



Submission on the draft 3.0 Strategy for the SUN Movement 2021-2025 by Mothers First

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About Mothers First

Mothers First is a community based targeted nutrition project in India. Its mission is to provide nutrition to malnourished pregnant mothers and their children, breaking the cycle of malnutrition in communities. It advocates for the inclusion of maternal nutrition in global nutrition policy and global targets. It was established in 2004 as the Varanasi Children's Hospital. Mothers First is a registered charity in Ireland.

Overview of this submission

Given the past decade we cannot presume that the SUN Movement will be successful in scaling up intervention and reach the targets set in the nutrition strategy. It was brave of the draft strategy to set concrete targets. After almost a month of being immersed in the strategy and its annexes and the independent reviews I completely rewrote this submission from deeply negative to a real tone of optimism and hope.

The significance of this line in annex 2 stating that “the movement will support the development of priority investable actions and the networks will be held accountable to support these priorities”

How the movement will support the development of priority investable actions at a country level. All SUN networks and structures will be held accountable for supporting these priorities, as outlined in Annex 2. If we can unite in this centre, our focus on this, there is no doubt the 3.0 will be a success.

Q1. Do you agree with the draft SUN Strategy to Accelerate Nutrition Action, 2021-2025?

The Draft Strategy is complicated to discuss because the ethos remains unchanged from the Movements founding documents in 2010.

- Scale-up evidence-based, cost-effective interventions prioritising the 1000 day window.
- Multi-Stakeholder approach Country owned nutrition programming.

It is welcomed that there is a more balanced perspective on the Intervention mix between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions which were lacking in the previous Strategies. It is also welcomed that Annex 6 has identified nutrition indicators reduction that can be monitored every year as clear markers of success and progress. The strong call for evidenced-based prioritised interventions sends out a powerful message to all stakeholders for impact.

On principle, we welcome the upgrading of the Country Focal Points to Coordinators. We add; however, a word of caution. Placing too much responsibility could be seen as unrealistic unless there are significant frameworks and training that is transparent across countries and regions.

There is also a danger that the weaker states will get left further behind.

We believe that more attention could be given to the recruitment of additional fragile states into the Movement, which was one of the recommendations of the ICE Report in 2015. This strategy, in our opinion, represents the best and clearest possibility to realise one of the founding pillars of the movement. Start from the principle that what ultimately matters is what happens at the country level.

Q2. Introduction

It is clear from Annex 2 that SUN 2.0 remains an unfinished agenda. Gains in the previous decade around country plans are undermined by the fact that most were not implemented. As the draft

strategy points out, the time for talk is now over, and now it is time to see the impact in the field.

We must, however, bear in mind that the 2015 ICE report outlined That “many interviews stressed that progress under 2.0 needs to go beyond being a talking shop, and register results on the ground.”

The mix of nutrition challenges is changing in terms of overweight, so it is broadly acknowledged that this is a necessary step. We would suggest that maternal underweight be also included here. While anaemia and underweight may often merge together, their prevention and treatment, as well as intergenerational outcomes, have significant differences to justify separating them.

While the introduction states that ‘the Movement is anyone who cares about nutrition’, the most central voice in the matrix platform is those that are affected or have been affected by malnutrition. We believe they are critical voices that we need to hear from.

The concept of accountability is a central theme in the Movement; however, in practice, it remains unclear how we are accountable to each other and how we are accountable to all those directly affected by malnutrition.

Q3. The changing external context.

Encompassing overweight is a welcome addition to the movement's priorities and represents a more holistic approach. However, expanding the remit when so little progress has been achieved in undernutrition needs to be managed intelligently with a robust underlying narrative for countries and stakeholders. There is a worry that SUN is trying to be everything to everybody while not being sufficiently focused on the first 1000 days.

It is unclear how the Movement has tackled the issue of gender and in particular, gender nutritional equality in the past or in this strategy.

The ICE report recommended that “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” It went on to recommend that 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”

We also recommend including maternal underweight and Low Birth Weight to be included as one of the impact indicators outlined in Annex 6. One of the added benefits of these indicators is that they directly align to outcome one of the Global Action Plan on wasting. The executive committee might find it useful to read an excellent paper by Parual Christian [Addressing inequities in the global burden of maternal undernutrition](#) The paper systematically describes the inequalities of both policy, funding and scale-up of interventions for maternal nutrition which are relevant to all SUN countries.

