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Unravelling Commitment? An Empirical Assessment of Political Commitment to Reduce Hunger and Undernutrition in Five High Burden Countries

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Introduction

There are many reasons for insufficient progress in reducing hunger and undernutrition. One of these is a 'lack of political will' or political prioritisation.
(Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2012: 22)

In recent years, the global hunger and nutrition community has increasingly come to view political commitment as an essential ingredient for pushing food and nutrition security higher up public policy agendas (Foresight Project 2011; te Lintelo *et al.* 2011, 2014b; FAO, IFAD and WFP 2013, 2014; Gillespie *et al.* 2013; International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) 2014). In response, commitment metrics and scorecard tools to assess levels of political commitment have proliferated. They enhance accountability of governments, donors, civil society and private sector organisations for actions addressing hunger and nutrition. International organisations and aid donors also use these tools to make decisions on funding and programmatic action. Examples of these metrics include the World Health Organization's (WHO) nutrition landscape analyses (Engesveen *et al.* 2009); the HungerFree scorecard (ActionAid 2009, 2010); the Hunger Reduction Commitment Index (te Lintelo *et al.* 2011, 2014b); the Nutrition Barometer (Save the Children and World Vision International 2012); the Hunger And Nutrition Commitment Index (te Lintelo *et al.* 2013, 2014a); the Political Commitment Rapid Assessment Tool (Fox *et al.* 2014) and the Global Nutrition Report's review of Nutrition 4 Growth Summit commitments (IFPRI 2014).

These metrics have focused on operationalising the concept of political commitment to enable its measurement. Yet many inadvertently conflate commitment to address food security with commitment to tackle nutrition security; and commitment to fight hunger with commitment to combat undernutrition. This conflation is also common in the policy and academic literature (World Bank 2006) and in dominant narratives on nutrition in development (Nisbett *et al.* 2014). Because the concepts of food security and nutrition security are only partially overlapping, we hypothesise that government commitment to hunger reduction is empirically different from government commitment to reducing undernutrition. This study accordingly builds on research that has used secondary data to demonstrate that developing countries often have divergent strengths of commitment to hunger reduction and to nutrition (te Lintelo *et al.* 2013, 2014a). We review the literature to synthesise a set of nine political commitment indicators; construct a survey instrument; and collect primary data in five high burden countries (Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, Tanzania and Zambia) to ascertain whether government commitment to hunger is the same as commitment to nutrition.

We present two key findings. Firstly, our evidence shows that hunger and nutrition commitment are not the same. Empirically, hunger reduction commitment exceeds nutrition commitment in Malawi, Bangladesh, Tanzania and Zambia, and the reverse is the case in Nepal. We thus affirm our hypothesis that government commitment to hunger reduction does not equate with commitment to nutrition. This matters because metrics that conflate hunger and undernutrition risk misinforming government and donor policy and maintain historically inadequate prioritisation of non-food aspects of malnutrition (Heaver 2005). This in turn imperils achieving key global or regional nutrition targets on stunting such as set out in the African Union Malabo Declaration 2014 (to achieve 10 per cent stunting levels by 2025), or by the World Health Assembly (a 40 per cent reduction of the global number of stunted children under five by 2025). We hence conclude that commitment metrics, which are gaining in popularity, must be sensitive to these differences in order to better guide public policy and programmatic action.

Our second main finding is that the research instrument developed for this study is sufficiently sensitive to record divergent performances on nine commitment indicators within each country. Accordingly, the instrument could have diagnostic value in assisting donors, civil society leaders and nutrition champions to assess in which areas commitment is in need of strengthening, and in which areas further strengthening may not be a priority. We discuss what kind of intervention strategy could improve nutrition commitment.

Following this introduction, Section 1 provides a brief overview of the current status of hunger and undernutrition as global development problems and discusses some important conceptual differences that need to be reflected in political commitment metrics. This is followed in Section 2 by a synthesis of the literature to identify nine key political commitment indicators that inform the research instrument employed in this study. Section 3 presents the research methodology and the research instrument. Section 4 presents findings, followed by a discussion (Section 5) and conclusions (Section 6).

1 Hunger and undernutrition as a global problem

Hunger and undernutrition are among the most persistent global development challenges. Global numbers of undernourished people remain very high despite some improvements since the 1990s (Black *et al.* 2013). In 2012–14, 805 million people (around one in eight people in the world) were estimated to be suffering from chronic hunger and regularly not getting enough food to conduct an active life (FAO *et al.* 2013). Just as there are multiple manifestations of hunger and undernutrition, so there are a number of different anthropometric measures, the most common of which are stunting (a measure of chronic undernutrition), wasting (acute undernutrition), and underweight (an amalgam of the two). Globally, one quarter of children aged under five are stunted (an estimated 162 million in 2012); 15 per cent are underweight; and 8 per cent are wasted (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2014). At regional level these statistics can be even more alarming. Many countries in Africa still report high or very high child stunting prevalence rates, of 30 per cent or more. The worst affected countries are concentrated in Eastern Africa and the Sahel. A few countries in South Asia also report stunting rates of up to 50 per cent (FAO *et al.* 2013). The rate of stunting among children under five in South Asia is a staggering 32 per cent, while one in six (16 per cent) children in the region suffer from wasting (UNICEF 2014). In 2012, nearly 70 per cent of the world's wasted children lived in Asia and the condition exposes these children to a markedly increased risk of death. Undernutrition contributed to 45 per cent, or 3.1 million deaths, of children under five globally in 2011 (Black *et al.* 2013), and is both a manifestation and an intergenerational driving mechanism of poverty (Nisbett *et al.* 2014).

Notwithstanding the routine measurement of hunger and nutrition outcomes by governments and international organisations, the definitions, conceptual explication and accompanying measurement instruments for food security have rarely been static over the past three decades (FAO 2003; Foresight Project 2011; FAO *et al.* 2014: Annex 2). The partially overlapping nature of hunger, food insecurity and undernutrition concepts has impeded analytical clarity (Foresight Project 2011: 3–4). While nutrition has kept rising up the international development agenda over the past decade, thanks to major efforts by, among others, the *Lancet Series* (Bhutta *et al.* 2008), the Scaling Up Nutrition movement and the recent Global Nutrition Report (IFPRI 2014), policy and academic debates have long focused on agriculture and food. However, major international organisations such as the World Bank, UNICEF and FAO now explicitly use definitions and measurement indicators that distinguish between food and non-food aspects of nutrition, including care, hygiene and health. Thus, for instance, FAO defines food security as: 'a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (FAO 2001), and has recently adopted a nutrition security definition that includes but 'differs from food security in that it also considers the aspects of adequate caring practices, health and hygiene in addition to dietary adequacy' (FAO *et al.* 2014: 50). This incorporation of food security as a subset of nutrition security facilitates an empirical assessment of whether political commitment to the reduction of food insecurity equates to the commitment to improve nutrition security. Or in common parlance: is commitment (for instance, at government level) to reduce hunger the same as commitment to improve nutrition?¹ In order to answer this question, the next section explores the concept of political commitment to identify nine indicators that can ascertain commitment levels.

