Independent Comprehensive Evaluation of the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement

FINAL REPORT

Executive Summary

15 January 2015

Mokoro Limited

in partnership with

Valid International

FEG Consulting

The evaluation was undertaken by Mokoro Ltd in partnership with Food Economy Group (FEG) Consulting and Valid International. The team of evaluators and researchers comprised Stephen Lister (team leader), Stephanie Allan, Zoe Driscoll, Alta Fölscher, Christopher Leather, Lilli Loveday, Mirella Mokbel Genequand, Robrecht Renard, Stephen Turner, and Muriel Visser. Additional support was provided by Philip Lister, and assistance with country case studies was provided by Liv Bjørnestad (Senegal), Adriana Moreno (Guatemala), Ray Purcell (Bangladesh), Gregory Rooney (Indonesia), and Chris Tanner (Mozambique).

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The Independent Comprehensive Evaluation was commissioned by the SUN Movement’s Lead Group and was overseen by its Visioning Sub-Group (VSG). Three quality assurance advisors, Julia Compton, Chris Gerrard and Eva Lithman, were appointed to assist the VSG. The evaluation manager was Ruwan de Mel.

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This report should be cited as:


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Independent Comprehensive Evaluation of the SUN Movement: Executive Summary

The SUN Movement

S1. This is the final report of an independent comprehensive evaluation of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement (SUN).

S2. For some years before SUN was launched, there had been growing recognition of the problems of undernutrition, and concern that the international system was failing to deal with it effectively. These concerns were crystallised by The Lancet in 2008. Its series on maternal and child nutrition highlighted evidence about the high personal and economic costs of stunting and criticised the failure of a "fragmented and dysfunctional" international architecture to deal with it.1

S3. A number of agencies and working groups collaborated on the early proposals for what later became the SUN Movement. These proposals were set out in a "Framework for Action" and a "Road Map", both published in 2010.2 They highlighted the need to tackle stunting, to focus especially on the 1,000 days from conception to two years old, and to embrace nutrition-sensitive approaches to tackle the underlying causes of malnutrition as well as nutrition-specific interventions to tackle its direct manifestations. They proposed that civil society, donors, UN agencies and the private sector should all collaborate to support country-led, multi-sectoral strategies to combat undernutrition. This was to be an informal partnership, and its role would be to catalyse support for countries prepared to "scale up nutrition". It was deliberately not set up as a global fund or agency. (Though SUN has been supported by a Multi-Partner Trust Fund, this is a small fund mainly used to support the development of civil society alliances for nutrition.)

S4. This approach struck a chord: within a few months the Framework for Action had been endorsed by over 100 entities, and numerous countries came forward to participate. Rapid expansion has continued throughout the four years of SUN’s existence, so that by the end of 2014 more than 50 countries had joined the movement.

S5. On the basis of a stewardship study which was conducted in 2011, SUN’s institutions became somewhat more formal. A high level Lead Group was established in 2012, supported by a Secretariat based in Geneva; both operate under the auspices of the UN Secretary General. A Strategy 2012–2015 was published,3 and together

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with a Revised Road Map, it provides the guiding framework for the SUN movement, with the structure pictured in Figure S1.

Figure S1: Organisation of the SUN Movement

![Figure S1: Organisation of the SUN Movement](source)

Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

S6. The Strategy set the following main objectives:

"The Movement’s strategic objectives to the end of 2015 focus on increasing support and demonstrating effectiveness through:

1) The creation of an enabling political environment, with strong in-country leadership, and a shared space (multi-stakeholder platforms) where stakeholders align their activities and take joint responsibility for scaling up nutrition;

2) The establishment of best practice for scaling up proven interventions, including the adoption of effective laws and policies;

3) The alignment of actions around high quality and well-costed country plans, with an agreed results frameworks and mutual accountability;

4) An increase in resources, directed towards coherent, aligned approaches."

(Strategy, ¶7)

S7. The present evaluation was envisaged in the 2012–2015 strategy. Its Terms of Reference were very broad – to assess all aspects of SUN’s performance and pose options for the evolution of SUN to build on strengths and address weaknesses.

S8. The evaluation was commissioned by the Visioning Sub-Group (VSG) of the Lead Group, but it is intended to be used by all stakeholders in SUN to chart the
movement’s way forward. The text of the main report has been kept as short as possible, but annexes provide supporting evidence and material which should be useful to those directly involved in taking forward the report’s recommendations.

