

Title: From Coherence Towards Commitment: Changes and Challenges in Zambia's Nutrition Policy Environment

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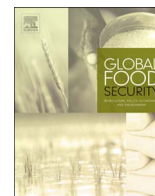
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More details/abstract: This paper reviews the literature on taxation of the informal economy, taking stock of key debates and drawing attention to recent innovations. Conventionally, the debate on whether to tax has frequently focused on the limited revenue potential, high cost of collection, and potentially adverse impact on small firms. Recent arguments have increasingly emphasised the more indirect benefits of informal taxation in relation to economic growth, broader tax compliance, and governance. More research is needed, we argue, into the relevant costs and benefits for all, including quasi-voluntary compliance, political and administrative incentives for reform, and citizen-state bargaining over taxation.

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From coherence towards commitment: Changes and challenges in Zambia's nutrition policy environment



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ABSTRACT

An enabling environment for malnutrition reduction includes creating policy and political momentum, and converting momentum to implementation and impact. We used several qualitative data sources to investigate changes in policy and action over time in Zambia. There now exists coherent policy covering key nutrition issues from several sectors, and multisectoral coordination structures at national level and in pilot districts. However, converting momentum into action faces challenges of limited national political and funding commitment, with increased donor resources currently bridging the gap, and reach into communities is still limited. To sustain recent stunting reductions there are still political challenges to be addressed in Zambia, and citizens and civil society will need to hold government to account for recent commitments on nutrition.

1. Introduction

1.1. Nutrition policy processes

Malnutrition in its multiple forms affects one in three people in the world, in every country on the planet, manifesting among other things as stunted growth, micronutrient deficiencies, and chronic illnesses brought about directly by hunger, poor diets, and disease (IFPRI, 2016). Recent years have seen increased international momentum for nutrition action, and concurrently increased research into how nutrition policy is made and implemented in countries (the policy process), and the particular contexts in which this plays out (Bryce et al., 2008; Gillespie et al., 2013). Both historical changes and future challenges in nutrition policy processes need to be understood if countries are to learn from one another on how to move forward with reducing their malnutrition burden. This paper contributes an exploration of the experience of Zambia, as one of six country case studies under the Stories of Change research project.

Nutrition is often called a 'cross-cutting issue', with relevance to and implications from multiple sectors, hence its cross-cutting nature is often cited as a rationale for cross-sectoral coherence in policy and cross-sectoral coordination in action (Benson, 2008; Garrett et al., 2011; Harris and Drimie, 2012). Scholars define policy coherence as different levels of consistency in written policy within or across different sectors (vertical or horizontal), either in terms of actions

promoted or goals aimed for, with the intention of creating synergies or reducing duplication, fragmentation or contradictions between policies (Duraiappah and Bhardwaj, 2007). Similarly, coordination of inter-sectoral action in implementing policy may be either horizontal or vertical, and has had multiple definitions along a continuum describing levels of formality of intersectoral governance, sharing of responsibility, and pooling of resources (Harris and Drimie, 2012). In order to link coherence in policy with coordination of implementation, the institutions governing nutrition need to commit both attention and resources to an issue, and the importance of sustained commitment of different forms has been recognized in previous nutrition research (Engesveen et al., 2009; Haddad, 2012; Pelletier et al., 2012). In assessing commitment, important distinctions can be made between political attention (often at a high level, such as mention in presidential speeches), political commitment (such as executive directives or setting of targets or policy), and system-wide commitment (such as allocation of the necessary authority and financial and human resources to relevant bodies, and the exercise of oversight and accountability) (Pelletier et al., 2011).

This study looks at the level of policy coherence for nutrition currently found in Zambia, with a view to understanding the synergies that are available and any contradictions that are evident among policies in different sectors. It also looks at intersectoral coordination, and in particular at a pilot project of coordinated implementation that takes a very different form to previous top-down approaches. The study

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assesses how different forms of commitment have played out in Zambia, and the effects these have had on the possibilities for action. Finally, the study comments on how coherence, commitment and coordination in governance have been experienced by communities in practice, and notes some new actions required going forward.

1.2. *Zambian context: nutrition indicators, actors and policies*

Zambia has a level of chronic malnutrition, manifesting as stunted growth, far beyond the limits defined as acceptable; currently standing at 40%, this is almost one in two of its children. Overall, stunting increased in surveys from 1992 to 2001 and then reduced by 12 percentage points from 2002 to 2014 (Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Health et al., 2014). This recent downward change was driven in large part by household ownership of bednets as a proxy for malaria reduction; in part by increased assets as a proxy for wealth (improving in Zambia, albeit highly unequally); and in part by positive and negative changes in water and sanitation (Headey et al., this issue). As well as this decreasing prevalence of stunting in children, Zambia mirrors other lower middle-income countries in having an increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity in women, which has risen from 12% in 2002 to 23% in 2014 (Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Health et al., 2014), and high levels of deficiency in multiple micro-nutrients (NFNC, 2013), creating a ‘triple burden’ of malnutrition in large parts of the country.

