



ABOUT NIPN

National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) is an initiative of the European Commission supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and UNICEF. The initiative aims to strengthen national capacity to manage and analyse information and data from all sectors that have an influence on nutrition and to disseminate and use information so as to better inform the strategic decisions countries are faced with to prevent undernutrition and its consequences.

DISCLAIMER

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AUTHORS

Julien Chalimbaud

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Quick Note: How NIPN platforms are dealing with the challenge of sustainability?

Examples based on literature review of Evaluations, Sustainability Studies & plans-

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1. Introduction & Objectives

As NIPN is entering phase II, the sustainability of the platforms is becoming an important focus and priority. Some platforms have already conducted or are conducting a sustainability study. Other platforms have elaborated or are elaborating a sustainability plan. There is no easy solution for sustaining the platforms beyond phase II and each platform has to figure out a specific roadmap. In this complex process, experiences from other platforms can be useful.

One of the role of C4N is to facilitate exchanges of experiences and lessons learnt across the platforms. On the topic of sustainability, C4N found that quite a lot of resources were developed by the platforms. External and internal evaluation or mid-term reviews have almost systematically a sustainability section (as it is one of the DAC criteria for evaluation). A sustainability study has been published by the platform in Niger and the platform in Ethiopia elaborated a sustainability plan. C4N therefore decided to review those resources to:

- Identify country examples on activities to foster sustainability
- Compile and Review recommendations from evaluation on the sustainability topic
- Highlight some lessons learnt
- Feed the sustainability guidance note that is being prepared by C4N.

2. Methodology

This note is not meant to be exhaustive or providing guidance for sustaining NIPN platforms. It is rather a quick compilation and an arbitrary selection of country examples / strategies / methodologies that could inspire other platforms.

This note is based on a literature review of all the project evaluations (internal or external); stocktaking exercise, sustainability studies & plans that have been collected in may 2022 from all the platforms. In total, 10 documents have been reviewed.

[Table 1:](#) List of documents reviewed

REF	Country	Document reviewed & date of publication	Type of document	Specific content regarding Sustainability
ROM-ALL	Ethiopia – Côte d'Ivoire – Uganda	ROM consolidated report Oct 2018	External evaluation	"Sustainability" as one of the DAC criteria for Evaluation
MTR-GUA	Guatemala	Mid Term Review Sept 2019	External evaluation	"Sustainability" as one of the DAC criteria for Evaluation
ROM-BAN	Bangladesh	ROM mission Jan 2020	External evaluation	"Sustainability" as one of the DAC criteria for Evaluation
ST-RCI	Côte d'Ivoire	Stocktaking report Sept 2020	C4N project review – Country report	No specific section on sustainability but some elements.
MTR-ET	Ethiopia	Mid Term Review Dec 2020	Internal team review.	No specific section on sustainability but some elements.
ST-ALL	Côte d'Ivoire, Lao PDR, Uganda	Stocktaking global report - Dec 2020	C4N project review – Overall report	One specific section on sustainability
SP-ET	Ethiopia	Sustainability plan Feb 2021	Team Plan to ensure the sustainability of NIPN	All the document is focusing on sustainability
MTR-RCI	Côte d'Ivoire	Mid Term Review Feb 2021	External evaluation	"Sustainability" as one of the DAC criteria for Evaluation
MTR-UG	Uganda	Mid Term Review July 2021	External evaluation	"Sustainability" as one of the DAC criteria for Evaluation
SS-NI	Niger	Sustainability Study report July 2021	Study on sustainability feasibility. External review	All the document is focusing on sustainability

Limitations of this note:

- It is only a literature review. No interviews have been conducted to provide a more in-depth understanding.
- Only published documents that were shared with C4N have been reviewed. To our knowledge no other document is available on this topic.
- There is no published document from Burkina Faso and Kenya as no evaluation was planned in their project. Some interesting experiences from these countries may not be captured here.
- Each country context is different and recommendations / analysis do not apply to all. Also, the reviews were done at different stages of the platform. Some reviews were done very early on, others very recently.

