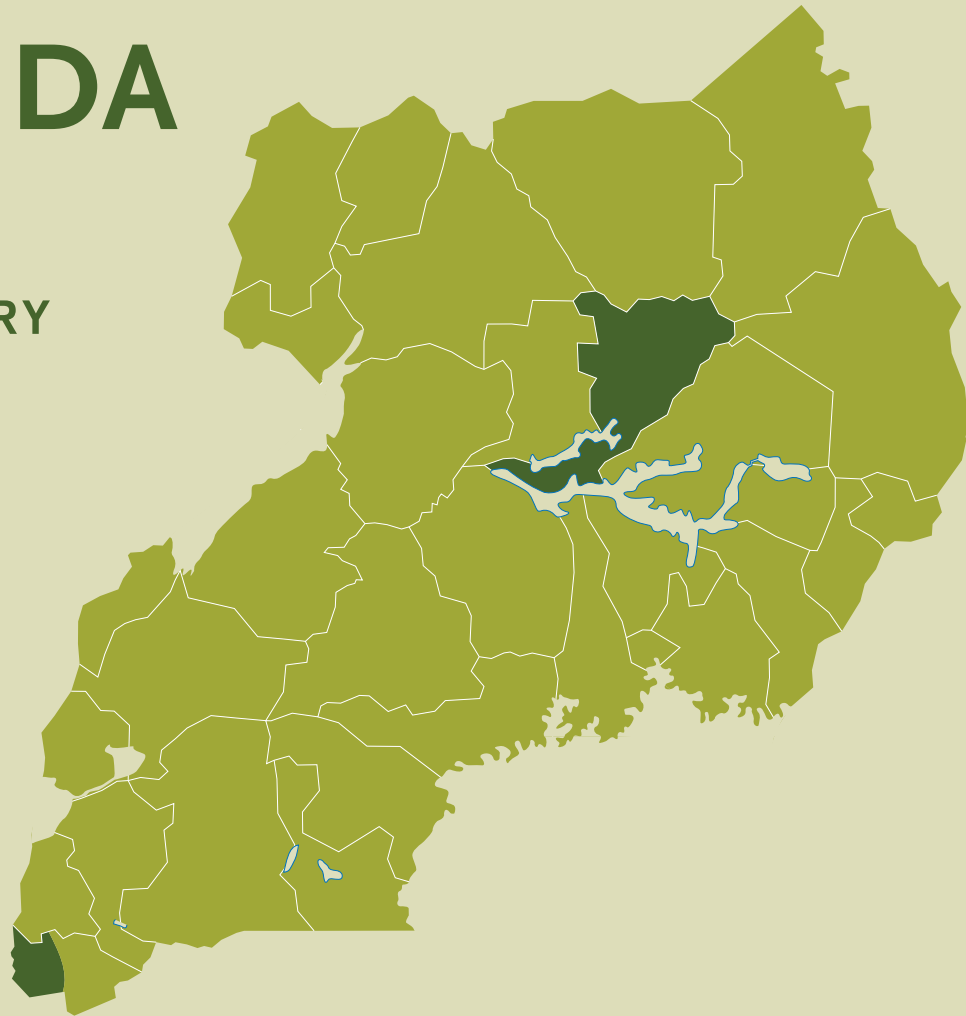


PATHWAYS TO BETTER NUTRITION
CASE STUDY EVIDENCE SERIES

Pathways to Better Nutrition
IN UGANDA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



JULY 2016



About SPRING

The Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project is a five-year USAID-funded Cooperative Agreement to strengthen global and country efforts to scale up high-impact nutrition practices and policies and improve maternal and child nutrition outcomes. The project is managed by the JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., with partners Helen Keller International, The Manoff Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Disclaimer

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement AID-OAA-A-11-00031 (SPRING), managed by the JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI). The contents are the responsibility of JSI, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.

