



May 2016

Nutrition for Growth: Sierra Leone's progress on its commitments 3 years later

In 2013, at the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in London¹, leaders from governments, international organisations, private sector and the civil society gathered to place nutrition at the centre of the global development agenda. 94 stakeholders willing to urgently scale up nutrition endorsed the Global Nutrition for Growth Compact and respectively committed to their own specific targets, with the overall objective to prevent 20 million children from being stunted and to save 1.7 million lives by 2020.

As a signatory to the Compact², the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) recognised malnutrition as a major cause of the high maternal and infant mortality rate in the country and committed to:

- Reduce the prevalence of stunting from 25.7% to 11.7% and wasting from 6.9% to 2% by 2020, while increasing exclusive breastfeeding from 32% to 70%;
- Finalize and endorse the five year Nutrition and Food Security costed plan by July 2013 and prioritize fundraising to ensure successful implementation;
- Increase the Government's financial allocation to nutrition and food security and create a specific budget line for nutrition in budgets for the Ministries of Health and Sanitation, Agriculture and other relevant ministries;
- Establish legal frameworks and enforce the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and food fortification;
- Scale up community support networks for nutrition and food security.

The GoSL developed and adopted the Food and Nutrition Security Implementation Plan (FNSIP) for years 2013 to 2017. The SUN Secretariat coordinated the elaboration of the plan in collaboration with partners from civil society, donors and United Nations agencies. The FNSIP aims at addressing all nutrition-related sectors, such as health, food security, water, sanitation, hygiene, and education, and includes a wide range of nutrition-sensitive as well as nutrition-specific interventions.

In May 2014, a year after the GoSL committed to scale up nutrition at the N4G Summit, Sierra Leone was hit by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak. Analysing progress on funding for nutrition since 2013 thus has to be made in the light of this health emergency and the considerable means required to address it. The GoSL had to put substantial efforts in the EVD emergency response, which inevitably resulted in a prioritisation of funding for EVD related activities, at the detriment of other sectors such as nutrition.

¹ <http://scalingupnutrition.org/news/an-historic-moment-for-nutrition-nutrition-for-growth-summit-in-london#.VzXNGPkrI2w>

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248760/Endorserscompact_update7_10_2013.pdf

Nutrition targets' commitment

Reducing the prevalence of stunting from 25.7% to 11.7% and wasting from 6.9% to 2% by 2020, while increasing exclusive breastfeeding from 32% to 70%.

		2010 (SMART ³)		2014 (SMART ⁴)	
		Global	Severe	Global	Severe
Wasting	<5	6.9%	0.9%	4.7%	1.0%
	<2	N/A		7.8%	1.8%
Stunting	<5	34.1%	9.5%	28.8%	7.8%
	<2	25.7%	N/A	26.7%	6.8%
Exclusive breastfeeding ⁵		32% ⁶		58.8%	

Overall, from 2010 to 2014, stunting and wasting rates improved, except for severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and stunting among children under-two, whose rates increased from 0.9% to 1.0% and from 25.7% to 26.7%, respectively⁷. Stunting among children under-five decreased from 34.1% to 28.8% and from 9.5% to 7.8% for severe stunting. During the same period, wasting among children under-five decreased from 6.9% to 4.7%, and exclusive breastfeeding for children from 0 to 6 months significantly improved from 32% to 58.8%⁸.

Additional efforts are now needed to build on this progress towards scaling up nutrition and to reach the N4G targets by 2020. The last National Nutrition Survey was conducted in 2014, and the impact of the EVD outbreak on the nutrition situation is still unknown. Given that information is essential to assess the progress made towards these targets, the lack of accurate data on children's nutritional status is a major issue that needs to be addressed.

