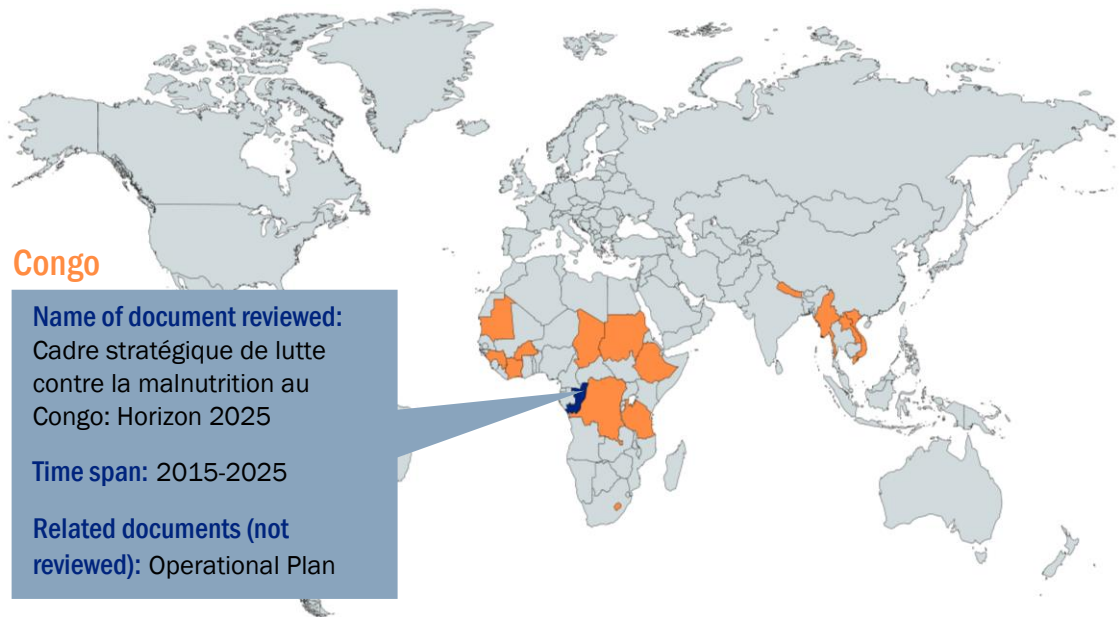


National Nutrition Plan Assessment: Congo

In December 2016, the United Nations Network for the SUN Movement and the SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS), with the support of an expert group, developed and launched the [Checklist on the Criteria and Characteristics of “Good” National Nutrition Plans](#) (“SUN Checklist”). In 2018, at the request of the SMS, the Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+) project undertook a systematic assessment of the main planning document of 15 countries’ multisectoral national nutrition action plans, according to the criteria in the SUN Checklist. This brief summarises select strengths (✓) and suggested areas for improvement with recommendations (-) for Congo, organised by each of the five areas in the SUN Checklist: (1) situational analysis and policy and programming review; (2) stakeholder engagement and high-level political commitment processes; (3) costs and budgetary framework; (4) implementation and managing arrangements; and (5) monitoring, evaluation, operational research and review. A section on gender considerations is also included.



Overview

The Republic of Congo’s *Cadre stratégique de lutte contre la malnutrition au Congo: Horizon 2025* is the country’s first national nutrition plan since it joined the SUN Movement in 2013. It aims to reduce the prevalence of all forms of malnutrition by 50 percent and is organised around five strategic areas: strengthening institutional and legal frameworks; expanding coverage of nutrition-specific and -sensitive interventions; establishing effective communication systems for nutrition; improving food security; and building capacity in nutrition research and food/nutrition information systems. Since the start of the strategy, an operational plan (not reviewed) running from 2016-2018 has been implemented.

Key strengths

The strategy demonstrates evidence of a strong commitment to multisectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration and presents clear ideas for developing synergies and joint targeting of interventions. Below are a few key strengths that emerged from the review:

- ✓ Describes key nutritional indicators among children and women of reproductive age, disaggregating by region and socioeconomic status when appropriate. Presents multiple causes of malnutrition according to UNICEF's conceptual framework, with country-specific analyses.
- ✓ Provides a comprehensive review of existing sectoral programmes and policies (including gaps and systemic weaknesses), which then inform the actions proposed in the strategy.
- ✓ Prioritises a nutrition advocacy approach through inclusion of a national Contact Group for Nutrition comprised of parliamentarians, religious authorities, national sports persons and artists as a mouthpiece for the fight against malnutrition within the country and beyond.
- ✓ Developed systematically and included a wide range of stakeholder groups.

Key recommendations

Given the existence of the corresponding operational plan (not reviewed), these recommendations should be considered in the context of strengthening the next operational plan or refinement of the strategy.

Area 1: Situational analysis and policy and programming review

- The strategy is unclear in regards to which forms of malnutrition it specifically aims to address (stating only the aim to reduce malnutrition by at least 50%) and is lacking specific targets towards achieving the overall goal of eliminating malnutrition.
 - **Recommendation:** Develop impact and outcome targets for the indicators described in the situational analysis (e.g. stunting, underweight, anaemia), using World Health Assembly nutrition targets as a guideline and modifying according to what is feasible in the country, based on prevailing prevalence rates and progress to date.
- The strategy includes a broad range of activities but does not yet clarify scope, target groups and numbers to be reached.
 - **Recommendation:** Include more tightly formulated priority actions with defined target groups. This may be elaborated in the corresponding operational plan but should be specified in the strategy as well.