Acknowledgments

The SPRING Pathways to Better Nutrition (PBN) team would like to thank Ssansa Mugenyi, Maureen Bakunzi, and Boaz Musiimenta from the Uganda Office of the Prime Ministers Department of Policy Implementation and Coordination for their kind support on this activity. We would also like to thank USAID | Uganda, the SPRING Uganda office, the SPRING Knowledge Management Team, and REACH Uganda for their input and support during this work. Finally, we owe a debt of gratitude to the key informants (at both national level and in Kisoro and Lira), including those from government offices, donor agencies, academia, the private sector, civil society organizations, and United Nations groups who participated in this study for their time and thoughtful insights into the nutrition prioritization and budgeting process.

In support of the technical sections of this report, we want to acknowledge our excellent partners on the district budget analysis, Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW), an international development and advocacy organization (especially Mona Herbert and Matthias Brucker). USAID's Nutrition Innovation Lab also graciously allowed us to use their district-level survey data as part of this study. We also want to thank Manohar Shenoy, Sascha Lamstein, Louise Sserunjogi, Hallie Eilerts, and Heather Pitorak for their insight and contribution to this work.

Recommended Citation

Pomeroy-Stevens, Amanda, Nancy Adero, Alexis D'Agostino, Hannah Foehringer Merchant, Abel Muzoora, Daniel Lukwago, Diana Tibesigwa, Edgar Agaba, Lidan Du, and Ezekiel Mupere. 2016. *Pathways to Better Nutrition in Uganda: Executive Summary of Final Report*. Arlington, VA: Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project.

SPRING

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

1616 Fort Myer Drive, 16th Floor

Arlington, VA 22209 USA

Phone: (703) 528-7474

Fax: (703) 528-7480

Email: info@spring-nutrition.org

Internet: www.spring-nutrition.org

Acronyms

CSO	civil society organization
DNCC	District Nutrition Coordination Committee
GoU	Government of Uganda
JSI	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PBN	Pathways to Better Nutrition
SPRING	Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovation in Nutrition Globally
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UGX	Ugandan shillings
UN	United Nations
UNAP	Uganda Nutrition Action Plan 2011-2016
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar

SPRING's Pathways to Better Nutrition (PBN) Case Study Evidence Series reports on findings that emerged from this two-year, two-country, mixed-methods study on how nutrition-related activities are prioritized and funded. Please check the SPRING PBN webpage (<http://www.spring-nutrition.org/pbn>) for more information on the studies and other products in this series.

Executive Summary

A multi-sectoral approach is often thought to be the most effective way to address malnutrition.

With the renewed global attention on nutrition, supported by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition has returned to the forefront of nutrition activity (Levinson, Balarajan, and Marini 2013).

In 2011, Uganda developed and instituted a shining example of multi-sectoral policy to combat malnutrition. Developed within the context of national policy and legal frameworks, the *Uganda Nutrition Action Plan 2011–2016* (UNAP) engages multiple sectors in the Government of Uganda (GoU), as well as external partners such as donors, United Nations (UN) groups, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, and the private sector (Government of Uganda 2011). UNAP calls on these stakeholder groups to implement activities in five objective areas to reduce malnutrition.

Poor nutrition poses a great risk to Uganda's development and the well-being and potential of its people. Nearly 50 percent of children are undernourished, despite improvements in the last decade and continued investment by the GoU and donors (Office of the Prime Minister and FANTA Project 2014c). Malnutrition will cost Uganda an estimated 19 trillion Ugandan shillings (UGX) (US\$7.7 billion) in lost productivity by 2025. If additional investments for expanded nutrition activities are not made, an additional 840,000 Ugandan children's lives will be lost to stunting and wasting by 2025 (Office of the Prime Minister and FANTA Project 2014b). The good news is that for every USD spent on nutrition, Uganda can save US\$30 through improved health and economic benefits (Office of the Prime Minister and FANTA Project 2014a). Increased nutrition financing, therefore, is a strong predictor of future improvements in malnutrition and mortality.

The UNAP policy signals commitment at the highest level and is an important first step in addressing the immediate, underlying, and basic causes of malnutrition (UNICEF 1990). However, if the activities proposed in the plan are to be completed, stakeholders must own and prioritize the UNAP. While some important research on translating nutrition policy to action has been conducted, there are still gaps in knowledge about how to achieve this.

