

Chapter Twelve

Speaking Up for Nutrition: The Role of Civil Society



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“The evidence is clear that governments can’t do this alone. Momentum for improving nutrition is strong, in large part thanks to our civil society partners who have worked tirelessly to mobilize support around the world behind the evidence that nutrition matters.”

Rajiv Shah, Administrator, USAID

Key messages

- Civil society has helped to shape the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement at global level and helps to deliver improved nutrition at country level.
- As the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals approaches, hunger and malnutrition remain part of the unfinished agenda.
- As the international community debates the post-2015 development framework, food security and nutrition should be explicitly addressed in the goals, and stunting should be a priority indicator.
- Civil society organizations work closely in, and with, communities, and have experience in implementing multi-sectoral programs. They are uniquely positioned to advocate for greater attention to hunger and malnutrition.
- By engaging national governments on the post-2015 agenda, civil society can play an important role in elevating nutrition as a priority for the next set of goals.

From its first beginnings, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has been a multi-stakeholder effort. Civil society organizations have been engaged in establishing SUN and civil society is represented on the SUN Lead Group.

At the global level, as noted in Chapter 10 of the present volume, civil society has helped shape and build support for SUN with donor governments. At the country level, civil society organizations have an important role to play in strengthening the political will, engaging in policy development/reform; in designing and implementing programs; and in monitoring and feedback.

In June 2011, the first international meeting to help organize the voice of civil society in the SUN Movement was held in Washington. The focus was on building political commitment to scaling up nutrition as part of the 1,000 Days Partnership and Call to Action. Participants discussed the unique role of civil society. Specifically, it was noted that civil society organizations work closely in and with communities. They have extensive reach, often working in areas that are not being served by government programs. They also have a great deal of experience with implementation and a greater understanding of the causes of undernutrition in each community that can and should be leveraged. Participants also noted that civil society organizations work across sectors and have developed integrated solutions in their programs.

Civil society also has an important role to play in advocacy. Political leadership and support is essential to making progress on any given issue. Civil society organizations can help develop leaders and champions and improve the enabling policy environment for addressing maternal and child nutrition through advocacy. They can :

Educate and rally support

- Draw attention to and define the issues;
- Build consensus among other civil society actors and policy advocates;
- Work together to shape and advance policy solutions and recommendations.

Persuade

- Elevate the importance of an issue;
- Urge leadership on an issue;
- Identify and engage effective and credible messengers.

Leverage

- Engage the debates that are happening within or between governmental ministries or departments or between the parliament and the administration;
- Lend support to a specific point of view within the debate and make the case for a specific set of policy solutions.

Broker

- Carry information and messages between different players;
- Help identify common objectives;
- Add pressure when needed or helpful.

Engage and mobilize grassroots constituents

- Inform and educate grassroots and the engaged public about issues – show connections between issues and how specific policy actions can help;
- Demonstrate public support for specific measures being debated;
- Build relationships with members of parliament and their staff – to show that there is a long-term constituency around the issues.

In the two years since the first civil society gathering, there has been much progress in deepening the engagement of civil society in the SUN Movement. To date, 11 SUN country civil society alliances have received funding from donors to support their efforts, including through the SUN's Multi-Partner Trust Fund. In June 2013, the SUN Civil Society Network was launched and held its inaugural meeting alongside a civil-society-led event, Sustaining Political Commitments to Scaling Up Nutrition, to mark the first 1,000 days of SUN and to look ahead to the next 1,000 days. The two events served to highlight some of civil society's successes in elevating nutrition as a priority and in building nutrition champions.