Area 2: Stakeholders' engagement and high-level political commitment process

- The strategy briefly describes the main coordinating bodies, but does not specify national governing bodies' roles in ensuring accountability, providing oversight, coordination and reporting for the strategy; and does not discuss any governance arrangements at the subnational level.
 - **Recommendation:** Develop terms of reference for each group that outline committee membership, expectations and reporting mechanisms that demonstrate how each group will interact with each other. In addition, consider whether similar arrangements need to be developed at the subnational and local level to facilitate implementation and reporting.

- Although advocacy is briefly described as a strategic approach, the strategy does not include specific details on how advocacy will be used to promote implementation at the subnational level.
 - **Recommendation:** Once a subnational implementation structure has been established, orient local and regional authorities to the strategy and their associated responsibilities.

Area 3: Costs and budgetary framework

- While the reviewed strategy is not an operational document, no details are included on the estimated costs of the proposed activities and current levels of financing.
 - **Recommendation:** If not already included in the corresponding operational plan, assess which activities need to be initiated or expanded, estimate their costs and communicate the gap to decision-makers in government and the donor community when advocating for resources. In the event of a financial shortfall, issue guidance to national and subnational bodies responsible for developing plan budgets on how to prioritise interventions or populations, using available data and transparent criteria, and consider a plan for mobilising increased funding for nutrition.
- The strategy does not describe a mechanism for tracking financial expenditures during implementation.
 - **Recommendation:** Consider developing a system of tracking financial expenditures (from both public and donor sources) for all of the strategy's proposed actions, based on existing tracking systems within sectors and among partners; and consider including an indicator for government spending on nutrition as an outcome measure for advocacy efforts.

Area 4: Implementation and management arrangements

- While the strategy does not include details on implementation and management arrangements, it serves as an outline on which to build the operational framework.
 - **Recommendation:** If not already done, ensure the operational plan clearly describes the roles and responsibilities of government and other partners (including lead and contributing agencies for each action). As well, ensure a clear process for incorporating the strategy's proposed actions into annual sectoral and regional plans, taking into account existing structures and capacity needs.

Area 5: Monitoring, evaluation, operational research and review

- While the strategy does include indicators in the monitoring and evaluation framework, it does not provide details on how the strategy will be monitored or systematically evaluated.
 - **Recommendation:** If not already done as part of the operational plan, develop outcome and output indicators for each proposed activity, with details on data sources, responsibilities of different parties in data collection, review and determining follow-up actions, and strategies to address data gaps. The evaluation should build on existing sector reviews and allow for participation at the national, regional and community level.

Gender consideration

Beyond the SUN Checklist, all country plans were assessed with a gender lens for their consideration and inclusion of gender dimensions of nutrition. See supplemental [gender brief](#) for the specific factors that were considered.

While Congo's plan highlights that one of the fundamental causes of malnutrition is "gender disparities at the administrative, legislative and regulatory levels", there is an absence of details on how gender will be mainstreamed across plan actions. This could be strengthened through the following recommendations. It is acknowledged that some of this may have already been completed or documented in supplemental planning documents.

- **Situational analysis:** Data in the situational analysis should be sex- and age-disaggregated for nutrition-specific indicators and relevant nutrition-sensitive indicators to inform targeted and appropriate interventions. If not already done, a gender assessment could be conducted as part of an updated situational analysis to fully assess gender-related dimensions of nutrition in the Congo context (e.g. exploring traditional gender roles/norms and how these may influence nutrition).
- **Planned actions:** Ensure that relevant planned actions consider the unique circumstances of different populations based on the situational/gender assessment, including actions that address underlying inequities and broader harmful gender norms, where possible. As well, include gender equality as a crosscutting strategic principle or goal, and establish mechanisms to assess and address the specific needs of men, women, boys and girls across planned actions.
- **Capacity building:** Capacity-building actions should include measures to encourage active participation of both men and women (and address any unique needs or potential barriers to participation). Capacity-building efforts should also broadly integrate gender discussions, where relevant, to address gaps in knowledge and action around gender-related needs and differences.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Selection of appropriate gender-related indicators should be based on Congo's individual situational analysis. Relevant data should also be disaggregated by sex and age, and there should be a documented plan for how sex-disaggregated data will be used to inform decision making. For nutrition-specific indicators, it is recommended that all should be sex-disaggregated, and disaggregation of nutrition-sensitive indicators should be determined based on the country context.

For future nutrition planning at both national and subnational level, the involvement of gender-experienced stakeholders (e.g. Ministry of Women's Affairs, gender representative CSOs, relevant UN agencies/international NGOs) and the discussion of gender norms and differences can strengthen the consideration of gender across nutrition actions.

Moving forward

The recommendations above can be applied to either the ongoing implementation process for Congo's national nutrition plan or to the next iteration of the plan once the time frame of the current plan comes to a close in 2025. Country stakeholders should refer back the [SUN Checklist](#) to consider other areas of improvement. For additional information on how closely this plan aligns with the SUN Checklist, please contact SMS or MQSUN+@path.org to request a full copy of the plan assessment.

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.

For more information about MQSUN+

Website:

mqsunplus.path.org

Email:

mqsun+@path.org

Social media:



Maximising the Quality of Scaling of Nutrition Plus



@MQSUNplus

Acknowledgements

This brief was compiled by PATH under MQSUN+: Jolene Wun, Amanda Coile, Carrie Hemminger and Tamsin Walters. Special acknowledgements to the SMS for their collaboration on this initiative, and the MQSUN+ reviewers of this country plan, Jolene Wun and Tamsin Walters.

MQSUN+ cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this brief. This document was produced by MQSUN+ through support provided by UK aid and the UK Government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.

