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Final Report

Contribution Study of the National Information Platform for Nutrition Initiative

September 2023

Executive Summary

The overarching aim of the National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN) is to support the capacities of national authorities in Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) Movement countries to harness existing multisectoral nutrition-relevant data for informing policy and strategic decision-making for reducing malnutrition. NIPN was conceived by the European Union (EU) in tandem with two other donors (Gates Foundation and DFID) NIPN and initiated in 2015.

A mid-term review of NIPN was undertaken in 2018. In 2022, N4D was commissioned to evaluate NIPN's Phase 1 (which concluded in most countries by December 2022), review progress with activities in the current Phase 2 (which are set to continue in most countries up until 2025) and identify how NIPN can be strengthened. The study assessed NIPN's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact and sustainability across all nine NIPN countries through a desk review of key documents and key informant interviews. A country visit to Bangladesh took place in April 2023 to capture learning on why this NIPN country programme had been discontinued; and two deep dive country visits to Kenya and Niger took place in April 2023 and February 2023, respectively, to better assess effectiveness and impact.

This report provides an in-depth analysis of N4D's findings. Section 1 introduces the study, Section 2 describes the background, Section 3 presents the main findings and in Section 4, the conclusions and recommendations are organized under four thematic headings. Additional information is provided in the annexes including the revised Theory of Change (ToC) developed by N4D during the inception period. The report findings were presented to the NIPN Global Gathering participants in June 2023, and the conclusion and recommendations to key EU, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and Capacity for Nutrition (C4N)-NIPN stakeholders in July 2023. Next steps for 2023 further presentations to external audiences, submission of a peer review paper to an international journal and development of an N4D podcast about NIPN country experiences.

Relevance

There is unanimity amongst country and global level stakeholders on the relevance of NIPN. The platform's approach shifted from a focus mainly on data to an emphasis on the policy relevance of data and evidence. This evolution was supported through in-country technical assistance, globally-generated tools, guidance and routine monitoring. Considerable time was invested in identifying those national institutions with authority to convene sectors, share and analyse data and guide the policy analysis, which served to ensure a strong sense of national ownership. Although guided by the overall NIPN approach, each country has a unique story to tell about its progress and ability to adapt NIPN to meet emerging country priorities. Countries faced significant delays in the set-up period and also experienced COVID-19 pandemic related delays and in the transition from Phases 1 to 2.

Coherence

At the country level, NIPN has achieved a high level of coherence with nutrition relevant sectors within government, which has fostered a good level of data sharing, nutrition policy engagement and coordination. However, the degree to which countries engage and collaborate with other initiatives and actors has been very variable and in Phase 2, the visibility and influence agenda will be key to ensure full coherence of NIPN's endeavours and increased demand and use of NIPN's resources. At the inception of NIPN, there was a priority focus on NIPN's coherence with allied initiatives and organizations at the global level but this did not sustain. Today, the platform is not widely visible or well understood amongst regional or global entities. Strategic engagement between NIPN and the SUN Movement is identified as a gap, along with allied data, evidence and accountability focused initiatives such as the Global Nutrition Report (GNR), the Nutrition Accountability Framework (NAF) and the humanitarian sector more broadly. There is recognition of the need to 'ramp up' visibility and communication efforts in the NIPN country and global teams.

Effectiveness

NIPN has been largely effective in achieving its direct outcomes as set out in its ToC. All countries have established nutrition dashboards, which are a one-stop shop for nutrition-related data. These outward facing NIPN dashboards enable visualisation of data and in some cases, contain data repositories that allow access to primary administrative and survey data. While the experience of implementing the policy cycle analysis has been a steep learning curve, almost all NIPN countries have completed policy question formulation cycles resulting in dedicated analysis to answer key policy questions captured in widely disseminated policy briefs.

The substantial capacity strengthening element of NIPN's work in Phase 1 has raised awareness, enhanced knowledge and skills and strengthened coalitions across nutrition sensitive sectors in government. This in turn has also contributed to greater appreciation amongst decision-makers of the importance of evidence in informing nutrition policy. Embedding NIPN in national government structures has been a pre-requisite for a functional NIPN, although learning from a more detailed analysis of institutional arrangements, especially regarding access to multisectoral data, could inform and facilitate any planned scale-up of NIPN to other countries. The role of GSF and C4N-NIPN has been crucial during the start-up of NIPN and has in many cases helped resolve country challenges in the early stages of Phase 1. Most NIPN countries are now considering how to devolve NIPN to sub-national level with some countries implementing pilot programmes. The complexity of this task should not be underestimated though, as institutional architecture and policy dynamics varies between and within countries.

Impact

NIPN has had less success in achieving 'indirect' outcomes i.e., those it contributes to in concert with other actors. The reason for this is that NIPN needs longer to inform and influence multisectoral policymaking, particularly given the delay in establishing NIPN during Phase 1 and the natural length of policy cycles within each country. However, in several countries it is clear that the NIPN's efforts have created an enabling environment to influence and change sector and multi-sector nutrition policy in Phase 2 and beyond. Where NIPN has achieved significant and critical impact is in its strengthening of sector monitoring and alignment of activities included in multisectoral nutrition plans. This is already bolstering accountability towards the implementation of these plans.

NIPN has also succeeded in strengthening nutrition tracking in most countries through a combination of re-analysis of existing data sets, improved visualisation of data on dashboards and through advocating for improved or more timely nutrition data provision. Barriers to further strengthening nutrition tracking include lack of available data and limited access to certain types of data. The EU-Nutrition Information Systems (NIS) programme being implemented in several NIPN countries is meant to address data quality and data gap issues but there is limited evidence that this is taking place. There is growing interest in some NIPN countries around the potential to impact key issues such as humanitarian and development nexus strengthening, financing for nutrition and climate change through the generation of evidence.

Sustainability

The relevance, coherence, utility and visibility of NIPN's processes, outputs and outcomes are key to its sustainability. In Phase 1, activities have enabled varying levels of technical and institutional sustainability through building the capacity of national data and policy-focused personnel, and in building a strong sense of ownership of NIPN activities and processes. Devolving NIPN to the sub-national level should increase relevance and coherence and support sustainability.

Throughout Phase 1 and in Phase 2, NIPN has largely relied on funding from the EU and, more recently, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Gates Foundation

(DFID funding did not continue beyond 2019). Phase 1 funding came directly through the EU Delegation to the host national institution, whilst in Phase 2 funds were directly managed by external organizations (UNICEF, GIZ and CARTIE). It is too early to determine whether this approach confers benefits, but some risks are identified which need mitigating. A realistic level of national financing needs to be identified and countries have started to develop detailed sustainability plans. As Phase 2 will end by 2025 (and as soon as mid-2024 in some countries), a transitional Phase 3 is widely viewed as necessary to allow time for national resourcing, more engagement in strategic outreach globally and nationally, and to further demonstrate effectiveness and impact. The use of more and better data for driving evidence-based policy and programme decision-making is as relevant today as it was nine years ago when NIPN began.

List of Abbreviations

AEDES	Agence Européenne pour le Développement et la Santé (Burkina Faso)
APN	Action Plan for Nutrition
ASAL	Arid and Semi-arid Lands
AU	African Union
BMI	Body Mass Index
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
BNNC	Bangladesh National Nutrition Council
CATIE	Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza
C4N	Capacity for Nutrition Initiative
CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
COMUSAN	La Comisión Municipal de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional del Municipio de Guatemala
DAU	Data and Analysis Unit
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DFID	Department for International Development
DHIS	District Health Information System
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DINU	Development Initiative for Northern Uganda
DRI	Development Research Institute (Laos)
EAG	Expert Advisory Group
EC-NIS	EU-funded 'Strengthening national nutrition information systems' project
ECHO	European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDHS	Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey
EIAR	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research
EPHI	Ethiopian Public Health Institute
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FIRST	Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation
FIVIMS	Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GNC-TA	Global Nutrition Cluster Technical Alliance
GNR	Global Nutrition Report
GSF	Global Support Facility
HC3N	High Commission for 3N Initiative
HDN	Humanitarian and Development Nexus
HKI	Helen Keller International
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICO	Information Commissioners Office
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
INS	National Institute for Statistics
INSD	National Institute of Statistics and Demography (Burkina Faso)
INTPA	EU International Partnerships Sustainable Agri-Food Systems
ITC	Institutional Liaison Technical Committee of the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition in Guatemala
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KIPPRA	Kenya's Institute of Public Policy and Research
KNAP	Kenya Nutrition Action Plan
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
LINK-NCA	Link Nutrition Causal Analysis
LIST	Lives Saved Tools
LSIS	Laos Social Indicator Survey
MAC	Multi-sector Advisory Committee
MAD	Minimum Acceptable Diet
MER-SC NNP	Monitoring and Evaluation Research Steering Committee
MF	Meal Frequency
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment (Laos)
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MSPAS	Ministry of Public Health and Welfare (Guatemala)
MTDP	Mid-term Development Plan
MTR	Mid Term Review

MWSI	Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation (Kenya)
MSNAP	Multi-sector Nutrition Action Plan
N4D	Nutrition for Development
N4G	Nutrition for Growth
NAF	Nutrition Accountability Framework
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
NDMA	National Drought Monitoring Authority
NDPG	Nutrition Data Partners Group
NFNC	National Food and Nutrition Commission (Zambia)
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NIER	National Institute for Economic Research (Laos)
NIPFN	National Information Platform for Food and Nutrition
NIPN	National Information Platform for Nutrition
NIPN-AC	NIPN Advisory Committee
NIS	Nutrition Information System
NITWG	Nutrition Information Technical Working Group
NNP	National Nutrition Programme
NPAN	National Plan of Action for Nutrition (Ethiopia)
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PAC	Policy Analysis Cycle
PNIN	Plateforme Nationale Informatique pour la Nutrition
PNSN	National Nutrition Security Policy (Niger)
QPM	Quarterly Progress Monitoring Reports
RF	Results Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDN	SUN Donor Network
SE-CONNAPE	Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food and Early Childhood Development
SESAN	Secretariat of Food and Nutrition Security of the Presidency of the Republic
SIDESAN	Sistema de Información Departamental de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional
SINASAN	Sistema de Información Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional de Guatemala
SMART	Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief, Transition for National and sub-national Nutrition Surveys
SMS	SUN Movement Secretariat
SOFRECO	Societe Francaise de Realisation D'etudes et de Conseil
SQEAK	Semi-Quantitative Evaluation of Access and Coverage
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition Movement
SUN CSA	SUN Civil Society Alliance
SUN GG	SUN Global Gathering
SUN MEAL	SUN Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN REACH	United Nations
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP VAM	World Food Programme Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
WHA	World Health Assembly

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Section 1: Introduction

The National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN) initiative was launched by the European Union (EU) in 2015. It aims to strengthen the capacity of countries with a heavy undernutrition burden to make use of multisectoral nutrition data to inform nutrition policy and programme design. The initiative provides support to countries in strengthening their information systems for nutrition and improving the analysis of data to better inform policy and strategic decisions for preventing malnutrition and its consequences. See Section 2 for more detail on the NIPN initiative.

The objectives of this assignment are threefold:

1. To evaluate the performance of the NIPN Phase I;
2. To understand whether any changes are needed to NIPN's approach to inform future implementation; and
3. To provide actionable recommendations that inform the future implementation.

The assignment comprehensively assessed the (1) **relevance**, (2) **coherence**, (3) **effectiveness**, (4) **impact** and (5) **sustainability** of NIPN Phase I to understand how far it has increased demand for data-driven policymaking on nutrition within its target countries. An important element of this assignment links to accountability and assessing whether NIPN is achieving and contributing to stated outcomes, and it is also crucially a learning exercise. The methodology outlined briefly below (described in detail in Annex 1) included opportunities for internal reflection and learning within NIPN countries. This evaluation focuses on whether NIPN has: (1) achieved intended direct outcomes; and (2) the extent to which it has or can achieve indirect outcomes. Using a theory-based approach, the evaluation assesses how far the NIPN initiative has achieved its objectives as detailed in its Theory of Change (ToC) and contributed to longer-term indirect outcomes that require partnership with multiple actors to achieve. This evaluation is informed by and builds on the previous Mid-term Review (MTR) conducted in 2018¹. The MTR assessed the establishment of the initiative, while also examining the inception of each platform within the target countries. However, due to the development of each NIPN being delayed, the 2018 review was not able to comprehensively assess performance.

1.1. Evaluation questions

The evaluation addresses the following questions categorised by the OECD-DAC criteria:

1. **Relevance: How relevant is the NIPN approach in driving optimal policy and programme approaches to address malnutrition?**
 - a. How relevant is the operational and institutional approach of NIPN in achieving its stated aims and objectives?
 - b. To what extent does NIPN respond to current and emerging needs and priorities, both within countries and globally?
2. **Coherence: To what extent is NIPN coordinating and collaborating with relevant initiatives and actors to achieve results?**
 - a. How far does NIPN partner with other initiatives and actors within countries to ensure multisectoral coordination and to avoid duplication?
 - b. To what extent has NIPN engaged with other relevant actors and initiatives to communicate its approach and results to establish credibility, influence and avoid duplication globally?
3. **Effectiveness: To what degree is NIPN achieving its results?**
 - a. To what extent has NIPN achieved its expected results at national and global levels?
 - b. What factors enabled or prohibited NIPN in achieving its expected results?

¹ Mid-Term Review of the European Commission's National Information Platforms for Nutrition initiative (NIPN), Mokoro, 2018.

4. **Impact: To what extent have NIPN activities implemented in Phase 1 contributed to indirect outcomes?**
 - a. To what extent have NIPN activities and outputs contributed to improvements in countries' ability to track nutrition progress and report progress globally?
 - b. How far have NIPN findings and analysis influenced policymaking on multisectoral approaches to nutrition?
 - c. To what extent has NIPN affected political commitment in using nutrition data to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability?
 - d. Which factors have contributed to the achievement of outcomes, and what factors impeded the achievement of outcomes?
 - e. Are there any likely unanticipated longer-term effects of the NIPN project?
5. **Sustainability: To what extent will results be sustained in strengthening national capacities for evidence-based nutrition policy and programming?**
 - a. To what extent will capacity building activities be sustained?
 - b. What proportion of NIPN costs are provided to government and national institutions? What proportion of NIPN costs are covered by government budgets?
 - c. To what extent have countries increased investments in nutrition due to NIPN activities?
 - d. How far has NIPN considered an 'exit strategy' to enable sustainability?

1.2. Methodology

The methodology for this evaluation was presented in the Protocol Report developed during the inception phase of this study. An evaluation framework was produced to guide the analytical approach comprising four components for the compilation of evidence (both the report and framework are described in full in Annex 1). Furthermore, during the inception phase, N4D worked with C4N-NIPN on revisions to the existing NIPN ToC to better demarcate the direct and indirect outcomes (see Annex 2 for a full explanation of these developments). A total of 102 stakeholders were consulted for this Contribution Study. Figure 1 below highlights the varying degrees of stakeholder engagement across different regions and organizations involved in the Contribution Study. It demonstrates a significant level of interest and involvement from stakeholders in the countries visited (Bangladesh, Kenya and Niger), a comparatively lower stakeholder's engagement from Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Guatemala and a good global level of engagement.

Figure 1: Contribution Study country stakeholder engagement



Section 2: Overview of NIPN

The NIPN initiative was launched by the EU in 2015 with the goal of supporting partner countries that are part of the global SUN Movement and are committed to deliver evidence-based programmes for improving human nutrition.² Starting in 2015, NIPN was co-funded by the UK's former Department for International Development (DFID), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the European Commission (EC). Its initial objective was to “support countries in the SUN Movement to strengthen their capacity to bring together existing information on nutritional status with information on factors that influence nutritional outcomes, including policies, programmes and investments, in order to track progress towards international global targets; to analyse data to understand better how malnutrition can be prevented; and to inform national policies and improve programmes”.³ In the first phase, the initiative had a budget of €35 million over 2015–2022.

The EC initially used the Agrinatura network to provide overall coordination of NIPN, which in turn contracted Agropolis International to implement the initiative. Agropolis International was therefore responsible for creating and hosting the Global Support Facility (GSF), tasked with developing the delivery framework and leading its implementation. The role of the GSF has evolved over time but was primarily intended to coordinate the initiative between countries and support the establishment of each NIPN through technical assistance.

An Expert Advisory Group (EAG) was also formed to provide technical guidance and advice throughout the project. It consists of 16 members from United Nations (UN) organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), the SUN Movement Secretariat and research institutions. It aims to represent different disciplines and sectors that can inform nutrition policymaking. The initial role of the EAG was to provide technical advice on establishing NIPNs to ensure the architecture was technically robust for enabling multisectoral coordination.⁴

In January 2020, the GSF moved out of Agropolis International and NIPN was integrated into the Joint-Action “Capacity for Nutrition” (C4N) initiative. C4N supports the EC, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ), and partner countries in strengthening evidence-based approaches and strategies for nutrition-related programming and policymaking. At EC level, C4N responds to commitments from Nutrition for Development (N4D),⁵ which underpin the implementation of the EC “Action Plan for Nutrition” (APN). C4N-NIPN is now the global coordinator, providing support to the NIPN initiative and its respective countries with NIPN consultants hired to provide technical assistance. The GSF has been integrated within C4N, but the EAG is still a separate entity, under the coordination of C4N-NIPN.

Phase 1 of NIPN (2015–2022) was the initiative's inception period. The focus was on establishing multisectoral platforms at the country level (with nine active NIPNs during Phase 1, detailed in Section 2.2), although there were also some results achieved (as discussed in this report). The GSF and then C4N-NIPN both played central roles in providing support to establish each NIPN, as well as in galvanising technical support from the EAG. Phase 2 of NIPN (2022–2025) will focus on continuing the implementation of each active platform and ensuring national stakeholders have the support needed to achieve stated objectives. Mali and Zambia are expected to join the NIPN initiative in 2023, while NIPN Bangladesh was closed in February 2022. Technical and management support will be provided by C4N-NIPN in Ethiopia, Mali and Niger; by UNICEF in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lao PDR and Uganda; and by Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE) in Guatemala.

² *NIPN Annual Report*, Global Support Facility, 2016.

³ *NIPN Annual Report*, Global Support Facility, 2016.

⁴ *NIPN Annual Report*, Global Support Facility, 2017.

⁵ Not to be confused with N4D, the organization commissioned to undertake this Contribution Study.

2.1. NIPN approach and operational cycle

NIPN aims to be rooted within existing national institutions and multisectoral coordination systems for nutrition. The platform generates evidence, from analysing available and shared data within each country, which is used by (sub-) national stakeholders for developing policy, designing programmes and allocating investments throughout the NIPN operational cycle. This cycle consists of three elements that aim to constantly revolve and feed into each other:

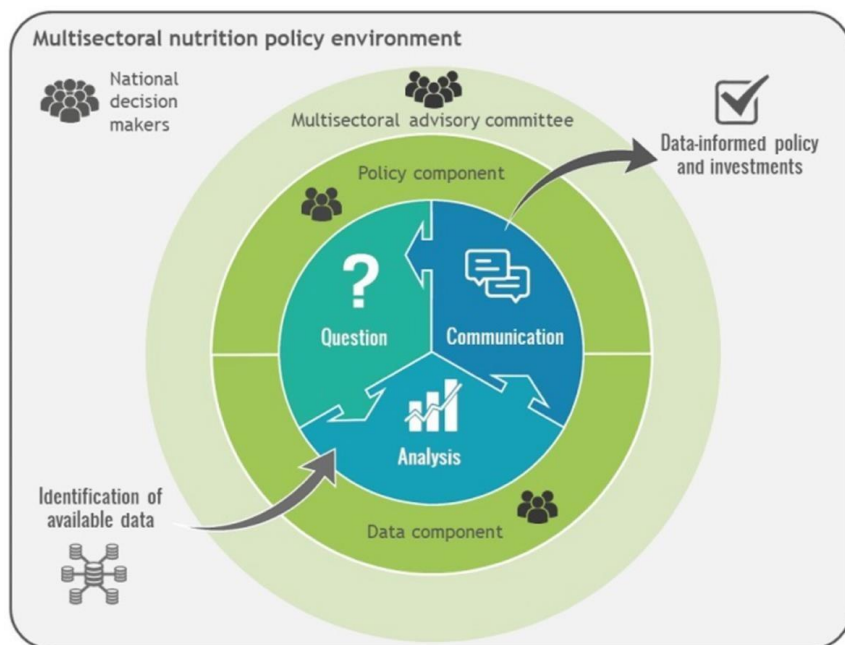
- **Question formulation** based on government priorities;
- **Analysis** of data to inform the questions; and
- **Communication** of the findings back to government.

The NIPN operational cycle is supported by the national NIPN structure made up of:

- Actors within a **policy component** that convenes and facilitates a multisectoral advisory committee, playing a key role in policy question formulation, interpretation of the results of data analysis and communication of findings; and
- Actors within a **data component** that collates multisectoral data in a central repository and analyses the data.

Both components are hosted by national institutions. The NIPN country team, comprising staff from the national host organizations, staff on contract and technical advisors, is embedded within these two components and is responsible for implementing the NIPN approach. The NIPN Multisectoral Advisory Committee (MAC) guides the country team, validates its work and ensures information flows between NIPN and the national multisectoral mechanisms for nutrition. Figure 2 represents NIPN's approach and cyclical nature, which aims to inform multisectoral policy and investments on nutrition.

Figure 2: NIPN's approach



2.2. Development of NIPNs

During Phase 1, there were nine active NIPNs globally. These were; Burkina Faso, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Laos and Guatemala. Most country platforms only became functional between mid-2018 and mid-2019 due to the various activities and long timeframe needed to set up a NIPN at country level. In 2021, the decision was made to discontinue the NIPN in Bangladesh. Annex 3 details the development and institutional arrangements of each NIPN platform targeted in Phase 1.

Implementation of NIPN followed similar approaches and trajectories in all countries, although there were considerable differences in timelines. Following scoping missions to identify optimal institutional arrangements, there were often protracted negotiations and processes to finalise Terms of Reference (ToRs), Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and contracts between the donor/s and the NIPN implementation bodies. Once the contractual agreements were in place, intensive capacity building and sensitisation of the approach with the NIPN implementing bodies was carried out. Each country then undertook its first Policy Analysis Cycle (PAC) involving multiple stakeholders in workshops and meetings to determine the policy related questions and through a process of refinement, a short list of 5–6 priority questions. This stage in the process was often very lengthy: once agreed, analysis was undertaken to answer the questions, with findings being written up and published in policy briefs and other technical reports. Country dashboards were developed in parallel to the PAC process.

Section 3: Findings

3.1 Relevance

Box 1: Key findings related to the relevance evaluation question

Relevance – key findings:

- There is unanimity in the relevance of NIPN at country and global level. The need for more and better data and evidence is as relevant today as it was nine years ago when NIPN was first conceptualised.
- NIPN's approach has evolved considerably from a data/quasi-scientific focus to policy relevance. This evolution has seen a plethora of well-developed globally produced tools and resources to support country implementation.
- The changes to the coordination of NIPN under C4N-NIPN are positively viewed as meeting the needs of countries.
- There is a more powerful story to be told about NIPN than is apparent through available documentation. Central global information does not capture the range and depth of country experiences.
- The setting up of NIPN took considerably more time than envisaged. The COVID-19 pandemic and the transition from Phase 1 to 2 also created delays.
- The institutional set up of NIPN has fostered engagement with multiple sectors through the convening power of different ministerial entities and through national bureaus of statistics.
- NIPN has shown that it can be responsive to national needs through responsive data analysis and engagement.

In this section, relevance is concerned with whether the design and set-up of NIPN is enabling it to influence policy and programme approaches to address malnutrition and its consequences and whether it is responsive to emerging needs at the country level.

The bringing together of multisectoral nutrition relevant data, analysing this to generate new evidence on aspects of malnutrition through the engagement of those concerned with policy, programming, advocacy and resource mobilisation is unique across NIPN countries. In its early inception, (2015–2017) there was wide agreement that the concept of NIPN would be highly relevant to global actors in response to demand for a nutrition 'data revolution', highlighting the need for robust and multisectoral data to underpin nutrition investments and programming.⁶ DFID was a leading figure in spearheading this call and introduced the NIPN initiative during the SUN Global Gathering in Côte d'Ivoire in 2017, receiving strong support from attendees.⁷ DFID then became a co-funder of the NIPN initiative until the end of Phase 1. Globally, there continues to be widespread recognition of the need for more and better nutrition data; although NIPN doesn't generate new data, its relevance is in collating existing multisectoral data, harnessing its utility for policy makers and highlighting gaps in data quality and frequency.

The operational and institutional approach to NIPN has evolved considerably since its inception. Originally, there was a heavy data focus, and a surveillance system was envisaged with continually updated 'live' nutrition information with the district level as the unit of analysis.⁸ This earlier vision shaped the recruitment of academically capable staff in the GSF who positioned NIPN as a scientific data led initiative. Over time, concern that NIPN was overly data focused resulted in a NIPN shift to building in-country capacity for harnessing and analysing existing multisectoral data to address priority policy-related questions.⁹

⁶ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2016.

⁷ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2017.

⁸ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2017.

⁹ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2018.

Following the 2018 Mid Term Review¹⁰ (MTR) of the NIPN initiative, the EU pushed for NIPN to sit under C4N within the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)/ the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Overall, this move is widely viewed as positive as it has led to NIPN being better supported and equipped to achieve its objectives. According to an EAG member, **'NIPN became a much more credible initiative when the transition to GIZ occurred'**. The C4N-NIPN team have regular contact with relevant EU staff overseeing NIPN, which supports an efficient transfer of knowledge at headquarters and at country level. A workshop was held with all European Union Delegations (EUDs) engaged in NIPN during the handover to GIZ and supported the transition period. The EU attend key NIPN events, such as the Chief of Nutrition attending the launch of NIPN Phase 2 and the NIPN Global Gatherings. It is not clear, however, whether relevant EU stakeholders engaging regularly with NIPN is enabling wider knowledge sharing within their organization.

The 2018 MTR formulated a NIPN ToC and revised the Results Framework (RF), which became the main vehicle for quarterly progress monitoring reports (QPMs). The ToC, accompanying technical guidance and operational documents are widely viewed amongst those consulted as having positively served to facilitate NIPN's Phase 1 objectives. During the inception phase of this study and as described above, it became apparent that the ToC needed to differentiate between the results NIPN has responsibility for delivering (direct outcomes); and those to which NIPN contributes (indirect outcomes). N4D worked with C4N-NIPN on a revised global ToC to address these weaknesses (see Annex 2).

