

# Empowering Women and Girls to Improve Nutrition: Building a Sisterhood of Success



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# Forward



**Mary Robinson,**  
President, Mary Robinson  
Foundation – Climate  
Justice and SUN Movement  
Lead Group Member

Malnutrition currently affects one in two people on the planet and is the underlying cause of 45% of deaths in children under the age of five. Global trends including population growth, changing diets, inequality and climate change risk exacerbating this problem. Women are both disproportionately affected by malnutrition (60% of the world's 800 million malnourished people are women) and critical actors in finding lasting solutions<sup>1</sup>, hence the value of this edition of *Scaling Up Nutrition in Practice* as it shines a light on strategies that SUN Countries are adopting to integrate gender equality into their nutrition responses.

The impacts of climate change on food and nutrition security are exacerbating existing inequalities in access to resources, especially for women who are primarily responsible for food production and for feeding their families. This is contributing to an injustice whereby the people who have contributed least to the causes of climate change are already suffering disproportionately from its impact, which is undermining their right to food, their health and well-being.

Nutrition justice will only be achieved when women are empowered and when policies and programmes are gender responsive. Even though women farmers are responsible for between 60 and 80 per cent of food production in developing countries<sup>2</sup>, their rights and socioeconomic status are rarely equal to those of men, and this disempowerment undermines their ability to attain food and nutritional security. When women are empowered, not only do they become more productive, as studies have shown, but as the main source of food for their children, they give future generations a better start in life. Hunger, nutrition and climate justice are development challenges that cannot be effectively addressed without explicitly dealing with their interconnectedness. This is the core of a climate justice approach – which links human rights, development and climate change to deliver people centred responses.

The case studies presented here bring to life the experiences of those implementing gender responsive nutrition actions in SUN Countries. They present activities and approaches that other SUN members can be inspired by to address immediate nutrition needs while progressing women's social and economic empowerment. It is encouraging to see the positive steps that have been taken by civil society and government in relation to gender equality within their nutrition strategies, recognising the value of addressing women's empowerment within the work of the SUN Movement. I hope these case studies encourage and inform all who read them, as they have me and I encourage all involved in the SUN Movement to continue to place women at the centre of all nutrition strategies.



<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secretary-General - Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development accessed at <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp224568.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> FAO's The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development.

# Introduction

This series of briefings – entitled *Scaling Up Nutrition in Practice* - presents the experiences of SUN Country governments, and other national stakeholders, as they scale up their efforts to ensure all people enjoy good nutrition. Each briefing in the series explores themes selected by SUN Country Government Focal Points for discussion during their quarterly meetings.

## The importance of empowering women and girls in national efforts to scale up nutrition

As evidence has long suggested, gender inequality can be a cause as well as an effect of hunger and malnutrition. Not surprisingly, higher levels of gender discrimination are associated with higher levels of both acute and chronic undernutrition.<sup>3,4</sup> Gender and nutrition are not stand-alone issues with some experts considering women to be the nexus of the agriculture, health and nutrition sectors.<sup>5</sup>

Studies have shown that when women's incomes rise they tend to invest more in the nutrition, education, and health of their family, causing a ripple effect that can benefit entire communities— *Higher female earnings and bargaining power translate into greater investment in children's education, health and nutrition, which leads to economic growth in the long term.*<sup>7</sup>

But as the stories that follow will show, the virtuous circle starts with the girl child. In 2012, there were 1.2 billion adolescents in the world. Adolescence is a time of rapid physical growth, second only to the first year after birth. During adolescence, children gain up to 50% of their adult weight and skeletal mass and more than 20% of their adult height.<sup>8</sup> Poor nutrition during adolescence will not only affect adult body size, resulting in shortness or thinness<sup>9</sup>, but may also affect the nutritional status of any children born to mothers who were malnourished during adolescence. This is particularly important for the estimated 10 million girls under the age of 18 who get married each year and the 16 million adolescent girls who give birth each year.<sup>10,11,12</sup>

**A study from as early as 2000 shows that women's status and improvements in women's education are associated with positive impacts on nutritional status. The study estimates that improvements in women's status account for 11.61% of global reductions in the proportion of children who are underweight, and improvements in women's education secondary enrolments account for 43.01% of global reductions in the proportion of children who are underweight. Taken together, the two indicators accounted for over half of the reductions in child underweight.<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> Mucha, N. (2012). "Enabling and equipping women to improve nutrition." Briefing Paper no. 16, Bread for the World Institute, Washington D.C.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP (2011). "Human Development Report 2011. Sustainability and Equity; A Better Future for All." New York.

<sup>5</sup> IFPRI (2011). "Agriculture, nutrition, health; exploiting the links." Washington DC.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, L., and L. Haddad. (2000). Explaining child malnutrition in developing countries. A cross-country analysis. Research Report 111. Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute referenced in UNICEF December (2011). Gender Influences On Child Survival, Health And Nutrition: A Narrative Review, pg14.

<sup>7</sup> Department for International Development (DFID) (2010), Agenda 2010 – The turning point on poverty: background paper on gender, DFID, London.

<sup>8</sup> Meier, Paul R et al.(2003) "Prevention of Iron Deficiency Anemia in Adolescent and Adult Pregnancies." Clinical Medicine and Research 1.1: 29–36, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1069018/>

<sup>9</sup> WHO (2006) Adolescent Nutrition: A Review of the situation in selected South-East Asian countries, World Health Organization, New Delhi.

<sup>10</sup> The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (2012). 'Reaching child brides'. Knowledge Summary #22, World Health Organization, [www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/summaries/ks22.pdf](http://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/summaries/ks22.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> WHO (2014) 'Adolescent pregnancy', WHO factsheet no 364, [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/)

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from Save the Children (2015). Adolescent Nutrition: Policy and Programming in SUN+ Countries.

## Women and girl's empowerment in SUN Countries

The importance of eliminating child marriage and adolescent pregnancy is key to ensuring every girl and woman can reach her full potential. Being a child mother slows and stunts the growth of a girl. It reduces education potential and future life opportunities – such as employment. Evidence shows that child mothers and their newborn children have increased risks of complications and mortality.<sup>13</sup>

The role of women as small holder farmers and food producers is also critical. Women make important contributions to the agricultural and rural economies of all regions of the world – with women comprising at least 50% of the labour force in Asia and Africa.<sup>14</sup> Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities can include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. When women have more control over household resources, families are healthier, better educated, and have more access to more nutritious foods.

Women play a decisive role in the food security, health and nutrition of their families and this should be taken into account in the design and targeting of all food security and nutrition actions. While the determinants of good nutrition and health are complex, there are several areas where changes to policy, legislation and planning can play a critical role in empowering women to act as key agents of change for improved nutrition.

These include:

- protecting girl children from early marriage and pregnancy
- safeguarding and increasing women's access to, and control over, incomes and other resources
- exploring innovative approaches to reducing women's time constraints
- enhancing women's understanding of good nutrition
- increasing women's involvement in decision making at all levels



ENGAGE • INSPIRE • INVEST

### Empower women as key agents of change for nutrition with better policies and legislation to:

- protect from child marriage and pregnancy
- increase access and control of income and resources
- reduce time constraints
- enhance knowledge about good nutrition
- increase involvement in decision making at all levels



<sup>13</sup> 2014 World Health Statistics.

<sup>14</sup> FAO. 2010a. Roles of women in agriculture. Prepared by the SOFA team and Cheryl Doss. Rome.



**Asma Lateef,**  
Director-Bread for  
the World Institute  
and Member of the  
SUN Movement Civil  
Society Network  
Steering Committee

## As Women Rise, Malnutrition Falls

*“There is growing evidence that women’s empowerment is key to addressing hunger and malnutrition. Good disaggregated data is critical to knowing whether we are making progress on both women’s empowerment and improved nutrition outcomes.”*

The relationship between women’s empowerment and progress against child malnutrition is highlighted in Bread for the World’s 2015 Hunger Report which includes an interactive tool that pairs stunting rates of children under 5 in low- and middle-income countries with indicators for women’s health, education, human rights, and gender equality. This innovative tool illustrates that stunting rates are lower in countries where women are empowered.

Visit <http://hungerreport.org/2015/empowerment-to-improve-nutrition/> to customize your own charts highlighting the relationship between stunting and other indicators of women’s empowerment.

This issue of *Scaling Up Nutrition in Practice* recounts the ways in which actors in several SUN countries are focusing on women and girls’ empowerment as a part of national efforts to support nutrition. Representatives of government, civil society and international organisations from Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Malawi, Myanmar and Zimbabwe have shared their experiences. Stories of these countries shed light on the efforts being made at the country level to empower women and girls through existing national policies, plans and programmes tailored to their context.