3. Synthesis MTRs

As emphasized by (ROM-BAN), “Sustainability is an integral part of NIPN and a clear priority. NIPN is a process with the objective to achieve sustainability”. (ROM-BAN) distinguishes institutional, technical and financial sustainability.

3.1. Technical Sustainability:

Technical sustainability refers to the technical ability to run a data analysis unit and to sustain multi-stakeholder processes in the long run (ROM-BAN). NIPN processes are often new and require to develop or strengthen skills within the host organisations.

To reach this technical sustainability, most of the documents reviewed emphasize [the importance of the Capacity Development \(CD\) component of NIPN to achieve sustainability](#). Typical challenges faced to build capacities are mentioned in the documents reviewed (vast needs, turn-over and time availability of targeted audience). More documentation on this topic is available in the CD mapping report ([ref](#)).

When looking at technical sustainability, the platforms looked at CD strategy in the long-run so [not only trying to achieve NIPN project objectives but trying to increase the chances of reaching technical sustainability](#):

- (SP-ET) emphasises the need to look at long-term capacity building to ensure technical sustainability:

(SP-ET): “Long-term capacity for the NIPN is built in several ways: funding Ethiopian PhD students; building in-house capacity within EPHI, but also the analytical and interpretation capacities of key sectoral ministries and research institutions. NIPN also engages researchers and works with sectoral ministries and universities to respond to nutrition policy research questions”

- Some platforms are anticipating the need for more sophisticated skills:

(SS-NI): “it is clear that the complexity of the nutrition questions to the platform of Niger will call for more sophisticated analysis tools and involve extensive cross-analysis of data”.

(MTR-ET): “There is still limited capacity for performing complex statistical analysis”.

- (SS-NI) also recalls the importance of Technical Assistance (TA) in phase I and the difficulty to evaluate the needs for TA in the long run:

(SS-NI): “Technical assistance played a real ‘Swiss Army knife’ role, and this makes it difficult to identify the corresponding outputs and services and determine the nature of the internalisation process”.

- Having a long-term vision may also call for a review of the targeted audience of the CD activities:

(SS-NI) recommends to continue skills development but with a new focus on the sub-national level. (ROM BAN) identified a mismatch of the targeted audience of CD activities and the organisations who are most in need of CD.

3.2. Institutional sustainability:

Institutional sustainability refers to the capacity and willingness of the institutions involved to continue to maintain a NIPN platform (ROM-BAN).

- 2 reviews identified that a high level political commitment for nutrition can be both conducive and a risk for Institutional sustainability:

All the documents reviewed note that it is easier to achieve institutional sustainability when the national institutional set-up facilitates multi-sectoral collaboration and when nutrition is identified as a national priority. Nevertheless, (MTR-GUA) note “the change of government administrative authorities is an evident risk for the sustainability of the NIPN services” and (ST-RCI) confirm that “Two informants suggested that the current political situation in RCI could pose a certain risk to PNMIN”.

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 particular with other donors, development partners, SUN networks, from the point of view of institutionalisation and longer-term sustainability of the initiative.”

- How to switch from a “project management mode” to a “full integration in the institutions”:

- By embedding NIPN in the governance of the institution:

(SP-ET) recall that “the NIPN’s integration within the nutrition governance structures strongly contributes to the sustainability of the program”.

(SS-NI) note that “when there is external financial support, there is necessarily a project steering committee”. But, this steering committee should have a [light oversight role](#) “when existing institutional committees exist and are functional”.