However, even with a more robust global ToC, NIPN remains a complex initiative, and capturing the range of country NIPN implementation experiences and outcomes is challenging. There is an inherent tension between what NIPN strives to be at country level and the demands of being a donor-driven and -funded initiative. On the one hand, countries have had agency to develop NIPNs in a way that meets their specific needs. For example, in Guatemala the coordinating body of the national food and nutrition security system wanted to focus its NIPN Phase 1 on stunting, to generate learning for the whole nutrition and food security policy area¹¹. In Côte d'Ivoire, the NIPN has become primarily focused on monitoring the national nutrition plan.¹² In Laos, the NIPN has focused on strengthening policy dialogue and multisectoral coordination through capacity building and data- policy engagement.¹³ In other countries, NIPN has served as a tool to strengthen national systems and capacities of policymakers. On the other hand, the global ToC and RF mean that countries are required to report on progress and results through the QPMs, which cannot capture either all the unique developments in-country or the nuances relating to implementation that each country experiences. Providing such centralised monitoring instruments for all countries does not allow for a consistent understanding of progress or challenges each NIPN experiences. Indeed, this lack of awareness of critical challenges was a contributory factor that led to the closure of the Bangladesh NIPN.

The development of country specific ToCs and RFs can serve to further institutionalise and communicate NIPN's relevance nationally. A recent evaluation of Laos¹⁴ recommended that this should be a focus, although UNICEF Laos stakeholders indicated this is unlikely to be a priority in Phase 2. In Côte d'Ivoire, a revised country-specific ToC was developed during a mid-term review, yet country stakeholders were unable to confirm how this had occurred and were confident this was not guiding implementation of the NIPN.¹⁵ The Niger and Kenya "deep dive" country visits conducted by N4D found a strong appetite for developing country-specific ToCs, and the C4N- NIPN team see value in more tailored logic models that reflect the progress and ambitions of each NIPN.

¹⁰ Mid-Term Review of the European Commission's National Information Platforms for Nutrition initiative (NIPN), Mokoro, 2018.

¹¹ Informe Final Plataforma de Información Nacional sobre Nutrición en Guatemala, CATIE, 2017–2021.

¹² Rapport de mission d'appui de C4N: Appui à la Plateforme Nationale Multisectorielle d'Information pour la Nutrition du SE-CONNAPE, C4N-NIPN, undated.

¹³ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, 2022.

¹⁴ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, October 2022.

¹⁵ Rapport de mission d'appui de C4N: Appui à la Plateforme Nationale Multisectorielle d'Information pour la Nutrition du SE-CONNAPE, C4N-NIPN.

The in-country institutional arrangements and policy context for NIPN rightly received considerable attention during the inception period in Phase 1. This was assessed through nutrition context mapping for each NIPN country, which provided an overview of the landscape/ecosystem, existing data platforms and relevant nutrition indicators. The GSF visits also supported the identification of institutional options for NIPN, recognising that national ownership was fundamental. Early attention in identifying the most relevant institutional location for policy and data means that NIPN is largely associated within the institutions that coordinate multisectoral nutrition policies and programmes, and within national bureaus with significant data convening, handling and analytical capabilities. Data landscape mapping was comprehensive, but there is no clear evidence from countries that this directly informed the data collection design of NIPN. In Kenya, these original assessments are updated every year, which enables new and emerging issues to be identified. It was not clear whether other NIPN countries had revisited the context analysis or landscaping mapping to ensure NIPN's relevance.

NIPN is reliant on its ability to work between sectors and with other relevant actors. Engagement and ownership of the NIPN process is fostered by where NIPN sits, either under or closely connected to Ministries of Planning or Offices of the Prime Minister i.e., non-sectoral ministries, and their related convening powers. The experience of the institutional arrangements in Bangladesh (see Box 2 below) highlights the critical role institutional ownership plays in NIPN. However, it is ultimately the profile afforded to nutrition and the level of government commitment to reducing malnutrition that determines the impact that NIPN can expect.

Box 2: Examples of country NIPN institutional arrangements

Bangladesh: This is the only country where NIPN was implemented by an international NGO (iNGO). In the absence of a call for proposals, Helen Keller International (HKI) was chosen by the EU for its experience in generating and analysing nutrition data in Bangladesh, but there was disappointment that the Government of Bangladesh was not selected as the partner for NIPN. The contracting of HKI negatively affected progress and the commitment of government, which in turn negatively impacted on communicating the added value of NIPN across sectors.¹⁶ This led to the slow implementation of activities and a negative cycle whereby NIPN was not able to demonstrate its relevance fast enough, which further undermined government ownership and the strategic multi-stakeholder approach needed for NIPN's processes. Stakeholders agreed that the decision to award an iNGO as the contract holder was a significant factor to the breakdown of relationships between NIPN implementing agencies. Personality clashes between senior leadership in the NIPN implementing agencies also became a barrier for collaboration and implementation of activities. Meanwhile, NIPN engagement with the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC), was not sufficient for spearheading NIPN's operational processes. A range of global level and country stakeholders noted that Bangladesh NIPN ceased because of the choice of HKI as the lead, which led to irreparable tensions between Government stakeholders and HKI.

Côte d'Ivoire: NIPN is overseen by Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food and Early Childhood Development (SE-CONNAPE), which sits under the Vice President's Office. Previously, NIPN had a close relationship with Cote d'Ivoire's Technical Committee of the National Nutrition Council, which is responsible for developing the new National Multisectoral Nutrition Plan, due to the leadership of both government agencies.¹⁷ The Director of SE-CONNAPE was previously also the SUN Focal Point, which enabled them to have influence over both SE-CONNAPE and the policy-making arm within the Technical Committee. As such, NIPN was closely connected to policy dialogue and used official channels to inform policy.¹⁸ However, recently the leadership of both agencies has changed, with the SUN Focal Point leaving their role as Director of SE-CONNAPE and focusing on the Technical Committee. The new Director has moved

¹⁶ Bangladesh NIPN ROM Report, C4N-NIPN, 2020.

¹⁷ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

¹⁸ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

NIPN to sit within the M&E department of SE-CONNAPE, which, along with the change in leadership, has limited NIPN's influence and connection with the Technical Committee. These changes to NIPN's institutional location within Côte d'Ivoire government structures highlight the critical importance of positioning the NIPN within a government agency that has regular contact with policymaking committees to increase its influence. Stakeholders noted that locating NIPN within SE-CONNAPE's M&E department also limits NIPN's role to that of a monitoring tool, rather than playing a critical role in influencing the new National Multisectoral Nutrition Plan.

Ethiopia: NIPN works under the umbrella of the National Nutrition Programme (NNP) and the 2018 Food and Nutrition Policy (FNP). The Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) chairs the NNP Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Steering Committee (MER SC), which monitors the progress of the NNP and the FNP.¹⁹ This proximity allows NIPN to reach out to all multisectoral members, ensuring its activities are aligned with the needs of the NNP and FNP. NIPN applies a dual approach in its implementation: 1) the NIPN Advisory Committee (AC), formed of a small group of selected advisors with high level decision-making leverage and close links to ministers, provides advice to NIPN and supports the uptake of NIPN outputs by key decision makers; and 2) the MER SC provides advice and guidance to NIPN on operational issues and NIPN implementation.²⁰ The NIPN AC and the MER SC give the NIPN technical 'clout', which is crucial in securing NIPN's place within the nutrition sector.

In Guatemala, NIPN is implemented by the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) in close collaboration with Secretariat of Food and Nutrition Security of the Presidency of the Republic (SESAN), the national institution responsible for multisectoral coordination.²¹ NIPN achieved full alignment with SESAN's policies ensuring that findings are integrated as closely as possible within the national system, including the system for accessing and visualising data and information.²² In addition to establishing the agreement with SESAN at the national and municipal level, different sets of agreements were signed with other decentralised governmental institutions, civil society groups and other relevant actors. The type of agreement depends on the nature of the actors and how they are organized and represented at the decentralised level.

Kenya: NIPN sits within two government entities (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and Kenya Institute of Public Policy and Research), both of which are under the Ministry of Planning. However, coordination of nutrition and allied policies and plans resides with the Ministry of Health, which does not have multisectoral convening power.

Laos: NIPN is housed in the Ministry of Planning and Development, enabling close linkages and synergies with nutrition-relevant initiatives. For example, the National Nutrition Committee, led by the Office of the Vice Prime Minister, has a coordination mandate so can galvanise high-level buy in and links closely with NIPN.²³

In Niger, the placement of NIPN in the INS (Institute National de la Statistique) offers a technical 'home' for NIPN with the strategic oversight and guidance of High Commission for 3N Initiative (HC3N) ensuring connectedness to decision-makers across government.²⁴

¹⁹ National Information Platform for Nutrition Communication Strategy Ethiopian Public Health Institute Addis Ababa, April 2020

²⁰ Review of the Ethiopian Nutrition Policy Landscape 2010 – 2020 . August 2020

²¹ Informe Final Plataforma de Información Nacional sobre Nutrición en Guatemala, CATIE, 2017–2021.

²² Informe Final Plataforma de Información Nacional sobre Nutrición en Guatemala, CATIE, 2017–2021.

²³ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, 2022.

²⁴ Etude des déterminants des politiques en matière de nutrition au Niger Comprendre les liens entre la politique multisectorielle de nutrition et les politiques sectorielles et les liens avec les évidences qui sous-tendent ces politiques Dec 2017. NIPN

Uganda: NIPN is led in the National Nutrition Secretariat in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), working in partnership with Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS).²⁵ This arrangement should ensure strong national ownership in the most relevant institutions: the OPM convenes all eight main line ministries, hosts the SUN Focal Point and coordinates the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan.²⁶ Whilst this is the right home institutionally, the high-level political level of the OPM Director confers significant responsibility for many other activities, which can reduce the level of attention on NIPN. Thus, locating NIPN in a convening institution does not guarantee multisectoral engagement.

The institutional arrangements in Phase 2 could pose a risk in some countries to the further localisation of NIPN, its ownership, impact and sustainability. These arrangements are a marked departure from Phase 1 when contracting was directly by the EUD through government (Treasury or directly to the implementing institutions) who had responsibility for managing NIPN activities and the budget. In Phase 2 by contrast, contracts are with one of three non-state actors (UNICEF, GIZ or CATIE) and government actors now request funds from the lead partners for NIPN activities. In some instances, government has limited oversight of the decision-making in terms of how activities are prioritised and resources allocated to NIPN activities. These arrangements might confer some advantages. For example, where UNICEF is the main managing partner and NIPN is integrated into its overall country programme and nutrition portfolio, this can enable the speedier realisation of activities and finances, information can be shared across teams and programmes and as UNICEF typically has strong relationships with government, they can work with a wide range of ministries and organizations to understand priorities. Nonetheless, there are strongly-held views amongst some government and other actors that the gains in Phase 1 (country owned and led, embedded capacities, etc.) are at risk of being eroded as the localisation of NIPN and its sustainability are being jeopardised. As noted by a key informant, 'there is a critical difference between empowering and implementing'.

The experience of NIPN in Bangladesh suggests that international organizations having managerial power within the institutional structure of NIPN could cause relationships to break down and for activities to be severely delayed. Indeed, in Kenya, this risk is evident as over one year into Phase 2, full agreement between government and UNICEF on the alignment of Phases 1 and 2 workplans, budgets and priorities has not been reached, although Phase 2 activities have started under UNICEF's lead with Phase 1 continuing under government. Such arrangements need very careful managing to avoid any risk to the progress of NIPN. It is too early to discern whether the Phase 2 arrangements will actively empower government to implement NIPN activities in a way that reflects their priorities and needs, or whether the institutional arrangement is not relevant in delivering on this core NIPN principle.

In terms of NIPN's responsiveness to national priorities, NIPN is demonstrating a capacity and willingness to respond to unplanned but emerging needs and priorities through additional data analysis and policy articulation. In Niger, issues relating to the nexus between humanitarian and development actions is emerging as a significant country priority that NIPN is supporting through data mapping.²⁷ In Kenya, analysis of the potential impact of COVID-19 on nutrition outcomes was undertaken in response to concerns at that time²⁸; and in Uganda, the OPM organized a high level (attended by the Prime Minister) National Nutrition Dialogue in 2022 for which NIPN was central in supporting, providing data, analysis and support.²⁹ At this event, there was a call for Government to invest more in nutrition.

²⁵ Mid Term Review of the National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) Project in Uganda. CEREIS July 2021 report covering the period Jan 2018 to December 2021 (commissioned by the Office of the Prime Minister)

²⁶ Uganda. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

²⁷ Rapport d'analyse N°15: Les données et indicateurs de la sous-nutrition permettant de caractériser les enjeux du nexus urgence-développement pour la nutrition au Niger

²⁸ Food Security Situation during the COVID-19 Pandemic. March 2021. NIPN Kenya

²⁹ Uganda key informant interview, May 2023. N4D

In Laos, a recent evaluation found that an overwhelming majority of respondents believed the NIPN was either “responsive” or “very responsive” to national needs and priorities.³⁰ NIPN in Laos provided data and direct input for the development of the national plan and contributed nutrition indicators and targets to the development of the 9th Five Year National Social-Economic Plan 2021-2025.³¹ There was consensus that nutrition data and results made available by NIPN are in the best interest for national needs and priorities in using data for decision-making. In several countries, NIPN has the potential to track nutrition investments and there is likely to be a high demand for a credible approach to monitor the financing of multisectoral plans.

Amongst the country and global stakeholders consulted for this study, there is unanimity in the continued relevance of the NIPN concept. Arguably, some eight years after NIPN was conceived, it is even more relevant with increased demands for more and better data and evidence for addressing malnutrition. NIPN has evolved as a frontrunner in providing data and evidence for monitoring national plans and informing policy thinking, as well as showing its ability to adapt in meeting country-specific priorities. It has been well served by the C4N- NIPN mechanism and allied technical advisors in achieving its objectives. The experiences and results in each NIPN country, however, are not readily captured through the current centralised logic model or QPMs: the rich and diverse experiences, results and pathways to greater impact are not currently being fully communicated. The focus in Phase 1 has rightly been on ensuring NIPN institutional location has fostered a high level of government engagement and ownership, although Phase 2 institutional (and financial) arrangements may pose risks to sustaining and building on this sense of government ownership.

3.2 Coherence

Box 3: Key findings related to the coherence evaluation question

- NIPN country teams are engaging with a wide range of sectors which serves to foster data sharing, nutrition policy engagement and coordination. This aspect of coherence is generally strong.
- In the early stages, NIPN focused more on sharing lessons and communicating its approach and outcomes with global entities and some regional initiatives. Since the transition to C4N, there has been less attention to global level influencing and more on internal NIPN process and country support.
- There is a lack of strategic engagement between NIPN and the SUN Movement at the global level and via the newly formed regional and convergence hubs, although opportunities exist to form more strategic alliances at all levels (global, regional and country).
- There is little evidence that NIPN has been engaging with some of the key global initiatives, such as the Global Nutrition Report, ensuring that NIPN country analyses are incorporated into country profiles, accountability frameworks and other global outputs. This lack of engagement extends to other data relevant initiatives.
- There are notable gaps in engagement within NIPN countries including in accessing humanitarian data, with the EC-Nutrition Information System and other data systems including DHIS.
- There is considerable variation in the degree to which countries engage and collaborate with other country initiatives and actors and all countries recognise the need to leverage greater influence through improved communications and alliances in Phase 2.
- Communication and visibility plans at the global and country level are a priority and should help ensure synergies are being harnessed.

This section looks at the extent to which NIPN has engaged with other relevant actors and initiatives at the global and regional level to communicate its approach and results, establish credibility and influence.

³⁰ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, October 2022, p.11.

³¹ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, October 2022, p.11.

It also looks at how well NIPN has partnered with initiatives and actors within countries to ensure multisectoral engagement and avoid duplication.

Global and regional level

NIPN's coherence at global and regional levels would involve:

- Regularly sharing outputs, outcomes and lessons learnt of NIPN country activities with key regional and global stakeholders, including the SUN Movement, the Global Nutrition Report (GNR), Nutrition 4 Growth (N4G) and nutrition teams within regional entities such as the African Union (AU);
- Engaging with global and regional stakeholders to ensure that outputs of NIPN country analyses are used, e.g., informing GNR country profiles and commitment tracking; informing N4G analysis of priority countries targeting increased commitments; informing SUN Movement analysis of country support needs (advocacy, technical, financial etc.); informing UN agency global / regional reports and country support; informing regional monitoring and accountability processes, e.g., AU country scorecards etc.; and
- Coordinating with other data and information focused actors and initiatives that provide similar support to national information systems, e.g., the World Food Programme Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (WFP VAM), Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS); District Health Information Software 2 initiative (DHIS2); the Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief, Transition for National and sub-national Nutrition Surveys (SMART); and the GNC Technical Alliance (GNC-TA) etc, to ensure sharing of lessons learnt and coherence of approach between different initiatives in providing technical assistance to NIS.

During NIPN's initial establishment, considerable emphasis was placed on global engagement and influencing including with the SUN Movement, Data Dent, UN REACH and other allied initiatives (see below). NIPN was financed by the EU, DFID and the GATES Foundation, each with strong global influence and engagement with which NIPN was encouraged to utilize. At the same time, NIPN's EAG was established with members who were well connected to the global ecosystem, who in turn supported NIPN's coherence with various initiatives. Under C4N-NIPN, less attention has been afforded to global influencing in part because of greater focus on enabling country progress and because NIPN results have been slower to evidence than anticipated due to implementation delays and time taken for nationally generated evidence leading to influencing policy and resource allocations (see Section 4.4 below).

NIPN's origins were in the SUN Movement.³² All NIPN countries are SUN countries and in the early years, there was keen interest to scale up NIPN to all SUN countries. NIPN was well represented at previous SUN Global Gatherings (SUN GG) e.g., at the 2017 SUN GG, presentations were made by NIPN Niger and Laos on their experiences of addressing 'data poor' environments; and the global SUN Donor Network (SDN) network produced a joint statement reaffirming donor commitment to a 'data revolution' and to the NIPN initiative.³³ At 2019 SUN GG, 'more and better data for improved decision-making for nutrition' was a major thematic area focused on nutrition data challenges, gaps, duplication, recommended actions and collaborative mechanisms for sharing, convergence and harmonisation.³⁴ NIPN was central to these discussions and this session reportedly prompted a greater understanding of NIPN among representatives of the SUN Civil Society Alliance of Kenya that sustains today.³⁵

NIPN engagement with SUN is coordinated internally within C4N. The close collaboration established in the early years with the monitoring, evaluation and learning (SUN-MEAL) facility in the SUN Movement Secretariat ensured that NIPN country dashboards were built on the original SUN-MEAL indicators and used the same template format.³⁶ C4N-NIPN remains as an active member of the SUN MEAL Technical Advisory Group, and

³² NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2016.

³³ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2018.

³⁴ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

³⁵ Kenya. Key Informant Interview. May 2023. N4D

³⁶ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2018.

contributed to the SUN Strategy 3.0 providing a ‘consolidated feedback paper’ focused on the SUN MEAL approach for the strategy.³⁷ C4N-NIPN also acts as a strategic advisor to the EU International Partnerships Sustainable Agri-Food Systems (INTPA F3), which is also a member of the SDN.³⁸

Despite historic engagement between NIPN and SUN as described above, NIPN and SUN have reportedly not met over the past couple of years. There is a wide sense from stakeholders interviewed that the NIPN and SUN interactions need to be strengthened given the stronger SUN Movement focus on supporting country priorities in delivering multisectoral nutrition actions and the arrival of a new SUN Movement Coordinator. Furthermore, the SUN Movement’s newly formed regional hubs signal SUN’s intention to support country efforts in a more devolved way. The Anglo-Regional Hub coordinated out of Kenya is an example of where NIPN could showcase its work and explore new areas of engagement with the 17 African countries supported by this hub. The SUN Convergence Hub, which is focused specifically on supporting fragile countries by strengthening the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, is another opportunity for engagement for NIPN countries defined as fragile. EU stakeholders noted that NIPN should be present at the next SUN GG (due to be held in 2024) to showcase developments and gauge interest from other countries in the NIPN approach. GIZ is supporting implementation of the SUN Movement 3.0 strategy, but it is not clear whether potential synergies have been explored as to how C4N-NIPN can add value to this, given that it too falls under GIZ.

The lack of more strategic engagement between NIPN and SUN at the global level and via the newly formed Regional and Convergence Hubs is surprising, since NIPN was established to support SUN countries. Both initiatives share the principles of being country-owned and -led, actively support multisectoral engagement and promote more and better data for nutrition. The new SUN Movement Coordinator has taken up position and this offers an opportunity for C4N-NIPN to re-activate a more purposeful engagement between the two initiatives, which in turn (see below) needs to filter down to the country level.

Beyond the SUN Movement, there is evidence of other global interactions, particularly in the early days of NIPN, e.g., the UN-REACH initiative developed tools on multi-stakeholders and multisectoral analysis for nutrition that were presented during a NIPN EAG meetings.³⁹ The joint EU and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) programme ‘FIRST’ (Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation), which has a similar objective to NIPN in supporting governments to strengthen nutrition-sensitive policy and programme decisions,⁴⁰ held meetings with the GSF to identify different ways for collaborating at country level. This resulted in joint statements shared with respective country teams encouraging them to identify concrete topics for further collaboration. More recently, at the Micronutrient Forum, held as virtual event in October–November 2020, NIPN held a side panel⁴¹ and in November 2021, the Nutrition Data Partners Group (NDPG) held a Nutrition4Growth (N4G) side-event on “Improving Nutrition Through Accountability and Data Systems” showcasing NIPN.⁴² The event highlighted important data themes across the data value chain through interesting examples and good practices by country governments. NIPN’s contributions included a presentation from the Secretary General from the Ministry of Planning on the experience of NIPN in Niger⁴³, with an intervention from the EU Ambassador, and a showcasing of the Guatemala decentralisation experience.⁴⁴

There is also evidence of some prior regional engagement. For example, UN-REACH supported developing a National Multisectoral Nutrition Dashboard meeting in Rwanda attended by NIPN country staff.⁴⁵

³⁷ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

³⁸ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

³⁹ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

⁴⁰ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

⁴¹ NIPN Annual Report, C4N-NIPN, 2020.

⁴² NIPN Annual Report, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

⁴³ NIPN Annual Report, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

⁴⁴ NIPN Annual Report, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

⁴⁵ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

Representatives from NIPN Ethiopia and Niger attended a regional analysis workshop undertaken by the Mali NEP (National Evaluation Platform) team in Senegal. This workshop provided an opportunity for bilateral discussions between NIPN country staff and the Mali NEP team, including Johns Hopkins University and NEP coordinators.⁴⁶ The West African Nutrition Data Summit in Senegal held in February 2020 saw NIPN contributing as a co-organizer to the preparatory discussions on the objectives, agenda and invitation list. More recently, C4N-NIPN was represented in the Regional Nutrition Working Group Subgroup Data Systems in 2021, which involved several organizations, projects and institutions and represented an important opportunity for sharing the NIPN experience and learning.⁴⁷

There are several regional entities with a focus on nutrition such as the AU Development Agency-NEPAD, which has a Nutrition and Food Systems Strategic Programme (2019–2025) that aims to catalyse and support member states to address malnutrition more effectively through multisectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches including nutrition surveillance, data-based evidence and analysis. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a Nutrition Forum that is closely engaged with the SUN Movement and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) has close links with FAO and UNICEF on nutrition issues. NIPN Niger participated in 2023 ECOWAS Nutrition Forum and C4N NIPN moderated a plenary panel discussion. There may be further opportunities in Phase 2 but this will require careful scoping and consideration of added value to these entities and to NIPN.

Less attention has been afforded to global level partnerships and influencing in recent years. Instead, C4N-NIPN has focused on support to countries, particularly in generating guidance and tools to aid NIPN processes. There is no evidence of a concerted effort to engage with the GNR and the allied Nutrition Accountability Framework (GNR-NAF) where data and evidence from NIPN countries could be shared, as well as reporting on country progress with monitoring national nutrition plans and formulating new policies for nutrition. The GNR and the NAF have a new hosting institution (PATH) with which C4N-NIPN could engage along with other data initiatives such as the WFP VAM, FIVIMS and SMART particularly for NIPN countries experiencing fragility. The DHIS-2 also offers opportunities to facilitate more data sharing and collaboration through agreements at the global level, in anticipation of greater involvement at country level.

Linked to the role of NIPN in relation to data, WFP noted that NIPN could improve its self-promotion, communicating results and, crucially, that it could play a role in highlighting major data and knowledge gaps and advocating for these gaps to be filled at global level. For this, NIPN requires a strong oversight of the data gaps emerging in the different country contexts and the institution/agency or mechanism that can support gap filling. Such an advocacy role would strengthen NIPN's level of influencing in Phase 2, and it is encouraging that C4N-NIPN has noted that communication and visibility is a priority for Phase 2, to be achieved through its social media, website, country case studies and tailoring NIPN analyses to specific audiences. Good practice around global and regional coherence requires NIPN undertaking an analysis of its priority target audiences and partners at global and regional levels; and developing a strong engagement and partnership approach. The level of 'internal' coherence between NIPN and key enabling nutrition sectors as well as NIPN's coordination with 'external' actors/agencies is described under the headings below.

Internal country engagement

Several countries (e.g., Niger and Burkina Faso) have plans for engaging partnerships, communications, visibility and advocacy, and which identify key stakeholder categories to be targeted by NIPN with evidence for informing or influencing policy decisions. The main types of partnership across NIPN countries have been between NIPN teams and sector government staff. This has enabled raising awareness of nutrition's role in sector activities as well as increasing capacity to identify nutrition-sensitive indicators and monitoring these in sector plans and policies

⁴⁶ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

⁴⁷ NIPN Annual Report, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

as well as in national multisectoral nutrition plans. Capacity strengthening has been achieved through training and technical support. Developing policy briefs and reports as part of the PAC has also laid the foundations for, and in some cases helped establish, effective partnerships. However, the extent to which the policy outputs have been accessed and read varies, with some countries recognising the need to increase their efforts around communications and visibility in Phase 2, e.g., Niger.