¹ Here, we consider freedom from hunger (the experience of an empty stomach due to a deficit of food consumption) to equate with a narrow definition of food security. A broader definition such as employed by Foresight Project (2011) also expresses the latent risk of falling prey to hunger (having sufficient access to food today but at risk of loss in the future), as well as having sufficient access to food that can stave off hunger, but that is of a quality that is not good enough to provide sufficient vitamins and minerals for health. In turn, the concept of undernutrition considers, besides food, other deficits in care, water and sanitation and health services. Someone can also be food insecure but not suffer from undernutrition, either because food access is merely temporarily interrupted or is at risk only in the future (Foresight Project 2011).

2 Operationalising political commitment

'Political commitment' is often considered synonymous with 'political will'² and has been part of mainstream development policy discourses for at least two decades. Debates in the 1990s and early 2000s considered political commitment 'development's latest holy grail' (McCourt 2003: 1015) and a key factor in explaining the outcomes of governance (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2000) and macroeconomic reforms (e.g. Morrissey 1995; McCourt 2003). Responses to the 2007–08 global food price crisis also highlighted the role of political commitment. The Irish Hunger Task Force (2008: 23) noted: 'Addressing hunger... ultimately is a matter of political priorities', and FAO (2012) identified political commitment as critical to achieving its strategic objectives of eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

Political scientists have an ambivalent take on the concept of political commitment. 'Standing at the crossroads of politics and policy' (Post, Raile and Raile 2010: 654), political commitment is variously described as complicated and multidimensional (Goldberg *et al.* 2012), a 'classic black box' (McCourt 2003: 1016), and the 'slipperiest concept in the policy lexicon' that is 'never defined except by its absence' (Hammergren 1998: 12). The concept is routinely used in a rhetorical, catch-all manner (Thomas and Grindle 1990: 1164), using *post hoc* circular logic (Brinkerhoff 2000) to explain both failure and success of public policy interventions. While this plasticity ensures commitment to remain an important part of the vocabulary of political leaders, various authors have attempted to define³ and unpack the concept to facilitate empirical analysis (e.g. Morrissey 1995; Brinkerhoff 2000; McCourt 2003; Shiffman 2007; Shiffman and Smith 2007; Post *et al.* 2010; Goldberg *et al.* 2012). These analyses have focused on two types of questions. Firstly, political economy approaches investigate the context within which political commitment emerges, seeking to explain *why* political commitment emerges or fails to emerge, often at national government level. (Examples of these relating to hunger and nutrition include Shiffman 2007; Mejía Acosta and Fanzo 2012; Pelletier *et al.* 2012; Gillespie *et al.* 2013; Mejía Acosta and Haddad 2014; Nisbett *et al.* 2014). Key explanatory factors for commitment identified by these studies include the structure of the polity and policy subsystems; ideas; the characteristics of the actors and their power; and the features of the policy issue at stake.⁴ While some cross-country studies record common features, typically, in-depth political economy analyses focus on few cases within a country, as comparison across diverse contexts is highly complex. Theorisation of why and how contextual factors causally shape commitment has hence been limited (Post *et al.* 2010; Brinkerhoff 2000).

² We use these terms interchangeably.

³ For instance, Post *et al.* (2010: 659) define political will as 'the extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem'. In contrast, McCourt (2003) considers common dictionary definitions, such as a 'pledge or an undertaking', sufficient to start conceptually unpacking commitment.

⁴ These studies typically identify three major explanatory factors for the (lack of) emergence of political commitment. Firstly, the characteristics of the policy issue at stake. For instance, Shiffman and Smith note that 'problems that cause substantial harm, as indicated by objective measures such as numbers of deaths, are more likely to attract resources than are those that do not' (2007: 1372). In contrast, the invisibility of malnutrition for individuals, communities and governments leads them to discount human and economic costs of malnutrition and under-prioritise demand for nutrition services (Heaver 2005). Secondly, institutional characteristics of the polity and policy subsystems affect the creation of political commitment. These comprise for instance: the democratic or autocratic nature of the political regime; the roles of key institutions such as the presidency and parliament in policymaking; and the relations between scales of government involved in designing and delivering policies (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2000; Post *et al.* 2010). Also, multisectoral policy interventions require much learning within bureaucracies and more easily generate opposition to implementation than those that do not (Hyden and Karlstrom 1993). Thirdly, the configurations and characteristics of key actors within hunger and nutrition policy subsystems play an important role in driving commitment (e.g. Shiffman and Smith 2007). Characteristics include leadership, power, interests, values, beliefs and motivations. For instance, actors can consider interventions addressing hunger as the right thing to do, the beneficial thing to do, or the 'commonsensical' thing to do (*cf.* Yanguas 2013). Given that motivations differ, a certain level of consensus is needed in order for political commitment to become manifest (McCourt 2003; Hyden and Karlstrom 1993; Post *et al.* 2010). A 'sufficient set' of political leaders, policy elites and implementers thus need to agree (i) that a particular issue has reached problem status; (ii) on the nature of the problem; and (iii) that the problem requires government action (Post *et al.* 2010). Furthermore, they need to find effective ways of framing and expressing these preferences to gain the attention of the general public, and of political and bureaucratic leaders to generate traction in policy agenda-setting forums (*cf.* Chong and Druckman 2007).

This paper is however concerned with the second type of question: what does political commitment look like? How do we know it is there or not? Generally, analyses of political commitment underline revealed preferences, i.e. when intent is acted upon, because it is often impossible to divine – let alone measure – latent intent (Post *et al.* 2010; Morrissey 1995; Brinkerhoff 2000). Political commitment should hence not be seen as separate from, or prior to, action on the ground. As such, commitment indicators need to be sensitive to what government decision-makers say, what they do and what they do not do in terms of material, legal and financial efforts (The Policy Project 2000). FAO (2012: 22) thus notes that government political commitment to reduce hunger and undernutrition would be shown by purposeful and decisive public action, through public policies and programmes, public spending and legislation. Various commitment scorecards and metrics have recently attempted assessing exactly this. WHO nutrition landscape analyses (e.g. Engesveen *et al.* 2009) and Scaling Up Nutrition profiles (Scaling Up Nutrition 2013) summarise the presence of particular nutrition governance features within countries. Other tools actively compare countries, such as the Hunger Reduction Commitment Index (HRCI) (te Lintelo *et al.* 2011, 2014b), and offshoots including a Nutrition Barometer scorecard (Save the Children and World Vision International 2012), the Hunger And Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI) (te Lintelo *et al.* 2013, 2014a), and the Global Nutrition Report (IFPRI 2014). Typically, these metrics employ secondary data on policy, legal and financial commitment indicators to compare, score and rank countries.⁵ However, governments do not routinely collect and publish data on nine key commitment indicators identified in the literature: ‘explicitness’; ‘irrevocability’; ‘voluntariness’; ‘publicness’; ‘mobilising support’; ‘continuity and capacity’; ‘analytical rigour’; ‘credible incentives’; and ‘implementation’.