**Methodology**

S9. The evaluation used mixed methods. Evaluation questions were guided by a reconstruction of SUN’s theory of change, and the evaluation systematically tested the assumptions underlying the SUN movement’s approach. Evidence was collected from an extensive literature review and eight country case countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mozambique, Senegal and Tanzania), in addition to over 250 global and country-level interviews, an electronic survey of SUN stakeholders (with 186 respondents), a visit to the SUN secretariat in Geneva, and participation in country network, Lead Group and other SUN meetings by telephone. The Global Nutrition Report,\(^5\) which was published in November 2014, was also a valuable resource.

S10. A short time frame (with only six months from the contract being awarded to the delivery of the final report) limited scope for extended consultation. Nevertheless, three interim papers were published: an Inception Report (August) set out a detailed methodology; an Interim Progress Report (September) provided a preliminary assessment of the SUN movement secretariat, and an Options Discussion Paper (November) provided the basis for the evaluation team’s engagement in the Global Gathering.

S11. An independent panel of quality assurance advisers reviewed all outputs at draft stage.

**Principal Conclusions**

**Conclusion 1:** Concerning its strategic objectives 1 and 2: SUN has been widely successful at the level of advocacy and mobilisation but there is only limited evidence that this is leading further towards scaling up nutrition at country level. Effective progress in scaling up nutrition responses was found in only a limited number of countries.

S12. SUN’s advocacy has been very influential in keeping nutrition on the international agenda, and in encouraging and reinforcing country-level efforts in advocacy and mobilisation to address undernutrition. This is itself a significant achievement. SUN’s influence is reflected, among other things, in the rapid growth in country affiliations to SUN.

S13. Forms of multi-stakeholder collaboration are being promoted, but it is less clear whether greater political support and enhanced analysis are yet leading further along the path towards scaling up nutrition in practice. The country case studies

identified few signs that development partners and civil society organisations are applying aid effectiveness principles by really lining up behind government plans for scaling up, as opposed to continuing independent programmes that have similar objectives.

S14. In addition, SUN’s aspirations for ensuring a systematic focus on gender empowerment have not yet been moved from global-level rhetoric into country-level practice.

Conclusion 2: Concerning strategic objectives 3 and 4: progress towards SUN’s multiple stakeholders aligning their actions with high quality costed plans and common results frameworks is limited, and progress in mobilising and scaling up resources for nutrition is also very limited.

S15. SUN proposes costed plans and common results frameworks that can serve to align the actions of all stakeholders towards achieving nutrition objectives at scale, but few of the plans and results frameworks have yet been developed to the intended level. Consequently, SUN is not yet able to move the focus in many countries from alignment and planning to the achievement of outcomes.

S16. SUN has contributed to international efforts to mobilise funds (notably in supporting the Nutrition for Growth event in 2013), and some SUN countries have achieved moderate increases in nutrition funding, but, as SUN’s own monitoring indicates, overall progress has been very limited. At global level, these findings are corroborated by the limited evidence of scaling up resources that is reported by the Global Nutrition Report.

S17. Monitoring of financial scaling up is hindered by the difficulty of tracking nutrition expenditures. The SUN donor network has devoted considerable efforts to developing methods to track international aid for nutrition, with modest success. More work is needed on this and on country-level tracking.

Conclusion 3: SUN has important strengths to build on, including its relevance and the goodwill it has accumulated.

S18. SUN was relevant: in highlighting the need to address undernutrition and reduce stunting; in drawing attention to the importance of the 1,000 day window for action on maternal and child nutrition; in advocating multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approaches; in noting that such approaches must include both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive components; in insisting that nutrition plans must be country-led; and in including women’s empowerment as an essential element of progress. It was also relevant in addressing an acknowledged gap in the international architecture for nutrition.

S19. SUN’s other strengths include:

(a) The goodwill it has built up and the experience it has gained in the four years since it was launched. This is embodied, not least, in the progress there has
been in establishing the support networks and in the capability demonstrated by its Secretariat.

(b) There has also been notable progress (supported by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund) in strengthening country-level civil society networks.

(c) Its transparency and willingness to address difficult issues, such as conflicts of interest within the movement.

(d) It has been reasonably efficient in its use of resources, which are modest in proportion to the potential benefits of improved nutrition.

(e) Its adaptability and willingness to learn from experience, which is reflected in the iterative way that SUN has evolved.

S20. In addition, the Global Nutrition Report (although not itself a SUN output) is now set to be an important part of SUN’s wider framework for monitoring and evaluation in future.

Conclusion 4: But SUN also has weaknesses in its current design...

S21. Weaknesses in SUN’s design include:

(a) Insufficient clarity in its approach to costed plans and common results frameworks (an aspect where more explicit reflection on the lessons of previous episodes of multi-sector planning would be useful).