Q4. The changing context within the movement

There will be much interest in how the movement will support the development of priority investable actions at a country level. All SUN networks and structures will be held accountable for supporting these priorities, as outlined in Annex 2. If we can unite in this centre, our focus on this, there is no doubt the 3.0 will be a success.

The Global Action Plan on Wasting by UN agencies is ready to act as a platform with 20 SUN countries engaged in country consultation. Nutrition, however, does not operate in silos and approaches to reduce wasting will also reduce stunning mortality and overweight.

[The UN lead Global Action Plan on wasting \(GAP\)](#) is a blueprint of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive intervention mixes to prevent

and treat child wasting. It currently has 20 SUN countries on board

The framework for action seeks to accelerate progress in preventing and managing child wasting and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. A multi-year, multi-country and multi-stakeholder RoadMap for Action will be developed to facilitate implementation.

One of the clear strengths of the movement is that it recognises the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of malnutrition and the need for a whole-systems approach required to end malnutrition.

“The SUN Movement’s identity must be to support nutrition to be rooted in country structures, actions and the minds of its leaders, supported by a global system that is equally country-focussed and meets its needs and supports countries to finance and drive context-appropriate evidence-based nutrition actions at scale.”

It may be said that the Movement needs GAP and GAP needs the Movement.

Q5. SUN’s Strategy to Accelerate Nutrition Action, 2021-2025 500

The strategic objectives remain largely unchanged. This is not a criticism; we absolutely need to do all these things. The small changes in the objectives are critically important. If implemented, we can genuinely and authentically go from words to action, and 3.0 will be a success. SO1

We would recommend adding this text in on the end of the first line in section 5

The line would read ‘Develop and implement Country Actions Plans (CAP) that help focus the resources of the entire Movement on delivering a manageable set of evidence-informed country priorities that advance the nutritional status of all **while prioritising the most vulnerable and furthest behind.**

It is clear that 3.0 achievement pivots on the success of the country coordinators. We have concerns around how realistic the new roles and terms of reference of the country coordinator are in terms of implementation. From an external perspective, they seem unrealistic. However, with the right training and evaluating tools, it could be advantageous on many levels.

The roles for the Country Coordinator and the supporting MSP team members range from Policy, Coordination, Facilitation, Resource mobilisation, Advocacy, Supportive supervision, MEAL and Research.

Cautionary note

We must be careful of the potential unintended impact. The countries that are likely to benefit most from the leadership approach will be already further advanced. The danger that needs to be evaluated is does this makes weaker states more vulnerable. Equally in creating a more robust country lead narrative, the rising tide could be narrated to weaker countries. It is for this reason that we believe it is on principle and with a strong accountability framework a great idea.

We need to be acutely aware of the nutrition landscape within the movement and outside the movement. It is notable while most countries have national nutrition plans, the Plans, however “lacked prioritisation and hence were rarely financed.”

The impact indicator in appendix 6 of a 2 % reductions in core interventions. Is very much welcomed, but it is somewhat unfortunate that it comes so late in the Strategy. We would suggest that we need greater clarity on this indicator and what impacts regionally it will have on the achievement of SDG 2 and the WHA Targets.

The Draft 3.0 outlined that “there is no one size fits all approach and no blueprint” This, however, is an oversimplified and misleading assumption.

The blueprint for actions centres around Nutrition Specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. Here the choice is not one or another but the intervention mix. These choices will be informed by the availability of resources and driven by data such as food consumption score, maternal and child nutrition data and non-communicable diseases.

SUN in practice, while not arguing against nutrition-specific has certainly veered towards nutrition-sensitive interventions.

Q6. Financing for Nutrition

SUNs strategy to accelerate nutrition actions and finance are acutely interlinked and requires strong leadership within the movement, within SUN countries themselves and the international community. A sense of global solidarity needs to be narrated by the Movement.