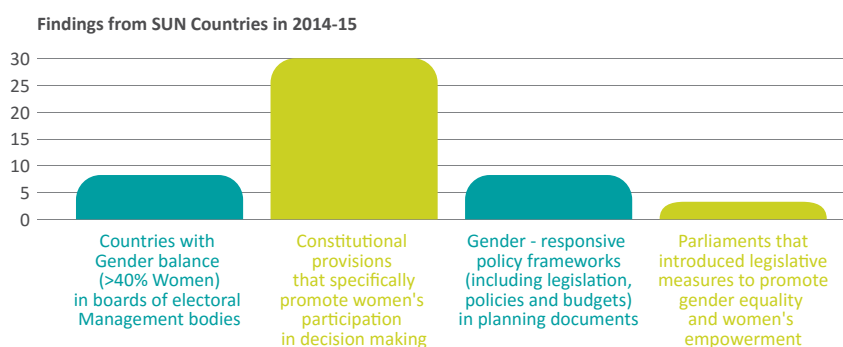
In **Touba, Senegal**, existing religious community structures provide a platform for empowering women as implementers of essential actions to improve nutrition. In **Sierra Leone**, women are organized through mother-to-mother support groups and are witnessing gradual improvements in their nutritional status and infant feeding. With the assistance of development partners and the innovative Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index, **Tajikistan** is building capacity among women to not only improve household farming but also to generate income, increase control of assets and improve the nutrition of their families. In **Malawi**, leaders - from the president to traditional and religious leaders to parents – are taking on

gender inequality and in particular, working at all levels to stop child marriage and improve girls education. **Zimbabwe** highlighted the importance of involving community support groups, village health workers and men in efforts to strengthen women’s ability to learn, share and lead.

This brief also captures insights from other stakeholders across the Movement. Based on a recent study amongst its members, the **SUN Civil Society Alliance in Lao PDR** has simple yet effective recommendations to share on programming for empowering women and improving nutrition. In **Myanmar**, civil society is using the findings from its Maternal and Child Cash Transfer pilot to further demonstrate that nutrition-sensitive cash transfers delivered to women are amongst the most impactful interventions to reduce stunting. **Alive and Thrive**, an initiative that helps countries to implement infant and young child feeding interventions at scale reflects on the power of emotive messaging that can model a better future for girls and their mothers.

Through a distinct set of approaches and actors, SUN Countries are challenging underlying assumptions and norms in society to eradicate gender discrimination and break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. Their stories can hopefully inspire others seeking to do the same.

### Women’s Empowerment in SUN Countries at a Glance



Data source: 2014 UN Women Data companion

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# Country Articles



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# SENEGAL

## Building on what works: empowering women through religious community-based associations



**Mrs Sokhna Mame Bousso Mbacke,**  
*Director of the community-based organisation Wilaya in Touba and coordinator of the project Jiggen Ak Domam ("mother-child") carried out under the National Scaling Up Nutrition Programme*

*"Having a woman leader, who engages broad community participation, is a guarantee of success for actions against malnutrition".*

**Mrs Sokhna Mame Bousso Mbacke**



**Néné Hawa SY,**  
*Thies Regional Office Executive Head Fight Against Malnutrition Unit (cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition)*

Touba, Senegal's second most densely populated city, offers a compelling illustration of the way that the country is scaling up nutrition through the empowerment of women. Touba, often recognized as Senegal's religious centre, is home to the historic headquarters of the Muslim Mouride brotherhood, the most influential of the four main Muslim brotherhoods in Senegal. In Touba, and most of Senegal, religious and political powers are strongly interconnected. An example of this can be found in the dahira structure which are Mouride religious associations established in urban areas to provide a space for communication and mutual support. Dahiras have historically played an important role in integrating migrants or newcomers from rural areas. The first Mouride dahiras formed in Dakar in the 1940s and continue to play a very prominent role in community life. The dahiras of Touba offer a space for women and girls to actively participate in addressing economic, social and health issues.

Founded in 1987, Wilaya is a community-based structure that has grown to include over 40 dahiras in Touba. From its founding, Wilaya has acted as a forum through which women played leadership roles in implementing hygiene actions and awareness-raising campaigns for health issues. Led by Mrs. Sokhna Mame Bousso Mbacké, Wilaya plays a major role in

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>19.2%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>15.9%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>37.5%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>8.9%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>1.5%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>57.5%</b>

*Source: DHS\*\* continue (EDS-Continue 2012-2013). DHS\*\*s. Calverton, Maryland, USA: ANSD et ICF International., 2013 (and additional analysis).*

implementing the activities set out in National Scaling Up Nutrition Programme.

Wilaya is supported by the Fight Against Malnutrition Unit (Cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition), housed in the Office of the Prime Minister, which coordinates all nutrition relevant projects and oversees the national nutrition policy implementation. Services provided by Wilaya to improve the nutritional status of communities

include monitoring children's weight, acute malnutrition screening, talks and social mobilisation of mothers and other community members, local food processing and availability, motivating community actors through economic activities (fabrics and food trade) and promoting nutrition education in schools. Wilaya has also been instrumental in establishing a health insurance scheme called Gaindé Fatma that provides health care to individuals and families at lower cost.

**Senegal's National Scaling Up Nutrition Programme relies on 18 community-based implementing structures to roll out its activities targeting pregnant and lactating women as well as children under 5 years of age.**

The engagement of religious and community leaders, including the General Caliph of Mourides, as nutrition champions has been essential to Wilaya's success. These leaders were all sensitised on the importance of nutrition and trained to help raise awareness within their communities. These nutrition champions also helped to foster collaboration amongst local administrative, religious, and health stakeholders (sub-prefect officials, presidents of the rural council, village chiefs, district medical officers, and heads of local medical centers).

### Collaborative activities organised by the dahira

#### Activities within the framework of the Scaling Up Nutrition Programme:

- Communicate and disseminate key messages about family nutrition and health behaviors
- Nutrition support to vulnerable individuals and households
- Support community nutrition service delivery (mothers and child-care workers' mobilisation, monitoring children's weight, acute malnutrition screening, talks, etc.)

#### Activities in cooperation with other sectors of development:

- Follow-up meetings with the Chamber of Commerce in relation to income-generating activities (local cereals processing and commercialisation; soap production; dyeing; etc.)
- Exchanges with the donor of the Wilaya (COFENAC Bank)
- Strengthening learning among children through the creation of schools



© Fight Against Malnutrition Unit (cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition)

Social mobilisation in Touba



© Fight Against Malnutrition Unit (cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition)

Nutrition education stalks in Touba

Because of the dahiras' established approaches to community engagement, Wilaya recorded high participation rates for its activities, generating significant results in the adoption of positive nutrition behaviors. The results achieved include:

- decline of childhood diseases;
- reduction of infant and maternal mortality;
- increasing involvement of women as agents of influence and behavior change;
- husbands' involvement in scaling up nutrition activities;
- participation in income generating activities.

## Key Lessons

The early involvement of women in the fight against malnutrition at the community level drives the success of the National Scaling Up Nutrition Programme. Empowering women is vital because it allows them to better strengthen their children's health.

Empowering women on nutrition has helped to:

- consolidate strong community dynamics and engagement
- establish "family attics" (Saxum Njaboot) for cereals storage and preservation in every nutrition community center
- strengthen women's leadership roles (management committees of the nutrition community centers are chaired by women)

The success of Wilaya in Touba demonstrates the power of the Government of Senegal's approach. By building on the structures and relationships that exist within communities, participation in activities and uptake of services and interventions that are required for improving nutrition are most likely to increase. Replicating this success requires:

- Mapping existing women's associations
- Identifying influential women leaders
- Informing decision makers on the National Scaling Up Nutrition Programme objectives
- Establishing management committees whose members are drawn from community-based associations
- Providing training to actors and community stakeholders involved in efforts to address malnutrition
- Elaborating an action plan as well as a monitoring and evaluation process



© Fight Against Malnutrition Unit (cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition)

Local food processing initiatives (cereals)





## Women's Empowerment for improved community nutrition in Lao PDR

Recognising the need to scale up efforts to tackle hunger and malnutrition, development partners have increased their commitment to support the Government of Lao PDR for improved nutrition.

The Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance (SUN CSA) in Lao PDR with support from Plan International and the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), undertook a study to document examples of successful approaches to improved nutrition implemented in the country that address gender equality or gender mainstreaming. The primary aim of this study has been to inform the National Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (FNSAP) to strengthen the commitment to gender equality recognising that this is key to improved nutritional outcomes, and inform partners supporting the implementation of the FNSAP on approaches and models that work.

The key interventions that were identified vary across the spectrum of agriculture, livelihoods, and education. Two examples, women's support groups and gender responsive health systems-strengthening approach are presented below.

