



A community mobilizer in Indonesia. Leadership is pivotal at all levels. (Minzayar Oo/Panos/Save The Children)

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Governance and Leadership in Agri-food Systems and Nutrition

Stuart Gillespie^{1*} and Nicholas Nisbett²

¹International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Brighton, UK;

²Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK

* Corresponding author: s.gillespie@cgiar.org

Introduction

A decade ago, the governance of the international nutrition system was found to be ‘fragmented and dysfunctional’ in one of several reviews in the seminal *The Lancet* Nutrition Series (Morris *et al.*, 2008). A lot has happened since then, with global political attention to nutrition being greater now than at any time since the World Food Conference held by the United Nations in Rome in 1974.

This chapter first reviews the relationship between governance systems and processes (at various levels) and the nutrition sensitivity of agri-food systems, before reviewing the role of leadership in orienting such systems toward nutrition goals.

Governance, Agri-food Systems and Nutrition: What Are the Links?

In 1990, UNICEF laid out a comprehensive framework for understanding the multiple drivers of child and maternal undernutrition at basic, underlying and immediate levels (UNICEF, 1990). In 2013, the second *The Lancet* Maternal and Child Nutrition Series further adapted this framework to highlight three levels of action to achieve optimal child nutrition and development: (i) the design, implementation

and scaling up of a package of core ‘nutrition-specific’ interventions; (ii) the embedding of nutrition objectives and actions within a range of broader sectoral actions (including agriculture and agri-food systems) to foster ‘nutrition-sensitive development’; and (iii) the creation and sustenance of an ‘enabling environment’ for nutrition that is crucial for all three levels of action (Black *et al.*, 2013).

The concept of enabling environments went beyond a focus on basic causes of undernutrition such as unequal access to resources (still seen as critical in shaping underlying drivers), to incorporate governance concerns (Box 12.1). Key ingredients of such environments include: (i) knowledge, data and evidence and its effective framing and communication; (ii) political commitment, effective governance and sound policy; and (iii) leadership, capacity, and financing (Gillespie *et al.*, 2013).

In parallel, work on obesity has also identified it as a complex, multifactorial problem with genetic, lifestyle, cultural, medical, and social drivers (Lachal *et al.*, 2013) that are in turn fueled by rapid economic, societal, and cultural change. Swinburn *et al.* (1999) first coined the term ‘obesogenic environment’ to refer to ‘an environment that promotes gaining weight and one that is not conducive to weight loss’ within the home, workplace or society. Work on obesogenic environments has, as with work on undernutrition, increasingly focused on the

Box 12.1. What is ‘good governance’ for nutrition?

The concept of governance has many definitions. The United Nations (UN), for example, defines national governance as:

... the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences.

(UN STT, 2012)

Most definitions incorporate institutional structures, relationships between actors and/or organizations, decision-making processes, and incentives. Governance importantly encompasses the capacity to act, the power to act and the commitment to act; it requires accountability, responsiveness and transparency (Gillespie, 2013).

Governance is relevant at many levels, from global to local. In a recent review, the UN’s Standing Committee on Nutrition defines ‘global nutrition governance’ as the network of actors whose primary function is to improve nutrition outcomes through processes and mechanisms for convening, agenda setting, decision making (including norm-setting), implementation and accountability (UN SCN, 2017). ‘Governance for nutrition’, on the other hand, is defined as the process by which impact on nutrition by non-nutrition policies (e.g. policies in agriculture, education, employment, health, environment and trade) is leveraged or mitigated.

governance, political and policy drivers which shape such environments – questioning the assumption that obesity is simply down to poor individual choices.

Policy and institutional environments that shape agri-food systems and their nutrition outcomes may thus be characterized as enabling (with regard to positive outcomes), or ‘disabling’ (Gillespie and van den Bold, 2017), but they are far from ever neutral.

Governance, Power and Accountability: Words and Actions

Accountability is ultimately about governance and power and determines how and why decisions are made, who makes decisions, how power is used, shared, and balanced, whose opinions are important, and who holds whom to account.

(Swinburn *et al.*, 2015)

Food systems are complex (see next section), and the global institutional architectures for agriculture and nutrition have many nodes of planning and action: national governments, civil society (global and national), international and regional organizations (including UN agencies, development banks, African Union), bilateral donors, charitable foundations, international research organizations, academia and private sector companies.

