



PATH/Minizayar

MODULE 5: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning for Nutrition

This module is structured around five key steps and considerations for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), detailed below, and is accompanied by featured tools and additional resources:

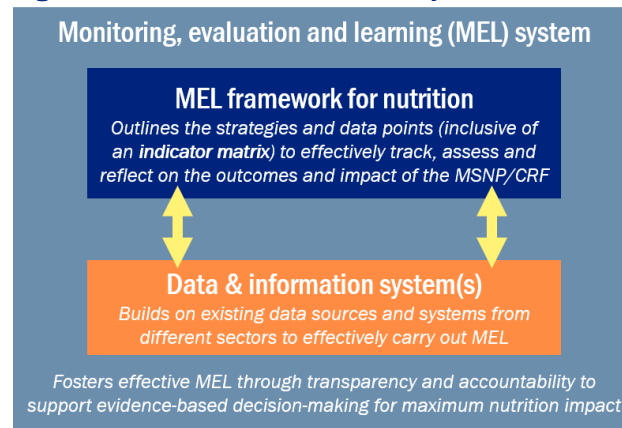
- 5.1 Engaging Stakeholders to Develop an MEL Framework
- 5.2 Structuring an MEL System for Nutrition
- 5.3 Developing an Indicator Matrix for Nutrition
- 5.4 Enhancing Information Management and Structures for Nutrition
- 5.5 Strengthening Learning and Accountability for Nutrition

Overview

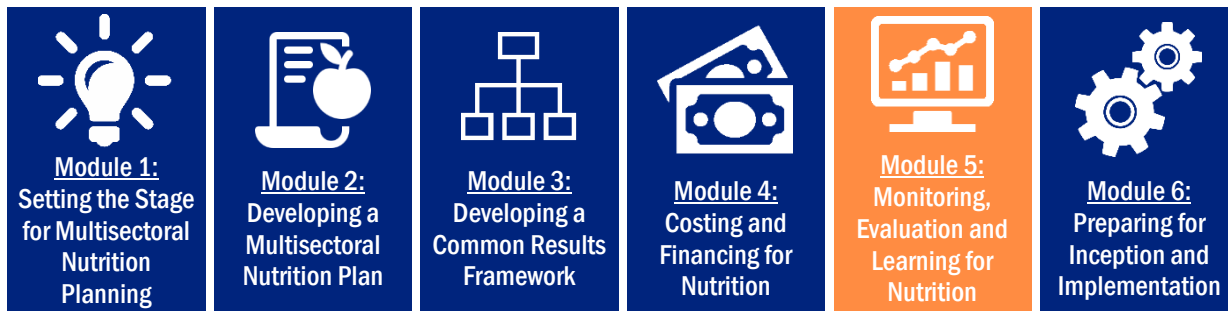
A robust **MEL system** (Figure 1)—which builds upon traditional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to also foster learning and evidence-based decision making—is required to be able to verify whether a multisectoral nutrition plan (MSNP) and/or common results framework (CRF) is on track to achieve its targets. The MEL system should be managed in such a way as to stimulate learning, foster accountability and support evidence-based decision-making. It should support synthesis, use and sharing of information arising from implementation or from evidence from evaluations and research. It should also create transparency and accountability for results. The backbone of an MEL system for nutrition is the MEL framework that defines the architecture of the system.

An **MEL framework**—which can also be described as a plan, strategy or matrix—is usually developed as a separate document to the MSNP or CRF but is closely aligned with these documents. Dissimilar from the CRF which primarily captures the selected targets and indicators, the MEL framework's role is to quantify and advance the results in the MSNP/CRF into sufficient detail (granularity) to systematically and progressively monitor and measure change. It is often accompanied by a description of mechanisms to support institutional learning and adaptive implementation and a research and evaluation agenda that identifies priority data gaps that can be filled through sound research and/or evaluations.

Figure 1. Architecture of an MEL system.



Abbreviations: CRF, common results framework; MSNP, multisectoral nutrition plan.



Specifically, this MEL framework—a narrative document typically accompanied by an Excel®-based indicator matrix—outlines indicators, processes and tools that serve five key purposes to help stakeholders make informed decisions at various levels regarding plan implementation:

- > To help determine whether the MSNP is on track to meet its output, outcome and goal targets and where changes need to be considered and to help make timely decisions to resolve constraints or problems of implementation.
- > To support evidence-informed decision-making (e.g. related to resource mobilisation, resource allocation, service quality improvement, capacity building, policy and plan formulation or

revision) by the national steering committee or Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement networks and other stakeholders involved in MSNP/CRF implementation.

- > To better align support to nutritionally vulnerable populations and foster accountability for results linked to nutrition impact.
- > To support advocacy and resource mobilisation with the information generated.
- > To support learning across stakeholders.

A key guiding principle in implementing a nutrition MEL system is to build on existing systems and reporting arrangements as far as possible, rather than introducing parallel systems and processes that may be difficult to sustain or too complex given local capacities and resources.