In Peru, a coalition of civil society organizations called the Child Nutrition Initiative (CNI) has worked together to obtain commitments to reduce malnutrition among children under 5 by 5 percent in 5 years from the 10 presidential candidates running in the national elections in 2005. They followed up with specific recommendations and a 100-day action plan for the newly-elected President Alan Garcia, who pledged to reduce malnutrition by 9 percent. To sustain political commitments, CNI also worked with other stakeholders, regional leaders and the World Bank, to build long-term support and commitment to nutrition. When



Mothers laugh during a nutrition education seminar hosted by Care Development Organization, a Nepali NGO that receives support from Maryknollers, in Bandarkharka, Nepal, on Friday, April 27, 2012. About 30 women plus their kids and grandkids attended the seminar.

The seminar focused on recognizing the signs of malnutrition in children and learning how to prepare foods hygienically. A health worker taught the women about vaccinations for children, prolapsed uterus and the importance of cutting an umbilical cord with a sterilized knife. She also stressed that children need to be fed multiple times a day, which doesn't always happen since the women labor in fields all day. All produce used in the seminar is locally available.

Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World

President Ollanta Humala came into office in 2011, he pledged to continue the commitment to nutrition. He established the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (MIDIS), with a specific mandate to coordinate government agencies, private sector and civil society to reduce child chronic malnutrition by 10 percent. The first lady of Peru is on the SUN Lead Group.

Since 2011, civil society organizations in Zambia have helped elevate the issue of maternal and child nutrition as a national priority. In 2012, they have established the Zambia Civil Society Scaling Up Nutrition Alliance (CSO-SUN), which has raised awareness of the impact of chronic maternal and child malnutrition on Zambia's development through the media. The Post Newspaper in Zambia wrote in December 2012 :

“We are told that 45 percent of our children under the age of five – a terrifying percentage – are affected by malnutrition. The painful truth is that, despite the goals to eradicate it, malnutrition among our under-fives still persists and tends to grow. For 45 percent of our children under the age of five, malnutrition is not a mere conceptual reference, but rather a tragic daily experience, a disgraceful reality for

all of us ...This is an affront to our collective conscience. It is an imperative need of our times to be aware of this reality, because of what a situation affecting 45 percent of our children under the age of five entails in terms of human suffering and the squandering of life and intelligence ...We appreciate and exalt the work being done by Zambia Civil Society Scaling up Nutrition Alliance in creating an awareness of the inevitable need for profound socio-economic structural changes that are needed to address these problems.”

The editorial went on to call on the government to take action. In February 2013 the civil society alliance hosted a media capacity building workshop to educate journalists on the issue.

In April 2013 the government launched the National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan 2011– 2015 and the First 1,000 Most Critical Days Program (MCDP). Dr Joseph Katema, Minister of Community Development, Mother and Child Health; Mr Malcom Geere, DfID Deputy Head of Office and representative of the SUN donor convenor in Zambia; and William Chilufya, Coordinator of the CSO-SUN in Zambia spoke at the launch. The alliance's



People hold a candlelight vigil at Immanuel Baptist Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on October 22, 2011, to pray for a Circle of Protection around US federal programs that help poor and hungry people in the United States and abroad.

Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World



Sandesh Rai (leaning forward), 5, and his mom Sapana Rai (in yellow) wait for a health worker from Care Development Organization to conduct a nutrition education seminar in Bandarkharka, Nepal, on Friday, April 27, 2012.

Sapana said she often attends CDO seminars and came on this day because she wanted to learn more about health.

Care Development Organization is a Nepali NGO that receives support from Maryknollers. CDO runs various education and health seminars every month or two in poor, rural areas of Nepal. About 30 women plus their kids and grandkids attended the Bandarkharka seminar.

Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World

effective advocacy has also succeeded in building champions in the parliament. At the June 2013, Sustaining Political Commitments event, representatives of Zambia’s government, parliament and civil society alliance spoke about Zambia’s experience in scaling up nutrition.