Linking agriculture and nutrition in policy and programming faces structural, operational, and organizational hurdles. The two sectors are usually housed under different bureaucratic structures and are allocated significantly different levels of resources. But in any analysis, it is also crucial to go beyond the architecture and artefacts of governance (e.g. national nutrition council, existence of policies, or codes of conduct) to look at what is actually happening with regard to implementation of policies and regulations. Governance in this respect cannot be apolitical – it has to relate to a particular goal (in this case, helping agri-food systems to become more nutrition sensitive). There are both winners and losers and a variety of such actors looking to influence the outcomes of policy processes in their own interests. In analysing this, many approaches to nutrition governance, which could similarly apply to agriculture governance, have also employed the

concept of political economy – defined as ‘the competing interests, incentives, and ideologies of a range of different actors with direct and indirect interests in nutrition, and the resultant inequalities’ (Nisbett *et al.*, 2014, p. 422).

Actors respond to incentives, some of which are pro-nutrition, and some of which are not. Strong governance is particularly important where there are asymmetries of power and incentives – for example, between governments and multinational companies. Civil society and social activism can help rebalance power across the agri-food system towards better nutrition, especially for the most nutritionally vulnerable who tend to be the least empowered.

Governance and accountability mechanisms are thus crucial for identifying, preventing and addressing conflicts of interests between public and private actors; for example, where the incentive to make profits may lead to practices that damage nutrition.

How are Nutrition and Agri-food Governance Measured and Monitored?

Different approaches, methods and indicators have been employed in recent years to measure governance and facilitate accountability. In regards to nutrition, in 2012, the World Health Organization (WHO) developed a ‘Landscape Analysis’ mapping tool to assess nutrition governance in different countries. Countries with strong nutrition governance and a readiness to accelerate action in nutrition were defined as having most or all of the following traits: political commitment and awareness of nutrition; focused policies and regulation at a central level, with supporting plans and protocols at subnational level; resource mobilization at central level and budget provision at subnational level; coordination of nutrition activities at all levels; involvement of partners; support to districts and facilities; trained staff with appropriate skills at all levels; capacity and motivation of staff; quality of services and follow-up, management, information systems and supplies in place; and community engagement strategies (WHO, 2012). Other innovative tools are available to stimulate, monitor and build commitment and

accountability. A Nutrition Commitment Index, for example, has been developed by the Institute of Development Studies for cross-country and within-country comparisons over time (te Lintelo *et al.*, 2013). This measures political commitment to tackle undernutrition in 45 developing countries by focusing on a series of policy, legal and spending indicators.

Although there has been an upsurge in research and action on the nutrition outcomes of agriculture and agri-food systems, the governance dimension remains under-studied. A 2012 assessment of research on the agriculture–nutrition nexus identified eight clear research gaps, one of which was:

... governance, policy processes and political economy as it relates to the development of agriculture-for-nutrition policies and programmes, the ability to implement them (and scale up) and for them to achieve their stated goals once implemented.

(Turner *et al.*, 2013)

Only six of 151 studies investigated governance, at that time. Since then, there has been some progress.

The two ‘Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition’ initiatives (the multi-party consortium LANSAs for four countries in South Asia, i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan; and the IFPRI/FAO collaboration LANEAs for East Africa covering Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia) investigated stakeholder perceptions of the governance of agri-food systems in six high-burden countries in 2014 (Table 12.1), applying the distinction between the building of political momentum and its translation into

effectively implemented, scaled-up policies and programmes that generate impact on the ground (Gillespie *et al.*, 2013).

Recent studies, though not specifically about agriculture and nutrition linkages, draw insights about multisectoral governance arrangements that are highly pertinent to the topic. In a recent study of nutrition governance metrics in Nepal, stakeholder interviews were structured around three topical categories that drew on findings of the WHO’s landscape analysis and its 2013 global nutrition policy review (Webb *et al.*, 2016). These are as follows:

1. Commitment to nutrition (do policies and instruments exist? Are civil servants outside the health sector willing to adopt nutrition as a core responsibility? Are institutional management structures able to accommodate the inclusion of nutrition in annual work plans?).
2. Capability to implement pro-nutrition policies and programs (adequate budgetary, technical, and human resources to do the jobs required).
3. Collaboration (management support for cross-sectoral engagement toward common goals, coordination mechanisms, and institutional incentives for the adoption of jointly owned goals).

