

FRAGILE GAINS: SUPPORTING NUTRITION EFFORTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan has made considerable progress in addressing malnutrition but high rates of undernutrition persist: 40.9% of children under five years old suffer from stunting and 42.0% of women (15-49 years old) are anemic¹. The country ranks 171 out of 188 countries in the UN Human Development Index (HDI).

In 2017, Afghanistan joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement² and the following year, July 2018, the Afghanistan Civil Society Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (ACSA-FSN) was established. The ACSA-FSN advocates for Right to Food and amplifies the people's voice on food security and nutrition concerns to decision makers and policy-making bodies. It also aims to build the capacity of government partners and other members.

In 2018, the ACSA-FSN members elected their chair and co-chairs and developed the alliance's legal constitution, term of references, policies and procedures, sustainability and action plans, and other governance-related documents. By 2021, the organization and its governance framework have been restructured. Currently, the ACSA-FSN consists of an executive committee, advisory committee, and four core committees: Technical, Communication/ Outreach and Advocacy, Fundraising, and MEAL/ Research committees.

SUN Pooled Funds Project Initiatives

Expansion of ACSA-FSN: The ACSA-FSN expanded from 26 member organizations to 70 across four different regions. These member organizations and networks represent the academia, civil society organizations (CSOs), youths networks, private sectors, and women-led associations.



ACSA-FSN core committee launching data

Endorsement of policy briefs: The ACSA-FSN conducted a series of round table discussions with national and international organizations. Two policy briefs on anemia and stunting were developed that were later endorsed by the Ministry of Public Health and the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A) of the Afghanistan Food and Drug Authority.



Coordination meeting of the newly formed ACSA-FSN held at Nangarhar Province



Roundtable discussion for policy briefs held at Kabul in February 2020

¹ https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SUN_Report_EN_2019_Country_Afghanistan.pdf

² <http://actfordev.org/projects/sun-project/>

Review of the national strategic and nutrition-related action plans: For the first time, ACSA-FSN reviewed the national strategic and nutrition actions plans. Recommendations and suggestions were shared with AFSeN-A that later endorsed to amend various points in the national action plan.



ACSA-FSN members reviewing the national plans

ACSA-FSN achievements in 2021

Revision of standards for National Curricula: The ACSA-FSN advocacy for ensuring healthy food and nutrition resulted in the incorporation of nutrition sensitive kitchen gardening standards into the National Skills Development Program (NSDP). In addition, NSDP standards were expanded for food processing and storage.

Incorporation of nutrition in ANPDF II framework: As a result of AFSeN-A and the ACSA-FSN, nutrition was added to Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework II (ANPDF II). The ACSA-FSN advocated and raised campaigns on TV, radio, and social media and met with several key stakeholders like the Minister of Agriculture, General Director of program and policies at the Ministry of finance, and representative of the administrative office of the President to incorporate nutrition into the ANPDF II. Perhaps this was one of the biggest achievements at the country level – to add nutrition into the national level priority programs.

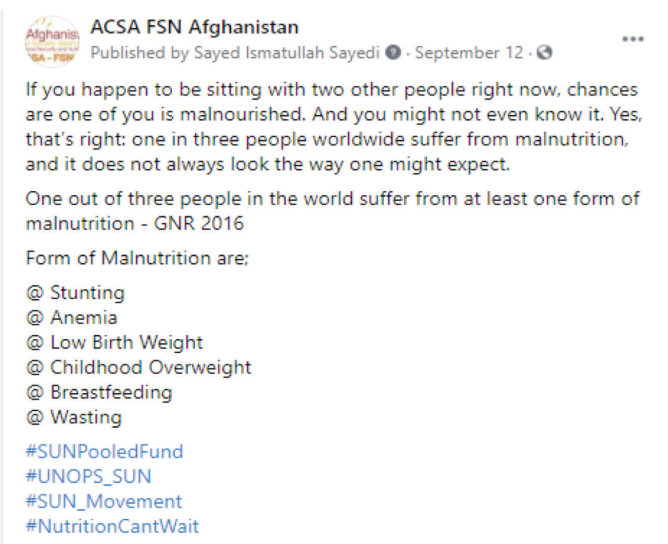


Nutrition-related advocacy awareness campaigns done on national television, see [here](#).

Advocacy and awareness campaign: The ACSA-FSN issued several press releases, raised voices on tv, radio, and social media to bring awareness on breastfeeding, stunting, anemia, and nutrition issues in Afghanistan.



ACSA-FSN launched a social media page to share advocacy messages about nutrition and food security.



ACSA-FSN provided its social media followers with information about malnutrition in Afghanistan.

The Alliance also conducted a number of seminars and awareness-raising sessions in the provinces of Jawzjan, Herat, Kandahar, Samangan, Nangarhar, Balkh, and Baghlan. As a result, a number of provincial governors pledged their support to nutrition-related interventions.



Food security and nutrition seminars discussed government interventions to create awareness on stunting/ anemia at schools and workplace and to support home gardening.



ACSA-FSN secured three small private donations to provide assistance during the humanitarian crisis in the country.

A number of meetings were conducted with parliamentarians, ministers, and deputy minister to advocate for food security and nutrition. The head of the budgetary committee of the Afghan parliament, Mr. Safi, pledged to do the mid-term budget review and include ACSA-FSN representatives during the review process. He ensures that reasonable funds will be allocated to support food security and nutrition as this is a national priority.

emphasized, including the expectations from members.

Ways forward

The ACSA-FSN had shared its year 2021 plan with AFSeN-A and its advocacy-related plans with the SUN Asia Coordination Group (ACG). The ongoing conflict in the country has toppled the Afghan government and if it continues, an estimated 97% of the country's 35 million population will live in poverty within the next six months. That means Around 20 million will sleep without food by the end of 2021.



ACSA-FSN chairperson meeting with Mir Afghan Safi, budget committee chairperson of the national parliament in February 2021 to discuss the national budget for fiscal year 2021-2022.



ACSA-FSN members commit to support in ending hunger and malnutrition by 2030.

The ACSA-FSN also made a Facebook video to heighten awareness on Covid-19 and distributed food packages to families affected. This small donation was secured from the AMAN network, Thailand, and through fundraising efforts in the US and within Afghanistan.

The current government is new and may take some time to fully function. For these reasons, the ACSA-FSN recommends an international level awareness and advocacy be done to support the nutrition agenda in Afghanistan.

Lesson learned

One of the biggest challenges the ACSA-FSN faced is the poor participation of members in the SUN-CSA activities. To address this, the principles of engagement should be clearly defined and