The strategy is to be welcomed for its emphasis on evidence-based interventions, in particular nutrition-specific interventions that target immediate need. To this regard, the inclusion of the Investment Framework for Nutrition and Optima Nutrition Tools will be welcomed by many, including those women and children requiring the interventions. Welcomed also is the inclusion of a clear set of nutrition markers outlined in Annex 6 to be monitored annually.

“There is a continuing debate within the nutrition community on the appropriate balance between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. On the one hand, it is argued that nutrition-specific interventions cannot tackle more than part of the problem, on the other, that at least the implementation of nutrition-specific interventions are well understood and need not be postponed” ICE 2015

Why this matters and fiscal space.

In 2018 MQSUN assessed funding ratios for nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions which averaged 16 to 1. This funding ratio is incompatible with reaching the furthest behind and meeting immediate need. In terms of the proven, evidence-based interventions identified by the Lancet Nutrition series in 2008, scale-up has not occurred. It is worth remembering 12 years ago the evidence base was sufficient to scale these interventions in 36 countries.

ICE recommended that “SUN focuses sufficiently on an appropriate balance between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions and programs” ICE

Essentially what the SUN Movement has still yet to articulate is a position on the appropriate balance in the intervention mix between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive. “Plans must be realistic about what is achievable. This means undertaking a candid assessment of the political economy realities of the country and investing appropriately to fill gaps.

This position would have to take account of fiscal spaces within domestic budgets and potential external funding for nutrition, impact and scalability to the broadest possible context. It would also need to take into consideration the furthest behind, those that are malnourished and finally, those who are at risk of malnutrition.

At a country level, the Movement needs to be able to clearly articulate for each member country based on need using the WHA targets and SDG 2 monitoring indicators on how to develop SMART Policy. The Food Systems Dashboard is a valuable resource for the latter and Optima Nutrition Tools for nutrition-specific programming could be instrumental in managing fiscal space.

Please see the finance chapter in the 2020 Global Nutrition Report for more information. Of

particular value in the case study carried out in Bangladesh.

“We also need to place more emphasis not just what these interventions will buy, but more importantly what nutritional outcome indicators will this achieve” ICE 2015

The strategy states that we need to scale up all interventions. This simply is not financially feasible. We need to understand the field reality that with constraint financing budgets policy choice not only affects what is implemented but indirectly informs what interventions are not implemented.

“Plans must be realistic about what is achievable. This means undertaking a candid assessment of the political economy realities of the country and investing appropriately to fill gaps.

7. Implications for Operations and Governance

A key concern we have in terms of operational lies is the technical capacity required for the role of the country coordinator as well as the need for political buy-in from individual governments.

On the one hand, the Movement outlines a suggested terms of reference for the country coordinator that would be needed to implement 3.0; On the other hand, it states that ideally, the government should provide clear terms of reference that will clarify duties and powers.

If the terms of reference are perceived to be too complicated by governments and coordinators, the strategy risks not being implemented. Robust and transparent technical support will be essential here.

In terms of inclusivity, one of the ideas put forth in the ICE report was that the Movement would actively recruit more fragile states into the Movement.

8. What success will look like in 2025

“If the Movement can demonstrate how their collective efforts contribute clearly to an acceleration in the improvement of nutrition

outcomes and systemic change at the national and subnational levels, it will be judged a success”.

According to this definition of success, the Movement has not been a success in the past decade. Or maybe which we believe the time has come for the seed of the SUN Movement to germinate and bear fruit. Both the ICE Report in 2015 and the Strategic Review was very critical of the central component of the Movement, so it has not been a comfortable journey for the Movement.

There are a number of very positive points in these sections. Table 3 is very well outlined, clear and monitorable. An important point to note here is that the yearly reviews will prove essential to the monitoring of outcome indicators.

It might be helpful to have a number of the outcomes prioritised and time-bound for countries to systematically work towards. This was one of the central recommendations of the Strategic Review recommendation 12 and 14.

The issues that the strategy has not addressed is how do we define the priority programs to be scaled up. Alongside being SMART, they must also be prioritised in relation to evidence for impact and value for money and most importantly tailored on such a way that the furthest behind benefit the most.

