Global Support Facility for National Information Platforms for Nutrition

Third meeting of the Expert Advisory Group

MEETING REPORT
(WRITTEN BY GSF ON 17/06/2019)

Date: May 21, 2019

Place: Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Participants:

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- Sandrine Dury, CIRAD, France
- Chika Hayashi, UNICEF, USA
- Rebecca Heidkamp, Johns Hopkins University, USA
- Purnima Kashyap, SUN UN Network, Italy
- Danka Panchova, Action Contre la Faim (ACF), France
- Jef Leroy, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), USA
- Yves Martin-Prével, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), France
- David Pelletier, Cornell University, USA

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Agenda

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.00 – 09.30</td>
<td>Framing of the discussion – by GSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.30 – 10.30</td>
<td><strong>Implementation of NIPN operational cycle:</strong> what are the main challenges and what can be proposed to overcome them? Presentation by GSF and Q&amp;A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30 – 11.00</td>
<td>Coffee / tea break</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00 - 12.30</td>
<td>• EAG group work</td>
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<td>• Plenary discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30 – 13.30</td>
<td>Lunch break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.30 – 14.30</td>
<td><strong>Future steps towards institutionalizing the NIPN approach:</strong> ownership &amp; other dimensions, learning and adaptation - Presentation by GSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.30 – 17.15</td>
<td>• Group work EAG (tea / coffee break during group work)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Plenary discussion – Chaired by David Pelletier, Cornell University</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wrap-up and way forward</td>
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</table>
Introduction

This 3rd Expert Advisory Group (EAG) meeting took place one year after the 2nd EAG meeting: a year full of changes. Over the past year the narrative around NIPN regained emphasis on establishing a continuous dialogue between policy decision makers, multisectoral nutrition actors and data owners / analysts (a new way of working). Data management and analysis of existing data are seen as the means towards this dialogue. The formulation of nutrition policy-relevant questions and the answers to these questions (provided by data analysis) are meant to create a deepened and detailed understanding of what is really happening in the country, leading to informed and better nutrition policy, programme and investment decisions related to the existing multisectoral nutrition plans of action. Guidance notes have been developed for each step in the NIPN operational cycle and through webinars, capacity building workshops, and direct in-country support the GSF has aided the NIPN country teams in implementing the steps. Figure 1 provides an overview of EAG involvement since its first meeting in September 2016.

Figure 1: Key moments of EAG engagement in the NIPN

Objectives of the meeting

The objectives of the meeting were to:
- Inform EAG members about progress
- Discuss hurdles in implementation of NIPN & obtain recommendations for improvement
- Discuss future steps & obtain recommendations on institutionalisation of the NIPN approach and the learning & adaptation agenda

The one-day agenda was divided into three parts:
1. Introduction and framing of EAG involvement in NIPN progress (appendix 1)
2. Presentation and discussion of technical challenges which the NIPN country teams encountered in the implementation of the NIPN operational cycle (appendix 2)
3. Looking forward, reflections and discussion on institutionalisation and how a learning & adaptation agenda may support NIPN country teams in this process (appendix 3)
Highlights and key recommendations

1. Overcoming challenges in the implementation of NIPN

A series of challenges encountered by countries and GSF was presented (see Table 1) and EAG members discussed solutions in subgroups, which are summarised in below paragraphs.

Table 1: Main challenges encountered in implementing the NIPN operational cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges in formulating questions</th>
<th>Challenges in data management &amp; analyses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How to turn the guidance notes into practice</td>
<td>On data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to formulate questions of strategic relevance</td>
<td>• How to move from theory to practice: what is the added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to use the impact pathway approach</td>
<td>value of NIPN (e.g. Ethiopia, Uganda, Guatemala)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to prioritise questions</td>
<td>• How to drive the main focus away from survey data and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to own the question formulation process</td>
<td>closer to routine and financial data (e.g. Laos, Uganda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to engage sectors</td>
<td>• How to deal with the uncertainty with regards to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to deal with uneven technical assistance capacities for facilitation in countries</td>
<td>type of analysis which is most suited to NIPN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to avoid focusing on questions about determinants of malnutrition rather than on implementation (e.g. Niger, Burkina Faso)</td>
<td>• How to ensure the quality of the analysis done (e.g. Guatemala, Côte d’Ivoire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On data management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How to ensure that achievements are valued as outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. Niger, Guatemala, Côte d’Ivoire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How to balance efforts between data management &amp; analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approaches to better engaging the sectors