One key finding was the strong stakeholder support for mandatory mechanisms for collaboration among respondents in non-health sectors. Many non-health professionals wanted to do more ‘for nutrition’ but felt that their management support systems and incentives were not conducive. This sentiment could presumably be applied to agriculture professionals. The review also found that the food security and agriculture sectors mostly devoted their policy work towards

Table 12.1. Summary of key issues in governance of agri-food systems in six high-burden countries (LANSAs, LANEAs). (Source: Gillespie *et al.*, 2015.)

Building commitment	Turning commitment into action and impact
Horizontal (cross-sectoral) coherence	Vertical coherence (national to community)
Priority-setting and policy formulation processes	Ensure incentives for implementation
Address production bias	Clarify and ensure accountability at all levels
Identify mechanisms for communication and coordination	Decide whether to integrate or co-locate programs and interventions
Decision-making incentives (for change)	Empower women through agriculture
Leadership/champions	Engage private sector and other development partners, based on comparative advantage
Pro-nutrition legislation	Forums for sharing lessons on what works
Global and regional conferences and movements	

research, provision of seeds, irrigation, and rural infrastructure with the goal of increasing farm level income and outputs; few agriculture policy goals explicitly mentioned nutrition.

In another recent study of nutrition governance in several African countries, Pelletier *et al.* (2018) viewed the ‘ecosystem’ of individuals and institutions in multisectoral governance as a complex adaptive system which ‘makes it difficult to govern exclusively through formal and hierarchical (legal and bureaucratic) institutions commonly established to address the problem (e.g. multisectoral coordinating committees)’.

In 2016–2017 there were several high-profile publications focusing specifically on nutrition and food systems, including the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition and the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE, 2017). The latter portrayed the latest adaptation of a conceptual framework of the food system (Fig. 12.1). This highlighted an array of drivers conditioning the operation of food supply chains, food environments, and consumer behaviors leading to

effects on diets and to various nutrition and health impacts. This system is amenable to political, program and institutional actions that can steer the outcomes of this system towards the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In this framework, governance and leadership are viewed as key political drivers and actions. Most of the concluding section of the report (‘Translating Evidence into Action’) refers to the challenge of strengthening enabling environments and governance within this system – along with the pivotal need for strengthened leadership.

How Important is Leadership in Improving Nutrition Outcomes of Agri-Food Systems?

Leadership has been identified as a central element of effective governance for nutrition in most of the nutrition, food systems and agriculture governance frameworks reviewed. The role of individual leaders and champions has also