### Women's Income and Nutrition Groups: by women for women

Women's Income and Nutrition Groups (WINGs) developed by CARE International and the Lao Women's Union brings together village women to help them to identify solutions that best respond to their needs. The various activities undertaken by these groups include training in the preparation of nutritious family meals using local and seasonally available foods. This enables women to be able to make decisions on how household resources are used in order to improve nutrition. While the groups have a focus on nutrition, including how to grow their own food (fish ponds, cropping etc.), they are also encouraged to look at other aspects of their lives that also impact on nutrition such as their workloads, incomes and health.

Some WINGs groups have linked women to the District Health Offices (DHO) for access to contraception and child and mother health checks. Others have provided wheelbarrows to reduce women's workloads, or provided training on coffee growing and processing as a potential income earning opportunity. In all these examples, the women themselves agree on group membership, topics for discussion and what support or technical assistance they will need.



© Plan International Lao

### Recruiting, Training and Supporting Women Health Workers

Save the Children currently supports a health systems-strengthening approach to enable District Health Offices (DHOs) to provide quality health and nutrition services to all villages in their district. To increase access to health care, Save the Children has supported the construction of village clinics, with each clinic serving a cluster of 5-8 villages (about 3-4000 people).

Having trained women in health facilities is critical. The DHOs participating in the Primary Health Care Program are encouraged to consider staffing quotas and placement. Now, each health centre has at least one, and often two women staff (out of two or three total staff) working in their health centres, one of which is usually a nurse midwife/skilled birth attendant. Pairing women staff together in health centres provides a more supportive working environment for the women, and increases the retention rates of trained staff. Having women staff also increases the number of patients to the centres (Save the Children has seen an increase from 200 patients to 2,500 patients over 2-3 years in some centres). Several NGOs support scholarships for women from ethnic communities to study nursing to increase the number of trained female health staff able to speak in local languages. Important to the success of this program is that it operates within the government health system, not apart from it. Save the Children provides skills training, better facilities and equipment.

Based on these examples and the other interventions identified in the study, the SUN CSA in Lao have been able to share some insights on the most effective ways to empower women and improve nutrition. These include:

- Use local, ethnic languages when working with non-Lao speaking communities. Organising meetings and trainings in local languages encourages the participation of girls and women.
- Use or develop tools that are suitable for non-literate persons.
- Work at the household and village level is essential. Nutrition is a complex issue that needs to be addressed in homes and communities.
- Build and invest in long-term relationships with communities. Changing behaviors, testing and revising approaches, convincing communities and delivering benefits all take time and require trust.
- Acknowledge and understand the specifics of different communities such as the cultural differences, including language, but also the different roles and responsibilities of men and women, food taboos and practices.
- Incorporate monitoring and evaluation, including feedback and adjustment mechanisms, into programs, and ensure monitoring and evaluation frameworks fully mainstream gender.
- Ensure that additional costs required to address gender equality and to fully mainstream gender are included in the programme budget.

Source: Adapted from *Women's Empowerment for Improved Community Nutrition, Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance in Lao PDR, 2015.*







# SIERRA LEONE

## Focusing on the community: Mothers in action for improved nutrition



*“Our grandmothers and mothers are an important driving force in community development. We must therefore empower them for the improvement of the nutritional status of our communities.”*

**Ms. Aminata Shamit Koroma**

*Director of Food & Nutrition, National SUN Technical Focal Point,  
Ministry of Health & Sanitation – Sierra Leone*

### Laying strong foundations – Coordinating actors and establishing sound policy

Sierra Leone’s multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Implementation Plan 2013-2017 (FNSIP) brings together line ministries (health, agriculture, gender, finance, local government etc.), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) in a coordinated manner to address the burden of undernutrition among women and children and support scaling up nutrition. In addition, women’s empowerment has been mainstreamed into existing policies and plans, including:

- **The Smallholder Commercialization Programme**
- **The Sustainable Nutrition and Agriculture Programme**
- **The National Gender Strategic Plan**
- **The National Policy on the Advancement of Women (adopted by Government in 2000)**

Unfortunately, the Ebola outbreak has hampered the gains made over the years on women’s empowerment. As Sierra Leone recovers from the outbreak, the country is focusing on strengthening existing structures that are geared towards the empowerment of women.

### Nutrition Situation

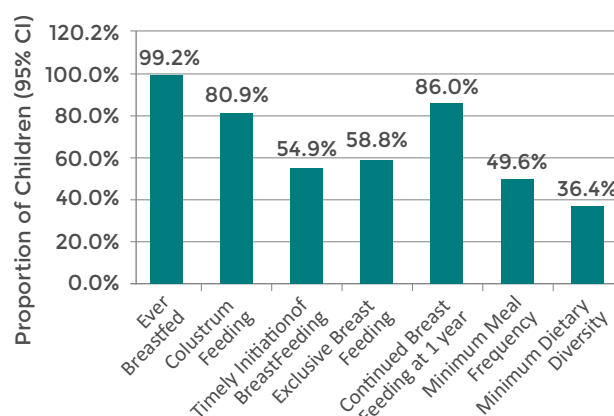
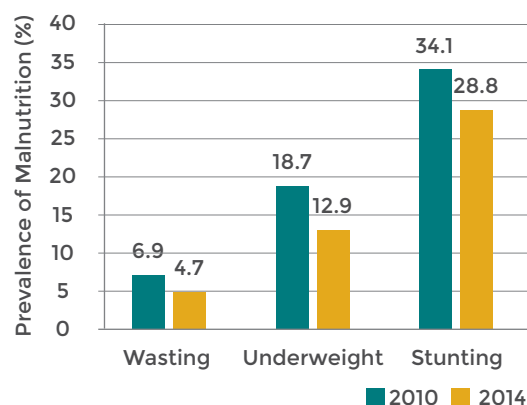
Under five stunting:	<b>37.9%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>7.1%</b>
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Under five wasting:	<b>9.4%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>8.9%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>45.2%</b>

*Source: Sierra Leone DHS\*\* 2013. DHS\*\*s. Freetown, Sierra Leone and Rockville, Maryland, USA: SSL and ICF International, 2014 (and additional analysis).*

### The Mother Support-Groups Model

As featured in Sierra Leone’s Food and Nutrition Security Implementation Plan for 2013-2017, Mother Support-Groups (MSG) provide an example of a community structure that creates a safe environment of respect, attention, gratitude, sincerity, and empathy. These groups consist of 5-15 members who are facilitated by a ‘Lead Mother’ with good communication and listening skills. MSG members are trained as community infant and young child feeding counsellors, provided with community infant and young child feeding counselling cards and Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) tape to carry out group facilitation as well as individual counselling and self-screening of children aged

6-59 months within their community. Thanks to efforts like these, there has been a gradual improvement in children's nutritional status and infant feeding practices as indicated in the graphs below:



Source: Sierra Leone National Nutrition Survey (SLNNS) 2010 & 2014 using SMART methodology



## Integrated service delivery with women at the centre

The Ministries of Health and Sanitation, Agriculture, Education and Social Welfare all work together with nutrition implementing partners (United Nations partners, NGOs and community based organisations) to ensure that the services offered by MSGs are as harmonized as possible. Examples of how this is done include:

- ➔ **Health and Nutrition – Counselling by MSGs, self-screening and referrals, food diversification/cooking demonstration, distribution of mosquito nets, family planning, food rationing for malnourished pregnant women and lactating mothers with water, sanitation and hygiene**
- ➔ **Agriculture and Livelihood - Linking MSGs with Agriculture Business Centres to build skills around community gardening, crops diversification, preservation and processing as well as crop storage**
- ➔ **Social Welfare – Initiating Village Savings and Loan programmes for MSGs as a means of improving income generation for women at the community level**
- ➔ **Education – Capacity building through training (vocational and adult literacy classes)**

## Challenges

Thanks to Sierra Leone's integrated approach to service delivery, women are now better placed to advocate and demand that their voices are heard and that their gender-based interests are considered on the national development agenda. However, despite efforts by women to participate on an equal footing with men in

## Development partners support to women's empowerment

The Sustainable Nutrition and Agriculture Promotion (SNAP) Program is a Multi-Year Assistance Program (MYAP) in Sierra Leone funded by the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Food for Peace. In addition to the provision of food aid to pregnant women and children, the programme strengthens households with technical assistance and training in improved agricultural production, access to credit through membership in village savings and loan associations, and improved livelihood opportunities through vocational and numeracy/literacy trainings.

