



Realigning Agriculture to Improve Nutrition: RAIN Project

Intersectoral Coordination and Alignment for Nutrition

Background on the RAIN Project

Levels of child stunting (the result of chronic malnutrition) in Mumbwa District, Central Province are at 43%, which is around the national average, and highlights a pressing development challenge for Zambia. The RAIN project aims to develop a replicable model for reducing stunting in young children in Zambia by providing a combination of agricultural, nutrition, and health interventions that address the food, health and care determinants of malnutrition during the first 1000 days of life from conception to two years old. A unique component of the RAIN project is to 'coordinate and align' Zambian agriculture and health sector activities at the district and community levels in order to better address malnutrition, with the understanding that coordination across sectors will improve project impact, ensure sustainability and encourage replication. Experiences and learning from this process will be fed upwards to the national level with the intention of providing learning for improved intersectoral policy implementation.

Rationale for Coordination and Alignment (C&A)

The UNICEF nutrition framework (1990) identifies the key underlying determinants of nutritional status as (1) sufficient quantity and quality of food, (2) adequate health services and hygiene, and (3) appropriate childcare and feeding practices; satisfactory access to these three broad elements is vital for proper nutritional status and a resultant healthy and productive life. The public goods and services relating to these will necessarily be available from a range of sectors, and these need to be provided in a coordinated fashion for maximum impact. Recent international strategies for tackling stunting, such as the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, promote an intersectoral approach that combines direct, nutrition-specific interventions with broader nutrition-sensitive programming and policies from sectors such as agriculture and health.

However, with some notable exceptions, the underlying determinants of stunting are normally tackled separately by different sectors, with programs implemented by government ministries with separate resources, frameworks, and approaches. Due to the predominance of direct, nutrition-specific interventions for development, the health sector tends to 'own' nutrition, with interventions typically implemented through health programs; this is also the case in Zambia. Nutrition, however, cannot remain solely in the domain of health services. That the agriculture sector in particular should also be a vehicle for improved nutrition is intuitive: agriculture has the potential to improve nutrition through the production of diverse and nutritionally-appropriate food for consumption or income; through improved sensitivity to the role of women in the sector; through modulation of food prices and of the quality of foods available; and through generating economic growth. However, this sector often does not deliver good nutrition to the most vulnerable in the population, due to a focus on food security and mono-crop production rather than nutrition outcomes.

Coordination between the agriculture and health sectors, including the alignment of objectives and resources for maximum impact, is a potentially potent mechanism for addressing the multidimensional causes of stunting, but there have been few serious attempts to facilitate intersectoral solutions. While several countries, including Zambia, are successfully writing nutrition into the national policies of different sectors, there is as yet no consensus on how intersectoral solutions are best implemented or institutionalized. It is this information gap that the Coordination and Alignment (C&A) work in Mumbwa District hopes to fill.

Global Experience with C&A

Experience in other countries suggests three broad barriers to intersectoral collaboration for nutrition: low political commitment and mobilization; sector-bound organizational structures and weak coordinating bodies; and lack of human resources and capacity. Areas for improved intersectoral implementation include the role of advocacy in highlighting mutual gains for different sectors, to create the political will and working space for coordinated nutrition action; the importance of institutional arrangements, including convening or coordinating bodies with multisectoral credibility to facilitate mobilizing and resourcing power; and the importance of building not only technical but also strategic capacity to manage multisectoral relationships for improved nutrition outcomes.

