

Stories of Change in Nutrition

A RESEARCH SUMMARY JULY 2016

Country Brief



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Senegal

Background

Senegal has made impressive improvements in nutrition in recent years and is often seen as a success story for stunting reduction, though there are a number of important challenges remaining. The hope is that by identifying the factors which contributed to this positive change, the nutrition community can learn from the successes and challenges of Senegal's story of change in nutrition.

This brief summarises the findings from a research study – **Stories of Change in Nutrition in Senegal** – the aim of this study is to develop a story which helps to explain the interrelated factors that contributed to Senegal's reduction in undernutrition. The hope is that these findings will help to contribute to wider impacts in terms of political commitment and policy coherence for nutrition.

Key findings

Drivers for reduction in stunting

Based on quantitative data, the findings show that wealth accumulation is the dominant factor in driving reductions in stunting, followed by healthcare and parental education. These factors may have had this particular effect on stunting reduction because they happened concurrently with large improvements in the enabling environment for nutrition in Senegal.

Getting multi-sectoral actors “on board”

At a basic level the enabling environment for nutrition in Senegal is dependent on the degree to which important actors understand the complex issue of

nutrition, and whether they think it is important. Over the past 15 years, awareness about the importance of nutrition increased in Senegal among stakeholders from the government, international agencies, non-profits and within academia. Sectors such as agriculture, health, and education, have shown a growing awareness for the importance of nutrition and for the way in which change for nutrition is a joint effort requiring engagement at multiple levels. Nutrition as a discipline has been historically “homeless”. As an issue that belongs to everyone and no one. This multi-sectoral awareness marks the first step in paving the way for increasing commitment to nutrition through political and policy changes.

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Government commits to nutrition

Changes in nutrition in Senegal have been driven in large part by the significant increase of government engagement. Starting in the early 2000s, there were three main changes which led to new levels of political commitment: the end of the preceding national nutrition program, the establishment of a new national coordinating body for nutrition (CLM), and the launch of a new national nutrition program (PRN).

The first change leading to renewed political commitment was the end of the “*Programme de Nutrition Communautaire*” (PNC / community nutrition program) (1994-2000). Addressing nutrition and unemployment, the PNC was largely shaped by the political and economic context in which it was created. It was

launched in response to the economic crisis caused by the devaluation of the Senegalese currency (CFA) as part of structural adjustment. The government needed an effective solution to unemployment and childhood malnutrition and it needed it fast. In the interest of speed and efficacy, the government chose to execute the PNC through a private contractor. A number of stakeholders in nutrition were surprised that such a program was not being executed by the government, and some felt that a private contractor limited the long term efficacy. The PNC brought up many questions about who “owns” nutrition and to what sector it “belongs”. By 2000, drawing from the experience of the PNC the need for an institutional anchoring for nutrition became clear.

This fuelled the second major political change: the creation of the “Cellule de Lutte contre la Malnutrition” (CLM/ cellule for the fight against malnutrition) in 2001. **The CLM is a coordinating body for nutrition housed in the Prime Minister’s office, and its establishment was arguably the most significant change for nutrition in Senegal over the last fifteen years.** The CLM filled a need that was sorely lacking. Previously, there existed no group or agency which had the capacity for such an institutionalised, long term commitment to nutrition. For the first time Senegal had a legitimate platform for leadership in nutrition and a network of multi-sectoral engagement. As a coordinating body, the CLM does not belong to just one sector, but can be thought of as the glue which holds together the network of nutrition across all sectors. The way in which it branches across multiple sectors is a key strength. The CLM fosters commitment to nutrition by providing a platform on which the nutrition community can grow in size and influence, allowing leaders in nutrition to centralise and coordinate their efforts with a high level of political support.

The third major political change also occurred in 2001 in synchronicity with the CLM. A new national nutrition program was launched, the “*Programme de Renforcement de la Nutrition*” (PRN / nutrition enhancement program), with a fifteen-year agenda. The CLM provided the tools necessary for the operationalisation of the PRN and gave it a “home” within an institution, something that the PNC lacked. The PRN was structured to engage the community to a new degree, incorporating a broader network of implementers. The executing agencies of the PRN are composed of a network of already existing community agencies, NGOs, or branches of local government, thus **putting implementation into the hand of organisations which are already imbedded in local communities.**

The creation of the CLM and PRN are indicative of institutional and programmatic commitment. Supporting this there has also been a notable increase in the integration of nutrition into policy.