The programme activities includes:

- Monthly trainings in mother care groups and conditional food ration distribution targeting pregnant and lactating women and children up to 23 months of age
- Development of vegetable gardens for mother care groups to promote access to nutritious food for families after the end of the SNAP project
- Establishing and support of village savings and loan associations to promote individual and community savings in areas without access to commercial or community banks
- Vocational training on soap-making and gara tie-dyeing to expand opportunities for households to diversify their income sources

The programme reported that 31,168 vulnerable individuals have been targeted for livelihood sustainability activities and 4,670 individuals have received adult literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills training; 64% of those trained were women.

democratic processes, cultural impediments, illiteracy and other political structures that tend to lower the status of women still stand in the way.

While progress is tangible, Sierra Leone still needs to increase the number of women represented in parliament and appointments to ministerial positions in government. At the local level, women are still often viewed as unsuitable for local authority positions, such as paramount chiefs and tribal heads.

Beyond the inadequate space for women in politics, traditional and cultural beliefs are also strong contributing factors towards discrimination against women in society. For example, acquisition of properties, especially land, after the death of the husband is impossible as it is traditionally believed that ownership can only pass to the

decedent's male kin. Too often, food distribution within the household unfairly favours men. Disempowering traditional practices have also affected Sierra Leone's educational system with far too few women attaining higher levels of education.

## Opportunities to overcome challenges

Although faced with the above challenges, the Government of Sierra Leone can clearly see the opportunities to move forward. They are planning to engage the media to conduct robust advocacy and awareness raising on gender equality and equity. They are also considering ways to provide free post-primary education, school meals, take-home rations and higher education scholarships for girls.

By investing in education, Sierra Leone will be much better positioned to increase women's participation in decision-making positions and processes at all levels of government as well as within traditional and household authority structures.

## Lessons learned

- It's important to get the right policies and structures in place to empower women and scale up nutrition. A multi-sectoral approach, which incorporates women's empowerment issues into existing policies and strategic plans, is one effective way to do this.
- Community level action is paramount. Mother support groups form a core pillar of Sierra Leone's efforts to improve nutrition. Allowing women the space to discuss their problems, identify solutions and take action has led to significant gains.
- Mother support groups need support from all relevant sectors – health, agriculture and livelihoods, social welfare and education to really maximise opportunities for women to lead on efforts to improve nutrition.
- Development partners can amplify efforts of mother support groups by building on their success and established relationships.
- Continuous focus on girls education and increasing women's participation in decision-making processes is essential.



## Women leading the SUN Movement country work - Our Government and Technical Focal Points



**Haiti**  
Joseline Marhone Pierre  
Director of Nutrition  
Government Focal Point



**Sierra Leone**  
Ami Shamit Koroma  
Director of Food & Nutrition  
Technical Focal Point



**Namibia**  
Marjorie Van Wyk  
Chief Health Programme  
Administrator  
Government  
Focal Point



**El Salvador**  
Daysi de Marquez  
Executive Director  
CONASAN  
Government  
Focal Point



**Guinea Bissau**  
Ivone Menezes  
Moreira  
Government  
Focal Point



**Costa Rica**  
Dra. Cecilia Gamboa  
Director of Strategic Planning  
and Evaluation of Health Interventions  
Government Focal Point



**Peru**  
Ariela Luna Florez  
Viceministra de Políticas y Evaluacion  
Government Focal Point



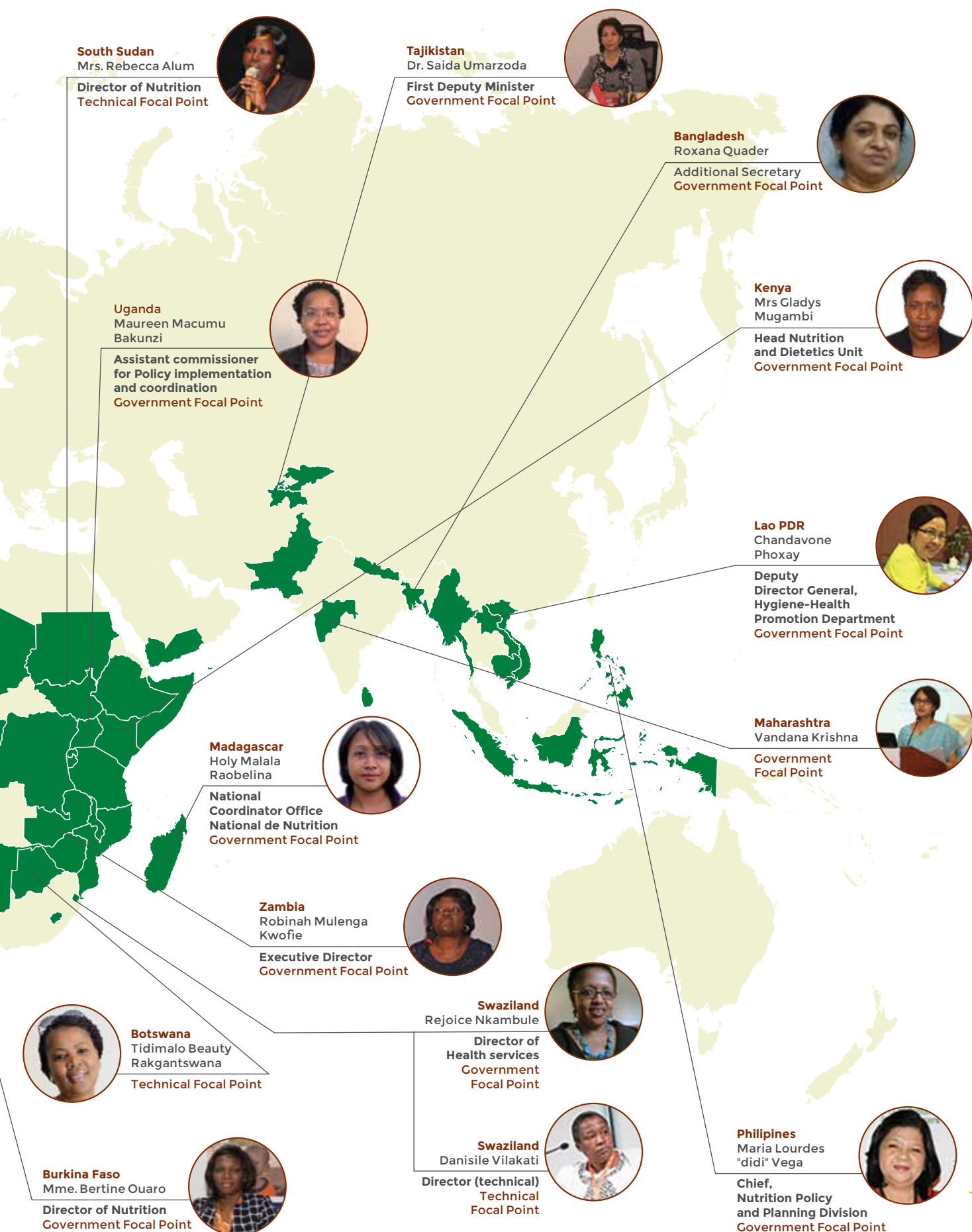
**Liberia**  
Kou T. Baawo  
Director, Nutrition Division  
Government Focal Point



**Cote d'Ivoire**  
Dr Patricia Ngoran Theckly  
Directeur Coordonnateur  
du Programme National  
de Nutrition (DCPNN)  
Technical Focal Point



**Ghana**  
Mary Mpereh  
Principal Planning  
Analyst (Gender,  
Communications  
and Social Policy)  
Technical Focal Point









# REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

## Using Innovative tools to understand the drivers of women’s empowerment



*“Women are the key in improving nutrition”*

**Dr. Saida Umarzoda,**  
*First Deputy Minister of Health  
and Social Protection of Population*

*With contributions from:*

**Dr. Sherali Rahmatulloev,** *Head of Maternal and Child Health Department,  
Ministry of Health and Social Protection;*

**Yuki Suehiro,** *Chief, Health and Nutrition, UNICEF; Safina Abdulloeva, Nutrition Officer, UNICEF and  
Samantha Huffman, HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis Technical Advisor/SUN Coordinator, USAID*

In Tajikistan, agriculture accounts for 75 percent of total employment and 23 percent of gross domestic product. However, as a result of Tajikistan’s mountainous topography, water shortages, and poor irrigation system, only seven percent of Tajikistan’s land surface is arable. These constraints, coupled with a history of conflict have left almost half the population living below the national poverty line, and many women and children undernourished.

Women undertake 80 percent of the farm work in Tajikistan, often because the men in the family have migrated out of Tajikistan or to a city to gain off-farm employment. These women are organising themselves with more than 4,200 self-directed women’s groups established throughout the country around community and income generating activities. The Government of Tajikistan believes that by giving women equal access to agriculture inputs and training, they can dramatically improve farm output and household nutrition.