Recommendations

While we acknowledge the efforts to address the malnutrition issue and to collect data, as well as the undeniable impact the Ebola outbreak had on the country, we strongly recommend that the GoSL:

1. **Conduct annual National Nutrition Surveys, using alternatively SMART and SQUEAC methodologies**, with support from partners, to enable data comparison over the years and thus progress monitoring;
2. **Ensure that National Nutrition Surveys always report on the same indicators to enable trend analysis over the years.** Surveys should always report on exclusive breastfeeding rates in children from 0 to 6 months and on global acute malnutrition, SAM, stunting and severe stunting in children under-five, with disaggregated data for children under-two;
3. **Align nutrition targets on the World Health Assembly timeline**, by setting targets for 2025, in addition to mid-term targets aligned with the period of implementation of the new FNSIP when it is developed⁹;
4. **Include the new nutrition targets in the next FNSIP when it is developed**, along with a detailed planning of activities to reach these targets and a monitoring and implementation plan.

³ Source: National Nutrition Survey SMART 2010. All figures in CI 95%.

⁴ Source: National Nutrition Survey SMART 2014. All figures in CI 95%.

⁵ Infants under 6 months.

⁶ No data on breastfeeding in the SMART 2010. Source for 2010 breastfeeding rates: Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF-Sierra Leone. 2011. Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010, Final Report. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF-Sierra Leone. The DHS 2013 uses the same figure (32%).

⁷ All confidence intervals for wasting and stunting rates in this paragraph are 95%.

⁸ Sources: National Nutrition Survey SMART 2010 and National Nutrition Survey SMART 2014.

⁹ For instance, if the new FNSIP implementation period is 2018-2015, nutrition targets should be set for 2018 and 2025.

Financial commitments

Finalize and endorse the five year Nutrition and Food Security costed plan by July 2013 and prioritize fundraising to ensure successful implementation & Increase the Government's financial allocation to nutrition and food security and create a specific budget line for nutrition in budgets for the Ministries of Health and Sanitation, Agriculture and other relevant ministries.

The costed plan

The GoSL successfully finalised and endorsed a costed plan for the FNSIP¹⁰. The total cost for five years was estimated at \$117.2million – with an \$81 million funding gap identified. 46.7% of funds were dedicated to nutrition-specific interventions, 19.8% to nutrition-sensitive interventions and 33.5% to strengthening governance.

Additional efforts were put on communication activities as the SUN movement summarised the costed plan in an infographics document. **However, the FNSIP only includes a summary**, and does not provide information on how the costs are estimated or funded. As of May 2016, the FNSIP has not been monitored through the mid-term, the costed plan could not be monitored and no information is available on progress made to fill the funding gap¹¹.

Nutrition budget lines and line ministries' involvement in nutrition¹²

Before the EVD outbreak, the GoSL gathered line ministries¹³ through the SUN movement to initiate discussions on budget lines for nutrition. Though the EVD outbreak interrupted the process, several positive outcomes can be highlighted.

A budget line for nutrition was created in 2014 within the budget of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) and was followed by an improvement in terms of expenditure recording¹⁴, and thus accountability, for those activities. This is a significant step towards an improved accountability on government expenditure for nutrition in Sierra Leone.

A budget line was also created in 2014 within the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food security (MAFFS). However, activities meant to be funded by this line were not clearly determined and as a consequence **no activity was recorded against it so far¹⁵**.

Three years after the N4G Summit, line ministries are better involved in nutrition related issues, for instance through their participation to SUN meetings. Although budget lines for nutrition were not created for other line ministries than MoHS and MAFFS, it is important to note that the absence of specific reference to the ministries concerned may have been a barrier to taking on the commitment.

Additional efforts are now needed to strengthen accountability for government expenditure on nutrition through an improved recording of all nutrition-related activities. The accountability for the FNSIP would be significantly improved if activities planned in it were associated with activity codes that Ministries,

¹⁰ Because of the Ebola outbreak, the official launch of the FNSIP by the Vice-President was postponed to July 2015.

