

NUTRITION FINANCING IN ASIA

Capacity Strengthening Workshop

Bangkok, Thailand



August 27-30, 2024

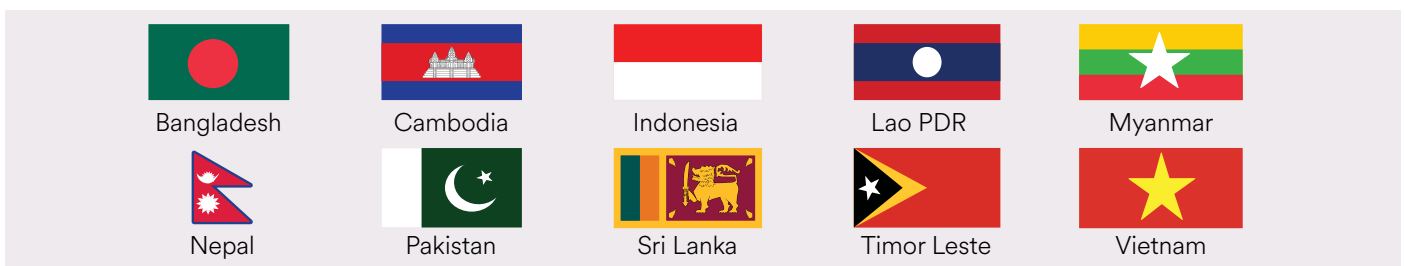
Workshop Summary Report

BACKGROUND

Countries in the Asia region have made significant progress to accelerate nutrition financing, however, they have faced roadblocks along the way and require support to strengthen systems for nutrition financing. The SUN 3.0 strategy promotes a greater prioritization of nutrition financing through focused-learning, and experience-sharing. To this end, the SUN Movement Secretariat Asia Hub organized a workshop to accelerate governments' efforts in the region to scale up nutrition financing.



Countries



During the three-day capacity strengthening workshop sixty-five participants from 10 countries convened to discuss core issues of nutrition financing. Participants included 4-member country delegations composed of the SUN Focal Point, government officials from the Ministry of Finance or Budget and Planning, representatives from SUN CSA, and the UN Agencies who support the nutrition finance process in the country. The objectives of the workshop were to:

Support participating countries to review and strengthen plans for nutrition financing.

Discuss domestic and external resource mobilization opportunities and the role of Ministries of Finance.

Share country experiences on nutrition financing and agree on a country-led vision of success for sustainable nutrition financing in Asia.

The preparatory process for the workshop involved a rapid finance landscaping of each country which was conducted in collaboration with the country teams. Countries shared data on nutrition budget allocations, expenditures, and releases across sectors.

This information helped to gain a general understanding of the financial landscape for nutrition across the countries and informed the country-specific worksheets for group work sessions and plenary discussion.

Technical presentations from partners opened each session including: UNICEF- EAPRO (Rene Gerard Galera), World Bank (Kyoko Shibata Okamura and Evan Harold Blecher), Asia Development Bank (Shingo Kimura), and a Senior Adviser in Nutrition at the Institute of Nutrition Mahidol University, Thailand (Dr Emorn Udomkesmalee). FCDP (Albertha Nyaku, Abbe McCarter, Lalita Bhattacharjee), and C4N (Wolsey, Jonathan), facilitated the plenary and group work sessions. For each group work session, country teams engaged in a hands-on review of their nutrition financing landscape, guided by a set of practical worksheets covering each of the five key components of sustainable nutrition financing:

- 1 Setting the Scene and Policy Foundations;
- 2 Mainstreaming Nutrition within Annual Planning & Budgeting;
- 3 Country-led Financing Opportunities;
- 4 Multi-sectoral Governance & Accountability; and
- 5 Calls to Action & Vision of Success

KEY LEARNING AND INSIGHTS

Some of what we heard on what's necessary to transform nutrition financing in Asia:

1. Ministries of Finance and/or Budget and Planning must be engaged in nutrition financing discussions and can lead the way towards country-led innovations.