- Positioning NIPN as linked to the SDGs may provide a consensual framework to involve all sectors
- So far the multisectoral interest of NIPN has mainly focused on government sectors – but it should also unpack other sectors for instance private sector and multi-stakeholder engagement
- Using the “extended network” (for instance the REACH facilitators) can be helpful to link with UN agencies, to support the NIPN approach (e.g. as members of the NIPN multisectoral advisory committee), to strengthen national capacity
- Create synergies with SUN movement at country level to embed lessons from NIPN in the SUN approach, to make use of SUN-related investments (e.g. technical assistance mechanisms such as MQ-SUN+ or NI-TAN) to strengthen capacity
- Use impact pathways and storytelling so that sectors feel concern
Approaches to ensuring quality (and relevance) of data analysis

- Ensuring quality of implementation at key steps of the operational cycle (identification of questions, data analysis plan, initial results, final interpretation)
- Involving researchers / research organisations, the SUN academia network and EAG members in a peer-review mechanism for NIPN outputs
- Think more broadly about information, beyond survey data (e.g. the relation between policies & plans and financial investments, budget allocations across sectors and at sub-national level, expenditure levels, as well as process markers such as level and regularity of attendance to meetings, etc.)
- The quality of the process starting from question formulation is a precondition for a timely and quality data analysis output

Approaches to move from theory to practice and identify the added value of NIPN

- The NIPN operational cycle starts with the question formulation but other entry points are possible too
- Facilitation of a workshop to develop a common impact pathway
- Make use of the extended nutrition system around NIPN (UN agencies, academia, NGO, coordinated by the national government) to strengthen the decision-making process
- Identify the “niche” of NIPN. For example, analysis of sectoral budget allocation to multisectoral nutrition efforts is rarely done and is of added value. The added value of NIPN will be perceived in different ways by each country
- Create an evidence-gap map at country level to identify information needs and NIPN niche
2. Institutionalisation, learning and adaptation

While a lot of work still needs to be done to ensure the NIPN operational cycle is being effectively implemented in the different countries and that it generates valuable outputs that build the credibility of the NIPNs, it is also important to start reflecting about the future beyond project support. Over the coming years, the GSF would like to encourage each NIPN country to develop its own roadmap towards institutionalisation, keeping in mind that the goal is to institutionalise an evidence-based dialogue and decision-making process in nutrition. Nevertheless, expectations should be reasonable on what can be achieved in the next 2-3 years. The discussion of the EAG members is summarised below.

What are the key elements and challenges to overcome on the road towards sustainability?

- What are the steps for sustainability and what is their sequence:
  1. How to be effective (current piloting phase)
  2. How to expand and scale-up
  3. How to maintain and sustain over time
- Main focus of efforts currently is on implementation issues, strengthening country capacity and producing quality outputs to establish NIPN credibility
- The questions to be answered are how far can NIPN get by 2021-2022 (end of 1st phase contracts) and how to achieve longer-term sustainability?
- Demand for information should be created from decision makers, which means that the outputs produced must be timely and of the right quality, avoiding misleading conclusions
- Define the ‘business model’ for NIPN: identify the ‘clients’ and what they expect from NIPN

Longer-term sustainability or institutionalisation

A possible definition of institutionalising the NIPN approach could be: “the process of ensuring that an evidence-informed policy dialogue and decision-making becomes part of the daily activities of the partner organisations and becomes an integral part of the way of working of the multisectoral nutrition coordinating system in which there is demand for the NIPN services and use of the NIPN outputs”.

The approach relies on the assumption that the availability of reliable information is a barrier to efficient decision-making, but good information is not enough for better decision-making. NIPN may produce results that governments do not want to see: how to deal with that? This can be a threat. EAG members brought a number of approaches forward:

- Embedding NIPN in the larger partner community, beyond governments, including the civil society
- Ensuring that the government owns the questions and the process, which will lead to them also owning the results
- Similarly, ownership needs to be created in how and why information is obtained, which may require behaviour change and a culture of accountability
• The NIPN cannot control all parameters but can focus on the quality of products, the timeliness and the networks

• The theory of change is a good tool to monitor whether processes are gone through as expected

**Learning agenda**

In order to move towards institutionalising the NIPN approach, NIPN teams at country level should adopt a purposeful learning approach, which enables them to capture and analyse what works and does not work well in order to modify and strengthen the NIPN approach in relation to the country context. How can this take shape at country level? What type of capacity building is needed?

