



Data for Decisions to Expand  
Nutrition Transformation

# One-Year Follow Up Assessment: Together for Nutrition (T4N) West African Data Forum

## B R I E F

### Background

On 11-12 February 2020, Transform Nutrition West Africa (TNWA)<sup>1</sup>, and partners<sup>2</sup> organized the [Together for Nutrition: West African Data Forum](#) ('T4N Forum') in Saly, Senegal. This event brought together 93 actors from 15 ECOWAS countries around four key objectives (Box 1). After the February event, the Call to Action (CTA) was finalized with input from T4N Forum participants and other regional nutrition stakeholders. Box 2 describes the T4N Forum and CTA development processes in more detail.

Approximately 12 months after the event, [DataDENT](#), in collaboration with TNWA and UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO), followed-up with T4N Forum participants. Guiding questions for the one year follow-up included: 1) did the T4N Forum achieve its objectives; 2) how did the event and CTA influence action around nutrition data; and 3) should similar events or CTA be organized in the future?

#### Box 1. T4N Forum Objectives

1. To share national and regional achievements and challenges in collaboration on data driven nutrition action;
2. To strengthen connectivity, coordination, and collaboration on data-driven nutrition action;
3. To formulate a Call to Action (CTA) to strengthen the data value chain (DVC) for nutrition at country and regional level; and
4. To identify stakeholder groups to take up and support the call to action.

### Methods

The one year follow-up involved direct engagement with T4N Forum participants through key informant interviews (KIIs) and an online survey as well as a review of T4N-related products.

In March 2021, DataDENT staff conducted KIIs with ten participants purposively selected to represent different types of Forum participants. They played different roles in the T4N Forum including organizing partners (2), presenters (3), group facilitators (3), and general attendees (2) and had different institutional affiliations including government (5), donor (1), regional institutions (1), and academic/research institutions (2). The respondents were asked questions and probes around the guiding assessment questions (see above). In June 2021, a brief online survey was sent to all meeting participants and organizing partners. A total of 31

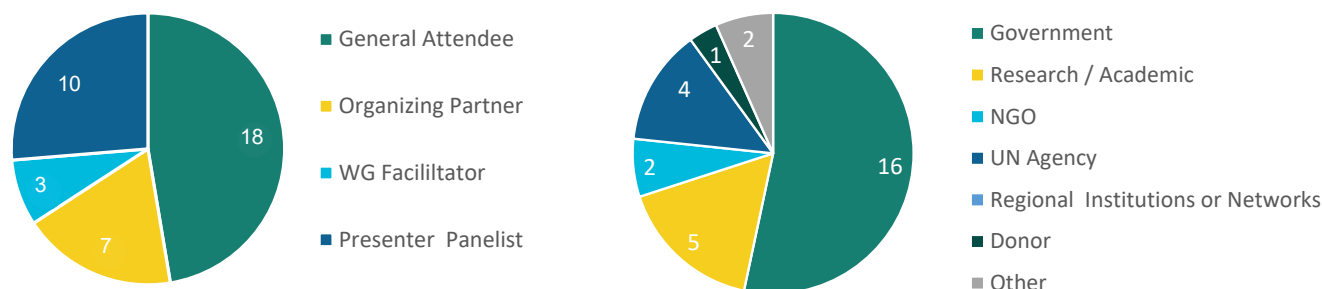
<sup>1</sup> TNWA is an initiative led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI),

<sup>2</sup> Organizing partners included IFPRI, Data for Decisions to Expand Nutrition Transformation (DataDENT) project which includes Johns Hopkins University, IFPRI and Results for Development, UNICEF, Alive and Thrive, Countdown to 2030, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Health Organization (WHO), the West African Health Organization (WAHO), and the National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN).

T4N Forum participants responded to the online survey (Figure 1). The KII guide and online survey tools are available on the [DataDENT website](#).