In the process of strengthening MEL for nutrition, it is critically important to take account of four key cross-cutting considerations: advocacy, gender, capacity building and the humanitarian response situation. Details on the relevance of these considerations for this step in the process are detailed below.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Building capacity at all levels across the MEL system—of both technical and nontechnical staff—will be critical for good functioning of the system and for the country to have confidence in the quality and reliability of data generated by the system, and hence the efficiency and effectiveness of the MSNP. It is also key to emphasise the advantages for using data and results for learning and decision-making to strengthen nutrition action for maximum impact.

GENDER

Selection of appropriate [gender](#)-related indicators should be based on a country's individual contextual analysis. Relevant data should also be disaggregated by sex and age to evaluate equity of the MSNP/CRF with respect to women, men, girls and boys, and there should be a documented plan for how sex-disaggregated data will be used to inform decision-making. Engaging stakeholders with gender expertise in MEL planning will be critical to ensure the MEL framework and system will achieve the above objectives.

ADVOCACY

The MEL framework and system should be developed with an eye on advocacy, as presentation and dissemination of results, if done well, can prove an important and effective advocacy tool for the MSNP and for nutrition in the country as the plan is rolled out. The MEL system should build in processes and time points for dissemination of its results for advocacy amongst decision makers in policy and finance, as well as with the general public, including communities benefitting from the nutrition-related services provided.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Planning for MEL-system strengthening should involve working with humanitarian actors—and using platforms such as the Cluster Approach system where it exists—to integrate data from humanitarian efforts into MSNP reporting and data use. It should be ensured that all nutrition-related data collection and use is streamlined across these actors, and institutional arrangements should be explored to support data sharing and reporting between humanitarian and development stakeholders. More details are available in [MQSUN+'s Linking Humanitarian and Development Actions brief](#).

5.1 Engaging Stakeholders to Develop an MEL Framework

Similar to the process for developing an MSNP or CRF, developing or strengthening an MEL framework and/or system that aligns with the agreed nutrition objectives requires continued engagement with government and nongovernment nutrition stakeholders (see **country case study from Yemen** below). The process of developing or strengthening an MEL framework and system usually involves the following:

1	A review of existing documentation, including the MSNP, CRF (if available), existing M&E / MEL plans and the strategies and systems of each prominent sector/ministry engaged in the plan, as well as any multisectoral systems or nutrition information systems.
2	Consultations with the nutrition-related sectors and nutrition steering/governance structures to understand the functioning of existing systems and any constraints, as well as to discuss and agree on the options for the CRF/MSNP MEL framework. This involves M&E specialists within those entities, as well as senior management/direction.
3	Drafting of an indicator matrix or MEL framework outline for use as a template for stakeholders.
4	Bringing stakeholders together in workshop(s)—largely M&E specialists and programme staff from across sectors and organisations (government and nongovernment partners)—to discuss, review and develop the indicator matrix and MEL framework, including the coordination and information management structure.
5	Finalisation, validation and launch of the MEL framework.

Some of these steps may be conducted in parallel with the development of the MSNP/CRF or after these planning documents are drafted or finalised. At the very least, planning documents and information from the [contextual analysis](#) and MSNP/CRF development can inform this process in order to reduce duplication of effort.



MQSUN+'s Stakeholder Consultation tool provides guidance for the purpose of consulting with stakeholders in preparation for the development of a MSNP/CRF—including a sample agenda and examples of nutrition stakeholders. This guidance can be adapted for the purpose of bringing sectoral representatives together to develop an MEL framework.

In developing the MEL framework, consultations with stakeholders are intended to:

- > Review and elaborate on a proposed MEL system for nutrition (**Section 5.2**).
- > Review and complete the indicator matrix that will serve as a reference on objectives, indicators and targets for which each sector will be held accountable, as well data flow and reporting arrangements (**Section 5.3**).

- > Discuss and elaborate on data flow within/between ministries and organisations (**Section 5.4**).
- > Discuss and decide on mechanisms for learning, accountability and data for decision-making (**Section 5.5**).

At the end of the consultations/workshops, each key ministry should have:

- > Identified outcome- and output-level indicators and targets responding to the MSNP's/CRF's overall priorities, goals and strategic objectives.
- > Described data management and data use.
- > Highlighted programmes that need to be evaluated.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY

Developing a monitoring and evaluation plan for nutrition in Yemen

In 2019, the government of the Republic of Yemen led the development of the 2020-2023 [Yemen Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan](#) (MSNAP) and its associated updated [CRF](#), [advocacy strategy](#) and M&E plan. The M&E plan followed as an accompaniment to the CRF and MSNAP based on the results of an M&E workshop. This was followed by bilateral consultations with sectors to discuss data flow within and between ministries and organisations and to review and complete indicator matrices that serve as a reference on objectives, indicators and targets that each sector is accountable for, as well as data flow and reporting arrangements. As a result of those consultations, each key ministry identified outcome- and output-level indicators and targets that respond to its priorities, goals and objectives, described data management and data use and highlighted programmes that need to be evaluated.

The CRF formed the basis for setting the indicators and targets at the various levels, complemented by information arising from the sectoral M&E consultations. M&E reporting templates complemented the M&E plan as annexes, capturing sectoral (ministerial) outcomes and quarterly output indicators for tracking and reporting against set targets. Formats and content were based on input collated through consultations.