. Given the lack of progress to date to scale up interventions, we need to focus on the easy wins with maximum impact and oriented towards the people and children in immediate need.

What perhaps none in the movement can realistically answer is if the foundation seeds set with the establishment of CAPs and country focal point/ coordinators is now enough to germinate the seeds to impact. A key to demonstrating impact will lie in the annual reviews which is being said to be more comprehensive .

Despite the strategy that seeks to prioritise actions the key impact indicator of 2 % reduction in malnutrition rates comes very late in the draft strategy and is only expanded upon in the last line of annexe 6.

We recommend that the impact indicators are strategically placed within the strategy and highlighted early on in the strategy document. We would also suggest that Annex 6 could include all 10 Essential Nutrition Actions, concisely reinforcing again the impact these interventions have on WHA targets as outlined in the finance chapter.

While in theory, both nutrition-specific interventions should be treated equally, annexe 6 is another example where the majority of the suggestions are centred around nutrition-sensitive interventions. The strategy previously outlines there is no clear evidence of impact for these interventions.

It might also be worth considering to develop SMART monologues and finance requirements. Vague commitments have no accountability built within them. 467

A central question to the food systems debate is whether meeting the immediate food and nutrition needs through nutrition-specific interventions should be reconsidered to be part of the food systems debate. Mothers First would strongly believe that for the furthest behind that is an essential part of the food system that works for everyone. Wd 518

9. Managing Conflicts of Interest

The inclusion of conflict of interests in the strategy is very much welcomed and the recognition of the need for a clear and strong mechanism to identify, prevent and manage conflict of interests. We are unsure how helpful it is to single out the business community as it takes away from the fact that conflicts of interest exist throughout and within the movement itself.

It is worth noting again what the Strategic Review said about conflicts of interest.

“Despite SUN’s mantra of being ‘country driven and country led’, country voices and priorities are secondary to the agendas and interests of some multilateral entities and donors that have considerable power and influence within the governance of the Movement. There is a lack of clarity between the various global governance structures and players that comprise SUN’s GSS (see section 3.3.1), with the current governance arrangement and locus of control within the Movement not being conducive to transparent and inclusive decision making in the best interest of SUN’s member”

As with the other sections of the draft strategy how this framework will develop will depend on how well and systematic the operationalisation of the upcoming strategy is. As outlined in Draft 3.0 ‘This process will lay out the detailed steps for operationalizing the strategy, a clear timeline, and a carefully managed change-management process in readiness for 2021’

Q 11. The Strategy Development Process

The development of 3.0 has been an ongoing process that began with its inception in fact as the movement unfolded in ways that no one expected. **Strategic Review**

In the decade that has passed the ICE 2015 and the Strategic Review were the two major independent reviews carried out on the Movement. To help understand how this building took place, it was necessary to re-analyse these documents and how they related to both 2.0 and this Draft Strategy.

It was difficult to find significant evidence that both reviews directly affected the strategy development. In particular, it is not clear if the Lead group or Excom has agreed with the findings of the Strategic Review. Bearing that in mind, it can be seen that there was sufficient fusion of

ideas in this draft strategy that cut across both reviews.

End.

Transparency and accountability

The process for this review set out to be highly collaborative. To that end, it developed a framework in place.

We question the need for the process to be confidential, and no clear rationale was given for this. It is presumed that the reason is that it was felt that people could be more honest with their inputs. From previous consultations we have been involved in that were open and transparent with the caveat that anyone who asked for confidentiality would be given it.

The regional consultations were also closed, and CSN provided the same rationale

It is unclear how the submissions were processed for the first consultation with the Excom and the facilitators to aid mutual accountability, this process could have been clearer by outlining the methodology developed by the facilitators and record minutes and make publicly available of the virtual discussion that took place to form this Draft.

Question 5

on the initial consultation question five (regarding recommendations that needed clarifications, however no clarifications were given. We did ask the Civil Society Network for this information, but they were unable to supply us with this information.

As a new Global Member of the SUN Civil Society Network despite requesting dialogue with network members to inform this submission, this was unable to be arranged. A global membership base has not been updated on the website, nor are there any contact details for each member. The members of the steering committee are also not on the web site.

