

MULTI-SECTOR GOVERNANCE: LEARNING FROM THE DUTCH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

SUMMARY REPORT OF A SYMPOSIUM HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2023 AT THE MICRONUTRIENT FORUM 6TH GLOBAL CONFERENCE IN THE HAGUE



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ABOUT GAIN

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) is a Swiss-based foundation launched at the UN in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition. Working with governments, businesses and civil society, we aim to transform food systems so that they deliver more nutritious food for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

ABOUT NWGN

NWGN is a network of professionals and organisations, ranging from civil society organizations, knowledge institutes, the private sector and the government, based in The Netherlands working in the field of international nutrition. NWGN aims to increase the nutrition impact of Dutch stakeholders targeting the SDGs in low- and middle income countries by exchanging knowledge and influencing and supporting them in how to better include nutrition in their policies and their work. The supporting partners Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and Wageningen University and Research (WUR) are members of the NWGN. The NWGN works closely with the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP). See: <https://the-nwgn.org/>

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SUMMARY

A symposium on local Dutch and international experiences of multisectoral food security and nutrition initiatives was held at the Micronutrient Forum 6th Global Conference, on 16 October 2023 in The Hague (The Netherlands). Three case studies - one each from Ghana, Ethiopia, and The Netherlands - were presented. These cases aimed to illustrate successful approaches and learnings with a spotlight on how different initiatives were governed in practice. Attendance comprised about 80 people in person and 43 people online. This convening paper presents the background to the Dutch multisectoral approach, provides an overview of main case study findings, and discusses aspects of the practice of food security and nutrition governance, drawing on the framework provided by the Committee on World Food Security's Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition.

KEY MESSAGES

- A symposium was held at the Micronutrient Forum 6th Global conference on local Dutch and international experiences of multisectoral food security and nutrition initiatives
- Three case studies – from Ghana, Ethiopia and The Netherlands – provided insights into different types of multisectoral food security and nutrition initiatives and the practice of governance
- The Committee on World Food Security's Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition provided a useful framework to structure the analysis of the case studies and contribute to the enhancement of multisectoral governance in efforts to realise food security and nutrition for all.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

Since the late 1990s, the Dutch government has strongly supported partnering between academia, the private sector, civil society, and government in a multi-sectoral approach ('the Dutch Diamond') to tackle major social challenges, such as food and nutrition security (FNS). The close cooperation between knowledge institutions, non-government organisations (NGOs), companies, and governments in the Netherlands has generated many useful lessons for jointly developing and testing new social and technological models for the food system. This collaboration often takes the form of public-private partnerships (PPPs).

In the past two decades the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) supported different types of PPPs through various financial policy instruments. Most instruments consider partnerships with the private sector as innovative, non-commercial - usually pre-competitive - collaborations in which the financial contribution of the government is seen as a way to leverage resources and mitigate risks. Recently, the Partnership Resource Centre synthesised, on behalf of the NWGN, a comprehensive compilation of lessons and insights of PPPs in the Netherlands with a focus on FNS (1). That report provides insights into the designs and financing modalities of FNS PPPs, how FNS PPPs deal with potential tensions between multiple stakeholders, what conditions or principles improve the working of FNS PPPs, and how FNS PPPs measure their success, sustainability, and potential to scale. Based on the lessons and insights, the report gives recommendations to: 1) Increase nutrition sensitivity; 2) Make FNS PPPs more effective; 3) Make FNS PPPs more inclusive; and 4) Increase sustainability and scalability of FNS PPPs.

Notably, not all Dutch multi-sectoral initiatives take the form of PPPs. Sometimes, multi-sectoral approaches do not focus on partnerships with the private sector, but more on collaboration between partners from government, academia, and NGOs working in different sectors. The literature, and Dutch experiences of FNS PPPs, suggests that multi-sectoral cooperation is a necessity to make progress on food systems transformation. Good multi-sectoral governance is required to ensure that FNS projects do no harm to the environment and should be used as a tool to navigate the complexity of such transformative processes. As James Lomax (food systems expert United Nations Environment Programme UNEP) said at the United Nations (UN) multi-stakeholder governance session at the UN Food Systems Summit stock-taking moment in Rome in July 2023, 'We are all talking about the necessary transformation of the food system, we know where to – but not how to get there! That is why UNEP is working on governance.'