(b) A monitoring and evaluation framework which is not rigorous enough and is too subjective. It is therefore not reliable as a guide to individual country progress over time, nor for comparing progress across different countries.

(c) An unnecessarily restrictive assumption that country-level network structures should replicate the global structure.

S22. There are additional potential weaknesses if SUN interprets the principle of inclusivity too narrowly, or fails to adapt to the particular needs of middle income countries and fragile states.

S23. There is also a risk that deference to the language of a "movement" and the (wholly appropriate) principle of country ownership, will prevent SUN from getting to grips with issues of quality, which need to be addressed if all stakeholders, not just governments, are to be held accountable for their commitments towards tackling undernutrition.

Conclusion 5: ... and SUN also has weaknesses in implementation.

S24. SUN’s vision is that country-level improvements in nutrition can be built on improvements in nutrition governance that are supported by global and country-level networks of all main stakeholders. This is reflected in the strategy adopted in 2012. However, it is taking time to put all the elements of that strategy into place. Thus:
(a) It has taken time for all the support networks to put their own systems of governance in place and establish their ways of working. The UN network and the business network are still addressing basic issues of strategy and coordination.

(b) Progress in developing practical methodologies for financial tracking has been understandably slow, but this undermines progress towards scaling up resources.

S25. Although not surprising, this slow progress has serious implications:

(a) SUN has not actually implemented the accountability framework described in its Strategy and Revised Road Map – so at global level it is not following up the accountability of stakeholders systematically enough.

(b) In part this is because the Lead Group in its current form operates at too abstract a level, and is not suited to the practical tasks of holding networks, the Secretariat and stakeholders accountable for making and then delivering on actionable commitments. (And the networks' "operational plans" envisaged in the 2012–2015 Strategy and Revised Road Map are not yet visible.)

(c) At country level it has not followed through with establishing quality standards for costed plans and it has only recently specified common results frameworks in a way that is consistent with country-level accountability for all stakeholders.

Conclusion 6: Serious weaknesses in the international architecture for nutrition still persist.

S26. SUN has been a timely and appropriate attempt to strengthen global-level architecture for nutrition, but serious weaknesses remain. Although SUN was not, and should not have been, expected to resolve all problems, it will be important to take them into account in the design of SUN’s next phase. In particular:

(a) There continues to be a plethora of overlapping and insufficiently coordinated and coherent international initiatives on nutrition.

(b) There has been only slow progress in addressing issues of coherence and coordination among UN bodies concerned with nutrition.

Conclusion 7: SUN will ultimately be a failure unless its weaknesses are seriously and urgently addressed.

S27. There is good evidence that the changes in nutrition policy and programmes that SUN is advocating are feasible and can have lasting benefits for affected populations, and also that the changes in nutrition governance that SUN promotes can leverage appropriate changes in policy and programmes. At the same time, bringing about such changes is not easy, and SUN has made progress on this front in only a limited number of countries. SUN has been very successful in advocacy and
mobilisation, but this will not translate into demonstrable and widespread results unless the weaknesses the evaluation has identified are seriously and urgently addressed.

**Recommendations**

S28. The recommendations are designed to be incorporated into the planning process for SUN’s next phase, which is referred to as SUN 2.0. The Visioning Sub-Group has been given responsibility for managing this process as well as organising the stakeholder response to the evaluation; the main report makes some additional suggestions about responsibilities for taking each recommendation forward.

**Recommendation 1: SUN should be continued and strengthened, building as far as possible on the existing framework.**

S29. SUN is addressing an issue of huge global importance. It has made promising early achievements and has considerable strengths to build on. The evaluation has also identified some serious shortcomings which need to be addressed if SUN is to achieve its objectives. The prospects for future success will be increased by maintaining continuity with the elements that have worked well while making changes to address clearly identified weaknesses.

S30. Accordingly, the current mandate of SUN should be extended by 5 years, to match the period of its new strategy document (see Recommendation 2). There should be no presumption of continuation beyond that period unless a further mid-term evaluation of SUN 2.0 finds that it has successfully addressed the weaknesses this report has identified and is achieving demonstrable results at country level.

**Recommendation 2: The necessary re-design and strengthening of SUN should be reflected in a new strategy document to be prepared during the first half of 2015.**

S31. A new strategy document will be needed. This should thoroughly revisit, and supersede, the 2012 Strategy and Revised Road Map. It will need to serve both as an updated "constitution" for SUN (explaining its objectives and structures, its ways of working and the mutual obligations of participants), and as an operational plan with clear and monitorable targets. It should address the weaknesses identified in this report.