• The GSF can provide guidance on how to develop learning and adaptation skills and capacity – that builds upon what countries are already doing

• Creating learning, adaptation and strategic thinking capacity within NIPNs is a way to address the threat of political instability or staff turnover

• One way is to embed the principles of the NIPN approach (including the impact pathway approaches) in existing trainings, courses of nutritionists (through the ‘extended network’)

• Create a learning and adaptation environment at country level and ‘self-learning’ capacity within NIPN teams, to cross-correct and build sustainable, adaptive NIPNs

• Build ‘soft skills’ capacity (facilitation, communication, problem solving, etc.), up a certain point within the project lifetime, knowing where you start from (referring to NEP experience)

• Self-assessment tools could be developed (although self-reflection alone is not sufficient): the ‘quarterly progress monitoring’ system used by the GSF may include questions for self-reflection, evolving with time

• Each country team may organise specific reflection moments, through weekly meetings or biannual retreats; the teams need to capture, analyse and document the challenges they have met and the solutions found in a continuous manner; this reflection might include the extended network which is also needed to help find the solutions

• Besides building capacity within the NIPN teams, it is also crucial to build relationships to identify support/adequate skills within the extended network, bringing the right allies and ‘champions’ on board and involve them in the reflection and adaptation process

• GSF is responsible for learning across the countries by capturing the variability among countries in order to maximize the learning from this experience: what works where? (using the ‘quarterly progress monitoring’ system)

• Each country may be able to showcase a different part of the theory of change
Next steps and summary of recommendations

- The GSF should develop a framework for a peer-review mechanism for different steps related to: 1) question formulation, 2) data analysis plan, 3) initial results of analysis, 4) interpretation of the findings; as well as propose external, credible national or international reviewers who could be involved.

- The GSF should develop a learning and adaptation strategy to propose to countries, building on what they are already doing, but in a different way (including self-assessment tools, self-reflection moments).

- The GSF, with the help of EAG members and donors, should support countries to create the extended NIPN network / set of allies. These networks are important to overcome challenges and to strengthen capacity, to engage sectors, to review the quality of NIPN outputs, to ensure their utilisation and to influence decision makers and make sure NIPN becomes part of the puzzle for evidence-based decision making (see Figure 2).

- It is recommended that the GSF and NIPN country delegates present opportunities and progress of the NIPN process at the SUN Global Gathering in Nepal, November 2019.

- Though a lot of work still needs to happen, the GSF should nevertheless continue reflecting on the approach towards institutionalisation – discussing with countries on the different dimensions which have been identified (refer to the report of the 2nd NIPN Global Gathering, May 22-24, Amsterdam), focusing on the institutionalisation of the process rather than the structure.

The meeting ended with a confirmation by the EAG members that they would like to continue the current way of working, with a specific focus on strategic issues, country follow-up where appropriate, and active engagement in the peer-review of specific steps in the NIPN operational cycle.

Figure 2: NIPN is a piece of the puzzle for evidence-based nutrition policies
Appendix 1: Introduction and framing

Recommendations made March 2018

- Further development NIPN approach (culture change: question formulation, demand for data)
- Definition of quick wins: Dashboard, LIST
- Defining boundaries & stimulating broader data use
- Strategic collaboration with other nutrition data initiatives...
- Make better use of individual expertise EAG
- Sustainability / institutionalisation challenge

Roll out & Capacity building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oct - Dec 2018</th>
<th>Jan - Feb 2019</th>
<th>March - April 2019</th>
<th>May - June 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rplus Dashboard</td>
<td>Delta Landscape</td>
<td>Capacity Building</td>
<td>Delta Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger, Guatemala</td>
<td>Ethiopia, Niger, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Angola</td>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire, Laos, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Minister</td>
<td>Ethiopia, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Niger</td>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Angola</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Country support includes the country visits (included in the table) as well as long-distance support e.g.
- To question formulation process (AF, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, Guatemala)
- To NIPN Dashboard (Laos, RD, Côte d’Ivoire, Uganda)
- To create central repository (AF)
- To budget & institutional issues (AF, Zambia)

Recommendations turned into action

- Steps in NIPN operational cycle elaborated
- Guidance notes developed & rolled out in webinars & capacity building workshops
- Quick wins: sub-national NIPN dashboard, Guatemala case study, Laos MODA analysis

EAG engagement - to date

Some highlights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD PROGRESS ON:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NIPN teams well embedded in local system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition policy relevant question formulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant data analyses on-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data repository being set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity development plan implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active dialogue with policy makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions on institutionalization have started</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Countries

- Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Laos, Niger, Uganda
- Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Mauritania
- Guatemala, Laos, Ethiopia

Quick Wins

1. Case study on Guatemala –
   - Full report in Spanish;
   - Presented in National Seminar;
   - Final paper in English for global dissemination
   - Tbc – possible contribution to GNR 2019?