DataDENT, TNWA, and UNICEF WCARO team members reviewed the assembled information and together identified key findings that are presented in this brief.

Figure 1: Characteristics of online survey respondents (n = 31 participants however multiple responses allowed)



## Box 2. Planning the T4N Forum & developing the CTA

In 2018, the TNWA project frequently engaged with national, regional and global partners as it carried out a regional nutrition data landscaping. Recognizing shared interest in nutrition data issues, TNWA convened a core group of partners who, over six months of discussions, agreed to sponsor a regional event. This group proposed the T4N objectives and agenda. With time, more partners contributed to planning and offered financial support.

The T4N Forum was held in February 2020, right before the COVID-19 pandemic reached global scale. The T4N agenda was organized around the components of the [nutrition Data Value Chain \(DVC\)](#). Each topic area included individual speakers and panels who addressed global/regional perspectives and most importantly, country-specific experiences. Breakout sessions and table discussion groups were used throughout the two days to encourage participant engagement around the content. The agenda also included a skills building workshop on data visualization techniques.

Throughout the event, participants were asked to identify actions that could be taken in response to issues and ideas being raised during sessions. These actions were captured in a “[visual note](#)” during the event. After the event, these actions were further developed into a regional [CTA](#) for strengthening nutrition DVCs in West Africa. The CTA identified stakeholder groups best positioned to take specific actions including national governments, regional bodies, donors, UN agencies, implementing partners, and researchers.

Finalized through a coordinated individual and institutional review process, the CTA reflects the priorities of those working with and for nutrition data across West Africa. The CTA was disseminated through T4N Forum participants and UNICEF country offices. At regional level, it was adopted by the Regional Nutrition Working Group for Data Systems and Strategic Use of Data and was endorsed by the WAHO as consistent with the ECOWAS Regional Nutrition Strategic Plan.

TNWA supported communications and networking efforts around the event and the CTA including a webpage and social media presence.

## Key Findings

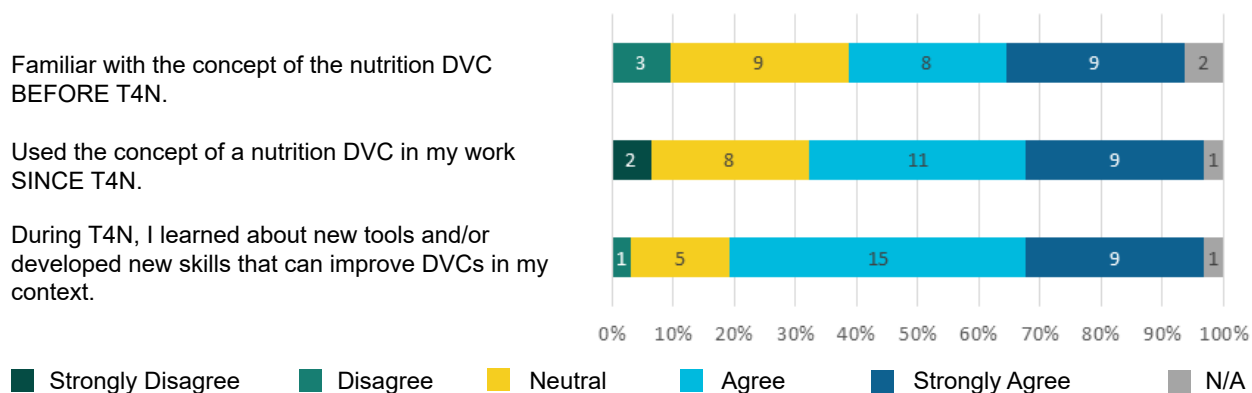


**Key Finding 1: Respondents have taken up the Nutrition DVC framework—which was used to structure the T4N Event agenda—as a tool for strengthening nutrition data in their own contexts.**

A number of participants were familiar with the nutrition DVC concept before the T4N event (Figure 2) and KIIs suggest that their understanding of and appreciation for the DVC framework deepened during the event.