[Yemen's Nutrition Monitoring and Evaluation Plan 2020-2023](#)

The current M&E approach is rooted in an understanding that Yemen is ready to transition out of a humanitarian crisis that was disruptive in all realms, including service delivery; individual, institutional and systems capacity; and data availability. Thus, the plan includes indicators and an M&E approach that is deemed to be realistic in the short to medium term. It also highlights M&E-related activities that will facilitate the introduction of processes and institutional arrangements to track MSNAP implementation and outcomes and foster accountability and learning across sectors for timely nutrition-related results that can benefit the people of Yemen for years to come.

5.2 Structuring an MEL System for Nutrition

The MEL system for nutrition encompasses all the components related to MEL planning; collecting and storing data; monitoring progress; evaluating outputs, outcomes and impact; and utilising these results for broader learning and evidence-based decision-making. In many countries, these systems exist in parallel for different sectors. Given the multisectoral nature of nutrition, it is beneficial to build on, streamline and utilise these existing systems to monitor and evaluate nutrition-related action within the country. In some cases, additional effort may be required to develop or strengthen systems to support MEL for the MSNP if functional ones do not currently exist. For the purposes of MEL for nutrition, 'monitoring', 'evaluation' and 'learning' are defined as below.



Monitoring is the routine process of data collection and measurement of progress towards a country's nutrition objectives. Administrative data/routine information systems usually form the backbone of nutrition monitoring.

Evaluation is the use of specific study designs and special studies to measure the extent to which changes in desired nutrition outcomes are attributable to the MSNP's interventions. Evaluation is usually undertaken as an independent exercise at the MSNP's midterm and/or end-term point or can be conducted to monitor progress of specific objectives, if necessary.

Learning is the sharing of new evidence and applying knowledge from this evidence to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of planned nutrition actions and ensure accountability for scaling up nutrition in-country.

The key elements of an MEL system for nutrition are:

- > Dedicated management, coordination and governance structures.
- > A set of selected indicators.
- > Defined data-collection mechanisms: source of data; periodicity of data collection; data-collection tools; data-reporting mechanisms.
- > Data management, analysis and interpretation plans: analysis mechanism; data validation and verification (quality assurance); use of data at different levels; data storage; data sharing; preparing strategic information.
- > An evaluation plan: annual reviews; midterm evaluation; final evaluation. It can also include assessments to monitor progress if resources are not available for intensive evaluations.
- > Budgeting for MEL (refer to [Module 4](#) for more information): Typically, at least 10 percent of the activity cost should be directed towards MEL, but the percentage can vary considerably depending on what is needed to set up the MEL system for nutrition. Hence, resources should also be estimated and allocated for MEL during the costing of the plan.


The elements of the MEL system should be laid out in the **MEL framework**, which describes the linkages between the strategic information obtained from various data-collection systems to decisions that will improve achievement of the MSNP.

As mentioned previously, the majority of data-collection systems are likely to be existing monitoring and data-collection systems for different sectors, such as health management and information systems, education information management systems, food market surveillance and others, which can be leveraged to provide key information. However, a dedicated data-collection and monitoring system can also be established for the MSNP/CRF where feasible and necessary.

The MEL framework might detail some of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing data-collection system(s) and recommended areas to be further developed or strengthened in the early stages of a plan's implementation to ensure that all indicators can be adequately collected. Investment may be required by line ministries and sectors to strengthen the completeness, availability, accessibility and quality of nutrition-related information within their own administrative data sources. Additional elements of the MEL framework are further outlined within this module.

The MEL system should support learning and lay the groundwork for establishing mechanisms to measure accountabilities at the various levels, including accountabilities to commitments, as well as accountabilities to communities for their entitlements, such as availability of services. For example, monitoring visits may go beyond reporting and analysis of data and results but be utilised to monitor processes and implementation and provide supportive supervision for learning and strengthened implementation. These could include:

- > Sectoral, technical or internal monitoring visits or activity checks, or supportive monitoring and supervision, using checklists and process-monitoring reports to assess quality of services and staff capacity.
- > Multisectoral monitoring, which focuses on synergies and the quality of mechanisms for delivering in coordination with other sectors, so that subnational- and community-level coherence is ensured.
- > Improvement in the quality of selected nutrition indicators collected through health management information systems and their analysis, interpretation and reporting.



MQSUN+'s Global Nutrition Data Initiatives spreadsheet provides a compiled Excel® spreadsheet of ongoing initiatives relevant to tackling the most important challenges in the nutrition data landscape, categorised by methodology development, data generation, data curation/access, data analysis, dissemination and evidence-based policy. Users may find the information helpful in developing or strengthening their MEL framework or system.

5.3 Developing an Indicator Matrix for Nutrition

A key element of the MEL framework is an indicator matrix with the set of outcomes, outputs and activities already outlined in the MSNP/CRF and corresponding results, targets and indicators. It is

likely that many of the components of the indicator matrix, such as the selection of indicators and targets, were previously decided during the development of the CRF. As such, *it is recommended that this section be reviewed in conjunction with [Module 3](#), as there are overlapping considerations, processes and resources to keep in mind.* A strong indicator matrix promotes data-driven, evidence-based decision-making through regular data collection and analysis.