In Cote d'Ivoire, NIPN has fostered greater multisectoral collaboration around nutrition, although inter-sectoral relationships between representatives was highlighted as one area for improvement, e.g., the need to strengthen communication across the sectors between ministerial representatives in charge of data collection, ensuring equivalent 'weights' in hierarchical levels of NIPN representatives across the different ministries.⁴⁸ Similar issues relating to hierarchical mismatches across sectors have been noted in Kenya.

In Niger, the close working relationship between the technical lead of The High Commissioner for the 3N Initiative (HC3N) and the General Secretary and between NIPN technical analysts means that there are regular meetings and discussions. In Phase 2, NIPN is formalising linkages and collaboration with additional stakeholders, e.g., the Ministry of Humanitarian Action. The advocacy and communications strategy (2022–2025) sets out a plan of action that involves recruiting a communications and advocacy manager.⁴⁹ Other approaches include statistical cafes for decision-makers and seminars for parliamentarians, and the strategy also has timelines for each activity, a budget and an M&E plan.

In Kenya, NIPN capacity building of M&E staff across sectors, their work in training sector staff to formulate questions informing policy as part of the PAC cycle, and their support in analysing nutrition-sensitive data, has led to greater understanding of the importance of nutrition in sector planning.⁵⁰

In Ethiopia, the 2020 communications strategy sets out primary and secondary audiences for NIPN outputs.⁵¹ It details key messages for different audiences and communication channels, discusses visibility and branding and includes tables on outputs and activities by outcome with indicators for monitoring implementation and achievement. There is a communication strategy log frame for monitoring the strategy's achievements and the NIPN team has hired a dedicated communications expert to implement the strategy. Audiences for NIPN Ethiopia are distinguished as primary (e.g., direct implementers such as members of MER SC) and secondary (those not directly involved in NIPN activities but identified as the 'final destination' for outputs, e.g., policy decision-makers).

In Bangladesh, lack of trust between stakeholders and sectors was highlighted as a barrier to sector coherence and coordination. NIPN's institutional structure created an environment where there were rivalries and disagreement, which created barriers for NIPN's effectiveness.

Countries demonstrate considerable variability in the degree to which they have achieved meaningful engagement with external country actors. The country communication and visibility plans are a key activity within the NIPN implementation cycle for enabling identification and targeting of key external stakeholders and organizations to inform policy and increase multisectoral coordination. Information on these plans is provided in Box 4 below.

Prioritisation of these plans is important for an initiative that depends on the successful engagement of multiple stakeholders. This was challenging during Phase 1, and the extent of implementation has been inconsistent. Consequently, barriers have been created in achieving strategic and purposeful engagement with external

⁴⁸ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

⁴⁹ Plan de Communication et de Visibilité de la PNIN 2022–25

⁵⁰ Kenya key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

⁵¹ National Information Platform for Nutrition Communication Strategy Ethiopian Public Health Institute Addis Ababa, April 2020.

actors. Country NIPN stakeholders reported that strategic engagement in Phase 1 was not easy whilst also establishing and managing NIPN, which for many countries was a more arduous endeavour than originally envisaged. Furthermore, there is no evidence that NIPN countries have carried out comprehensive needs assessments to inform the communication and visibility plans; but there is recognition in all countries that improving communication with external actors is a priority in Phase 2.

External country engagement

All countries engage with different external actors according to their specific ecosystem. In Phase 2, increasing knowledge about NIPN should offer new opportunities for amplifying NIPN and reducing any duplication. Good examples of country external actor engagement include Uganda's links with Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINU, also funded by the EU), which gave rise to an agreement between UBOS, UNICEF and WFP to institutionalise food security and nutrition assessments carried out in the north of the country.⁵² In Côte d'Ivoire, partnerships with the National School of Statistics and Applied Sciences have been formed although it is not clear how these are enabling NIPN to achieve its objectives.⁵³ In Laos, development partners expressed concern that there was not sufficient coordination with NIPN to drive progress on collective outcomes; and in Niger, almost all stakeholders felt that NIPN communications, its visibility and added value could be significantly strengthened as knowledge of its expertise was not widely understood.

Three of the eight NIPN countries have a degree of fragility and a humanitarian sector presence. This is important as the sector generates a wide range of relevant data that has not been readily available to NIPN. Key data includes SMART, sentinel surveillance and risk-related survey data that are regularly collected and which, if collated and harnessed, could generate very useful data for NIPN analysis. Niger has high rates of malnutrition, climate change effects and large population displacement. A humanitarian dominance has persisted though the creation of a National Nexus Committee and a growing focus on more developmental approaches is emerging. The annual SMART surveys, that demonstrate nutrition trends and the nationally-led intervention mapping provide ample opportunity for NIPN to overlay data on wasting, stunting and other forms of malnutrition with data on programme interventions at the regional and municipal level. Correlating nutrition trends with programming could generate evidence of programme effectiveness by establishing whether a correlation between levels of malnutrition and the presence of different programmes exists. Furthermore, combining the wealth of data in annual SMART surveys in Niger with multisectoral routine data could provide information on the underlying drivers of malnutrition, support the emerging prevention of malnutrition focus and place NIPN at the centre of the Nexus thinking.

In Kenya, the National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) is starting to merge SMART data with the NIPN database, offering a rich resource for trend analysis. Given the nature of Kenya's climate fragility, overlaying SMART data with the National Drought Monitoring Authority (NDMA) sentinel surveillance data in 27 fragile Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) areas to generate analysis of the drivers of wasting and stunting would be immensely powerful. However, data sensitivities mean these data are not yet readily accessible.

An obvious engagement should be evident between NIPN and the various SUN Networks that exist at country level. Other than a few exceptions, NIPN has not yet worked closely with in-country SUN structures. In Kenya, the SUN Civil Society Alliance (CSA) is closely involved in NIPN, and the SUN Focal Point is engaged in the NIPN Advisory Committee.⁵⁴ In Côte d'Ivoire, partnerships have been established with the SUN MEAL entities.⁵⁵

Finally, there is a lack of coherence between the EU-funded 'Strengthening national nutrition information systems' project (EC-NIS) and NIPN in the countries where both initiatives exist, apart from Laos where there

⁵² Mid Term Review of the National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) Project in Uganda. CEREIS July 2021 report covering the period Jan 2018 to December 2021 (commissioned by the Office of the Prime Minister)

⁵³ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, *C4N-NIPN*, 2021.

⁵⁴ Kenya. Stakeholder Interview. May 2023. N4D

⁵⁵ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, *C4N-NIPN*, 2021.

is some evidence NIPN is connected to EC-NIS. The disconnect is true even in the same UNICEF supported EC-NIS and NIPN countries, and this is reflected at the global level. The reasons for this appear to be rooted in an earlier confusion in differentiating between NIPN and EC-NIS, but work on increasing collaboration between the two has recently started that should help to forge more strategic engagement. From a data coherence perspective, EC-NIS offers NIPN a real opportunity to host strengthened health systems data including key nutrition indicators.

Box 4: Examples of country communication and visibility plans

Box 4: Examples of country communication and visibility plans

In Bangladesh, the draft communication and visibility strategy was criticised as being too general as it did not differentiate between specific organizations, agencies or ministries and highlight the best channels to ensure NIPN data and evidence would influence policy discussions.⁵⁶ Needs assessments for each target audience group were not conducted to fully understand nuances of how NIPN could meet the needs of stakeholders and ensure information and analysis was presented and packaged in the most appropriate way.⁵⁷

In Cote d'Ivoire, a communication plan was jointly developed by the Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food and Early Childhood Development (SE-CONNAPE) and UNICEF, but this had not been implemented at the time of this study.⁵⁸ Stakeholders reflected that communication across sectors was insufficient and a strategy was needed to guide collaboration and coherence and increase synergies between sectors.

Ethiopia has developed a comprehensive communication and visibility plan. The strategy clearly identifies primary and secondary audiences for NIPN outputs and sets out key messages for these different audiences with priority communication channels.⁵⁹ Outcomes are well defined with details on which activities and outputs are needed to achieve them. A logical framework has also been developed to monitor achievements.

Uganda developed its communication and visibility strategy in 2020, although the MTR noted that that NIPN visibility and influence in Uganda was minimal and that NIPN needed to build its sphere of influence to gain the attention and influence key decision-makers across government and development partners.⁶⁰

In conclusion, global level attention was a significant focus in the initial stages of Phase 1; however, supporting countries in setting up NIPN and with peer interactions has meant that global-level influence has not been afforded the same level of continued emphasis. The limited strategic engagement with the SUN Movement globally, regionally and in most NIPN countries is unexpected, although communication and visibility in Phase 2 is a priority at all levels. Countries struggled in Phase 1 to carve out time to strategically engage with NIPN external actors and afforded more time to fostering strong cross sectoral engagement (see below). Nonetheless, there are opportunities to increase NIPN's visibility and coherence in Phase 2 both globally, regionally and in country, which should raise NIPN's visibility and encourage greater demand for NIPN's services.

⁵⁶ Bangladesh NIPN ROM Report, C4N-NIPN, 2020.

⁵⁷ Bangladesh NIPN ROM Report, C4N-NIPN, 2020.

⁵⁸ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

⁵⁹ National Information Platform for Nutrition Communication Strategy Ethiopian Public Health Institute Addis Ababa, April 2020

⁶⁰ Mid Term Review of the National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) Project in Uganda. CEREIS July 2021 report covering the period Jan 2018 to December 2021 (commissioned by the Office of the Prime Minister)

3.3 Effectiveness

Box 5: Key findings related to the effectiveness evaluation question

Effectiveness – key findings

- Embedding NIPN in national government structures has been a pre-requisite for a functional NIPN, although learning from more detailed analysis of institutional arrangements, especially regarding access to multisectoral data, could inform and facilitate planned scale-up of NIPN to other countries.
- The role of GSF and C4N-NIPN has been crucial during the start-up of NIPN and has helped resolve challenges in the early stages of Phase 1.
- The experience of implementing the policy analysis cycle has been a steep learning curve for most countries but has ultimately led to more streamlined processes and increasingly useful and relevant policy briefs.
- All countries have developed outward facing NIPN dashboards allowing visualisation of data and, in some cases, data repositories that allow access to primary administrative and survey data. There is no systematic analysis of how dashboards are being used and by whom.
- The capacity strengthening element of NIPN's work in Phase 1 has raised awareness, enhanced knowledge and skills and strengthened coalitions across sectors. It has also contributed to more efficient PAC processes and greater appreciation amongst decision-makers of the importance of evidence to inform nutrition policy.
- Most NIPN countries are considering how to devolve NIPN to sub-national level with some countries already implementing pilot programmes. The complexity of this should not be underestimated though, as institutional architecture varies between and within countries.

The effectiveness of the NIPN initiative is assessed by investigating the extent to which NIPN has achieved its direct outcomes relating to the outputs of NIPN's original Results Framework (RF) and ToC. The section assesses how far NIPN has achieved each of the following direct outcomes in Phase 1:

- A functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems;
- Strengthened institutional capacity to collect, analyse and communicate nutrition data and evidence, integrated into wider national information systems;
- Effective partnerships with other stakeholders to ensure that data and evidence are used for informing policies, investments and accountability for nutrition;
- Political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence for informing multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability for nutrition; and
- GSF/C4N-NIPN coordinates between countries, donors and global experts, provides support to countries, captures lessons learned and positions NIPN in the global data-for-nutrition landscape.

Functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems- institutional arrangements

The choice of institutional location for all NIPN countries (described in detail under 'Section 1: Relevance') was preceded by scoping missions to determine the optimal location for country specific governance arrangements. Except for Bangladesh, NIPN was located within government structures on the clear understanding that NIPN needed to be owned by country institutions to achieve sustainability and influence. It is necessary to examine direct and indirect outcomes on a country-by-country basis to determine the effectiveness of NIPN's institutional arrangements in terms of supporting NIPN function. The key cross-cutting element for effective implementation across all countries is NIPN's capability in informing multisectoral planning and policy, with resources to follow. It is critical that NIPN can influence the generation of, access to and collation of, multisectoral nutrition data.

Without embedding NIPN in government structures, this influence will not have been realised, as illustrated in the country-by-country analysis below.

Specifically, the institutional location of NIPN's policy analysis function has played a significant role in determining the extent to which sectors have asked questions that speak directly to existing or emerging policy needs. Equally, the extent to which the analysis and findings have started to influence the understanding and thinking of decision-makers is a function of this location. Locating the data component in government statistical agencies has been important in facilitating access to multisectoral data.

The analytical roles and capacity of Niger's HC3N and Kenya's Institute of Public Policy and Research (KIPPRA) and their institutional location has ensured that NIPN in these countries is supporting the monitoring of both sector plans and multisectoral national nutrition action plans. In Niger, HC3N oversight of the PAC and the multisectoral nutrition policy and plan has enabled a focus on ideas and information needs related to current emerging issues on the Humanitarian and Development Nexus (HDN) and the COVID-19 pandemic⁶¹, as well as information needs on entrenched nutrition problems for which new solutions are needed.⁶² Furthermore, in Niger and Kenya, locating NIPN in the national statistics authorities (INS and KNBS respectively) for the data collation, quality control and dashboard function has led to largely successful efforts in ensuring that sectors are enabled to improve understanding of the role of nutrition within sector programming and report on nutrition-sensitive elements of their programming.

In Laos, NIPN's institutional location within the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the engagement of policy stakeholders has enabled NIPN to have wide influence over sector monitoring and planning.⁶³ The Data Analysis Unit (DAU) has systematically mapped data sets, indicators and information systems and, with the national nutrition centre, selected nutrition specific and sensitive indicators. The MPI Department of International Cooperation as the convenor of the NIPN Secretariat ensures that both policy and data units are operating together and can hold them accountable.⁶⁴ However, in Ethiopia the data function is housed in Ethiopia Public Health Institute (EPHI) in the Ministry of Health (MoH), which has reportedly hindered cross-sector linkages resulting in failure to capture all relevant sector relevant data. Nevertheless, having high-level multisectoral staff within NIPN oversight committees, NIPN Advisory Committee (AC) and the Monitoring and Evaluation and Research MER Steering Committee (MER-SC) does give NIPN input and influence over multisectoral nutrition planning in Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia, Kenya and Niger, there is a strong sense of national ownership, with NIPN teams identifying where they want to focus in Phase 2 and beyond and already making contingency plans for continuation should there be no follow-on funding beyond Phase 2. Cote d'Ivoire and Guatemala are also said to have strong national ownership as does Laos. However, in Laos there have been questions over whether the driving role of UNICEF has meant a slight loss of agency by government institutions. In Guatemala, there has also been concern over the lack of ownership by ministries and at subnational level, with the recommendation that the PAC needs to become more functional to build greater ownership.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Rapport d'analyse N°16: Approche nexus urgence-développement dans le domaine de la nutrition – avancées, défis, nouveaux enjeux, perspectives

⁶² TENDANCES DE LA MALNUTRITION CHRONIQUE DES ENFANTS DE MOINS DE 5 ANS ET DE SES DÉTERMINANTS AU NIVEAU RÉGIONAL Jan 2020 NIPN

⁶³ *Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022*, Baastel, 2022.

⁶⁴ *Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022*, Baastel, 2022.

⁶⁵ *Informe Final Plataforma de Información Nacional sobre Nutrición en Guatemala, 2017-2021*, CATIE, 2021.

Functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems – policy question formulation process

Although slow to start in some countries, the PAC process has progressed well in most countries. Countries have generally ‘learnt by doing’ and invested in supporting sectors to understand how to formulate sector specific and relevant questions that address important policy issues. It was felt by stakeholders that the PAC cycle has become easier and faster with each iteration of the PAC.

In many countries the large number of questions initially posed by interested stakeholders required a complex process of final question selection. The criteria for question selection cited by stakeholders included availability of data of sufficient quality and year of data collection for the analysis, access to data, equity between sectors and timelines of policy processes. Most countries found that too many questions were posted in initial rounds of PAC and that a significant reduction in numbers of questions had to be negotiated. The PAC process in all countries has led to greater alignment and coordination between a range of sector and development partner stakeholders. For example, the process of reducing questions involved sensitising government and external stakeholders on the ‘how’ of formulating policy relevant questions, which has increased a common understanding of nutrition issues, objectives and goals.

In Cote d’Ivoire, 167 questions and sub-questions were developed relating to policies in line with national priorities and the decision-making calendar.⁶⁶ This process of formulating questions was followed by refining the questions and made it possible to prioritize a consensual list of 12 questions and a draft analysis framework.

In Ethiopia, NIPN is currently in its third PAC. The first cycle took six months due to problems with understanding how to develop policy related questions. The second PAC was modified and better engaged with sectors and therefore took less time. Awareness of NIPN and PAC is increasingly leading to more regular question approaches from sectors including Ministries of Agriculture, Education and Health.⁶⁷ Response time for questions varies significantly. One question from Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration on oil consumption resulted in analysis and response within one week. In Burkina Faso, a total of seven research questions were formulated and analysed as part of the PAC in its first phase. The question and analysis process has made it possible to prioritise certain interventions that link closely with the national nutrition plan and have been assessed as effective. Stakeholders highlighted that this process was critical to ensure the NIPN was responsive to the specific country priorities.

In Bangladesh, NIPN succeeded in formulating 10 policy questions and conducted analysis for 9 of these, producing reports (working/preliminary/final) and policy briefs.⁶⁸ The NIPN also produced three academic articles for journal submission.

However, the PAC process has faced challenges. In Kenya, the PAC process was described as ‘quite competitive’ with different sectors (and in some cases development partners) vying for question selection. It was not possible to form an opinion during the evaluation of the ‘fairness’ of question selection or the extent to which selection is a political negotiation. In Guatemala, the PAC is not very active even if formally constituted, as it is housed in the Inter-Institutional Liaison Technical Committee (ITC) of the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition, which according to respondents does not convene regularly or frequently.⁶⁹ In Uganda, transforming the findings of data analysis into knowledge products has reportedly been challenging due to the lack of nutrition expertise across the NIPN country team for guiding understanding of data and policy questions.⁷⁰ In Bangladesh, the PAC meeting yielded a series of policy questions. However, key informants asserted that the questions did not adequately relate to specific needs for evidence to inform upcoming policy processes.

⁶⁶ *Rapport de mission d’appui de C4N: Appui à la Plateforme Nationale Multisectorielle d’Information pour la Nutrition du SE-CONNAPE, C4N-NIPN*, undated.

⁶⁷ Nutrition Data Mapping for Ethiopia: Assessment of the Availability and Accessibility of Nutrition Related Data April 2021

⁶⁸ *Bangladesh NIPN ROM Report*, C4N-NIPN, 2020.

⁶⁹ *Informe Final Plataforma de Información Nacional sobre Nutrición en Guatemala, 2017–2021*, CATIE, 2021.

⁷⁰ NIPN Stock Taking Exercise, Uganda Case Study December 2020. GIZ

Functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems – production of policy outputs

Country NIPN teams have produced a vast array of policy briefs, reports and research papers through the PAC process. In some countries, outputs emerged early on in Phase 1 while in others (like Kenya where there were substantial delays in implementation), the bulk of outputs have only recently been launched. The scope and range of policy outputs have varied enormously between countries as has the degree to which these outputs served sector policy needs.

In Laos, policy outputs included analyses of COVID-19 risks, deprivation analysis of stunting, economic consequences of malnutrition and a costing of the national action plan for nutrition. Studies from Bangladesh included a regional perspective on dietary diversity, analysis of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) access and nutrition status of children, and a poverty relationship analysis of urban malnutrition. In Ethiopia, policy briefs have covered issues such as biofortification, WASH coverage and effectiveness of behaviour change counselling to improve infant feeding. In Guatemala, the NIPN has provided updated technical and methodological guidance on food and nutrition security and evaluation of nutritional interventions. Policy briefs from Niger included an examination of stunting trends and the status of the HDN.

There are different views on the utility of policy outputs. It is self-evident that utility will depend on the degree to which the policy analysis output responded to an identified policy need and has provided an evidenced answer to a policy question. Equally important is the degree to which the policy outputs have been disseminated and targeted to relevant decision-makers. There has been no overall review of country policy outputs in terms of quality, uptake and utility although some countries are planning follow-up in Phase 2 to determine how and whether policy outputs are being used by decision-makers and whether more needs to be done in ensuring use of outputs.

Functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems – data dashboards and repositories

All countries developed dashboards for NIPN. In some cases, such as Kenya and Niger, these dashboards are housed in the National Bureau of Statistics data portal, while in other countries the dashboards are standalone, for example in Laos where the dashboard is hosted by the MPI's Development Research Institute (DRI).

The dashboards vary enormously in terms of content, style of presentation (i.e., use of infographics), categories of information, age of data, level of disaggregation and range of multisectoral data. Dashboard variation between countries shows some interesting country developments. In Kenya, the dashboard has a tab that shows how the various nutrition indicators (anthropometric and others) are progressing in relation to specific national and international policy and strategy targets, such as World Health Assembly (WHA) global targets, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national nutrition action plans. Useful and innovative ideas like this merit sharing with other country NIPN teams.

The extent to which the dashboards can compile and present data from multiple sectors and sources also varies significantly. In Kenya and Niger, excellent access to multi-sector data is reflected in the large volume of multi-sector data presented on the dashboards. However, some sectors or data sources are reportedly less willing to share data, e.g., the National Drought Management Agency (NDMA) in Kenya and nutrition-sensitive line ministries in Ethiopia. Most dashboards have prioritised the latest Demographic Health Surveys (DHS surveys) and have presented these data in ways that are most compelling and user-friendly for decision-makers. However, dependence on DHS or Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS surveys) has inevitably meant that the dashboards appear out of date in some countries since these surveys are usually only carried out every five years or more and the formal release of reports can be very delayed.

Some platforms are increasingly collating and curating surveillance, SMART or programme monitoring data and where possible, using these to discern and demonstrate trends. Some platforms have also set up data repositories where the 'raw' survey data are available for researchers or for further analysis by NIPN in response to questions that may arise as part of the policy cycle analysis. In Ethiopia, most data are from the 2016 DHS.

Kenya's Phase 1 dashboard was based on DHS data from 2016. However, analysis of the recently completed DHS (2022) means that the dashboard will soon be updated and more relevant. This is particularly important given the impressive progress Kenya has made in stunting reduction over the past six years. In Niger, the Institute National Statistique (INS) carries out annual nationally representative nutrition surveys, so the dashboard is always up to date in terms of anthropometric data and trends. In Burkina Faso and Laos, the dashboard is valued by multiple stakeholders and has increased understanding of the multisectoral nature of nutrition, but there have been reported concerns over data gaps and the need for more current data.

There has been no systematic review of all the country dashboards or aggregation of dashboard use. Dashboard functionality or quality is not currently a feature of the quarterly monitoring reports.

Functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems – data landscape analysis

All countries undertook a data landscape study followed by a data readiness study with DURE Technology during the initial stages of Phase 1. This latter study adopted a standardised approach in terms of how data systems were described and classified. It is not at all clear how and whether the data readiness analyses have been used to influence design and operationalisation of country NIPN programmes. There appears to be no evaluative documentation of this.

Strengthened institutional capacity to collect, analyse and communicate nutrition data and evidence, integrated into wider national information systems – capacity development plan

All NIPN country programmes have invested significantly in capacity strengthening, usually preceded by a capacity needs assessment⁷¹ (e.g., Cote d'Ivoire and Laos) with varying success across countries and across different types of capacity.

There has been substantial success in raising awareness of the importance of nutrition across multiple sectors within government and enhancing knowledge of how to strengthen nutrition sensitivity for sector programming and monitoring success in implementation.

In Uganda, implementation of the capacity development plan was reportedly on course by the third quarter of 2020.⁷² A training module had been developed, and subsequently, a five-day capacity building training was conducted for 35 staff from eight ministries for enhancing their capacities in data handling and analysis.⁷³ More than 20 training modules were implemented in Burkina Faso as part of the capacity building of relevant actors. These modules focused mainly on data analysis tools and techniques; key concepts in nutrition; modelling with the Lives Saved Tools (LIST); data anonymization and data management. It was noted that the trainings were critical in enabling actors to progress with the NIPN activities and supporting a level of ownership.⁷⁴

⁷¹ C4N-NIPN GC conducted a CD mapping exercise in 2022 and mapped out all CD activities conducted from Phase 1 in NIPN countries. The detailed CD catalogue is available at: <https://www.nipn-nutrition-platforms.org/Capacity-building>

⁷² Brief report of C4N support to the NIPN Uganda inception workshop for Phase Two, May 2022

⁷³ Brief report of C4N support to the NIPN Uganda inception workshop for Phase Two, May 2022

⁷⁴ NIPN Report, Institut National de La Statistique et de La Demographie, 2020.

Cote d'Ivoire stakeholders agree that NIPN has increased understanding of nutrition as a multisectoral issue and how nutrition-sensitive actions can address malnutrition through a range of pathways. This is reported to have fostered greater awareness and sense of a shared vision and responsibility across different sectors for implementing the National Nutrition Plan and achieving its goals and targets.

A NIPN capacity needs assessment (CNA) was conducted in Ethiopia for EPHI and other ministries and institutions working closely with NIPN. Implementation of the resulting capacity building strategy involved many Ethiopian institutions. The strategy included funding Ethiopian PhD students to complete their doctoral studies, thereby creating strong research skills for furthering NIPN's reach and strengthening nutrition M&E and research capacity in-country. This capacity was built within EPHI and key sectoral ministries and research institutions that participated in various NIPN capacity strengthening trainings and consultative workshops, with requests to further cascade the trainings down within their institutions.

In Niger, two successive training sessions on nutrition concepts and measurement systems were organized in 2018 and 2019 by INS/NIPN jointly with the Nutrition Unit of HC3N.⁷⁵ These trainings involved 36 executives from the INS, HC3N, Nutrition focal points and executives from the Statistics Departments of the key Ministries involved in the National Nutritional Security Policy (PNSN). A total of 23 participants out of 36 trained (64%) come from contributory sectors (health, agriculture/livestock, environment, education, hydraulics and sanitation).⁷⁶

In Kenya, NIPN has focused capacity building activities related to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff across sectors, their work in training sector staff to formulate questions to inform policy as part of the PAC cycle, and their support in analysing nutrition sensitive data. This has led to far greater understanding of the importance of nutrition in sector planning as evidenced by sectors incorporating new nutrition sensitive activities and monitoring the outcomes of these activities.⁷⁷

In Bangladesh, NIPN organized and conducted 11 in-country (10) and overseas (1) trainings during the platform's implementation cycle. Six government officials were awarded the NIPN-Helen Keller International (HKI) Fellowship for one year on an International Masters Programme in 2020. However, some stakeholders highlighted that more institutional capacity building could have been prioritised, particularly for the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC).⁷⁸

In Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Kenya and Laos, strengthening the capacity of line ministries to incorporate new nutrition sensitive indicators into sector plans and monitoring has been a very important and sustainable achievement. NIPN's key role to date in Cote d'Ivoire has been to support the different sectors in collecting and analysing existing data relevant to nutrition, as well as improving the quality of regional data before transmission to the Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food and Early Childhood Development (SE- CONNAPE) evaluation service.⁷⁹ Stakeholders acknowledged that there had been some improvement in the quality of data being provided from the different sectors and noted how nutrition indicators and actions were increasingly being included within sector plans.