Zambia has come some way over the past years in creating strategies for tackling these different aspects of malnutrition; however, important challenges remain. Nutrition has been part of the national agenda at

least since Zambia became independent from Britain in 1964 (Fig. 1). Early actions for nutrition in the emerging state included the Act of Parliament establishing the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) as a semi-autonomous entity within the Ministry of Health (MOH) through the National Food and Nutrition Act of 1967. This Act mandates the NFNC to promote food and nutrition activities and to advise the government accordingly. Zambia focused largely on delivery of single micronutrients in national programs from 1972 to 1992; in the late 1970s programs were started for tackling iodine, iron and vitamin A deficiencies, spanning fortification and supplementation initiatives through the private sector and national health system, and these initiatives persist in some form to the present day (Haggblade et al., 2016).

The early 1990s saw several events that sent shocks through the country, including significant changes in governance through the introduction of multi-party politics in 1991; significant reductions in social spending through internationally-imposed economic reforms; a devastating HIV epidemic; and a severe drought and subsequent poor harvests. In the wake of these events, two key nutrition organizations were launched: the Program Against Malnutrition (PAM- a domestic NGO) was mandated to tackle the hunger and undernutrition sparked by the drought and economic reforms; and the Nutrition Association of Zambia (NAZ- a professionals group) convened to provide leadership from within the nutrition profession. At the same time, in 1992, a large international conference on nutrition (ICN1) endorsed a world plan of action on nutrition, and called for all countries to have a nutrition strategy in place (FAO and WHO, 1992). Zambia subsequently wrote a national plan of action on nutrition, though this was rejected by