For McCourt (2003), political commitment is strong to the extent that it is explicit, irrevocable, voluntary and public. ‘Publicness’ is about citizens’ physical and online access and the ability to scrutinise public policies. It is also about whether political and policy elites publicly state their support for, and set out what kind of priority they give to, a policy agenda (Johnson and Wasty 1993; McCourt 2003; Heaver 2005; Shiffman and Smith 2007; Post *et al.* 2010). Public statements of policy preferences need to be read in context. They can be acts of symbolic gesturing. Pelletier *et al.* (2012) find that Peruvian, Bolivian and Guatemalan political leaders publicly speak out on nutrition issues, but fail to translate this into effective action. Symbolic gesturing is however less likely when an issue attracts significant public attention; when citizens’ tolerance for manipulation is low; or if the cultural importance of saving face is high (Brinkerhoff 2000; Post *et al.* 2010). Also, when made in the face of strong opposition their public declarations suggest strength of conviction and commitment (Morrissey 1995). Conversely, the absence of a public declaration does not imply there is no commitment. Decision-makers weigh advantages and disadvantages prior to declaring policy preferences, keeping in mind both the administrative capacity to deliver the desired policies and the identities and power of potential opponents (Morrissey 1995; Hammergren 1998; Morrissey and Verschoor 2006). Part of this involves understanding which actors’ ‘agreement or indifference is necessary to change the status quo policy position’ (Tsebelis 2002).⁶

‘Voluntary ownership’ of a policy agenda (McCourt 2003) constitutes a second indicator of political commitment. In the case of the nutrition agenda, Haddad (2013) notes that while international commitment is currently high, it is often unclear if this is truly reflected at the country level. Hence, are hunger and nutrition policies a donor agenda foisted on developing country governments, and/or do national policymakers and politicians themselves see these as important problems to address? The literature suggests that governments that experiment and innovate with new policy approaches, and whose spending on malnutrition is sensitive to electoral cycles and to emergencies and disasters, signal ‘voluntary ownership’ (Brinkerhoff

⁵ Some commitment metrics employ primary data, notably HRCI and HANCI, while the Political Commitment Rapid Assessment Tool (PCOM-RAT) awaits field-testing.

⁶ Veto players may be located in both formal and informal political institutions, as shown by McCourt’s (2003) study of failed economic reforms in Swaziland, where traditional forms of authority overrode democratically elected leadership.

2000). It can also be assessed in terms of the locus of initiative for reforms: is a policy initiated and (co-)designed by the ministry or department that is espousing or implementing the change (Johnson and Wasty 1993; Brinkerhoff 2000)?

A third indicator of commitment is the 'explicitness' with which policy initiatives are presented. Do governments set clear and realistically attainable policy goals, with specific targets? Where governments agree to put in place committees to review policy change, do they also clearly commit themselves to adopt their recommendations (McCourt 2003)? Are allocated budgets adequate for realistically addressing policy goals? National investment plans not only formalise financial commitments but also can help to give nutrition visibility and standing (Heaver 2005; Post *et al.* 2010). Political party manifestos provide critical guidance to the policy priorities of (future) ruling governments and opposition (see for example, Selbervik 2006); their explicit incorporation of hunger and nutrition as developmental problems therefore signals commitment.

A fourth indicator of commitment is whether government actions are 'irrevocable'. Enshrining policy reforms in statutory law provides a barrier against reversal. Budget spending can be assessed for its adequacy in achieving policy goals. Clear budget lines and transparent financial mechanisms for earmarked hunger and nutrition funding are important accountability tools that can make spending promises harder to renege on. Discrepancies between budget requests and allocations, and between allocations and actual spending also signal levels of commitment (Heaver 2005).

A further indicator of commitment is whether governments actively 'mobilise support' to build consensus, enhancing their ability to implement policy initiatives (Johnson and Wasty 1993; Brinkerhoff 2000). This may take the shape of subduing or compensating political opponents for losses incurred. Conversely, in cases where legislators or executives anticipate significant bureaucratic resistance at implementation but do nothing to constrain or placate key bureaucratic actors, they may be intentionally undermining a policy initiative (Post *et al.* 2010). Heaver (2005) stresses how accountability to a wide range of actors is needed to mobilise support and develop greater commitment to nutrition. One important component of mobilising support is hence to adequately allow representation of divergent interests in hunger and nutrition policy development (Brinkerhoff 2000). Put otherwise, building commitment involves reducing political conflict (Morrissey 1995).

Furthermore, commitment can be shown in terms of 'analytical rigour'. That is, to what extent do governments undertake in-depth assessments of the problem at hand, and effectively generate and use data to devise technically suitable and politically feasible policy interventions (Brinkerhoff 2000; Shiffman 2007). Sustained support for a policy initiative also requires effective monitoring and evaluation systems to generate knowledge on policy delivery, adjustment and policy learning.

Moreover, tackling enduring challenges such as hunger and undernutrition requires 'continuity and capacity'. Political will not only requires initiating, but also sustaining efforts and bearing associated costs in the face of opposition until results are achieved (Brinkerhoff 2000; Heaver 2005). As such, governments that engage in 'one-shot' efforts at solving a policy problem, or that openly support a policy but subsequently fail to adequately fund it, are showing low commitment. A capable bureaucracy is essential for implementing policy initiatives, including sufficient human and financial resources – a common concern in nutrition policy (Pelletier *et al.* 2012; Nisbett *et al.* 2014). Moreover, a perceived lack of administrative, technical and strategic capacity to deliver policy can constrain policy elites to voice their commitment publicly (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2000; Morrissey 1995; Hyden and Karlstrom 1993; Post *et al.* 2010). Strengthening and effectively using the financial and administrative capacities to deliver policy initiatives hence signals commitment.

'Implementation' of policy initiatives and reforms constitutes a critical area for assessing political commitment. The strength of implementation provides evidence of prior commitment (Morrissey 1995; McCourt 2003; Post *et al.* 2010). Feedback loops occur between the results of implementation and the (re)generation of political commitment to a policy initiative. Whereas strong implementation outcomes may strengthen resolve, weak outcomes may undermine existing commitment (Heaver 2005). Strong relations between spending and coverage of nutrition interventions signals high commitment, as is effective support for horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms needed to deliver multisectoral nutrition interventions (Heaver 2005).

A final commitment indicator concerns the extent to which government bureaucracies provide 'credible incentives' to agencies and individual civil servants to deliver policy initiatives (Brinkerhoff 2000). Such incentives could relate to intrinsic motivations stemming from personal goals and values, and extrinsic motivations such as performance targets and milestones (Heaver 2005). Committed governments therefore would seek to institute credible incentive structures in agencies that design and deliver hunger and nutrition policy to reward good performance (e.g. through enhanced budgets, reputations, promotions) and conversely, to incur negative sanctions in case of failure.

To sum up, we have identified nine indicators of political commitment: 'explicitness'; 'irrevocability'; 'voluntariness'; 'publicness'; 'mobilising support'; 'continuity and capacity'; 'analytical rigour'; 'credible incentives'; and 'implementation'. In the next section we present a method for empirically assessing these indicators using primary data.

3 Methods

The most popular research instrument for commitment metrics drawing on primary data is the expert perception survey. It has, for instance, been applied to assess political commitment regarding health (Goldberg *et al.* 2012), HIV/AIDS (USAID *et al.* 2003) and hunger and nutrition (te Lintelo *et al.* 2011, 2013, 2014a; Fox *et al.* 2014). This paper reports on findings from perception surveys conducted from July to October 2013 with 213 experts in five high burden and Scaling Up Nutrition campaign countries: Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, Tanzania and Zambia (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Hunger and nutrition data related to children under 5 years of age in the sample countries

Country	Wasting ^a	Stunting ^a	Underweight ^a	Source
Bangladesh	16	41	36	NIPORT, Mitra and Associates, and ICF International (2013)
Malawi	4	47	13	NSO and ICF Macro (2011)
Nepal	11	41	29	MOHP, New ERA and ICF International Inc. (2012)
Tanzania	5	42	16	NBS and ICF Macro (2011)
Zambia	5	45	15	CSO <i>et al.</i> (2009)

Note: ^a Percentage of children aged 0–59 months who are moderately or severely affected by this.