MQSUN+'s Indicator Matrix template is an illustrative framework for a transparent and accountable mechanism to track and measure progress using action-oriented, measurable indicators for improved nutrition. It provides nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive output, outcome and impact indicators drawing on global commitments, evidence and widely used measures of nutrition actions that can be considered and adapted according to the country context.

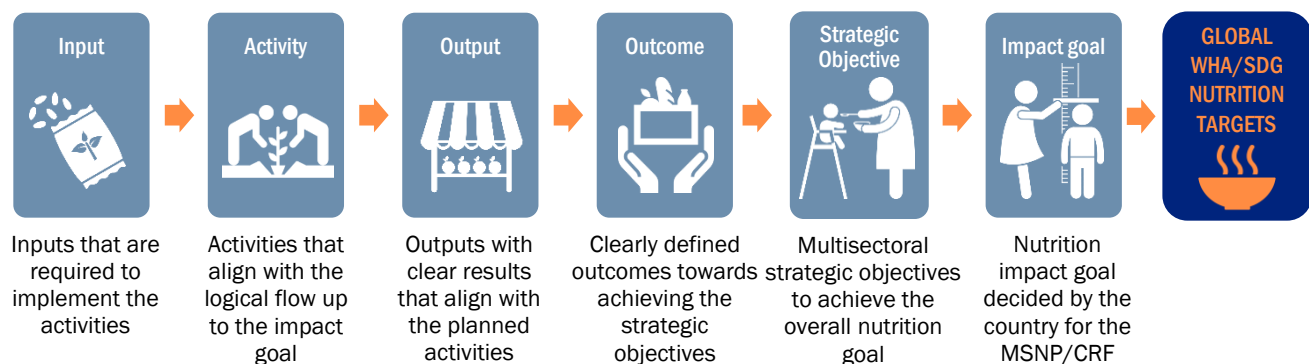
The process for developing the indicator matrix is likely to involve a mixture of desk review and discussion of existing available systems and data and can involve meetings of stakeholders from each sector and/or workshops where facilitated group work sessions can be employed to agree and fill the matrix. Whichever mechanisms are employed, it is essential to ensure input from a variety of stakeholders—governmental and nongovernmental (civil society, United Nations (UN), donor community, private sector, academia)—so that an agreed, realistic indicator matrix can be formulated to which stakeholders are committed. The components of the indicator matrix should include the following for each identified output (activity), outcome and impact indicator:

Baseline data	Presented for all indicators and usually drawn from the most recent national Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), micronutrient surveys or sources that the national government and their development partners commonly refer to.
Targets	Presented annually, midterm and end-line or simply as baseline and at the end of the planning cycle. MSNPs are often for five years.
Frequency	Refers to how often data are collected/reported. Data for indicators are collected monthly, quarterly, biannually or annually. This component helps keep track of when the most recent data were reported and how they compare to targets.
Source	Refers to where the data are obtained (e.g. monthly reports, routine service-provision database, national surveys, subnational information systems, etc.). Sources will largely fall into four overall categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Existing routine data sources, such as routine service-provision databases of the various sectors or facility-based data. > Data from regular and/or specialised assessments/surveys or surveillance, such as periodic national nutrition surveys, surveys on infant and young child feeding and complementary feeding practices, national micronutrient surveys, household expenditure and consumption surveys, national (nutrition) budget-analysis surveys of related sectors (e.g. Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, or MICS; DHS; food market or food security surveillance). Such surveys commonly provide information at the household, family and individual levels. > Sectoral and multisectoral progress reports, sectoral progress reviews, programme coverage data, food and nutrition security analysis or food system analysis. > A dedicated monitoring system established for the CRF/MSNP. This might include subnational information systems and surveys dedicated to the subjects and objectives of the CRF/MSNP.

Level of data collection	Refers to the administrative or service-provision level—district, community, household, facility, etc.
Responsible institution	<p>Outlines the institution most responsible for the data. This may be a ministry or may refer to the specific department responsible for collating and reporting the data. It may be at the national or subnational level and will include sectoral as well as multisectoral administrative entities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Multisectoral reporting and monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The overarching nutrition planning and steering institution (sometimes the SUN Movement Secretariat, or SMS) will need to perform monitoring that focuses on the multisectoral level, such as follow-up on the MSNP and spot checks to ensure consistent plan delivery. It also compiles sectoral monitoring information. ○ Ministries of finance may engage in tracking MSNPs' expenditures and service delivery and play an important role in results-based management and financing. > Sectoral reporting and monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Usually each sector has an M&E department, or a section or unit under the planning and development department, that can play a role in addition to the line-ministry departments for the technical reporting and monitoring. ○ Sectors' technical departments can be engaged in technical monitoring. <p>Significant supporting partners may also be listed alongside the identified responsible institution. Third-party or external monitoring is an approach that may be used to enhance independence of monitoring or to facilitate monitoring where situations are difficult to access or specialised approaches are required. Third-party organisations may also be listed as supporting partners in the matrix.</p>

Many of these indicators may have already been identified and/or approved by the MSNP steering committee and sectoral line ministries, in cooperation with their partners, during MSNP or CRF development. However, it is an important process during MEL framework development to go through the MSNP/CRF and check that all actions have corresponding identified indicators to enable tracking of progress. Each strategic objective identified in the MSNP or CRF must have at least one output and outcome indicator as a sentinel measure of progress related to that objective (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2. The results chain of nutrition actions as indicated in the MSNP/CRF.



