



Position Paper: Revamping the Consolidated Effort to Combat Malnutrition in South Sudan

Introduction:

South Sudan's nutrition and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) sectors remain in a state of perpetual emergency due to the combined effects of hunger, climatic shocks such as floods and prolonged dry spells, and ongoing conflict. Despite clear Nutrition for Growth (N4G) commitments and significant investment from both the Government of South Sudan and international donors, malnutrition rates continue to rise. This paper calls for a comprehensive review and recommitment to South Sudan's Tokyo 2021 N4G promises, and urges decisive action to reverse the deteriorating situation.

Background:

South Sudan is facing a severe food crisis, exacerbated by escalating humanitarian needs and dwindling international aid. The country's vulnerability is compounded by political instability, economic challenges and natural disasters, including floods and prolonged dry spells, as well as frequent outbreaks of disease. With 9.0 million people (54% of whom are children) in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, the country struggles to provide basic services such as nutrition, education and health care. The additional challenges of displacement, gender-based violence and inflation are further exacerbating the situation.

Women and children are particularly at risk, with 2.8 million children out of school and vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Malnutrition is widespread, with more than 2.2 million people in need of nutritional support, making South Sudan one of the most disaster-prone countries, particularly vulnerable to climate-related flooding.

By 2024, more than 60% of the population is expected to be acutely food insecure, with 2 million women and children suffering from malnutrition.

At the 2021 Tokyo N4G Summit, South Sudan committed to:

- Reducing wasting in children under five from 16.2% in 2020 to $\leq 5\%$ by 2030.
- Reducing stunting in children under five from 15.1% in 2020 to $\leq 10\%$ by 2030.
- Allocating 10% of the national budget to nutrition multi-sectoral activities.

Current Progress & Gaps:

While progress has been made in developing the National Food Policy, important gaps remain. South Sudan has yet to fully align with international standards such as the Maputo Protocol, which requires 10% of the national budget to be allocated to agriculture and food security, and the Abuja Declaration, which requires 15% of the national budget to be allocated to health. Unfortunately, there has been a gradual reduction in these allocations over the last four years (starting at 9.6%, 3.7%, 1.9% and down to 1.3%), which is a worrying trend. Although efforts have been made to scale up nutrition programmes, persistent challenges hinder the achievement of the goals set.

Key Challenges

- Fragile health systems: Only 46% of health facilities are moderately functional. In addition, the national Ministry of Health's response is heavily dependent on humanitarian aid.
- Rising food costs: Basic food prices have risen by 122% since 2022.
- High rates of malnutrition: An estimated 1.65 million children and 870,000 pregnant or lactating women face acute malnutrition.

Our Positions and Rationale

These positions highlight key priorities for addressing malnutrition in South Sudan. They call for the rapid finalization and implementation of the National Nutrition Policy, the promotion of an open civic space for civil society engagement, and an increase in national resource allocations for nutrition, food security and climate resilience, with a focus on transparency and accountability, all leading to the implementation of the commitments made at the Tokyo N4G Summit in 2021.

Position 1

Finalizing and Implementing the National Nutrition Policy

South Sudan needs to accelerate the finalization and nationwide adoption of its National Nutrition Policy. This should include a multi-sectoral cost strategy that outlines specific activities, targets and timelines, complemented by a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan. It should also include a detailed budget analysis for both government and development partners, identifying funding gaps and sector-specific investment needs.

Position 2

Fostering an Open Civic Space

An open civic space is essential for civil society organizations (CSOs) to actively participate in addressing malnutrition and health challenges. By engaging local communities, CSOs can amplify voices and develop context-specific solutions. In addition, an open civic space enhances government accountability and promotes collaboration among stakeholders.

Position 3

Enhanced Monitoring and Reporting on Nutrition Outcomes

South Sudan needs to increase domestic resource allocations for food security, health, nutrition, WASH and climate resilience. Transparency in the allocation, disbursement and spending of these resources must be prioritized to improve accountability. Public access to this information will ensure efficient use of resources and lead to better nutrition and food security outcomes.

Recommendations

- 1 Accelerate the national nutrition policy:**
Finalize and implement the policy and multi-sectoral nutrition strategy through the Ministry of Health.
- 2 Align with international frameworks:**
Fully comply with the Maputo Protocol and the Abuja Declaration and ensure that national resources are allocated to the food security and health sectors.
- 3 Sustain donor engagement:**
Urge the donor community and development partners to adapt their strategies to ensure a balanced approach that includes emergency response, advocacy and development support to combat malnutrition.
- 4 Integrate WASH and nutrition:**
Promote better integration of WASH services into nutrition programs to address malnutrition holistically.

Call to Action

We call upon the Government of South Sudan, development partners, and civil society to prioritize the implementation of the Tokyo N4G, Abuja Declaration, and Maputo Protocol commitments. By doing so, we can ensure that all of South Sudan's population, especially women and children, have access to the nutrition and food security they need to thrive.

Conclusion

South Sudan stands at a critical crossroads in its fight against malnutrition. While progress has been made, achieving the ambitious targets outlined at the 2021 N4G Summit requires immediate and coordinated action. By finalizing the national nutrition policy, fostering civic engagement, and increasing domestic and foreign resource allocations, South Sudan can take a vital step toward improving the health and well-being of its population.

The time to act is now.

References

1. SSDemographic and Health Survey (EDHS), 2019
2. Tokyo N4G Summit Commitments, 2021
3. World Health Organization (WHO) Reports on Nutrition in South Sudan, 2023



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