The surveys were carried out by well instructed in-country consultants, and overseen by partner organisations working on hunger and nutrition issues. A careful selection of experts based in each country was made to ensure representation from government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and/or civil society, the academic/research community and development partners. The consultants drew up lists of potential experts, with inputs from partner organisations and the authors. In order to obtain insider perspectives on political commitment, we endeavoured to include one-third of survey respondents from the government, and achieved this in all countries except Zambia. Substantial participation of government officials in the survey established external legitimacy and facilitated dialogue with government actors on research findings. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the sample of experts.

Table 3.2 The distribution of the sample of experts

	Bangladesh	Malawi	Nepal	Tanzania	Zambia	Total
Government	14	20	15	15	8	72
NGO/civil society	10	18	9	12	14	63
Academia/research	10	10	6	6	4	36
Development partners	4	6	9	7	12	38
Other	2	–	–	–	2	4
Total	40	54	39	40	40	213

Given the multisectoral nature of hunger and undernutrition, we involved experts representing health, nutrition, water and sanitation, social protection, agriculture, local government and gender development sectors. Respondents participated on the basis of informed consent obtained beforehand. Responses were anonymised and aggregated across the sample in each country.

Thirty-five survey questions sought to elicit experts' subjective opinions about various aspects of their country's government commitment to addressing hunger and nutrition. Because the concept of food security is a subset of nutrition security, before starting the survey, interviewers ascertained that respondents were clear about the conceptual differences.⁷ We then asked each survey question in Table 3.3 twice: once in relation to hunger and then again in relation to nutrition.

Table 3.3 The questions representing nine political commitment indicators

Explicitness	1. How well are the goals of improving (a) hunger and (b) nutrition outcomes expressed in development strategies/policies? 2. How well defined are (a) hunger and (b) nutrition outcomes in policies? 3. How well defined are (a) hunger and (b) nutrition outcomes in ruling political party/coalition manifestos? 4. To what extent are government policy preferences for addressing (a) hunger and (b) nutrition reflected in budget allocations? 5. In your opinion, how strong or weak would you, in general, characterise the national government's absolute (in money terms) budget allocations on (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?
Irrevocability	6. How well are budget lines related to (a) hunger and (b) nutrition developed in national budgets? 7. To what extent are government policy preferences for addressing (a) hunger and (b) nutrition reflected in its budget expenditures? 8. How well has the government developed transparent financial mechanisms for earmarked (a) hunger and (b) nutrition funding? 9. In your opinion, how strong or weak would you, in general, characterise the national government's absolute (in money terms) budget expenditures on (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?
Voluntary ownership	10. To what extent are (a) hunger and (b) nutrition policies initiated by the government agency responsible for executing these? ^a 11. To what extent does the government experiment and innovate with new policy approaches in (a) hunger and (b) nutrition? 12. In your opinion, how sensitive are government budget expenditures on (a) hunger and (b) nutrition to electoral cycles? 13. In your opinion, how sensitive are government budget expenditures on (a) hunger and (b) nutrition to emergencies/disasters?
Publicness	14. What kind of a priority does the government give to (a) hunger and (b) nutrition? 15. How accessible is government policy on (a) hunger and (b) nutrition to public scrutiny? 16. How developed is presidential/prime ministerial leadership in the country on (a) hunger and (b) nutrition? 17. How convincing are public statements made by senior politicians at the national level in relation to (a) hunger and (b) nutrition? ^b

(Cont'd.)

⁷ Whereas the double burden of malnutrition (under and over-nutrition) is a growing concern in all of our countries, and political commitment against both aspects is of importance, this research focused on undernutrition and hunger.

Table 3.3 (Cont'd.)

Mobilising support	<p>18. How well do agencies responsible for the design of (a) hunger and (b) nutrition policies build social/political support?</p> <p>19. How well do agencies responsible for the implementation of (a) hunger and (b) nutrition policies build social/political support?</p> <p>20. How well do policy/strategy decision-making bodies allow representation of divergent interests in area of (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p> <p>21. How successful are agencies in gathering support to overcome resistance from threatened interests of stakeholders in (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p>
Continuity and capacity	<p>22. To what extent does the government enhance administrative capacity to address (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p> <p>23. To what extent does the government enhance financial capacity to address (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p> <p>24. To what extent does the government utilise administrative capacity to address (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p> <p>25. To what extent does the government utilise financial capacity to address (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p>
Analytical rigour	<p>26. How developed are government systems that generate knowledge and evidence for (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p> <p>27. How likely are government policies to be adjusted when strong evidence suggests a change in course for (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p>
Credible incentives	<p>28. For national government agency/agencies in charge of designing (a) hunger and (b) nutrition policy, is achievement or failure to achieve public policy objectives credibly rewarded or sanctioned?</p> <p>29. For national government agency/agencies in charge of implementing (a) hunger and (b) nutrition policy, is achievement or failure to achieve public policy objectives credibly rewarded or sanctioned?</p> <p>30. For individuals within the national government agencies in charge of designing (a) hunger and (b) undernutrition policy, is achievement or failure to achieve public policy objectives credibly rewarded or sanctioned?</p> <p>31. For individuals within the national government agencies in charge of implementing (a) hunger and (b) undernutrition policy, is achievement or failure to achieve public policy objectives credibly rewarded or sanctioned?</p>
Implementation	<p>32. If the national government has appointed a coordinating body/bodies that promote(s) joined up thinking/action, how successful is/are the body/bodies in delivering a coordinated cross-agency approach to addressing (a) hunger and (b) nutrition? ^c</p> <p>33. In your opinion, what is the strength of coordination efforts by national government with sub-national government efforts to improve (a) hunger and (b) nutrition outcomes?</p> <p>34. How good is the implementation of public policies on (a) hunger and (b) nutrition?</p> <p>35. How sufficient are current government efforts towards fulfilling policy goals for those policies (you identified) which the national government considers most relevant to reduce (a) hunger and (b) undernutrition? ^a</p>

Notes: ^a A mean score was calculated based on opinions regarding up to five expert-identified flagship policies either addressing hunger or nutrition; ^b Data available for Zambia only; ^c All five countries have coordination bodies.

Each question uses a five-point Likert scale. An example of a scale used in HANCI is: (1) Very strongly, (2) Strongly, (3) So-so, (4) Weakly, and (5) Negligibly/not at all. Scales consistently used lower numeric values to denote higher commitment.⁸ We converted the experts' Likert scale-based responses to percentage scales using the following transformation function:

$$x'_{i,q,c} = \left(\frac{5 - x_{i,q,c}}{4} \right) \times 100$$

where $x_{i,q,c}$ is the original Likert scale response by an expert, i , for a question, q , in a country, c , and $x'_{i,q,c}$ is the corresponding percentage-transformed scale. The percentage scale allowed us to communicate findings to policy audiences in a more intuitive manner. The transformed scales were used to calculate mean score for each question, q , in a country, c . We also calculated mean scores at the indicator level. For both calculations, missing values were dropped. For example, if an indicator included two questions and one of the experts had only answered the first question, we drop his/her answer to that particular question but include his/her answer to the second question when calculating the indicator level mean score. Mean scores, both at the question level and at the indicator level, were estimated separately for hunger and for nutrition in each country.

