

# BUILDING AND SCALING UP NUTRITION INNOVATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

## Building a multi-sectoral nutrition plan

In 2017, the National Nutrition Council (NNC) crafted the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN) 2017-2022. PPAN focuses on pressing nutrition issues and defined both nutrition specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions based on stakeholder inputs.

The PPAN regularly conducts monitoring, evaluation, and recalibration of targets, to which members of the SUN Civil Society Alliance (CSA) has attended and provided inputs. Various consultation workshops and group discussions to bring about real issues and possible interventions on the ground were held and facilitated by NGOs and the CSA.

The NNC was collaborative and proactive in raising concerns to high-level authorities. Despite this, it is recognized that the PPAN have gaps in identifying the cost and the different sources of funding that can be used to implement the identified interventions. In 2021, Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies (PIDS) and UNICEF Philippines presented their study findings<sup>1</sup>, which showed that “budget allocation and implementation for nutrition programs are found to be inconsistent and highly fragmented across different levels of governance. At lower LGU levels financing nutrition programs are perceived to be highly dependent on the priority of and buy-in from local chief executives, particularly mayors. This disparity in funding across LGUs is highly indicative of a lack of specific guidance for budget allocation in nutrition.” Ongoing efforts to address these concerns are underway, such as multi-stakeholder platforms and supporting mechanisms, ensuring a coherent policy and aligning actions around common results, resource mobilization, and multi-sectoral technical assistance for nutrition to mobilize local governments and advocate for increased investments in nutrition.



*Participants of the 3rd Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Joint Assessment Workshop Philippines held on July 18-19, 2019 in Tagaytay City*

In 2017, the SUN CSA Philippines consistently advocated for the inclusion of SUN priorities in the Infant and Young Child Feeding Strategic Plan 2019-2030 through its technical expertise and experience working in different areas of the country. The Department of Health (DOH) also recognized SUN CSA Philippines' technical support through its membership to the Infant and Young Child Feeding Program (IYCF) Technical Working Group (TWG) and its role in drafting the IYCF Strategic Plan. A series of consultations were held with members of SUN CSA Philippines for technical inputs.

Through continuous advocacy and engagement with the national government, the Philippines, spearheaded by NNC as the SUN Government Focal Point, has finally created the SUN Core Group for Philippines, with SUN CSA Philippines as one of the founding members. This multi-stakeholder platform is a crucial mechanism for coordination, a platform for following up nutrition outcomes and targets, and a venue to plan and prioritize SUN initiatives. Through this SUN Core Group, the CSA has become more pointed in terms of putting efforts together in the implementation of activities and looking for areas of collaboration.

<sup>1</sup>Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies (PIDS)/UNICEF Philippines. Silvestre MA, Nuevo CEL, Ballesteros AJC, Bagas J and Ulep V. Technical Report. Identifying and Addressing the Determinants of Stunting in the First 1000 Days: Review of Nutrition Governance Strategies and Implementation of the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN) 2017-2022. Submitted March 2021.

## Advocacy activities as a civil society alliance

The SUN CSA Philippines has been active in its duty of supporting community development goals through its members. Its presence in the local, national, and international scene has ensured that nutrition commitments and targets remain in policies, guidelines and legislation.

- SUN CSA Philippines lobbied and advocated for activities that support the First 1000 Days Bill, which has been passed and ratified into law — the Republic Act 11148 (An Act Scaling Up the National and Local Health and Nutrition Programs Through A Strengthened Integrated Strategy for Maternal, Neonatal, Child Health and Nutrition in the First One Thousand (1000) Days of Life, Appropriating Funds Therefore, and for Other Purposes). It is also known as the “Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Mag-Nanay Act”. SUN CSA Philippines’ participation in the series of consultations on RA 11148 resulted in it putting on the agenda the prioritization of the Milk Code Monitoring and other interventions both at national and local levels. These efforts were sustained up until the implementing rules and regulations for the said policy was finalized.
- SUN CSA Philippines coordinated with multi-sector and multi-stakeholders in the national and local levels through its member organizations. In 2018, it connected with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGs) in the Philippines and participated in its annual planning meeting. This effort engaged the youth in initiatives that contribute to healthy eating among adolescents.
- In 2018, SUN CSA Philippines was very visible in presenting national case studies in round table discussions and interactive debates on Code implementation at the World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva. One offshoot of its participation there was that SUN CSA Philippines led the implementation of the Learning Session and round table discussion on Child Rights and the Right to Food, participated by CSAs from various sectors.
- Funding support from UNICEF enabled participation of a SUN CSA Philippines representative to the SUN Global Conference in Kathmandu, Nepal in December 2019. In this event, country representatives shared their experiences and insights on how nutrition and multi-stakeholder partnerships can accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable

Development Goals.