¹¹ The SUN Secretariat reported that the FNSIP mid-term review was initially planned for May 2016. However, at the time of the finalisation of this briefing paper (June 2016) the date was not set yet.

¹² For more details, see *2013-2016: The trends of Government funding for nutrition in Sierra Leone, briefing paper*.

¹³ Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS), Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), Ministry of Social welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MoSWGCA).

¹⁴ Oxford Policy Management, *Tracking government expenditure on nutrition in Sierra Leone, Piloting the SUN three step approach*, Alex Jones, May 2016

¹⁵ Ibid.

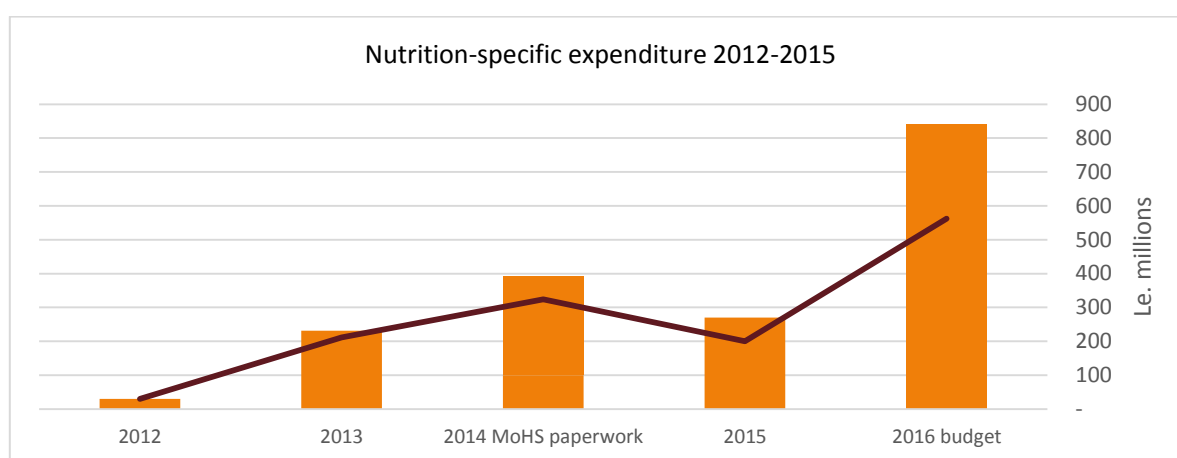
Departments and Agencies (MDAs) could use to record them. This would considerably facilitate the FNSIP's monitoring, since activities would be reflected in the budget.

The line ministries' contribution to nutrition still needs to be strengthened. As line ministries address issues related to the underlying causes of undernutrition and are responsible for the implementation of a number of interventions within the FNSIP, nutrition should be mainstreamed within their policy documents and strategic plans.

Despite the direct link between nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH)¹⁶ – according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 50% of cases of child undernutrition are the result of repeated diarrhoea and intestinal infections caused by poor sanitation and hygiene conditions or lack of safe water¹⁷ – **the Ministry of Water Resources¹⁸ (MoWR) has no nutrition-sensitive policy document**, and does not clearly appear in the FNSIP as a line ministry responsible for its implementation.

Government funding for nutrition

Compared to the very low level of funding for nutrition specific activities in 2012, the GoSL made considerable efforts towards that aim from 2013¹⁹. The expenditure followed a significant growth in 2013, a year after the country joined the SUN movement. While this increase from USD7,000 in 2012 to 44,000 in 2015 reflects the GoSL's will to make nutrition-specific activities a higher priority, it is important to note that it seems high because of the low baseline of 2012, when government funding for these interventions was very limited²⁰. In addition, while the 2016 budget plans to triple funding for nutrition-specific activities compared to 2015, **in May 2016 no funds have been released yet for the year²¹.** The GoSL must urgently address this issue to enable an effective implementation of planned nutrition-specific activities.