We use paired sample t -tests for each of the 35 questions within the five countries to test our hypothesis that estimated question level mean scores are not equal between hunger and nutrition. More specifically, the paired t -test measures whether the difference between the mean score for hunger and the mean score for nutrition is significantly different from zero. Some authors claim that the use of parametric analyses (such as the t -test) for statistical testing of ordinal data (such as those based on percentage-transformed Likert scales) leads to inaccuracies, because the data are not normally distributed (Jamieson 2004). However, others such as Norman (2010) counter-argue that the suitability of parametric tests is conditional only on the normality of sample means and not on the normality of the data. They point out that even in cases where the data are non-normal, the means thereof will have normal distributions. Accordingly we proceed in the next section to implement the analytic strategy noted above and test the hypothesis that hunger and nutrition commitment are the same using paired t -tests. However, we also analyse the sensitivity of our results to the parametric nature of the analysis. We do this by repeating the analysis using the Wilcoxon (1945) signed sum test; the non-parametric version of the paired sample t -test.

The methodology employed was driven by our purpose to assess in-country political commitment. Expert perception surveys are well suited for this but do not explain underlying reasons for the data patterns detected. Moreover, we refrain from using the data for cross-country comparisons. The problem is one of measurement equivalence: survey questions are not necessarily interpreted in the same manner across the geographical, social and cultural set of locations studied here, thus introducing systematic bias. Within a country, however, measurement equivalence is assured.

⁸ Three other five-point scales were used: (a) Very important, Important, So-so, Unimportant, and Very unimportant; (b) Very clearly, Clearly, Somewhat, Unclearly, and Very unclearly; and (c) Strongly developed, Developed, Somewhat, Poorly developed, and Non-existent. 'Don't know' and 'refrain to answer' responses were re-coded as missing values *before* calculating the mean scores.

4 Findings

Table 4.1 provides summary statistics of survey findings for each country. It presents mean scores calculated for two to five questions (see column 'Qs') for each of the nine political commitment indicators. For example, five questions are relevant for the 'explicitness' indicator. The count of tabulated valid responses, 'Valid', varies mainly because of the unequal number of questions for each indicator. We are more interested in the variability of valid responses due to missing values which is highlighted in column 'Valid/N' reporting valid responses as a proportion of *N*, the total possible responses for an indicator in a given country. The latter is the product of the number of questions in an indicator and the number of experts in a country. For example, *N* for 'explicitness' in Bangladesh is 200=40×5. Out of these 200 possible expert responses 188 were valid which yields 'Valid/*N*' value of 0.94=188/200.

Table 4.1 Summary statistics organised by country and indicator of political commitment

	Indicators of commitment	Qs	Hunger					Nutrition				
			Valid	Valid N	Mean	SD	Med.	Valid	Valid N	Mean	SD	Med.
Bangladesh	Explicitness	5	188	0.94	68.4	22.7	75	186	0.93	55.6	23.4	50
	Irrevocability	4	153	0.96	55.6	23.5	50	152	0.95	46.5	22.5	50
	Voluntary ownership	4	129	0.81	66.5	23.8	75	134	0.84	57.1	23.3	50
	Publicness	4	117	0.73	70.1	23.0	75	117	0.73	61.5	24.5	75
	Mobilising support	4	157	0.98	60.8	22.7	50	157	0.98	54.6	21.9	50
	Continuity and capacity	4	153	0.96	56.4	21.4	50	154	0.96	46.6	22.0	50
	Analytical rigour	2	80	1.00	61.6	21.0	50	80	1.00	55.0	20.8	50
	Credible incentives	4	118	0.74	34.5	24.7	50	115	0.72	33.5	22.4	50
	Implementation	4	118	0.74	55.7	22.2	50	126	0.79	48.4	23.2	50
Malawi	Explicitness	5	249	0.92	73.7	25.9	75	255	0.94	59.1	30.8	50
	Irrevocability	4	199	0.92	57.9	31.7	50	197	0.91	45.9	29.1	50
	Voluntary ownership	4	192	0.89	71.0	27.0	75	167	0.77	61.3	30.0	50
	Publicness	4	157	0.73	72.9	26.4	75	160	0.74	65.6	26.7	75
	Mobilising support	4	201	0.93	64.4	25.9	75	203	0.94	62.2	27.1	75
	Continuity and capacity	4	209	0.97	60.3	25.5	50	213	0.99	55.4	24.6	50
	Analytical rigour	2	107	0.99	59.1	28.4	75	102	0.94	59.3	28.3	63
	Credible incentives	4	167	0.77	42.1	33.3	50	171	0.79	39.8	32.5	50
	Implementation	4	185	0.86	60.2	24.4	75	169	0.78	58.7	25.7	50
Nepal	Explicitness	5	174	0.89	50.6	22.6	50	179	0.92	52.7	24.2	50
	Irrevocability	4	138	0.88	44.4	21.1	50	148	0.95	46.3	22.8	50
	Voluntary ownership	4	133	0.85	53.0	24.5	50	147	0.94	56.6	24.9	50
	Publicness	4	112	0.72	55.4	24.5	50	113	0.72	59.1	25.7	50
	Mobilising support	4	152	0.97	54.1	22.7	50	152	0.97	57.6	21.2	50
	Continuity and capacity	4	152	0.97	45.4	18.1	50	152	0.97	47.4	18.0	50
	Analytical rigour	2	75	0.96	51.7	19.9	50	76	0.97	52.6	19.4	50
	Credible incentives	4	140	0.90	40.9	21.5	50	140	0.90	41.3	22.2	50
	Implementation	4	123	0.79	52.5	17.9	50	143	0.92	54.1	17.9	50

(Cont'd.)

Table 4.1 (Cont'd.)

	Indicators of commitment	Qs	Hunger					Nutrition				
			Valid	$\frac{Valid}{N}$	Mean	SD	Med.	Valid	$\frac{Valid}{N}$	Mean	SD	Med
Tanzania	Explicitness	5	163	0.82	51.8	23.3	50	169	0.85	42.6	22.6	50
	Irrevocability	4	148	0.93	36.8	19.7	25	151	0.94	30.1	20.1	25
	Voluntary ownership	4	133	0.83	63.3	24.8	75	139	0.87	46.5	22.4	50
	Publicness	4	119	0.74	54.0	25.0	50	119	0.74	48.7	27.0	50
	Mobilising support	4	153	0.96	46.1	21.1	50	155	0.97	44.2	22.4	50
	Continuity and capacity	4	157	0.98	43.5	21.8	50	159	0.99	37.6	21.4	50
	Analytical rigour	2	78	0.98	48.1	22.7	50	79	0.99	39.6	19.9	25
	Credible incentives	4	152	0.95	20.4	20.4	25	153	0.96	19.9	19.5	25
	Implementation	4	138	0.86	51.2	21.4	50	150	0.94	45.3	23.3	50
Zambia	Explicitness	5	185	0.93	65.8	25.9	75	182	0.91	44.8	30.3	50
	Irrevocability	4	150	0.94	54.0	26.9	50	146	0.91	35.3	25.9	25
	Voluntary ownership	4	125	0.78	71.8	26.6	75	129	0.81	55.0	30.9	50
	Publicness	4	154	0.96	47.7	34.6	50	151	0.94	38.2	31.8	50
	Mobilising support	4	157	0.98	58.6	23.8	50	157	0.98	51.4	25.0	50
	Continuity and capacity	4	153	0.96	56.0	23.7	50	148	0.93	41.6	24.5	50
	Analytical rigour	2	78	0.98	60.9	25.7	50	77	0.96	52.3	24.7	50
	Credible incentives	4	127	0.79	13.8	22.3	0	131	0.82	13.1	24.8	0
	Implementation	4	101	0.63	57.7	23.4	50	103	0.64	45.0	25.3	50