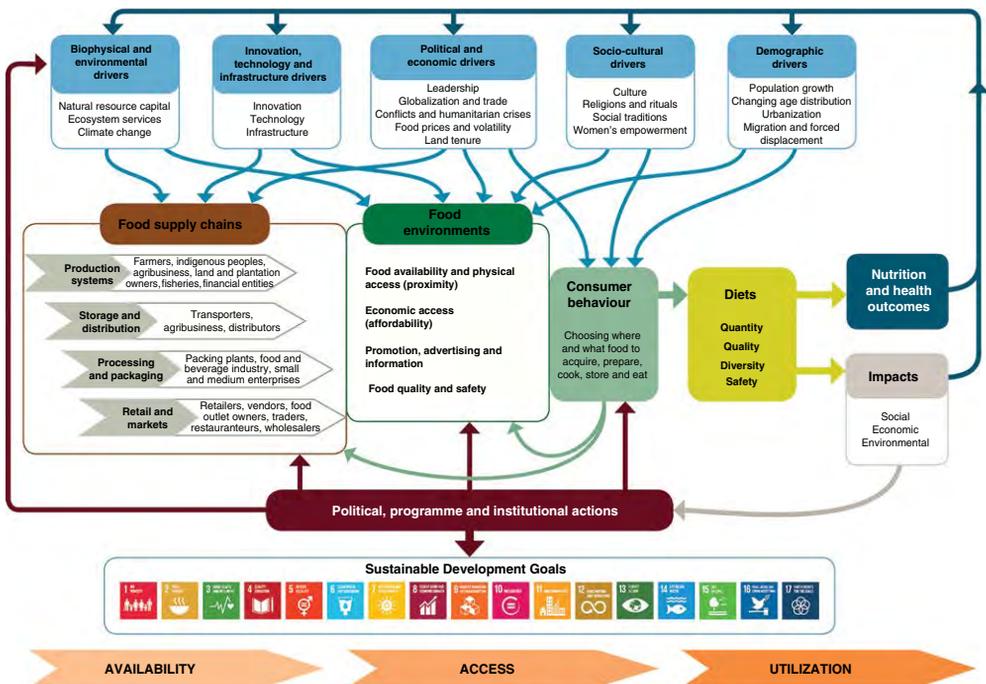


Fig. 12.1. Conceptual framework of food systems for diets and nutrition (HLPE, 2017).

been highlighted as a critical element in many positive ‘stories of change’ or country case studies of rapid improvements in nutritional status and food security. In some policy fora, the focus has been directed towards the need for higher-level political leadership on malnutrition. But research has also now highlighted the importance of leadership throughout nutrition, agriculture, and food systems and in particular the role of individuals working at ground level, as well as these executive levels, who collectively contribute to the functioning of systemic leadership (Nisbett *et al.*, 2015). Such individuals tend to be adaptive, strategic boundary spanners (Pelletier *et al.*, 2018) or, more simply, those who make the effort both to understand and to speak the language of others. Given the multi-causal and systemic nature of malnutrition, this process of translation is most effective when it is genuinely multisectoral and politically savvy.

Effective leaders have been shown to be those who can understand both the available contributions and the obstacles to effective action within public and private sectors. They have a good understanding of the policies and programs that exist in their own field, whether agriculture or others, as well as the potential contribution of changes to the agri-food system and in other potentially nutrition-sensitive sectors such as social protection. They are driven not only by general notions of ‘what works’ (i.e. what the evidence tells us) but also ‘what can work in a given situation’ (i.e. both politically and contextually). Poor leadership is that which tries to impose a package of solutions on multiple contexts without adaptation to local ground realities.

The actual attributes of leaders have been reviewed in research in which 89 individuals identified as leaders in four countries experiencing a high burden of nutrition in South Asia (India, Bangladesh) and sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya and Ethiopia) were interviewed (Nisbett *et al.*, 2015). These and other attributes associated with leadership were identified in a recent guide by Transform Nutrition and Scaling Up Nutrition (TN and SUN, 2017) and summarized as follows:

- Skills required to effectively operate within networks:
 - advocacy;
 - knowledge dissemination and communication;
 - relationship-building;
 - consensus-building;
 - risk-taking;
 - diplomacy;
 - ability to overcome opposition;
 - ability to navigate boundaries between social, political and professional groups; and
 - ability to understand (and navigate) policy and practice environments.
- Skills required to shape one’s network:
 - ability to inspire and motivate;
 - ability to unleash the potential of others; and
 - ability to focus their own and other members’ energy on achieving collective results.

Leadership has traditionally been associated with power – with formal authority, or the power that accrues to the holder of charisma or reputation. Whilst such leadership is surely important, the attributes highlighted above also demonstrate that, for most people, leadership is something that they develop over time in building respect amongst peers and in continually attempting to understand others’ positions, to work through others and to openly self-reflect and adapt. In so doing, they build a following, and can become more effective than those who simply rely on formal power alone.

Shining a Light on Successful Leadership

Examples of successful leadership in nutrition, food systems and agriculture have grown in recent years, with the appearance of a number of awards for successful nutrition champions, such as that run by the Transform Nutrition research consortium, which has been taken up by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement. Such initiatives have brought public recognition to a range of new leaders at all levels, from a 15-year-old youth parliamentarian in Zimbabwe, to high-level political leaders, to mid-level career bureaucrats who have driven through change (SUN, 2017).

The work of some of these leaders and others has also now been well documented in nutrition policy research and has contributed to

the key attributes listed above. Understanding how leaders operate – the particular skills they have in crossing boundaries, communicating, networking and ‘getting things done’ – is as important as identifying who they are. But although particular individuals stand out, the research also demonstrates that such individuals are not operating in a political vacuum. Not only do they know how to work through others, but also they have often been brought to their positions championing agriculture, nutrition and food security via either political necessity or the encouragement or advocacy of others.