In a symposium at the Micronutrient Forum 6th Global Conference, on 16 October 2023 in The Hague (The Netherlands) we aimed to share three cases of Dutch multi-sectoral initiatives that address nutrition security but were not set-up in the form of an FNS PPP. The focus was on understanding how these initiatives are governed, on comparisons between these real-world practices/experiences and the literature on multi-sectoral governance, and to gain insights for the potential of adaptation, scaling, and/or transfer of such models to other contexts.

VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION

A well-regarded example of guidelines for governance mechanisms within food systems are the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN). The Committee on World Food

Security adopted the VGFSyN at its 47th Plenary session in February 2021 (2). The VGFSyN are an inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder negotiated policy tool for use by governments and their partners to develop appropriate policies, investments, and institutional arrangements to address the causes of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms, from a food systems perspective. These guidelines have been supported and adopted by many countries, including the Netherlands.

The VGFSyN present a wide range of recommendations to promote policy coherence and reduce policy fragmentation between relevant sectors, including agriculture, health, and environment - all of which impact and are impacted by food systems. The VGFSyN aim to support the development of coordinated, multi-sectoral national policies, laws, programmes, and investment plans to enable safe and healthy diets through sustainable food systems.

The VGFSyN lay out the importance of governance mechanisms, leadership, and accountability across the range of actors, at local, national, regional, and global levels, within food systems. As per guidelines, governments are responsible for developing sound, science- and evidence-based, coherent and coordinated, context-specific public policies and regulatory and legislative frameworks that govern food systems, promote awareness, and set priorities for impactful action. Furthermore, the guidelines encourage governments to develop transparent mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the distribution of transition costs, costs, and benefits of policy actions across sectors and actors; managing conflicts of interests; safeguarding against power imbalances; and ensuring public interests are put before other interests.

The framework of the Micronutrient Forum symposium was informed by four key governance areas that are spotlighted in the VGFSyN as recommended practice to facilitate transparent, democratic, and accountable governance. These are:

1. Promoting policy coordination and coherence by integrating food systems and nutrition into local, national, and regional development;
2. Strengthening multisectoral, multistakeholder, and multilevel coordination and actions, including the facilitation of an inclusive and transparent dialogue ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders and actors in the food system;
3. Creating accountability mechanisms and tools for monitoring and evaluation;
4. Strengthening participation and inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities, and in particular women, girls, marginalised groups, and people with disabilities, in the governance of food systems and nutrition.

These guidelines provide a robust and transferrable framework but are not the only resource that provides guidance on multisectoral governance. For example, Tefft & Jonasova (2020) present insights and emerging lessons on food systems governance from the experience of nine cities that have developed urban food interventions. The *Making Better Policies for Food Systems* report (3) and *Rethinking Our Food Systems: A Guide for Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration* (4) also offer further resources and recommendations about multisectoral governance. However, we have chosen to stick with the four key governance areas from the VGFSyN.

DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

In this paper, we reference the UNEP, FAO and UNDP guide (2023) for the following definitions:

- **Sustainable food system:** A food system ‘that ensures food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition of future generations are not compromised.’
- **Governance:** Formal and informal rules, organisations, and processes through which public and private actors articulate their interests and make and implement decisions.
- **Sector:** Refers to either a policy area (e.g., economic, social, cultural, environmental sector); a distinct field or theme of economy (e.g., agriculture, education, health sector, etc.); or a specific sub-sector (e.g., fisheries, livestock, nutrition).
- **Stakeholder:** A term ‘used to designate any person or group who has a stake, i.e. an interest, whether financial or not, in an issue’. It refers to any person or group who is affected by or can affect the situation or issue at stake, as well as the achievement of an organisation’s objectives.
- **Vertical governance:** multi-level (e.g. national, province, district, village) governance
- **Horizontal governance:** multi-stakeholders per level governance