- By taking into account the culture of the institution:

(SS-NI) identifies two aspects related to the culture of the host institution that can potentially be difficult to align with the NIPN objectives:

- 1) While the NIPN host institution is an [“hierarchical organization”](#), NIPN aims to promote multi-sectoral collaboration. The classic management solution is to create a specific “Task force” or “Project Unit” which is a good temporary solution, but not good-enough to ensure sustainability. Some past experiences transformed these task forces into new divisions within the host institution, and, to be sustained, these new divisions should not depend on external funding.
- 2) (SS-NI) also notes that the classic mandate of a statistical office is to produce and communicate neutral official information. But its [official mandate “does not include an advisory role on any policy”](#). The NIPN, as an initiative, features both aspects. (SS-NI) recommends that “in the future, the two components will need to be separated properly”.

- By following the procedures of the institution:

As noted by (ST-ALL): “In addition to ensuring the long-term financial viability of the initiative, the adoption of NIPN and/or its functions by national institutions into the normal ways of working of existing government structures is equally important”.

(MTR-UG) specify that the “NIPN staff were recruited following the government’s procedures and salary scales making it possible to absorb some staff at the end of the project if fiscal space allows”.

Looking at financial integration, (SS-NI) also points out that “from the next budget year, the National Statistical Institute is prepared to earmark a new financial allocation for the monitoring of nutrition as a priority action.” This is a progress for sustainability as opposed to mark NIPN as a project budget line.

(ST-ALL) notes “that when contracting national institutions via UNICEF and GIZ rather than directly through EU delegations, it may result in the national institutions losing the current ability to implement and manage resources directly, thus being less empowered to meet national priorities and work towards sustainability”.

- By officially linking NIPN platforms with national priorities and policies:

(ST-ALL) recalls that “grounding NIPNs as central to the national multi-sectoral nutrition plans was widely considered a central factor to their continued relevance and sustainability”.

Several examples are documented:

(MTR-ET) notes that “the finalization of the National Food and Nutrition Strategy will ensure the NIPN sustainability plan is embedded within the national priorities.”

Both (ST-RCI) and (SP-ET) stress out that it is critical to have a strong monitoring and evaluation component of the new National Nutrition Plans for the sustainability of NIPN.

(SS-NI) has also clearly identified key important policy opportunities:

- formulation of the next PNSN Action Plan, which must ensure that the role of the nutrition information system is better planned and that the HC3N’s Nutrition Unit has officers capable of taking over from TA; [SEP]
- revision of the SNDS, which presents an opportunity to include nutrition information as a priority action; [SEP]
- reform process under way to restructure the INS’s organisational chart

- Increasing the efficiency of NIPN operational cycle is key:

NIPN is an innovative approach, promoting new ways of working between institutions which imply new processes, a large number of stakeholders and institutions involved. This can “affect the efficiency of these arrangements” (ST-ALL).

(MTR-UG) warns that “NIPN Project achievements were considered most likely to be sustained, provided that the development processes are quickened.”

To that end, (SP-ET) recommends to “strengthen existing systems, to document approaches and strategies to serve as reference and guidance documents for use by NIPN members,

researchers and key NIPN stakeholders” so that the NIPN activities can be more easily absorbed by the institution.

3.3. Financial Sustainability:

Financial sustainability refers to the “ability to continue the funding of NIPN activities” (ROM-BAN).

“Financial sustainability can be a result of institutional and technical sustainability. Without adequate (quantitatively and qualitatively) technical capacities, hosts organizations will not be in a position to maintain their institutional commitment and to allocate budget and human resources to run NIPN in the long term”. (ROM-BAN)

- **Clearly evaluate the costs of the future sustained platform**

A first step is to evaluate the real costs of a “sustained platform. As noted by (ST-ALL) a sustained platform can be different compared to the platform of phase I and phase II and focus on key elements of the platform that have a strong added value.

(SS-NI) calculated that, for example, “the added-value created in phase I by the NIPN to data collection processes and taking into account the costs of the SMART12 survey alone (EUR 350,000 +/- per financial year), the additional cost is 35% of the amount invested in data collection: for every EUR 10,000 invested in data collection, EUR 3,500 of information development must be added to the current cost” to conduct secondary data analysis and link it with national policy processes.