In Kenya, NIPN convened workshops with sectors on indicators related to Kenya Nutrition Action Plan (KNAP) leading to mapping and harmonising nutrition-sensitive and specific indicators for monitoring KNAP. This was a multi-stage expert consultation process involving 25 professionals from 12 institutions, which mapped the indicators of interest, ranked the indicators against pre-defined criteria and finally, prioritised indicators

⁷⁵ Nutrition. Systeme d'information et statistiques ministere de la sante publique No 02. March 2019. Min du Plan, INS, HC3N

⁷⁶ Seminaire parlementaire sure l'importance des investissements public pour renverser les tendances alarmantes de la malnutrition au Niger – HC3N September 2019

⁷⁷ Kenya. Stakeholder Interview. May 2023. N4D

⁷⁸ Bangladesh NIPN ROM Report, C4N-NIPN, 2020.

⁷⁹ Rapport de mission d'appui de C4N: Appui à la Plateforme Nationale Multisectorielle d'Information pour la Nutrition du SE-CONNAPE, C4N-NIPN, undated.

through discussion and consensus.⁸⁰ This process also involved considering modifications through re-framing and merging for a harmonisation of indicators. As a result, all KNAP 2 indicators are included in sector M&E and tools have been rolled out to collect data for KNAP 2.⁸¹ NIPN has enabled ministries like the Ministry of Agriculture to roll out M&E indicators at county level, with the launch of a nutrition-sensitive agriculture training package to support counties in scaling up nutrition-sensitive actions at a recent nutrition symposium.⁸²

There has also been considerable success in increasing the capacity of multiple sector stakeholders in formulating policy relevant questions as part of the PAC process across all countries. For example, in Burkina Faso the GSF supported the NIPN to implement a capacity building workshop on research questions aimed at focal points of key sectors, with seven questions formulated by November 2019.⁸³ In Niger, there have also been efforts to strengthen the capacity of decision-makers to understand the policy implications of PAC outputs, with two seminars conducted with parliamentarians and action plans drawn up.

Guatemala is a standout country in terms of decentralisation of NIPN. In Guatemala, NIPN strengthened capacity/trained a total of 1,137 people from Sistema de Información Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional de Guatemala (SINASAN) member institutions and partners as well as strategic actors to analyse and display data on information platforms at the municipal and departmental level.⁸⁴ Guatemala produced a learning paper providing recommendations on what is needed to decentralise a NIPN and the benefits. NIPN is now being implemented in a pilot municipality at the local level, in Momostenango in the district of Totonicapán. Other countries have mainly focused on strengthening capacities at national level, which is rational and appropriate. However, several countries including Kenya and Niger intend to devolve capacity strengthening to sub-national level in Phase 2 NIPN. In April 2020, a short-term expert was recruited by SOFRECO in Niger to develop a training toolkit on nutrition information based on material from the two training courses on basic nutrition concepts and measurement methods.⁸⁵ The toolkit was rolled out by HC3N and INS to all eight regions. In Phase 2, Niger NIPN is planning on testing the feasibility of decentralising to regional level in two regions.

Laos has made considerable efforts for scaling up the programme at subnational level and held inception meetings with subnational stakeholders to explain NIPN. However, coordination mechanisms at sub-national level are complex and challenging; although NIPN is trying to address some of these challenges, it is not proving easy.⁸⁶ NIPN has been trying to get a decree establishing a coordination structure that involves all subnational level committees. It has also conducted capacity assessments at sub-national level, concluding that there is insufficient understanding of and expertise in nutrition data analysis at provincial level, let alone at lower administrative levels. NIPN Laos are now considering setting up NIPN core teams at subnational level under MPI, which it believes has the convening power for bringing all sectors together.⁸⁷ MPI also has statistics' units that can support data management and analysis.

Some of the PAC questions in Cote d'Ivoire addressed regionally-specific questions, although there is general acknowledgement that the NIPN is not well-evolved at regional level and that actors in the regions require more sensitisation on nutrition. Regional reliance on expensive surveys to provide data is also regarded as unsustainable. NIPN has dedicated funds to support a decentralised approach in year 3 of the programme and the SE-CONNAPE infrastructure at regional/préfet level, in conjunction with the World Bank's programme

⁸⁰ Policy Questions Formulation Process: National Information Platform for Food Security and Nutrition (NIPFN) Kenya perspective Report. January 2022.

⁸¹ Kenya. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

⁸² Kenya. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

⁸³ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

⁸⁴ Informe Final Plataforma de Información Nacional sobre Nutrición en Guatemala, 2017–2021, CATIE, 2021.

⁸⁵ Nutrition analyses, solutions process objectifs travail d'équipe savoirs. Manuel des bonnes pratiques pour mieux utiliser les information de la PNIN Janvier 2022 Min du Plan, INS, NIPN

⁸⁶ *Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022*, Baastel, 2022.

⁸⁷ *Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022*, Baastel, 2022.

to strengthen nutrition at community level, was viewed as a potential network through which this could be piloted.⁸⁸

The Description of Action for Phase 2 NIPN in Kenya has a stated aim to devolve NIPN to county level. A pilot is currently underway in Isiolo County (in response to a request from local government) for establishing a county dashboard with support from KNBS. The KNBS/KIPPRA vision is that all counties will eventually have their own NIPN dashboards.

In Laos, many stakeholders believed that the government was relying too much on national and international consultants to conduct NIPN capacity strengthening; they would like to see capacity strengthening skills transferred to the government staff thereby ensuring future accessibility and sustainability. Furthermore, rotation and attrition of government staff assigned to NIPN activities for both DAU and PAU has been a major issue.⁸⁹ In Kenya, delays in agreements for the 'no cost extension' for Phase 1 and start of Phase 2 meant that the senior analyst and the communications officer in KIPPRA sought work elsewhere leaving a significant capacity gap. In Cote d'Ivoire there has been a loss of capacity, lack of continuity and loss of information through turnover in ministry NIPN Focal Points.⁹⁰

Political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability for nutrition

There is substantial evidence that sectors across many NIPN programmes have incorporated new nutrition indicators and M&E frameworks for sector plans because of the NIPN initiative. In several countries, NIPN has enabled greater alignment between sector and national nutrition plan reporting categories. This demonstrates political commitment across sectors in strengthening the use of data to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability. In addition, increasing involvement of a range of government and international stakeholders in the PAC process competing for inclusion of questions demonstrates a growing political commitment to the rationale of NIPN.

In Ethiopia NIPN has generated strong interest amongst stakeholders in its ability in identifying and responding to nutrition-related research questions for informing nutrition policymaking. For instance, in 2020, the Ministry of Health (MOH) requested NIPN to respond to research questions and to conduct a progress analysis of the NNP indicators to inform the new Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS).⁹¹ In addition, the national M&E framework of the draft FNS clearly mentions the importance of a Food and Nutrition Information Platform in Ethiopia, thereby validating the role of the NIPN.⁹²

In Cote d'Ivoire, NIPN is part of the working group tasked with developing the National Nutrition Plan (2021-2025).⁹³ This has enabled the NIPN to be central in policymaking processes and informing political commitments related to nutrition.

In Kenya there is a strong sense (within Treasury and the Ministry of Planning) that political interest in, and commitment to, using evidence for informing multisectoral policymaking is growing due to NIPN. Furthermore, the positioning and growing influence of NIPN 'evidence' in relation to the KNAP and MTPs will inevitably enhance political confidence in policy making and resulting investment flows.

⁸⁸ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

⁸⁹ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, 2022.

⁹⁰ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

⁹¹ Ethiopia. Key informant interview in February 2023. N4D

⁹² Capacity needs assessment for nutrition monitoring, evaluation and policy research in Ethiopia Jan 2020

⁹³ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

In Niger, the close connections between INS/NIPN and HC3N with its proximity to the office of the President ensures that there is very strong political commitment for evidence-based decision-making. A good indicator of this is the readiness of parliamentarians to participate in NIPN-convened seminars for raising awareness of nutrition and formulating parliamentary action plans. However, there have been concerns expressed during stakeholder interviews that the choice of PAC questions is subject to political sensitivities especially around issues of gender and regional disparities in nutrition outcomes.

In Laos, nutrition remains one of the Government's highest priorities. This is evidenced by nutrition being prioritised in the National Socio-economic Development Plan, as well as establishing a National Committee for Nutrition. However, there is a view that more time is needed to achieve full political commitment for evidence-based decision-making as there is inconsistent participation by line ministries (MOH, MAF, MOES) with NIPN activities. Some stakeholders reported that the perceived lines of authority within NIPN organizational structures was not always clear to government institutions.

In Guatemala, both the NIPN main partners and nationally-relevant public institutions identified the political nature of policy and programming decisions as a likely barrier to achieving better nutrition policies and programmes. This decision-making culture, together with high turnover of decision-makers coupled to political change, was seen as the key challenges to NIPN achieving political commitment around evidenced-based policymaking, even if all outputs such as NIPN analysis results are presented in clear and friendly formats and decision makers are trained and exposed to evidence-based policy practices.

GSF/C4N-NIPN coordinates between countries, donors and global experts, provides support to countries, captures lessons learned and positions NIPN in global data-for-nutrition landscape

The focus of GSF activity in 2017 was on identifying the right institutions and organizations for hosting and managing NIPN.⁹⁴ The next step was getting agreement from those institutions and organizations and discussing with them their specific needs in adapting the project proposal. This process involved several missions by GSF staff in explaining the initiative to many stakeholders in a government hierarchy; achieving a consensus, typically at a meeting or workshop with senior government officials to formally agree to proceed with NIPN and confirming the lead agency and any partners; and then developing a proposal with staff of the lead national institution and any partners.

In early 2019, the initial set of 15 guidance notes was finalised supporting countries with implementing the NIPN operational cycle. It was then revised based on country feedback (following capacity building workshops) and GSF's own observations. Finally, in response to requests for support from countries during the NIPN Global Gathering in May 2019, guidance notes were completed with additional material on how to engage sectors. The GSF then started to develop three additional guidance notes:

1. Use of impact pathway to formulate questions;
2. Data sharing principles and best practices; and
3. Process to ensure the quality of Data Analysis results.

Roll-out of the guidance notes was done through a series of webinars (English and French, available on the NIPN website) and five capacity building workshops for eight countries: Ethiopia (January 2019), Côte d'Ivoire (February 2019 – including the Niger and Burkina teams), Lao PDR (April 2019), Uganda (June 2019) and Bangladesh (October 2019).⁹⁵ The 3-day agenda of the workshop provided a practical introduction on the implementation process of the NIPN operational cycle. This training package (provided in the GSF archives) has been designed in order to ensure a certain level of coherence in implementation across countries while keeping the flexibility to adjust to context.

⁹⁴ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2017.

⁹⁵ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

Most workshops were delivered to individual countries to allow them to extend workshop participation to external stakeholders of the broader multisectoral nutrition system.

In-country support was provided in 2019 through GSF missions, especially for the following countries⁹⁶:

1. In Ethiopia, Lao PDR, Uganda and Bangladesh by extending missions before and/or after workshops;
2. In Côte d'Ivoire, the GSF mission was extended after the capacity building workshop, and another one-week mission was completed; and
3. In Burkina Faso, three 1-week technical support missions (partly to overcome the gap in national technical assistance).

Remote support was provided by GSF experts continually throughout the year, for instance by reviewing draft documents and discussing specific institutional or technical issues such as reviewing formulated questions, policy studies, data analysis plans or the elaboration of the NIPN dashboard.⁹⁷ In Zambia, support was provided in early 2019 to get agreement between the NIPN host institution and the European Union Delegation (EUD) on the project proposal, notably the budget. However, as no consensus could be found between the parties, the GSF put its engagement with Zambia on hold in April 2019, in agreement with EU Development Cooperation (DEVCO) C1.⁹⁸

Based on early experience during Phase 1, country respondents strongly expressed the need for a dedicated unit with staff who understand issues in their country and with whom they have a trusted relationship. Ideally, countries wanted a dedicated expert assigned to each country for ensuring efficient and effective support.

NIPN teams were generally positive regarding the technical support provided by the GSF and C4N-NIPN. In Cote d'Ivoire, the NIPN team reported that the guidance notes and webinars provided by the NIPN Global Support team and webinars were always clear and useful, and that technical assistance provided by C4N and UNICEF was appropriate to requirements and that requests for support were satisfied. The team also appreciated opportunities for exchanging learning with other country NIPN projects and suggested establishing a platform for ongoing exchange and collaboration between NIPN countries. The NIPN team raised the need for clarity, streamlining and complementarity in relation to the respective technical assistance provision roles and responsibilities of C4N and UNICEF, proposing a review by the two agencies on each partner's support focus. The existence of many NIPN documents and resources in English language only was also raised as a constraint. In Kenya, the prevailing view of KNBS NIPN staff was that C4N-NIPN has consistently provided timely and valuable technical support as needed.

In Burkina Faso, the C4N-NIPN focal point was highlighted as especially helpful in guiding the NIPN team and providing technical assistance. In Bangladesh, there were mixed feelings regarding the support provided by the GSF / C4N-NIPN and by the EUD. Some stakeholders believed that there should have been closer engagement with the challenges in Bangladesh, particularly in relation to personality clashes and relationship management: some of the challenges may have been mitigated by regular updates with C4N-NIPN. However, when discussing this with C4N-NIPN, it was clear that a more decentralised approach was adopted, with the hopes that the EUD in Bangladesh would have been more involved with ongoing issues.

The EAG was established in 2016 to provide technical and strategic input into NIPN. By all accounts it was more active in the early stages of Phase 1 NIPN, with a gradually diminishing role and attendance at meetings. The EAG played an important and intensive role in contributing to guidance documents with members providing important expertise, e.g., SMART/Semi-Quantitative Evaluation of Access and Coverage (SQEAC) or Link Nutrition Causal Analysis (Link-NCA) experience.

⁹⁶ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

⁹⁷ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

⁹⁸ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

The EAG role was also to read and comment upon country documents and reports. However, there were occasions when members of the EAG felt that sudden surges of demand on their time conflicted with the 'day job'. Critical reflections of those involved in the EAG ranged from 'an over-emphasis on conceptual matters rather than country specific realities', and that 'there was a lack of understanding of what was expected of its members'. Another key comment was that requests to the EAG were increasingly ad hoc and without context and that members were not really kept informed of NIPN developments. In March 2022, a decision was taken to replace regular meetings with ad hoc EAG meetings when specific issues arose, or when work needs to be undertaken. There has also been discussion on changing its name to the Strategic Advisory Group, reflecting a less technical role going forward. One suggestion has been to deploy the EAG at key strategic moments, e.g., at NIPN learning moments, to take stock of innovations and evidenced success.

In conclusion, all NIPN countries have succeeded in establishing a functional and operational nutrition information system that engages a wide array of stakeholders in formulating key policy-related questions, which are addressed through the work of a NIPN analysis team. NIPN dashboards have become important tools to help policymakers and nutrition stakeholders visualise the changing nutrition landscape. Through NIPN, countries have made considerable progress in building the capacity of sector staff in both understanding the potential role of sectors in addressing malnutrition and employing nutrition data to further this end. NIPN has also helped strengthen political commitment for nutrition by raising its profile and by enabling policy makers to both understand nutrition evidence and use it to feed into policy processes. GSF and C4N-NIPN have played a significant role in helping countries to establish NIPN platforms and navigate a range of country specific challenges in Phase 1.

3.4 Impact

Box 6: Key findings related to the impact evaluation question

Impact – key findings:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIPN has strengthened nutrition tracking in most countries through a combination of re-analysis of existing data sets, improved visualisation of data on dashboards or through advocating for improved or more timely nutrition data provision. Barriers to further strengthening nutrition tracking include lack of available data and limited access to certain types of surveillance data. The EC-NIS programme being implemented in several NIPN countries is meant to be addressing data quality and data gap issues, but there is limited evidence that this is taking place. There is widespread recognition that NIPN needs longer to inform and influence multisectoral policymaking and investments on nutrition, particularly given the delay in establishing NIPN during Phase 1. There is evidence that NIPN has effectively laid the foundations to influence policy for individual sectors and multisectoral programming in Phase 2 and beyond. NIPN is playing a key role in monitoring implementation and impact of national multisectoral nutrition plans in several countries. NIPN has the potential to significantly impact key issues such as humanitarian and development nexus strengthening, government and external partner financing, and climate change policy in Phase 2 and beyond through its PAC process and evidence generation.

This section reports on whether NIPN activities implemented in Phase 1 have contributed to the indirect outcomes specified in the revised ToC. It is largely based on evidence from Kenya and Niger, which were the deep dive countries. However, evidence from Laos is also included in this section as Laos was originally a deep dive country and in-depth analysis based on documentation was undertaken in anticipation of this exercise. Four indirect outcomes are highlighted in the revised NIPN ToC, which form the headings below (see Annex 1 for specific judgement criteria).

Indirect Outcome 1: NIPN activities and outputs have contributed to improvements in the ability of countries to track nutrition progress and report progress globally

Tracking nutrition progress means being able to measure nutrition status across populations over time to determine trends. This may be done at national level or subnational level. It usually involves representative nutrition surveys but can also involve sentinel site surveillance. Tracking may also involve analysis of causal factors that contribute to changes and explain geospatial variations across a country.

NIPN activities have contributed significantly to tracking national nutrition progress in almost all countries and has been done largely through analysis of nationally representative nutrition surveys. In Niger, INS have been conducting annual national nutrition surveys pre-dating NIPN. However, NIPN's location in INS allowed full access to the data for analysis and dissemination of results. These annual surveys now involve a deep dive into one region per year allowing for sub-regional data disaggregation and an analysis of causal factors associated with malnutrition.⁹⁹ One of Niger's first NIPN policy briefs contained regional stunting trend analysis and analysis of the causal factors explaining regional differences.¹⁰⁰ Another policy brief analysed prevalence of anaemia with sub-national analysis of trends.¹⁰¹ NIPN is also working towards sectors being able to conduct analyses independently and looking at causality with routine data, correlating their sector data with available nutrition data.

In Kenya, the first policy brief was an analysis of stunting trends drawing on Kenya DHS data.¹⁰² This analysis disaggregated data between rural and urban populations and highlighted disparities between the counties. Further analysis reported on associations with poverty and other household characteristics. Work on harmonising indicators and recommending which needed tracking by sector is making a substantial contribution to tracking nutrition and understanding which causal factors may explain trends as well as helping anticipate changes. Sectors are now approaching NIPN to support with including nutrition indicators in sector surveys. In addition, NIPN Kenya is working closely with the Nutrition Information Technical Working Group (NITWG) to strengthen SMART surveys that are largely conducted in the ASAL regions of Kenya.¹⁰³

NIPN Kenya is also advocating along with other government actors to increase the frequency of DHS surveys to every three years for improving the availability of population level data. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)/NIPN are exploring 'piggybacking' nutrition and food security indicators onto the Continuous Household Survey Programme, which is implemented every quarter to fill nutrition data gaps and complement data and information conducted in the ASALs.¹⁰⁴ NIPN has developed an impressive dashboard with user-friendly infographics that breaks down indicators into four main categories: food security, nutrition, indicators tracking initiatives and commitments (for example, the Big 4 agenda for Kenya – food security; affordable housing; manufacturing and affordable healthcare; Kenya Nutrition Action Plan; global targets, etc.) and routine monitoring data. Under food security there are data on availability, access, stability, prices and food utilisation. Nutrition indicators cover nutrition trends and rank the top five and worst five performing counties, providing good comparative analysis for decision-making.

⁹⁹ Rapport SMART 2022 – Enquête nutritionnelle et de mortalité. Retrospective au Niger – November 2022 – INS

¹⁰⁰ Tendances de la malnutrition chronique des enfants des moins de 5 ans et de ses déterminants au niveau national – Jan 2022

¹⁰¹ Rapport d'analyse No21: Prévalence et facteurs de risque de l'anémie chez les enfants de 6 à 59 mois au Niger.

¹⁰² An Analysis on Nutritional Anthropometric Trends in Kenya. NIPN. November 2021

¹⁰³ Kenya. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

¹⁰⁴ Kenya. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

In Ethiopia, the NIPN dashboard contains data on regional stunting and wasting trends from the 2016 EDHS and poses questions about these differences.¹⁰⁵ It also presents regional data on women's body mass index (BMI) and overweight for the same period. The dashboard is a visualisation tool for decision-makers in which nutrition trends can be easily viewed. A recently completed food and nutrition baseline survey (2022/3), technically and financially supported by NIPN will ensure updating of the dashboard with nutrition trend analysis.¹⁰⁶

In Guatemala, the active search process, carried out by the Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security (SESAN) in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health and Welfare (MSPAS) of children aged under 5 years by municipality and department, has allowed for the follow-up of malnutrition cases, collation of the information and presentation to different ministries of rates of malnutrition for informing monitoring and prioritising interventions in certain localities.

In Laos, the NIPN team has launched the dashboard and collected routine and periodic data from the health and agricultural sectors. However, stakeholders were concerned about lack of nutrition-related data from other sources e.g., the Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS), which is a periodic population-based survey, has only been collected twice (2016 and 2017) with the third round being conducted in 2022/23, while nutrition surveillance sentinel site data was delayed for two years due to COVID-19. Another difficulty is that DHIS-2 routine data has not been uploaded onto the dashboard in real-time and takes a long time to get the approval needed.

Indirect Outcome 2: NIPN has enabled an increase in the use of nutrition data and analysis to inform multisectoral nutrition policymaking, implementation and accountability

Although this review has concluded that it is too early to expect to see NIPN impact on policies and resulting plans (see next section), there has been a significant impact on the 'enabling' environment to influence policies and resulting plans in policy and planning cycles taking place during NIPN Phase 2 and beyond. This has been achieved through strengthening the indicators collected by nutrition-sensitive sectors and the PAC process, which has led nutrition stakeholders through a process of identifying key policy questions related to nutrition and having these addressed through the NIPN analysis team.

Strengthening the capture of nutrition relevant data across sectors

In Kenya, NIPN Phase 1 and 2 has ensured that all KNAP M&E indicators are now included in sector 'harmonised' indicators.¹⁰⁷ In Niger, there has been enormous progress in ensuring sectors capture nutrition-sensitive data as part of their monitoring systems.

In Ethiopia, NIPN has a substantial role in the formulation of the national nutrition strategy providing data and analysis, e.g., on micronutrients and across sectors. There are now a set of indicators for all sector ministries on which they report. In Laos, stakeholders reported that NIPN has the potential for tracking progress and results of the National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN) but still has a long way to go in terms of capturing nutrition-relevant multisectoral data.

Data challenges

NIPN has generally been successful in enabling sectors to strengthen nutrition sensitive data collection, analysis and reporting, but it is not within its current remit or capacity to directly strengthen data quality or fill data gaps (temporally, geographically, sectorally). To some extent, this role was meant to fall to EC-NIS, although as discussed in Section 4.2, it is not clear whether and how EC-NIS and NIPN collaborate and complement each other's activities at country level. Despite substantial progress in most NIPN countries, there are still inevitably numerous barriers to NIPN efforts in strengthening use of data to inform policy.

¹⁰⁵ [Dashboard2 | NIPN \(ephi.gov.et\)](#)

¹⁰⁶ Ethiopia. Key Informant Interview – March 2023. N4D

¹⁰⁷ Mapping and Harmonization of Nutrition-Sensitive Indicators Across Sectors to Facilitate Food and Nutrition Security Monitoring and Evaluation Processes-SP2. NIPN May 2023.

These include lack of access to multisectoral data, poor quality data, gaps in data (especially nutrition-sensitive data from sectors) and periodicity of nationally representative nutrition surveys (leading to data being several years old).

NIPN Ethiopia has had difficulties accessing multisectoral nutrition data and lack of current data (EDHS 2016 was the main data on the dashboard until recently). Data quality and resulting weak analysis as part of the PAC has been an enormous challenge in Uganda. In Cote d'Ivoire data for some sectors does not arrive on time for monitoring the national nutrition plan and other indicators do not appear in the statistical system of the technical ministries. In Kenya, a mid-term review of the KNAP undertaken with support from NIPFN found a lack of nationally representative survey data (especially as the KDHS was delayed) and gaps in anthropometric data.¹⁰⁸ The exception is the ASAL counties undergoing repeated SMART surveys who were better able to report on the KNAP.

In Laos, nutrition-related surveillance data are largely unavailable while a great deal of data are out of date or of poor quality. For example, there are no data collected from the education sector and there have been significant delays in the sentinel site nutrition surveillance data or DHIS data being uploaded to the dashboard. NIPN has made efforts in addressing some of these challenges and setting up systems for tracking progress, including the development of the "Standard Operating Procedures for Providing Data and Metadata on Indicators to NIPN Data Repository".¹⁰⁹ More recently, in June 2022, a "Standard Operating Procedures for Routine Nutrition Monitoring" was approved providing a guide on data sharing and updating the data repository and dashboard. This has enabled other stakeholders and actors to understand the standards needed to measure and add indicators related to the NPAN.

The PAC process

Although the PAC process has not been without its challenges, it has had a considerable impact on sensitising policymakers to key questions that need addressing for formulating policies that will impact nutrition in the future. It has achieved this in multiple ways.