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL DUTCH MULTI-SECTORAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION INITIATIVES

Three case studies of Dutch multisectoral food systems/nutrition initiatives were presented in this symposium. One case was located in The Netherlands, and two cases were located in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in sub-Saharan Africa. These cases, in order of presentation, were:

- **Ghana Urban Food Environments: Collective Impact Coalition – An example of a bottom-up process to strengthen the urban food system.** This case was presented by Nicole Metz (Senior Knowledge Broker) from the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) and offered insights about a bottom-up coalition building approach.
- **The development of Food-Based Dietary Guidelines for Ethiopia.** This case was presented by Dr Tesfaye Hailu Bekele (Postdoctoral researcher) from Wageningen University and Research. It highlights how diverse expertise, knowledge, and perspectives can be brought together to develop contextualised food-based dietary guidelines that are broadly accepted.
- **Municipal approaches to combatting youth overweight and obesity - Learnings from The Netherlands.** Dr Leonie Barelds (NWGN Co-chair) presented this case, which provided insights from an analysis of experiences in 33 Dutch cities.

A panel discussion moderated by Dr Ann Trevenen Jones (Lead FSN Governance) from the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) followed the presentation of the three cases. The panel critically considered how these practical examples of multisectoral, multi-stakeholder food systems and nutrition governance reflected different aspects of the prioritised four areas of governance, as outlined by the VGFSyN. Design, approach, implementation, innovation, successful experiences, and learnings were considered with a view to context-specific and transferable take-aways that can better

inform interventions that aim to facilitate resilient, sustainable food systems transformation for healthier diets.

A short summary of each case study and a selection of key insights as presented and appraised follows.

Ghana Urban Food Environments: Collective Impact Coalition

An example of a bottom-up process to strengthen the urban food system

The Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) aims to help making food systems in LMICs more sustainable by connecting people and knowledge. NFP drives relationships and networks between partners from the private sector, knowledge institutes, NGOs, and government and provides linkages and knowledge access to all agri-food organisations in the food system.

NFP initiated a coalition by publishing a ‘scene-setter’ document, describing key trends in Ghana’s rural and urban food and nutrition system, and calling for action through a collective impact coalition. It highlighted the following aspects: higher food insecurity in rural than in urban areas; high food price inflation; high share of (ultra-) processed foods; and that residence in the urban food environment was associated with increased risk of obesity and non-communicable diseases, due to convenience stores and availability of unhealthy foods.

A group of around 25-30 organisations showed interest and developed a common agenda and approach to improve the urban food environment in Accra, forming the Ghana Urban Food Environment (GUFÉ) collective impact coalition. The coalition consisted of a wide range of disciplines, such as architects, market vendor representatives, academics, agro-ecologists, food journalist, farmers, young food entrepreneurs, government officials, nutritionists, and chefs, approximately two-thirds of them working in Ghana. The GUFÉ coalition worked on four domains of action. Action group 1 focused on urban consumers, and specifically on stimulating people, especially youth, to get involved in urban farming as a way to increase (awareness of) access to, and consumption of, nutritious diets. Action group 2 worked on improving the trading and purchasing environment, starting with market upgrading activities in a number of large markets in Accra. Action group 3 supported increased availability of healthy food, focusing on improving capacities of small scale processors to produce safe foods. Action group 4 supported initiatives to start the implementation of food environment policies and agreement on requirements for a national nutrient profiling system. The process of building a joint framework for collective action took place over mid 2020 – mid 2022, a period of 24 months, with various outputs such as formative research, trainings, and stakeholder discussions.

The GUFÉ coalition was formed by a bottom-up approach, driven by the participants. The structure of the coalition, action groups focusing on the four domains of actions, started to emerge after some initial conversations. The connection and linkages between these four domains was brought alive by one of the participants writing a visioning story: an imaginary story about how the life of a woman selling vegetables at the open market had changed in a few years, since the GUFÉ coalition had made its introduction. NFP, in collaboration with MDF West-Africa and the Ghana Netherlands Business and Culture Council, facilitated the coalition by forming an overall governance structure with representatives from each working group and by providing seed money for the action groups.