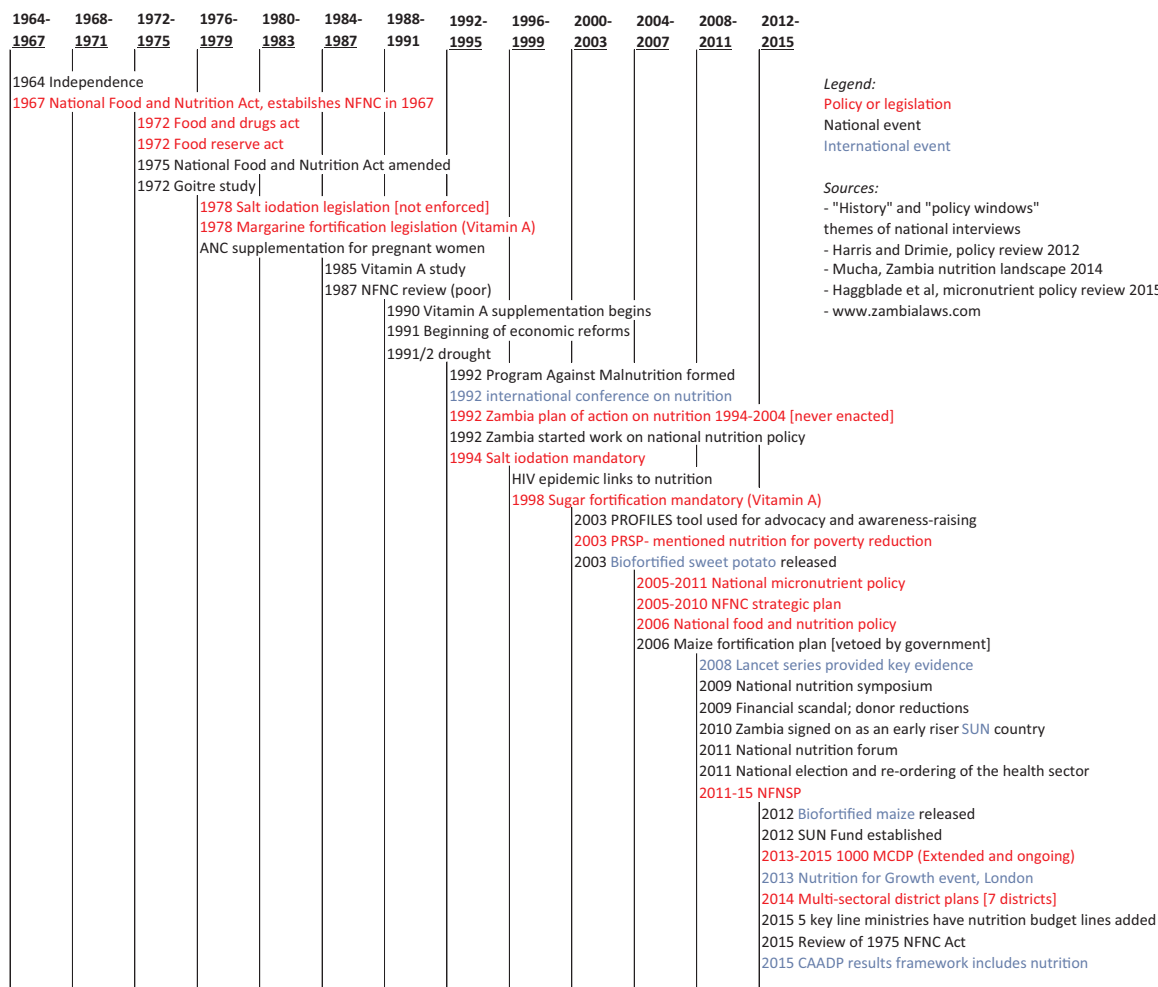


Fig. 1. Nutrition policy in Zambia since independence (Mucha 2014).

legislators as it did not have the backing of any formal policy documents. The plan was never enacted, and work began instead on a National Food and Nutrition Policy (NFNP) – not completed until almost 15 years later in 2006 – that incorporated and built upon disparate policies on breastfeeding and micronutrients that had been created in the interim.

Two years after the NFNP was launched, the Lancet produced its landmark series of papers documenting the state of evidence on malnutrition and implications for action (Black et al., 2008), cited by many respondents in this research as a key advocacy and learning tool for the Zambian nutrition community. At the same time, two important national events put nutrition squarely on the Zambian map (the 2009 national nutrition symposium and 2011 national nutrition forum), with inaugural addresses by the President and attendance by senior ministers. Zambia also joined the SUN movement as an early riser country in 2011, creating platforms for a multi-donor fund (the SUN Fund) and a broad civil society grouping with a focus on nutrition advocacy (CSOSUN) among others. Over this time the emphasis of the nutrition community narrowed to focus on current narratives of stunting and multi-sectoral action, with the production of the 2011 National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan (NFNSP) and the subsequent First 1000 Most Critical Days Program (MCDP). This study traces the processes leading to these policies and programs, and the implementation that has happened since, to start to understand what has driven Zambia's story of change in nutrition.

2. Methods

This study uses an in-depth, longitudinal, qualitative case-study methodology to track the nutrition policy process over time in Zambia and assess how certain issues came to the fore; how issues were acted upon at different levels; who and what drove these processes; and how policy and program changes were received and experienced by communities. Several guiding frameworks were used in designing this research: An overall model of the policy process as four key, interlinked stages - from agenda-setting to policy formulation, implementation and review - gives some structure to the different phases we assess (Lasswell and Lerner, 1951); then frameworks looking in more depth at agenda setting (Shiffman, 2007), commitment (Heaver, 2005) and intersectoral coordination (Garrett and Natalicchio, 2012) are superimposed to guide a deeper assessment of specific policy process issues relevant to Zambia.

This research uses several sources of qualitative data, collected at several different levels and several different time points. First, at national level, a narrative review was undertaken in 2015 of key policy and strategy documents in several sectors, and these were systematically assessed particularly to look for content related to nutrition within each sector, as to whether there was vertical coherence within sectors, and horizontal coherence across sectors as relates to nutrition.

Second, stakeholder mapping methods (Schiffer, 2007; Schiffer and Waale, 2008; Schiffer and Hauck, 2010) involved the facilitation of respondents (in groups or individually) in creating drawn maps of actors in a policy network and their links, and assigning relative influence based on the respondents' understanding of the network. These were used at national level in 2015 to gain a cross-sectional view of organizations involved in nutrition-relevant policy and action, as well as their influence over the issue of nutrition, and the 'accountability' links between organizations. Stakeholder mapping was also undertaken in 2011 and 2015 in one district where multi-sectoral action for nutrition is being piloted, to assess changes in nutrition actors and coordination among them. Interview data were entered into matrices to show links, and from these social network maps were generated using the Visualizer network analysis software, and analyzed qualitatively for structure and content.

Third, to elicit the views of actors from a range of government and non-government institutions on issues involved in creating and implementing nutrition policy and programs, a total of 51 interviews with

43 participants at district and national levels were undertaken at regular intervals between 2011 and 2016. In addition, 14 focus groups and 4 key informant interviews were undertaken in communities within the pilot district in 2015, to explore the experiences of men, women and young people around the implementation of nutrition programs. Interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed using NVivo 11 software, involving a process of coding to themes to identify patterns in the data. Initial 'sensitizing themes' for developing codes were derived from concepts in the guiding frameworks, but codes were also derived directly from the data in the course of fieldwork and analysis. Given the timeline of this research, more than one round of interviews took place to further investigate emerging themes, so that the process became iterative. Data under each code were organized and reduced using Framework Analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002), particularly noting key points of consensus or lack of agreement around different topics.

Findings from each data source and method were then woven together narratively by the authors with contextual data on nutrition change, with reference to the core themes of the study, to produce the final analysis. Several country-based reviews, or 'member checks', of emerging findings through the course of the research strengthened the final interpretation.

