Focal Points can share experiences, best practices and learn and practice key functional capacities. This could also include self-motivated personal development plans or reflection on progress post-training.
- Mentorship opportunities to provide guidance and advice to Focal Points, including across sectors and through regional mechanisms, UN/REACH networks as well as SUN Civil Society and Business Networks. This could encompass feedback from mentors' experiences to demystify leadership challenges as something even they face.
- Information-sharing platforms with multi-stakeholder platforms and SUN Networks.

In addition to the insight provided from the Global Gathering session and key informant interviews, several training modalities were identified from the desk review, including:

- Modalities necessary to reinforce functional capacities include training and experience-sharing workshops, 'twinning' and knowledge-sharing platforms with countries, articulating clearer roles and responsibilities, revising multi-stakeholder platform structures and inviting additional partners to them and examining existing information platforms (SUN, 2015).
- Leadership and capacity development requires changing individual orientations, perceptions, habits and behaviours and embedding this to become normal practice (SUNLEAD AFRICA, 2015). Although it is relatively easy for people to change behaviour in the short term, sustaining change is much more difficult and takes more than once-/twice-off training. Leadership development must be carried out over a longer time and requires more frequent face-to-face interactions.
- Supporting transfer of learning from a workshop to the 'real' work environment is critical. Unlike technical capacity building, these efforts require more intensive and sustained intervention. Giving practical work-related assignments to be completed in between workshops offer experiential learning and reinforcement of learning in a structured and practical way.
- Having participants develop a plan to sustain planned individual and team change as part of the workshop programme is a good practice. Future programmes would benefit from longer-term follow-up monitoring and evaluation of such implementation plans.

## Recommendations for next steps

Developing functional skills for SUN/CAADP Focal Points are essential for strengthening effective engagement and keeping sustained momentum to scale up nutrition (SUN, 2015). The 2015 SUN workshop identified the need for the SUN Movement to support countries to develop adequate functional capacities. The work of this initiative responds to this need. Based on the findings of this assessment, there were four recommended gaps to be prioritised as key areas to strengthen for SUN and CAADP Focal Points:

Priority functional capacity gap	Objective of capacity strengthening
Leadership	To be perceived as, and act as, a leader regardless of position within the government
Advocacy	To develop advocacy strategies with defined goals and potential allies as well as identified target audiences, appropriate channels and tactics
Communication	To be able to deliver compelling messages, tailored to different audiences using different channels of communication and to the specific context
Coordination	To be able to effectively coordinate state and non-state actors regardless of their position

In addition to these core areas, other priority functional capacity-building areas for Focal Points could include:<sup>1</sup>

- Clarification of the role of both SUN and CAADP Focal Points.
- Self-management capabilities, including self-awareness, ability to balance conflicting demands and ability to promote the nutrition agenda.
- Social capabilities, including the ability to build and maintain relationships, leverage partnerships, negotiate, problem solve, recognise and manage conflicts of interest and build trust.
- Communication, including effective communication within multisectoral platforms and negotiation.
- Work facilitation capabilities, including prioritising, managing people, thinking and acting strategically, having facilitation skills, transparency and accountability skills and being well equipped with nutrition technical skills.
- Technical areas of a food systems approach.

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<sup>1</sup> While it was not a noted capacity gap in this assessment, gender equality was another area that was prioritised as part of the functional capacity strengthening programme.

MQSUN+ belongs to the Technical Assistance for Nutrition (TAN) programme with partners Nutrition International and the Emergency Nutrition Network to strengthen the capacity of the 60 countries within the SUN Movement to deliver policies and programmes which reduce malnutrition.

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