“Even if, even if I would have been able to talk about [the DVC], it wouldn’t be with the same level of conviction by which I was able to talk about them, because now I had other people’s examples and, also, I had insights from quite a lot of discussions, quite a lot of the discussion about some of the challenges in trying to say let us do that.” – Government Ministry / Policy Advisor, KII

Figure 2: Online survey respondent familiarity & use of DVC concept (n = 31)



More than half of online survey participants have used the framework since the event and more said the Event exposed them to new tools or skills to improve data value chains (Figure 2). Respondents specifically found the nutrition DVC framework useful for understanding how data can support decision making and that examining links between DVC elements is important for ensuring data quality. Practical examples of applying the DVC framework shared by KIIs and online survey respondents included its use for developing new projects, structuring proposals and in teaching students.



**Key finding 2: Respondents valued the T4N event as a knowledge sharing and networking opportunity at both regional and country levels.**

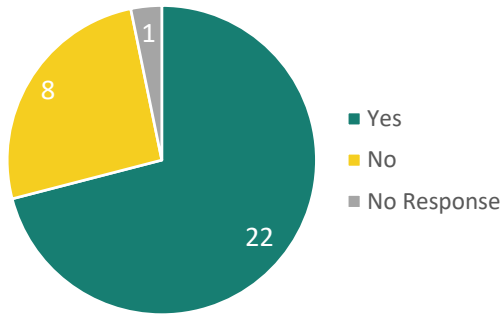
Looking back on the T4N Event, about two-thirds of the online survey participants (20/31) could recall having a meaningful conversation around nutrition data with another participant at the event. KII respondents echoed the value of engaging with others at the T4N event.

“It was, it was a great opportunity to build on our network...with colleagues who ...work with data or produce data. It was an opportunity ...to exchange on our experiences, to share information, to share documentation on the different work being done. It also strengthens our ability to do the work that we’re already doing and it allowed us to learn from the experiences of others which leads us to ask, you know, why not experiment with new ways, or why not try new ways?” – Government Ministry / Policy Advisor, KII

Both the online survey and the KII responses suggest that the connections initiated or strengthened during the event have carried on after the event (Figure 3).

“Three Ministries from my country participated in the meeting and we have worked together more than before on the implementation of a survey and an intervention for improved nutrition” – Government Ministry / Policy Advisor, KII

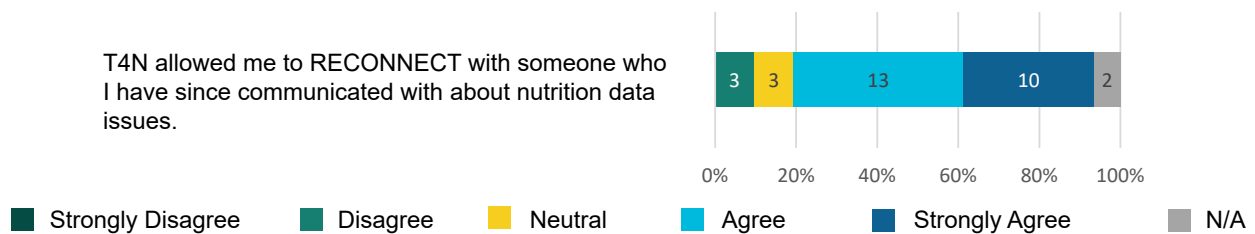
Figure 3: Online survey respondents who report of follow-up with someone they FIRST met at T4N event



For many participants, the T4N event was an opportunity to strengthen existing ties between individuals and institutions working on nutrition data in West Africa. A number of the online survey participants had participated in one or more other regional nutrition data-related events in the previous three years including TWNA Evidence & Leadership Short Courses in 2018 and 2019 (6/31), Countdown to 2030 Nutrition Analysis workshop in 2019 (7/31), WAHO Nutrition & Health Management Information Systems (HMIS) Meeting in 2021 (5/31) and the WAHO Nutrition forum in 2019 (5/31).