Abbreviations: CRF, common results framework; MSNP, multisectoral nutrition plan; SDG, Sustainable Development Goal; WHA, World Health Assembly.

As detailed in **Module 3**, indicators should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound, and preference should be shown for those already collected through existing systems by the

various sectors engaged or by central-level administration (for multisectoral indicators) to facilitate collection and avoid additional workload. Only in instances where there is no indicator currently collected that is fit for the purpose should new indicators be added to existing monitoring systems.

DATA DISAGGREGATION TO PROMOTE EQUITY IN MSNP IMPLEMENTATION

The emphasis on ensuring that gender, marginalised groups and those most vulnerable to malnutrition are adequately represented requires basic disaggregation of data to highlight disparities or inequities related to both the reach of nutrition activities and their impact on different segments of the population. Large-scale surveys, such as MICS or Demographic and Health Surveys, provide opportunities to examine a broader range of variables (e.g. household wealth quintile, women's level of education, religion, ethnicity, etc.). However, the following shortlist of variables should be considered when analysing and presenting data through the MEL system, and there may be others critical to a particular country context that should be discussed and agreed during MEL planning:

- > Place of residence (urban, rural).
- > District/community.
- > Gender (male, female).
- > Critical age groups (e.g. 0 to 23 months old; 24 to 59 months old; all under 5 years old, or 0 to 59 months; 15 to 19 years old).
- > Displacement status, such as internally displaced person (IDP), refugee or non-IDP/resident (where applicable).

Data-collection tools and reporting templates should reflect this level of disaggregation to ensure that the above level of detail is being captured by implementers and reported.

It is recommended that a minimal number of indicators be selected. More information is not necessarily better, and a large set of indicators will be burdensome to track. The following are useful questions to ask: *Is this indicator absolutely necessary to measure whether progress toward the strategic objective is being achieved? Will it create additional burdens on the respondents or on the staff collecting the data? How will this indicator help with monitoring, management, evaluation and decision-making?* Having multiple stakeholder opinions on the design of the CRF provides an opportunity for discussion and eventual consensus on what good indicators and measures are and what number of indicators will suffice.

Once the indicators are listed, decisions need to be made on appropriate targets to be achieved at regular time intervals throughout the MSNP implementation period. It is usual to set annual targets; however, an interval (i.e. frequency) should be selected for which monitoring capacity is adequate, and for some indicators, every two years or only midterm and end-term measurements may be feasible. Setting these targets should be based on existing and projected programming capacity, which includes consideration of resources (human and financial) available to deliver the activities, and review of trends in progress to date (for existing



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activities) to assess the anticipated degree of progress achievable in an indicator within the agreed time interval.

The process of agreeing and setting these targets should involve sectoral discussions where government sector leads sit together with their nongovernmental counterparts to ensure establishment of realistic targets and shared commitment towards their achievement. This can be done through bringing stakeholders together in workshops (often requiring two to three days to go through the full detail of the plan in focused groups and in plenary) or sector-focused technical meetings. Whichever option is chosen, it is useful to bring all MSNP/CRF sectors together in one workshop at some point so that cross-sectoral and multisectoral indicators can also be discussed and targets agreed over the same period. Finally, it is important to ensure that the indicators selected for M&E at the country level are coherent, with the suggested global-monitoring framework indicators.



COUNTRY EXAMPLES OF AN INDICATOR MATRIX: AFGHANISTAN

In 2018, Afghanistan initiated their multisectoral planning process, which led to the development and approval of their first Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda Strategic Plan, which is supplemented by an activity matrix, an [M&E framework](#) (with indicator matrix) and a costing of the key activities, as well as preliminary implementation planning on M&E, operational research, capacity building and advocacy.

5.4 Enhancing Information Management and Structures for Nutrition

Timely and accurate data, accessible by personnel at all levels, are critical to the successful implementation of an MSNP/CRF and are key to effective MEL systems. Information systems that are well designed and that function well should support the processes needed to manage programmatic activities. As detailed above, data-collection processes are cyclical and ongoing, and the collection, analysis and usage of evidence to inform decisions also create a cyclical process.¹

Key components to consider under information management and structures—operating within a multisectoral MEL system—include the level of coordination and information flow, information management and governance of the system. Effective communication and strategic management of the information that is transmitted into the MEL system are both fundamental areas of focus to ensure that data-collection and decision-making cycles run smoothly. These components should be clearly articulated within the MEL framework and the governance structures.