The GUFÉ coalition presented the main result of phase 1 of the GUFÉ coalition, its joint framework for collective action, at an event in Accra in May 2022. Despite the positive collaboration, strong attendance at meetings, and shared support for the vision, the partners within the coalition fell short of achieving collective implementation after the initial phase. Valuable lessons have been learned from this experience, highlighting the need to enhance the likelihood of successful follow-up endeavours in the future. These lessons emphasise the importance of ensuring adequate capacity in facilitating the coalition, the ability to secure follow-up funding, and ensuring institutional commitment and integration to sustain support for the coalition's objectives.

Development of Food-Based Dietary Guidelines for Ethiopia

An example of careful stakeholder management to ensure broad acceptance

The Food Systems for Healthier Diets program, part of the CGIAR research program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health and led by Wageningen University, focuses on improving food systems through agri-food value chains and supportive policies to boost innovation, scaling, and implementation. The development of the Ethiopian Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) was supported as part of this programme and by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. FBDGs define a healthy (and, in some cases, sustainable) diet based on country profiles; the more comprehensive FBDGs aim to promote all dimensions of individuals' health and wellbeing, lower environmental pressures on the food system, and include foods that are accessible, affordable, safe, equitable, and culturally acceptable. The project started with an analysis of dietary gaps and food systems in Ethiopia. Based on prior stakeholder mapping, 25 national and international organisations, representing the Ethiopian government, international NGOs, national and international knowledge institutes, religious organisations, and UN organisations, were invited to form the FBDG Technical Committee. The technical committee was informed about the project objectives and proposed methodology and were asked to provide input into the methodology and findings of the project. Whilst the formation and convening of the technical committee was challenging and time consuming, the inclusive approach helped to leverage diverse knowledge and expertise and facilitate access to different datasets about consumption, agriculture, and food prices.

The core activities of the programme consisted of evidence generation, contextualising the information, and compiling it, with graphical food-related designs. Through the inclusion of diverse stakeholder groups in focus group discussions and interviews, the FBDGs were contextualised for fasting/vegan consumers and further adapted for pastoralist communities. The development of the FBDGs took four years and resulted in contextualised FBDGs and supporting documents and tools for measuring adherence to the FBDGs. The FBDGs were broadly accepted, and the early involvement of implementing sectors accelerated their implementation.

Municipal approaches to combatting youth overweight and obesity

Learnings from the Netherlands which might be applicable to other countries and contexts.

Overweight and obesity are urgent public health problems, not only in high-income countries, but also in LMICs, particularly in urban settings. The Netherlands is recognised for the successful implementation of the originally French EPODE (Together Let's Prevent Childhood Obesity) programme (5; 6). The Dutch program is called JOGG ('Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht' or 'youth at a

healthy weight'). This case study was initiated by the NWGN and GAIN and analysed and reported by Voedingsjungle. It aims to learn from the experience in the Netherlands of combatting youth overweight and obesity, which might be applicable to other contexts. The experience in 33 Dutch cities was analysed using a literature-based framework, looking at five aspects:

1) Municipal organisation and political support

For example, numbers helped to create urgency for prioritisation and including citizen's questions in the municipal council increased participation.

2) Collaboration with civil society, academia, and private-sector partners

PPPs were established based on a common goal and synergies between the activities of the partners. Steering committees at strategic, tactical, and operational levels were used to govern such partnerships.

3) Activities focused on prevention and care

Primary schools were used as a starting point to reach all children in the municipality, recognising and expanding ongoing activities towards a structural programme.

4) Communication

It was important to talk positively about the programme and its core behavioural targets and involve all partners.

5) Monitoring and evaluation

Collaboration with academic partners and the Public Health Service was sought to monitor and evaluate the programme on a regular basis, using simple tools and not focusing only on body mass index (BMI) outcomes. The findings were used to adapt the programme.

Furthermore, a national organisation provided support to local authorities by providing an overarching roadmap for implementation and monitoring and helped them influence national policies. This is also an important supporting factor as (inter)national political regulations often overrule local initiatives and therefore impact the environment in which food choices are made. The full report is available at the NWGN website (7).