3. Findings

3.1. Policy coherence across sectors

A review of nutrition-related policies in different sectors prior to 2010 found that Zambia's nutrition policy environment over several decades had been incoherent and uncoordinated across sectors, and incomplete within the nutrition sector (Harris and Drimie, 2012). In the decade since the release of the NFNP, a cascade of strategic plans, program documents, multisectoral district plans and guidance notes have followed, giving Zambia - on paper at least - one of the strongest policy environments for nutrition in southern Africa. Due to the predominance of direct, nutrition-specific interventions in nutrition for development (whose primary objective is to address nutrition and that target the immediate causes of undernutrition), nutrition has traditionally been the preserve of the health sector. More recently, with increased funding for nutrition-related programs and new discourses promoting stunting as a key indicator of overall development in a country, other sectors are also taking steps to incorporate nutrition-sensitive actions (whose primary objective is not nutrition, but that have the potential to improve food and nutrition security) into policies and programs.

Fig. 2 shows Zambian policy and strategy documents relevant to nutrition in five key line ministries implementing the MCDP, as well as dedicated nutrition policies and over-arching development plans. Zambia's Vision 2030 clearly articulates a vision for "a well-nourished and healthy population by 2030", and goals and targets support this vision. As a result, the Sixth National Development Plan (SNDP), released in 2011, has a goal of "food and nutrition security", and acknowledges nutrition as underpinning progress on all development objectives, including a direct contribution to Vision 2030 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Once nutrition is on the SNDP agenda, it then opens opportunity for government spending and action. The SNDP resonates with the 2006 NFNP, as well as aligning with the NFNSP which appeared in the same year. Each document reinforces the emphasis on line ministries taking responsibility for different aspects of addressing malnutrition as part of their sectoral activities.

Two key sectors for nutrition are health and agriculture. The National Health Strategic Plan of 2011–15 was the fifth in a series of strategic plans that give substance to the work of the Ministry of Health (MOH). The overarching nutrition objective was "to significantly improve the nutritional status of the population and ensure food safety, particularly for children, adolescents and mothers in child bearing age, so as to prevent diseases", across nine strategic areas. The Strategic Plan

		Millennium Development Goals, 2000					
		Zambia Vision 2030, GRZ 2006					
		Zambia Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, IMF 2007					
		Zambia Sixth National Development Plan, GRZ 2011					
International		Nutrition	Agriculture	Health	Education	Social protection	Water and sanitation
			SUN Framework for Action	CAADP agreement	World Health Assembly agreement		
← National		National Food and Nutrition Policy 2006	National Agriculture Policy 2016	National Health Policy 1992	National School Health and Nutrition Policy 2006	National Social Protection Policy/plan, 2014	
		National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan 2011-15	MAL Strategic Plan 2013-16 (“Budget Strategy”) Including 2008 Nutrition Guidelines	National Health Strategic Plan 2011-16		Social Protection Framework 2013	WASH Framework 2006
← District		1000 Most Critical Days Program 2013-15	Agriculture Sector Implementation Plan	Micronutrient Policy 2005-2011	School Health and Nutrition Program Guidelines 2008		National Rural / Urban Water & Sanitation Supply Programmes
			National Agriculture Investment Plan 2014				
		Multisectoral District Plan (Mumbwa)	Agriculture Ministry Workplan (Mumbwa)	MCDMCH-DOH Workplan (Mumbwa)	Education Ministry Workplan (Mumbwa)	MCDMCH-DCW/DSP Workplan (Mumbwa)	Local Gov Ministry Workplan (Mumbwa)

Fig. 2. Nutrition-relevant policy in key sectors in Zambia. Notes: SUN: Scaling up Nutrition CAADP: Common African Agricultural Development Plan MCDMCH: Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene MAL: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

refers explicitly to the NFNP, Vision 2030 and the Sixth National Development Plan, thus demonstrating explicit alignment, at least in the policy discourse.

The 2016 National Agriculture Policy (NAP) places the agriculture sector as a key driver of economic growth in Zambia, continuing the focus of the first NAP (2004–2015) of increased production, sector liberalization, and commercialization. Within this context, the 2008 Nutrition Guidelines for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) were an important departure for a Ministry focused on food security and staple food production issues, stating a “focus on food as the primary tool for improving the quality of diet and for overcoming and preventing malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies”. These guidelines can be shown to form the genesis of the priority intervention identified in the Most Critical Days Program for MAL: the promotion of increased availability of diverse foods. Building on this base, the National Agriculture Investment Plan 2014 (NAIP) was a five-year road map for agricultural investment, and it was striking that the investment plan cited nutrition data as key for the investment outcome. The new 2016 National Agriculture Policy contains an entire strategic direction on food and nutrition security, listing key activities to improve diets. Thus within written agriculture policy, there is a strengthening focus on diversification and diets related to nutrition.

