

All hands on deck:

a global collaboration to end malnutrition



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Around the world, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has spent the last decade working to invest in nutrition, with the aim of breaking the cycle of malnutrition across generations and leaving no one behind. To this end, SUN networks are partnering with other organisations in many countries – such as Nigeria, where the SUN Business Network (SBN) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) collaborated to provide nutrition training, encourage private sector commitments to nutrition goals, and improve access to finance for small businesses in the food system.

The SUN Movement launched in 2010 as a result of growing global recognition that malnutrition is an underlying development challenge that requires a multistakeholder approach to eliminate. The global Secretariat works collaboratively with SUN countries to engage civil society, donors, implementers, United Nations (UN) agencies, academic institutions, and the private sector to improve national efforts to reduce malnutrition. Due to the complex nature of malnutrition, addressing it requires a multi-stakeholder approach across the food system. Private sector companies especially play a critical role in scaling up successful nutrition interventions, as they can help ensure

“The partnership with UNICEF was a step towards inter-network collaboration and alignment against a common objective. It meant more and more partners were accepting the important role of the private sector in addressing malnutrition.”

Ibiso Ivy King-Harry,
SBN Nigeria Coordinator

the provision of high quality, effective, and affordable products and service using a market-based approach.

As such, the Nigerian SBN was launched on 21 April 2016 with a mandate to amplify and strengthen the private sector’s contribution towards improving nutrition within the country. Since then, it has grown to represent over 230 members from the private sector which have the capacity for direct and indirect impact on improving nutrition.

SBN is one of the SUN Movement’s four global networks, which also include the Donor, Civil Society, and UN networks. Just as SBN brings together private businesses, the UN network brings together all UN agencies working in nutrition to support SUN countries. Through the UN network, SBN Nigeria established a partnership with UNICEF to strengthen public-private engagement to address malnutrition in Nigeria. Their collaboration ran from May 2019 until December 2020, and saw major private and public sector groups brought together to develop and drive a common vision for nutrition in two Nigerian states – Kano and Lagos.

Private sector potential

The partnership was driven by Oluwaseun Okediran, UNICEF’s Nutrition Manager, and SBN Nigeria Coordinator, Ibiso Ivy King-Harry, who noted that having a shared vision, clear objectives, and a willingness to collaborate, were key factors behind the success of the partnership.

Kano and Lagos were selected based on their robust private sector base and the willingness and readiness of the Chambers of Commerce in those states to collaborate on the project. Through the partnership, public-private sector engagement and technical support to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was achieved.

As a result of the UNICEF partnership, a Food Safety and Nutrition Curriculum containing key information on food safety and nutrition was developed. This was shared with 171 businesses (comprising 217 individuals) via nutrition trainings, which served to increase knowledge and awareness of nutrition and demystify the role of business in addressing malnutrition. It also supported businesses in effectively linking their activities with nutrition outcomes, promoted private sector contributions to the reduction of non-communicable diseases, and addressed food system issues around post-harvest loss prevention, market access, and research priorities.

Resources from SBN Nigeria's partnership with UNICEF were also used to build the capacity of businesses, so their leaders could serve as Private Sector Ambassadors. These ambassadors have joined SBN and each made a signed commitment to improve nutrition in Nigeria, by moving their enterprises towards enhanced nutrition as part of their business practices. Twenty-six of these businesses have made commitments to their workforces and/or customer bases – such as nutrition education and reducing salt, sugar, and trans-fats in the processed foods produced.

And, in collaboration with the states' respective Chambers of Commerce and Industry, partnership linkages were also established to ensure access to finance and technical support to business owners.

Proactively tackling challenges

Whilst the partnership undoubtedly strengthened public-private engagement in addressing malnutrition in Nigeria, the process was fraught with challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic was a major trial, bringing about



restrictions on travel, business operations, and face-to-face meetings. As a result, the Nutrition Curriculum had to be adapted for virtual delivery rather than in-person training – although this enabled more beneficiaries to attend than would have been possible in-person.

Public sector inclusion into this initiative was often a slow process owing to the bureaucratic processes of engaging relevant personnel within relevant public sector agencies. Leveraging relationships within a SUN Government network helped address this issue by providing the required linkage at sub-national level.

Strength in numbers

To build on the project's successes, the SBN team, in close collaboration with other networks, such as the Civil Society network, hopes to advance in creating an enabling environment for businesses via public-private sector dialogues, and further scale up consumer awareness to drive demand for nutritious foods. It also aims to continue collaborating with business associations, government, other SUN networks, and Chambers of Commerce, to deepen sub-

national engagement across states where partners have a presence.

The successful nutrition and food safety training conducted in Kano and Lagos has also been replicated by the SBN in other states to ensure more businesses are aware of the importance of nutrition and their roles in improving it. This will lead to the production and access to more safe, nutritious foods in Nigeria.

SBN looks forward to the collaboration developing into a multi-year-funded partnership to ensure business leaders in at least six additional states are provided with nutrition and food safety training, with an improved focus on improved nutrition for women and children.

“The partnership will serve as a model for other SUN countries, and learnings will be shared widely. It shows there is strength in numbers: joining forces with others makes your voice louder and increases your reach. Partnerships increase potential for impact: without the financial support from UNICEF, we would not have been able to have strong sub-national level engagements in both states,” notes Ibisó.



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