- **Diversify external sources of funding**

As noted by (MTR-RCI), “80% of the costs of the project is relying on an external unique donor”. (MTR-UG) also recommends to “move away from a single donor funding by diversifying the funding base to ensure longer-term viability”.

To do so, (SP-ET) has set up an [action plan with key milestones and dedicated resources](#).

The plan recommends to:

- “Sustain the strong and professional relations between the NIPN and the EU Delegation”
- “Showcase NIPN’s achievements, results, success stories and the valuable returns on the donor’s investment in this platform”
- “Create a fundraising committee, develop a fundraising plan, conduct a donor landscape analysis, high level advocacy”
- “Train NIPN and EPHI staff in fundraising and proposal development”
- “Allocate time for proposal writing”

- Increase internal sources of funding

(ST-ALL) recalls that “a reduction in external financial support for country NIPNs is inevitable in the long term”.

(ST-RCI) noted that “a key feature favourable to the sustainability of the platform is the government payment of NIPN staff salaries”. “Financing of these positions is planned for the medium term. In the case that donor funds were no longer available, the project could be sustained for some time, albeit with a smaller team and budget”.

3.4. A roadmap to sustainability

From the review of all the studies on sustainability, it is possible to draw a roadmap to sustainability. While the final objective of the NIPN operational cycle is to produce reliable data analysis to better inform nutrition policies, it is also possible, with this roadmap, to look at the same NIPN activities but targeting a complementary objective: sustaining the platform. Having this complementary objective in mind can imply to use NIPN resources differently. (see ppt file).

3.5. How to operationalise sustainability?

- Conduct a sustainability study

(SS-NI) conducted a Sustainability Study with an overall goal to develop a sustainability plan. The specific objectives are to:

- Conduct a mid-term analysis of the NIPN’s strengths and weaknesses; [SEP]
- Propose a sustainability plan; [SEP]
- Provide support for the Steering Committee’s approval of the sustainability plan.

- Elaborate a sustainability Plan

(SP-ET) designed a sustainability plan to “describe how the NIPN will continue beyond the project end-date (December 2021) and to ensure its long-lasting impact in the nutrition sector”. The specific objectives of this plan aim to describe:

- 1) The NIPN’s interventions and specific actions which foster sustainability. [SEP]
- 2) The future plans for the sustained use of the NIPN and its services. [SEP]
- 3) The NIPN’s fundraising plan to diversify its funding portfolio. [SEP]

- **Moving to sustainability gradually**

(ST-ALL): FCDO suggested a graded 'exit strategy', which identifies benchmarks of graduation from the need for support to a point where there is national uptake and independent continuation of the approach

(ROM-BAN) also recommend to have an incremental plan: "to achieve the different components of sustainability it is important to have an incremental plan: First, Capacity Development activities, to be able to handle the NIPN operational cycle to show relevance and then looking for institutional sustainability and then financial support"

- **Identify which elements of the platform are more or less likely to be sustained**

(MTR-UG) identified which elements of the NIPN are more likely / less likely to be sustained and interviewed all stakeholders to understand their vision of a sustained platform.

- **Use external entity**

(ST-ALL): "The important role of an external entity (currently C4N-NIPN Global Support) as an 'outside force' to bring people together to work in a multi-sectoral way, promoting a sense of joint purpose and common goals was also emphasised"

- **Evaluate the necessary budget to sustain a platform**

First, a methodology must be identified.

(SS-NI) identified all costs related to individual outputs: "to simplify the production cost analysis, four items are considered for operating expenses:

- The human resources.
- The acquisition of goods and services for intermediate consumption, including the cost of workshops and meetings, reproduction costs and dissemination costs.
- Fixed costs, that is administration and management costs, which are set at 15%.
- Contribution to the amortisation of equipment.

The average cost calculated is EUR 28,000 per analysis document produced and disseminated."6

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