Other sectors are also key to nutrition. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives in Zambia have been an integral part of government policies and programs across a number of ministries, with no single institutional home. Key programs are the National Urban and

Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programs (NUWSSP and NRWSSP) aimed at providing safe water supply and sanitation and hygiene in communities, but without specific reference to a role in improving nutrition outcomes. In the education sector, the School Health and Nutrition Program was initiated in 2003 to address poor health and nutrition among learners, and incorporated a midday meal program as well as WASH activities. Building on this, the National School Health and Nutrition Policy 2006 and subsequent 2008 implementation guidelines were designed to provide integrated health and nutrition interventions in learning institutions, including growth monitoring and promotion and micronutrient supplementation (relating to the policies of MOH); establishing food production units at schools to support school feeding (relating to MAL); and improving eating practices through health and nutrition education. In the social welfare sector, the National Social Protection Policy 2014 (NSSP) builds on a 2005 Social Protection Strategy but has a much more explicit focus on enhancing food and nutrition security for vulnerable populations through social cash transfers. Nutrition outcomes were assessed in a pilot evaluation (Richards and Bellack, 2016), after which nutrition was scheduled to be mainstreamed in the program 2015, coordinated by the NFNC. However, while Social Protection programming has been framed with a nutrition objective, there are no targets set, which limit its ability to effectively achieve nutrition outcomes (Richards and Bellack, 2016).

This policy review in 2015, unlike the previous review in 2010, finds that there have been the beginnings of coherence through each of the major sectors pertaining to nutrition, with written policy laying out

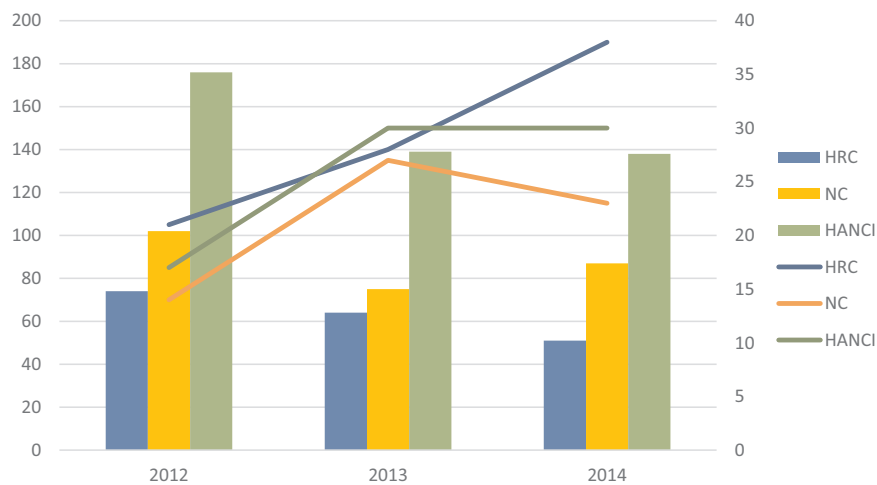


Fig. 3. Hunger and nutrition commitment index for Zambia. Notes: Lines: right axis (rank out of 45 countries). Bars: left axis (score from various combined metrics) HRC: Hunger Reduction Commitment; NC: Nutrition Commitment; HANCI: Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index.

Source: HANCI 2012, 2013, 2014 <http://www.hancindex.org/>

clear action for each sector to address its part of the nutrition problem. There is clearly deliberate and methodical action to incorporate nutrition across different domains of written policy as sectors come under review and their strategies are revised, and written policy now provides a clear nutrition roadmap for each sector. Thus this review can be used to argue that concerns about horizontal and vertical coordination are being addressed, albeit slowly considering the scale of the challenge, and more recent policy and amendments (especially since the launch of the NFNSP in 2011) increasingly utilize the language of nutrition.

3.2. Political and financial commitment to nutrition

Putting all of this nutrition-relevant policy into practice requires the commitment of attention and resources. Since 2011, the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI) has produced an annual ranking of commitment in 45 high-burden countries, also scoring them separately on hunger reduction commitment (HRCI) and nutrition commitment (NCI) (te Lintelo, 2012). Several important points emerge from the HANCI material (Fig. 3): First, while Zambia's nutrition commitment scores have fluctuated, Zambia has not fared well compared to other countries; its rank has fallen. Second, as the HANCI index makes explicit, commitment to hunger reduction is not the same as commitment to nutrition. In Zambia, the politics of hunger are front-and-center, with maize security and mealie-meal prices recurring sources of popular discontent, political rhetoric, and policy and budgetary commitments. Thirdly, Zambia has been stronger so far on political commitment to nutrition (such as joining of the SUN movement and creating written policy) than on high-level political attention or system-wide commitments.