Some salient features of the data revealed in Table 4.1 highlight the following themes:

1. Response rates are strong overall, though are not even for all commitment indicators. 'Valid/N' for 'Publicness' is the weakest among all indicators in all countries except Zambia.
2. The response rate for hunger and nutrition is similar for all indicators in all countries. It follows that experts who answered a hunger-related question were also highly likely to answer the corresponding question on nutrition, and vice versa.
3. On 35 (out of 45) occasions the mean for the indicator of hunger commitment is higher than the corresponding mean for nutrition.
4. Out of the remaining ten cases (where the hunger commitment mean is lower than the nutrition commitment mean), nine are in Nepal.
5. On 11 occasions the median for hunger commitment is higher than the median for nutrition commitment and the reverse is true in none of the cases.
6. Within each of the countries, the range of mean scores (in per cent) on commitment indicators vary substantially: in Zambia (13.1–71.8); Tanzania (19.9–63.3); Nepal (40.9–59.1); Malawi (39.8–73.7); and in Bangladesh (33.5–70.1). This suggests that within countries, commitment-building efforts could focus on indicators with lower range scores.

We next take a more detailed look at the data. Figure 4.1 sets out mean scores on hunger and nutrition commitment for 35 questions asked organised by indicators within each country. All pairs of hunger-nutrition commitment averages are plotted in the figure with an arrow connecting the two averages. The arrows highlight whether there is a difference between the mean scores and also the direction of that difference. All right-pointing arrows indicate that hunger commitment obtained a higher mean score (stronger commitment) than nutrition commitment; the left-pointing ones indicate the reverse. Upward-pointing arrows indicate that the two means were identical.

Figure 4.1 also summarises the results of the series of paired *t*-tests carried out to establish whether the observed differences are statistically significant. A black dot placed against a

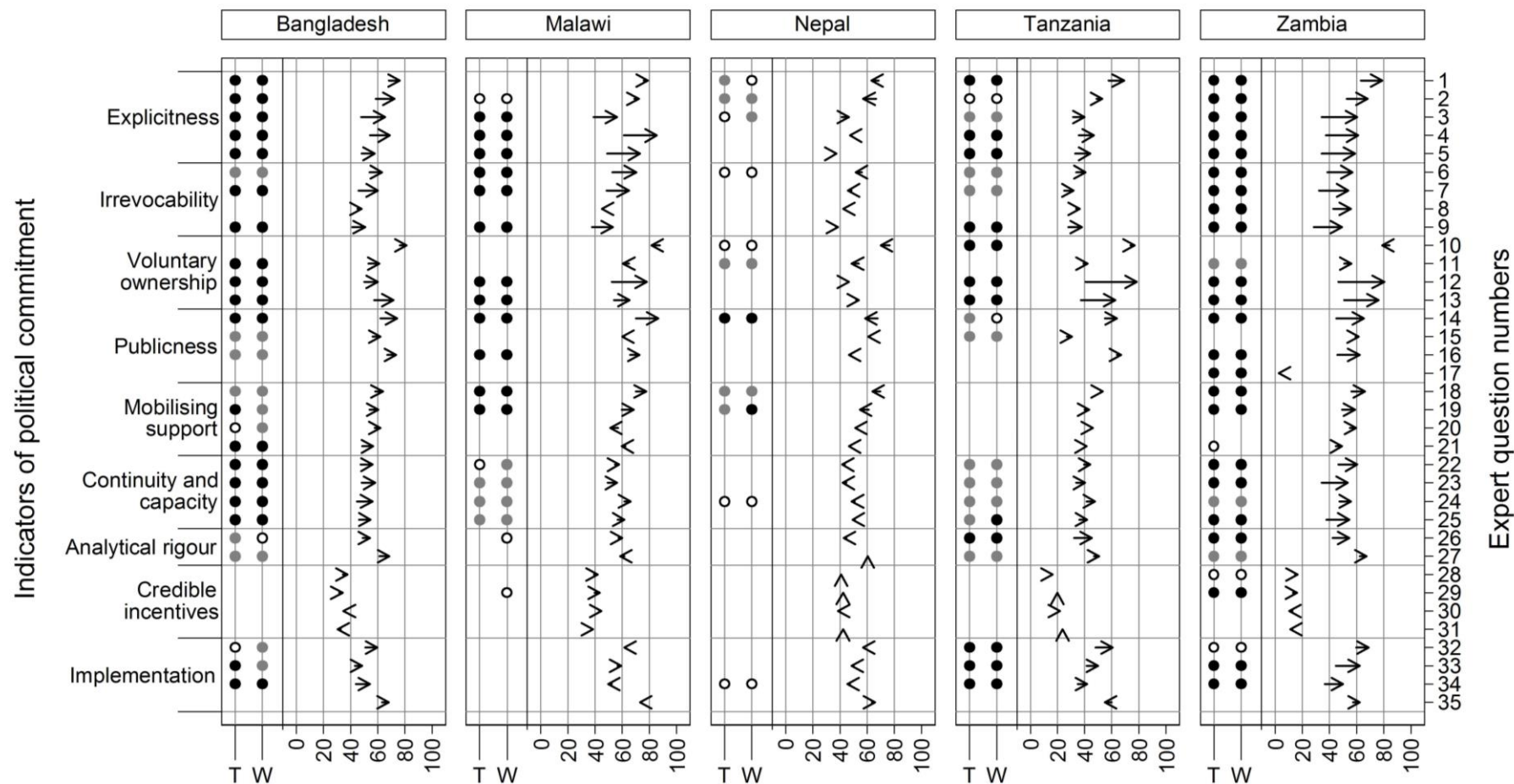
country-question combination along 'T' in the horizontal axis indicates that mean scores for hunger/nutrition commitment are statistically different at the 1 per cent level of significance. Similarly, grey dots indicate significance at the 5 per cent level; white dots at the 10 per cent level. Missing dots signify (1) that hunger/nutrition mean scores are identical or (2) that they are different but the difference is not statistically significant. The dots against 'W' report the corresponding Wilcoxon signed sum test results and are colour coded similarly.

The *t* statistic results in Figure 4.1 indicate that evidence from Bangladesh and Zambia provides the strongest support for the assertion that hunger and nutrition commitment are divergent phenomena. In Zambia, all commitment indicators have at least one expert question with a *t* statistic significant at the 5 per cent level. Out of 35 *t*-tests, 26 are significant (26/35) at the 5 per cent level.⁹ In Bangladesh 25/34 *t*-tests are significant and 8/9 commitment indicators have at least one expert question with a *t* statistic significant at the 5 per cent level. Moreover, in all of these 51 (26+25) cases, hunger commitment is stronger than nutrition commitment (as per mean scores). In the vast majority of these cases (19/34 for Bangladesh and 23/35 for Zambia) the *t* statistics are significant at the 1 per cent level, which lends even stronger statistical support for these findings.