¹ Management Sciences for Health. *Health Systems in Action: An eHandbook for Leaders and Managers*. Medford, MA: Management Sciences for Health; 2010. Available at https://www.msh.org/sites/default/files/2015_08_msh_managing_information_monitoring_evaluation.pdf.

5.4.1 Improving coordination and information flow

The MEL system requires a clear mechanism for coordination and data management, and the MEL framework should describe how data will be collected, verified, consolidated, analysed, disseminated and used and the role and responsibility of each stakeholder in each part of this system.

The ideal situation is to establish a single national-level repository and management committee, or make use of one that already exists, ensuring the appropriate representation of the committee across stakeholders and sectors for accountability and transparency. As previously noted, for all steps in multisectoral nutrition planning, it is essential to consider the cost and workload of developing something new and to examine whether a structure already exists that can be adapted for the purpose of nutrition MEL or to which it is possible to add. The repository and management authority should be held at a neutral ministry or one with oversight wherever possible so that all sectors will be open to report their data to the appointed representatives.

A similar structure—with a repository and management committee—is also needed at regional and district levels to ensure a seamless flow of data from implementers at the community level up to the national level and so that, once analysed, findings, reports and management decisions can be communicated back to the implementing level and onwards to communities and beneficiaries.

Timely data flow and results reporting between various implementers and central-level line ministries may require systematising and strengthening during MSNP/CRF implementation through the establishment of institutional arrangements. Within the government, line ministries are likely to already have institutional arrangements in place for sector-specific data reporting and planning. Where relevant and feasible, the timeframe and content of data collection and analysis should be streamlined and reporting systems aligned in order to reduce duplication of efforts and maximise limited capacity and resources for MEL. As well, to ensure smooth functioning of the MEL system, data reporting and data review should constitute regular agenda items for SUN network meetings, coordination or cluster meetings (in countries where the humanitarian Cluster Approach system is activated) and nutrition steering committee meetings throughout MSNP/CRF implementation.



PATH/Matthew Dakin

At national, regional and district levels, multisectoral M&E or MEL committees/groups can be established to jointly review and examine data to ensure a rigorous system of data validation and a consensual process of agreeing any adaptations to interventions or targets stemming from data analysis and learning.

Figure 3 depicts how data might flow from the implementation level within districts to the national level and what the necessary data validation, compilation and dissemination steps are at each level. However, these systems may differ based on country context and the level of decentralisation. A system could be established whereby each sector collects its own data and reports up through existing sectoral systems to share at the national level, or a system might be established whereby district-level M&E/MEL staff collect data from across sectors and package the multisectoral data to report onwards to first regional and then national levels.

Figure 3. Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) information flow between administrative levels.



5.4.2 Strengthening information management

Appropriately managing the information and data that are generated, stored, analysed and stored within the MEL system is vital. Two key components to ensure effective information management are strengthening MEL capacity for the appropriate stakeholders and conducting data quality assurance activities.

Capacity development for MEL

Strengthening the broader nutrition MEL system requires training of the line ministry nutrition Focal Points and SUN network members in [core MEL concepts, standardised tools and processes](#), as well as a comprehensive orientation of the nutrition steering committee (or national SUN secretariat) staff. There will also need to be development or adaptation of standard curricula to strengthen MEL capacities—including critical functions such as data quality assurance and data use for management decision-making—across stakeholders at different levels. This would require investment in strengthening subnational (regional/provincial/district) MEL capacities given the important roles that subnational units within each sector/line ministry will play—for example, in collating data from different service delivery sites and providers (governmental and nongovernmental) and providing frontline data quality assurance to rectify reporting errors before data are shared with the central level.

Data quality assurance

Mechanisms will need to be introduced—for example, through spot checks, random site visits, error checking protocols, etc.—to ensure that all desired data features reflected in the MEL system achieve the desired qualities in terms of the following:

VALIDITY

Measuring what is intended.

RELIABILITY

Giving the same result with data collected using the same methodology.

TIMELINESS

Providing up-to-date data when needed.

PRECISION

Having the ability to minimise error (due to data-collection instruments).

INTEGRITY

Providing data free of wilful or unconscious errors due to manipulation (human or machine).

[Tools and protocols](#) should be developed to support data managers in examining those elements of the data they receive from implementers.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR NUTRITION

In 2017, Nutrition International conducted a *Mapping of Information Systems for Nutrition in SUN Countries* which aimed to describe the current status of information systems for nutrition in each of and across the 57 SUN countries. Such information systems allow for an assessment of a country's nutrition status amongst populations, tracking of progress of nutrition action and support to evidence-based decision making amongst governments and other nutrition partners. The mapping included detailed case studies for Guatemala, Nigeria and Peru.