At high level, in the offices of the president and vice president, political attention to nutrition appears to be sporadic and opportunistic. As Chilufya and Wakunuma (2015) note, there is little or no mention of the word 'Nutrition' in key presidential or high-level speeches. A deviation from this pattern was in 2013, when the former vice president made ambitious commitments on nutrition funding, human resources, governance and outcomes at the Nutrition for Growth Summit in London, at the behest of key nutrition donors (Nutrition for Growth, 2013). There has been little movement on these pledges since, however; while new budget lines expressly for nutrition have been created in key line ministries since 2013 (to enable ministries to use SUN Fund resources), currently none of these nutrition funding and capacity commitments are on-course to being achieved as pledged (Francis et al., 2016).

Funding allocation to the activities and targets set out in written policy is an important marker of system-wide commitment, but is notoriously difficult to track due to the dispersed nature of nutrition activities across ministries. By current estimates, around 0.1% of the national budget, or just under US\$ 1 million, constituted government spending towards nutrition in the 2015–2016 budget (Francis et al., 2016), with a disconnect between budget allocations and the lower amounts subsequently disbursed. National revenue incomes are highly variable and are not sufficient for fully funding all programs and services to which the government is committed, including nutrition. Nutrition in Zambia is therefore largely internationally financed; total donor investment in Zambia to basic nutrition in 2014 was US\$ 9.73 million, or US\$ 3.4 per child under 5 (Francis et al., 2016), dwarfing national investments, but still not sufficient to scale up nutrition programs fully. In 2014, the World Bank calculated the cost to roll out eleven key nutrition-specific interventions in Zambia at full national coverage at around US\$ 52 million (Subandoro, 2014). Commitment assessed as national funding allocation to nutrition, and as high-level political attention, is therefore weak in Zambia, not yet matching the strong written policy environment described above.

3.3. Cross-sectoral governance and implementation

Despite tenuous political support and national funding for nutrition, Zambia's increasing coherence in written policy is leading to increased coordination in governance at different levels. At national level, SUN has catalyzed the convening of multisectoral working groups (notably the SUN Fund and CSOSUN, as well as a cross-ministry group) in order to support cross-sectoral working. At local level, an innovative pilot scheme was started in 2011 in one district, to coordinate the action of different sectors closer to the level of implementation. To understand how better to implement cross-sectoral action on the ground, the international NGO Concern Worldwide initiated a project in Mumbwa District, Central Province, which aimed to foster closer links and improved intersectoral working between ministries and other development actors for nutrition, and to generate lessons for scaling up intersectoral action to other districts. This project used an innovative learning and reflection design, and a new structure emerged from the process – the District Nutrition Coordinating Committee (DNCC) – which linked with existing administrative arrangements in the district for embeddedness and sustainability.

Fig. 4 shows the 'collaboration' links from NetMaps undertaken in Mumbwa district in 2011 and 2015. These social network maps show the main nutrition actors at district level in each sector, and how they