Country delegations including representatives from Ministries of Finance reflected on the important role the Ministry of Finance has to play in advocating for and taking ownership over adequate nutrition financing. Innovative solutions on how best to leverage investments and attract new sources of funding can emerge from engagements with the Ministry of Finance as nutrition is elevated as priority. For example, Thailand's sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) excise tax was highlighted where the Ministry of Finance played a key role in stipulating the new tax policies. Review indicated a positive public health and nutrition impact and supported a strong case for the allocation of government revenues for nutrition programs that maximize the impact of these tax policies, although the increase in revenue is limited.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of institutionalized budget tagging or tracking: introducing a nutrition budget code within government financial management and accounting systems. Any change to financial systems requires political buy-in and often a high-level mandate which in turn requires adequate preparation, review, and planning to design the new budget code. This process must be led by the Ministry of Finance together with nutrition leaders.

2. Country-led resource mobilization is a high priority, with a need to diversify funding sources and attract partners that will invest in government systems.

Participants noted that the donor financing landscape dominated by traditional donors is plateauing and that a diversification towards new partners and sources of funding is critical. Investment in government systems is also critical to ensure program sustainability, highlighting the importance of nutrition within World Bank and Asian Development Bank investments as well as philanthropies. The UNICEF Child Nutrition Fund was identified as a mechanism that countries can tap into. Above all, participants emphasized the importance of creating targeted fundraising strategies to harness and ensure effective utilization of investment opportunities.

3. Mainstreaming nutrition into planning and budgeting is essential: so is a common understanding of how to leverage sectoral investments to optimize nutrition gains.

Participants recognized the need to leverage existing investments across sectors to ensure that nutrition gains are maximized—for example, agriculture & food systems and climate financing were discussed. Tools to mainstream nutrition into planning and budgeting were discussed as necessary.

However, the most pressing need is for resources to sensitize sectors on the importance of nutrition and evidence-based resources that help guide investment-making to optimize nutrition gains, for example, by adding nutrition or healthy diet objectives to relevant investments.