“What I found really great was being able to reconnect with many of the people I had met with the WAHO forum in 2019. So, it was a nice continuation of relationship building and learning.” – Donor, KII

Figure 4: Online survey respondent report of reconnection and follow-up with other T4N participants (n=31)



Even though they valued the experience of the T4N Event, none of the KII respondents from public sector institutions said they would have been able to fund their own participation in the event nor that their institutions would have resources to fund such an event.



**Key finding 3: Respondents varied in whether they found the Call to Action (CTA) useful for inspiring and informing action within their contexts.**

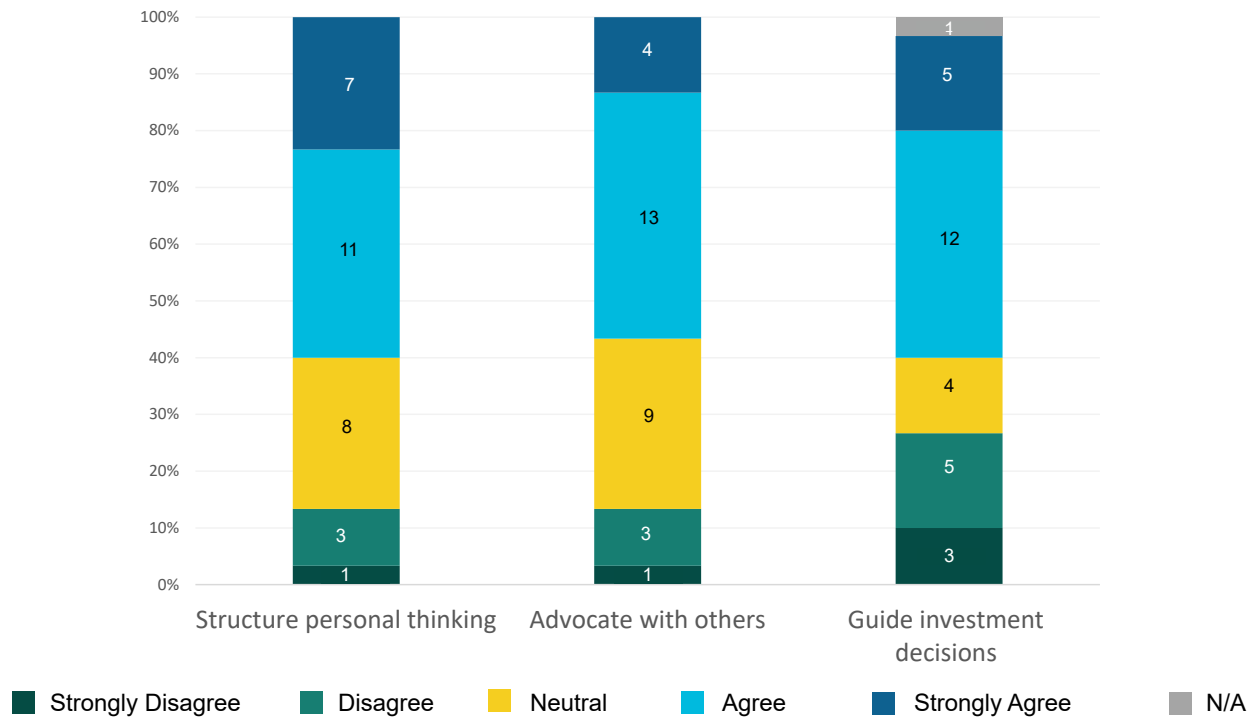
Awareness of and engagement with the CTA varied across online survey and KII respondents. All ten KII respondents were aware of the finalized CTA; however, a quarter of the online survey respondents said they had not seen the final CTA after the T4N Event (8/31). About half of online survey respondents reported being involved in finalizing the CTA after the T4N Event (14/31).