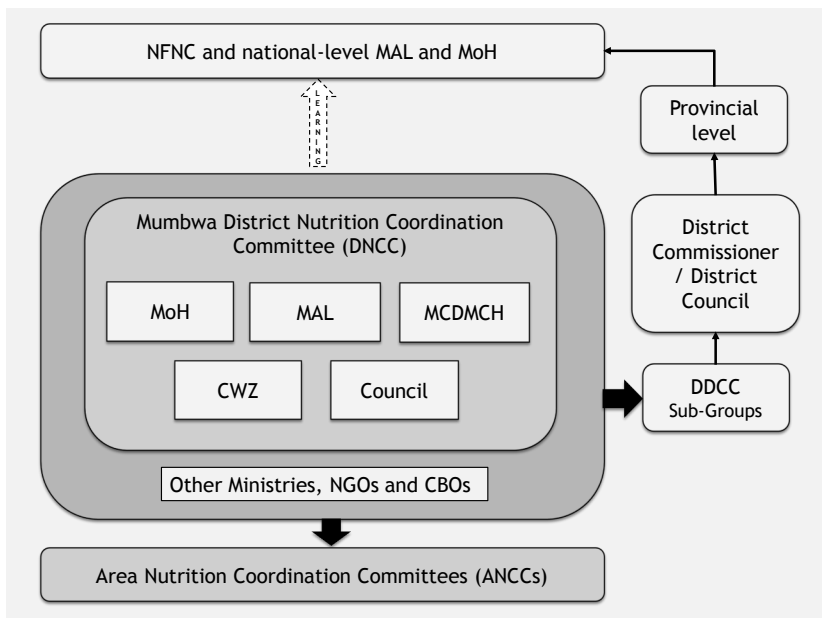


Figure 1:

A representation of the Mumbwa District Nutrition Coordination Committee, and its offshoots and reporting lines.

CWW: Concern Worldwide

DDCC: District Development Coordination Committee

MAL: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock

MCDCA: Mumbwa Child Development Agency

MCDMCH: Ministry of Community Development and Maternal and Child Health

MOH: Ministry of Health

NFNC: National Food and Nutrition Commission

WFC: Women for Change

Zambia's 'Enabling Environment' for C&A

Zambia is a politically stable country with plenty of natural resources and a vision of poverty reduction and economic growth; it is therefore an ideal candidate for a country that could make a significant impact on its stunting problem. With the emergence of the SUN movement in the country, nutrition has received some high-level political attention, and nutrition is recognized in overarching development policies and strategies including the National Food and Nutrition Policy (NFNP) and National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan (NFNSP).

Despite some favorable structures and policies at the national level, however, there is currently little coordination between the agricultural and health sectors on nutrition in Zambia. Zambia is not alone in having difficulty with bringing action to its plans; many countries in Africa and beyond are struggling with similar issues. Through learning from the C&A process, however, Zambia could become a global leader in generating evidence on how intersectoral coordination can be achieved.

With the high-level momentum created by the SUN movement, the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) is in an opportune position to become a force for nutrition advocacy, planning, and implementation in Zambia. There remain high hopes that the NFNC will assume the important role of facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue and advocating for increased resourcing towards nutrition.

C&A in Mumbwa District

In response to the poor stunting situation in Mumbwa, the District Commissioner has established a committee to bring key stakeholders together towards a common goal of improving the nutritional status of children in the district. This committee, known as the Mumbwa District Nutrition Coordinating Committee (DNCC), includes District representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), Health (MoH), Community Development and Maternal & Child Health (MCDMCH) and from civil society. It is officially recognized under the District Development Coordinating Committee (DDCC) and reports to the DDCC, and through that mechanism, to the District Council and Provincial and National bodies. The DNCC and its connections to other relevant bodies are shown above in **Figure 1**.

The purpose of the DNCC is to establish coordination mechanisms that will help align the activities of key stakeholders in the District to effectively address malnutrition. Through reflective and learning processes designed to bring sectors together, new and interesting ways are being explored to promote coordination between officials in the agriculture, health and community development sectors, starting at district level in Mumbwa, and then cascading down to extension workers in these sectors at community levels. This is an innovative design: normally these processes are started at national level, often with little or no attempt to understand or engage with structures at the district and community levels where program implementation actually occurs. C&A activities in Mumbwa are doing the reverse, by first generating local learning and then feeding this upwards, to connect with policies and processes at the national level, thereby providing intersectoral policy recommendations that are firmly rooted in the realities on the ground. Ultimately, the DNCC aims to demonstrate that intersectoral coordination and alignment, bringing in health, agriculture and other key sectors, is a more effective approach to address malnutrition. Mumbwa District hopes to provide a practical example of how this could be achieved, sustained, and replicated elsewhere in Zambia.

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