Overall, nutrition-sensitive interventions did not benefit from the same scale up. Though GoSL funding for nutrition-sensitive activities grew by 21% from 2012 to 2015, it remains close to 5% of total government

¹⁶ For detailed explanations on the impact of poor WaSH on the nutritional status, see: ACF International, *Greater investment in water, sanitation and hygiene, is key to the fight against undernutrition*, 2014.

http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/sites/default/files/publications/fichiers/c1_plaidoyer_importance_eha.pdf

¹⁷ Source: World Health Organisation, *Safer water, better health: costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health*, 2008. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596435_eng

¹⁸ When the FNSIP was developed in 2013, the MoWR did not exist, but there was a Water services department within the Ministry of Energy and Power. This department was not clearly identified as an implementer in the FNSIP, as there is no mention of it in the M&E plan.

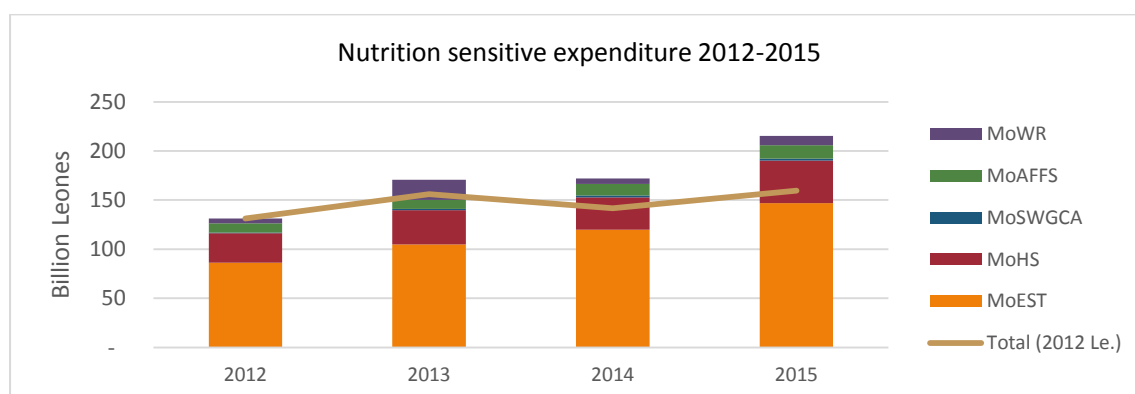
¹⁹ *Tracking government expenditure on nutrition in Sierra Leone, Piloting the SUN three step approach*, op. cit.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ This late disbursement issue is not specific to nutrition. In May 2016, none of the ministries had yet received any funds from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

expenditure over the years²². This shows that despite the efforts to fund these activities, the priority given has not changed, as it does not represent a higher proportion of what the GoSL choses to finance each year.

Funding for nutrition activities should be reflected in the line ministries' budgets. **While from 2013 to 2015 expenditure on nutrition have increased within MoEST (from 41% to 45%) and MoSWGCA (from 51% to 67%), it remained constant in MAFFS (around 75%) and decreased within MoHS (from 88% to 36%)²³.** However, those figures must be treated with caution. The scope of nutrition-sensitive activities is not as clear as the nutrition-specific scope. As a result, tracking expenditure on those activities is a complex task whose findings are less precise than for nutrition-specific activities and that will need improvement over the years through new budget analyses.



Recommendations

While we acknowledge that GoSL fulfilled its commitment on the endorsement of the costed plan, we recognise that given that nutrition is a high priority for GoSL, this commitment can be reinforced to bring more significant change, and we strongly recommend the GoSL to:

5. **Reinforce the existing Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Plan** for the FNSIP through a joint revision and implementation by all line ministries' stakeholders and the creation of a multisectorial M&E taskforce at national and district levels with clear roles and responsibilities;
6. **Include an annual review of the costed plan** in the M&E Plan in order to assess and monitor needs for funding for a successful implementation of the FNSIP.