S32. The strategy document itself will not resolve every detail of the responses to the recommendations, but it can incorporate a work programme for doing so. The VSG will need to establish sub-groups (supported as needed by consultants) to address key elements of the redesign, including clearer specifications for costed plans and results frameworks with associated quality standards, to feed into systems of independent review and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) that have a purposeful country-level focus. Country networks must be thoroughly engaged and consulted during this process.
S33. The SUN 2.0 strategy should have a five-year horizon, with provision to
complete a thorough independent review by the end of the fourth year so as to guide
any subsequent phase. Main elements of design should be agreed by the middle of
2015, so that the SUN 2.0 strategy can be formally adopted by September 2015.

Recommendation 3: SUN’s primary focus should continue to be on undernutrition
and the elimination of stunting. However, there should be more acknowledgement
that good nutrition plans will need to address all forms of malnutrition, including
the double burden of undernutrition and overnutrition.

S34. SUN’s advocacy efforts around stunting have been found to be highly relevant
and effective, and with global stunting levels still unacceptably high, will continue to
be relevant. At the same time, it must be recognised that most SUN countries already
suffer from multiple burdens, that this trend will continue, and that national
nutrition strategies must address all dimensions of malnutrition. SUN 2.0 should
continue to focus on countries where undernutrition is a significant burden, while
recognising that stunting must be tackled in tandem with other dimensions of
malnutrition.

Recommendation 4: The strategy should also encompass practical ways to
strengthen the focus on gender and equity as they relate to nutrition. This should
include a concerted focus on the nutritional status, knowledge, and practices of
females, as well as action to reinforce the participation of disempowered and
marginalised groups in scaling up nutrition, including a continued commitment to
women’s empowerment.

S35. SUN’s good gender intentions have so far not made enough practical
difference. Sufficient attention to the nutritional needs of women and women’s
empowerment will not be achieved simply by exhortation but requires practical
measures to strengthen monitoring, analysis and the sharing of experiences. More
broadly, SUN needs to pay more systematic attention to (in)equality of nutrition
(including regional, social, economic and ethnic dimensions).

S36. Gender and equity should have a central role in the next strategy, but, more
than that, the movement needs to identify ways of sharing experiences of
stakeholders in the movement that have successfully dealt with these issues, for
instance by facilitating learning from nations which have ensured that gender
determinants of undernutrition have been addressed across sectors and beyond
those traditionally associated with women’s reproductive and traditional roles.
Gender and equity should also be reflected in the quality criteria for assessing costed
plans and common results frameworks, and must be given stronger prominence in
the monitoring framework.

Recommendation 5: The revised strategy must, inter alia, reflect existing aid
effectiveness principles, and focus on strengthening accountability across the
movement, globally and at country level, with all stakeholders making, and being
held accountable for, monitorable undertakings in support of country-led plans for scaling up nutrition.

S37. SUN must develop clearer guidance on what is meant by common results frameworks and national nutrition plans, the relationship between these concepts, and the sequencing of actions to establish them in practice. To support this, SUN must develop a system of credible independent assessment of the quality of plans and results frameworks, in a manner that takes account of the responsibilities of all stakeholders, not just the government, and does not compromise the principle of country ownership. Such an independent (peer) review system will require careful design and piloting followed by the propagation of good practice solutions.

Recommendation 6: Recognise that expecting countries all to replicate the same country-level configuration of the support networks is unnecessarily rigid. Allow for more diversity, both in the guidelines to SUN countries and within the global action plans of the support networks.

S38. Completely standardised approaches are not necessary in principle nor feasible in practice. Among other things, the assumption of uniformity has led to an imbalance between global and country requirements in the way SUN country progress is monitored. Each network should update its strategy and activity plans so as to reflect the diversity found in countries, in parallel with, and as an input to, the preparation of the SUN 2.0 strategy.

Recommendation 7: Recognise that scaling up cannot proceed at the same pace in all countries and that there should be room within the movement for innovation and experiment. Accordingly initiatives to promote large-scale action in selected countries should be accommodated within the movement, so long as they observe the movement’s basic principles, including the principle of country ownership.

S39. Whilst retaining an open door policy, there is a case to be made for demonstrating impact at scale in a few countries. (The 2012 Revised Road Map stated that the Movement’s members would concentrate support on countries that had demonstrated their readiness to scale up nutrition.) A number of partners are pursuing this agenda, e.g. in relation to a proposed catalytic financing facility. Such initiatives should be encouraged to operate within the framework of SUN and its accountabilities rather than outside.