The location of the NIPN analytical function and coordination mechanism for the PAC, for example, in KIPRA in Kenya and HC3N in Niger, has meant that those individuals with primary responsibility for nutrition policy setting in country have been intimately involved in both the question formulation processes and in understanding the significance of the NIPN analysis undertaken to address the question. Increasing awareness of, and interest in, the PAC process amongst nutrition stakeholders in NIPN countries has also meant that the nutrition policy space is being occupied by an ever-expanding set of stakeholders (from government and non-government) with potential impact on government and NGO actor policies. Another unexplored aspect of how the PAC process is contributing to the enabling environment for policy change is the sense of ownership created within government; and the fact that the PAC question analysis uses national data, thereby providing national context-specific analysis and findings. This reinforces the confidence of policymakers in the analysis. Furthermore, national ownership of NIPN is empowering governments in having more control over policy development cycles rather than having to wait for international actors at global or national level to help provide answers to key policy questions.

Indirect Outcome 3: NIPN findings and analysis have influenced evidence-based multisectoral policymaking and investments in nutrition Nutrition policies

The terms 'nutrition policy' and nutrition plans are often used interchangeably. However, nutrition plans (including multisectoral nutrition plans) usually include and are based upon policies that pre-date a plan. Nutrition policies are normally based on evidence of what will improve nutrition.

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of NIPFN Project Management Committee Meeting held virtually 29th August 2021

¹⁰⁹ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, 2022.

Most stakeholders believe that the policymaking process takes more time than allowed for in Phase 1 of NIPN and that it is therefore too early to see or attribute an impact of NIPN on policymaking. Furthermore, the timing of policymaking cycles in some countries have not synchronised with NIPN Phase 1. However, there is no question that NIPN outputs are increasingly reaching decision makers and that these outputs are being used or referenced in policy related documents, speeches and advocacy pieces, providing a level of certainty that policy changes resulting from NIPN analysis will emerge in Phase 2. The institutional location and connectedness of NIPN to key policy and planning entities within government is already influencing content and evidence in national nutrition plans so that subsequent policies and plans will inevitably be impacted.

In Niger, for example, the HC3N policy analysis framework process led to analysing two key questions considered a priority for policy development, i.e., the causes of the deteriorating nutrition situation and the HDN.¹¹⁰ The anaemia analysis has also been enormously helpful in identifying priority actions to address this widespread problem. There are increasing approaches to NIPN for supplying information and analysis from a range of stakeholders.¹¹¹

The PAC Nexus analysis examined survey and administrative data with a view to 'identifying indicators of the determinants and effects of undernutrition in a way that made it possible to characterise the need for an emergency and development Nexus approach for nutrition at the national and subnational levels. Selected indicators that illustrate the Nexus approach have been categorized into four categories: (1) nutritional emergency and severe acute malnutrition; (2) development and chronic malnutrition among children under 5 in Niger; (3) underlying determinants of chronic malnutrition at the national level; and (4) feeding practices among children aged 6–23-months and among women. This is effectively the start of developing a framework for monitoring Nexus progress.

In Niger, there was also good evidence of information development cycles being synched with PNSN action planning. HC3N is the coordinating body for PNSN and so in theory can ensure that articulation of questions for analysis serve PNSP planning needs. The final step in the process of formulating the 2019–2020 Analysis Framework Plan was validation by the members of the PNSP Technical Committee, whose suggestions were considered before disseminating the final document version. The INS technical methodology states that 'the proposed methodological approach is to engage the PNIN team to gradually identify information needs throughout the implementation of the PAC 2021–2022'.¹¹² This includes emerging needs during PNSN meetings and forums for popularising the results of analyses and a series of face-to-face exchanges with decision-makers and nutrition programme managers.

In Kenya, NIPN data and analysis are beginning to impact the policymaking process across sectors. For example, within the Ministry of Water, Sanitation, and Irrigation (MWSI), involvement with NIPN Phase 1 has stimulated a re-examination of national irrigation and water policy, with stakeholders reporting a strong desire for revising policies due to evidence showing a link between irrigation and improved dietary diversity.¹¹³ There is recognition within MWSI of lack of nutrition sensitivity in its policies as the current irrigation policy (2017) has little links with nutrition.¹¹⁴ A new question submitted for Phase 2 aims at looking more closely at the association between stunting outcomes and small holder irrigation; another posted question is the association between other forms of malnutrition and irrigation. At project level, MWSI is now looking at nutritious foods when designing irrigation systems.

¹¹⁰ Nutrition analyses, solutions process objectifs travail d'équipe savoirs. Manuel des bonnes pratiques pour mieux utiliser les information de la PNIN Janvier 2022 Min du Plan, INS, NIPN

¹¹¹ Key informant interview – March 2023

¹¹² Note on PAC methodology. Min du Plan, INS – 2022

¹¹³ Kenya. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

¹¹⁴ Kenya. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

The Deputy Director of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) is part of the NIPN Policy Advisory Committee and considers that he is well placed to both input into the PAC process and bring this knowledge into the policymaking process going forward.¹¹⁵

Several factors and developments could further speed up the process of contributing to multisectoral policymaking. For example, continuous engagement with Permanent Secretaries (PS) from relevant sectors on recommendations from NIPN policy briefs. In Kenya, there are plans to sensitise the PS that are new in the ministries on key PAC outputs, while NIPN is lobbying to ensure that NIPN Steering Committee meetings are held regularly. Kenya is planning to set up a SUN parliamentary group that would facilitate inserting nutrition across all sectors at the highest level. NIPN is expected to have a marked impact on KNAP 3 as well as the mid-term development plans (MTDP4), as sectors alter policies that feed into MTDP4. The MTDP4 is still in process but every sector has submitted a draft with nutrition-sensitive interventions and associated budgets more prominent than in previous MTDPs. This undoubtedly reflects the work of NIPN to onboard and train staff (economists and statisticians) in every ministry central planning unit.

In Uganda, delays in NIPN implementation and in establishing the PAC process has resulted in delayed production of policy briefs and limited opportunities for influencing policy understanding and formulation. However, six regional policy dialogues sessions were successfully held, using the data analysed by the NIPN team, to understand how child related nutrition indicators i.e., Minimum Acceptable Diets (MAD), Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices, Dietary Diversity (DD) and Meal Frequency (MF) were fairing amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In Uganda, the NIPN team participated in the development of the National Development Plan III, with nutrition included as one of the key cross-cutting programme issues, and provided data for a Nutrition Issues Paper.¹¹⁶

In Cote d'Ivoire, the NIPN is part of the working group tasked with developing the next National Nutrition Plan 2021-2025, which represents an opportunity for the platform to raise its profile and to consolidate and formalise its role as the body responsible for the plan's M&E.¹¹⁷ Stakeholders have asserted that using NIPN data analysis for providing evidence on the effectiveness of nutrition-sensitive actions outside of the health sector is important in enabling PNMIN to influence policy, although this has not yet been achieved.

In Laos, data generated from NIPN has been used for the new NPAN and the 9th Five Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021-2025.¹¹⁸ However, there was limited use of NIPN data and research to influence policies beyond NPAN, and a recent UNICEF evaluation stated that stakeholders found it difficult to assess how the use of dashboard, research findings/dissemination was influencing policies, legislation and laws, and that this will need to be examined more closely in Phase 2.¹¹⁹

In Ethiopia, NIPN had a substantial role in informing the development of the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS), providing data and analysis, e.g., on micronutrients and across sectors. There are now a set of indicators for all sector ministries that they follow and report on as part of the NNS monitoring.¹²⁰ Furthermore, NIPN briefing papers that have helped identify factors that drive decline in acute malnutrition (October 2022) could have a significant role in informing annual NNS action plans and priorities, as these analyses have identified key causal factors driving reductions in wasting and how these vary by region.

¹¹⁵ Kenya. Key informant interview. May 2023. N4D

¹¹⁶ Uganda. Key informant interview. June 2023. N4D

¹¹⁷ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

¹¹⁸ *Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022*, Baastel, 2022.

¹¹⁹ *Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022*, Baastel, 2022.

¹²⁰ Nutrition Data Mapping for Ethiopia: Assessment of the Availability and Accessibility of Nutrition Related Data April 2021

Humanitarian related policies

In accessing humanitarian and development data, NIPN has the potential to engage with and influence policies relating to strengthening the HDN, localisation and financing arrangements in fragile NIPN countries (or counties) with humanitarian activities. However, as noted above, there appears to be limited access to humanitarian data, which may reflect the fact that these data are often held by development partner organizations rather than government. However, such data is of value in terms of accessing more regular anthropometric, mortality and climate risk data for further analysis. This is beginning to change in countries like Niger, Uganda and Kenya and in so doing, will strengthen NIPN's impact. In Kenya, NIPN is supporting the analysis of SMART surveys in ASAL counties although NIPN is finding it difficult to get NDMA to share humanitarian programming data.¹²¹ In Niger, although most international actors work on the humanitarian side, NIPN resources have not been widely used to inform this programming. The two HDN reports produced by NIPN based on the second PAC question were the first significant foray by NIPN into humanitarian issues and it is almost certain that the next PNSN will be heavily influenced by this NIPN analysis. HDN issues are becoming increasingly prominent in the minds of Nigerien development actors and NIPN in Niger are increasingly committed to supporting learning and evidence-based policy change for addressing this issue in Phase 2. Furthermore, the recent approach and constructive engagement with the Ministry of Humanitarian Action may pave the way for greater use of NIPN resources by international actors. In Uganda, Phase 2 has already seen NIPN reaching out to the Ministry of Humanitarian Action with plans to share data and work more collaboratively.

Indirect Outcome 4: NIPN has contributed to increased accountability for nutrition policies, implementation and results

Accountability can be thought of in many ways in NIPN countries. There can be accountability of government for delivering multisectoral nutrition action plans, parliamentarians investing more in nutrition or formulating new policies, government and international partners achieving global nutrition targets, accountability of international actors in aligning activities with national multisectoral nutrition plans, etc. This section makes the case that NIPN has contributed to increased accountability by establishing and strengthening M&E frameworks for different plans and actors. It has not, however, been possible to determine whether these frameworks have led to greater accountability, e.g., whether they have made decision-makers and programmers more accountable, thereby contributing to changes in programming or investments in nutrition. It is possible to conclude that NIPN has strengthened the mechanisms for ensuring greater accountability, which is a major achievement and a significant contribution to rolling out multisectoral nutrition plans.

In Kenya, NIPN's on-going work with sectors strengthening the identification, prioritisation and harmonisation of nutrition-sensitive indicators is increasingly strengthening the accountability of sectors towards undertaking and monitoring nutrition-sensitive activities. NIPN's work in Phase 1 and 2 has ensured that all KNAP M&E indicators are now included in sector harmonised indicators. Stakeholders from the MoA assert that before NIPN, nutrition had barely featured within the Ministry M&E framework; the NIPN Phase 1 team went through all the indicators relevant to nutrition with M&E staff and jointly developed a revised nutrition-sensitive M&E framework for the Ministry. Furthermore, there is a report entitled 'Kenya Agri-nutrition Implementation Strategy 2020-2025' with one focus area on 'Community Strengthening to Produce Nutritious Foods'.¹²² This contains the template for aligning and reporting to KNAP 2, and it is anticipated that these data will be collected and reported at county level going forward.

¹²¹ Minutes of the NIPN Project Management Committee Meeting held virtually 14th March 2022

¹²² NIPN Draft Communication Strategy 2020-21

The vision for Phase 2 NIPN Kenya is that these national indicators will be inserted into county sector plans and county integrated development plans (CIDPs). NPN Phase 2 aims to increase the digitalisation of country and county reporting. KNAP 3 will endeavour to rationalise indicators ensuring that there is no overlap between sectors. There has been no work on KNAP 3 so far but the results framework linking to multisectoral coordination will be more prominent in this KNAP, which will be launched in the last quarter of 2023.

NIPN's role in increasing accountability towards nutrition policies can also be seen on the NIPN Dashboard 'tab' dedicated to comparing outcomes with policy targets such as the Kenya Big Four, WHA, SDGs and KNAP. This section of the dashboard provides a readily accessible and visual presentation of Kenya's progress in relation to policy targets.

In Niger, sector data are reported through the Commitment and Accountability Framework for the National Nutrition Security Policy (PNSN) 2021–2025, which NIPN has developed with sectors and the HC3N.¹²³ NIPN has had a substantial role in influencing the reporting frameworks and choice of indicators within the PNSN M&E Plan.¹²⁴ NIPN Niger will also be the conduit for, and help with, analysing the recently launched HC3N intervention mapping initiative. This third HC3N mapping exercise (previous ones in 2014 and 2018) will provide programme coverage data for all stakeholders, e.g., government and external actors' programmes. There have been no data on sector convergence in previous mapping analysis, but this could be a NIPN initiated analysis role for the current mapping.

In Guatemala, SESAN, with the support of NIPN, developed an application tool (web and mobile versions) based on the governance index methodology that allows evaluation of the performance of the La Comisión Municipal de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional del Municipio de Guatemala (COMUSAN) through the collection of information in real time and includes processing the data of each municipality for generating a municipal ranking. Monitoring is carried out every four months. The Sistema de Información Departamental de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional (SiDESAN) de Totonicapán is a municipal information system implemented in each of the eight municipalities of Totonicapán, which gathers data and multisectoral information on food and nutrition security. Information is generated, analysed (based on available data), validated and provided by the institutions that have competencies in implementing FNS interventions.¹²⁵ Sector variables and indicators have been developed that contribute to explaining food and nutrition security at municipality level.

In Ethiopia, between three to six regions are being considered for inclusion in a NIPN feasibility study looking at the potential for regionalising the M&E system for the NNP.¹²⁶ Parliamentary seminars organized by NIPN Niger have also significantly increased decision-maker accountability. The first seminar engaged parliamentarians in closely monitoring allocations dedicated to the fight against malnutrition and challenged them to increase the resources for preventing malnutrition in Niger. The second parliamentary seminar on investing in nutrition occurred as a side meeting of the 2021–2022 budget session. Once again, it enabled parliamentarians to understand and highlight nutrition security issues and formulate simple nutrition awareness and advocacy messages during the Government's budget session. These recommendations made it possible to finalise the National Assembly's Nutrition and Food Security Network Action Plan. Specifically, this seminar aimed to take stock of the implementation of the National Assembly's RNSA commitments made between 2019 and 2020 during the first parliamentary seminar held in September 2019, the regional parliamentary dialogue workshop held in November 2019 in Abidjan and the meeting held in Niamey on the marketing code for breastmilk substitutes. There is a planned follow up of parliamentary seminars to see whether actions plans developed through these seminars have been implemented to any degree.

¹²³ PA PNSN Sep 2022 – HC3N 2021–25

¹²⁴ PA PNSN Sep 2022 – HC3N 2021–25

¹²⁵ *Informe Final Plataforma de Información Nacional sobre Nutrición en Guatemala, 2017–2021*, CATIE, 2021.

¹²⁶ The national nutrition programme (2016–20) progress analysis: evidence for the development of the National Food and Nutrition Strategy. – EPHI/IFPRI

In Cote d'Ivoire, NIPN is an integral part of the mechanism for implementing the National Multisectoral Nutrition Plan (PNMN) 2016-2020, through establishing a multisectoral M&E system. One of the first NIPN activities was examining 150 indicators of the PNMN M&E framework (CCSE) with a view to centralising the related data. The NIPN has made it possible to centralise more than 60 per cent of the nutrition data for the common M&E PNMN framework. However, sector staff in Cote d'Ivoire reportedly feel unaccountable in terms of nutrition results due to the lack of financial support allocated specifically to nutrition-sensitive activities which, for some of them, are a new prioritization. In Laos, the national nutrition committee uses the data repository to track progress of the five-year national nutrition plan of action and the related investment plan.¹

Since financing follows on from policymaking it is too early to expect to see a change in government financing for nutrition. However, there appears to be some demand from country stakeholders that NIPN take on the role of monitoring nutrition financing, an important but challenging ambition. Even in more advanced NIPN countries like Niger, it was not possible to get data on trends in nutrition financing where there are difficulties with sectors reporting nutrition-sensitive spending.

Indirect Outcome 5: Unanticipated effects of the NIPN project

NIPN has had a few unanticipated impacts at country level, which are briefly set out below. These are mainly positive.

1. NIPN has strengthened processes for ensuring sector accountability in delivering nutrition-sensitive programming as well as accountability for delivering multisectoral nutrition action plans.
2. In Niger, NIPN's PAC cycle involved working on the HDN at a time when the country has been struggling with balancing humanitarian and development programming. This work has meant that NIPN is well placed to contribute to improving the evidence base for HDN approaches going forward with the potential also for helping develop M&E frameworks for HDN programming.
3. NIPN's role in supporting multisectoral policy formulation, programme implementation and monitoring has encouraged attention to indicators of multisectorality. Potential indicators of sector convergence are being discussed in countries like Niger where NIPN is overseeing programming mapping and more recently Kenya, which is considering a mapping initiative. This is an interesting and important development in progressing a multisectoral nutrition approach.
4. Several NIPN country stakeholders have indicated a potential role for NIPN in supporting the tracking of nutrition spend. While no NIPN country programmes to date have succeeded in implementing finance tracking or mapping, there is the wish, if not the intention, to do so in several countries. This could play an important country accountability role as well as supporting global initiatives such as the National Accountability Framework as part of the GNR.

In conclusion, although there has not been sufficient time for NIPN to directly impact policies, NIPN activities and outputs have contributed to improving the ability of countries in tracking and reporting nutrition progress globally. Policy briefs have also begun impacting nutrition action plans and in some cases, sector plans. NIPN has strengthened accountability mechanisms through capacity building of sector actors in developing and implementing monitoring frameworks for multisectoral action plans. NIPN has created an enabling environment in most countries for policy impact during Phase 2 and it will be important to capture these impacts for supporting future resourcing efforts for the NIPN initiative.

¹²⁷ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, 2022.

3.5 Sustainability

Box 7: Key findings related to the sustainability evaluation question

- There was a limited focus on sustainability in Phase 1. This is a priority in Phase 2.
- Capacity activities have contributed substantially to technical sustainability, although high staff turnover poses risks.
- Phase 1 saw government partners directly financed to foster greater ownership and systems strengthening. Phase 2 arrangements have changed with funding via three external actors, which poses some risk to ownership and sustainability.
- Many stakeholders believe external support will be needed for NIPN gains to be continued. It would be hard to justify ending funding following Phase 2, given progress and the prospects of policy influence over the coming years.
- Phase 1 activities enabled institutional ownership. The experience of Bangladesh highlights the critical importance of ensuring national ownership for NIPN to be sustainable.
- The effectiveness of multisectoral coordination and collaboration is critical to institutional sustainability, and scaling NIPN to the sub-national level may prove to be an important strategic aim for sustainability.
- The value and inclusiveness of the PAC process and use of country dashboards are key to sustainability. More can be done to create greater demand for NIPN services through business case development and strategic outreach.

This section focusses on the extent to which NIPN results can be sustained through capacity building efforts, the further embedding of NIPN in government systems and the approaches set out in country sustainability strategies and plans. Phase 1 saw a limited emphasis on sustainability strategies and plans but in the build-up to Phase 2, a review by C4N-NIPN resulted in guidance for supporting country sustainability plans. Sustainability was a thematic focus at the NIPN Gatherings in 2022 and 2023.

Each country has approached sustainability differently, reflecting individual circumstances. In some countries, strategies and exit plans are more advanced (e.g., Ethiopia and Niger) while other plans are at earlier stages (e.g., Uganda). At the global level, the QPMs serve to monitor sustainability progress.

Sustainability is explored in terms of technical, institutional and financial considerations relating to the guidance countries have received. Each of these considerations are interconnected in that technical knowledge ensures NIPN staff can progress with activities underpinning NIPN in their respective institutions. Activities that have proven to be effective showcase the relevance of NIPN to national nutrition plans, to the nutrition-relevant line ministries, research institutions and development partners. This in turn increases institutional commitment and demand for NIPN and, in the longer-term, the resources needed to sustain it. The work that NIPN countries are doing to increase communication and visibility is closely linked with sustainability considerations.

Technical sustainability

NIPN's focus on strengthening technical capabilities of government stakeholders was a significant focus in Phase 1. This took the form of trainings, webinars and workshops covering a range of technical areas, including the basics for understanding malnutrition, collating nutrition data and carrying out complex analyses, policy articulation cycles and communicating results to ensure NIPN's visibility. These capacity building activities have served in building a level of technical knowledge, coherence and literacy about NIPN's objectives and the processes for align data, evidence and decision making that have continued in Phase 2.

Capacity activities have undoubtedly contributed substantially to technical know-how and there are promising examples of countries having adopted innovative approaches with universities and research institutions for embedding NIPN type technical capabilities.

Ethiopia has emphasised the need to look at long-term capacity building for ensuring technical sustainability in several ways: funding Ethiopian PhD students to complete their doctoral studies ensures strong research skills are created to further NIPN's reach.¹²⁸ NIPN also builds in-house capacity within the EPHI as well as the analytical and interpretation capacities of key sectoral ministries including members of the national nutrition MER SC, Ministry of Health, Agriculture and Water, Irrigation and Energy, the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) and other national and regional institutions.¹²⁹ These institutions have been asked to participate in various NIPN capacity strengthening trainings and consultative workshops and requested to further cascade the trainings within their institutions. This multisectoral capacity strengthening should contribute to increasing the number of nutrition researchers that can work with NIPN.

NIPN Ethiopia engages researchers from national and regional institutions to contribute to research activities including nutrition data mapping, research and policy seminars as well as delivering trainings, e.g., in December 2019, a national conference on "Diets, Affordability and Policy in Ethiopia" was organized in Addis Ababa and students from all national universities were invited to submit high-quality poster presentations.¹³⁰ A short training was provided to those selected on how to communicate their findings. This initiative not only exposed these institutions to NIPN's work but promoted national interest in nutrition research. NIPN works with sectoral ministries and universities to respond to nutrition policy research questions, e.g., inputs were sought from a group of technical and research experts from other institutions and sectors for a question related to the drivers of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Sustainability is the priority strategic focus of Phase 2 NIPN in Niger. A detailed sustainability study was published in March 2021, which outlines a phased transition to NIPN becoming a self-sustaining entity in INS including access to a larger office space for INS/NIPN staff and a public space for researchers and students to access the data through INS computers.¹³¹ Niger has noted that there is still work to be done with more complex statistical analysis to embed technical capabilities.

In Uganda, the national bureau of statistics (UBOS) is keen to analyse the main drivers of malnutrition using technical skills to analyse and report on high levels of poverty and low levels of stunting in the north of the country, compared to the reverse situation in the south with low levels of poverty and high rates of stunting. As with other NIPN countries, Uganda significantly invested in capacity building although country stakeholders believe capacity constraints thwarted greater progress with the PAC and subsequent policy products in Phase 1. This experience underscores the fact that for most countries, NIPN trainings were taking place in contexts where the bringing together of national data analysts and policy analysts/decision makers was a new phenomenon requiring repeated sensitisation and support.

The ability of country NIPNs to anticipate newly emerging needs is key to its sustainability. The climate crisis and its known and potential effects on food and health systems and on nutrition outcomes is a significant concern in many NIPN countries where climate fragility is increasing pressures on vulnerable populations and might erode the gains made in reducing malnutrition. NIPN must be at the forefront of analysis and related policy briefs on this and on other issues. In Kenya, the most recent KDHS showed impressive reductions in the rates of stunting but marked variations in rates between counties.¹³² The ability of NIPN to provide evidence for why this variation exists and the drivers behind these trends would further showcase its added technical value to decision makers.

¹²⁸ Capacity needs assessment for nutrition monitoring, evaluation and policy research in Ethiopia Jan 2020

¹²⁹ Capacity needs assessment for nutrition monitoring, evaluation and policy research in Ethiopia Jan 2020

¹³⁰ <https://www.compact2025.org/2019/11/14/national-nutrition-conference-in-Ethiopia-December-12-2019/>

¹³¹ NIPN Sustainability Study Report. Niger Study Report. March 2021 – Ministère du Plan, INS, NIPN

¹³² Kenya Demographic and Health Survey. Government of Kenya. 2022.

In Niger, the importance of responding to emerging needs given the crisis prone nature of the country is driving a need for integrating NIPN analysis into the HDN in relation to the national nutrition plan. In Laos, capacity development should continue to be a priority for NIPN as government stakeholders do not yet have sufficient capacity or resources to lead NIPN. There are accounts that international consultants and UNICEF often 'hold the pen and lead on policy briefs and analysis'. While this is sometimes an effective way to ensure outputs are being produced, engagement with the government is critical (e.g., meetings to discuss findings and what can be learned) as without it, sustainability will be hampered. The recent UNICEF evaluation noted that many stakeholders thought NIPN could not function without the national and international consultants and that there was no transition plan for government and government personnel to absorb these roles and responsibilities.¹³³

Staff turnover is high within government institutions in some countries. This presents challenges in maintaining the required capacities for NIPN and poses risks to sustaining results. Skilled staff have also been lost during the delays and uncertainties in transitioning from Phase 1 to 2 and will undoubtedly be an issue during deliberations about NIPN beyond the second phase. Many stakeholders highlighted the risk to technical sustainability where government staff involved in NIPN trainings move to other departments or into international roles with newly acquired knowledge and skills, so that the direct benefit to NIPN is at best diminished. Mitigating this would require some form of agreement for retaining government staff in key data and policy related roles where they have participated in substantial capacity building activities. National stakeholders in Uganda and Niger suggest that technical sustainability could be better enabled by building capabilities of cadres of staff as trainers of trainers (ToTs) so that there is the ongoing capability to ensure new staff have the requisite knowledge, skills and exposure for continuing NIPN activities. Whether this is a viable approach will need to be determined on a country-by-country basis.

Institutional sustainability

In most countries, NIPN is in the right institutions mandated to oversee data and policy. The high-level skills and staff expertise in running the NIPN data and policy analysis units is serving to position NIPNs for meeting the needs of decision makers and in being more demand responsive. This augers well for NIPN's future institutional sustainability as evidenced in a few countries where the feasibility of NIPN units being subsumed within existing government systems and departments is being explored.

The sustainability review carried out at the start of Phase 2 noted that achieving NIPN's institutional sustainability is more likely where the national institutional set-up facilitates multisectoral collaboration, and where nutrition is identified as a national priority.¹³⁴ Added to this, the institutional home for NIPN is widely viewed as vital to NIPN's ultimate longevity: in most countries this home correctly resides in both the state bureaus of statistics (or equivalent where the data analysis units are housed) and policy/research institutions (or equivalent where the policy analysis units are housed). Work in Phase 1 has secured a strong sense of institutional ownership for NIPN in these government structures, which has built on what already existed in almost all countries rather than creating new structures.

