



Perspectives on the coordination of multisectoral nutrition in Mozambique and an emerging framework



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ABSTRACT

Multisectoral approaches represent a prominent ideological consensus, influenced by historical roots and the current political, financial and institutional landscape, to address the multi-faceted and complex causes of most nutrition, public health and food problems. However, the implementation of multisectoral approaches presents tremendous challenges; one of the most often cited problems, in the literature and by practitioners, is coordination. This study investigates the perspectives of key national leaders on a range of issues regarding the coordination of a Multisectoral Action Plan for the Reduction of Chronic Undernutrition (PAMRDC) in Mozambique. Within this policy group, the principal researcher played the role of a researcher-participant for 14 months, and used Q methodology with a total of 21 key national leaders who had been actively engaged in coordination groups at the central level. Participants sorted 54 subjective statements on a range of issues that were present in the current national discourse. The results revealed four distinct perspectives. The *Implementation perspective* (n = 12) prioritized concrete actions to advance the operationalization of the plan, based on a guidance-based approach from the central level to the lower administrative levels. The *Advocacy perspective* (n = 3) emphasized advocacy to increase politicians' awareness of the problem and of potential solutions to enhance political commitment. The *Structuralist perspective* (n = 3) was concerned with the development of structures and mechanisms to facilitate coordination, funding and improving communication between the government and donors. The *People-centered perspective* (n = 3) focused on the importance of mobilizing individuals to compensate for the sub-optimal structures and processes for coordination. Areas of convergence across the perspectives included: low capacity and skills that limit the work; the agency in charge of coordination (SETSAN) should exercise an increased leadership to facilitate the multisectoral work; and SETSAN should advocate to mobilize politicians and donors for resources. Areas of divergence related to the type of guidance from national to sub-national levels (prescriptive or not) and the functions to be carried out by SETSAN. This study highlights lack of clarity on the meaning of coordination and on the functions of the multisectoral coordination body that appear to arise for two reasons: the lack of an explicit and shared framework for the policy process and the complex nature of coordination itself. These results are examined through the lenses of several related literatures, including governance, public policy and political economy of nutrition, leading to a three-dimensional conceptual framework for coordination that distinguishes the coordination space, forms, and instruments. Global guidance, such as provided through the SUN movement, could support countries in overcoming their coordination challenges by facilitating an analysis of their decision-making processes in order to choose the functions for the coordination body based on a shared understanding of countries' needs, context and opportunities. This paper moves the field beyond a broad consideration of horizontal and vertical coordination within multisectoral initiatives.

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1. Introduction

Undernutrition is a major health problem that affects mothers and children worldwide and significantly contributes to child

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mortality (Caulfield et al., 2004; Pelletier et al., 1995; Uauy et al., 2011). It leads to powerful and harmful short-term and lifelong consequences, for example, on cognitive development (Mendez and Adair, 1999), school achievement, economic productivity in adulthood, maternal reproductive outcomes (Dewey and Begum, 2011) and an increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (Adair et al., 2013; Barker, 2007). Globally, in 2015, a total of 156 million children less than 5 years of age (23.2%) were

estimated to be stunted, and 50 million (7.5%) to be wasted (UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Group, 2016).

Multisectoral approaches represent a prominent ideological consensus of many actors to address the multi-faceted and complex causes of most nutrition, public health and food problems, a consensus influenced by historical roots, and the current political, financial and institutional landscape. Its prominence is seen in the academic literature (Ruel and Alderman, 2013), agency documents (Alderman et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2013, 2014), and the on-going work at national and sub-national levels (Gobierno de la República de Guatemala, 2011; Government of Mozambique, 2010; Government of Nepal, 2012). In the past, many lessons were learned with the approach (Burkhalter, 1974; Field, 1977, 1987; Levinson, 1995; Pines, 1982) but it is re-emerging after several decades. The current efforts are taking place in a world transformed by globalization and the ascendant importance of global health, nutrition and food security, with an increasingly complex landscape of interdependent actors who work in the absence of clear governance structures (Gostin and Mok, 2009).

Many countries have created institutions to strive for multisectoral coordination, however, these attempts are falling short and coordination remains a challenge for a host of reasons (Benson, 2007, 2008; Bryce et al., 2008; Garrett and Natalicchio, 2011; Mokoro, 2015).

In the last few years, the global nutrition agenda has gained exceptional traction with unprecedented political attention in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). Contributors to this momentum have been two Lancet Nutrition Series (Black et al., 2008, 2013) and the Copenhagen consensus on hunger and malnutrition (Hoddinot et al., 2012). The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement has also been an important initiative, with 59 countries having officially joined the movement by May 2017 (<http://scalinnutrition.org/>).