INSIGHTS: THREE CASE STUDIES

The case of the Collective Impact Coalition in Ghana shows that a bottom-up approach is possible and that it is inspirational for stakeholders and engages them equitably. Coherence and coordination was promoted by calling potential partners to contribute via a broad and open invitation and sharing knowledge in the early phases of the process. This helped to create energy in the coalition. Inclusiveness and transparency were promoted by the nature of the bottom-up approach, bringing 'unusual' stakeholders on board, such as architects. On the other hand, the approach took a significant amount of time and relied on the commitment of participating individuals and organisations. Accountability was organised both formally and informally. Neutral brokering and seed money were good assets to help the coalition form and develop its common framework. The longevity was built on the idea of phases and stakeholders defining whether and how they would play their role in these

phases. However, the stop of backbone support after the first phase, without establishing appropriate alternative arrangements for sustained and locally owned coalition support, led to a standstill. Yet this setback provided valuable insights, guiding others toward strategies to ensure future success and continued momentum beyond the initial phase.

In Ethiopia the technical committee for the development of the FBDGs helped with coherence and coordination of the project and resulted in broad acceptance and accelerated implementation. The initial training helped get everyone involved speaking the same language and may have contributed to a smooth development process. The project used an extensive stakeholder mapping and chose the members of the technical committee carefully. For example, companies were not part of the technical committee because of possible conflicts of interest. Later in the process, the committee engaged private-sector representatives and considered their feedback in the development process. Religious leaders were included in the committee to ensure that their perspectives were taken into account. Involvement of consumers was achieved through engaging them in qualitative research on the understandability, acceptability, cultural appropriateness, and practicality of the dietary recommendations.

Learnings by Dutch municipalities underscored that successful governance in combatting childhood obesity involves political will, local champions, a long-term mandate with budgetary support, inclusive involvement of all relevant stakeholders, and a commitment to continuous evaluation, learning, and adaptation.

CONCLUSION

In this symposium three cases of Dutch multi-sectoral initiatives were presented, and aspects of their governance mechanisms were analysed using the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition on multi-sectoral governance as a framework. These case studies feature real-world practices and experiences, illustrating the complexities of multistakeholder governance. The stakeholders in these case studies were not only coming from different governmental sectors (such as health, agriculture, social) but also included private companies, civil society organisations, and knowledge institutes and academia.

The CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition provide a useful framework for different dimensions of multisector governance. They focuses on four areas of transparent, democratic, and accountable governance for which the case studies provide valuable input:

- **Coherence and coordination.** The municipal approach in the Netherlands showed that political will and strong leadership to prioritise tackling the issue of childhood overweight and obesity in a city context was needed. This will lead to a long-term vision and mandate, as programmes that aim to tackle these complex problems often do not show immediate results. The development of the Ethiopian FBDGs showed that finding a common ground or language facilitates collaboration between different stakeholders and domains.
- **Inclusiveness and transparency.** The GUFÉ case study showed that a bottom-up approach creates local ownership and transparency and may bring ‘unusual’ stakeholders on board. On the other hand, the approach took a significant amount of time and relied on the commitment of participating individuals and organisations.

- **Accountability, monitoring, and evaluation.** In the municipal approach study, monitoring and evaluation came out as essential elements for success. Data and insights gained can also be used to make the case for the approach. Simple tools and a focus on behavioral outcomes are very important. The other two case studies were not followed long enough to witness effective use of these governance aspects.
- **Indigenous peoples and local communities.** In the Ethiopian FBDGs case study religious groups were invited into the technical committee and the views of local communities were considered through qualitative research.

The three case studies provide examples of how these different dimensions of multisector governance have been managed in practice. It seems that multisector and multistakeholder governance was not consciously managed in its broadest sense, although some governance aspects were unconsciously implemented well.

We conclude that these examples may resonate very well with other experiences and are not limited to the 'Dutch Diamond' approach. The CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition and other literature about best practices for multisector and multistakeholder governance, such as the recently published *Guide for Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration (4)*, may help govern approaches to food and nutrition security and sustainable development more systematically.

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