Nutrition worked into policies and programs

The prioritisation of nutrition at a policy level is increasingly visible in sectoral policies, namely in the health, and education sectors, and to some extent

agriculture. That said, the most notable changes have been in nutrition policy itself.

Over the last fifteen years, Senegal has had two national policies for nutrition: the Letter of nutrition policy (2001-2014) and the national nutrition development policy (2015-2025). The changes made in the new nutrition policy reflect a long multi-sectoral process of revision, driven by a collective new vision for nutrition. The main changes seen in the new nutrition policy reflect a new **focus on multi-sectoral action** with a clear definition of the role that each sector plays as well as a clearer path towards a plan of action. The new nutrition policy puts a renewed focus on the structural determinants of nutrition, recognising the way in which it spans across several sectors. This is important to establishing commitment – breaking down the issues of nutrition into understandable and addressable “sections”, shows that the government is serious about creating change, specifying just how it intends to do so.

The process of revision from the Letter to the new nutrition policy is a significant factor as it was a **participatory process which invited stakeholders from multiple sectors to contribute.** The new policy also reflects and incorporates global nutrition positioning. It follows the broad orientation defined by the international Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, the Global Nutrition Report (GNR), an influential series of Lancet publications on nutrition (2013), as well as the Plan of Action of the World Food Summit and the Declaration of Rome.

As the new nutrition policy was launched only last year, it is still rather early to draw conclusions about the future challenges for this policy. Across all other sectors however, the challenge of incorporating nutrition is rather clear. Within health, education and agriculture, while there have been definite improvements there exists a shortage of indicators, and a distinct lack of budgeting for nutrition. To be expected, there is often a conflict of interest regarding the priorities that each sector must follow, which may or may not align with nutrition priorities.

Taking a long term vision

It is clear that the CLM and PRN are indicative of new levels of commitment to nutrition in Senegal. Their importance has not only been in initiating change, but tying together achievements and establishing coherence in action.

The CLM has been the major player in establishing coherence of action at the institutional level. As the first national coordinating body, **the CLM has brought together related sectors such as health, education and agriculture, and facilitated the incorporation of nutrition into their agendas.** The CLM guides action for nutrition on a national level, defining a clear idea about where the country is headed. However, a major challenge exists in that the CLM does not have the authority to enforce collaboration: the future of this

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coherence in action rests to a certain extent upon the willingness of the sectors involved. There is potential to strengthen links between the different sectors, but many remain held back because a lack of internal initiative, mainly due to the absence of a nutrition budget. Looking ahead, the challenge of the authority of the CLM is specifically addressed by the new national nutrition development policy: it includes a key political measures involving the revision of the institutional and legal framework of the CLM, in order to reinforce its capacities and role in coordination.

Also important is the degree to which different sectors are able to coordinate and work together. The PRN has been influential in facilitating cooperation between different sectors. As the PRN was being created, it garnered the support from a notably wide range of sectors and collaborates with a significant number of ministries, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Health, Education, Commerce, and Fishing. Again, the main challenge behind sustained and meaningful coordination is the accompanying budget. There is no silver bullet solution to this question of finance: the context of each sector varies. The new national nutrition development policy (2015-2025) addresses the challenge of finance, identifying five sources for providing funds, but the funding for nutrition will not be enough and the initiative must come from individual sectors - who have their own priorities and challenges.

Communities became more aware of nutrition

In a broad sense, change at the community level has been a specific goal of the government for over the past twenty years. In 1994 the government passed a decentralisation reform, which transferred competences to local governments, giving them more power in decision making. This approach preceded the PRN, and is reflected in the way it is structured with local governments playing a leading role.

The changes in nutrition awareness seen over the past 15 years at the community level are a result of a number of factors, though most visibly they are indicative of the increase of service delivery by the PRN. A major feature of the PRN was the **introduction of a large network of volunteer health development relays**, who execute monthly screenings to detect and treat acute malnutrition in young children, refer relevant cases of acute malnutrition to a trained nurse and raise awareness among beneficiary mothers. **Knowledge and awareness among relays as well as the mothers who benefit from care, has increased.** Furthermore awareness for nutrition among community leaders has grown. The PRN target beneficiaries speak to the benefits of the health services provided, appreciating increased access to screenings, vaccinations, and care for children suffering from severe and moderate malnutrition. Additionally, changes in behaviour are seen with regards to increased awareness of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and nutritive diets for mother and child. While the presence of the PRN is undoubtedly felt, perspectives are of course mixed, with service delivery being biased by village proximity to cities or health



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centres, and the challenge of aligning certain optimal behaviours with traditional practices.