Online survey and KIIs reported different ways that the CTA has been useful to them including harmonizing regional actors around common messages, developing regional consensus for data priorities, and strengthening the integration of nutrition data within strategic plans and funding requests. The data sub-group of the Regional Nutrition Working Group used the CTA as an umbrella framework for their annual workplan.

Box 3 identifies other ways countries have used the CTA which were presented during a 2021 webinar hosted by WAHO, and supported by TNWA and UNICEF WCARO.

“We used it during the Regional Nutrition Working Group. It allows us to map what different partners are undertaking in different areas and directs actions towards the needs of countries/regional context.”  
 – Academic or Research Institution, Online Survey

Figure 5: Online survey respondent report of how the CTA has been useful in their context (n=31)



“I think that was a really great initiative to keep us accountable as well as give us a reference point to say ‘okay, we were all here, this is what we agreed to, this is the standard.’ So, I reference the Call to Action all the time actually.” – Donor, KII

“As an NGO staff, the T4N Call to Action has been useful as a guidance to nutrition program implementation and monitoring” – NGO, Online Survey

More than half of the online survey respondents (19/31) agreed that the WAHO endorsement of the CTA has been meaningful to stakeholders in their context. However, nine online survey respondents were not aware that WAHO had endorsed the CTA and some KII respondents did not see WAHO endorsement as particularly useful.

“I wasn’t aware that WAHO endorsed the call to action. Furthermore, we don’t really have a direct communication channel with WAHO. We work with them sometimes, but we do not have a direct communication channel to be aware and to be up-to-date with their communication.” – Gouvernement Ministry / Policy Advisor, KII

Five of the KII respondents said that the CTA has had limited influence in their contexts. Reasons included that T4N Forum participants are not able to access decision makers, poor understanding of the CTA by decision makers, and uncertainty of how to operationalize the CTA, particularly in terms of resource mobilization.

“We are not doing any advocacy, so for us it is good to know about it, but we are not really using it”  
– Donor, KII

“I see that [the CTA] is a good thing. It is a good thing because they shared [the CTA], and we gave our feedback. It’s good, it’s a well elaborated document. The problem is putting it into action.” – Gouvernement Ministry / Policy Advisor, KII

Although it occurred after the assessment period, it is notable that in August 2021 the Nutrition Data Partners Group used the T4N CTA as a primary source of sample commitments that can be made by global and country actors for the Nutrition for Growth event in December 2021.

### Box 3. Webinar highlighting country actions in response to the CTA

One year after the T4N Forum, WAHO hosted with support from TNWA and UNICEF a webinar “Investing in the Data Value Chain for nutrition in West Africa: How to bring a call to action to life?” which was attended by over 100 participants. The webinar highlighted experiences of adopting the CTA from Liberia and Nigeria as well as examples of DVC strengthening in Kenya. It also shared examples of how the participatory CTA development process was catalytic for DVC strengthening in a number of T4N Forum countries including Burkina Faso, Togo, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Cape Verde, and Ghana. The achievements, challenges and lessons of the CTA uptake shared in the webinar are summarized in the table below.





	Achievements	Lessons Learnt	Challenges
 <p><b>Increase and maintain funding</b> for strengthening all elements of the data value chain for nutrition.</p>	CTA was used as an advocacy tool for financing multisectoral strategic plans	CTA helps to facilitate call for investments in nutrition; identify priorities for nutrition information systems	Mobilize and maintain funds for each step of the DVC
 <p><b>Institute measures to harmonize</b> nutrition data management systems across subnational, national, regional, and global levels; improve data quality; and make data more accessible to guide decision-making</p>	Harmonization of data through nutrition indicator framework (based on strategic plans) reducing parallel reporting systems	CTA helps to catalyze processes to identify common framework for nutrition indicators across different sectors	Electronic data collection; mapping stakeholders in nutrition
 <p><b>Invest in capacity strengthening</b> around each stage in the data value chain</p>	Training on data analysis and visualization training at district levels	CTA helps to identify various levels of capacity strengthening needed for each step of the DVC	Supporting universities; instability of human resources; lack of capacity in other sectors
 <p><b>Provide leadership</b> for developing and implementing coordinated strategies for nutrition data across institutions, sectors, and partners that meet policy and program needs</p>	Clear leadership around strategic multisectoral policy and its plan of action	CTA supports detailed development of M&E plans in nutrition	How to gain traction, obtain leadership