In Tanzania, the Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania (PANITA) was launched in 2011. It now includes 280 civil society organization members implementing nutrition programs across Tanzania. PANITA’s mission is “to advance advocacy efforts and improve mobilization and

coordination of civil society organizations to contribute towards a more effective national and local response to addressing undernutrition.¹ PANITA has engaged 34 members of the Tanzania Union Parliament and House of Representatives in Zanzibar “to act as ‘nutrition champions’.” It also works with the Tanzania Association of Journalists for Children that represent the 15 major media agencies.” PANITA is also represented on Tanzania’s High Level Steering Committee on Nutrition.

Nutrition and the Post-2015 Development Agenda – the role of civil society

There is gathering momentum around the post-2015 development agenda. Civil society engaged in nutrition and nutrition advocacy globally and in SUN countries specifically should pay attention to the debate and engage constructively to ensure that nutrition is strongly represented in whatever framework is agreed.

Since 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been the dominant global development framework. The MDGs have come to represent the most holistic approach yet to human development. They have galvanized public support around the world for ending hunger and extreme poverty. In 2012, the World Bank announced that the percentage of people living below the international poverty line had already fallen by more than half, thus achieving a 2015 target for MDG 1, which calls for cutting extreme poverty and hunger in half. More people escaped poverty during the 2000s than in any decade in history. Even more importantly, progress was made in every major region of the world. In addition, since 1990, the baseline year for measuring progress towards the MDGs, at least 75 percent of all participating countries have made progress in reducing poverty, hunger, and maternal/child mortality, and in providing clean drinking water. Nearly two-thirds of countries have made progress in gender equality by improving girls' enrollment in primary school. Between 1999 and 2005, the number of children dying of measles fell by 75 percent – from more than 500,000 deaths each year to about 126,000. Overall, there has been a two-thirds reduction in child mortality, due largely to the continued rollout of vaccines. Clear, time-bound and measurable targets have certainly been important in focusing political attention and resources on the MDGs and improving accountability for results.

Despite these successes, much remains to be done, and challenges remain. Significantly, hunger and malnutrition are still part of the unfinished agenda. At the current rate of progress, the hunger target will not be met by 2015. The MDGs measure progress in reducing hunger by calorie intake and children's weight. Yet even combining efforts to improve calorie intake and children's weight with the dramatic reduction in extreme poverty that has been achieved has not been effective in speeding up progress against malnutrition, particularly the continued high rates of stunting (when a child is far too short for age) and wasting (when a child weighs far too little for height) - both of which are signs of chronic malnutrition.

Over the next two years, as we approach the MDG deadline of December 2015, it is imperative to invest more resources in strategies to reduce malnutrition that we know to be effective. In 2015, through a process shepherded by the United Nations, national leaders are expected to decide on a new set of global development goals. A vigorous debate about what these goals should be is already under way. There are many ideas now being put forward about what a new set of goals should include. It is critical to include hunger and malnutrition targets. National leaders will identify these based on the recommendations of the international development community, reflecting the best medical and scientific evidence, and there is growing consensus on how to do this.

WHO nutrition targets for 2025

In 2012, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) agreed a set of six nutrition targets to be achieved by 2025.

These are:

- A 40 percent reduction in the global number of children under age 5 who are stunted;
- 50 percent reduction in anemia among women of reproductive age;
- 30 percent reduction in low birth weight;
- No increase in childhood overweight;
- An increase to 50 percent in the proportion of infants breastfed exclusively (no other food or water) for the first 6 months.
- A reduction of childhood wasting to 5 percent and maintenance of the rate at 5 percent or lower.



Jane Sebbi tends to her goats in Kamuli, Uganda. Sebbi grows corn, bananas, coffee, amaranth, potatoes, soy beans, common beans and sweet potatoes. She also takes care of pigs, goats and chickens
Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World



A villager poses for a photograph in Chiquimula, Guatemala. Chiquimula is in the Corredor Seco (Dry Corridor), an area near the Honduran border that recently suffered a severe drought, thus exacerbating poverty and malnutrition in a country that has the highest malnutrition rate in the Western Hemisphere.
Photo by Todd Post/Bread for the World Institute

At a February 2013 consultation on “nutrition in the post-2015 development agenda” in Washington, DC, nutrition experts agreed that nutrition should be more explicitly addressed in the next set of development goals and that stunting should be the priority indicator. Stunting is a powerful indicator, not only of the impact of malnutrition on a child, but also of chronic inequality and deprivation in a community. Experts also agreed that the next set of goals need more than one nutrition indicator, and that the WHO targets provide a sound set of alternatives.

