

National Nutrition Plan Review: Sri Lanka

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 and 2020, at the request of the SMS, the Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+) project undertook a systematic review of 26 countries’ multisectoral national nutrition plans, according to the criteria in the SUN Checklist. This brief summarises select strengths and suggested areas for improvement with recommendations for Sri Lanka, 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. Where relevant, specific suggestions for increasing gender sensitivity for the plan are also included (see MQSUN+’s [gender brief](#) for more information).

Sri Lanka

Name of document reviewed: Multi-Sector Action Plan for Nutrition

Time span: 2018-2025

Related documents (not reviewed): National Nutrition Policy; Noted as ‘forthcoming’ in the plan: Communications and Advocacy Strategy; M&E Framework; Costing Analysis; Capacity Assessment



Overview

Sri Lanka’s *Multi-Sector Action Plan for Nutrition (MSAPN) (2018-2025)* links to the *National Nutrition Policy* and builds upon the country’s first *MSAPN (2013-2016)* to reduce malnutrition in a multisectoral, coordinated and systematic manner. The plan aims to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) using five strategic objectives: (1) strengthen and enable an environment for nutrition; (2) improve quality and coverage of nutrition-specific interventions to enhance maternal and child nutrition status; (3) improve quality and coverage of nutrition-sensitive interventions to enhance nutrition status of the population; (4) strengthen the National Nutrition Information System (NNIS) as a planning and monitoring tool; and (5) strengthen community empowerment to optimise nutrition at the household level.

Key strengths

The plan provides detailed objectives and activities—based on global guidance and evidence—to achieve its nutrition goals. Highlighted below are some key strengths identified in the review:

- Provides a clear description of the nutrition context at national and subnational levels.
- Demonstrates that its development was clearly informed by widespread consultations at national and subnational levels and describes the individuals and organisations consulted.
- Includes most of the World Health Assembly nutrition indicators and targets, in addition to a range of nutrition-sensitive SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) indicators, which are clearly laid out and easily understandable.
- Outlines well-described planned governance structures for nutrition, including proposed members, terms of reference and roles of members, with a clear leadership role for the highest levels of government.
- Mandates the development of a number of supplemental documents to provide further operational detail, including plan costing, M&E, capacity development and communications and advocacy.

Key recommendations

Area 1: Situational analysis and policy and programming review

- The situational analysis provides a good description of the nutrition context at national and subnational levels; however, there is limited information on disparities in nutritional status across population groups and the broader basic causes of malnutrition (e.g. political economy and socio-cultural factors). Additionally, several underlying determinants of malnutrition related to the strategic objectives and planned actions are missing from the analysis.
 - **Recommendation:** Where possible, review existing data to identify key determinants of undernutrition more broadly and consider conducting further assessment of nutritional status by gender, region, ethnic group, urban/rural, and/or other groups suspected to be vulnerable in the country to facilitate prioritisation and improve targeting of interventions.
- A range of nutrition specific and health actions with a strong evidence base are included in the MSAPN table, however the included actions are lacking in detail, despite the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis noting that the previous iteration of the plan included actions that were overly broad.
 - **Recommendation:** Ensure sufficient detail on all priority actions in the *MSAPN (2018-2023)* by developing a detailed operational plan that maps current actions and identifies the additional actions, resources, priority groups and specific responsibilities of stakeholders to address the identified gaps. Furthermore, consider integrating gender considerations across all planned actions by developing an overarching gender strategy (ensuring equitable participation of women, men, boys and girls in activities and addressing underlying determinants of gender inequities in nutrition).

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

- Although continued discussion and prioritisation of the MSAPN are evident through regular meetings at all levels, specific advocacy actions targeted to government and other stakeholders are largely missing.
 - **Recommendation:** If not already included in a corresponding communication and advocacy strategy (planned for 2019), include actions to mobilise nutrition champions at multiple levels (e.g. politicians, sector representatives, community leaders and members) to facilitate buy-in and uptake of plan activities.

Area 3: Costs and budgetary framework

- Whilst the plan currently does not include a costing of proposed activities and existing levels of financing, it notes plans for developing a financial framework with costing estimates and gaps.
 - **Recommendation:** As planned, undertake a costing exercise for all activities within the plan (including governance and coordination costs) and summarise the overall budget, currently available funding and remaining funding gap. In the case of a large financial gap, ensure a plan is in place to prioritise activities and to mobilise additional resources. As noted above, a more detailed elaboration of planned activities will be necessary to allow for a full costing.

Area 4: Implementation and management arrangements

- The operational framework indicates the establishment of committees to operationalise the plan; however, there is a lack of information on how actions are linked with or already covered in sectoral plans and pre-existing programmes versus where actions are newly proposed.
 - **Recommendation:** Once specific actions and responsibilities are established for each activity, ensure that they are linked or integrated with existing accountability mechanisms, and ensure a clear process is in place to incorporate planned actions into annual sectoral and subnational plans, as relevant, to ensure uptake.
- Although a capacity needs assessment and formation of a capacity development plan are intended, the MSAPN does not provide a general overview of the scope of capacity-building needs.
 - **Recommendation:** Ensure that the planned capacity needs assessment and corresponding plan consider the available institutional arrangements for training (e.g. existing academic institutions) as well as the potential support available from development partners and that the plan includes a description of the necessary resources, timeframe and target groups for training. In addition, the assessment could examine disparities in access to existing capacity-building initiatives between men and women, and the plan could propose measures to encourage active participation of both women and men and include gender considerations in the design of future capacity-building activities.

Area 5: Monitoring, evaluation, operational research and review

- The Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning chapter currently does not elaborate on specific components of the plan's monitoring and evaluation (M&E). However, it is noted that a separate M&E framework was to be developed in 2019.
 - **Recommendation:** If feasible and relevant, further elaborate on activities in the plan in order to appropriately define indicators (and corresponding sources of verification) for monitoring progress. Additionally, ensure that the M&E framework incorporates processes for data management,

describes the use of existing sectoral information and surveillance systems and measures to address data gaps, and describes how data will be analysed. The framework should also consider establishing procedures for collecting data by sex and age.

- The plan does not describe how research priorities will be identified, pursued or coordinated or how research findings will be disseminated.

→ **Recommendation:** Identify a research body that will work with the national nutrition plan's coordinating bodies to identify research priorities and conduct further research on issues related to the plan's implementation.

Moving forward

These recommendations can be applied to the ongoing implementation planning and process for Sri Lanka's national nutrition plan. As they are mentioned as immediate priorities within the plan, the development of the capacity development, M&E, advocacy and communication plans and costing will likely add substantial operational detail to support plan implementation. As part of this process, further elaboration of details on the strategic areas and actions will give more specificity and facilitate the practical implementation of the plan. This is also important in informing the further plans envisioned to supplement the MSAPN. For additional information on how closely this plan aligns with the SUN Checklist, please contact SMS to request a full copy of the plan review.

For more practical guidance on multisectoral nutrition planning, see the resources included in the [SUN Checklist](#) and refer to the [forthcoming multisectoral nutrition planning toolkit from MQSUN+](#)

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:



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