Bangladesh (see Chapter 15) and Ethiopia (see Chapter 16) represent two examples where political necessity has driven broader food and agricultural policy leadership, as a result of significant famines in their history directly linked to, or at the time of, political change and upheaval (Davis *et al.*, 2016; Warren, 2016). Both countries have made significant strides in increasing agricultural production and improving broader food security as well as broader nutritional outcomes.

In Bangladesh, agricultural growth during the past four decades has been coupled with increased food consumption, GDP growth, and poverty reduction. Significant improvements in nutrition have yet to be achieved, but the country’s policy processes and outcomes have shown a growing recognition of the links between agriculture and nutrition. The 1997 National Food and Nutrition policy, which recognized nutrition as a human right, was formulated in consultation with experts in food and agriculture, among other sectors (Naher *et al.*, 2014). The 2008–2015 National Food Policy Plan of Action and the Bangladesh Country Investment Plan on Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition have prompted the establishment of several large agriculture-for-nutrition interventions (van den Bold *et al.*, 2015). The Department of Agricultural Extension is beginning to integrate concerns about balanced diets. And civil society and the media seem to have played a strong role in establishing accountability mechanisms for coordination between the sectors. Much work remains in the way of building up research capacity and other areas (van den Bold *et al.*, 2015).

In Ethiopia, country-level leadership continues to ensure that these sectors remain prominent – including, for example, the Ethiopian Ministry

of Agriculture’s efforts via its twin-track Productive Safety Nets Program (PSNP) and the Agricultural Growth Program (focused on high production areas) (Warren, 2016). Since 2005, PSNP has provided food security and an avenue for distributing improved agricultural technologies, in addition to (in its fourth phase launched in 2016) nutrition-friendly provisions such as connecting clients with nutrition and health services, prenatal and postnatal care, and behavior change communication (Warren, 2016; see also Chapter 16). The Agricultural Growth Program II includes nutrition capacity building and behavior change communication on dietary diversity. The enabling environment for supporting agricultural extension agents still needs to be improved through better nutrition training (Beyero *et al.*, 2015). Ethiopia’s revised National Nutrition Plan, launched in 2015, includes agriculture among other sectors and sets indicators for its contributions to nutrition.

Country-level stories of change in nutrition can offer lessons for how to advocate for stronger agriculture–nutrition political processes and outcomes. In Peru, the country’s rapid reduction of undernutrition in 2005–2011 has been analyzed as resulting from the executive leadership displayed by Peruvian politicians on all sides – particularly in the adoption of the electoral campaign ‘5 × 5 × 5’ (reduce stunting for the under 5s by 5 percentage points in 5 years) and the subsequent government programs put in place to achieve this (Mejia Acosta and Haddad, 2014). But to attribute this change to the leadership of sole-acting individuals such as President Alan Garcia alone would be a misrepresentation of the process. A civil society coalition advocated for this focus in the first place and then held the government to account for its commitments.

A further example exists from the Indian state of Maharashtra, where the actions of a mid to senior level official to focus on particular pockets of deprivation and malnutrition in *adivasi* (‘scheduled tribe’) areas has been lauded as a factor leading to the state’s focus on nutrition via a ‘Nutrition Mission’ and associated with the state’s subsequent declines in child stunting (Haddad *et al.*, 2014; Nisbett and Barnett, 2017). Again, this individual’s actions were supported by a sustained campaign and focus on malnutrition from civil society activists, UNICEF, the media, and even the judiciary.

Civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often add important leadership roles to the advocacy efforts documented here in terms of their drive to innovate at a community level and provide examples that can be scaled up elsewhere. One such leader recognized by the Transform Nutrition Consortium is Debejeet Sarangi, who has worked with landless and marginal farmers and communities in Odisha, India. His organization, Living Farms, uses participatory methods to diagnose and improve food security, agricultural practices, nutritional and child survival outcomes. Mr Sarangi's use of networking and advocacy to local officials and the collection and sharing of data also highlights use of the skills and attributes highlighted above (Nisbett *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, the NGO Helen Keller International's experimentation with, and participation in, the evidencing of enhanced home-stead food production over three decades in multiple countries has become an important part of the global evidence base on what works in nutrition-sensitive agriculture (Yosef, 2016).