2. Lessons learned on the Setting up of National Information Platforms for Nutrition
   - Draft paper submitted
   - Final paper in June 2019
NIPN Subnational Dashboards

- Inspired by POSHAN
- In collaboration with SUN-MEAL
- In preparation by 5 countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Laos, Uganda

Recommendations turned into action

- Steps in NIPN operational cycle elaborated
- Guidance notes developed & rolled out in webinars & capacity building workshops
- Quick wins: sub-national NIPN dashboard, Guatemala case study, Laos MODA analysis
- Collaboration with SUN-MEAL, WHO-TEAM, FAO-GIFT, FAO-FIRST, NEP/ JHU

Objectives of this meeting

- Inform EAG members about progress
- Discuss hurdles in implementation of NIPN & obtain recommendations for improvement
- Discuss future steps & obtain recommendations re: institutionalisation of the NIPN approach including:
  - Dimensions of institutionalisation such as ownership
  - Knowledge management and Learning at country level
  - Revision of logframe
Appendix 2: How to overcome challenges and risks related to the implementation of the operational cycle?

Objectives

• Present and discuss challenges and risks related to the implementation of the NIPN operational cycle

• Provide recommendations on how to overcome those challenges and risks

Outline of the session

1 - Where do countries stand
2 - What works well
3 - What remains challenging
   • Question formulation
   • Data management
   • Analysis
4 - Potential risks
5 - Way forward

1 - Where do countries stand?
### 1 - Where do countries stand?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Question formulation process</th>
<th>Data Analysis Process</th>
<th>Challenges for next steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Adapting a data approach on WASH not calculated</td>
<td>Longitudinal data analysis past year/ existing household income &amp; consumption &amp; expenditures surveys</td>
<td>Slow progress - Focus on the capacity building rather than analysis output - Difficulties to go from theory to practice - Managing stakeholders expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Not started</td>
<td>Using the opportunity of UNICEF MDA analysis to include a specific analysis on stunting</td>
<td>Going from theory to practice - Difficulties to identify strategic priorities of stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>- GSF workshop planned in June 19 - Likely to start afterward</td>
<td>Political demand for a dashboard at sub-national level</td>
<td>Set up took less than six months - Reactivate the momentum around HNFs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2 - What works well

**Data management:**
- Quite ambitious work done in certain countries having an impact on the rational information systems
- Ex: Niger, Guatemala, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso
- Most countries:
  - data mapping study &
  - nutrition information system study

**On analysis:**
- Some countries have seized analysis opportunities to quickly produce an output
  - Ex: Guatemala, Laos, Ethiopia
- Dashboards in Ivory Coast, Burkina, Uganda

### 3 - What remains challenging?

**Reminder:**
- Guidance notes + regional workshops have been finalised very recently
- It is not surprising that some challenges remain
- It is not through 1 workshop with GSF that the NIPN teams will be able to implement with all the sectors involved

**On the question formulation process:**
- Turning the guidance notes into practice
  - How to formulate questions of strategic relevance
  - How to use the impact pathway approach
  - How to prioritize questions
- To own the question formulation process
- To engage sectors
- Uneven in country TA capacities for facilitation
- Focus on questions on determinants of nutrition rather than on implementation (Ex: Niger; Burkina)
3 - What remains challenging?

On the data management:
- Achievements not valued as an output (Ex: Niger; Guatemala; Ivory Coast)
- Unbalanced efforts between the data management & the analysis

On how the support is provided:
- Finding the right balance between GSF and National TA support.
- We observe diverse situations:
  - Some countries requesting high support from the GSF (RCI, BF)
  - UNICEF acting more as grant manager rather than TA (Laos, RCI)
  - TA support from other institutions quite autonomous (Ethiopia, Guatemala, Niger)
  - Ex from National Research institutions not optimal (Korea, Bangladesh)

4 - Potential risks

- Loss of interest from stakeholders at national level
- None of the objectives of 1) producing outputs & 2) building the capacity are fully met
- The multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder ambition of the NiPN is not fully achieved
- Risk of producing analysis that can be criticized & risk of mislead policy decisions
- Spending too much time on analyzing questions that are not very strategic

5 - Way forward

Discussing additional recommendations & proposing new solutions?