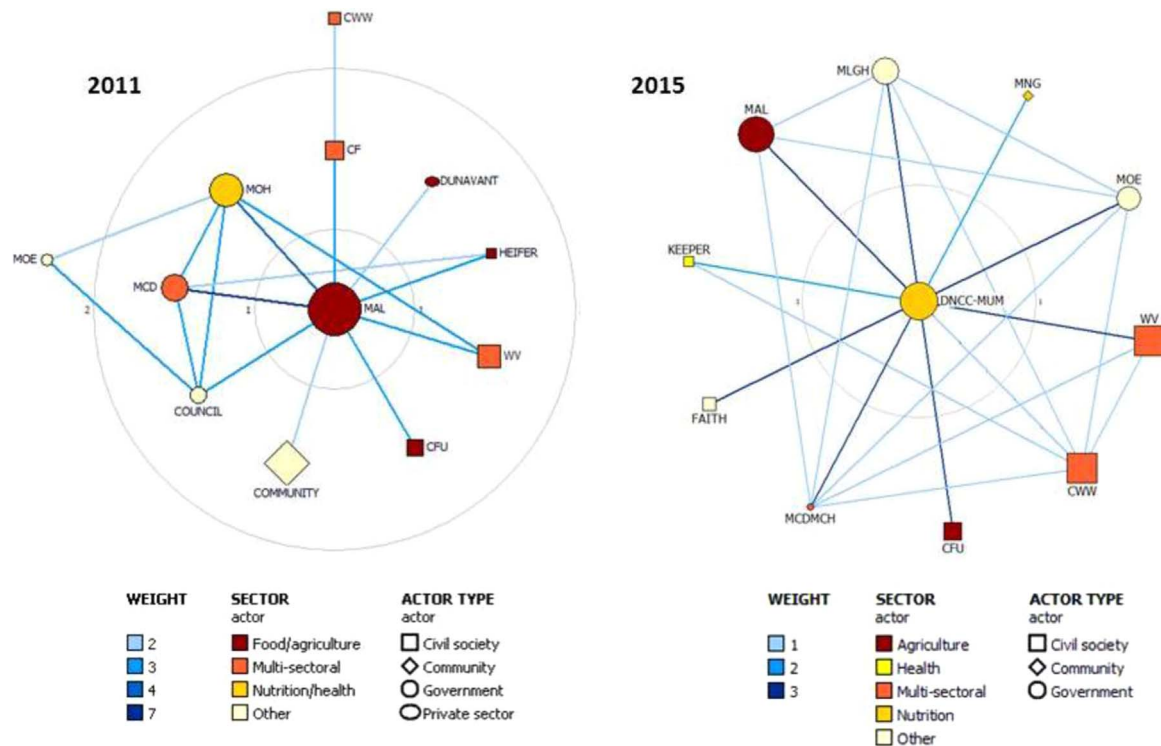


Fig. 4. Changes in coordination in Mumbwa district, 2011–2015.

are linked through ‘coordination’, as perceived by local actors. The maps capture visually the changes reported by respondents: In 2011, MAL and to some extent MOH and MCDMCH were considered separate hubs for nutrition, but interaction was not consistent or regular among the ministries and other partners. From the interviews undertaken at the time, we know that while ministry staff and partners generally had a positive outlook on the need for integration between agriculture and health, most were not sure what other sectors were doing. What it meant to be ‘working for nutrition’ was not well articulated, except for a clear focus on the community; several respondents mentioned a version of the mantra “everybody is working for the same individuals, just some call them farmers and some call them patients”. In 2015 the Netmap shape is considered a much stronger network, with the DNCC now as the hub, but also more consistent interactions between the network members even outside of the DNCC. The agriculture sector is less central to nutrition implementation in 2015, now that the understanding of nutrition does not equate so strongly in respondents’ minds only with food security, and other ministries are stepping into equally important nutrition roles. Changes were largely attributed to the NGO’s facilitation process, more explicit links to national level, and increased funding flows.

Mumbwa is an exceptional case: While the administrative structures and staffing levels are not different to other districts, the level of engagement of Concern Worldwide is notably different from other districts. Coordination did not happen spontaneously- ‘business as usual’ cycles and siloed working models had to be purposefully altered by an outside impetus provided by the NGO. The external support has been key, but the internalization of the rationale for coordination is what has sustained this work as facilitation has reduced. Overall, the presence of joint resources from SUN, joint planning at the DNCC, and recognition from national level, have made Mumbwa a poster child for intersectoral coordination in practice, and the DNCC has subsequently provided a model for other districts piloting the MCDP (particularly in the context of continued administrative decentralization which is ongoing in Zambia), and lessons for national level on how to duplicate the process (Drimie and Kumar Chakrabarty et al., 2014). Intersectoral coordination for nutrition is happening in Mumbwa; it is not complete,

and it is not perfect, but it is one of the first documented examples of coordination between sectors for nutrition at district level that is embedded in government systems rather than project-based.

3.4. Community experiences of nutrition services

How is this momentum for creation of coherent policy, an influx of external resources, and district-level administrative coordination being felt at community level, where malnutrition still manifests and where change is most needed? Some responses in community interviews in Mumbwa suggested that there was in fact little or no coordination between the agriculture and health sectors that could be perceived at community level. The general consensus among participants however was that coordination, particularly between the work of the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, is important and actively pursued here. The main point of coordination in communities seems to be on the issue of joint messaging in training sessions delivered to the community, emphasizing the importance of the relationship between the agriculture and health components of nutrition. This narrative fits well with findings about people’s solid knowledge of the agriculture-nutrition relationship in their lived experiences.

Responses around people’s expectations and experiences with regard to service quality were very mixed. In general, if there is any consensus around this issue, it revolves around the low expectations people have of Government services and comparatively higher expectations of the NGO sector, particularly in the context of Mumbwa where Concern Worldwide is active. A number of respondents felt that they could expect- and at times received- good health, nutrition and agriculture services from both the Government and the NGO sectors, but others felt that while they had the right to expect good service provision, they had nowhere to complain in the event that this was not provided or did not meet expectations. Citizens are - in theory - owed accountability from several of the key nutrition actors at national and local levels, however they are not assigned much influence or agency in the results of our research (national Netmap, not shown). Citizens’ balance of accountability makes them potentially powerful actors, if they could be motivated to demand their nutrition rights, and it is on

this basis that recent advocacy efforts have focused on securing nutrition pledges from political parties standing for national election in 2016. Further than commitments however, this would require awareness creation at community level to demand better nutrition, by holding relevant officials – be they politicians or nutrition professionals – to account.