Tanzania and Malawi have the next highest number of significant *t* statistics with 21/34 and 15/34 statistics significant at the 5 per cent level respectively. Here again we find hunger commitment to be stronger than nutrition commitment. In Tanzania 7/9 commitment indicators have at least one expert question with a *t* statistic significant at the 5 per cent level, and in Malawi this is 6/9.

⁹ Zambia has data for one additional question, question 17.

Figure 4.1 Empirical characterisation of political commitment to hunger and undernutrition



Notes: Mean scores for 34 (and in case of Zambia, 35) questions are compared using arrows where the arrowheads point from nutrition scores to the corresponding hunger scores. The vertical axes show question numbers on the right-hand side and indicators on the left. The questions are spelt out in more detail in Table 3.3. In addition to comparing the means (using arrows) the figure also illustrates whether the estimated differences in mean scores are statistically significant. Significant *t*-test results are indicated by dots against the relevant question along 'T' in the horizontal axis. Similarly, significant Wilcoxon signed rank sum test results are indicated by dots along 'W'. The dots are uniformly colour coded where white (○) indicates significance at 10 per cent level; grey (◐) at 5 per cent level; and black (●) at 1 per cent level.

Nepal has the lowest number of significant t statistics with 6/34 significant at the 5 per cent level. Interestingly, pair-wise comparison of means in these six cases finds nutrition commitment to be stronger than hunger commitment. Similar scoring patterns were found for 19 other questions, however the differences were not statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. At the indicator level in Nepal, 4/9 commitment indicators have at least one expert question with a t statistic significant at the 5 per cent level.¹⁰

The question-by-question comparison of hunger and nutrition commitment scores enables an assessment of how well questions empirically fit selected commitment indicators. For example, if four expert questions are relevant for a given indicator of commitment all four would be expected to score hunger above nutrition or vice versa. If not, the basis for selection of these questions to represent a given commitment indicator will have to be considered empirically weak. Our data in this respect show that in all instances where statistically significant differences in hunger and nutrition commitment were found, all questions in a given indicator in a given country rank hunger and nutrition commitment in the same order.

Further, findings from Wilcoxon signed rank sum test results reported in Figure 4.1 confirm the t -test based results, nearly one to one. Out of 171 country-question combinations that were tested, only 14 yielded a Wilcoxon test result that diverged from the corresponding t -test result. Only in one case is this difference so strong that a t -test result rejecting the null hypothesis at least at the 10 per cent level was overturned when the test was done using the Wilcoxon method where the latter test failed to reject the null. It is clear that the core of the findings based on t -tests do not change if instead we use Wilcoxon tests. We therefore conclude that our results are not sensitive to whether parametric methods are used to arrive at those results.

The results in Figure 4.1 may be summarised as follows:

1. In each of the five countries studied empirical levels of government commitment to hunger reduction are shown to differ from commitment to nutrition.
2. Hunger commitment is stronger than nutrition commitment in four of the countries: Bangladesh, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia.
3. In contrast, in Nepal nutrition commitment scores are statistically significantly higher than hunger commitment, at the 5 per cent level, however only in six out of 34 questions.
4. While findings for all political commitment indicators support the assertion that government commitment addressing hunger and nutrition is different, the 'credible incentives' indicator offers least support for this. These incentives tend to be systemic, and not unique to those parts of bureaucracies addressing hunger or nutrition.
5. There is some empirical support for our allocation of questions under specific political commitment indicators.
6. The results are robust and are not sensitive to the parametric tests used.

¹⁰ Whereas this study is not designed to explain why these results show for the countries we note that Nepal has seen remarkable improvements in stunting outcomes over the past decades and is one of a select group of low-income countries succeeding in achieving Millennium Development Goals on maternal mortality.

5 Discussion

In this section we will situate these findings in the context of the existing literature in a bid to understand them better and to consider implications for donor organisations, civil society and governments which seek to enhance political commitment to reduce hunger and nutrition.

The first key finding of our study is that empirically, hunger reduction commitment exceeds nutrition commitment in Malawi, Bangladesh, Tanzania and Zambia, while somewhat less strong evidence suggests the reverse is the case in Nepal. Failure to acknowledge what are often superior levels of commitment to hunger reduction within high burden countries may risk continuing historically inadequate prioritisation of non-food aspects of malnutrition (Heaver 2005), to imperil the achievement of key global or regional nutrition targets. For instance, the African Union Malabo Declaration 2014 seeks to achieve 10 per cent stunting levels by 2025 (African Union 2014), and the World Health Assembly targets a 40 per cent reduction of the global number of stunted children under five by 2025 (World Health Organization 2012).

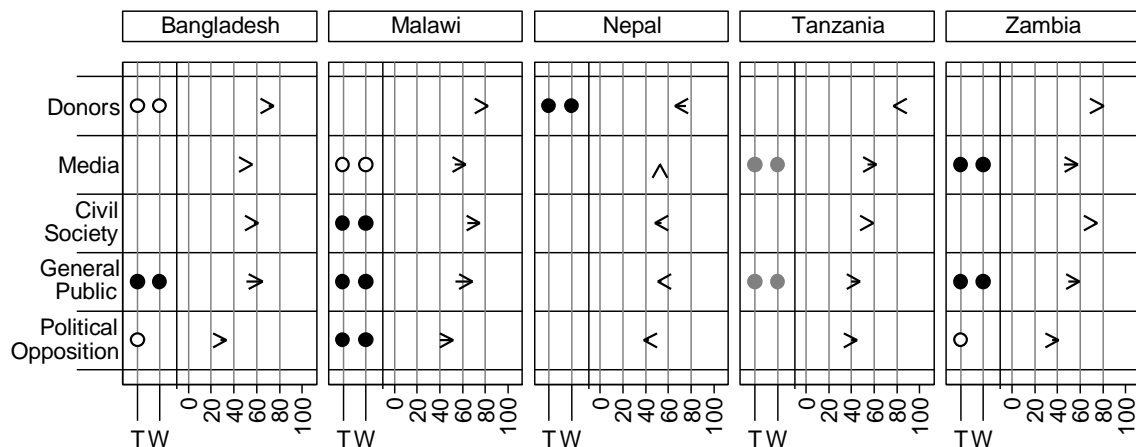
The second key finding from the study is that within each country, performance on the nine commitment indicators is quite uneven. The survey thus offers a diagnostic tool that could help donors, civil society leaders and nutrition champions to assess in which areas commitment is in need of strengthening, and in which areas further strengthening may not be a priority. Thus, in Bangladesh, 'publicness' is gaining strongest scores in the case of both nutrition and hunger, whereas for Zambia scores on this indicator lag behind other commitment indicators. Nevertheless, we also see some commonalities across countries. First, experts consistently allocated weakest commitment scores to 'credible incentives'. Reforms towards more credible incentives in bureaucracies are not specific to nutrition and hunger; they are systemic and exemplify the impossibility of strengthening commitment overnight (Heaver 2005). Second, 'irrevocability' and 'continuity and capacity' emerge as other indicators on which scores are relatively poor in each country. In particular, expert scores highlight the need to anchor nutrition budget lines in national budgets; to substantially increase funding for nutrition in order to deliver government policy preferences; and the importance of developing more transparent financial mechanisms. These findings affirm concerns in the literature that highlight under-investment in care, hygiene and health aspects of nutrition (Heaver 2005); weak financial and administrative capacities to deliver nutrition interventions; unevenness in public information on national nutrition budget allocations and the poor tracking of domestic investments in nutrition. For instance, out of 51 Scaling Up Nutrition countries just three currently track domestic investments (Fracassi and Picanyol 2014).

