



# Strengthening nutrition sector governance: Lessons from the WINNN programme

## Key messages

- **Political commitment to the nutrition sector was strengthened by evidence-based advocacy**, underpinned by collaboration among champions for nutrition in government, development partners and civil society.
- **Civil society engagement in the nutrition sector** helped to strengthen political commitment and accountability.
- **Increased attention to malnutrition in the media** has been influential in increasing awareness of the problem and political commitment to addressing it.
- **Close collaboration among numerous development partners** on nutrition sector policy, planning and coordination strengthened both the coherence and the impact of WINNN's work to strengthen governance.
- **While there has been progress in public financing for nutrition, public funding is still very low compared to the need.** Nutrition work remains largely reliant on donor funding. State governments should be continuously encouraged to increase their funding for nutrition, and to access funding from federal and donor sources.

Northern Nigeria has a high prevalence of child malnutrition, with around 10% of children (aged 6–59 months) acutely malnourished, one-third underweight, and over 50% stunted.<sup>1</sup> This brief summarises learning about strengthening nutrition sector governance from the Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria (WINNN) programme<sup>2</sup>, which was implemented in five states in northern Nigeria (Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara and Yobe) and at the federal level.<sup>3</sup>

Changes in governance contexts from 2013 to 2016

▲ **176%**

increase in state  
budget releases  
for nutrition

**5/5**

States now have budget  
lines for nutrition in 2016  
(compared to 0 states in 2013)

**Nigeria signed up to the Scaling-up Nutrition (SUN) movement in 2011, and signed the Global Nutrition for Growth Compact in 2013. In doing so, it committed to tackling its high rates of child malnutrition. WINNN has worked with other development partners to strengthen the policy, planning and coordination frameworks for nutrition, political commitment and civil society engagement.**

**Good nutrition is important for individual and national development.** It underpins healthy physical growth and intellectual development among children, and

enhances adult productivity and lifetime earnings. In so doing, it can make an important contribution to national gross domestic product (GDP). WINNN supported three nutrition interventions in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in five focal states: micronutrient supplementation for pregnant women and children under the age of five; community management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) in children under five; and improved infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices for children under two.

## Context

Nutrition sector governance is affected by various factors.

Political recognition of malnutrition and support for nutrition work was very limited at the beginning of the programme. This is changing, though slowly. The large drop in the price of oil in 2015 reduced the allocation and release of public funds for nutrition, and affected the payment of health workers' salaries. The insecurity in the north-east also affected the governance context, particularly in Yobe.

## What worked well?

Political commitment to the nutrition sector was strengthened by evidence-based advocacy that used research findings to highlight the severity of the problem of

*'If we manage nutrition properly, it's like generating revenue'*

Ministries of economic planning and budget (MEPB) play an important role in coordinating the nutrition response as well as leading on financial planning for the state government. Before WINNN, there was not systematic understanding of nutrition.

As one MEPB Permanent Secretary put it: 'I had a limited knowledge of nutrition before ... I just see nutrition as ... once you have availability of food ... once there is money, food is available, and you eat. Nothing more, nothing less. Nobody would have convinced me to put any reasonable amount of money to nutrition'.

He now thinks differently: 'With the coming of WINNN, and with the capacity-building and the knowledge we have received, the conferences ... training in the UK ... I saw the international dimension and even the [nutrition] movement globally, and realised we just have to be a part of it'.

He has become a strong advocate for nutrition, and the funding it deserves: 'I have seen nutrition as an investment. As an economist who plans for government, my concern is always when we put Naira and Kobo together and how much we get. I have been able to see in terms of GDP what this translates to... If we manage nutrition properly, it's like generating revenue because we cut costs that could be used in other areas'.



malnutrition and the efficacy of nutrition interventions. WINNN supported government and civil society nutrition champions to pursue advocacy toward political leaders. Advocacy strategies included high-level meetings and retreats with governors and legislators, taking political leaders to CMAM sites, media publicity, and the use of data and photos as evidence of malnutrition. The integration of new nutrition services into routine primary health care, supported by WINNN, also helped to build the profile of nutrition work.

**Budget lines for nutrition have been established in each of the WINNN focal states, which supports institutionalisation.**

Releases for nutrition increased by 176% from 2013 to 2016.<sup>3</sup> In most of the focal states, budget advocacy started at SCFN meetings, where WINNN brought together key government stakeholders for dialogue on the need for public financing. SCFN members then pursued advocacy toward key commissioners and legislators. WINNN also developed targeted briefings providing malnutrition statistics and highlighting the need for secure funding.