In May 2013, the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda released their recommendations and illustrative goals and targets. The panel proposed five transformative shifts needed to achieve a more equitable and peaceful world:

leave no one behind, put sustainable development at the core, transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth, build peace and effective open and accountable institutions for all, and forge a new global partnership. In order to achieve these shifts, the panel recommended a set of illustrative goals and targets, including one that would “Ensure Food Security and Good Nutrition.”

In September 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will present his report on the post-2015 agenda. Then, over the next two years, governments will begin to negotiate amongst themselves with the objective of reaching an agreement by 2015. It is crucial at this stage that civil society in all countries engages governments about the importance of a new set of goals and about ensuring that nutrition is integrated into the post-2015 development framework.



Faustine Wabwire (left) from Bread for the World Institute receives a banner of the Development Action Association from Lydia Sasu (right) as a token appreciation for coming to Ghana and talking with women farmers that DAA has trained.

Photo by Todd Post/Bread for the World Institute

Case study

Guatemala: Gilma's Story

In a country like Guatemala, where social norms change slowly, gender parity in education can't come soon enough. Guatemala is a middle-income country, but it has the highest rate of malnutrition in the Western Hemisphere and one of the highest in the world. It also ranks near the top of an index measuring inequality in Latin America.

Gilma, a five-year-old girl, lives in a Guatemalan village precariously on the edge of food insecurity in the best of times. In more challenging times, children like her are at grave risk. In 2011, a severe drought struck her region of the country, leading the US government to send food aid. Without the food aid, many children there might have died from malnutrition, and this is what almost happened to Gilma.

Gilma has four siblings, all of them boys, and that means she and her mother eat last and often there is nothing left for them. Her greatest disadvantage is not that she is a poor child in a region where food is often scarce, but that she is a poor girl there. By November 2011, Gilma was suffering from a condition known as severe acute malnutrition (SAM). Her legs were swollen and ulcerated, as happens when children suffer such severe malnutrition. In Guatemala, when a child falls below the SAM threshold, government health officials must be alerted and they will then assume responsibility for care.

Gilma was fortunate in that her village was receiving food aid. Save the Children, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) administering the program, contacted health officials when Gilma slipped from moderate to severe acute malnutrition, but the officials didn't respond right away. She is alive today because of the persistence of Save the Children staff in getting the officials' attention.

Before long, Gilma will be going to school; hopefully, her education will enable her to prevent what happened to her from happening to her daughters.

Source: Bread for the World 2013 Hunger Report

Case study

Ghana: Lydia's Story

The Development Action Association (DAA) provides training to women farmers in Ghana, working in some of the poorest communities in the country. Lydia Sasu is the executive director of DAA, which she co-founded in 1997. Before DAA, Ms Sasu worked in Ghana's Ministry of Agriculture and served as the country's first female agriculture extension agent. Working with women farmers has been her life's work, shaped by her experiences as a child watching her mother struggle against obstacles that have hardly changed for the women she works with today.

In spite of the success Ghana has had in reducing hunger - meeting the 2015 MDG target before any other country in sub-Saharan Africa - progress has not been shared equally by all. Rural women and girls are the most disadvantaged members of society. This remains true of Ghana, even though its record of progress on gender equality is stronger than that of many other African countries. Progress on the MDGs is bound to stall until it is a top priority to confront and correct the structural inequalities that hold marginalized groups in society back.