### Nutrition-specific interventions – maternal and child health and nutrition:

Maternal and child health and nutrition is one of the priorities of the Government of Tajikistan as outlined in major strategy documents pertaining to improving the health status of the population.<sup>15</sup> Given the critical role women play in this area, many components of the maternal and child health and nutrition programmes in

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	26.8%
Low-birth weight:	7.2%
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	34.3%
Under five wasting:	9.9%
Under five overweight:	6.6%
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	24.6%

*Source: Tajikistan DHS\*\* 2012. Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and Calverton, Maryland, USA: SA, MOH, and ICF International, 2013 (and additional analysis).*

Tajikistan directly and indirectly target women. Moreover, efforts to better understand and address the gender norms that underlie malnutrition are also rising. For example, formative research is planned to explore the barriers to exclusive breastfeeding and optimal infant and young child feeding practices among young mothers who are not empowered to make their own decisions or who do not receive enough support from their husbands and other family members. Early pregnancy leading to a vicious

<sup>15</sup> The Comprehensive Health Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2010-2020, 2010, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Tajikistan.

cycle of malnutrition is another area which the Ministry of Health and Social Protection together with development partners have been addressing recently.

## Nutrition-specific interventions – tackling iodine deficiency through women’s groups

While Tajikistan was among the first countries in Central Asia to adopt a national law on iodization of table salt (2002), Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) remain a crucial public health problem, with high prevalence observed especially in the south and in mountainous areas. In this context, USAID, GAIN, and UNICEF, together with civil society organizations such as Mercy Corps and Save the Children, have been supporting the Government of Tajikistan to promote universal salt iodization through a combination of market-based interventions aimed at encouraging consumers to select iodized salt, and active private sector engagement to drive production and increase the availability of iodized salt to consumers. The extensive network of women’s groups played a major role here to keep generating community awareness on salt iodization and iodine deficiency. As the country will move forward with flour fortification, a similar approach involving women could be considered for demand creation and quality monitoring.

## Understanding the drivers of disempowerment

The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) is a tool that is used to measure the empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agriculture sector. Using a scale from zero to one, a person is identified as empowered if her or his score is 0.80 or higher. In Tajikistan, a baseline assessment was conducted in January 2013 with the help of the United States Government’s Feed the Future Initiative in 12 districts of Khatlon province. The WEAI score was 0.69, meaning that women are considered disempowered in Khatlon province.

Additional analyses of the WEAI in Khatlon province have shown that women in households with moderate to severe hunger are significantly less likely to be empowered in making decisions about agricultural production, ownership of assets, and the purchase, sale, or transfer of assets compared to women in households with no hunger. A positive correlation has also been shown between women’s empowerment and both exclusive breastfeeding of children under 6 months of age, and children aged 6-23 months receiving a minimal acceptable diet. With support from partner programmes like Feed the Future, the Government of Tajikistan is using the WEAI tool to better understand how women are disempowered and what can be done to reverse this.

## Supporting governments to inform programming with evidence

Feed the Future, the U.S. Government’s global hunger and food security initiative, works from farms to markets to tables to improve incomes and nutrition. In Tajikistan, Feed the Future focuses its activities in the southwestern Khatlon Province, a key region for agricultural production that also has some of the highest rates of undernutrition in the country and the largest number of people living below the poverty line. Coordinating with the active and diverse development partner community in Tajikistan, Feed the Future is supporting the Government of Tajikistan’s efforts to implement agricultural, land and water reforms and improve food security and nutrition based on the information generated by the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI).

In Tajikistan, women play a major role in farming but lack control over resources in the household and within society. Feed the Future is addressing gender issues to support broad-based growth inclusive of both men and women. Strengthening the fruit and vegetable value chains where women predominate helps build capacity among women to not only improve household farming but also to generate income from their labor and increase control of their assets. Feed the Future is targeting nutritional behavior change activities toward women and men to ensure improved household nutrition and health. The initiative also considers gender roles in service delivery by identifying and training women facilitators to act as local organizers. All efforts to advance agrarian reform help ensure that women are fully represented and receive and control their share of land and water resources.

### How does Feed the Future use the WEAI?

1. As a monitoring indicator to evaluate whether programs are having intended effect on women’s empowerment
2. As a diagnostic tool to help identify areas in which women and men are disempowered, so that programs and policies can be targeted to those areas
3. Impact evaluations, testing new indicators/assessing validity in different contexts, etc.



Habiba Tukhtaeva shows off the vegetables she grew in her family’s kitchen garden with assistance from Feed the Future

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<sup>16</sup> The WEAI was initially developed as a tool to reflect women’s empowerment that may result from the United States government’s Feed the Future Initiative, which commissioned the development of the WEAI. The WEAI can also be used more generally to assess the state of empowerment and gender parity in agriculture, to identify key areas in which empowerment needs to be strengthened, and to track progress over time.

## Areas of collaboration to scale up interventions empowering women and girls

Catalysed by its membership to the SUN Movement, the Government of Tajikistan is committed to the development of a common results framework and multi-sectoral plans for nutrition. The plans will be aligned with the existing policy frameworks and will build capacity for planning, costing and budgeting of both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. The government is committed to ensuring that women's empowerment issues are taken into account in the design and targeting of all food security and nutrition actions through:

- Safeguarding and increasing women's access to, and control over, incomes and other resources
- Reducing women's time constraints
- Enhancing women's understanding of good nutrition
- Increasing women's involvement in decision making at all levels
- Protecting women's employment and livelihoods through guaranteed three years of maternity leave (of which six months are paid)
- Women's education including a special provisions to support girls in remote areas to access tertiary education (through free tuition and housing)

## Key lessons learned

- Recognize the role of women in agriculture in terms of their control over resources and decision-making, as well as their role in improving nutritional outcomes.
- Tools such as the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index allows us to understand and quantify the problem, and identify the specific domains of empowerment which are most problematic in the specific country context. This then enables an evidence-based approach in tailoring programming to the specific areas in which it is most needed and most likely to effect change.
- The process of developing a common results framework provides an important opportunity for gender to be emphasized as one of the main components of a nutrition strategy.



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## Tackling gender equity, one nutrition TV spot at a time

*This blog was written by Ann Jimerson, Behavior Change Specialist at Alive and Thrive and was originally featured on the Alive & Thrive LESS GUESS blog which discusses the art of using data for strategic behavior change design*

As the clock ticks to mark the first hour of the baby's life, a young mother raises her hand to contradict her mother-in-law, who wants to give the baby honey instead of breastmilk. It's one of my favorite TV spots from Alive & Thrive's (A&T) program in Bangladesh. Every time I view this TV spot, I feel a surge of emotion when the young mother firmly says, "No, give her to me. I have to breastfeed." This young mother surprised viewers by taking control of her baby's first hour of life.

So it caught me off guard when a participant in the recent SUN Movement Global Gathering questioned the program planners' decision to portray this young mother standing up to the authority of elders. "Why did you show the mother that way? It's completely unrealistic. That would never happen," the participant said.

We didn't have much time during that session on Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) to follow up on the participant's question, but I did take the opportunity to talk about the value of emotional messages that are "aspirational"—that is, that model an action or a situation that our audiences may wish were their reality.

The discussion was enough, though, to trigger a personal response from Mona Girgis, Country Director in Lao PDR for Plan International. Mona had been asked to report to the Global Gathering on the content of the SBCC session. Mona and others in Lao PDR are deeply committed to gender equality and women's empowerment in their work on nutrition. In its publication "Women's empowerment for improved community nutrition," the SUN's Civil Society Alliance in Lao PDR points out that "there is evidence of a positive association between women's empowerment and improved nutrition outcomes, and conversely, the disempowerment of women can result in reduced nutritional status for themselves and for their families[1]." But Mona confessed that she has at times felt discouraged at the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of women's lives.

"We do have a problem at the moment at the global (and national) level where we have the rhetoric on women's empowerment, and it is clearly defined in policy, but we are struggling to translate to practice," Mona wrote to me following the conference.

Seeing the young mother's bold move in the TV spot—and similar depictions of empowered young women in other nutrition materials—gave Mona a glimmer of hope.



I went back to the TV spot from Bangladesh and recounted the ways that 40-second drama shows us what a more gender-equal community might look like: When the mother expresses her wish, the elders hand her the baby to breastfeed. Her husband watches the scene and lovingly affirms, "I'm lucky the mother of my baby is so intelligent." Perhaps most importantly, the spot opens on the anxious men waiting outside the home for news of the birth. The young father beams at the joyous cry, "It's a girl!"