The overall governance of nutrition is an added factor, whereby the presence of a higher-level multisectoral arrangement offers NIPN the chance to influence and embed its key results and contributions within a more effective ecosystem through NIPN's direct and indirect outcomes. In Guatemala, respondents remarked that NIPN would be less sustainable if tackling malnutrition and the coordinating structures was only at the level of government policy. Prioritising food and nutrition security and establishing the National Food Security and Nutrition Council and SESAN in law have served to elevate nutrition to a 'state' priority that offers some protection against short-term political change.

In Kenya, sustainability of NIPN was not prioritised in Phase 1 (largely due to the delays in getting the project up and running). However, the current Phase 1 no-cost extension is giving space for sustainability issues to be prioritised through the Project Advisory Committee as to how NIPN can be institutionalised.

¹³³ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, 2022.

¹³⁴ NIPN Sustainability Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

The current view is that a sub-working group in the PAC is needed to develop a clear road map and reach a common perspective on what sustainability of NIPN means, what it will take and how to advocate for its continuation. As with all countries, there is unanimity in not wanting NIPN to stall or cease in Kenya with the majority of stakeholders wanting to see the institutionalisation of NIPN in the Phase 2 period. Although NIPN is embedded in two strong national institutions (KNBS and KIPPRA), the national nutrition action plan (KNAP) is coordinated by the MoH, which does not have the mandate or authority to convene the nutrition-relevant sectors. Furthermore, the long-awaited high-level steering committee for nutrition has not yet been ratified in law in Kenya, which exposes nutrition to changing political priorities and within this ecosystem poses risks to NIPN.

In Uganda, the NIPN is mainstreamed in the UNAP (Uganda's National Nutrition Plan) Secretariat housed in the Office of the Prime Minister, which was responsible for coordination in Phase 1. Uganda experienced significant delays with institutionalising NIPN and in creating the necessary demand for drawing on the technical capabilities of UBOS (Uganda Bureau of Statistics) staff where there is a strong sense of the importance of maximising the use of data for discerning nutrition trends and sub-national disparities.

In Niger, the sustainability study (March 2021) is a de facto withdrawal plan although it is widely viewed as aspirational.¹³⁵ A key element of ensuring NIPN sustainability is further embedding NIPN in the INS, which may be achieved if NIPN is mandated as a unit or department within INS with the command of treasury funding that such status brings with it. There are positive signs of political will and commitment to make this happens though this will take time and will need to be carefully and strategically progressed.

In Guatemala, the change of government administrative authorities is an evident risk for the sustainability of NIPN services. To minimise this risk, (MTR-GUA) recommends 'to establish strategic alliances outside the governmental environment' and (ST-RCI) to 'increase its collaboration beyond the sectoral partners, and particularly with other donors, development partners, SUN networks, from the point of view of institutionalisation and longer-term sustainability of the initiative'.¹³⁶ The institutionalisation of NIPN ultimately involves a change in habits in the way of working by promoting and generating a 'culture of data use'. In this sense, it is important to keep on strengthening processes, forming multidisciplinary teams to continue with analysing data, promoting agreements and commitments between the interested parties and institutional strengthening for storing data and replicating the information and knowledge management experiences for decision-making at an internal and multisectoral level.

There is a drive towards devolving NIPN to sub-national structures and systems in some countries which, if well managed, will extend NIPN's relevance and impact beyond the national level. This drive is highly relevant in already devolved nations and in those countries where marked variations in the levels of malnutrition exist, to provide more granular analysis of drivers behind these high burdens.

Kenya has a highly devolved county structure, and a pilot is underway to support the set-up of NIPN in one county with ambitious expansion plans in Phase 2. In Niger, NIPN is also looking to test the feasibility of decentralising to two regions. This will enable an analysis of available routine data and the capacity needs for strengthening data and its analysis. Making NIPN relevant at this level of decision-making during Phase 2 is viewed as a key step towards supporting its continuation. In Uganda, there are plans to carry out pilots for NIPN in local government systems.

Bringing NIPN to the sub-national level is an important strategic aim in ensuring NIPN's future impact and sustainability. However, the cost and time for achieving should not be underestimated when considering the set-up time required at the national level and the shorter Phase 2 period (ending in 2024 and 2025). C4N-NIPN guidance will be important in supporting these processes as well as active learning and dissemination of what works.

Financial sustainability

Institutional and technical sustainability are enablers for NIPN's financial sustainability in that high level political and development partner support should bring about financial sustainability. However, as most NIPNs remain reliant on EU funding and very few have other donor or government financial allocations, considerable efforts are needed to secure NIPN beyond the second phase.

Donor funding is routed through GIZ, UNICEF or CATIE across all NIPN countries. The intention is for a gradual transitional approach whereby personnel are increasingly embedded as regular government salaried staff in the national institutions in question (bureaus of statistics and policy units) and therefore, no longer NIPN funded. Added to this, the cost of continuing to sustain and build the dashboards/platforms and carry out PACs should be increasingly supported through government's own resources. This incremental transition requires that national treasuries earmark specific funds for NIPN related costs (staff and running) into their annual plans and even longer-term five-year development planning cycles.

There is considerable variation in a country's ability to secure the required budgets. Financing for implementing multisectoral approaches is limited in Niger as other ministries involved in the national plan do not currently have dedicated budget lines for nutrition. Kenya has stronger economic growth and may therefore be more likely to receive government funding while in Laos, there is a widespread view that most activities will continue to need donor budgets. An online survey of government respondents asked about the likelihood of NIPN continuing after donor funding is withdrawn, with 37 per cent responding 'very likely' and 48 per cent responding 'somewhat likely'.¹³⁷

In Niger, several avenues are being explored to enable resources with a proposal currently being considered by EUD and exploring widening the partner funding base that up until now has depended on two donors. As Niger is slowly shifting to more development-led funding and a 'shrinking' of the humanitarian space and financing flows, this means that more reliable and predictable funding should be available to augment government support (in cash and in kind) for NIPN. Widespread recognition that multi-years of humanitarian response and significant emergency budgets have not prevented malnutrition also means data and evidence for what works to lower rates of wasting, stunting and anaemia is even more critical. NIPN can – and should – be at the forefront of this analysis and ultimately, accountability of actors in delivering the PNSN.

In Niger, sustainability may also be enhanced through greater involvement of nutrition stakeholders and partners in question formulation and analysis, with NIPN already making overtures to various partner organizations, e.g., formulation of questions by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) around food safety and EUD on the HDN. In some respects, NIPN's sustainability and visibility are synonymous. NIPN's role in helping sectors monitor and be accountable for implementation of the PNSP, in providing nutrition trend and analysis data for decision-makers in government and partner organizations and in answering critically important programming related questions suggests that NIPN has done enough in a short period of time to ensure that stakeholders are unlikely to let NIPN 'go' for lack of financing. Added to this, the sustainability study sets out both INS and HC3N's operating expenses and how these might be assumed by government over a two to three-year period whereby INS takes up NIPN's additional costs not currently financed by government, e.g., drivers, secretary, office space, etc. This could be achieved by NIPN being 'promoted' to a unit or even departmental status within INS, which would guarantee a minimum level of funding for sustainability. Another approach under consideration is widening the funding base for NIPN beyond GIZ and aligning this ambition with the communications and visibility strategy as a key approach to sustainability.

¹³⁷ Final evaluation of the EU-UNICEF NIPN in Laos PDR, 2018-2022, Baastel, 2022.

Over the first two years of project implementation in Cote d'Ivoire, the government is reported to have contributed just under one quarter of the costs¹³⁸ for NIPN showing government commitment. The EUD has emphasised the need for developing an exit strategy from single donor funding and diversifying the funding base to ensure NIPN's longer-term viability. Government have also made strong written commitments through a letter from the Prime Minister detailing commitments to enable the 'regular collection of data relating to nutrition from the ministries concerned' and for deploying human resources for project implementation. These commitments have been kept: since 2018 and the start of NIPN, the Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food and Early Childhood Development (SE-CONNAPE) has been generating data and SE-CONNAPE has also recruited five officers. Côte d'Ivoire is the only government to have made available an entire team of civil servants necessary for the implementation of NIPN.

In Kenya, paid staff to staff responsibilities for implementing NIPN is now being directly covered by Government posts and salaries. There is a strong possibility that the data analysis unit could be sustained within KNBS at a lower level with staff continuing with some of the NIPN related activities (such as sustaining the dashboard) but 'double hatting' with other roles. Certain staff in KNBS are already being mentored to take on roles if NIPFN Phase 2 stalls. KIPPRA by default is having to do this on the policy analysis front having lost their NIPFN policy analyst who is yet to be replaced. The national level focus on the Medium-Term Development Plans in Kenya is an important opportunity through which NIPN can potentially be sustained as this would embed NIPFN in sectoral plans for which budgets are allocated. UNICEF are advocating for 12 per cent of NIPFN Phase 2 costs to be allocated by Government and that all sectoral ministries embed NIPFN in their plans with the associated financing.¹³⁹ However, the 'off budget' nature of the funding might make treasury financing for NIPN more challenging for Government.

A significant risk to sustaining NIPN in Kenya is the lack of agreed alignment of Phases 1 and 2, the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities of the different institutions and financial agreement. An issue yet to be resolved relates to who or which organization should be the custodian of NIPN. This has become unclear during Phase 2 in terms of determining NIPFN priorities and the road map to secure its continuity. NIPN have not until now approached other donors to diversify the funding base partly out of the hope that government would begin to contribute more to NIPN.

In Uganda, by the end of Phase 1, the sustainability study and plans were scheduled to be completed but this has not happened due to delays within the OPM (Office of the Prime Minister) with recruiting a consultant. However, this is a priority focus in Phase 2 and support is being provided by UNICEF and C4N.

In Ethiopia, NIPN is entirely funded by donors and stakeholders report it would be unable to independently sustain implementation by the end of Phase 2. However, there are two sustainability strategies. The first is integrating into EPHI, MoH and MoA with MERSC and the data repository in NDMC. Also, the increasingly spontaneous raising of questions by different ministries contributes to, and is a sign of, sustainability of NIPN. In addition, being in EPHI means that NIPN will always be there in some form. The second strategy is NIPN becoming a clearly defined organisational structure within EPHI rather than a project.

Across NIPN countries, there is a justifiably strong sense of pride in the achievements to date and the journey (which has at times been challenging) that national staff and development partners have been on. There is unanimity in wanting to see NIPN continue beyond Phase 2 and a powerful sense that the shorter contract period for Phase 2 will not leave adequate time to fully position NIPN to ensure its longevity. It will also take time to identify diverse funding streams, to embed NIPN in existing departments, transition to fully financed government staff and advocate for treasury budgets to cover running as well as staff costs.

¹³⁸ Côte d'Ivoire NIPN Mid-Term Review, C4N-NIPN, 2021.

¹³⁹ Kenya. Key Informant Interview. May 2023. N4D.

Uncertainty around the future resourcing of NIPN must be balanced with judgements that avoid losing key skilled NIPN staff who now have so much collective experience, insight and ability to drive the future NIPN. This loss of staff is happening in some countries and whilst it cannot be entirely prevented, it delays progress as new recruitment processes take many weeks and months of time and effort. C4N-NIPN has a key role in judging the appetite amongst donors for NIPN and in communicating global level intentions sooner rather than later whilst countries take forward sustainability plans.

The contractual arrangements for NIPN Phase 2 with GIZ, UNICEF and CARTIE bypasses direct agreements with governments and is viewed in some countries and amongst several global actors as negatively impacting the embedding of NIPN in government systems, which risks eroding the principle of national ownership. This risk is greater in some countries than in others where empowerment and localisation is not high on the agenda, as this will have a direct bearing on NIPNs institutional and financial sustainability. These new contracting arrangements, however, were a pre-requisite for the continuation of NIPN under EU funding.

Government stakeholders in some countries view these new modalities for Phase 2 as 'disempowering'. Responsibility for NIPN still resides in government institutions in terms of data collation and analysis and policy decision making, but overall planning of activities and accountability has in part been taken away through the oversight of development partners who manage the budget. There also appear to be differences in the way in which different donors have approached Phase 2, ranging from a more supportive and empowering approach to one whereby ownership shows signs of being diminished. In Kenya, the current approach poses risks to the further embedding of NIPN in government systems, levels of trust between the different stakeholders are sub-optimal and the realisation of future earmarking of treasury budgets is unclear (due in part to 'off budget' regulations). In Niger, on the other hand, NIPN Phase 2 is firmly located within the national institutions and all decisions and planning are taken collectively.

Overhead costs in Phase 2 are likely to be substantial under the new arrangements, which in turn reduces the amount of funding available for NIPN activities. However, comparative analysis of administrative and institutional costs between the different development partners and between Phases 1 and 2 are outside the scope of this study.

C4N-NIPN has a key role in interacting with global actors to inform their understanding of NIPN's achievements as well as its constraints. As several key global informants commented, it is not an easy task to explain NIPN, to showcase the process leading to the concrete activities undertaken and how this relates to direct and indirect (impact) outcomes. Communicating the 'NIPN story' is a key aspect of sustaining support for countries at the global level, particularly with regards to enabling adequate time to further embed the processes and resources required to secure its future beyond the current second phase.

In conclusion, Phase 2 NIPN has signalled a concerted focus on sustainability with most countries having developed strategies and plans to secure NIPN's longevity based on global guidance and country specific realities. The reliance on a single donor funding is high although governments are contributing and are considering the further embedding of NIPN in their institutions. There is unanimity in the belief that more time is needed to transition sustaining NIPN beyond Phase 2 and given the positive results being generated by countries, a sudden withdrawal of donor funding would be counterproductive. Furthermore, the risks posed by the new contracting arrangements need to be carefully managed if gains made in Phase 1 are to be protected.

Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

The NIPN approach and experience has important implications for countries facing complex nutrition challenges that need a level of data oversight and hosting for monitoring their multisectoral nutrition action plans and ongoing analysis for informing evidenced-based nutrition policies and decision-making. The recommendations below are deliberately ambitious as we believe NIPN will yield increasingly impressive results both nationally and globally. They are organized under four broad headings: (1) Global Capture and Learning; (2) Financing and Sustainability; (3) Rolling out NIPN; and (4) Data Strengthening and Advocacy. These recommendations are delineated according to whether they are a high or medium priority in Phase 2, or whether they should be considered in any subsequent Phase 3. The organization/s responsible for implementing the recommendations is also indicated.

4.1 Global Capture and Learning

Political economy analysis

The most fundamental aspect of NIPN's success has undoubtedly been embedding the initiative within government structures and systems and in such a way as to enable multisector engagement around nutrition. Apart from Bangladesh, all NIPN countries have succeeded to varying degrees in selecting appropriate government institutional locations for the initiative. Furthermore, access to multisectoral data (a pre-requisite for an effective NIPN) is undoubtedly a function of institutional location of NIPN and appears to be most guaranteed where NIPN's institutional location and support is underpinned by cross-sector convening authority and influence. NIPN's ability to both draw on and influence the perspectives of decision-makers in government is also a function of its institutional location and proximity to decision-making. The precise institutional location of NIPN has varied between countries but there are commonalities. However, it has not been possible during this evaluation to conduct a thorough political governance analysis for pulling out key learning around optimal institutional location.

- **It is recommended in a subsequent Phase 3** that C4N-NIPN recruits a specialist to carry out a detailed political economy analysis of how different institutional arrangements have impacted NIPN functions and contributed to national ownership. Furthermore, this analysis should ascertain whether certain types of arrangements confer a greater chance of sustaining NIPN through government investment and resources. This will serve future NIPN countries or similar initiatives in terms of planning the appropriate institutional locations and systems.

Policy briefs

Countries have produced many policy and technical questions through the policy question process, which has been a significant part of the NIPN endeavor and for which country teams have invested significant time and expertise. These outputs are easily accessible on NIPN country websites. However, there has been no systematic follow-up to generate an overview of the metrics for who has received, read and used the briefs and, importantly, which outputs have proven more impactful and why.

- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that country NIPN teams conduct reviews of how their policy briefs have been used and generate the necessary metrics. C4N-NIPN could develop 'light-touch' guidance on how to conduct the review and synthesise findings for cross-country learning and global dissemination.

Dashboards

NIPN dashboards (which in some countries include data repositories) have become a highly valued output at country level. The dashboards provide a 'one-stop' platform for nutrition data and reports as well as providing user-friendly infographics for a range of actors including policymakers. Countries have made enormous progress in compiling multisectoral nutrition data on dashboards and repositories, with each country approaching the dashboard in a unique way with different strengths and weaknesses depending on

the context. However, there has been no cross-country learning around dashboard best practice or sharing of innovative practices, nor systematic determination of how much the dashboards are being visited, used and by whom. The same is true of data repositories that may be attached to dashboards.

- **It is recommended in a subsequent Phase 3** that C4N-NIPN conduct a dashboard review to share cross-country learning and to help maximise the use and utility of these dashboards.
- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that the dashboard review also estimates the annual cost of maintaining each country dashboard to feed into discussions around NIPN sustainability.

Theories of change

NIPN's adapted global ToC serves to clarify the direct outcomes for which NIPN is held accountable and those to which NIPN indirectly contributes with other key actors. The global ToC does not require further adaptation. However, country specific ToCs are needed to fully capture the institutional arrangements and the activities leading to direct and indirect outcomes for each unique context. These will support countries to monitor and evaluate their NIPN and help them to communicate more effectively the added value of NIPN for internal and external actors. Adapted Results Frameworks (RFs) should also provide NIPNs the opportunity to provide narrative updates regarding implementation and progress to better capture country nuances. Country-specific ToCs and allied RFs will enable C4N-NIPN to more effectively provide compelling country stories and evidence the outcomes that NIPN is delivering to key global stakeholders.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that country specific ToCs and RFs are developed to ensure different country contexts are captured and country-specific processes are identified and strengthened for delivering optimal results. This activity should be prioritised to those countries that have already indicated a strong desire to be supported by C4N-NIPN, with support for other countries in any subsequent Phase 3.

NIPN's impact on national nutrition plans and policies

There is recognition across all countries that NIPN needs much longer to inform and influence multisectoral policymaking and investments in nutrition, particularly given the delay in establishing NIPN in Phase 1. However, in several countries, NIPN has effectively laid the foundations for influencing policy going forward, both for individual sectors and for multisectoral policies and resulting plans. This is not surprising given the focus of NIPN work on sector capacity building to incorporate nutrition indicators into sector plans, as well as the increasing demand from a broad range of stakeholders across multiple sectors to have policy questions accepted and analysed as part of the PAC.

There are some positive examples of NIPN findings and analysis already contributing to the development of multisectoral nutrition and sector specific plans and their respective monitoring and evaluation frameworks. There are also examples of NIPN playing a key role in monitoring implementation and impact of national nutrition action plans.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that the impacts in more advanced countries are carefully described, documented and summarised by countries with C4N-NIPN, supporting collation, synthesis and dissemination for cross-country learning, global advocacy and fundraising purposes.

4.2 Financing and Sustainability

Increasing sustainability through greater visibility and forward planning

NIPN's sustainability is to some extent dependent on its relevance, coherence and visibility at both global and country level. Its potential global relevance has not been prioritised during Phase 1, with missed opportunities. Long-term sustainability is ultimately dependent on national government commitment to nutrition and evidence that efforts to address malnutrition are supported by a NIPN type information and

analysis system. However, there is a pressing need to further demonstrate NIPN's 'value add' to global, regional and country level actors and specifically, potential donors.

At the regional level, there are the recently formed SUN Movement hubs that cover all NIPN countries (stable and fragile). NIPN outputs and outcomes could be amplified through engagement with the coordinators of these hubs (see below). In addition, there are numerous regional entities with a nutrition focus and important nutrition leadership strategy under the AU. These entities need to be made aware of NIPN's services since the data analysis and policy briefs being generated by NIPN have relevance to their understanding of regional nutrition challenges and solutions.

Several NIPN countries have developed formal sustainability plans while others are informally discussing how to ensure NIPN sustainability in the event that further funding is not available for a Phase 3 NIPN. These plans vary by country but may involve advocating for NIPN to achieve unit or departmental status that automatically confers a degree of government financing. There may also be efforts to transfer NIPN responsibilities currently undertaken through EU funding to government funded long-term staff. Some countries are also making efforts to ensure that dashboard costs are to be funded through bureau of statistics funding mechanisms.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that NIPN countries are supported by C4N-NIPN to develop business cases for encouraging medium-term support from national and/or regional level donor organizations. The country specific ToCs, accompanying RFs alongside succinct NIPN 'stories of change' that showcase the added value of data, analysis and policy engagement, should be central to these business cases. Government contributions in cash and in-kind and a detailed roadmap to full sustainability must be included. The sub-national level will be an important component of the business case in those NIPN countries that are testing its devolution.
- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN begin developing a streamlined NIPN approach that could be introduced in new countries or existing NIPN countries where subsequent Phase 3 funding is uncertain.
- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN with UNICEF support carries out a mapping of the main nutrition focused regional entities and shares this information with their NIPN country colleagues for them to liaise and coordinate with, offering NIPN services where this is relevant and feeding data, analysis and policy briefs to the regional nutrition focal points.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN engages directly with the new host organization of the GNR to showcase NIPN best practice around data, evidence and monitoring of national multisectoral nutrition action plans. The latter should also be reflected in the GNR report and in the GNR Nutrition Accountability Frameworks (NAF) and updated annually. C4N-NIPN could usefully engage one of the EAG members involved in the GNR to support this process.
- **It is recommended for a subsequent Phase 3** that NIPN create greater visibility for its work through concerted efforts to support country NIPNs in developing articles in non-peer reviewed journals and web platforms that capture and disseminate NIPN type stories (WHO bulletin, Field Exchange, IFPRI nutrition series etc.)
- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that global partnerships should be developed with other data initiatives such as World Food Programme (WFP) Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM), the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS), DHIS2 and SMART to facilitate data sharing and collaboration between these initiatives and NIPN at country level. This should also focus on highlighting significant data gaps that the global level should seek to address.

- It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority that partnerships should be sought to meet the specific needs of country NIPNs guided by their country-specific ToCs, for example, with those concerned with nutrition and climate risk analysis and with cost of diet analyses.

Deep dives

The short (five day) country visits undertaken by N4D for the impact assessments elicited knowledge, learning and evidence that was not possible to obtain through desk document reviews and remote stakeholder interviews. This is because NIPN is a complex initiative, and it is therefore difficult to capture the diversity of country NIPNs through the global centralised reporting system. Consequently, NIPN has struggled to tell a compelling 'value add' story at the global level that adequately describes the direct and indirect outcomes across the range of NIPN contexts to stakeholders within the global nutrition ecosystem.

- It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority that C4N-NIPN consider conducting deep dives in the remaining countries not covered by N4D when their Phase 2 is near completion to increase the understanding of outcomes and impact of NIPN and use this information to continue telling the NIPN added value story.

Responding to evolving needs

It is clear that NIPN has expanded and adapted its analytical focus to the specific needs of country contexts and it is argued in this report that such adaptability is important for NIPN's sustainability. There is evidence that NIPN has undertaken analysis for responding to the need to strengthen the nexus and for assessing the impact of COVID-19, as examples of adaptation.

Other potential areas of analytical focus in NIPN countries could include the impact of climate and climate mitigation measures on nutrition indicators and tracking financial resource allocations for nutrition. The former could inform mitigation responses to the global challenge of climate change while a focus on resource flows can play an accountability role for national and development partners.

It is notoriously difficult to obtain reliable data on domestic resources allocated to nutrition, which partly stems from weak methodologies around the costing of nutrition-sensitive programming. The SUN Movement has been endeavoring to obtain and generate such data although there still appears to be a paucity of this data at country level.

- It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority that at global level, C4N-NIPN conduct a review of the institutional and technical feasibility of country analysis and the potential role in developing a methodology or guidance for country level NIPNs to undertake such work in relation to the major issues of the day, including climate risks and financing for nutrition.
- It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority that country NIPN teams map potential climate actors at national level with a view to determining the potential for collaboration, including data sharing and potential for developing climate related questions for the PAC process.
- It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority that those countries with an interest in developing better data systems to track nutrition spend are supported proactively by C4N-NIPN in tandem with the SUN Movement Secretariat, bringing in technical assistance as needed to help NIPNs to develop country specific approaches.

Safeguarding NIPN's continuity

Despite the early difficulties in Phase 1, NIPN has generally demonstrated enormous progress that must be maintained and nurtured. In most, if not all NIPN countries, it would be impossible for government to take over the costs of a fully functioning NIPN within the time frame of Phase 2, although there are opportunities for government to gradually absorb more of the costs. It is therefore imperative that donors continue

supporting the NIPN initiative beyond Phase 2. The new institutional arrangements in Phase 2, which involve funding being allocated to UNICEF, CATIE and GIZ rather than directly to national government parties, may confer advantages but these arrangements also pose risks to sustaining and building on national ownership in certain countries.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN monitor the situation closely in these at- risk countries to ensure that new financing arrangements do not delay progress and undermine national ownership. Furthermore, the position of key skilled NIPN staff must be protected and maintained during any periods of uncertainty.

Global support for NIPN implementation

C4N-NIPN has provided critical inputs and guidance, and country NIPN teams are generally very positive about the technical support they receive. C4N-NIPN's role in convening global gatherings has also been vitally important for cross-country learning. The role, value and impact of the EAG is less certain and has reportedly waned over time with less connection to country level NIPN developments and needs.

This evaluation concludes that C4N-NIPN could take on a greater role in Phase 2 and beyond, particularly in relation to supporting learning and forging connections between NIPN and other relevant initiatives at global and regional level. This will not only enhance the utility of current NIPN activities, outputs and outcomes but also strengthen NIPN capacity to scale up and become sustainable in the longer term.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN and UNICEF conduct a global and regional strategic mapping exercise to inform a global and regional visibility and communications plan to take NIPN forward in Phase 2 and beyond. Several potentially important global partnerships are highlighted in this conclusion and recommendations section.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that a wider funding base for a NIPN Phase 3 is explored and secured for all NIPN (current and future) countries, with the explicit objective of transitioning to nationally sourced sustainable funding at the end of the phase. A convening of the global SUN Donor Network where C4N-NIPN presents and showcases NIPN's achievements could help revitalize donor engagement and serve to galvanise funding. In addition, UNICEF's global NIPN role includes advocacy to donors and needs to be actively encouraged to take forward this responsibility.

