

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) Strategy

Overview

With civil society presence in 61 SUN countries, a growing membership of 4212 global members and an increasing number of partners and donors – there is a real need for a robust, coordinated approach to measuring the impact and contribution of the SUN Civil Society Network’s (CSN) to achieving change in the nutrition space.



In the 2020 Annual Survey, CSAs cited mobilising funds for nutrition as a key priority and the lack of funds as a considerable barrier facing CSAs. This emphasises the importance of having a solid MEAL system across the network, especially as the environment for donors grows more competitive, and the need to demonstrate the value of investing in the SUN approach and showing how the network is delivering on its strategic objectives. As of 2020, 30% of CSAs reported having a MEAL framework and sustainability plan.¹

This strategy sets out the SUN CSN’s overall approach to MEAL. MEAL underpins every part of our work and is key to ensuring progress towards our objectives. The strategy covers:

1. The overall approach to MEAL
2. SUN Civil Society Network Global Secretariat MEAL 2021-2025

Objectives

1. To use an evidence-based approach to strengthen the CSN and measure our contribution to change; and
2. To use evaluations to learn and correct the course from experiences through reflections and be accountable to all stakeholders, strengthening future aspirations for change for the SUN CSN, SUN Movement, and the nutrition sector.

Why use MEAL?

- **Plan** impactful and cost-effective interventions
- **Monitor progress** towards our strategic objectives at the sub-national, national, regional and global level

¹ The survey had a total of 30 respondents, 60% of the totality of CSAs. Out of the totality of the respondents, only 30% report having and applying well established MEAL strategies.

- **Evaluate the impact** of the contribution of Civil Society to achieving national nutrition targets, including SUN Movement targets, SDG2 and WHA, N4G commitments etc
- **Learn** by using our evidence to inform and adjust plans to work more effectively and accelerate progress; and
- **Be Accountable** to beneficiaries, network members, the SUN Movement, donors, and external stakeholders strengthening partnership, trust, and collaboration within and outside the network.

MEAL Principles & Approach

Our MEAL Principles are Inspired by the SUN Movement’s principles of engagement, the CSN MEAL system builds on the following principles throughout all its phases:



- **Participatory:** involves diverse stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process. This involvement can occur at any stage of the evaluation process, from the monitoring and evaluation design to data collection and analysis to reporting
- **Inclusive:** it creates space and channels for vulnerable and excluded groups (such as women, youth and other vulnerable populations) to input into the MEAL processes, influencing analysis and strategic decisions; and
- **Empowering:** through participating in MEAL processes, all stakeholders involved are learning and building their capacity.

By applying these three principles, those involved in the MEAL process will become more aware, engaged, and responsible for shaping strategic decisions. This will ensure that the MEAL work contributes to the long-term sustainability of the Alliance and CSN.

Characteristics of the MEAL System

To be effective and sustainable, our MEAL approaches, methodologies and tools are delivered to be:

- **User friendly:** MEAL processes will be simple, clear, and consistent to ensure they are easy to apply and participate in. A major barrier to MEAL is that it can seem complex and time-consuming
- **Accessible:** The SUN CSN will provide tools and processes to make MEAL easier for network members. Relevant data will also be accessible to network members through the shared SunLabs database, which ensures that members can easily access and share data across the network and therefore, fully participate in MEAL systems. The Secretariat will continue to drive the uptake and utilization of the database and ensure that all members have access to adequate training
- **Cost-effective:** The MEAL system and intervention have an adequate budget that allows data gathering, analysis/evaluations and dissemination; and
- **Consistent across countries & stakeholders,** the Secretariat and the CSAs build their strategy and MEAL on a shared Theory of Change and Indicators and apply/adapt similar tools to measure the progress across counties. This consistency facilitates sharing, learning, and dialogue across all stakeholders.

MEAL Cycle

The SUN CSN MEAL cycle builds on 5 key phases:

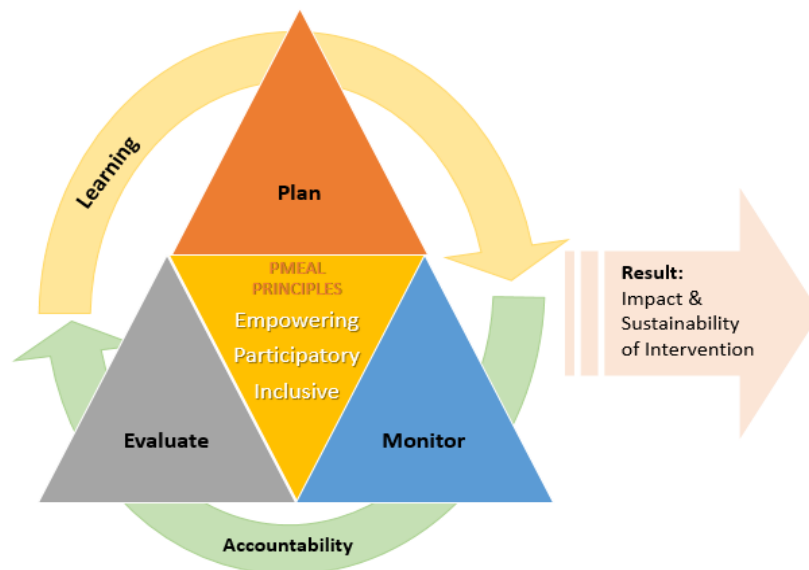


Figure 1: SUNCSN MEAL Cycle and Principles

- **Planning:** During this phase we reflect on lessons learnt, the current context and the desired outcomes of our interventions and efforts. We adjust our plans based on what we learned from previous evaluations and the data gathered
- **Monitor:** We set up robust processes that capture our progress and evidence that demonstrates our contributes to the change
- **Evaluate:** we test the framework and our approaches and reflect on the progress and impact of the alliances and Network. We create space for discussion and involve members and external stakeholders
- **Learning throughout the cycle:** We create communities of practice where members are encouraged to exchange knowledge on best practices to increase impact, build collaboration between different actors and increase capacity; and
- **Accountability at all stages, internal and external:** the CSN Secretariat and CSAs are accountable to members and beneficiaries and working towards achieving our shared objectives, as set out in the network-wide Theory of Change. Additionally, both are accountable to donors and the SUN Movement as a whole. Our participatory and inclusive approach to MEAL seeks to ensure that our beneficiaries are part of the implementation and evaluation processes and are empowered and able to influence Alliances and Network decisions and priorities. We champion accountability by establishing a transparent and effective communication system through which we share and discuss our impact, data, and learnings.

SUN CSN Strategy

The SUN CSN 2021-2025 strategy sets out the vision and high-level objectives for the Network and builds on the Movement's progress and achievements over the last decade. The strategy defines how the Network will contribute to the overall SUN Movement Roadmap and Ambitions and identifies our priority areas of intervention. Furthermore, it sets out the CSN's Mission Statement to **Develop a sustainable and integrated Network of civil society actors that collectively contributes to a world free of malnutrition by 2030.**

The **3.0 SUN CSN Theory of Change** was developed **by the network, for the network** through three network-wide consultations.

Over the next five years, the Network aims to achieve the high-level and intermediate outcomes outlined in the Theory of Change, which we believe will result in achieving the SUN CSN mission, and in turn contribute to the overall SUN Movement vision. As with all SUN Movement efforts, collaboration with other SUN structures and stakeholders is key to success, and this is reflected by the close alignment between the CSN 3.0 theory of change, and the strategic objectives outlined in the overall SUN 3.0 strategy.



SUN CSN Secretariat MEAL Approach

Our approach: The SUN Civil Society Network MEAL strategy underpins the Secretariat’s approach and focuses on three major workstreams which are interdependent and implemented parallelly to maximize coherence, efficiency, and impact of the Secretariat.

The approach can be categorised as follows:

- 1) **SUN CSN Global Secretariat MEAL:** assessing the impact of the support provided by the Secretariat to members of the network while maintaining oversight of country progress, challenges faced and sharing key learnings across the network and beyond. Moreover, ensuring that the Secretariat is accountable to members and donors through reporting and communications.
- 2) **National Civil Society Alliances:** building the capacity of national alliances to monitor, assess and report on their impact, and use their learnings to adapt their plans. Supporting CSAs to build sustainable MEAL systems and embed a culture of MEAL across the Alliance.
- 3) **MEAL within the SUN Movement:** contributing to the Global SUN Movement MEAL to ensure it is reflective of civil society experience. Working with the SMS (SUN Movement Secretariat) and the SUN Networks (UN, SBN, Donors) to develop and strengthen the overall SUN MEAL system and tools.