4. Discussion

As Schaffer (1984) stated “*policy is what it does*” – that is, however well-written a policy is on paper, it cannot be judged a success unless and until it is implemented, and significant change on the ground begins to manifest. In Zambia, it can be argued that political attention to nutrition in the form of coherent policy has slowly moved into concrete action, particularly through increased international funding, and internationally-led pilot projects of intersectoral coordination at the local level. What was perceived as a “point of disjuncture” between policymaking and reality in Zambia, and lack of implementation of grand ideas (Harris and Drimie, 2012), has begun to be bridged through a concerted effort of sections of government writing policy and administering programs (including the NFNC and the nutrition departments of key line ministries) and development partners providing funding and technical inputs and impetus (particularly the SUN Fund members). This research has shown how actions in one district are a product of, but also an input into, changes at national level. This is an example of how a policy framework may cascade downwards- albeit in this case not yet all the way to the community on the ground.

The coherence of written policy affecting nutrition in Zambia is found to be generally strong in 2015, both vertically within nutrition policy, and horizontally across key sectors. Joint multisectoral planning at national level has been taking place, among government ministries and development partners. Policy scholars have suggested that while policy coherence may reduce inefficiencies, 100% policy agreement is neither feasible nor in fact desirable (Duraiappah and Bhardwaj, 2007): policy coherence as a proxy for coordinated planning can be seen as a form of rational decision making, in implicit competition with incremental political forms of policy making which, it has been argued, create better policies through conflict among specialists (Jordan and Halpin, 2006). What is now needed in Zambia then is not a process of planned policy coherence, but monitoring of sectoral policy to ensure that new policies do not lose their nutrition thread, and do not adversely affect nutrition outcomes. We did not find other studies which have looked at cross-sectoral policy coherence for nutrition, so cannot compare the Zambian situation.

Zambia has also been successful in trialing coordinated implementation, embedded in local systems for applicability and sustainability. Success in intersectoral initiatives has been defined as the ability of a partnership “to emerge, to maintain itself over time, and to realize activities related to its goal” (O'Neill et al., 1997). By this measure, coordination for nutrition in Mumbwa has been a success: From previously ad-hoc action and sporadic communication on nutrition issues between ministries, the DNCC has now been constituted (in 2011); has met regularly since then; and has undertaken activities related to the goal it defined for itself (“To facilitate district level institutional arrangements to enable sustainable dialogue, joint strategies and interventions to efficiently and effectively address malnutrition”). Other attempts at cross-sectoral coordination for nutrition have tended to focus on national level, particularly around the placement of coordinating bodies (Benson, 2008, 2011; Garrett, 2009). What Zambia adds is a demonstration of what can be achieved in local-level coordination when the right combination of material, strategic and technical support is provided, even within existing administrative and political structures. Going forward, both the quality of scale-up of this approach to other districts, and the quality of actual implementation of programs through this system, requires close attention if beneficial changes are to be seen on the ground.

Previous attempts at intersectoral coordination and coherence elsewhere were often thwarted by limited commitment (Benson, 2008). Often in studies of nutrition commitment, high-level political attention has been a precursor to political commitment in the form of policy creation, and system-wide commitment including human resource allocation and funding. In the Zambian case however, the strength of the international nutrition movement embodied by SUN may have bypassed the need for political attention, channeling resources and technical support directly to the technical sections of government tasked with nutrition issues. This has moved the nutrition agenda forward quickly, with written policy and evidence from pilot programs lining up. It may also have limited broader government attention to nutrition however – filling the gap so government has less incentive to respond – and therefore limited system-wide commitment in terms of allocating budgets to back up written policy and monitoring nutrition targets and action. From this we can see that ‘government’ itself is not monolithic, but rather comprises different sections with different roles, mandates, interests and actors, and the commitment of different parts of government to nutrition is likely to vary. For this work, one useful distinction is between ‘technical’ arms of government (NFNC and the key line ministries), which have committed time and resources to nutrition policy and implementation; and the financial and executive arms, which in general do not back up this technical action with political priority and funding. Thus those advocating for nutrition in Zambia might do well to tailor calls for ‘commitment’ carefully, depending on the type of action required and the section of government addressed.

Overall, there are positive stories of change in Zambia, in particular a decrease in stunting that has been sustained over several years, and a momentum for nutrition policy processes that has built coherence over the past decade. Zambia has drawn on international evidence and best practice for its policy, but has also generated and shared its own experiential learning in Mumbwa. The current truth of nutrition in Zambia, however, is that many of the big-picture policy process issues described above simply do not readily translate into altered daily experience at the community level, where change is only perceived when there are sharp shifts in implementation modality. Ultimately, if the hive of activity at the national and even district level does not express itself through positive and perceivable implementation shifts, then it is either stalled at the discussion stage, or else there are simply massive obstacles standing between the talk and the action. Zambia is at the start of its story of change, and the coming years will show whether the big-picture changes will impact nutrition outcomes. A next step for Zambia is the challenge of getting away from the Lusaka-dominated policy network and understanding how to genuinely include communities in securing their right to good nutrition; if government commitment and accountability are limiting factors, the drive for these must ultimately come from Zambians rather than from the international community if positive changes are to be sustained.

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Conflict of interest

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