The Pathways to Better Nutrition (PBN) study in Uganda (2013–2015) aimed to close this knowledge gap. The U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project managed the PBN study, which was conducted in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). Over two years, the PBN study collected qualitative and quantitative data on planning,

UNAP Objective Areas

Objective 1: Improve access to and utilization of services related to maternal, infant, and young child nutrition.

Objective 2: Enhance consumption of diverse diets, which comprehensively address food availability, access, use, and sustainability for improved nutrition.

Objective 3: Protect households from the impact of shocks and other vulnerabilities that affect their nutritional status.

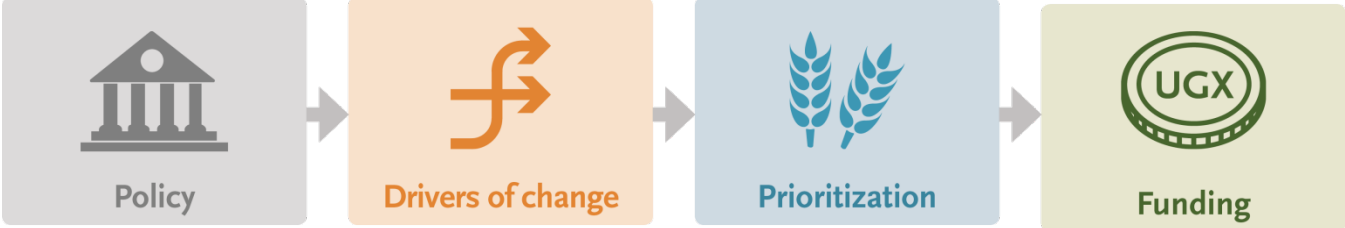
Objective 4: Strengthen the policy, legal, and institutional frameworks; and the capacity to effectively plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate nutrition programs.

Objective 5: Create awareness of and maintain national interests in and commitment to improving and supporting nutrition programs in the country.

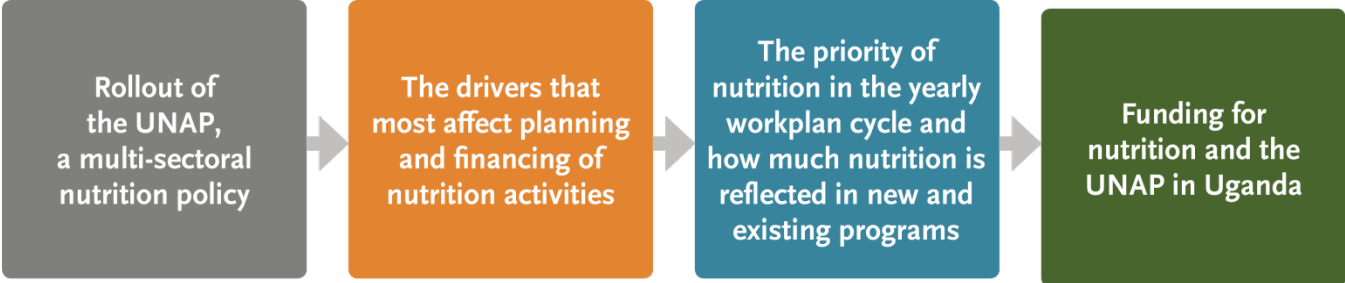
Source: Ugandan Nutrition Action Plan (GoU, 2011)

prioritizing, and funding processes related to nutrition-relevant activities within the context of the UNAP. Using a 360-degree view of the UNAP process, the PBN study interviewed stakeholders from the government, donors, UN groups, CSOs, the private sector, and academia at the national level and in two districts: Lira and Kisoro.

SPRING hypothesized that the **UNAP** would positively influence the **understanding of the policy, enabling processes and drivers, prioritization, and funding** for nutrition over the two years of the study.



To test this, SPRING's PBN study followed these four key study areas to assess—

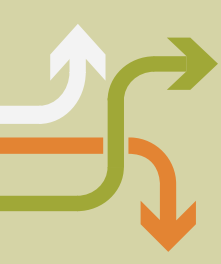


by asking the following questions –



These questions necessitated a longitudinal, mixed-methods approach.