In recent years, Sasu, now 65, has been invited to speak at international events on women in agriculture, most recently at the United Nations on International Women's Day 2012. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has pledged to incorporate consultations with multiple stakeholders into efforts to develop post-2015 global development goals. Consultations are planned in 50 countries and are supposed to include civil society organizations such as DAA. The participation of civil society is critical in developing a post-2015 development consensus that reflects the views of poor and hungry people themselves.

Source: Bread for the World 2013 Hunger Report

Case study

Bangladesh: Tohomina's Story

The afternoon hours are Tohomina Akter's favorite time of day. That's when she can take a break from her household tasks, rest, and play with her 17-month-old daughter, Adia. Like any toddler, Adia much prefers movement.

Adia runs through the four rooms of their home, her pink sundress and plastic pink shoes contrasting against the gray tin walls. First is her parent's bedroom, then the room where her father's parents and brothers sleep. Then a small room that contains clothes and dishes, and finally the kitchen, a skinny corridor that opens to the outside on one end, where her mother prepares their food over a fire.

Adia stops suddenly at the front steps, looking out at the familiar faces of Char Baria, a village in the Barisal district of Bangladesh. In front of her lies Tohomina's garden, a 25-foot square of spinach, amaranth, chili, and pepper plants, an important source of nutrients for Adia and her family. Spinach and red amaranth are Adia's favorites.

Tohomina planted the garden after receiving training in "Nobo Jibon," a program administered by Helen Keller International, a nongovernmental organization that works in several Bangladesh districts. The vegetables she harvests have increased the nutrients available to her family, especially her daughter. What's more, the extra money the family earns selling the surplus vegetables goes toward buying additional food for Adia.

In the program, Tohomina learned why a diverse, healthy diet is important, and also about the importance of breastfeeding her daughter. Tohomina attended classes for almost two months, hearing from health workers the benefits of giving Adia only breast milk during her first six months of life.

Tohomina has stuck to that schedule, introducing supplementary foods only after the initial six-month period, and she'll continue to breastfeed Adia until she is two.

"I did not do many things [before taking the class]," Tohomina said through a translator. "But after learning, I am keeping things clean and hygienic to prevent diseases, and cooking nutritious foods to keep me and my family healthy."

Source: *Bread for the World 2013 Hunger Report*



Guatemalan mother and daughter

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/breadfortheworld>. Source: Marsh, Molly. "Improving Nutrition Outcomes in Bangladesh." *Within Reach: Global Development Goals – 2013 Hunger Report*, Bread for the World Institute, pp. 14-15. Available at <http://www.hungerreport.org/>



Tohomina Akter and her daughter Adia, 17 months old

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/breadfortheworld>. Marsh, Molly. "Improving Nutrition Outcomes in Bangladesh." *Within Reach: Global Development Goals – 2013 Hunger Report*, Bread for the World Institute, pp. 14-15. Available at <http://www.hungerreport.org/>

Further reading

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My personal view

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Over the past four years, the nutrition landscape has been completely transformed. New knowledge, increased attention to hunger and food insecurity as a result of the food price crisis, and effective collaboration across stakeholders have led to the rise of the SUN Movement.

Civil society played an important role in making the case for action on nutrition. As a result of the governments of the United Kingdom and Brazil and Children's Investment Fund Foundation's Nutrition for Growth High Level Meeting in London on June 8, 2013, we now have impressive new financial and nutrition outcome commitments from donors, international organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the work is done! Now is not the time for complacency, however. The commitments have to be fulfilled. More importantly, resources and policies must result in dramatic reductions in the number of stunted children.

In order to ensure sustained political commitment, civil society needs to speak with unified, clear messages about the importance of nutrition in the post-2015 development goals. Communicating how fundamental good nutrition in the pregnancy and early childhood is to ending extreme poverty must be part of advocacy efforts in the near future.

There will be many interests and issues that will be under consideration. Countries that are taking steps to scale up nutrition are uniquely placed to make the case for including a nutrition goal, indicators and targets. Civil society can advocate for them to do just that.