Recommendation 8: SUN should strengthen accountability by considerably strengthening its governance arrangements, including: (a) an overhaul of the Lead Group and (b) the creation of a senior body that can exercise effective supervision of the implementation of SUN’s strategy.

S40. The Lead Group is found to be incapable of performing the detailed accountability function that is required in governing SUN, because it conflates the roles of strategic leaders with champions, has very high level membership, and meets only infrequently and for short periods of time. There needs to be a body which is
sufficiently senior to exert authority and has enough time to devote to full participation in extended meetings on a quarterly basis, that can facilitate the mutual accountability that was envisaged in, but never delivered by, the 2012–2015 Strategy. This does not mean departing from the principle of country ownership – rather it is a way of applying accountability in support of country-owned strategies and plans.

S41. It is important that governance arrangements are seen as legitimate as well as efficient, and proposals for change must be subject to thorough, but also rapid, consultation. A feasible option would be: (a) to retain a Lead Group formally operating under a mandate from the UN Secretary General; (b) to hold transparent consultations with stakeholders about appropriate membership, as a basis for appointing a new Lead Group; and (c) to specify the mandate, operating modalities and membership of a senior stewardship body / executive committee that would have primary responsibility for ensuring continuing functional accountability across the SUN movement.

S42. Requirements for the future configuration of the SUN secretariat need to be worked out as part of the development of the SUN 2.0 strategy. With many other priority issues to address, changes to its location or legal status should be avoided.

Recommendation 9: There should be a particular focus on strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning. The independent monitoring role of the Global Nutrition Report should be retained and strengthened.

S43. Reliable monitoring and objective evaluation are essential for an endeavour which, like SUN, depends on rapid learning and adaptation – both globally for the movement as a whole and at country level for the continual adaptation and improvement of nutrition strategies and programmes. The role played by the Global Nutrition Report as a monitor of nutrition progress globally has been a significant advancement this year, providing credible independent evidence on progress in SUN countries and elsewhere. This role is a safeguard against the risk of mixing monitoring with advocacy in SUN’s own reporting. SUN’s own current M&E approach is too subjective, and not sufficiently focused on in-country M&E requirements.

S44. In future, the Global Nutrition Report should lead on monitoring progress in SUN countries (as a regular part of its global monitoring), particularly at the outcome and impact level. Monitoring and evaluation of output-level results is likely to need to stay within the SUN system, but the system must be made more robust. Work on revising SUN’s M&E systems needs to be linked to work on developing peer review criteria for plans and common results frameworks and their associated in-country accountability arrangements.

Recommendation 10: The partners in SUN should pursue further rationalisation of the international architecture for nutrition. This should include strengthening of coordination and coherence among the UN agencies and a streamlining of international initiatives on nutrition. The Global Nutrition Report should
independently monitor the commitments under such initiatives, as it already does for the Nutrition for Growth commitments.

S45. Whilst SUN came about in part in reaction to the dysfunctional nutrition architecture, this continues to be a complex and continually evolving myriad of entities, with overlapping mandates and activities, displaying varying degrees of collaboration, and with much competition for resources. The monitoring of commitments under most high profile initiatives is weak and diffuse.

S46. Partners within the SUN movement have individual responsibilities towards rationalising this architecture. For instance, efforts of the UN agencies to strengthen coordination and coherence of streamlining of international initiatives on nutrition must be accelerated. Development partners should seek to harmonise their programmes to limit fragmentation, in addition to bringing new initiatives such as the Catalytic Fund for Nutrition under the “big tent” of SUN. The Global Nutrition Report should be supported to monitor commitments under a broader set of nutrition initiatives, as it already does for the Nutrition for Growth commitments.

Summary and Next Steps

S47. The SUN movement has demonstrated impressive energy and dynamism and has advocated successfully for nutrition to get the attention it deserves, both on global platforms and in countries with high burdens of malnourished populations. With an appropriate focus on support to country-led strategies, it has rapidly mobilised a broad base of supporters who have shown willingness to collaborate on nutrition. However, the evaluation has found some fundamental weaknesses in the design and implementation of SUN; these need be urgently addressed so as to ensure that the SUN movement’s potential is fully realised.

S48. There is now a window of opportunity to reshape and reinvigorate the SUN movement. The current mandate of the Lead Group, already extended by a year, runs out at the end of 2015. The Visioning Sub-Group has developed a programme for consultation across the SUN movement to consider responses to this evaluation and to ensure that the changes which are agreed are reflected in a strategy for SUN 2.0 which can be approved by the third quarter of 2015. This is a very important process, because the potential gains from ensuring SUN’s future success are enormous.