

The nutrition stakeholder network in India: An overview of results from a participatory mapping exercise¹

Objective

POSHAN and Transform Nutrition are two new research initiatives focused on maternal and child nutrition. In India, both involve consortiums including IFPRI, Public Health Foundation of India, Save the Children India and Institute of Development Studies. Both initiatives have a strong emphasis on generating and mobilising knowledge to inform programme and policy decisions. Therefore, a key focus of the inception phase of POSHAN and Transform Nutrition was to understand the knowledge flows in the current policy environment. A first step in this was to understand the networks of nutrition stakeholders through a network mapping exercise.

The Net-Map methodology

A method called Net-Map² was used to conduct a stakeholder network mapping in India. The Net-Map method is a participatory interview technique that combines social network analysis, stakeholder mapping, and power mapping. It is intended to help visualise and understand situations in which many different actors influence outcomes.

Three Net-Map group exercises were held in New Delhi, India from January 30 to February 1, 2012, with about 40 participants from a range of organisations. In these interviews, respondents were led through a facilitated process that aimed to map the actors who play a role in shaping maternal and child nutrition policy and programme decisions at the national level in India. Net-Map interview participants listed institutions or individuals that play a role, explained why they are important, specified how they engage in the network, and assessed the degree of influence each has in the network. These interviews focused specifically on the use of advocacy and technical information as means of engaging in or influencing policy and programme decisions in nutrition.

The resulting network and influence data from the three group exercises was combined and analysed using a social network analysis programme. The results reflect the opinions and perceptions of a broad range of key nutrition-focused individuals and should not be considered the complete definitive network of stakeholders, their links or their influence.

Results

Figure 1 depicts the complex landscape of actors involved in the national policy and programme landscape in India. Each circle on the map reflects the actors named by the interview participants, and the lines in between actors depict the links related to advocacy or provision of technical information. The size of the circle for each actor on the maps depicts their relative influence in relation to policy and programme decisions about maternal and child nutrition. The actors on the network include government actors involved in decision-making and implementation, as well as various other actors who shape and influence the

¹ Overview dated June 16, 2012. The Net-Map group interviews in India were led by Noora-Lisa Aberman from IFPRI, and were hosted jointly by IFPRI, PHFI, IDS and Save the Children India, in January 2012. This overview was prepared by Noora-Lisa Aberman and Purnima Menon at IFPRI.

² Read more about the Net-Map Toolbox <http://netmap.wordpress.com/about/>

discourse related to nutrition in India. The network includes a total of 56 actors and is highly centralised, i.e., that a few actors have many links while most actors have few. The network is centralised around two ministries, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), who make up the *core* of the network. The Planning Commission is also a fairly central actor in this network, and is reached out to by many of the actors in the network.

As the core of the network, the two ministries, MoHFW and MWCD, are currently targeted with technical information and advocacy by a large number of actors. This indicates that they, along with the Planning Commission, which is also highly targeted, are seen as opinion leaders and key decision makers in this network. These three opinion leaders are also considered highly influential. However some actors that are currently not highly connected or central in the network are also highly influential, such as the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister's Office, the National Advisory Council and the Legislature, indicating that some of the important decision-makers or influencers may not be easily accessed by stakeholders.

Some of the barriers to improving maternal and child nutrition raised by interview participants included a need for increased public awareness and the lack of a unified set of messages for how to improve maternal and child nutrition. Undernutrition was described as an “invisible” challenge that the public and policymakers must be made more aware of. Furthermore, since maternal and child nutrition encompasses highly personal and cultural behaviours, opinions about how best to improve it are varied and strong. Given the many voices targeting the national-level decision-makers on this issue, as we see in Figure 1, unified messages are essential. As such, actors focused on delivering consensus-driven information such as the Coalition for Sustainable Nutrition Security in India (referred to as the “Nutrition Coalition”) and broad-based movements such as the Right to Food Campaign could be critical to positively shaping nutrition policy.