The goal of this study was to document how nutrition is prioritized and how that prioritization, in turn, influences the funding of nutrition. The lessons from this study can help Uganda and similar countries further institutionalize nutrition into the regular policy and planning cycle.



PATHWAYS TO BETTER NUTRITION

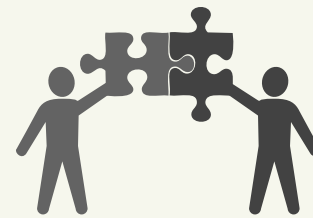
Uganda – Findings

For each study area, we assessed qualitative change by its intensity:



The results of the PBN study show that UNAP has played an important role in **increasing knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors** related to planning and financing for nutrition.

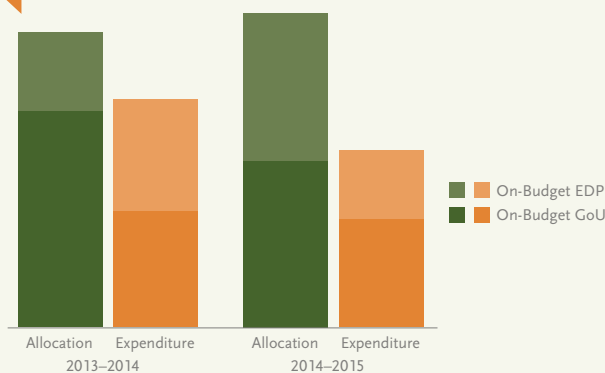
The study found positive changes in perceptions, behaviors, and structures for rolling out the UNAP. This has led to an increase in understanding and penetration of the UNAP into existing nutrition stakeholder organizations. Related to the UNAP rollout, knowledge of key nutrition messages also increased.



The study found six key drivers that the UNAP needs to affect to move prioritization forward. Of these, UNAP has made the most progress in positively affecting three of these drivers (coordination, advocacy, and adaptation to need), primarily by changing perceptions and behaviors, though some key structural and implementation changes occurred in the last six months of the study.

The UNAP has contributed to improved perceptions and behaviors of government, donor, and UN groups related to prioritization of nutrition (particularly within agriculture, gender, and health, and in Kisoro and Lira). While there were anecdotal increases in planned nutrition activities, no systematic increases in planned nutrition activities were found across UNAP stakeholders nationally.

Sector	Gov.	Kisoro & Lira	Donor	UN	Private
Agriculture	↑		↑	↑	
Education	→		↓		
Health	→		↑	↑	
Gender	↑				
Local Government	↑	↑			
Trade & Commerce	↑				→
WASH	N/A—WASH not covered at baseline. Academia and CSO could not be analyzed for change by sector.				



Although sector ministries and government planning agencies have begun to find ways to increase funding for nutrition, these efforts have not yet affected the budget—central ministry allocations for nutrition were flat (8 percent change after adjusting for inflation) between 2013–2014 and 2014–2015.

Recommendations

To capitalize on the positive influence of the UNAP and move toward increased development, funding, and implementation of nutrition activities, we recommend the following actions. SPRING based these recommendations on the findings in this study and refined them by incorporating feedback from stakeholders during national and district dissemination events.

#1 All nutrition stakeholders should **take the long view of scale-up** when planning the next UNAP.



The evidence indicated that national stakeholders strongly respect the goals of the UNAP and its role in scaling up nutrition in Uganda. Several stakeholders mentioned how important it is to sustain commitment to scaling up nutrition and noted that it may take until the end of the second or even the third iteration of UNAP before large-scale changes in undernutrition status are evident.

These observations suggest that nationwide scale-up of nutrition programs will take longer than the full tenure of the next five-year nutrition plan. The GoU should set longer-term goals and targets (e.g., over 15–20 years) for how and when to fully scale up nutrition programs. The next UNAP can take these into account and set intermediate goals for quarterly and yearly progress.

#2 Coordination is not easy. The UNAP Secretariat may want to **consider alliances across stakeholder platforms** to support the UNAP.