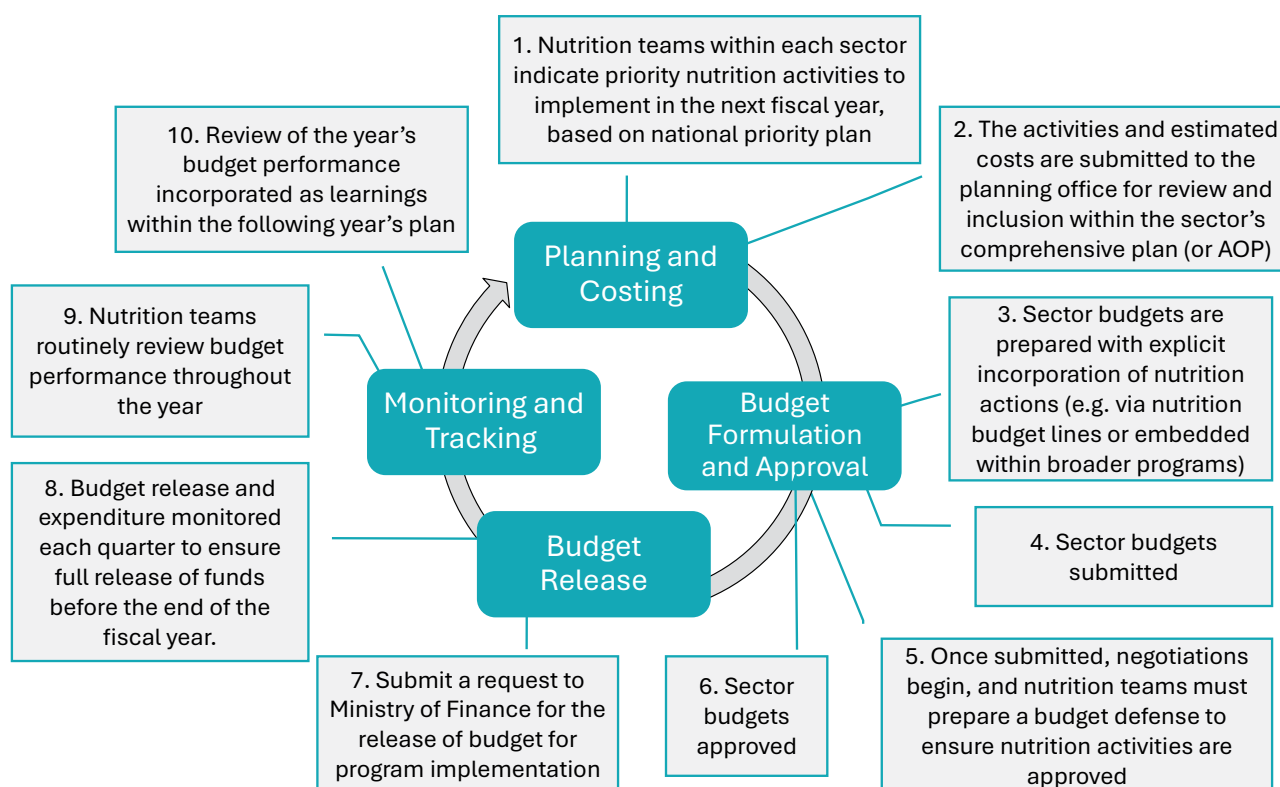


Figure 1: Generic Annual Planning & Budget Management Cycle to Mainstream Nutrition

Countries discussed the importance of reviewing nutrition budgeting and planning at all sub-national levels in order to comprehensively cover all opportunities for funding nutrition—and possible bottlenecks and areas for intervention.

4. Accelerated advocacy efforts are necessary—backed with targeted, evidence-based messages and strengthened accountability systems.

Advocacy is critical across all components of sustainable financing: to elevate nutrition on the policy agenda, to advocate for increased government funding, to engage new funders, to hold stakeholders accountable to their commitments, etc. Participants discussed the need for local civil society organizations to support and rally behind government initiatives. Regional partners also have an important role to play to engage with high level decision makers across countries and institutions to help elevate nutrition as a priority.

For example, having clear government financing targets for each sector, alongside clear actions each sector is responsible for funding. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of strengthening information and accountability systems backed by availability of quality nutrition financing data.

5. Sharing experiences and learning across countries is essential to transform nutrition financing, which should be supported by regional partners.

Although significant variation exists across the 10 participating countries, each emphasized the importance of cross-country learning and experience sharing. For example, countries wanted to learn from the experience in Indonesia on implementing a budget tagging system, from Bangladesh on successful nutrition stakeholder mapping, and from Pakistan on transparent tracking and reporting systems, to name a few.

The SUN Asia Hub has created a space to facilitate cross-country learnings for a variety of topics. Regional partners also play an important role in supporting knowledge sharing. Key insights from countries and regions must be shared with the global community committed to sustainable nutrition financing in order to make progress on the global goals for nutrition.



Workshop participant sharing country experiences

NEXT STEPS FOR COUNTRIES

Participants shared excitement for the way forward. Each country team outlined a vision of success for sustainable nutrition financing in their country and will take practical steps forward by convening partners and expanding on the work started at the workshop to develop sustainable financing frameworks for nutrition. For example, actions that countries will take forward after the workshop include to:

- 1** Articulate government financing goals for nutrition and identify the resource gap.
- 2** Convene discussions with sectoral leads to identify opportunities in sector investments for nutrition.
- 3** Convene discussions with the Ministry of Finance and/or Budget and Planning Commissions to identify concrete actions to strengthen annual planning and budgeting processes to prioritize nutrition.
- 4** Develop a government-led resource mobilization strategy for nutrition including both domestic and external sources of funding, with a clear accountability plan for implementation.
- 5** Develop and implement an advocacy strategy to increase political will and adequately prioritize nutrition financing.
- 6** Discuss the design of a nutrition budget tracking or tagging and information system to strengthen accountability and availability of quality nutrition financing data.

Each country is on its own path. While tackling large financing gaps may be a daunting task, it is important to build on existing foundations where possible and capitalize on small wins to garner momentum.

WAY FORWARD

Lessons learned shared above can be used broadly to accelerate global and regional discussions on how to scale up funding for nutrition sustainably, especially in context of the next Nutrition For Growth Summit and other milestones. The SUN Asia Hub will continue to convene countries and partners to discuss the critical topics mentioned above.



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