**Development partner work within coordination forums, technical support and high-level advocacy helped to strengthen the national policy framework for nutrition.** WINNN provided technical support for revision of the National Policy on Food and Nutrition (NPFN), and development of the National Strategic Plan of Action for Nutrition (NSPAN), and supported debate on both to ensure wide ownership. WINNN promoted adoption of the NPFN in its focal states and supported the SCFNs to develop five-year costed multi-sectoral Nutrition Plans of Action.

**Intersectoral platforms have played an important role in**

**the coordination of nutrition work and internal government advocacy.** WINNN played a key role in the revitalisation of the National Committee on Food and Nutrition (NCFN) and the SCFNs. WINNN support to the NCFN and SCFN secretariats helped to build their capacity and systems for coordination, and promoted a dedicated budget line for NCFN coordination. The committees provide a conducive forum for policy dialogue and review of implementation challenges. In several WINNN states, the SCFN has become a key platform for internal government advocacy.

**Civil society and media engagement helped to strengthen political commitment and accountability.**

WINNN helped to strengthen engagement at national, state and community levels by raising awareness of the severity of the problem of malnutrition and building capacity for advocacy and budget tracking, among civil society organisations (CSOs) and journalists. CSO engagement with the Senate and state legislatures then helped to strengthen political commitment. The increase in media reporting on nutrition helped to raise the profile of malnutrition, and was a key factor in the release of state nutrition funds in one WINNN focal state in 2016. WINNN also trained and supported local organisations to provide oversight of nutrition work and to convene community feedback meetings. This engagement strengthened local ownership of nutrition work and encouraged accountability.

**WINNN's close collaboration with numerous development partners on sector policy, planning and coordination strengthened both the coherence and the impact of its governance work.**

Collaborative work with multiple partners and co-funding for nutrition

work and events helped to move forward the debates and strengthen government commitment.

## What more needs to be done?

**While there has been progress with public financing for nutrition, the present level of public funding is very low compared to the need.** The NSPAN (2014–2019) estimated a financing gap over five years of US\$786 million based on a full costing of 10 nutrition interventions.<sup>4</sup> Nutrition work is largely reliant on donor funding. It may be necessary to continue to draw on donor funding for some years due to the current adverse economic situation and low tax revenues, but this should not supplant government responsibility in the long term. State governments should be encouraged to increase their funding, and to access funding from federal and donor sources, in order to sustain and scale up nutrition services.

**LGA monthly funding for nutrition has been established in several of WINNN's focal states, but is not yet institutionalised.**

In 2015, legislators across the WINNN states expressed their commitment to develop legislation to increase and institutionalise the LGA nutrition funding, and to provide oversight on the use of the funds. Moving forward with this commitment is critical for sustaining funding for nutrition in the long term.

**Federal engagement with the states on nutrition sector work has increased since 2013 but it requires ongoing strengthening to enhance state commitment and promote policy implementation in the**

**states.** The NPFN provides for the establishment of a National Council on Nutrition. The Council would play a key role in bringing together federal and state leaders, and strengthening political commitment at all levels. It is crucial that the government moves forward with inauguration of the Council.

**Local Committees on Food and Nutrition (LCFNs) have played an important role in promoting community support and local accountability.** WINNN has promoted the establishment of LCFNs through advocacy at SCFN meetings. Despite this, LCFNs had been formed in just two of WINNN's focal

states at the time of the endline evaluation. The achievements of the Zamfara LCFNs highlight their potential: here, the LCFNs undertake monitoring on CMAM days, organise local ceremonies on exclusive breastfeeding, and have elicited community support to improve amenities at CMAM sites.

## References

<sup>1</sup>National Nutrition and Health Survey (NNHS) 2015. <sup>2</sup>WINNN is a six-year programme (2011–2017) funded by the UK Department for International Development. The Operational Research and Impact Evaluation (ORIE) project is a separate component of the programme undertaking independent research around, and evaluation of, WINNN. The project is undertaken by a consortium led by Oxford Policy Management. This brief draws on evidence collected between 2013 and 2016. <sup>3</sup>The increase occurred in four of WINNN's states. The value of the release fell in Kebbi, but only because that value was very high in 2013. Kebbi's release was still among the highest in 2016. <sup>4</sup>Based on an estimated increase in funding of US\$126 million from 2014 to 2017, in addition to the cost of sustaining the interventions at current levels of coverage (NSPAN, 2014:25).

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