While we acknowledge the GoSL's efforts to initiate a discussion for the creation of budget lines for nutrition, and the challenges posed by the EVD outbreak, we strongly recommend that the GoSL, with support from the SUN movement:

7. **Gather line ministries to create awareness among stakeholders on the multifaceted aspect of malnutrition and on the need to address it through a cross-sectoral approach** requesting the involvement and cooperation of all line ministries;
8. **Consider means of mainstreaming nutrition within line ministries, such as the development of nutrition-sensitive policies** that include nutrition activities and indicators;
9. **Restart the discussions on the creation of budget lines for nutrition** within the budgets of MoEST and MoSWGCA and conduct an exercise to identify nutrition-sensitive interventions within these two ministries' policies to justify the creation of budget lines for nutrition;

²² 3,91% in 2012, 5,11% in 2013, 4,29% in 2014 and 4,81% in 2015. Source: *Tracking government expenditure on nutrition in Sierra Leone, Piloting the SUN three step approach*, op. cit.

²³ In 2015 the MoHS received huge funds from government under the budget line "Management Services Programmes". The specific activities for this line were not quantified in this study. However they must have served the MoHS numerous management activities including for both nutrition sensitive and specific. In view of this, when compared to 2014, the total expenditure of the MoHS in 2015 reflects a lower proportion of funds spent for both nutrition sensitive and specific.

10. **Give specific attention to mainstreaming nutrition within the MoWR**, to strengthen the understanding of the link between malnutrition and WaSH and engage in bilateral discussions on how MoWR contributes to nutrition. A nutrition-sensitive policy for the MoWR has to be developed accordingly, and the next FNSIP should integrate the MoWR as a line ministry. Finally, the creation of a budget line dedicated to the implementation of nutrition activities identified should be considered.

While we acknowledge that for the last two years funding were prioritised for the EVD emergency response, thus impeding the GoSL's efforts in increasing financial allocation to nutrition and food security, we strongly recommend that the GoSL take the opportunity of the starting EVD recovery phase to:

11. **Reinforce efforts to increase financial allocation for nutrition and food security** as it contributes to reaching the N4G targets on children's nutritional status by 2020, and as recommended by the Decade of Action on Nutrition adopted by the 69th World Health Assembly²⁴;
12. **Monitor nutrition funding, including keeping an accurate annual record of line ministries' staff providing nutrition related services**, to ensure an improved budget transparency that facilitates budget tracking;
13. **Make public the information on nutrition funding**, by including nutrition related budget lines in the annual budget profiles released on the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) website.

Policy commitment

Establish legal frameworks and enforce the Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and food fortification.

The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (CMBS) was adopted in 1981 by the 34th World Health Assembly (WHA)²⁵ who urged all member States to translate it into national legislation. In 2010, a Core Code Committee for the CMBS was established in Sierra Leone – now under the Directorate of Food and Nutrition (DFN) – gathering stakeholders from several ministries and UN agencies.

In 2011, the Committee elaborated a position paper to advocate for the endorsement of the CMBS. The position paper was presented to the MoHS Permanent Secretary Office but unfortunately there have been frequent personnel changes in this position over the years, hence **no step forward was taken despite the renewed efforts by the Committee.** For the Cabinet to authorise the CMBS regulation to be drafted, presented to Parliament and adopted, it is now essential that the Permanent Secretary Office finalises and submits the CMBS Cabinet Paper to the Minister of Health and Sanitation.

This is a crucial step towards the enforcement of the CMBS in Sierra Leone. Several factors provide an enabling environment for the CMBS' endorsement: the EVD recovery phase includes nutrition in its scope; the Directorate of Food and Nutrition demonstrates a strong leadership on CMBS issues; international health partners are involved in the process. **This opportunity must be seized to revive the process and particular efforts will be needed on communication** to avoid all forms of resistance based on a misunderstanding of the implication of the CMBS endorsement²⁶.