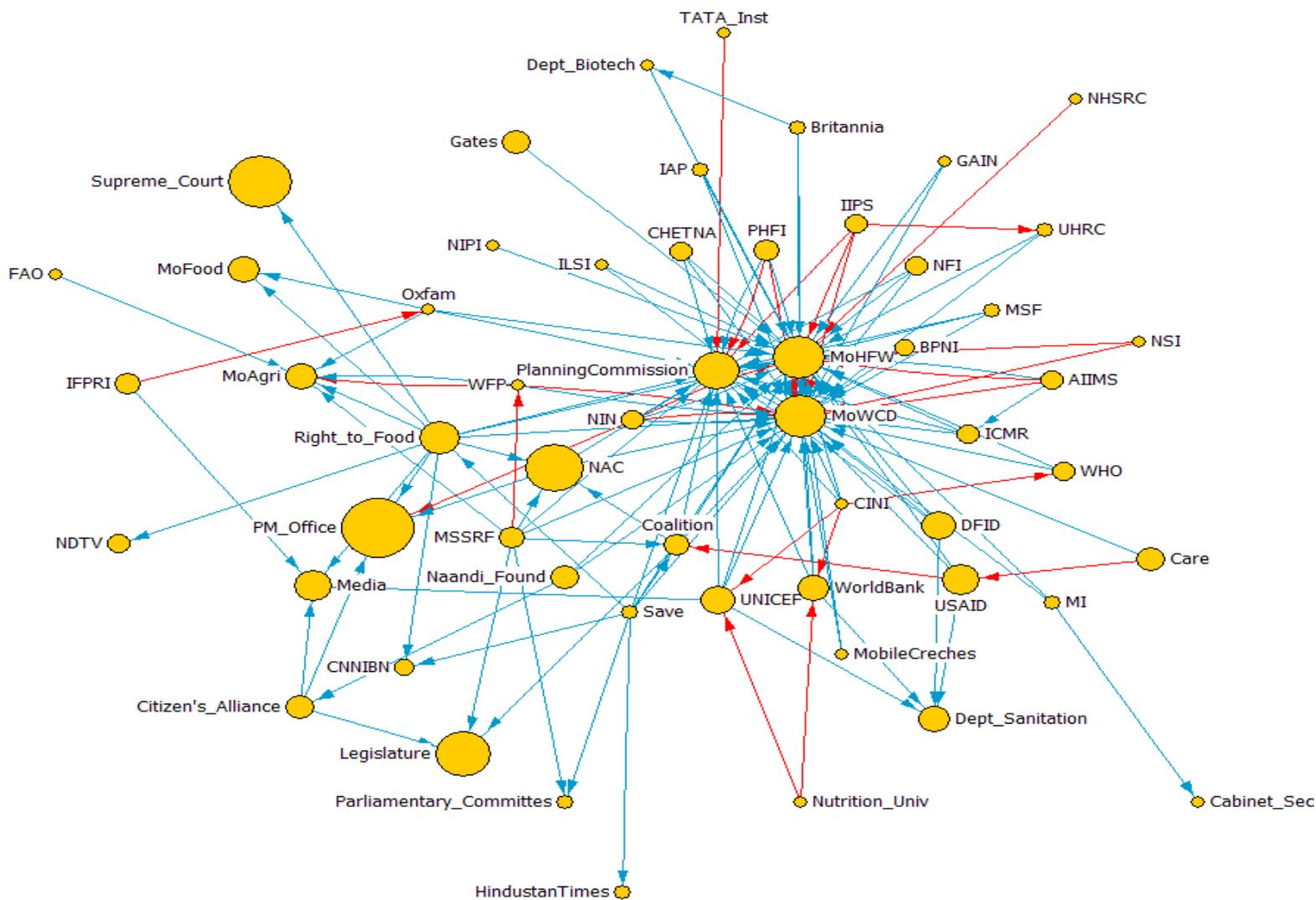
The Role of Research and Evidence in the Policy Dialogue

POSHAN has a particular interest in the role of evidence in the nutrition policy dialogue. The Net-Map group interviews revealed some key insights related to evidence producers and evidence consumers and users. In general ministries were considered to be consumers of technical evidence-based information, and not producers. It was noted that this technical evidence played some role in influencing policy decisions, although interviewees were not clear on how much of a role. In nutrition, National Institute of Nutrition was seen as a key evidence-producing research body. Indian Council of Medical Research is also seen as a trustworthy source of data for the government and others. In addition, universities with nutrition departments are noted as major producers of research—funded by a variety of external sources—the results of which are brought to policy planners. Among non-governmental organisations a few organisations were noted as key producers of evidence and technical information. International Institute for Population Sciences was described as an organisation that generates data and then provides technical information to the nodal nutrition ministries. Micronutrient Initiative was noted as aggregating global evidence on micronutrients and then disseminated it within India. The Nutrition Coalition was seen as a strong source of not only evidence but evidence-based consensus documents reflecting the views of its members and explicitly focused on maternal and child nutrition. Child In Need Institute was seen as an organisation that generated data directly from the field and then

disseminates this to the nodal ministries and the Planning Commission. IFPRI and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation were also seen as strong research organisations, although not explicitly in maternal and child nutrition.

Some interviewees felt that there was a substantial disconnect between research generating organisations and policy makers, particularly related to nutrition. They also noted that there was currently no public demand for improving nutrition and little awareness of the challenges among legislators. Some felt that a concerted awareness-raising campaign was necessary, while others saw a need for the evidence-producing organisations to focus more explicitly on advocacy to ensure that evidence was considered more deeply in decision-making.

Figure 1: A view of the national nutrition stakeholder network in India



Note: Size of circle denotes perceived influence of the stakeholders on the map in relation to influencing policy and programmes decisions related to maternal and child nutrition. Arrows depict the links between actors.