Examples of MEAL initiatives within the CSN. To enable the Secretariat to report on impact, we will be strengthening our Secretariat MEAL systems by:

- **Developing a Logframe/workplan:** we have established a clear framework that includes baseline, targets and indicators at activity, output, outcome and impact level that align with the overall CSN strategy
- **Recording global and national progress against MEAL indicators** (Impact tracker)
- Assessing the Secretariat capacity to respond to CSAs requests (quantity, quality) on quarterly basis (request tracker)
- **Conduct quarterly meetings to analyse progress and challenges occurred against our TOC,** targets and workplan (e.g Outcome Harvesting, Most Significant Change, Stakeholder’s analysis)
- **Produce quarterly MEAL products:** Impact stories to be shared with the Network; and
- **Uptake and utilization of SunLabs:** Providing training and technical assistance to members so that they are well equipped to use SunLabs.

Fostering Knowledge Sharing and Learning

The SUNCSN Secretariat takes a long-term approach to knowledge sharing and learning spans a range of different interventions specifically tailored to the needs flagged by CSAs (or other stakeholders). The Knowledge Sharing and Learning strategies build on evidence and expertise

within the network to strengthen how we work, increase our impact, and inform the work of other stakeholders. We value the knowledge, the champions and the experts that are already part of the network and aim to create platforms/channels for them to share their expertise with other CSOs and external stakeholders.

- **Knowledge Sharing:** we aim to document, package, disseminate the information about good practices, case studies, successes, failures at sub-national national and global level. We want to reach CSOs at all levels and external stakeholders and provide them with relevant information that may be useful for their planning, intervention and to inspire discussions; and

How we foster Knowledge Sharing: Regional, country, global face to meetings and virtual calls, advocacy calls, webinars, documentation of case studies, sharing updates through social media, newsletters, briefs, website and SunLabs.

- **Learning:** *transforming knowledge into action.* Our learning programmes aim to build capacity of CSAs and its members to undertake impactful, sustainable nutrition intervention, champion good governance and any other needs prioritized by the CSAs (normally through the annual survey or other regional/global knowledge gaps/needs assessments). We strengthen Alliances, organizations, and individual capacities, to ensure impact at all levels and long-term sustainability. Examples of our typical learning tactics are:
 - **Peer to peer learning,** like learning routes, learning exchanges: medium term programmes developed to strengthen individuals and their institutions, strengthening and stablishing at the same time a strong relationship among actors. It alternate face to face and virtual collaboration and learnings
 - **Mutual support-collaboration across CSAs:** like developing joint proposal or undertake joint initiatives across group of actors from different countries and/or sectors. This is mainly virtual coordination, and the joint initiative can be face to face
 - **Fostering Champions:** targeted work with individuals broadly acknowledged as champions to enhance their skills, capacity to reach and influence a large audience. This initiative can be held in person, virtually or a mix of both
 - **Technical Assistance:** virtually or via technical assistance in the country delivering sessions on specific topics to foster CSAs intervention on a one-to-one basis; and
 - **Multi-stakeholders learning initiatives:** we are looking forward to foster learning among SUN Networks and among different stakeholders (e.g. Donors, UN, CS, business, Government, non-SUN coalitions and institutions). Multi-network joint initiatives at global level or fostering multi-stakeholders learning at regional and national level, promoting national workshops.

How does CSN MEAL align with the SUN Movement MEAL?

The Need:

The SUN Movement have a MEAL framework and reporting mechanisms which the SUN CSN inputs to on an annual basis. The CSN plays a crucial role in providing timely and robust evidence on progress and challenges from the perspective of civil society. It is vital that the experience of civil society is reflected in the overall assessment of SUN movement progress against SUN roadmap. It is

also important that performance of the Network and inter-SUN network collaboration at national, regional, and global level is documented

Key opportunities:



The key opportunities for the CSN to feed into SUN MEAL processes are available primarily at national level via CSA engagement in the **Joint Annual Assessment (JAA)**

At the global level, the CSN will contribute to the preparation of the SUN Movement annual report.

The CSN is responsible for consolidating progress and challenges across the network

into the overall CSN progress report. This is a crucial document to inform future plans for the SUN Movement, SUN Networks and other stakeholders. We will also engage in virtual and face to face planning and review meetings and contribute to the MEAL community of practice.

The CSN Global Secretariat must ensure that all Alliances can and are effectively inputting into the SUN MEAL, planning and review processes at national and global level. We contribute to case studies in key areas to shape the overall strategic direction of the SUN Movement (E.g. thematic reviews in the SUN progress report like parliamentarians) and assess the functionality of multi-stakeholder platforms, quality of National Nutrition Plans and other area which are critical to end malnutrition (e.g. private sector engagement, civil society space to work on national policies, campaigns etc).

We want to hear from you! Please share your feedback and queries and/or join the CSN MEAL Community of Practice emailing to n.kafai-golahmady@savetehchildren.org.uk