Overarching questions for the working group session

1. How can some of the challenges be overcome? What more can be done to ensure countries define and prioritize questions of strategic relevance and produce robust & timely outputs?
2. Do you foresee other important challenges not mentioned?
3. Which challenges do you foresee as critical to overcome in the year to come?
4. What solutions do you propose?

Overarching questions for the working group session

In the solutions you propose, could you consider in particular the following points:
- Make better connection / use of the wider nutrition environment (country & global level)
- Identify the type of capacity building activities will be needed? What resources/materials/curriculum already exist could be used?

The GSP has produced a number of guidance notes (see list printed). What else can or should be done? What already exist? Where?
Appendix 3: The road to institutionalisation of the NIPN approach

Definition Institutionalisation

Institutionalising the process, more so than the platform!

From Oxford Dictionary:
- the action of establishing something as a convention or norm in an organization or culture.

From the Business Dictionary:
- Process which transfers an organization’s code of conduct, mission, policies, vision, and strategic plans into action guidelines applicable to the daily activities of its officers and other employees. It aims at integrating fundamental values and objectives into the organization’s culture and structure.

Possible framework for institutionalisation (1)
based on Rapid Response Unit case study, Burkina Faso

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>5 MATURITY LEVELS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Existence of institutional framework</td>
<td>1. Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Consistent production of relevant outputs</td>
<td>2. Experimentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Adequate resource availability</td>
<td>3. Expansion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on: World Bank, 2013 and

Overlap between the 2 frameworks

Level of the unit / platform
- Embedded unit in existing government institution and with government mandate
- Small-scale activities to learn and adapt
- Capacity building of team

Level of functional engagement with stakeholders
- Co-creating demand from policy makers
- Demonstrate improved service / output quality
- Embed activities in standard organisational operations

Level of full integration in the system
- Human and financial resources absorbed in government budget
- Access to data from the various actors in the nutrition system
- Integrated set of activities into everyday working of Ministry
- Service is integral part of broader health / nutrition system

Questions we are asking ourselves:
- What could be the dimensions of a NIPN institutionalisation framework?
- How to build a roadmap or operationalise this at country level?
- What type of support will the countries need to achieve institutionalisation?
Learning & Adaptation

What works and what does not work?

Aim is
1. to capture knowledge, analyse and disseminate findings and experiences
2. in order to improve performance and quality of implementation of the NIPN approach at country level and
3. share lessons learned with other countries.

A purposeful approach to learning & adaptation at country level will contribute to strengthening and institutionalising the NIPN approach

Which are relevant or interesting questions

E.g.
• How has the theoretical NIPN cycle of Questions-Analysis-Findings been operationalised at country level?
• What were the challenges encountered in doing so (challenges at the systems, organisational and individual level) for each step in the NIPN cycle?
• Which tactics have been applied successfully, and which ones failed in overcoming these challenges? for each step in the NIPN cycle?
• What were the key success factors or determinants for a functional NIPN at country level? for each step in the NIPN cycle?

How can countries implement?

• No specific budget lines for this activity ...

Initial logframe for NIPN initiative

- Indicators for EXPECTED IMPACT AND OUTCOMES reflected EU objective of stunting reduction commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGET IMPACT</th>
<th>TARGET OUTCOME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of stunted children reduced by 40% (68.4m) by 2025 (102.6m)</td>
<td>AARR projection = 5% by end of project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This cannot be attributed to NIPN

NIPN aims to establish a policy dialogue, leading to improved data-informed decisions on nutrition policies, programmes, investments

How to capture impact and outcomes of NIPN, as well as its expected institutionalisation, correctly in the log frame?

Theory of Change (Mokoro consultants for MTR)

What’s Next?

NIPN - GSF Priorities
• Capacity Building
• Establish Data repository
• Repeated Operational cycle
• Policy dialogue & outputs

Enabling Environment
• Improving data quality
• Filling the data gap
• Capacity Building

Roadmap towards Institutionalisation
• Knowledge Management, Learning & Adaptation
• Dimensions of institutionalisation

GROUP DISCUSSIONS for EAG on the following questions:
1. What are the appropriate dimensions & dynamics of the institutionalisation process(es) of the NIPN approach at country level?
2. How can a Learning & Adaptation strategy facilitate institutionalisation at country level? (reflect on the challenges discussed in the morning)