- The SUN CSA organization members supported the release of host convener, the Philippine Coalition of Advocates for Nutrition Security’s (PHILCAN) position paper on the Senate Bill No. 656, “An act encouraging corporate social responsibility, providing incentives therefore, and for other purposes” to highlight certain provisions of the bill that is in conflict with current laws. It stands in concern of the potential conflict with RA 11148, EO 51 or The Milk Code, and the DOH Department Memorandum No. 2020-0231 or the Guidelines on the Standardize Regulation of Donations, Related to Executive Order 51, series of 1986. To date, efforts to enact the said law with the position statements of various stakeholders yet to be considered now rests at the level of the Philippine Senate.

## Contributions to enabling nutrition-sensitive programming

SUN CSA Philippines was able to tap into the SUN Pooled Funds, a catalytic grant funding, to explore various pathways to advocate for and provide technical support on nutrition-sensitive programs at the national level and implement four local-level nutrition-sensitive interventions with the support of alliance-members as local-level implementing partners.<sup>2</sup>

One initiative from the SUN Pooled Fund was building the capacity of various key stakeholders on nutrition-sensitive programming so that they can integrate nutrition in their nutrition specific programs and fulfill their commitment to invest in nutrition. Various government agencies involved have other agenda and, at times, reverted to “business as usual”. It was difficult to find a common time to meet with them given their various activities. With NNC’s support in coordinating with the various agencies, efforts were made to promote inter-agency collaboration, convergence, and harmonization of plans.

A national convention on nutrition-sensitive programming was conducted, which brought together the academe, government institutions, and organizations to take unified actions to fight malnutrition.

Meanwhile, alliance members were able to develop, test, and document nutrition-sensitive models, such as nutrition-sensitive community savings and credit, home gardens and community gardens, and

<sup>2</sup>IIRR. 2020. Strengthening Capacities on Nutrition-Sensitive Programming in the Philippines: Project Brief. Philippines

community nutrition in the local-level. Partner local government units provided counterpart funding while the CSA members provided technical capacity to implement the project. Goals were achieved but the small funding only allowed teams to work in a few municipalities.



Participants of the National Convention on Nutrition Sensitive Programming held on 22 August 2019

Nevertheless, continuous efforts were done by the CSA to gain funding, such as negotiating agreement with UNICEF for funding and aligning organizational budgets. Programme Cooperation Agreement (PCA) has already been submitted, and is currently waiting for an update.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, some SUN CSA Philippines members shared their COVID-19 response, which were gathered and consolidated into briefs. One of these is Nutrelief, a nutrition-sensitive food aid developed within a project supported by the SUN Pooled Fund. It strengthened capacities of local governments on nutrition-sensitive programming.

Online learning exchange to share the learnings from the SUN Pooled Fund local-level project implementation

## Challenges faced head-on

One of the primary impediments of SUN CSA Philippines' operations is that activities are being done on top of what members are doing. The alliance doesn't have a secretariat to spearhead membership mobilization, resource mobilization, and other pertinent activities. The responsibility rests on the lead convener. Engaging members requires participatory activities that are aligned with their own organizations' goals. Reaching that sweet spot is often a concern.

Another challenge is expanding membership beyond its PHILCAN, the host organization. To date, the membership has extended through the efforts of different member organizations. Active recruitment is ongoing and sustained by the membership committee. Through collaboration among SUN Networks, sub-national gatherings in the SUN Movement is being rolled out across the country. The objective is to organize functional SUN Networks at the regional level that mirrors efforts done at the national level.

The SUN CSA Philippines is continuously working to make its strategic plan happen. Smart, costed, multi-stakeholder, and multi-sectoral national and subnational nutrition plans for actions are in place, including in high burden and conflict affected areas. There are ongoing international and domestic resource mobilization and budget advocacy for nutrition action plans. SUN CSA is regularly monitoring international commitments and progress at the country-level to ensure that the Philippines is on track in implementing its commitments (e.g. mobilizing resources and implementing nutrition plans) and are making a demonstrable contribution to reducing malnutrition.

Getting the members to prioritize SUN activities over equally important initiatives done by their respective organizations remains a challenge. Despite this, SUN CSA Philippines recognizes that addressing malnutrition is a team effort and civil society has a vital role to work together to fully realize the essence of SUN movement – towards “a world free from malnutrition in all its forms”.