If Sanjeeda Islam had been with us in the Global Gathering session, she would have given a definitive response to the participant's question about why the spot was written as it was. Sanjeeda led A&T's creative team for the design of our TV spots, and she is clear that when she wrote the line "It's a girl!" she wanted to break through the age-

old preference for a son. She reports that "surprisingly" there were no raised eyebrows. In fact, in our pretests of the TV spot, mothers had a highly emotional and positive response to the scene where the mother proactively asks for the baby. Mothers also liked the proud father's praise for his wife. The groups of mothers who saw the spot scored it high for credibility—and opinion leaders did too.

A&T's behavior change activities intentionally targeted grandmothers and other older women, along with fathers, frontline health workers, and community leaders. Our evaluation didn't measure these groups' attitudes, but we know that Bangladeshi women of different ages watch TV together. With the shared experience of seeing the image of that empowered young mother, the older women were likely more open to listening to the ideas of the young mothers in their community.

And the data for A&T's Bangladesh evaluation suggest that our strategy worked to increase mothers' self-efficacy related to breastfeeding. After three years of program implementation, mothers in A&T areas were significantly more confident than their counterparts in comparison areas that they could prevent others from feeding a child aged less than 6 months anything other than breastmilk (73% vs. 47%). In areas where the only A&T intervention was mass media, women who viewed one of our breastfeeding TV spots were 48% more likely to initiate breastfeeding within an hour of birth, compared with those who had not viewed one of the spots.

"It is possible to subtly address the wide gender gap that exists not only in Bangladesh but in many countries using different channels and mediums," Sanjeeda wrote me recently. "Gender roles are changing, though very very slowly, but we need to keep trying to sneak in our messaging initially. We need the change to happen soon if we want to make any progress in the nutrition scenario, where success depends on gender equity."

Let's all take hope, then, in the power of emotive messaging that can model a better world. Our communication materials may be explicitly addressing improved child feeding practices. But these same messages and materials can subtly, almost subliminally, introduce changes in gender roles and power as we move from rhetoric to action.







# MALAWI

## Leadership, coordination and education: Essential elements for empowering women and improving nutrition



*Felix Pensulo Phiri,  
Director of Nutrition  
Department of Nutrition,  
HIV and AIDS, Ministry of  
Health, SUN Government  
Focal Point*



*Dr. Mary Shawa,  
Principal Secretary  
for Gender, Children  
and Community  
Development of the  
Republic of Malawi*

### Advocacy at the highest level: Speaking out for girls from the president's office to the household

H.E. President Peter Mutharika is leading the path towards women's empowerment in Malawi. As a champion of the UN Women "He for She" campaign, he is committed to ensuring that women and girls' empowerment issues are prioritised in the country's development agenda. President Mutharika is also highly committed to making sure that child marriage is eliminated in the country and is also a champion for higher education in Africa. Additionally, the entire cabinet, ministers and permanent secretaries of Malawi are mobilised and committed to gender equality and women's empowerment. This high level leadership is met with equal commitment from local level traditional authorities who are working within their communities to realise the rights of every girl child.

**In Malawi 52% of girls are married before the age of 18 years. As a professional lawyer, the president knows the devastating effects of early marriage on the girl child's rights. With his leadership and commitment, the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (Marriage Act) - an act that Malawi started working on 20 years ago – became law in 2015. This law sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.**

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	<b>42.4%</b>
Low-birth weight:	<b>12.9%</b>
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	<b>70.2%</b>
Under five wasting:	<b>3.8%</b>
Under five overweight:	<b>5.1%</b>
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	<b>28.8%</b>

*Source: Malawi MDG endline survey 2014.  
Key findings.*

### Engagement with traditional leaders

Traditional authorities have been trained on all gender related laws including the Gender Equality Act and the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act. Chiefs have developed their own declaration which they are capitalising on to mobilise their community members and households to support the empowerment of women, end gender based violence and child marriages, and support girls' education. The work is on-going and traditional chiefs are making sure that these laws are being enforced at the village level through their integration within community by-laws.

Senior Chief Inkosi Kachindamoto annulled over 300 marriages, thereby applying the country's new Marriage Act.

*"I have terminated 330 marriages of which 175 were girl-wives and 155 were boy-fathers, I wanted them to go to school and that has worked," Chief Kachindamoto told Nyasa Times. "I don't want youthful marriages, they must go to school...no child should be found loitering at home or doing household chores during school time."*

Religious leaders have also been involved and lobbied to ensure that society achieves mindset changes. Many religious leaders have been sensitised to the danger and consequences of early marriage in order to ensure that they don't bless child marriages. Additionally, as key community gatekeepers, they have been encouraged to act as champions of change in their communities by openly advocating for the empowerment of women.

### **Collaboration across ministries: Using data to ensure effective coverage of funded actions and impact on women and girls**

Women's empowerment is everyone's business in Malawi. Several ministries working on education and training, health, agriculture, food security and nutrition, climate change management, governance and human rights, economic development, and gender-based violence place much emphasis on increasing women's access to training and production resources so as to increase women's participation in the economy.

In Malawi, the Technical Working Group on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment which meets every quarter brings together the Ministries of Gender, Agriculture, Finance, Health and other actors to assess progress and share plans for the next quarter. Each ministry has its own gender policy and framework as well as a gender focal point. All ministries have been trained on how they can develop budgets that are gender responsive in order to ensure that they meet the needs of both men and women. Gender budgeting

is also integrated by the Ministry of Finance in its financing framework where each ministry indicates the funds allocated to gender mainstreaming work.

Ministries were also trained in gender mainstreaming to ensure that women and girls issues are part and parcel of the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The gender focal points have been pivotal in achieving this mainstreaming. They are also closely assisted by the Gender and Youth Sector working group who are active members of the Sector Working Groups.<sup>17</sup>

### **Knowledge is Power: Keeping Girls in School**

One of the government's key strategies is to keep girls in school through initiatives that include:

- ➔ **School feeding programmes**
- ➔ **Take-home food rations (maize, ground nuts and beans) for girls attending school at least 21 straight days per month**
- ➔ **Free boarding options for girl students including the provision of good sanitary and hygiene services**
- ➔ **Free learning materials including uniforms, books, and writing materials**
- ➔ **Education on human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women to ensure that women and girls are aware of their rights**
- ➔ **Scholarship and bursary programmes particularly for secondary level students who are most at risk to drop out**
- ➔ **A social cash transfer programme that supports poor households with school fees and other school-related needs**
- ➔ **Community by-laws that discourage early marriages and the abuse of women and girls**

The government also emphasises the need to educate the girl child at the household level on the importance of good nutrition, food choices and preparation so they can make informed choices.

<sup>17</sup> The Government of Malawi launched the Sector Working Groups (SWGs) in 2008 as a means of implementing the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) and the Development Assistance Strategy (DAS). The main aims of the SWGs are to provide a forum for negotiation, policy dialogue, and agreement of plans and Undertakings among Government, development Partners, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the Private Sector at the sectoral level. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare (MoGCSW), and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as leaders of the Gender, Children, Youth and Sports Sector Working Group spearheaded the process of developing the Joint Sector Strategic Plan (JSSP) 2013-2017.



*“In my personal experience, parenting is very important as we seek to empower the girl child, they need support and guidance. My mother always made sure I had adequate food before going to school and made sure I had time for school work separate from house chores.”*

*“Parents should advise and educate their child on boundaries and sexual reproductive health so that they can make informed choices. It is very important to communicate with children according to their age so they understand the issues. The education must then continue at school with teachers who understand the rights of the girl child. The need to have adequate sanitation at school is also important as unfortunately girls drop out of school because of their menstruation.”*

Dr. Mary Shawa, Principal Secretary for Gender, Children and Community Development of the Republic of Malawi

The impact reported of these initiatives and incentives includes:

- Reduction in early pregnancy and teenage marriages
- Retention of girls in schools hence ensuring that they are completing school, and also performing better in their lessons
  - There is an improvement in the percentages of girls that are completing secondary education and also accessing tertiary education
  - Teen mothers who did return to school were often as successful in their studies as they were before dropping out
- Increased participation of women in economic life through small and medium enterprises
  - Many of the women in Malawi are members of cooperatives, associations and Village Savings and Loans (VSL) groups. This has widened their opportunities for economic empowerment
- Raised awareness and change of mind-sets of parents in relation to traditional and cultural practices that marginalised girls

## Lessons learned and challenges

While child marriages and girls education are still big challenges, considerable progress has been made and many girls have been rescued from forced marriages and reintegrated into school. But more can be done. Capitalising on this progress in order to improve nutrition outcomes requires further investment in trained personnel at the local level as well as training on gender mainstreaming and gender responsive budgeting to ensure that all relevant government ministries understand their role in empowering women.