[Mapping Information Systems for Nutrition in SUN Countries](#)



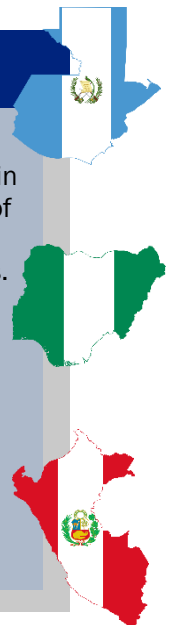
[National Nutrition Information Systems: Guatemala](#)



[National Nutrition Information Systems: Nigeria](#)



[National Nutrition Information Systems: Peru](#)



5.5 Strengthening Learning and Accountability for Nutrition

When considering the MEL system—composed of a series of cyclical processes surrounding data collection, analysis and decision-making—it is critical to ensure that components of learning and

accountability are involved to assist in fostering a nutrition MEL system that is aware of its weaknesses and actively working on improving them through incentivising appropriate and effective activities and actions. This emphasis on learning and accountability will promote a high degree of sustainability for the MSNP/CRF that, over time, should translate into positive impacts in the country. These data and evidence also feed into the SUN Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system—which supports the global tracking of multisectoral action to address malnutrition.

THE SUN MEAL SYSTEM

The [SUN Movement Theory of Change](#) is based on the belief that, when multiple stakeholders from multiple sectors and at multiple levels work together, in a country-led force, results will be achieved. Assessing progress towards the Movement's objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals for a world without hunger and malnutrition requires the alignment of globally agreed monitoring frameworks and initiatives. The SUN's [MEAL system](#) is the means for measuring the extent to which the SUN Movement is achieving results and impact.

MEAL primarily relies on secondary data **complemented** by primary data collected by the SMS and SUN networks. Sources include the [SUN Movement Joint-Assessment](#)—an exercise undertaken annually by many SUN countries, comprising a participatory process of self-reflection that brings together relevant in-country stakeholders working to scale up nutrition, including representatives from government, civil society, science and academia, donors, the UN, businesses and other relevant actors – in addition to results from a range of other exercises (e.g. financial tracking, surveys and stakeholder mapping, reports). This information from different sources is integrated into a [database](#) managed by the SMS. Findings from the Joint-Assessments also contribute to data gathering for the Global Nutrition Report.

5.5.1 Using data and evidence to facilitate learning

Opportunities to utilise nutrition-related evidence and knowledge for learning purposes should be incorporated into the MEL framework, as relevant and feasible. These can include setting up appropriate dissemination and collaborative channels to share and use new information, mechanisms for supportive supervision and capacity-strengthening and a research and evaluation agenda with an operational research component. Learning activities can be in-person (e.g. through annual learning exchanges) and virtual. Data access is a key requirement to facilitate learning.



The [DHS STATcompiler](#), funded by the US Agency for International Development, allows users to make custom tables based on thousands of demographic and health indicators across more than 90 countries. These tables can be customised to view indicators by background characteristics, over time and across countries. This resource can support compilation of and visualisation on key nutrition data, which can be used as a tool for further evidence dissemination and learning.

A nutrition dashboard that is accessible to stakeholders is one option for establishing a platform for retrieving up-to-date and complete data on CRF indicators and efforts in the country (see **country example from Kenya** below). SUN's annual Joint-Assessments can also be included in the MEL framework as a forum involving a broader set of stakeholders at the central and subnational levels that convene to jointly assess progress, showcase promising practices and discuss solutions to implementation challenges or gaps that have been identified.



Whilst operational research may be included within the MSNP/CRF itself, a research and evaluation agenda that identifies priority data gaps that can be filled through sound research and/or evaluations is an important feature of an MEL framework and a wider MEL system for nutrition. It supports the production of information that is relevant to programme, policy and planning processes. In particular, formative and operations research, in conjunction with the design and implementation of 'nutrition-sensitive' planned activities, helps to better understand the critical conditions that will lead to nutrition improvements in different contexts within the country.

Within the [SUN multi-stakeholder platform](#), data review should also be incorporated into the meeting agendas of the national steering committee—for example, to examine MSNP implementation progress for different constituencies, to enhance targeting and to identify and address barriers and bottlenecks related to access and quality of MSNP activities and interventions. Data review to inform decision-making and share information across sectors should be a feature of the existing agendas of other relevant platforms, such as sectoral coordination meetings or cluster meetings on education, food security, health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene.

In addition, such activities create an opportunity for engagement of academic and research institutions in the national nutrition response. The MEL system should provide an opportunity to establish clear contributions for national universities and other academic/research institutions. Linkages to such institutions should be strengthened or formalised, as feasible and appropriate, to bolster the evidence base and learning that can support policy and programme processes. A research and evaluation agenda is not a static concept. Forums—such as network meetings, sectoral coordination or cluster meetings and steering committee meetings—are important in identifying emerging data needs as MSNP implementation progresses over time. Research findings should feed back into the planning process in a timely manner, particularly if its aim is to inform and improve the plan itself.

5.5.2 Fostering accountability through monitoring and evaluation

Ensuring transparency around reported data and independent verification of analysis—an accountability mechanism—includes provision of feedback to those who provided the data in the first place and may include mechanisms for complaint-handling or broader discussion of data and reports

beyond the sphere of those engaged in implementation of interventions. Accountability is about reporting to invested stakeholders at each level of the system (**Figure 3**) and setting up systems that allow stakeholders to hold each other accountable: to the national government, which is funding the MSNP/CRF and has strategic oversight; to donors or private funders of activities within the MSNP/CRF; to representatives at district and regional levels who are working to ensure implementation of the plan; to volunteers and community workers working with populations to deliver services; and to the populations themselves whom the plan is aiming to support.