Table 1: Overview of achievements, lessons learnt, and challenges of uptake of the CTA at country level

Webinar presenters recognized the importance of WAHO leadership in monitoring performance and resource mobilisation towards the CTA. The WAHO regional Nutrition Observatory, a data warehouse that is under development with funding from USAID for collating, synthesising, analysing and disseminating nutrition and food security data, was recognized as a mechanism that will help WAHO play this role.



#### **Key finding 4: The T4N Event and CTA have been catalytic for ongoing action by regional institutions and have shown potential for influencing country actions.**

The T4N Forum and efforts to finalize the CTA have fostered sustained engagement, especially at regional level. Since the Forum, about half (16/31) of online survey respondents have visited the T4N webpage where the final CTA is publicly posted and 12 reported participating in the February 2021 WAHO webinar which highlighted country-level influence of the CTA (Box 3).

Several respondents noted the impact T4N has had on the regional nutrition working group data sub-group.

“The T4N was catalytic to bring the regional partners working on nutrition data together. It became a regional project under the regional nutrition working group data sub-group. It helped [identify] and build bonds with new partners working in the region.” – UN Agency, Online Survey

However, not all participants were aware of or engaging with regional efforts. Only 7 of 31 online survey respondents reported participating in one of the T4N follow-up calls organized by the Data Sub-group of the Regional Nutrition Working Group. Additionally, certain respondents emphasized that regional uptake does not necessarily translate into national action, suggesting that countries need to be actively engaged at higher-level (e.g., ministers) by regional institutions like WAHO.

“It’s fine to have regional interactions and initiatives aimed at stimulating action at the national level. But it’s not a given that the national level will then take those and then act on it, because there’s a whole trajectory for taking up initiatives.....The Call to Action has been shared; I have a copy, but I don’t have the responsibility to discuss with the Minister of Health. I don’t have access [to the minister]. But WAHO, for instance, can do this job to follow up specifically on points in the call to action with folks who can make it happen.” – Academia or Research Institution, KII

The same KII respondent suggested that the T4N Event and CTA might have been more influential at country level if it had included a different mix in the type of attendees both in terms of level of influence and sectors.

“I felt like we could actually bring better attention to this issue when inviting a combination of mid-level people like those who came, but also much higher-level people who would then make a drive the necessary advocacy and decision making around this.” – Academia or Research Institution, KII

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## **Conclusions**

To our knowledge, the T4N Forum and resulting CTA are the first efforts of their kind—engaging key data stakeholders at country and regional level to identify a set of common targeted recommendations for strengthening nutrition data value chains. It is also unique for a regional forum in the level post-event engagement including this one-year assessment.

Our findings suggest that the T4N Forum achieved its four key objectives of information sharing, networking, CTA formulation, and CTA stakeholder identification. The event was successful in positioning the nutrition DVC as a common tool for diagnosing problems and guiding actions to improve nutrition data. For networking, the T4N Forum facilitated new relationships and strengthened existing ties between individuals and institutions that have continued beyond the event.

The inclusive and collaborative approach used to plan and execute the T4N event and CTA process required significant human and financial resources—and was fully dependent on donor funding. A virtual event could be less expensive alternative to an in-person meeting. However, it is not clear whether the same results could be achieved using a virtual format, although much has been learned during the COVID-19 pandemic about successful virtual engagement.