In terms of the strongest commitment scores we witness greater variation across indicators in countries, as follows. In the case of nutrition commitment, 'publicness' received strongest scores in all countries except Zambia, and this indicator also obtains strongest scores in Nepal and Bangladesh for hunger commitment. This broadly affirms the finding from Pelletier *et al.* (2012) that while some governments do publicly speak out, committed action that delivers on nutrition is not as pronounced. For Tanzania and Zambia, 'voluntary ownership' obtains the strongest scores, and in Malawi the 'explicitness' indicator performs best for hunger commitment.

Several factors may explain different hunger and nutrition commitment scores. In many countries, political elites commonly appreciate that containing extreme hunger is germane to political survival. As a former president of Nigeria noted: 'A hungry person is an angry and dangerous person' (Obasanjo 2005). Moreover, hunger commitment is foundational in some countries; Bangladesh's independence occurred on the back of famine. Despite prominent recent statements by, for instance, Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete and India's former

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declaring undernutrition as a ‘national disaster’ or a ‘national shame’ respectively, historically non-food aspects of nutrition have not been as politicised as hunger. There is also a risk that symbolic politics thrive when reputational costs for unfulfilled public statements are low (Post *et al.* 2010) and the lack of popular demand for action on nutrition is indicative. One aspect of our survey (not reported above) explored who supports government action on hunger and undernutrition (see Figure 5.1). In all countries except Nepal, general publics are statistically significantly more supportive towards government efforts on hunger than nutrition. Furthermore, public support is often lagging behind donor support, raising questions about the sustainability of donor agendas.

Figure 5.1 Stakeholder support for government action on hunger and nutrition



Notes: The expert assessment of support by various stakeholders and the statistical significance of the level of support between the hunger and nutrition divide is documented here. Notation, the choice of statistical tests, and the colour codes used in presenting the test results are identical to those used in Figure 4.1.

For communities, malnutrition is usually invisible, and neither they nor governments tend to recognise its human and economic costs (Heaver 2005; Haddad 2013). Malnourished people, unlike hungry people, hence are less inclined to demand government action, and less likely to vote or rebel for change. We thus find that nutrition budgets are much less sensitive to electoral cycles than hunger budgets (question 12 in Figure 4.1).

Achieving greater nutrition commitment is also hindered by low levels of awareness or knowledge, institutional complexity and limited managerial capacity, and differing political or bureaucratic-political interests (Heaver 2005). Like the general public, decision-makers often have low awareness about the multiple causes, manifestations and consequences of malnutrition. Moreover, improving nutrition outcomes requires multisectoral action but this is often constrained by weak incentives for collaboration across sectors (Haddad 2013) and conflicting bureaucratic interests. Further, approaches to nutrition have also long been dominated by food- or disease-based models that emphasised technocratic solutions, neglecting political economy and policy process-related causes (Pelletier *et al.* 1995, 2012; Heaver 2005; Nisbett *et al.* 2014).

Given these findings, what strategies could improve nutrition commitment? Hyden and Karlstrom (1993) suggest that interventions by donors, civil society and governments should consider two dimensions: ‘conflict’ and ‘ambiguity’. The former represents the extent of political opposition that interventions are likely to elicit, while the latter represents the learning required to implement these, in terms of complexity and range of organisations involved (Morrissey 1995). As compared to nutrition, anti-hunger interventions benefit from higher levels of consensus, lower complexity and a smaller range of organisations are likely to be

involved. Under such conditions, well-resourced technical solutions (Hyden and Karlstrom 1993: 1,401) could address hunger, for instance by raising agricultural productivity and rural incomes. However, a different strategy may be needed for better nutrition outcomes. As long as nutrition remains under-politicised, efforts could focus on strengthening capacity (Hyden and Karlstrom 1993), before wide-ranging nutrition reforms are undertaken (Morrissey 1995: 640). Our expert survey findings also highlight the need for capacity building. The capacity of implementing organisations may be built by appropriately motivating staff and encouraging clients to use and monitor nutrition services (Heaver 2005). An incremental approach, strategically using small-scale programmes rather than comprehensive reforms, can demonstrate improved nutrition outcomes, which in turn can generate commitment to do more and enhance capacity for attempting subsequent complex reforms (Heaver 2005; Morrissey 1995). Small aid donors or foundations lacking resources to finance direct intervention programmes at scale could aim to persuade governments to seek additional development assistance and allocate more of their own resources for nutrition (Heaver 2005). Such an approach would also address long-term nutrition financing needs: aid funds for nutrition intervention programmes will always be a small proportion of what developing-country governments contribute (Heaver 2005; IFPRI 2014). However, without increased understanding of the manifestations and consequences of malnutrition among political leaders, senior bureaucrats, civil society leaders, communities and parents, sustained demand for greater action on nutrition will remain muted.

6 Conclusion

Academic and policy literatures as well as dominant narratives on nutrition in development have long had a tendency to conflate hunger with undernutrition, and food security with nutrition security (World Bank 2006; Nisbett *et al.* 2014). This suggests that commitment metrics, which have gained popularity in recent years, should be sensitive to these differences. This article accordingly aimed to empirically assess whether government commitment to hunger reduction is the same as commitment to addressing undernutrition. We synthesised the political commitment literature to identify nine commitment indicators, to build a survey instrument and test the hypothesis that governments are as equally committed to hunger reduction as to improving undernutrition. Structured surveys were conducted face-to-face with 213 experts in five developing countries, each with high burdens of hunger and undernutrition: Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, Tanzania and Zambia.

We find that in each case study country commitment to hunger reduction is not the same as commitment to nutrition, and paired *t*-tests show that these differences are frequently statistically significant. In Bangladesh, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia we find substantial evidence that hunger reduction commitment exceeds nutrition commitment. In Nepal, evidence is less pronounced but suggests that nutrition commitment surpasses hunger commitment. We thus affirm our hypothesis that government commitment to hunger reduction does not equate with commitment to nutrition and propose that commitment metrics are sensitive to these differences in order to better guide public policy and programmatic action.

The expert perception survey tool we presented offers a diagnostic for governments, donors, civil society leaders and nutrition champions to assess in which areas commitment is in need of being strengthened, and in which areas further strengthening may not be a priority. Our work with civil society groups, members of parliament and governments in Tanzania and Zambia has highlighted that survey findings are highly relevant to policy dialogues and advocacy. This is because empirical data on the nine commitment indicators are rare, grounded in local realities and credible thanks to the balanced approach to respondent selection. Longitudinal application of this low-cost survey tool could thus help to track temporal progress in delivering committed hunger and nutrition action on the ground. The commitment metric developed in this paper is a first, imperfect effort. We anticipate improving the survey instrument to more precisely disentangle commitment to food aspects from commitment to the care, hygiene and health aspects of nutrition security, and to use vignette techniques to enable cross-country comparisons.

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