The challenge at the community level is mainly based on finance: with much of the operational tasks of the PRN being based on volunteer labour, long term sustainability is a key concern. Many relays expressed emotions from frustration to pessimism in regards to the future of PRN implementation, if it remains on volunteer labour.

Conclusion

Moving forward, there are reasons to be optimistic that sustained progress against undernutrition can be made in Senegal. What is perhaps most notable is the amount of change in the institutional landscape, essential in terms of ensuring future success. In just fifteen years, a coordinating body for nutrition was established – the CLM – and anchored under the highest political authority. The national level nutrition program – the PRN – engages local populations and appreciates results, substantially increasing the reach and quality of nutrition services delivered. Change has been fuelled foremost by strong political commitment and delivered through increasingly fluid coherence between the disparate sectors whose work touches on nutrition. With increasing awareness of the need for a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition, coordination between policy and community is developing. At the local level, frontline workers make policy into reality and have substantially increased the quality and reach of nutrition services at a national scale.

Looking ahead, challenges still remain in transferring awareness into action; the main hurdle being finance. In the case of Senegal much of the building blocks are already in place: the issue is not technical, but financial. At the policy level more financial resources are needed for sectors to incorporate and budget for nutrition in their mandates. At the community level local governments need the money to incorporate nutrition into local development plans. Frontline workers need financial motivation in order to ensure sustainable service delivery at the village level. The story of change in nutrition in Senegal is one that is ongoing however, and in light of the strides made already the country seems ready to pave new ground.

▲ A relay reviewing his image tool box before leading a group talk on nutrition with mothers.

Key factors for success and recommendations

Commitment

- Nutrition education, from sensitisation of children to academic training, will continue to play an important role in developing the next generation of nutrition leaders. Inclusion of nutrition within the curriculum of related academic disciplines would raise multisectoral awareness of nutrition.
- The nuclear nutrition community should remain engaged in developing the current momentum for nutrition, assisting related sectors in understanding why and how they could integrate nutrition.
- Engagement in international nutrition movements shall be fostered, especially among the less engaged platforms of actors, including the academic platform and the private sector.
- Political commitment to nutrition has been evidenced by increased government funding for the PRN, which should continue: long term institutionalised nutrition services will have to come from the government itself.

Coherence

- The revision of the Letter of nutrition policy (2001) into the new national nutrition development policy (2015-2025) plans for a high level of multi-sectoral engagement and participation. Though this is a challenge, this type of collaboration has the best potential to enhance coherence in action for nutrition.

- Individual sectoral policy (agriculture, education, etc.) don't have enough nutrition indicators, nor do they allot a (sufficient) budget for nutrition. Nutrition will have to be better integrated into other sectoral policies, emphasising its role not only as an outcome but also as a contributor to successfully reaching specific policy goals.

Community

- Leadership should continue to be developed at the local level, where there still exists a disconnect between national level commitment to nutrition and local implementation of nutrition and health services. The planned revision of budgetary nomenclature should empower local governments and should be accompanied by continued efforts to raise nutrition awareness among local leaders.
- It will be important to continue to work towards expanding the geographic reach of sites so that nutrition services can touch even remote populations.
- A reasonable volunteer workload could be maintained for relays without harming the reach through the development of the network of trained volunteers. Existing motivations should be protected and innovative non-financial motivations should be sought.
- During the final institutionalisation phase of the PRN, it will be important to follow up with the implementing agencies to confirm continued motivation and means. As the PRN was designed to be "handed off" to already established NGOs, local governments, or local development agencies,

Credits

This summary is taken from the forthcoming research by Haile Kampman, Seollee Park, Rahul Rawat, Elodie Becquey and Amanda Zongrone

Further reading

www.transformnutrition.org/stories_of_change

<http://nourishingmillions.ifpri.info>



Stories of Change in Nutrition are a series of structured case studies in 6 countries: Bangladesh, Nepal, Odisha (India), Ethiopia, Senegal and Zambia. These 'stories' aim to improve our understanding of what drives impact in reducing undernutrition, and how enabling environments and pro-nutrition policy and implementation processes can be cultivated and sustained.

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