Several lessons have been learned along the way:

- Policies, legal frameworks and financing should be conducive to helping the girl child to complete her education cycle
- Government, community leaders, parents and global partners should all be on board to achieve results
- Mother-to-mother support groups can play an instrumental role in re-admitting the girls who dropped out due to teen pregnancies.
- For girls already married or pregnant when starting the programs a provision for re-admission in school is essential
- The creation of scholarships helps tremendously in preventing girls from dropping out of school



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## Empowering women through nutrition sensitive social protection - The experience from Tat Lan programme

“Women are central to any strategy to improve the nutritional status of children, families, and communities. Improving the health and nutrition of girls and women not only increases family well-being and overall development but is also essential for ensuring the health of future generations. Empowering women for nutrition involves educating, problem-solving to overcome specific barriers to improved behaviors, and helping women to develop the skills and confidence they need to make healthy choices for themselves and their families.”

**Jennifer Cashin,**  
SUN Civil Society Alliance Coordinator

The Tat Lan Programme, implemented by Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, and Better Life Organization, contributes to equitably and sustainably improving the livelihoods of Cyclone Giri-affected communities in the townships of Myebon, Pauktaw, Kyaukpyu and Minbya in Rakhine State. The Tat Lan Programme is funded by the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), a multi-donor fund established in 2009 to improve the lives and prospects of smallholder farmers and landless people in Myanmar.

Through the Tat Lan Programme a package of comprehensive, mutually-reinforcing interventions to improve livelihoods and food security in Rakhine State is implemented within community structures. The Tat Lan Programme engages with Village Development Committees (VDCs) to implement programme activities including nutrition. Village development community members are also actively engaged in the programme through advocacy. Save the Children is leading on the nutrition component of the programme which involves a cash transfer to mothers.

The Maternal and Child Cash Transfer (MCCT) pilot, which was launched in October 2014 and will finish at the end of July 2016, provides cash support of K13,000 per month for mothers for the first 1000 days of their baby's life. The pilot covers pregnant women until their children reach 2 years of age. The soft conditions of the cash transfer are three-fold: to attend nutrition sessions and mother-to-mother support group meetings, have four antenatal check-ups, and immunisation of her child according to the Myanmar government immunisation schedule.

Through the nutrition sessions, mothers have learnt that the cash transfers are intended for them to buy more nutritious food for their families and supplement healthcare costs. After participating in these sessions, mothers have demonstrated good understanding of the value of colostrum, breast milk and good complementary feeding practices. Practicing exclusive breastfeeding still presents some challenges as mothers are still inclined to feed their babies at least some water.

In most villages, village administrators and nutrition volunteers have reported that attendance at nutrition sessions and mother-to-mother support groups have increased, and money has incentivised mothers to seek out healthcare providers for immunisation and antenatal check-ups.

Initial findings are very positive. Mothers are indeed spending the money on food and health care. The behavior change communication is reaching women and they are now:

- Better informed on best feeding practices
- Increasingly seeking advice and support from health workers
- Attending nutrition and health education sessions more frequently
- Feeling empowered that the cash is under their control

Save the Children used the preliminary findings from the MCCT pilot to further demonstrate that nutrition-sensitive cash transfers in Myanmar are the most impactful intervention to reduce stunting, resulting in an increasing level of interest from major donors and government agencies. Save the Children and UNICEF, at the request of the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), developed and submitted a Feasibility Study and Operational Manual for the MCCT approach in 2015. DSW is using these documents to advocate for increased budget allocation for cash transfers for pregnant women and other priority groups.

Save the Children also used the MCCT pilot findings, coupled with global evidence, to develop two 1,000 Day nutrition-sensitive cash transfer interventions using different research designs, including a randomized control trial. Both interventions are now being funded by LIFT and will be vital for generating a robust evidence-base over the next three years on the feasibility and impact of scaling-up a 1,000 day nutrition-sensitive cash transfer national.

As part of this process, Save the Children and other development partners successfully advocated for the inclusion of a ‘flagship’ nutrition cash transfer intervention to cover the First 1,000Days in the National Social Protection Strategic Plan (NSPSP) led by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR), and was approved by the President's Office.

***“We see the impact of the programme as having better feeding and nutrition practices. The mothers are also now going to see antenatal care, and there is increased immunisation about the children. The cash provides motivation for the mothers to change their behaviour as it is a condition of the cash transfer. This creates a positive impact for the community”***

**Ma Than Nu, 42, Village Development Committee member and a leader of the mother-to-mother support group**

Source: **Interview with Jennifer Cashin**

Public Health Nutrition Consultant - SUN Civil Society Alliance Coordinator in Myanmar





# ZIMBABWE

## From Policy to Action: Everyone has a role to play in empowering women and improving nutrition



*“Empowering women is critical to addressing all forms of malnutrition, it promotes social justice and human dignity to humankind. This can be done in our lifetime, the time to ACT is NOW.”*

*Mr. Christopher Mweembe,  
National Coordinator, Zimbabwe CSO SUN Alliance*

### Women’s empowerment for improved nutrition in Zimbabwe

Malnutrition in all its forms presents the greatest threat to human development, with far-reaching consequences. Currently one in every three children under the age of five years suffers from malnutrition in Zimbabwe. One way that the government and its partners are working to reverse this situation is by empowering women using various strategies.

### Legal framework for women’s empowerment

The operational environment is guided by several policies and strategies supportive of women’s empowerment. The National Constitution and the National Gender Policy (2013-2017) are examples of key policy documents guiding stakeholders involved in empowering women. UN agencies, civil society, the private sector and donor community supported the government in formulating the National Food and Nutrition Policy of 2013 which prioritises interventions for women of reproductive age. The Maternal Protection Policy provides 3 months of maternity leave post-partum and allows working mothers an hour off-work during the baby’s first six months to promote breastfeeding. The National Nutrition Strategy (2014-2018) launched in 2015 promotes the implementation of evidence-based nutrition interventions with a gender lens.

### Nutrition Situation

Under five stunting:	27.6%
Low-birth weight:	-
0-5 months old exclusive breastfeeding:	41.0%
Under five wasting:	3.3%
Under five overweight:	3.6%
Women Anaemia 15-49 years:	28.4%

Source: MICS\*\*\* 2014. Key findings. Harare, Zimbabwe: ZIMSTAT, 2014.

### Diverse role of stakeholders

The key players in empowering women include government ministries and departments, civil society, United Nations agencies, the donor community, the private sector and many others. Most often these stakeholders work together in supporting women with capacity-building trainings, supporting women to access finance through income saving and lending schemes and access to agricultural inputs. Other activities include dam construction and borehole rehabilitation which help communities, particularly women, to establish nutrition gardens. These diverse processes empower women to become income-earners, decision-makers and agents of change thereby unchaining themselves from cultural, social, economic and political obstacles.

Each of these actors have a unique role to play. The donor community, which includes the European Union, Japan International Cooperation Agency, United States Agency for International Development and U.K. Department of International Development, provides funding for the United Nations (UN) agencies and civil society organisations who implement projects in collaboration with different government departments. At the same time, donors and implementing partners are adopting innovative and coordinated approaches of pooling resources together to leverage existing programmes to maximise greater impact. For example, the World Health Organisation and the other UN partners use pooled funds to support the government's efforts to improve women's health. UN agencies also help to build the technical capacity of government and civil society practitioners, who in turn lead the implementation of projects in communities with government and community based structures. This ensures sustainability of interventions after the projects are terminated.

### **The important role of village health workers**

Through village health workers, the Ministry of Health and Child Care and UNICEF are implementing community infant and young child feeding interventions throughout the country. The aim is to empower mothers with children under the age of two with knowledge and skills that promote appropriate infant and young child feeding practices.

*'My name is Mindmore Muuyandiyana. I am 24 years old. I live in Buwerimwe village in Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. I am one of the village health workers in the village. I have two young children. I gave birth to my first child and was not educated on exclusive breastfeeding. My child was always sick with diarrhoea, vomiting, and abdominal cramping and often cried at night. I spent most of my time at the clinic for medication. When I became a village health worker I was educated on infant and young child feeding practices including the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. When I gave birth to my second child, I used the acquired knowledge on infant and young child feeding practices. There is a great difference from my first child. I started breastfeeding my child soon after delivery. I gave her breast milk only for the first six months. My child is now seven months old and doing very well. I can now sleep because she is not often sick or crying like her older sister. My husband is now even more supportive ensuring that I have a variety of foods to feed the baby. I am so excited and have continued preaching the excellent gospel of proper infant and young child feeding practices in my village.'*



© Richard Nyamandindi Zimbabwe CSO SUN Alliance

Mindmore's baby is among thousands of young children across Zimbabwe whose nutritional status is rapidly improving thanks to the village health workers and community infant and young child feeding programmes. It is a sign that Zimbabwe is making progress on reducing vulnerability among poor families and adequately nourishing the children of today to help drive future economic growth and productivity as adults.