At the beginning of the study, stakeholder groups seemed to view UNAP as a theoretical framework only. By the end of data collection, that perception shifted and the UNAP coordination structures appeared to have motivated government and donor stakeholders to participate and collaborate. However, although leadership and participation in coordination have clearly improved, some areas still need improvement. In particular, there was some confusion about how to coordinate UNAP target monitoring and reporting. In addition, at the end of the study, there were questions about how to improve vertical coordination between the national ministries and the districts. District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) members in the two study districts were well aware of the UNAP’s structures and goals, but wanted more nutrition understanding to fulfill their coordination role at the community level.

Coordination between sectors, stakeholders, and government levels is critical to scaling up nutrition. The UNAP Secretariat can better utilize technical partners from academia or strategic partners, such as parliament or CSO representatives, to encourage advocacy and help develop the identity of nutrition in Uganda. These partners can also be leveraged by sector ministries to improve the evidence base (academia) and develop local demand for implementing nutrition activities (CSOs).

#3 GoU should deliberate on **increasing government financial resources for nutrition human resources** and UNAP support structures.



UNAP support structures—such as the secretariat in OPM, technical and coordination committees, and UNAP focal positions within ministries—are essential for oversight and management of nutrition planning in Uganda, from the national to the sub-county level. Lack of human resources was mentioned as a barrier to the full functionality of this support structure. Although improvements were made through increased district training and capacity building by OPM, other human resource challenges across time, sector, and level of government continued to be mentioned, including—

- lack of availability and over-commitment of staff
- inadequate capacity of human resources for nutrition
- high turnover of UNAP focal positions.

To improve the staffing of the UNAP structure in a sustainable way, more government funding to cover necessary human resources must be dedicated. This will provide a consistent resource envelope for these

positions and, by demonstrating GoU's commitment to nutrition activities, may attract more external funding to fund human resources for nutrition.

#4

UNAP stakeholders should **cultivate a mix of high-level, mid-level, and grass-roots advocates** for nutrition who are well versed in the UNAP.



Drivers of change

The Prime Minister is a highly influential champion for nutrition in Uganda; however, in the first year of the study, a number of national-level government stakeholders noted the need to broaden the base of higher-level advocacy to others inside and outside of government. CSO stakeholders emphasized their role in advocating to local leaders and political figures to develop champions for nutrition at that level. In Kisoro and Lira districts, lack of engagement of local political leaders was seen as a missed opportunity to champion the cause of nutrition. Although it occurred after the end of official data collection for this study, a major development that demonstrated the engagement of multiple advocates for nutrition was the launch of the Nutrition Advocacy and Communication Strategy by OPM, USAID, and UNICEF at the 6th Africa Day for Food and Nutrition Security event.

To ensure sustainable commitment to nutrition, advocacy networks must be developed at every level of the system. At the highest level, UNAP stakeholders should educate parliamentarians and other high-level leaders about the importance of nutrition and how the UNAP is helping to reduce malnutrition. Within sectors and external partners, basic nutrition should be incorporated into training packages to win mid-level advocates. At the grass-roots level, investments should be continued to increase awareness of multi-sectoral nutrition through multiple channels—radio, TV, print, etc.—for all target groups. UNAP stakeholders should develop the nutrition awareness of local policy and decision makers to help them understand the importance of nutrition across sectors, especially as it relates to urban development and education. This increased capacity will help generate demand for nutrition activities.

#5

The UNAP secretariat should **approve and implement the UNAP monitoring and evaluation framework** as soon as possible.



Drivers of change

Government stakeholders noted that the Ministry of Health has been developing a set of nutrition indicators for the health management information system, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sport has added some nutrition-sensitive indicators to its information system. However, during the course of the study, there were no coordinated efforts to collect or evaluate these indicators to track the progress of the UNAP. In Kisoro and Lira, no nutrition-related indicators had been included in the Output-based Budget Tool by the end of the study. These issues prompted OPM, with support from development partners, to develop the UNAP monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework in 2015, but this framework was not approved by the end of the study.