²⁴ http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA69/A69_ACONF5Rev1-en.pdf

²⁵ Resolution WHA 34.22

²⁶ For more details on the importance of communication in the process of endorsing the CMBS at national level, see: Sokol E, Aguayo V, Clark D. *Protecting Breastfeeding in West and Central Africa: 25 Years Implementing the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*, UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa, 2007.

Recommendations

While we acknowledge the efforts of the Core Code Committee for the endorsement of the CMBS, we recommend that urgent action is taken:

14. By **the MoHS Permanent Secretary Office, to finalise the position paper** and submit it to the Minister of Health and Sanitation for onward presentation to the Cabinet for validation and authorisation to draft the Sierra Leone CMBS regulation;
15. By **the Cabinet to solicit the presentation of the position paper from the Minister of Health and Sanitation and to give its authorisation** to draft the CMBS regulation.

We also recommend that:

16. **The Health Parliamentary Committee members solicit the MoHS** to request that the drafted regulation is presented to Parliament by 2017;
17. **The MoHS and the Core Code Committee continue and strengthen their advocacy** for the CMBS endorsement by Parliament, with the SUN Secretariat support and cooperation.

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Scale up community support networks for nutrition and food security.

Community support networks play an important role in nutrition and food security in Sierra Leone. **During the EVD outbreak, communities have proven to be key agents in addressing nutrition related issues, thanks to the efforts the GoSL made to support them.** The protocol on Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) was adapted to the EVD context, and the ‘no touch policy’ was applied to the detection and management of undernutrition by community health workers (CHWs), through visual screening. As a second step, mothers were then involved in measuring the Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) of their children to detect and self-refer to the appropriate structure for treatment under the supervision of CHWs.

Community support networks for nutrition and food security have benefited from a significant scale up, accordingly to the commitment that the GoSL took in 2013. **Mother to mother support groups** – key actors within the communities for nutrition related issues – were **increased from 3,318 in 2013 to 5,954 in May 2016,** among which 20% approximately have a food demonstration garden²⁷.

In 4 out of 13 districts the MAFFS, with the support of district nutritionists, trained agriculture community networks – such as district agriculture officers, extension workers and farmer field school facilitators – on food and nutrition security, to support them in communication of basic nutrition messages to farmers²⁸.

3,300 market women, involved in community mobilisation, were trained by a local partner NGO on nutrition and health related issues with the purpose of cascading key messages within their communities²⁹.

Recommendations

Recognizing the strides made to scale up community support networks, we encourage the GoSL to maintain these efforts by:

18. **Continuing to create mother to mother support groups, and to support the development of food demonstration gardens and vegetable production** within those groups;

²⁷ Source: Directorate of Food and Nutrition, MoHS.

²⁸ Source: MAFFS.

²⁹ Source: MAFFS.

19. **Replicating, to the remaining districts, trainings on nutrition and food security** for agriculture community networks;
20. **Ensuring a follow up with agriculture community networks and market women** to make this capacity building sustainable and to ensure continued involvement of the communities through renewed efforts from the GoSL in bringing support and motivation.

General recommendations for N4G commitments

The DFN made tremendous efforts to monitor the N4G commitments to date, gathering information from the different line ministries, with the coordination and support of the SUN Secretariat. **However, a stronger monitoring and reporting system is essential to support the DFN in this work and to enable the GoSL to accurately assess the progress** made and adapt accordingly to reach the N4G targets.

21. **We strongly encourage the GoSL to develop a monitoring system of the N4G commitments that includes communities and citizens for an improved accountability** and allocate necessary human resources for it with the means for its implementation, to ensure a proper follow up on the commitments' progress;
22. **We strongly encourage the GoSL to take SMART and ambitious commitments** at the next N4G Summit;
23. **We strongly encourage the civil society to support the GoSL in its efforts to scale up nutrition in Sierra Leone**, by addressing needs and gaps identified by the government, and through an improved coordination in programmes development and implementation.