Village Health Workers are central in the success of the community-based nutrition program. They provide counselling on breastfeeding and complementary feeding at least once a month until a child attains two years.

### **Food security initiatives transform lives Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe in Mashonaland East**

The Nyazhou Nutrition Garden Project comprises 60 villagers – half of which are women - who each own 26 vegetable beds. This is one of a number of projects that include a dam-rehabilitation being undertaken by World Food Program and United Methodist Committee on Relief.

Sekai Tembo, a 72 year old widow said the project had completely changed her life.

*“When my husband died, I had no choice but to carry on with life, though it was hard. I had no cattle, and you know the importance of draught animal power in our lives, but since I joined this project I now have two goats. Before, I used to do gardening but it would only sustain me and my family but now the produce is feeding me, my two grandchildren and I sell the surplus to surrounding villages. I get \$15 dollars per week, which is \$30 per month because the other two weeks the vegetables would be sprayed. Previously, it was hard to get hold of only \$2,” she said.*

This project is one of the examples of many other interventions aiming at improving household income, food and nutrition security of vulnerable women in poor communities in Zimbabwe.

### **Women gain meaningful nutrition knowledge through community forums in Gatsi Village, Mutasa**

The Peace Building and Capacity Development Foundation a member of the Zimbabwe CSO SUN Alliance started community forums where people meet and address their political or religious differences. Women form the bulk of the community forums and have assumed leadership positions. Through these forums, women have learnt about nutrition-sensitive agriculture. The community grows a wide range of crops which includes beans, bananas, maize, nuts etc. They also produce milk and eggs and rear chickens and pigs. This makes the community food secure. The community forums also offer a platform for trade among members of the community. Together they have embarked on a water project for their fields. Living in an area that is abundant with water, they contributed money which they used to buy pipes for harnessing water from Mutarazi falls and connecting these to each household nutrition gardens.

Through these community forums women have also gained knowledge on the composition of a healthy diet. Therefore, their food production, processing and preparation now take the nutritional needs of their families into careful consideration. The community also takes time to educate each other on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices and promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. They also share information on introducing nutrient rich, diverse complementary foods at six months.

## **Key lessons**

- **Comprehensive laws and policies set a strong found for programmes that empower women.**
- **It is important for stakeholders in a country to understand their roles as they align behind a common results framework to address malnutrition in all its forms. Bringing in women from the start ensures that women and girls issues are considered at all levels. The coming together of donors, civil society, UN agencies and government is commendable and can help reach a wider population and achieve greater impact.**
- **Mindmore’s story gives a loud and clear message that village health workers are key entry points for engaging communities as a central part of the solution to women’s empowerment. Food and nutrition programming targeted at empowering women should also involve men to help ensure they can play an active role in improving practices and changing behaviours.**
- **The involvement of community based organizations are key ingredients to empowering women. They can play an important part in supporting community forums which are critical platforms for operationalizing a people-centered, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral response to nutrition. By ensuring women are given the chance to engage and play leadership roles, these forums not only help women to attain the skills and knowledge they need to strengthen their livelihoods and earning potentials but also to understand the most nutritious ways to feed their families.**





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**What has  
been learnt?**







# Building a Sisterhood of Success: Empowering Women for Improved Nutrition



**Florence Lasbennes,**  
Head of the SUN  
Movement Secretariat

The virtuous circle of good nutrition and women's empowerment starts with the girl child. The girl child who is born to parents who know how best to ensure her good nutrition and are able to take action on that knowledge. She is raised in a community where there is access to the services that will monitor and protect her health, nutrition, education and provide her with the opportunities to learn and build a resilient livelihood. This girl child is likely to grow into a strong, healthy and vibrant women who can lead her family and her community in ensuring that **every girl child can achieve the best start in life.**

In this issue of *Scaling Up Nutrition in Practice* we showcase some of the lessons learned through implementing policies, strategies and programs that empower women and girls in Senegal, Lao PDR, Sierra Leon, Tajikistan, Malawi, Myanmar and Zimbabwe. So what have we learned?

First, **women need to be at the decision-making table with adequate support and space for their voices to be heard.** It is undeniably clear that women play a pivotal role in the food security, health and nutrition of their families; a fact that must be taken into account in the design and targeting of all food security and nutrition actions. For this to happen, women and men must have shared participation in political decision-making and equality under the law. Women need to be supported to hold leadership roles in decision making bodies – parliaments, ministries and local authorities at the district and community level - so that they can be part of the process of devising solutions to the nutrition-based challenges they face.

Second, **coherent and coordinated action across sectors and institutions is key.** While countries have national gender policies and strategies as well as gender components to broader development and sector plans, there is a need to coordinate efforts across different sectors and implementing bodies. As we saw in Sierra Leone, government ministries and development partners are rallying behind the success of mother support groups to help harmonise efforts and amplify their results. In Malawi, the appointment of gender focal points in key ministries coupled with training on how to mainstream and finance gender responsive actions is helping to make women's empowerment everybody's business.

The stories of these countries makes it abundantly clear that **a community-centered approach that ignites the power of sisterhood is essential.** At home, women are very often best placed to decide how resources are used to improve nutrition. Supporting them to reach out to other women in their communities to share their experience, knowledge and aspirations helps to build an incredibly powerful sisterhood of success. In Senegal, this is demonstrated by the positive impact on nutrition behaviours thanks to women's leadership within existing daira structures. By bringing women together, as we've seen in Laos PDR, they empower each other to identify priorities and solutions. In the Republic of Tajikistan, we learned how the power of women's groups can be harnessed to promote nutrition awareness raising and education. In Senegal and Zimbabwe, community groups offer women the opportunity to improve their income earning opportunities and learn ways to ensure their families have optimal access to good nutrition.

While each country is pursuing a unique approach to women's empowerment, it is remarkably evident that **education and women's knowledge of nutrition is a common ingredient to success** across all of the stories shared. This is certainly true in the case of Malawi where investments are being made in keeping girls in school but also in every other country where educational components related to infant and young child feeding, literacy and vocational training feature prominently.

Finally, **men must champion and actively engage in women's empowerment.** As we learned from Malawi, the President is setting the bar high for all levels of leadership



within the country to safeguard the rights of women and girls. In Zimbabwe, husband's like Mindmore's are actively engaging in ensuring that their family can enjoy good nutrition.

As we move forward to the next phase of the SUN Movement, we will continue harnessing lessons from action by documenting ways in which SUN Countries increase women's knowledge about nutrition, improve their decision making power and their social status, balance their

workload while increasing their control over resources. We will continue documenting practices that improve the quality of care and feeding offered to children by women and men. We will do this as we know that we cannot achieve our vision of ending malnutrition in all its forms without ensuring women are in the driving seat. We must plan, budget, coordinate, implement, evaluate and advocate with full appreciation of the critical role women play in unlocking success to scale up nutrition.

## Round up of lessons from SUN Country contributors

In **Senegal**, early involvement of women in the fight against malnutrition at the community level is driving the success of the National Scaling up Nutrition Programme. By building on the structures and relationships that exist within communities, women's participation in activities and uptake of services and interventions that are at required for improving nutrition are most likely to increase.

In **Sierra Leone**, mother support groups form a core pillar of national efforts to improve nutrition. Allowing women the space to discuss their problems, identify solutions and take action has led to significant gains. Mother support groups need reinforcement from all relevant sectors and development partners to really maximise opportunities for women to lead on efforts to improve nutrition. This also requires a continuous focus on girls' education and increasing women's participation in decision-making processes.

The **Government of Tajikistan**, recognises the role of women in agriculture in terms of their control over resources and decision-making, as well as their role in improving nutritional outcomes. Tools such as the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index are key to understand and identify the specific ways that programming can be tailored to unlock women's potential to help improve nutrition. When it comes to involving all the necessary actors, the process of developing a common results framework provides an important opportunity for gender to be emphasized as one of the main components of a nutrition strategy.

In **Malawi**, strong policies, comprehensive laws and leadership from the national to household level have led to huge gains in protecting young girls from early marriage and keeping them in school. Capitalising on this progress in order to improve nutrition outcomes requires further investment in trained personnel at the local level as well as training on gender mainstreaming and gender responsive budgeting to ensure that all relevant government ministries understand their role in empowering women.

**Zimbabwe's** comprehensive laws and policies set a strong foundation for programmes that empower women. At the same time, the coming together of donors, civil society, UN agencies and government around a common results framework for improved nutrition has really helped all stakeholders to understand their role in empowering women and improve nutrition. When it comes to implementation, village health workers, engagement of men and the involvement of community based organisations are key entry points for engaging communities as a central part of the solution to women's empowerment.











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Go to [www.scalingupnutrition.org](http://www.scalingupnutrition.org)  
for more information about the SUN Movement.