The ability to show what Uganda has accomplished in funding for nutrition and improved nutritional status is one of the most important ways to keep this varied and busy group of stakeholders motivated. Final approval and institutionalization of the new M&E framework should take place as soon as possible. The UNAP secretariat should include clearly defined instructions for district and sub-counties on what data to collect and how often to collect it. If possible, the M&E framework should include nutrition financing indicators to improve sustainable tracking systems for financing data and provide benchmarks for allocations and spending for nutrition activities.

#6

UNAP Ministries and EDPs need to **strengthen communication between nutrition focal points and planning offices** at the national and district levels.



Prioritization

When comparing in-depth interviews among nutrition focal persons to the validation interviews with the sector planning (budgeting) offices and departments, it appears that improved communication between these groups could have strengthened planning for nutrition funding. UNAP focal persons are the most appropriate people to lead reporting, decision making, and advocacy for nutrition—but they need support from their planning and budgeting offices to utilize budget data in their regular nutrition work-planning

activities. Another consistent finding over the period of the study at both the national and district levels was a lack of routine information systems that would allow UNAP focal persons to compare information on nutrition outcomes to inform funding.

UNAP Ministries and EDPs should increase opportunities for government nutrition and budget staff to communicate (at the national level, within sectors, and at the district level) to ensure that nutrition focal persons can use regular sector ministry budgets to guide their work planning. It would also be helpful to link routine information system data on nutrition-related indicators (once they are included in these systems) to the Output-based Budgeting Tool at the district level and to Ministry of Financing, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) expenditure tracking at the national level. This will help ensure that adequate resources in support of key nutrition activities are allocated.

#7

UNAP Ministries and EDPs need to **strengthen capacity for local-level planning processes** to better match funding to needs.



Prioritization

The official launch of the *National Nutrition Planning Guidelines for Uganda* (National Planning Authority 2015) signaled an effort to strengthen capacity for sector and local-level planning. This document calls for local governments' needs to be incorporated into sector plans (after local governments have identified and prioritized them). Findings from Kisoro and Lira indicated that the ability to collect, review, and use nutrition indicators for planning improved between the first and second rounds of data collection, but at the sub-county level and below (lower-level local government) these tasks were still challenging. District Nutrition Coordination Committees presented an opportunity to strengthen these processes, but more work is needed to develop a true system of feedback for planning and reporting.

Building on the progress made through district-level UNAP training, further technical support is needed to ensure that district staff and lower-level local government staff have tools to assess and prioritize community needs and authority to fund them. Funding to support the full institutionalization of the new planning guidelines for nutrition should be made available at the local level in support of this goal. In the meantime, EDPs should consider how to support local data collection and situation analyses, as well as planning activities.

#8

EDPs should **align planned activities and funding to UNAP objectives**.



Prioritization

Since the start of the study, several donors and UN groups have increased their alignment with GoU policies (not just UNAP). Nevertheless, at the national level, nearly all external partners still looked to their own internal work plans and strategies before reviewing the UNAP (as did sector ministries and the private sector). The timing of work planning and priority setting varied by agency, and differences in priority-setting cycles often made it difficult for UN groups in particular to be responsive to new GoU priorities on a yearly basis. This also affected alignment of nutrition activities in the two districts SPRING studied.

Given the large amount of donor and UN funding that comes from outside the government budget, external partners should make concerted efforts to ensure that the activities they fund are in line with UNAP goals and objectives, even if planning cycles do not align. Other external partners with greater flexibility (such as CSOs and private sector) should work together with GoU to define a time during the planning cycle to discuss where their help is most needed to support UNAP objectives. For all external funders, timely reporting of plans, allocations, and expenditures to GoU is critical to improve coordination of the nutrition effort.

#9

Include nutrition in each sector's investment and development plans.



Prioritization

We saw tangible markers of improvement over the course of the study in prioritization of nutrition during sector ministry planning, including greater discussion of nutrition in planning meetings, greater use of the UNAP, and greater understanding and advocacy for nutrition. Nevertheless, most sectors still started each planning cycle from their own sector investment plans. The more policies and plans that list nutrition as a priority, the more likely that greater funding for new activities will be allotted. Efforts are already underway

in the agriculture and health sectors to include nutrition as a priority in the next sector investment and development plans.