4.3 Rolling out NIPN

Partnering with the SUN Movement

It was always the intention for NIPN to be scaled up for meeting the needs of SUN Movement countries for better data and evidence informed policy. However, NIPN has not been able to add new countries to the initiative. Rather, it has focused on consolidating between Phases 1 and 2 in the same countries (except for Zambia, which is currently being re-introduced into NIPN). The need for more and better data is no less urgent than it was when NIPN was originally conceived in 2013/14. Indeed, the raft of global shocks and events makes NIPN services even more salient today. One of the constraints to scaling NIPN has been the longer than envisaged country set- up time in Phase 1 and delays with transitioning to Phase 2. However, a great deal of learning about the process for institutionalising NIPN, for establishing the data platforms and for working through the policy question cycles has taken place at country level.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN's more strategic interaction with the SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS) and the regional and convergence hubs includes advocating for the SMS and UNICEF to actively disseminate information about NIPN so that more demand is created for NIPN activities and services across SUN countries. The C4N support to SUN Phase 3.0 is another opportunity for increasing the linkages between NIPN and SUN and must be harnessed through this EU and BMZ funded support.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN works closely with the SMS and UNICEF to identify potential NIPN countries where there is demand for NIPN's activities. In considering greater scale, C4N-NIPN, UNICEF and the SMS should consider both stable and fragile contexts to demonstrate NIPN's relevance across different contexts and different models by which support and services are provided. This will require C4N-NIPN to work closely with the newly formed Regional Hubs for stable contexts and the Convergence Hub for those countries classified as fragile.
- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that the data and policy analysis teams from countries where NIPN is particularly well established are utilised to provide peer support for the start-up of NIPN in new countries through country visits. A key focus of this engagement will be supporting new countries in more quickly establishing NIPN systems and processes to avoid over-lengthy inception periods. By fostering direct learning and engagement there could be continued support or mentoring of new NIPN 'matched' countries that draw on C4N-NIPN for overarching guidance, tools and gatherings, as well as access to key global developments and initiatives that have a bearing on NIPN. Added to this, a more streamlined NIPN approach should be fully articulated by C4N-NIPN with the support of UNICEF and CATIE in the form of a short guidance document and shared with both new countries and existing NIPN countries in a position to provide peer support.

Devolving NIPN

Thus far, NIPN has been focused largely at the national level although some NIPN countries have begun devolving activities through pilot programmes. There is a general recognition of the need to take NIPN to this level (counties, regions, districts) to achieve greater influence and impact and to support the longer-term relevance, coherence and sustainability of NIPN.

- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that NIPN countries with devolved decision making and effective fiscal decentralisation are supported in devolving NIPN to the subnational level and ensuring that those countries already in the pilot phase of this process share their learning for the benefit of these NIPN countries. Sub-national capacity strengthening will be a significant component of this effort. The learning needs to capture the processes, costs and results and help tell the story of how NIPN can influence devolved coordination and planning to address malnutrition.

Strengthening capacity to implement NIPN

Capacity strengthening at national level has been a major focus for all NIPNs in Phase 1 and key to supporting localisation and government ownership of the platform. However, it is difficult to measure the extent to which the activities have been effective. Raised awareness, enhanced knowledge and skills and strengthened coalitions are the three main areas where there are positive results of NIPN capacity strengthening.

Sensitising and working with sectoral staff to incorporate nutrition indicators into sector plans and programming as well as multisectoral nutrition action plans and strategies has worked well in some countries and is a major achievement. Implementing the PAC has involved capacity strengthening of sector stakeholders to understand the role sectors can play in improving nutrition as well as helping sector staff in framing policy questions for underpinning future policies and strategies. The PAC process has also led to greater alignment and coordination between sector stakeholders around nutrition leading to shared nutrition objectives and goals. Critical barriers to capacity strengthening are high staff turnover within

national government institutions and over-reliance on international consultants for capacity building.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that capacity strengthening efforts are scaled to the sub-national level in those countries with devolved decision-making including fiscal, with lessons shared from those countries that are already progressing with NIPN devolution.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that each country consider options for reducing the inherent risks associated with high attrition rates such as 'trainer of trainers' approaches, embedding NIPN in national institutions training modules and via Memorandum of Understanding with key institutions to retain newly capacitated staff. Countries should report on progress to C4N-NIPN.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN mitigate the uncertainties that lead to loss of highly qualified staff by clarifying the likely financing situation beyond Phase 2 well before the scheduled contractual end dates for each country.

A greater role for NIPN in fragile contexts

Fragile contexts have a disproportionately high burden of malnutrition, fragmented information systems and a pressing need for data and evidence to inform decision-making and to monitor the efforts of multiple sectors and actors to prevent malnutrition. NIPN has so far operationalised in three fragile contexts (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Niger) but it has not systematically engaged with humanitarian stakeholders and information systems in these countries. This is a gap given the preponderance of nutrition relevant data generated by the humanitarian system. Furthermore, the NIPN approach offers an opportunity for supporting the 'right-sizing' of humanitarianism, given the needs for information systems that can inform a multisectoral nutrition response geared towards preventing malnutrition as well as its treatment in fragile contexts. The NIPN approach prioritises capacity strengthening of sectors to become more nutrition sensitive and alignment behind multisectoral national nutrition plans and strategies. A functioning NIPN system also offers the opportunity for governments to develop a stronger humanitarian, development and peace nexus by generating evidence that supports the need for change as well as evidence for monitoring new ways of working.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N-NIPN with the support of UNICEF (as the Global Nutrition Cluster lead agency) and the SUN SMS engage more strategically with the newly established SUN Convergence Hub, as well as bilaterally with humanitarian and development donors (including EU- ECHO) and country governments in fragile contexts to explore the potential for introducing the NIPN approach. This could start slowly with just a small number of fragile contexts.
- **It is recommended as a medium Phase 2 priority** that these pilots are evaluated quickly to capture learning for subsequent roll-out to other fragile contexts.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that C4N/NIPN considers NIPN's relevance in fragile settings and engages with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the UNICEF-led Global Nutrition Cluster and Inter-Cluster Working Group; and through leveraging ECHO via other humanitarian donors to promote and support global NIPN and enable more engagement at country level for improving access to humanitarian-generated data.

4.4 Data Strengthening and Advocacy

Nutrition tracking

NIPN has made significant contributions to nutrition tracking in several countries. It has done this largely through re-analysis of existing data sets, analysis of causal factors and geo-spatial or population differences, improved visualisation of data on dashboards and through advocating for improved or more timely nutrition data provision.

NIPN is also strengthening the decentralisation of nutrition tracking in several countries. Critical barriers that prohibit NIPN's ability to contribute to improving a countries' ability to track nutrition progress include lack of available up-to-date data, data gaps and poor access to certain types of data. The role of the European Commission Nutrition Information System (EC-NIS) in NIPN could be critical in addressing these constraints, but there is no evidence yet that EC-NIS and NIPN are coordinating sufficiently together at country level to fulfil such a role.

Although each NIPN country conducted a data landscape analysis at the beginning of Phase 1, there are questions over the use and effectiveness of this analysis and little evidence that the findings have been used to inform NIPN country developments and progress.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that NIPN country programmes include activities to strengthen nutrition tracking by drawing on the data mapping exercise undertaken at the beginning of NIPN country programmes.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that a review be conducted of how EC-NIS is complementing NIPN in the countries where the two programmes exist, with recommendations for strengthening complementarity. C4N-NIPN needs to foster more strategic engagement with EC-NIS and support countries in understanding the added value of the EC-NIS for the platforms and the policy cycle.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that all NIPNs strengthen connection and access to DHIS2 data systems and where applicable, to humanitarian data systems as these tend to collect more regular data that is amenable to trend analysis.

Strengthening the utility and sustainability of the policy process

At country level, the PAC processes have gradually strengthened as the number of PAC experiences increased. In some countries, the PAC have enabled closer collaboration and engagement between stakeholders and supported a broader understanding of NIPN's potential added value. However, in other countries, the process of identifying and developing key policy questions has been difficult, with a lack of nutrition expertise and complete understanding of the needs of decision-makers being critical barriers.

The PAC relies on existing quality data and in some situations, questions cannot be addressed due to the absence of quality data. As NIPN continues and knowledge of which data gaps are hindering answers to key policy-related questions, it should be possible to identify where investments in existing country data systems are most needed to support the generation of evidenced-based policy. NIPN has undoubtedly increased the demand for evidence amongst many decision-makers although further progress is needed and achievable with continuation of NIPN and in particular, the PAC process.

- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that a review of the PAC process is conducted by each NIPN country team. This review should endeavor to understand what data and information would have been necessary to address key unanswered questions and the feasibility of strengthening country information systems to furnish such data. This analysis could then inform the level of resources and capacity programmes such as EC-NIS that would be required to truly complement the NIPN initiative.
- **It is recommended as a high Phase 2 priority** that based upon this PAC review, C4N-NIPN advocate with SUN for strengthened EC-NIS engagement with NIPN at the global level and liaise with other actors to provide technical support and resources to strengthen national information systems so that countries can meet their priorities for information and decision-making.

Annex 1: Methodology

Review of the Theory of Change

The previous mid-term review developed a ToC based on the implementation progress of NIPN at the time (2018). Due to delays in establishing the NIPNs within target countries, the mid-term review was limited in its ability to reflect the activities and causal pathways of each platform. For this evaluation, the N4D team reviewed strategic documentation during the inception phase to develop an in-depth understanding of the progress of NIPN at a global level and within countries. Based on this information, the N4D team worked closely with C4N-NIPN stakeholders to interrogate the ToC to better represent the progress of the initiative and the logic model that had developed since the mid-term review.

The revised ToC (see figure below) was developed during the inception phase of this evaluation and formed the basis of the evaluation framework. Specifically, the ToC differentiated between direct and indirect outcomes which NIPN was aiming to achieve. Direct outcomes were defined as those which NIPN could achieve through its own activities and outputs and indirect outcomes were defined as those outcomes which could only be achieved through partnership and collaboration with other relevant actors. As such, it was agreed NIPN could only contribute to the achievement of indirect outcomes, whereas direct outcomes were directly achievable.

Global strategic review

The N4D team reviewed available documentation relating to the inception, evolution and performance of NIPN at a global level. This included performance-related documents, reports, the 2018 mid-term review and other strategic documentation that detailed NIPN's approach and activities during Phase 1. A brief review of relevant literature related to nutrition information platforms was also conducted. The global strategic review used the overall evaluation framework to guide analysis. It examined the effect of change in leadership and implementing agencies from Agropolis International and the Global Support Facility (GSF) to C4N-NIPN and the Global Coordination Facility. It also examined collaboration and partnership activities with global actors, to what extent GSF and C4N-NIPN achieved intended results and whether NIPN contributed to indirect outcomes as stated in the ToC at a global level.

Country case studies

To comprehensively assess whether NIPN had achieved intended results during Phase 1, it was necessary to review the performance of each NIPN in detail. The evaluation adopted a case study approach to assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability of all 9 countries with an active NIPN in Phase 1. In-depth document reviews were conducted for each country and findings were triangulated through key informant interviews (KIs) with a range of stakeholders involved in the implementation of each NIPN. Stakeholders were purposively selected due to the vast number of stakeholders engaged in each country.

Deep dive case studies

In addition to assessing whether each NIPN had achieved its intended results, the evaluation also sought to assess whether NIPN had contributed to indirect outcomes as per the revised ToC. To examine this, three countries were identified as deep dive case studies to investigate the performance in more detail. The three countries identified were **Niger, Kenya and Bangladesh**. In these three countries, specific focus was on impact evaluation question to assess the longer-term contribution of each NIPN. Although the NIPN in Bangladesh had closed, C4N-NIPN and the Bangladesh EUD advised that the findings and learnings related to the reasons for its closure could provide additional insights and comparisons for this evaluation. Fieldwork was conducted in all three countries; therefore, significantly more stakeholders were interviewed for the deep dive countries.

The four components described above were embedded throughout the seven methodological steps described in the Protocol Report. These seven steps represent the chronological sequencing of activities to enable the

overall analysis and the production of this final evaluation report and a peer review article. The seven methodological steps are summarised below.

1. **Protocol development:** The main objective of this initial research phase was to develop a strong understanding of NIPN and finalise the evaluation approach in agreement with C4N. It provided the opportunity to clarify the main evaluation scope and questions and interrogate the existing ToC, leading to the production of a revised ToC.
2. **Data collection:** During this methodological step, the N4D team undertook data collection for all NIPN countries and completed all case studies. This involved KIs and fieldwork in the three deep dive countries.
3. **Analysis and validation:** The analytical approach differentiated between assessing the results of NIPN (activities, outputs and direct outcomes) and assessing its contribution to indirect outcomes. As such, the evaluation originally adopted Contribution Analysis as the main analytical approach. However, during the data collection phase it became clear that the amount of evidence required to comprehensively complete Contribution Analysis was not available (see limitations section below). Due to this, it was agreed that evidence would be triangulated using the overall evaluation framework, and assessments regarding the contribution of NIPN would be restricted to data available in documentation and feedback from a range of stakeholders within the deep dive countries. The initial analysis was validated through ongoing discussions with the C4N-NIPN team.
4. **Drafting report:** Following the analysis and validation, the N4D team drafted the final report containing the findings related to all evaluation questions as well as recommendations.
5. **Consultation and finalisation:** The N4D team presented the preliminary findings to all NIPN countries and NIPN teams at the NIPN Global Gathering in June 2023. This was an opportunity for stakeholders to learn more about the overall findings of the evaluation and feedback with clarification questions. For each deep dive country, a de-briefing session was held to discuss initial analysis and to provide an opportunity for NIPN teams to offer additional evidence related to performance that was not initially captured.
6. **Dissemination of findings:** The N4D team will present the findings of the evaluation during a webinar for interested participants.
7. **Preparation of the final report and peer review article:** As instructed in the evaluation terms of reference (ToR), the findings of the evaluation will inform a peer review article for submission at the end of 2023.

Limitations

NIPN is a complex and vast initiative, with 9 active platforms in Phase 1. Due to this, the methodological approach had some limitations as described below.

Availability of data related to NIPN's contribution to indirect outcomes

While the evaluation originally sought to use Contribution Analysis to assess NIPN's contribution to indirect outcomes, there was a lack of available data due to the differing implementation stages of each NIPN. For some countries, mainly Niger and Kenya, it was possible to include a general assessment of how activities had contributed to longer-term outcomes. However, for most countries, the NIPNs had not had enough time to achieve these results. As such, the findings related to the impact evaluation question have been informed by stakeholder assessments and data where available. Rather than developing a robust contribution story through triangulation of various data sources as established by Contribution Analysis, the evaluation draws on the limited evidence available.

Availability of stakeholders

As evidence related to performance provided in documentation was limited, the evaluation triangulated assessments by stakeholders. However, not all stakeholders for each NIPN were available during the data collection phase. To mitigate this, several questionnaires were sent to stakeholders who were identified as critical to inform the overall findings. Out of the 8 questionnaires that were sent, 3 stakeholders were able

to complete these questionnaires.

Judgement criteria and indicators

The evaluation framework (presented in Annex 1) highlights the judgement criteria and indicators for each evaluation sub-question. The evaluation framework was developed at the start of the Contribution Study before all data was made available. As such, the judgement criteria represent the ambitions of the evaluation team relating to evidence that was hoped to be collected during the study. However, as noted above, it was not possible to collect evidence for each judgement criterion/indicator. As such, the findings presented in Section 4 are not categorised per indicator but are summaries of the main findings relating to each sub-question.

Representativeness of findings

Due to the limited data available regarding contribution to indirect outcomes and difficulties with arranging KIs with relevant stakeholders, the findings may not be fully representative of the diverse platforms and differing levels of implementation. The deep dive case studies have been used to present a more in-depth analysis of performance and contribution to indirect outcomes. Though the NIPN in Bangladesh had closed, it offered valuable lessons and comparisons for active platforms.

Research question	Judgement criteria/indicator	Evidence sources and approach
1. Relevance: How relevant is the NIPN approach in driving optimal policy and programme approaches to address malnutrition?		
1a. How relevant is the operational and institutional approach of NIPN to achieve its stated aims and objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far the theory of change, technical guidance and operational documents enable countries to establish platforms and achieve objectives • Evidence of target stakeholders believing design and approach enables the achievement of objectives • Evidence of different institutional arrangements influencing achievement of objectives • Evidence of changes, adaptations and learning from original approach which has enabled achievement of objectives • Evidence of assessments of risk to NIPN progress and mitigation strategies put in place 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN concepts and activities, such as ToC data landscape analysis and annual reports.</p> <p>Primary data: Key informant interviews (KIIs) with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p>
1b. To what extent does NIPN respond to current and emerging needs and priorities within countries and globally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of context analysis and needs assessment to inform adaptations to NIPN approach and design and whether this is happening periodically to inform further adaptations • Evidence that target stakeholders within countries and globally believe NIPN approach and design responds to their needs and priorities • Evidence that target stakeholders have informed the design and approach of NIPN at country level • Evidence that national NIPN platforms align with nutrition data and policy needs and priorities 	<p>Approach: Assessment of the relevance of NIPN design at country and global levels to meet needs of target stakeholders and to meet the aims and objectives of the initiative.</p>
2. Coherence: To what extent is NIPN coordinating and collaborating with relevant initiatives and actors to achieve results?		
2a. How far does NIPN partner with initiatives and actors within countries to ensure multi-sectoral coordination and to avoid duplication?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of relevant initiatives and actors within each case study country • Evidence of NIPN engaging and coordinating with relevant actors and established technical and policy focussed coordination initiatives • Evidence of newly established Policy Advisory Committees or equivalent to coordinate the prioritisation of nutrition related policy needs • Evidence of broader stakeholders in countries agreeing NIPN adequately coordinates with relevant actors and initiatives and avoids duplication 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN concepts and activities, such as ToC, data landscape analysis, annual reviews.</p> <p>Primary data: Key informant interviews (KIIs) with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of partnership/coordination strategies and planning at country level • Evidence of coordination and collaboration leading to specific outputs/events 	representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.
2b. To what extent has NIPN engaged with other relevant actors and initiatives to communicate its approach and results to establish credibility, influence and avoid duplication globally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far global level coordination has a focus on partnerships • Evidence of NIPN having mapped global partners and initiatives • Evidence of partnership and communication strategy and plans • Evidence of NIPN engaging in and informing global events • Evidence of NIPN using data and policy relevant analysis to inform global debates/discussion • Evidence of NIPN using approach, data and analysis to advocate for strengthening multi-sectoral approaches to malnutrition • Extent to which stakeholders believe NIPN adds value globally • Evidence of coordination and partnership activities seeking to avoid duplication at global level 	Approach: Assessment of coherence of NIPN at country and global levels to enable collaboration and partnerships with relevant actors.
3. Effectiveness: To what degree is NIPN achieving its results?		
3a. To what extent has NIPN achieved its expected results at national and global levels?	<p>A functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of project management, policy and data analysis units are fully operational • Evidence NIPN structure is embedded within government institutions with relevant mandates to action objectives of the platform • Evidence NIPN is embedded in the existing multi-sectoral committee and has capacity to guide platform • Evidence of NIPN leadership provided by national institutions/mechanism • Evidence data landscape assessment has been completed and is regularly updated • Evidence that countries have progressed with policy question formulation plans • Evidence that policy questions were formulated so they can be answered using existing quantitative data and available capacity • Assessment of policy questions that were not or could not be progressed and reasons for this, e.g. lack of data 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of existing monitoring data on NIPN performance, logical frameworks, annual reviews, strategic documents and evaluations and assessments.</p> <p>Primary data: KIIs with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p> <p>Approach: Assessment of the extent to which NIPN has achieved its desired results across all countries through triangulation of monitoring data with KIIs at global and country</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of policy-relevant outputs being produced and communicated to stakeholders in a timely manner <p>Strengthened institutional capacity to collect, analyse and communicate nutrition data and evidence, integrated into wider national information systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development plan is developed • Evidence that target stakeholders informed the capacity development plan • Evidence that target stakeholders agree main capacity gaps have been captured • Evidence that actions were created to address capacity gaps and are being implemented • Evidence of host individuals and organisations demonstrating improvements in line with ICO dimensions (e.g. operationalising skills and expertise) and NIPN having contributed to these changes <p>Effective partnerships with other stakeholders to ensure that data and evidence are used to inform policies, investments and accountability for nutrition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development plan is developed • Evidence of collaboration/communication plan to engage with relevant stakeholders and initiatives • Evidence of the different types of 'productive interactions' and whether these have increased due to NIPN activities • Evidence that stakeholders see NIPN as adding value and regard NIPN as a strategic partner <p>Political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability for nutrition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of policymakers advocating for data-driven policy design • Assessment that the right data is harnessed and analysed to deliver high quality outputs to inform policy dialogue • Evidence of new or scaled up programming as a result of NIPN analysis • Evidence of NIPN data informing monitoring and evaluation of national nutrition plans 	<p>levels, with a focus on identifying factors that enable/prohibit success.</p> <p>ICO framework to assess types of capacity being developed. 'Productive interactions' framework to see how NIPN actors are engaging with stakeholders.</p> <p>Contribution Analysis in three country case studies to assess how far NIPN activities have contributed to direct outcomes (e.g. how activities have developed institutional capacity).</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of coordination between NIPN platforms and national nutrition entities with oversight of policies and plans adapting due to NIPN • Evidence of public commitments to strengthen and use data and evidence to inform policymaking (for example through SUN knowledge management and learning processes) • Evidence of previous commitments being updated and revised with a focus on the importance of data and evidence <p>C4N-NIPN coordinates between countries, donors and global experts, provides support to countries, captures lessons learned and positions NIPN in global data-for-nutrition landscape</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of facilitation of cross-country learning • Evidence of engagement at global level with relevant partners and global nutrition ecosystem (see evaluation question 2b) • Evidence of relevant, timely and adequate technical assistance provided to countries based on assessment of their needs • Evidence of Expert Advisory Group being sufficiently engaged and supported to provide timely and appropriate expert advice 	
3b. What factors enabled or prohibited NIPN in achieving its expected results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors influencing the achievement of results • Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors prohibiting the achievement of results 	
4. Impact: To what extent have NIPN activities implemented in Phase 1 contributed to indirect outcomes?		
4a. To what extent have NIPN activities and outputs contributed to improvements in countries' ability to track nutrition progress and report progress globally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of increased in-country capacity to track nutrition progress through national and domestic human resources/capacity • Assessment from national stakeholders that capacity to track nutrition progress has increased since the implementation of NIPN Phase 1 	Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN's performance, existing financing data for country case studies, data on stunting and wasting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in nutrition tracking data in GNR and other equivalent initiatives for NIPN countries • Evidence of challenges in contributing to improvements in ability to use and analyse data to track nutrition progress 	(and possibly other data if available on other forms of undernutrition) within countries and information on nutrition-related policies in countries since establishment of NIPN.
4b. How far has NIPN findings and analysis influenced evidence-based policymaking multisectoral policymaking and investments on nutrition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of the different types of 'productive interactions' created due to NIPN activities and whether they have contributed to increase in policymaking • Evidence that analysis provided credible causal claims leading to nutrition policy decisions • Evidence that policymakers regularly use NIPN data to inform policy outputs and discussions (references in advocacy pieces, policy briefs, speeches etc) • Evidence of humanitarian programmes/activity informed by NIPN • Evidence of sustained and meaningful engagement between data analysts and policymakers (regular meetings, coordination, involvement in working groups etc) • Has the country MSNAP been modified as a result of NIPN analysis? • Evidence that data and analysis generated informs policies focused on gender and youth considerations (i.e. nutritional challenges for boys, adolescent girls and females of childbearing age and associated policies/interventions) 	<p>Primary data: KIIIs with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p> <p>Approach: Contribution Analysis in three country case studies to assess how far NIPN activities have contributed to indirect outcomes vis-à-vis other relevant contributory factors. 'Productive interactions' framework to assess how far interactions have enabled data and evidence to inform policymaking.</p>
4c. To what extent has NIPN enabled an increase in stakeholders using nutrition data and analysis to inform multisectoral nutrition policymaking, implementation and accountability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of data curated and analysed by the platform and accessible on the country dashboard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Population survey data (MICS, DHS, Agriculture, Household budget surveys etc) ○ Nutrition sentinel, cross sectional or monitoring data ○ Routine programme data ○ Financial allocations and expenditure data for nutrition • Assessment of how relevant the data and evidence generated by NIPN is to stakeholders • Assessment of how timely collaboration with other stakeholders has been to disseminate data and evidence • Evidence of sustained and meaningful engagement between data analysts and policymakers (regular meetings, coordination, involvement in working groups etc) 	

4c. To what extent has NIPN contributed to increased accountability for nutrition policies, implementation and results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that NIPN data and analyses are used by national and international actors including government, civil society, academia and non-government actors • Evidence of national multisectoral nutrition policies and plans during this period have been monitored by NIPN in collaboration with other stakeholders 	
4d. Which factors have contributed to the achievement of outcomes, and what factors impeded the achievement of outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors influencing the achievement of outcomes • Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors prohibiting the achievement of outcomes 	
4e. Are there any likely unanticipated longer-term effects of the NIPN project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it likely there will be unanticipated positive medium to longer-term effects of NIPN activities? • Is it likely there will be unanticipated negative medium to longer-term effects of NIPN activities? 	
5. Sustainability: To what extent will results be sustained to strengthen national capacities for evidence-based nutrition policy and programming?		
5a. To what extent will capacity building activities be sustained?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far have NIPN activities built sustained capacity to analyse data and increase demand for data-driven policy analysis and decision-making? • Has capacity development been integrated into ongoing training courses in countries • Evidence of countries taking ownership of processes, systems and partnerships established through NIPN (see evaluation sub-question 3a) • Evidence that governments are both engaged and capacitated to maximise use of the platforms to inform their decision making 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN's performance.</p> <p>Primary data: KIs with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p>
5b. What proportion of NIPN costs are provided to government and national institutions? What proportion of NIPN costs have been enveloped into government budgets?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of NIPN financing arrangements within two ongoing country case studies and the percentage of funding to government institutions vis-à-vis other partners • Evidence of governments in case study countries taking financial ownership of aspects of NIPN platform (e.g. staff, website, dashboard) • Evidence of financing plans for government to take on more financial ownership 	<p>Approach: Assessment of the extent to which NIPN results have been or will be sustained, leading to sustained and integrated systems and increase in investments.</p>

5c. To what extent have countries increased investments in nutrition due to NIPN activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far has funding increased for nutrition-related programmes and have these increases (if any) been influenced by NIPN activities? • Has there been increased interest in and financing for multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition and has this interest (if any) been influenced by NIPN? 	
5e. How far has NIPN considered an 'exit strategy' to enable sustainability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What consideration has NIPN given to exiting countries to enable results to be sustained at country and global level? • Specific to Bangladesh: If developed, was the exit strategy properly implemented to ensure the continuation of positive effects as intended? 	