SUN is a country-driven movement tailored to the current global context and seeks to unite diverse actors through four networks (civil society, donors, businesses and UN system) in a worldwide effort to end hunger and undernutrition in all its forms. The SUN Secretariat and the SUN Lead Group at the global levels aims to support the countries in the process of scaling up actions for nutrition. Actions are guided by a Framework (SUN, 2010), a Strategy (SUN, 2012a) and a Road Map (SUN, 2012b). One strategic objective of the SUN Movement involves creating an enabling political environment in which stakeholders align their activities and take joint responsibility for scaling up nutrition. This involves the establishment of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder platforms (SUN, 2012a). Countries take different approaches regarding the leadership and institutional anchorage of those platforms, and SUN does not endorse one specific approach. In 2014, the multisectoral platforms of SUN countries had anchorage in the Office of the President or the Prime Minister, in a line ministry, in an independent body or under a National Planning Commission. The creation of those multisectoral platforms is a central element of the Movement for pursuing multisectoral coordination. At the 2013 Global Gathering of SUN, actors noted that coordination was not being effectively achieved (SUN, 2014a).

Effective coordination requires that the relevant actors in the nutrition policy group have a shared understanding and agreement about coordination itself: what needs to be coordinated, by whom, how, when and for what purpose, among other matters. This study was undertaken in response to the lack of clarity on these issues in Mozambique and the desire of key actors to seek greater understanding and agreement. While the study is grounded in the Mozambique experience, the findings, the methods and the focus on stakeholder perspectives have broad relevance for the other countries in the SUN movement that experiencing similar challenges.

This paper adds to a growing literature on the political economy of nutrition based on empirical studies in LMIC, as synthesized recently (Nisbett et al., 2014). The authors provide an overview of two streams of nutrition and politics that have shaped this literature: (1) the policy and politics literature from the field of nutrition; and (2) the political science, policy process and health policy studies. In a majority of the papers discussed in the presentation of stream 1 (Burkhalter, 1974; Field and Levinson, 1975; Levinson, 1995; Pines, 1982) and stream 2 (Bryce et al., 2008; Pelletier, 2008; Pelletier et al., 2011, 2012), coordination is consistently noted as a challenge. However, studies from both streams fall short from specifying what is meant by the coordination challenges, and do not go beyond the categorization of vertical and horizontal coordination.

The present paper adds to the two streams of literature noted above through two inter-related methods: (1) an in-depth examination of diverse perspectives regarding “coordination” among key actors in one particular setting that has struggled with coordination, Mozambique; and (2) the integration of these empirical findings with insights from literature on governance, public policy and political economy of nutrition, to develop a framework for coordination. The paper concludes with suggestions for how this framework might be used by the SUN movement to help countries strengthen multisectoral coordination for nutrition.

2. Setting and background

2.1. Historical background of Mozambique

Powerful historical events have influenced the context of the fight against hunger in Mozambique and have implications for the current coordination challenges. Although the present paper cannot discuss them at length, several factors are acknowledged. First, Mozambique was under Portuguese colonial rule until 1975, which brought about serious transformations to indigenous societies. In colonial time, women in the south of Mozambique were forced to produce cotton (Farré, 2015), contributing to a transition from food producers to food dependents (Castel-Branco et al., 2010). Second, after gaining independence from Portugal, a protracted civil war plagued the country between 1977 and 1992, with profound consequences for governance, agriculture productivity and health (Dava et al., 2013; Domingues and Barre, 2013). It was accompanied and followed by a massive influx of humanitarian, financial, and food aid from international donors, thereby fostering new power relationships (Bellucci, 2002). The country moved into a post-conflict reconstruction phase, characterized by an impressive economic growth, beginning in 1998 with an average of 7.5% GDP growth over 10 years. The country was labeled a success story because of this economic growth, but this has been critiqued because the growth did not translate into gains in human development (Phiri, 2012). Much of the international aid was channeled through NGOs (Bellucci, 2002), contributing to the fragmentation of the local health system (Pfeiffer, 2003) and the strong presence of foreign donors has challenged the country's ability to assert control over national policy. These historical forces and dynamics have created some of the challenges in multisectoral governance, even as the government has come to recognize the problems of malnutrition and hunger (Government of Mozambique, 2010) and sought to address it through a multisectoral approach (Governo da República de Moçambique, 2015).

2.2. Multisectoral nutrition in Mozambique

The case of Mozambique is illustrative of the situation in many LMIC. About 46% of the total population lives below the poverty

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