

National Nutrition Plan Assessment: Lesotho

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 Lesotho, 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

Lesotho’s *Food and Nutrition Strategy and Costed Action Plan 2018-2022* constitutes the country’s first multisectoral nutrition plan since it joined the SUN Movement in 2014. The plan’s aim is to contribute to a well-nourished, healthy and productive nation by instituting and scaling up multisectoral nutrition interventions. At the time of review, the document was finalised excluding the costing analysis. The plan proposes interventions in 11 key result areas: infant and young child feeding; micronutrient supplementation; maternal and child health; food value chain; water, sanitation and hygiene; social protection; capacity building; enabling environment; gender; strengthening clinical services; and nutrition in emergencies.

Key strengths

Lesotho has one of the more systematic and comprehensive plans that were reviewed under this exercise. Below are a few key strengths that emerged:

- ✓ Comprehensively discusses the nutrition situation of children of all ages, women of reproductive age and adolescents; provides a very profound socioeconomic, political and economic analysis; and describes the food and nutrition security context well. Presents important issues around HIV and AIDS, non-communicable diseases and obesity and overweight.
- ✓ Commits to global nutrition targets, and includes all nutrition-related World Health Assembly impact indicators as well as country-specific indicators with clear baseline and target values.
- ✓ Concisely presents past responses and lessons learned from each of the sectors involved in plan implementation, as well as systemic issues found during a multisectoral capacity assessment.
- ✓ Proposes actions that are wide-ranging and respond to the underlying causes and system-wide governance and financing deficiencies described in the situational analysis.
- ✓ Presents risks to each of the plan's goals and proposes to assess them during the midterm review to inform future approaches. Furthermore, an entire key result area is devoted to nutrition emergency preparedness and addressing longer-term needs of populations vulnerable to shocks.
- ✓ Discusses capacity-building needs based on a capacity needs assessment and sectoral reviews, and span a wide range of competency areas (including financial, institutional, governance and human resource needs at various levels, including service delivery level).
- ✓ Includes a comprehensive set of impact, outcome and output indicators with data sources for all of the proposed activities. Annual, mid-term and final evaluations of plan implementation are expected to inform future improvements to strategy and operational research.
- ✓ Development of the national nutrition plan was systematic and included a wide range of stakeholders in terms of expertise areas and levels (from national to local government authority).

Key recommendations

Area 1: Situational analysis and policy and programming review

- Although the nutrition governance structures were identified as generally weak by the capacity assessment and the general governance approach is presented in the plan, the governance arrangements are not described in detail.

→ **Recommendation:** Develop terms of reference for the Food and Nutrition Council, Food and Nutrition Commission and any coordination groups at the subnational level that describes their management/oversight role and mechanisms for ensuring multisectoral planning and progress monitoring. In the next iteration of the plan, include the proposed structures in the main document.

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

- Although there is high-level political commitment for the plan, processes for ensuring endorsement of the plan within the national assembly or subnational levels and the required dissemination to its wide range of actors is not elaborated.

→ **Recommendation:** Ensure that the plan receives the necessary endorsements at all levels, and conduct a launch with key stakeholders for wider dissemination of actions and responsibilities. In the forthcoming advocacy strategy, include actions to support resource mobilisation and ensure buy-in and uptake of the planned actions with key stakeholders at multiple levels (e.g. politicians, community leaders, plan beneficiaries).

Area 3: Costs and budgetary framework

— At the time of this review, the costing of the plan was in progress.

→ **Recommendation:** If not already included in the subsequent costing, 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.

Area 4: Implementation and management arrangements

— The plan lists partners' contribution and support to key result areas, however, it does not list the responsible parties, annual targets and detailed timelines for implementation of each action.

→ **Recommendation:** Develop a matrix that includes the lead and supporting organisations and timelines for each activity to guide annual operational planning and ensure accountability.

Area 5: Monitoring, evaluation, operational research and review

— The plan discusses poor data quality as a risk to the development of a nutrition information system, but does not propose potential actions to mitigate this risk.

→ **Recommendation:** Ensure any supplemental monitoring and evaluation plan incorporates elements of monitoring the implementation progress and evaluating the effectiveness of the multisectoral efforts. Include data quality indicators in the plan and incorporate actions for improving data quality once root causes have been identified. This may include measures to ensure quality and timeliness of surveillance data.

— The plan proposes areas for operational research—addressing issues around implementation very well—but does not identify specific subject matters.

→ **Recommendation:** Ensure the forthcoming operational research framework includes a research institution to work with the plan's governing body to propose and prioritise operational research questions arising from annual, midterm and final evaluations of the plan. One example from the situational analysis that could be further explored is the rising risk of overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. Given the little experience on this rising risk, operational research on effective service provision to address these new challenges could help to gain insights to strengthen service delivery.

Gender considerations

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.

Gender is thoroughly considered throughout Lesotho's plan. It lists gender as one of its key principles and includes a thorough chapter on gender and women's empowerment which presents good practices and lessons for addressing gender imbalances and stresses the need to involve men in maternal and child health care services and empower women socially and economically. In addition to these aspects, it 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:** While the plan includes sex-disaggregated data on HIV prevalence and select nutrition-related indicators, data in the situational analysis should be sex- and age-disaggregated for all 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 Lesotho context (e.g. exploring traditional gender roles/norms and how these may influence nutrition).
- **Planned actions:** Ensure that all 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.
- **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 Lesotho's individual situational/gender 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.

Moving forward

These recommendations can be applied to either the ongoing implementation process for Lesotho'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 2022. 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+

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