Annex 2: NIPN Theory of Change and Adaptations

This Annex explains the programme objectives and expected results based on the original ToC, the N4D rationale for revising the ToC and how these revisions supported the overall evaluation. A key principle of theory-based evaluations is to identify the causal pathways between inputs and outputs, activities and outputs, outputs and direct outcomes and indirect outcomes and impact, helping to identify the processes that need to occur for changes to take place. This is usually represented in a visual ToC and accompanying narrative, with a Logical Framework (log frame) providing a more practical tool for implementers to manage progress through specific objectives and indicators of success.

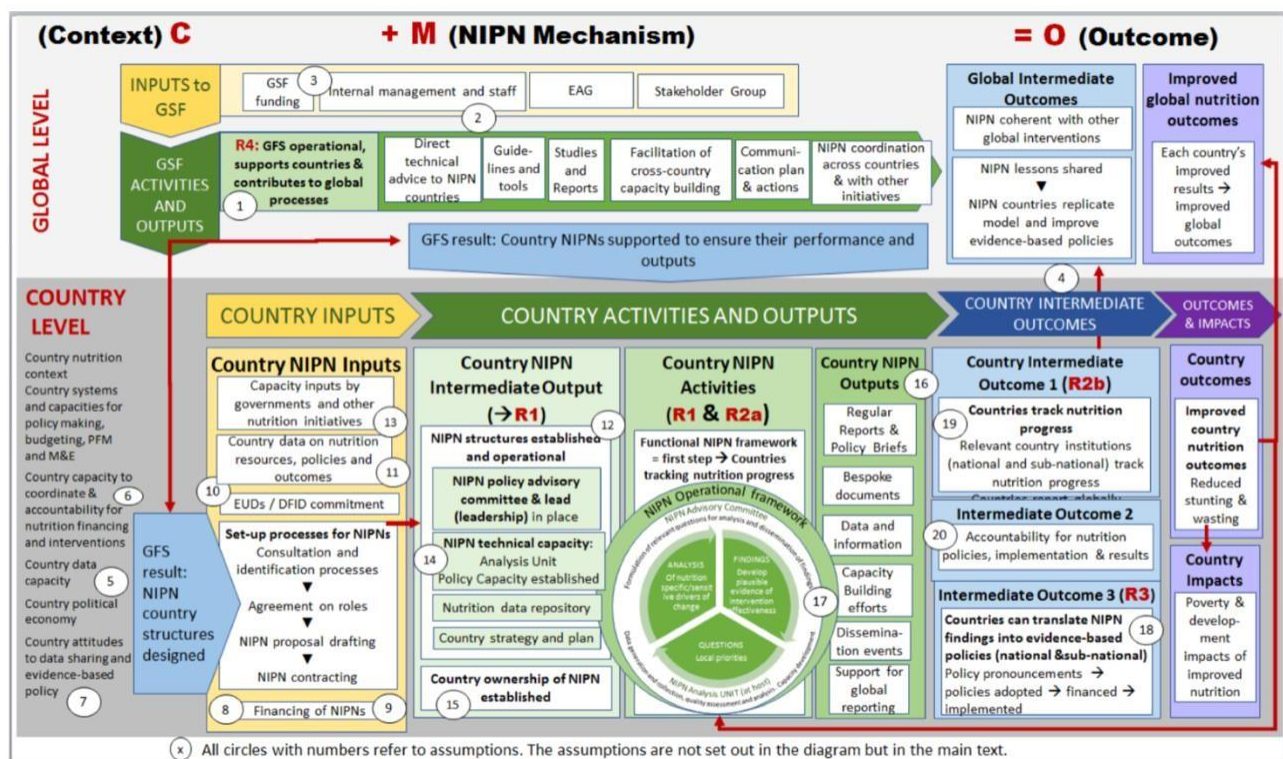
During the protocol phase of this evaluation, we reviewed and made early refinements to the existing ToC for NIPN. This process enabled us to reflect with key stakeholders on whether the existing ToC is a useful tool to guide programme implementation and whether it adequately represents the objectives both at country and global levels. We will build on this process as evidence of results and outcomes are gathered throughout the evaluation, helping us to understand what the programme is achieving and why, the degree to which key aspects of the ToC do or do not hold true, and whether this was because of: a) false beliefs about causal pathways in the programme design (known as theory failure); b) aspects of programme implementation which were difficult in practice (implementation failure); or c) the influence of contextual factors underpinning causal pathways, such as political-economic factors and power structures.

Refining the ToC has also been a critical first step in our Contribution Analysis approach, enabling us to form and evidence a 'contribution story' of how change happens and NIPN's specific contribution to this (see Section 4.5 for more on our evaluative approach). ToCs vary widely and although there is general agreement on their usefulness as models depicting how interventions should work, there is little consensus on what a ToC entails, how it should be represented or how it can be used. However, as a minimum a ToC should encompass the following:

- The context for the initiative, including social, political and environmental challenges, barriers, necessary pre-conditions and other actors that may influence change
- The long-term change the initiative seeks to support, and who will benefit from it
- The causal pathways that connect inputs to outputs and outputs to outcomes, thus creating the required conditions for desired long-term change
- Assumptions describing salient events or conditions necessary for a particular causal pathway to be realised. If an assumption does not hold true, then an expected effect may not occur.

NIPN's original Theory of Change

NIPN seeks to strengthen the capacity of data analysts, information systems and policymakers to improve the analysis of data to inform multisectoral policies that aim to combat malnutrition. The ToC, developed by Mokoro during the Mid-Term Review (MTR) in 2018, below aims to represent how its objectives will be achieved and what causal assumptions need to hold true for successful implementation.



The global results chain related to R4 of the NIPN design, which was previously led by the GSF and is now part of the scope under C4N-NIPN, is detailed in the top section of the diagram, while the NIPN country projects results chain – R1, R2 and R3 to which most of the global results chain is expected to contribute – is set out in the bottom half of the diagram.

The MTR team interpreted R2 as having two components that fit at different levels of the results chain. It argued that a functional NIPN (an output level result of the NIPN initiative) would represent a significant change in whether and how the country tracks nutrition progress (R2a). However, a functional NIPN would also contribute to broader progress in country institutions tracking nutrition, outside the direct activities and outputs of NIPN (R2b). The NIPN logical framework acknowledges this duality insofar as it sees strengthened capacities in the NIPN countries to monitor progress towards reduced undernutrition as an outcome of the intervention.

The position of the key assumptions of the NIPN initiative necessary for the results chain to materialise are indicated by circles on the diagram, with the assumption number displayed. The assumptions themselves have been copied in the table below.

Theory of Change Assumptions

ToC position	Assumptions
GSF → NIPN projects → global results chain assumptions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> GSF is established promptly and operates for an appropriate period. GSF can attract and retain the right capacity to support country platforms and engage at the global level. GSF is well managed and manages resources well. NIPN countries are willing for nutrition information to be shared amongst country-level stakeholders.

Country Context assumptions	<p>5. Sufficient political will to tackle malnutrition.</p> <p>6. There is sufficient leadership and coordination on nutrition issues to support agreement on NIPN arrangements / overcome inter-agency rivalries.</p>
	<p>7. The country context for policy making, budgeting and programme implementation, as well as the overall institutional structure, is conducive to evidence-based policy making, particularly in nutrition.</p>
Input and input → output assumptions	<p>8. External support is of sufficient size, duration and ability to institutionalise the NIPN.</p> <p>9. There is readiness to co-finance and eventually finance NIPN from country resources.</p> <p>10. The EU and DFID country offices sustain interest in NIPNs long enough for them to be embedded and institutionalised in country systems and budgets.</p> <p>11. Country data is available, including that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is a good cooperation and data sharing between NIPN stakeholders at country level, across sectors, including between the national and sub-national level; • there is sufficient country statistical capacity to produce or maintain the production of statistical datasets. <p>12. NIPNs are set up timeously to build and sustain momentum.</p> <p>13. There is sufficient readiness and capacity of country government institutions and other nutrition initiatives to support NIPN project implementation. Government institutions make their own staff/resources available for NIPN implementation.</p> <p>14. External policy and analysis advisors are competent and can work with counterparts building capacity.</p> <p>15. TA does not hinder ownership and engagement of country actors in NIPN.</p>
NIPN projects output and outputs → intermediate outcome assumptions	<p>16. The various NIPN outputs are appropriately disseminated and made available at the right levels for decision-making to take place.</p> <p>17. Governments are committed to support NIPN efforts towards updating nutrition related policies and dissemination of findings.</p> <p>18. Key decision makers have the capacity or are willing to develop the capacity to use NIPN-generated analysis.</p> <p>19. Countries maintain and update NIPN systems in the medium to long term.</p> <p>20. Civil society and media have capacity to engage with nutrition information and opportunities / freedom to engage political leaders, policy makers and programme implementers on programme choices and implementation.</p>

Enhancements to the existing Theory of Change

Informed by our consultations to date, including an internal ToC workshop conducted with key C4N-NIPN stakeholders, two possible ways of strengthening the country level ToC have been identified as described below. These possible amendments will be tested during this study and other amendments are likely to be identified, including how NIPN global support capacity contributes to country level activities, outputs and outcomes.

Use the terminology "direct" and "indirect" outcomes and more clearly distinguish between them to identify what NIPN is directly accountable for.

Direct outcomes are effects that are largely achievable by NIPN through its own activities and outputs. Indirect outcomes are ones that NIPN contributes to but cannot achieve on its own – rather, they require other stakeholders to be playing their roles. Clarifying direct outcomes will help NIPN to manage external expectations of what it can achieve on its own and where it needs to work in partnership with others in order to contribute to collective (indirect) outcomes. It will also help NIPN to measure its success, as well as prioritise and focus its activities and outputs on those that are most critical for achieving outcomes. Following the ToC workshop and a review of previous assessments of NIPN, the following emerged as possible, specific, measurable and achievable direct outcomes of NIPNs activities and outputs:

- A functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems
- Political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability for nutrition
- Strengthened institutional capacity to collect, analyse and communicate nutrition data and evidence
- Effective partnerships with other stakeholders to ensure that data and evidence are used to inform policies, investments and accountability for nutrition

The country intermediate outcomes and impacts in the current ToC could then be considered as indirect outcomes and impacts – we have provided edits to the wording of these under indirect outcomes in the revised ToC below. NIPN can contribute to create an enabling environment for evidence-based policies, tracking nutrition progress, strengthening accountability of nutrition policies and can help to increase political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence but cannot directly achieve these outcomes. The following are what we see as the indirect outcomes NIPN contributes to by creating an enabling environment through its direct outcomes:

- Countries track nutrition progress
- Nutrition data and analysis is used to inform multisectoral nutrition policymaking, implementation and accountability
- Evidence-based multisectoral policies are developed, financed and implemented
- Accountability for nutrition policies, implementation and results is strengthened

Clarify causal pathways, i.e., how activities will lead to outputs and how outputs will lead to direct outcomes.

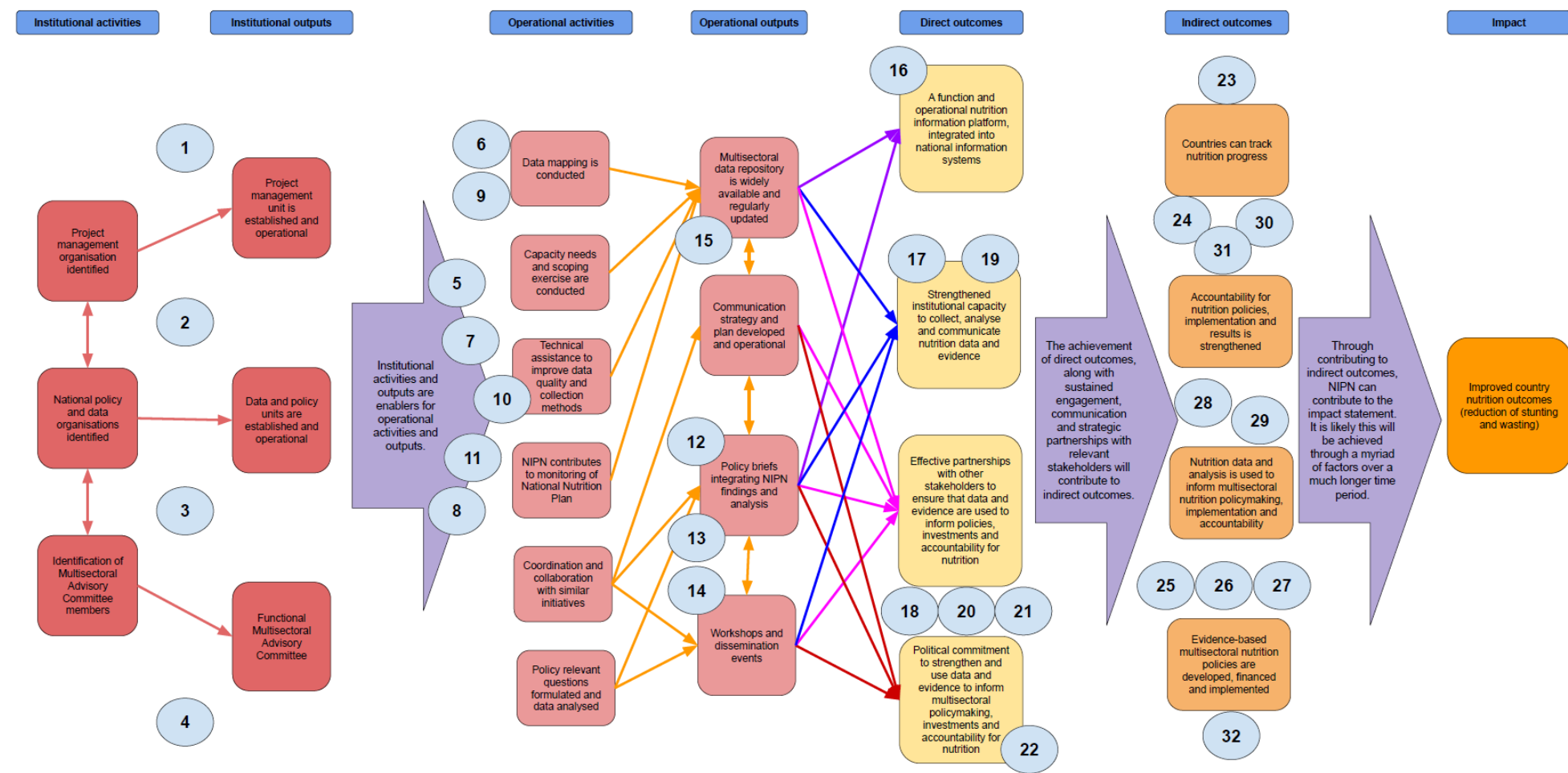
The ToC should reflect intended causal pathways rather than NIPN's operational cycle in order to clarify causal pathways. The current ToC needs to describe what is needed for change to take place between each step. Furthermore, the ToC could be strengthened through further differentiation between:

- Institutional activities: activities that aim to build the institutional arrangements of the platform at national level
- Operational activities: activities that are part of the implementation of the platform
- Institutional outputs: the product/service created by institutional activities (for example policy advisory committees and steering committees)
- Operational outputs: the product/service created by operational activities (for example reports and policy briefs; nutrition data repository)

The diagram below presents a revised ToC relevant to the global logical model of NIPN which we believe is adequate.

Revised Theory of Change

Figure 3: Revised NIPN Theory of Change



The table below provides further detail regarding potential causal assumptions between each level of the revised ToC. Each number in the table corresponds to the numbers in the ToC.

Causal assumptions of revised ToC

ToC position	Assumptions
Institutional activities → institutional outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Countries have the willingness and pre-existing organizations/mechanisms to host a NIPN. 2. Donor support is leveraged to enable formation of institutional mechanisms/outputs. 3. Countries receive relevant and timely support from C4N-NIPN. 4. C4N-NIPN has ultimate authority and sign-off to enable institutional outputs/mechanisms to be formed.
Institutional outputs → operational activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. NIPNs are set up timeously to build and sustain momentum. 6. There is sufficient country statistical capacity to be included in NIPN units. 7. There is sufficient readiness and capacity of country government institutions and other nutrition initiatives to support NIPN project implementation. Government institutions make their own staff/resources available for NIPN implementation. 8. Leadership for the NIPN is identified within national structures and oversees the operational cycle. 9. Country data is available, and there is a good cooperation and data sharing between NIPN stakeholders at country level, across sectors, including between the national and sub-national level. 10. External policy and analysis advisors are competent and can work with counterparts building capacity. 11. TA does not hinder ownership and engagement of country actors in NIPN.
Operational activities →	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Leadership is provided to guide development of outputs.
Operational outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. NIPN actors have the capacity to generate outputs and are supported by C4N-NIPN where needed. 14. Partners and other stakeholders are willing to collaborate and engage with NIPN to generate joint analysis, reports and other outputs. 15. NIPN platform is able to monitor the progress of the National Nutrition Plan with pre-existing datasets.
Operational outputs → direct outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. The NIPN operational cycle has been completed and the platform is fully operational with leadership embedded within national structures. 17. NIPN outputs are relevant to the needs of stakeholders and have been communicated in a timely manner. 18. Stakeholders have an appetite to receive and use relevant analysis, data and evidence. 19. Stakeholders have resources to engage in capacity building activities. 20. NIPN actors build the capacity to engage with and facilitate other stakeholders and initiatives. 21. Stakeholders and initiatives have the appetite to collaborate and engage with NIPN actors. 22. Governments have the appetite to improve approaches to nutrition data and evidence and strengthen commitment to data-driven policymaking.

<p>Direct outcomes → indirect outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23. NIPN actors develop capacity and stay within NIPN structures to track nutrition progress. 24. Data repository is continuously updated to enable tracking of nutrition progress. 25. NIPN analysis, data and evidence has been clearly communicated in a timely manner at the right levels for decision-making to take place. 26. NIPN analysis, data and evidence is relevant and up to date to be used for policymaking. 27. NIPN has coordinated with other initiatives and has strong partnerships to catalyse political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence for policymaking. 28. Governments are committed to support NIPN efforts towards updating nutrition related policies and dissemination of findings. 29. Key decision makers have the capacity or are willing to develop the capacity to use NIPN-generated analysis. 30. Countries maintain and update NIPN systems in the medium to long term. 31. Civil society and media have capacity to engage with nutrition information and opportunities / freedom to engage political leaders, policy makers and programme implementers to strengthen accountability. 32. Governments have the financial resources for nutrition policies to be developed and implemented.
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Annex 3: Details of NIPN countries Phase 1 Set-Up

Country	Duration of project set-up	Details
Niger	March 2016 (1st scoping mission) – October 2017 (19 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIPN policy component is hosted by the Secretariat of the presidential initiative "Les Nigériens nourrissent les Nigériens" (I3N). NIPN data component is hosted by the Institut National de la Statistique (INS). Technical assistance is provided by SOFRECO. It is supported by the European Union Delegation (EUD) and managed by INS. In Phase 1, 5 research studies were conducted resulting in 5 publications.
Ethiopia	December 2015 (mission) – December 2017 (24 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIPN policy and data components are hosted by Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI). Technical assistance is provided by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). It is supported by the EUD and managed by EPHI. In Phase 1, 8 research studies were completed and 12 policy briefs were published, totalling 20 outputs.
Burkina Faso	April 2017 (GSF initial mission) – December 2017 (8 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIPN policy component is hosted by the Nutrition Directorate of the Ministry of Health. NIPN data component is hosted by the National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD). Technical assistance is provided by Agence Européenne pour le Développement et la Santé (AEDES) and ECORYS. It is supported by the EUD and managed by INSD. In Phase 1, 7 research studies were completing resulting in 7 publications.
Guatemala	April 2017 (GSF consultant hired) – August 2017 (4 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIPN policy component is hosted by the Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security (SESAN). NIPN data component is being implemented jointly with the SESAN of the Presidency of the Republic of Guatemala. Technical assistance is provided by Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE). It is supported by the EUD and managed by CATIE. In Phase 1, 6 research studies were completed resulting in 6 publications.

Côte d'Ivoire	January 2017 (GSF initial mission) – December 2017 (11 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy and data components are hosted by the Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food and Early Childhood Development (SE- CONNAPE). • UNICEF provides technical and programme assistance with the support from the EUD. • In Phase 1, 4 research studies were completed resulting in 4 publications.
Kenya	February 2016 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (22 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA). • NIPN data component is hosted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). • UNICEF provides technical assistance. • It is supported by the EUD and managed by KNBS. • In Phase 1, 9 research studies were completed and 6 policy briefs were published, totalling 15 outputs.
Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR)	March 2016 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (21 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by the National Institute for Economic Research (NIER) • NIPN data component is hosted by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Centre for Development Policy Research. • UNICEF provides technical and programme assistance, with support from the EUD. • In Phase 1, 6 research studies were completed and 7 policy briefs were published, totalling 13 outputs.
Uganda	April 2016 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (18 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). • NIPN data component is hosted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS). • UNICEF provides technical assistance. • OPM and the EUD provide management support. • In Phase 1, 2 policy briefs were published.
Bangladesh	November 2015 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (25 months) The NIPN was closed in February 2022.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component was initially hosted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies. • The NIPN data component was initially hosted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. • Technical assistance was provided by Helen Keller International. • In Phase 1, 9 research studies were completed resulting in 9 publications. 5 newsletters were also prepared.

Zambia	March 2017 (1st GSF mission) No NIPN established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) in Zambia identified as host organization. • The NIPN platform in Zambia was not started due to lack of consensus between EUD and NIPN host institution. • GSF put engagement with Zambia on hold in April 2019 in agreement with DEVCO C1. Engagement has now restarted to scope out the possibility of establishing a NIPN in Zambia. • C4N-NIPN have re-engaged scoping activities to develop a NIPN in Zambia in 2023.
Mali	September 2018 (1st GSF mission) No NIPN established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scoping mission was undertaken to Mali upon request of the EUD. It was concluded a full NIPN in Mali would not be possible. • Considerations of a streamlined NIPN in Mali have been ongoing but political context has become a barrier.

Annex 4: NIPN Mid-Term Review Findings (2018)

This annex summarises the findings from the 2018 MTR conducted by Mokoro. While all the findings were not categorised by the following criteria, we present the findings in the below format for ease of linkages with the scope of this evaluation.

Relevance:

- There was widespread consensus at national and global levels that NIPN is relevant and important and has the potential to add value.
- The added value of NIPN is in compiling existing information from multiple sectors on a national information platform that is embedded within and builds upon existing national structures developing methods for analysis and reporting; providing evidence for policy and programming decisions; and supporting and strengthening cooperation among existing initiatives.
- NIPN responds to needs at the country-level and there are examples of specific country NIPNs being responsive to country contexts.

National statistic agencies are not necessarily the appropriate body for data analysis in all country contexts.

Effectiveness:

- Progress at the time of the MTR was largely limited to completion of set-up and progress on establishment of operational structures which took far longer than anticipated or planned. By July 2018, most countries had made progress in establishing operational NIPN structures, but only two countries were implementing activities.
- The degree of country ownership varied across countries and within countries. Evidence of ownership was stronger where the strategic lead of the NIPN was the institution mandated to coordinate on nutrition within the country.
- The achievement of NIPN's outcome objective of 'Countries are able to translate NIPN findings into nutrition related policies' is likely to be very difficult to achieve.
- NIPNs' contribution to more efficient nutrition information systems was possible but was going to be dependent on addressing data quality and access, and complementarity challenges.
- Political and policy advice are important to help break down institutional and political economy barriers to effective NIPN processes.
- Technical assistance at the national level is important to support collaboration and capacity building efforts.
- Context is a critical influencing factor for the set-up and implementation of a NIPN at national level. The complex institutional landscape, inter-sectoral relationships, capacity and resource challenges and the political environment were all factors identified that could impact implementation.
- The institutional arrangements and functional coordination structures are critical for the success of NIPNs. The need for NIPN platforms at country level to be owned by country institutions was identified as crucially important.
- The GSF was not set-up with sufficient authority to impact set-up processes at national level.
- The GSF could not be held accountable for delays in contracting, as it was outside of its control, but stakeholders felt the GSF could have provided better support to the countries to progress timelines.

- Views were more negative on the GSF's individual country support since contract signature, with the exception of the global technical gathering, which was welcomed as a helpful exercise.
- Promotion of NIPN and ensuring its coherence with other global initiatives was not effectively undertaken.
- Many planned GSF outputs were only partially delivered, or not delivered at all.

Efficiency:

- Complex set-ups relating to the composition of the data and policy components may have created inefficiencies, particularly as NIPN coordination burden increased with such set-ups, which required strong leadership to function.
- Where NIPN platforms were attached to a high office at national level, institutional conflicts could be managed more efficiently.
- A joint project steering committee and dedicated project financial and management capacity assist transparency and effective management of the NIPN.
- The GSF was seen as too small and had insufficient capacity to provide the right support to countries during set-up phase.
- Additional support should have been provided by DEVCO C1 and Agrinatura to manage capacity and leadership issues within the GSF.
- Risk management of the GSF and achievement of GSF's objectives was weak.

Sustainability:

- NIPNs are likely to prove more sustainable where they build on existing systems and institutional arrangements, but the MTR was conducted too early to determine this clearly.
- Countries with high-level (political) support are more likely to sustain NIPNs.
- The data management component of NIPNs' work is more easily sustainable than the analytical component that leads into evidence-based policy.

Coherence:

- Country-level platforms were broadly coherent with the concept of the global initiative.
- NIPNs were generally coherent with national policy in the nutrition sector, but coherence with other initiatives was more problematic.
- Coherence with other international initiatives, such as SUN's monitoring and evaluation efforts, showed promise.
- The GSF's vision of NIPN was not fully coherent internally, or with experts within the EAG.
- Programme documentation did not support internal clarity or coherence relating to the design of NIPN, the priorities at country level or support implementation.