Linking planned stakeholder activities (as outlined in the CRF) to expected outputs and outcomes is an important first step in fostering accountability, with line ministries identifying indicators that can be used to gauge progress. Through quarterly reporting of agreed output-level indicators and participatory data-review processes to periodically assess progress and identify challenges or bottlenecks, data can be used to enhance accountability by sector and by stakeholder group (e.g. government, UN agencies, civil society, donors, business sector).

Reporting and reviewing disaggregated data (e.g. by district; place of residence, such as urban or rural; gender; humanitarian status, such as IDPs) also fosters accountability across stakeholders for ensuring that MSNP implementation is inclusive. To facilitate this, stakeholders need to discuss and agree on accountability and learning arrangements.

Data presentation and use to support learning and ensure accountability may be conducted through various mechanisms, such as annual and/or semi-annual reports, technical field visits, trainings and other means.

5.5.3 Disseminating results and knowledge for nutrition

Once data have been endorsed by the national steering committee / SUN multi-stakeholder platforms, they should be shared widely, permitting wider scrutiny and ownership. A common approach for dissemination of results is to present them in a ‘dashboard’, as described above, highlighting only the key high-level objectives and outcomes/outputs achieved, using the framework for planning and review meetings (with the current status of the indicators highlighted) and using the change in the indicators from baseline to highlight the results. Selecting an outcome indicator and connecting it to key intervention outputs can provide a powerful communication and dissemination tool to inform and gather support from key stakeholders.²

Communication materials should also be designed for particular audiences—such as communities, media and donor/development partners—to ensure results are widely disseminated and understood and that they contribute to further advocacy for nutrition. Materials and platforms that showcase nutrition data and results serve as resources for continued advocacy and resource mobilisation for nutrition investment across sectors and stakeholders (refer to **Module 6**).

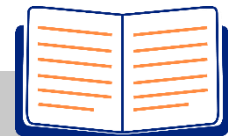
² Roberts D, Khattri N. *Designing a Results Framework for Achieving Results: A How-To Guide*. Washington, DC: Independent Evaluation Group / World Bank; 2012: 28 (Step 3). Available at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/331541563854787772/pdf/Designing-a-Results-Framework-for-Achieving-Results-A-How-to-Guide.pdf#page=30>.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE OF A NUTRITION DASHBOARD: KENYA



In Kenya, the Ministry of Health has developed a [Nutrition Portal](#) illustrating 'Nutrition Reports on Maps' which highlights child anthropomorphic indicators (disaggregated by sex), mortality indicators as well as data on child health, maternal health, infant and young child nutrition, micronutrients, food security and water, sanitation and hygiene. The information can be disaggregated by population and region. This can serve as a helpful resource for nutrition stakeholders to use to understand and advocate for appropriate action to address malnutrition.

Additional Resources to Monitor, Evaluate and Learn for Nutrition



Resources

Food Security Analysis Unit for Somalia (FSAU). *Nutrition: A Guide to Data Collection, Analysis, Interpretation and Use*. 2nd ed. Nairobi: FSAU; 2005. Available at https://www.unscn.org/web/archives_resources/files/Refman_65_FSAU_FAO_nutrition_a_guide_239.pdf.

MEASURE Evaluation. *A Trainers Guide to the Fundamentals of M&E for Population, Health and Nutrition Programs*. Chapel Hill, NC: MEASURE Evaluation; 2002. Available at <https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/ms-02-05>.

National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN) website. NIPN guidance notes: Managing and analysing data page. Available at <http://www.nipn-nutrition-platforms.org/NIPN-Guidance-Notes>. Accessed 01 October 2020.

SUN Movement. *Monitoring & Evaluation Framework*. Geneva: SMS; 2013. Available at <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/SUN-ME-Framework.pdf>.

United Nations Children's Fund MICS website. MICS6 Tools page. Available in Arabic and other languages at <http://mics.unicef.org/tools#analysis>. Accessed 02 November 2020.

Shekar M, Liddle A. *Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation in the World Bank's Nutrition Portfolio*. Washington, DC: The World Bank; 2003. Available at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/226601468314071107/pdf/35561.pdf>.

UN Standing Committee on Nutrition resource website. Nutrition assessment and M&E, general, page. Available at https://www.unscn.org/web/archives_resources/html/theme_000181.html. Accessed 02 November 2020.

Tools

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). *Compendium of Indicators for Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture*. Rome: FAO; 2016. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6275e.pdf>.

The Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) website. Tools page. Available at <https://www.fantaproject.org/tools>. Accessed 02 November 2020.

UN Statistics Wiki website. E-Handbook on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators page. Updated 25 Aug. 2020. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/SDGeHandbook/Home>.

About MQSUN+

MQSUN+ provides technical assistance (TA) and knowledge services to the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Secretariat (SMS) in support of pro-poor programmes in nutrition. MQSUN+ services are resourced by a consortium of five non-state organisations leading in the field of nutrition.

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