Commitment to nutrition can be accelerated and sustained within the ministries if nutrition is included as a priority in each sector's investment and development plans, and within each district's development plans.

#10

GoU may want to consider options to **institutionalize funding for nutrition**.

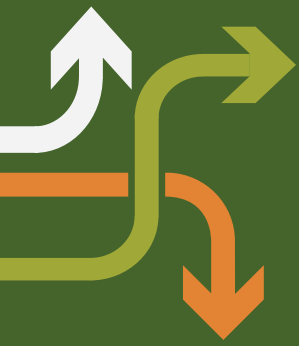


Financing is the ultimate demonstration of commitment to nutrition. However, tracking nutrition funding is difficult because it runs through multiple sectors, and is often funded as one component of larger, integrated vote functions. These challenges mean that the GoU and its partners must make a conscious effort to institutionalize budget and financial tracking systems for nutrition (Pomeroy-Stevens et al. 2015). Dedicated tracking systems will also help GoU identify bottlenecks in disbursement and spending. In the two districts SPRING studied, we heard that some dedicated mechanism for funding nutrition at the district and sub-county levels was needed to ensure effective operation of the nutrition coordination committees. Currently, these two districts rely almost entirely on national government transfers and partner funding for nutrition-related activities.

The study findings suggest several options for institutionalizing funding for nutrition. A first step should be to push for inclusion of the new nutrition planning guidelines in the budget-call circulars each year. Another is to establish a specific budget line-item—although this is a heavily debated option (Lydon et al. 2008)—or apply a tracking code across sectors, as used to track funding related to gender. Sector ministry staff also suggested setting targets for the percentage of a sector's yearly budget that should go toward nutrition. Sector ministries, the MoFPED, and OPM will need to discuss which options would work best with the existing budget tracking and funding systems.

References

- Government of Uganda. 2011. *Uganda Nutrition Action Plan 2011-2016: Scaling Up Multi-Sectoral Efforts to Establish a Strong Nutrition Foundation for Uganda's Development*. Kampala: Government of Uganda.
- Levinson, F. James, Yarlini Balarajan, and Alessandra Marini. 2013. *Addressing Malnutrition Multisectorally: What Have We Learned from Recent International Experience?* New York, NY: UNICEF, MDGF.
http://www.aecid.es/CentroDocumentacion/Documentos/Divulgacion/Addressing_malnutrition_multisectorally_MDG_F_Item1_Final-links.pdf.
- National Planning Authority. 2015. *The National Nutrition Planning Guidelines for Uganda*. Kampala, Uganda: Government of Uganda.
- Office of the Prime Minister, and FANTA Project. 2014a. *Economic Development and Nutrition Fact Sheet. Malnutrition in Uganda: We've Already Paid Too High a Price*. Kampala, Uganda: Office of the Prime Minister, USAID FANTA Project.
- . 2014b. Health and Nutrition Fact Sheet. *Malnutrition in Uganda: We've Already Paid Too High a Price*. Kampala, Uganda: Office of the Prime Minister, USAID FANTA Project.
- . 2014c. Media and Nutrition Fact Sheet. *Working Together for the Future of Uganda*. Kampala, Uganda: Office of the Prime Minister, USAID FANTA Project.
- UNICEF. 1990. *Strategy for Improved Nutrition of Children and Women in Developing Countries*. JC 27/ UNICEF-WHO/89.4. Policy Review Paper E/ICEF/1990/1.6. New York, NY: UNICEF.



ADDITIONAL PBN DOCUMENTS

To access the full complement of PBN reports, briefs, and snapshots, please go to www.spring-nutrition.org/pbn

ABOUT SPRING

The Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project is a five-year USAID-funded cooperative agreement to strengthen global and country efforts to scale up high-impact nutrition practices and policies and improve maternal and child nutrition outcomes. The project is managed by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., with partners Helen Keller International, The Manoff Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute.

SPRING

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
1616 Fort Myer Drive, 16th Floor
Arlington, VA 22209 USA

Tel: 703-528-7474

Fax: 703-528-7480

Email: info@spring-nutrition.org

Web: www.spring-nutrition.org