Where is Leadership Currently Lacking?

Malnutrition exists in many forms. Globally, it is estimated that 155 million children suffer from stunted growth and cognitive development as the result of chronic malnutrition, while a further 52 million suffer from severe acute malnutrition (UNICEF *et al.*, 2017). Rates of micronutrient deficiency are even higher, with around 2 billion people estimated to suffer from at least one form. Rates of overweight and obesity amongst both children and adults are already endemic in richer countries and are becoming more common among poorer populations: according to the 2017 estimates by WHO, UNICEF and World Bank, at least one in ten children under the age of five is already overweight in Northern Africa, Central Asia and Southern Africa. If leadership is lacking on any one of these forms, it is in even sparser supply when it comes to tackling the issues together, despite their common causes. This leadership gap extends to the kinds of systemic leadership described above – there are still very few people willing and able to work across the kinds of food system and health system boundaries that need to be bridged if we are

to tackle the causes of undernutrition and overweight and obesity together.

At a political level, this may be due to the fact that the political decisions required are difficult. They may well involve standing up to vested interests amongst producers, consumers and companies who benefit from the status quo of a food system either failing to deliver enough quality food to the right places, or delivering micronutrient-poor, calorifically dense and otherwise unhealthy, yet still craved-for, food in ever larger quantities. But even at the levels of technical, practical and research expertise, there are still significant challenges in adequately linking together nutrition and agriculture actors, who are often working to quite different agendas (e.g. public health/child survival versus food security) and where a 'food-first' focus on mass food production may predominate (c.f. Pelletier *et al.*, 1995) as a significant political pressure.

At a country level it is hard to find examples of the kind of multifaceted, ambitious and brave leadership these entrenched issues call for. But increasingly such leadership is being demonstrated by municipal leaders, with cities such as Amsterdam and Belo Horizonte revealing the ways in which public health, education, food distribution and retails, spatial planning, fiscal measures and other local legislative powers can be brought together to create more healthy eating environments for urban citizens (IPES-Food, 2017). More such examples are needed to indicate future pathways for countries wanting to transition from food-insecure environments to healthy food environments but without landing in the position that most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries find themselves in terms of diet-related disease. While this may be the focus of the nutrition- and health-related SDGs, such multifaceted leadership is also currently lacking in terms of the global institutions supporting agri-food and nutrition, many of which are still stuck on one side or another of dealing with either famine or undernutrition or the consequences of overweight and obesity.

How Can Leadership be Nurtured and Supported?

A recent 'toolkit' produced by Transform Nutrition and the SUN movement secretariat focuses

on the various ways in which potential leaders and champions can be identified, nurtured, supported and sustained (Fig. 12.2). This builds on the work of various leadership initiatives and training programs such as the African Nutrition Leadership Programme, and also work by Nisbett *et al.* (2015) to produce a framework which focuses on how to turn key individuals at senior, middle and grassroots levels into champions, leaders and advocates for change. The framework stresses the need for different strategies for different targets – reaching key high-level individuals via others close to them, for example, or finding ways to expose them to the realities of

malnutrition via field visits. But it also stresses the importance of leadership being held to account by and emerging from those communities suffering most from malnutrition. Thus, this framework ties in centrally to concepts of commitment, accountability, and visibility discussed so far. Sustainable leadership is that which exists in networks of individuals rather than one or two charismatic champions who may well move on. Therefore, appropriate strategies to work at each of these levels is an important part of an effective leadership strategy.

Broader leadership capacity-building initiatives exist, including those that have focused on