The CTA appears to have been most useful at the regional level where the WAHO, UNICEF, TNWA, and the Regional Nutrition Data Sub-Group have used it as a platform for ongoing engagement. There is evidence that the T4N Forum and CTA inspired country-level action, but also suggestions that inclusion of more diverse country stakeholders in the event and more direct country engagement by regional actors for CTA uptake could have improved country response.

We acknowledge limitations to the generalizability of our one-year assessment findings, including that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic slowed finalization and dissemination of the CTA and can be assumed to have impacted all participants. It also impacted timing, planning, and response to this assessment (i.e., one-third of participants responded to the online survey). Therefore, we are careful to not draw definitive conclusions, but rather use this as an informative exercise for any future endeavours.

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## Recommendations

The findings have implications for two primary audiences: (1) WAHO and other regional entities looking to contribute to nutrition data strengthening in West Africa, and (2) development partners who have expressed interest in hosting similar events and/or using the CTA approach in other regions.

*For WAHO and West Africa regional actors:*

- **Actively engage with more country actors through the nutrition data subgroup of the Regional Nutrition Working Group.** Regional initiatives should also consider supporting other ways of outreach to and engagement with T4N participants and their colleagues (e.g., webinars, newsletters) to highlight progress and actions for nutrition DVC strengthening at regional and country levels. Special efforts are needed to reach a wider range of sectors and individual roles.
- **Use upcoming regional forums to directly engage higher-level country stakeholders (e.g. ministers) around CTA** including the Annual Health Ministers Meeting and WAHO Nutrition Forum. Identify forums that reach leaders from other sectors including agriculture, social protection and education as well as public finance and private sector.
- **Leverage upcoming global advocacy events to obtain commitments to financial and human resource needs for strengthening nutrition data.** The upcoming [Global Food Systems Summit](#) and [Nutrition for Growth \(N4G\)](#) summit are opportunities to advocate for national and regional stakeholders to make commitments in line with the priorities identified in the Call to Action. As the T4N Forum was the first in its kind, it can serve as inspiration to countries and institutions outside of West Africa in developing and prioritizing actionable commitments.

*For those interested in hosting similar events or developing a CTA for another context:*

- **Be realistic about the resources required to organize such events and facilitate participation by a representative group of stakeholders.** Resources need to be available to support staff activities from planning phase through post-event engagement including dissemination and advocacy. Country-level participants in the T4N Forum were fully funded by the organizing partners including all travel and accommodations. Government respondents would not be able to self fund for similar events.
- **Ensure that the event platform is in line with the objectives.** Virtual forums may be a more cost-effective option but will likely impact level of participation particularly by those who face internet challenges or are called into other meetings and activities. Virtual events also as reduce the opportunities for interpersonal networking which was a key objective of the T4N Forum.



- **Time an event and/or a CTA to coincide with known windows of opportunity.** The T4N Forum and CTA built upon multiple years of nutrition data-related investments, and activities and training workshops by organizing partners at regional and country level. This enabled organizers to identify specific stakeholders to feature for various aspects of the T4N Forum agenda. The Forum was also held at the start of 2020 with understanding that participating countries would formulate commitments at the 2020 N4G Summit (now 2021 due to COVID) which could draw from the CTA. Additionally, WAHO was in early stage planning for a regional Nutrition Observatory but still at a point where priorities and implementation could be shaped.
- **Be realistic about what a CTA should and should not aim to do.** Countries do not always have the resources for uptake of recommendations. Ensure that recommendations around actions that have already been shown to be successful in similar contexts.

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### About this Brief

Data collection and development of this brief was led by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH) as part of Data for Decisions to Expand Nutrition Transformation (DataDENT) and in collaboration with Transform Nutrition West Africa (TNWA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) West and Central Africa Regional Office. DataDENT is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

