Financing a nutrition information system – Insights from a financing landscape assessment in Ethiopia

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Data for Decisions in Nutrition

B R I E F

Introduction

A strong national nutrition information system (NIS) is needed to support multisectoral policy design and implementation and drive equitable progress towards achieving nutrition targets. As defined by WHO-UNICEF guidance, an NIS includes four key components – people, processes, technology, and data. It relies on data from various periodic, routine, and surveillance sources to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of nutrition.[1]

Information on the financing landscape for nutrition data is critical to ensure there is sufficient and consistent financing to support the success of an NIS. This information is also beneficial to future policy and resource mobilization efforts to support the availability and use of data as well as ongoing monitoring and evaluation of nutrition policies and programs.

Financing the Nutrition Data Strategy in Ethiopia

There has been little work around how nutrition data are financed globally including in Ethiopia. Ethiopian nutrition stakeholders are well-positioned to support the collection and use of high-quality and reliable nutrition data. One of the key focus areas of the recently adopted Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS) is Strategy 12 which aims to strengthen evidence-informed decision-making, learning, and accountability.[2] The FNS, including Strategy 12, has been costed. However, financing sources have not been identified. While costing of a strategy is an important first step, it does not guarantee funds will be mobilized to support its implementation.

In 2022, DataDENT in collaboration with Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), conducted a financing landscape to support the planning and implementation of Strategy 12 of the FNS. This brief shares insights gained from Ethiopia's nutrition data financing experience which can be applied to other countries that are developing an NIS to support multisectoral nutrition strategies.

Summary of Key Insights

1. A clear multisectoral nutrition data strategy, which includes all core components of a NIS, should be developed and sensitized amongst partners.
2. An accompanying implementation plan developed with multi-sector engagement and measurable financing targets is needed to execute the nutrition data strategy and to keep partners aware and accountable.
3. It is important to understand the budgetary process and financing architecture across all levels of government to determine entry points for increasing financing for nutrition data.
4. Alternative and innovative financing options for nutrition data should be considered to fill current gaps and ensure the sustainability of NIS activities.

Key Insights from the Ethiopia Experience

Four key insights emerged from our financing landscape assessment in Ethiopia and are described in detail below.

A clear multisectoral nutrition data strategy, which includes all core components of a NIS, should be developed and sensitized amongst partners.

A clear nutrition data strategy embedded within a multisectoral nutrition plan is necessary to ensure data are produced and used. In Ethiopia, Strategy 12 of the FNS aims to enhance evidence-informed decision-making, learning, and accountability, and it includes the core NIS components (See **Figure 1**). Our assessment found most government agencies, donor organizations, and development partners were familiar with Strategy 12, suggesting partners were sensitized to the strategy and could support its implementation.

Figure 1: Key objectives of Strategy 12 of the Food and Nutrition Strategy

Strategy 12: Enhance evidence-informed decision-making, learning and accountability	
Strategic Initiative 12.1: Ensure evidence-based implementation of the FNP and strategy	
12.1.1	Ensure continuous generation and access of quality food and nutrition data and its use for decision making
12.1.2	Ensure generation and dissemination of food and nutrition research findings to enhance evidence-based decision making
12.1.3	Ensure the development of multisectoral monitoring and evaluation system for FNP/FNS implementation
Strategic Initiative 12.2: Ensure food and nurition evidence translation to improve program	
12.2.1	Ensure a mechanism for food and nutrition evidence translation to improve program implementation
12.2.2	Ensure that evidence-based learning is in place

An accompanying implementation plan developed with multi-sector engagement and measurable financing targets is needed to execute the nutrition data strategy and to keep partners aware and accountable.

An NIS implementation plan with measurable financing targets can help ensure all partners are aware of their role and how to productively contribute to reaching the plan's strategic objectives. In the case of Ethiopia, a multisector joint planning platform led by the Ministry of Health (MoH) develops an annual costed work plan to carry out the strategic actions. However, unlike Strategy 12, we found partners to either be unaware of this implementation plan or aware but not working to intentionally align their activities with it. This makes it hard to know whether and how financing for the strategy is being achieved. Therefore, there is a need to increase awareness of the action plan and ensure there are clear targets to hold partners accountable.

Further, tracking of targets within the plan may require capacity strengthening within sectors for resource tracking including ensuring there are platforms in place to routinely collect data on funding from public and development partner sources. In Ethiopia, there are existing platforms for resource tracking and evidence generation, however, these are not yet leveraged for Strategy 12. For example, the Resource Tracking and Partnership Management (RTPM) system currently provides users at the woreda, regional, and federal levels with access to tools to facilitate effective resource utilization and tracking. The MoH is working to align the indicators of this system to the FNS priorities which may provide an opportunity to easily track and analyze resources for Strategy 12.

It is important to understand the budgetary process and financing architecture across all levels of government to determine entry points for increasing financing for nutrition data.

Budgets are a key instrument used by governments to estimate the allocations, revenues, and expenditures for each fiscal year. It is important to understand how the budget is created and approved to determine entry points for increasing financing. Generally, activities can be funded either on-budget, where funding is directly channeled

to government budgets through normal budgeting processes, or off-budget, where funding is channeled through separate agencies and partners.

In Ethiopia, as seen in **Figure 2**, nutrition data activities are budgeted as part of broader nutrition activities. We found data activities to be a small focus as there is already a lack of consistency and coordination across sectors around financing nutrition activities more broadly. While all sectors include a budget allocation for nutrition activities during the planning phase, utilization of the budget for the activity planned is weak. Respondents also shared there is a need for improved coordination to support efforts to pool resources for nutrition data activities amongst partners to avoid duplication and more effectively utilize resources (e.g., avoid collecting the same indicators through different surveys, etc.).

Additionally, respondents noted nutrition data activities are most frequently prioritized for budgeting based on mandates within the government ministries, preferences of donor organizations, and the specific needs of a program.

Figure 2: Budgetary process in Ethiopia for nutrition data activities

Budget Preparation	Budget Approval	Budget Implementation
• Each sector embeds nutrition activities within their financial plans • Nutrition data activities are often included through M&E line items – For nutrition policies such as the FNS data generation and evidence-based decision-making are key activities	*No specific process for nutrition* More generally, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) compiles budgets from all ministries & regions and submits to parliament for approval	• Federal allocations focus on large-scale systems such as UNISE and the Resource Tracking and Partnership Management (RTPM) • Regional allocations often include M&E and performance management activities for specific plans (e.g., FNS)

Alternative and innovative financing options for nutrition data should be considered to fill current gaps and ensure the sustainability of NIS activities.

Given funds are limited and partners each have their priorities, it is useful to consider alternative financing options for nutrition data. Within the Ethiopian context, the mechanisms listed below were prioritized as being most feasible. However, this is not a "one-size-fits-all" list and it is important to consider a specific country's context including feasibility and sustainability.

- Government and public funding, such as prioritizing funds in existing government pooled funds within health and other sectors such as agriculture and education (e.g., Health sector Sustainable Development Goals pooled fund).[3]
- Private funding, such as the expansion of domestic resources for nutrition data through private donations (e.g., public figures, religious institutions, professional associations, etc.).
- External development partners, such as existing innovative financing and partnership platforms for nutrition data or data more broadly (e.g., Power of Nutrition Multi-Donor Trust Fund[4]), match funds that match certified domestic spending, or co-financing arrangements between public and private partners to achieve goals more efficiently.

References

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