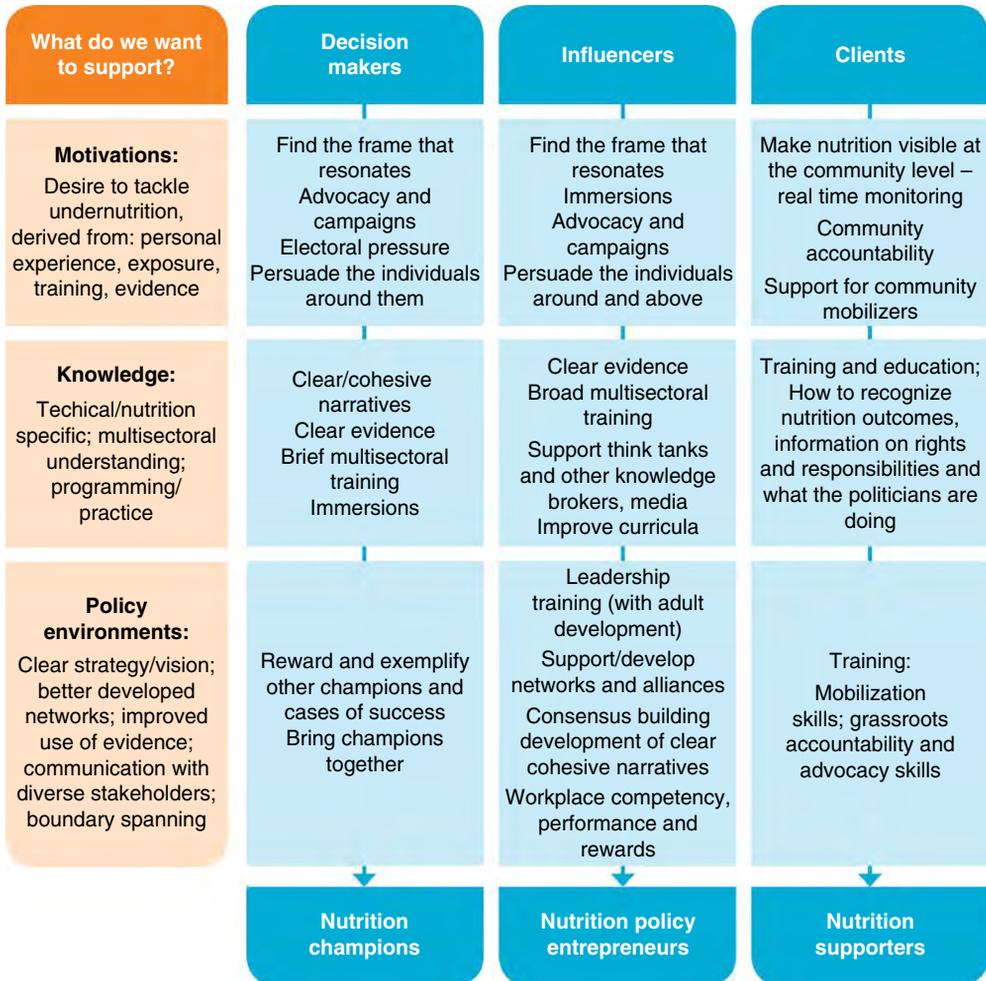


Fig. 12.2. Theory of change for supporting nutrition leadership (TN and SUN, 2017, adapted from Nisbett *et al.*, 2015).

the perennial challenge of ensuring agricultural policy and interventions make a greater contribution to nutritional outcomes. This includes, for example, the sub-regional training/workshops provided as part of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Nutrition Capacity Development Initiative: a unique initiative designed to help African countries integrate nutrition objectives and activities in their National Agriculture and Food Security Investment plans. This reached around 200 participants composed of multi-sectoral country teams from over 15 countries (Dufour *et al.*, 2013). Further such measures are needed in the future, including those that focus not just on technical country leadership but also on a younger generation which might be expected to form a leadership cadre in these fields in future.

Looking Ahead

Governance and leadership in the agri-food system cannot be treated separately – it takes

leadership to implement effective systems of governance that realize results on the ground. It takes a certain type of leadership to broker the alliances and trade-offs and to take the difficult decisions that lead to more equitable and sustainable food system outcomes. Neither governance nor leadership is apolitical in this respect: policy goals are always political goals and demonstrating leadership in advocating for particular (more nutritionally equitable) policy agendas requires a well honed ability to negotiate between the competing interests suggested by the concept of political economy. Understanding governance frameworks helps us better understand the venues for these negotiations and trade-offs – which occur not only in policy/agenda setting spaces, but also within implementation structures, within knowledge and evidence production and framing and within local communities. Future research on governance and leadership needs to further elaborate on the confluence of a variety of different nutritional and political contexts, governance systems and styles and types of leadership within these different spaces and the resulting impact on nutritional outcomes.

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