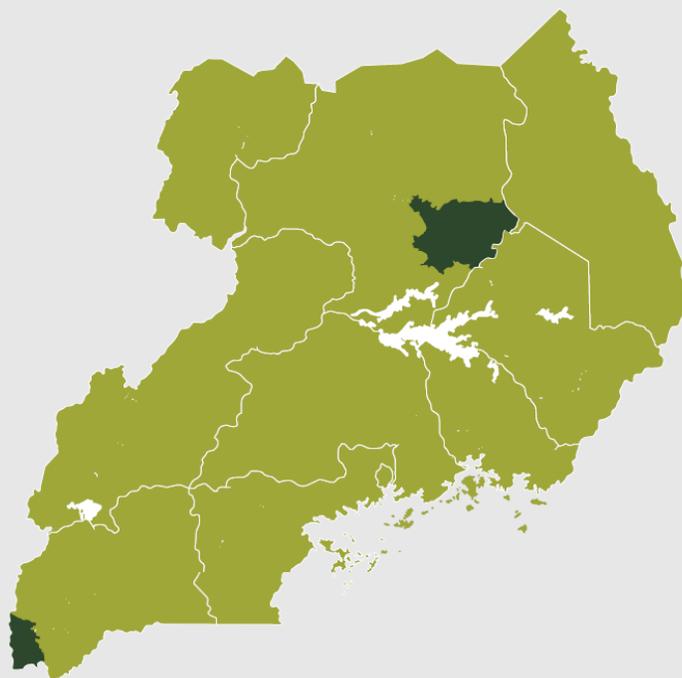


PATHWAYS TO BETTER NUTRITION

CASE STUDY EVIDENCE SERIES

District Technical Brief

Summary of **Qualitative Findings** in Kisoro and Lira Districts, **Uganda**



2013/14 and
2014/15 Financial Years

JANUARY 12, 2016



USAID
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SPRING
Strengthening Partnerships, Results,
and Innovations in Nutrition Globally

DISCLAIMER

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ABOUT SPRING

The Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project is a five-year USAID-funded Cooperative Agreement to strengthen global and country efforts to scale up high-impact nutrition practices and policies and improve maternal and child nutrition. The project is managed by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., with partners Helen Keller International, the Manoff Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute.

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

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BACKGROUND

The PBN Case Studies

The Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is collecting data prospectively in two countries—Uganda and Nepal—to document the decision-making process for prioritizing and funding nutrition-relevant activities within the context of their national nutrition action plans (NNAP). We began work in Uganda in November 2013.

The overall goal of these “Pathways to Better Nutrition” case studies is to provide insight into how NNAP activities are prioritized across sectors, and how that prioritization affects the financial resources committed to nutrition.

This brief summarizes all themes found during the baseline district data collection period in 2014. It aims to answer the following questions at the district level in Uganda:

1. What are the district stakeholder perceptions of nutrition and the UNAP?
2. How has the district prioritized nutrition activities and interventions? What are they?
3. How are resources mobilized for these priorities, and how does the flow of funding operate?
4. What are some strengths and opportunities these districts can capitalize on to support the UNAP?
5. What are some of the barriers to coordination and implementation of the UNAP in these two districts?
6. What are the recommendations to address the barriers?

Findings from the two study districts should help stakeholders in food and nutrition better coordinate, plan, budget, implement and monitor the UNAP implementation at the district level.

Methodology

The PBN case study is a mixed-method, prospective study that includes ongoing qualitative data collection as an integral component. The case study team conducted Key Informant Interviews (KII) with stakeholders affiliated with the district government and other key stakeholder groups¹ in two Ugandan districts, **Kisoro** and **Lira**, in April and August 2014. The team completed follow-up data collection via focus groups discussions (FGDs) and selected KIIs in December 2014 and January 2015. Final input was collected during data validation workshops conducted in Kisoro in February 2015 and in Lira in March 2015.

¹ UNAP is developed as Uganda’s effort in joining the global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative. SUN works with six stakeholder groups that are relevant to nutrition: government; donor agencies (bilateral and multilateral aid agencies); civil society organizations (CSOs); business/private sector; United Nation (UN) groups; academic/research institutions.

We chose districts based on several criteria: evidence of being a Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) early-riser district; presence of partners; relative progress in rolling out UNAP; and availability of district-representative data to complement findings. The criteria used to recruit key informants at the district were similar to those used at the national level: known nutrition focal persons affiliated with any of the stakeholder groups, including all members of the District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) implementing health, food, and nutrition security interventions.

We conducted a total of 31 and 16 interviews at baseline in Lira and Kisoro districts, respectively. The difference in the numbers was due to the large presence of partners in Lira compared to Kisoro district. The team collected data using the same tool used at the national level (minimal modifications were made to suit the district contexts), which covers three broad areas: (perceptions of nutrition/UNAP in the district; understanding of SUN in Uganda; and involvement of key stakeholders in the implementation of the UNAP). We conducted 11 KIIs and 3 FGDs (with District and Sub-County Nutrition Coordination Committees [SNCC]) in the follow-up period. The questions followed the same themes as the baseline, with some adjustments to reflect current events.

Where available, budget information has been included to help provide additional information and insights of the qualitative data in order to answer the research questions. This budget data comes from budget qualitative interviews and the in-depth budget data analysis conducted by SPRING study partners Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung (DSW) for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 fiscal years.

For further information on the PBN study methodology, please see our full methods annexes at: www.spring-nutrition.org/pbn.

FINDINGS

District Perceptions of Nutrition and the UNAP

In both Lira and Kisoro Districts, government stakeholders interviewed collectively showed a general understanding of nutrition and the nutrition situation in their district. However, at the time of follow-up data collection, exact sub-county level statistics for undernutrition were not known to many district officials and partners. In Lira, undernutrition was indicated to be high in a few sub-counties, though lower than its neighboring districts. Kisoro indicated high rates of stunting, considered second in the south western region. Table 1 summarizes stakeholders' perceptions of causes of undernutrition in Lira and Kisoro.

Table 1: Perceived Causes of Undernutrition in Kisoro and Lira Districts at Baseline

| Kisoro District | Lira District |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household food insecurity from selling perishable goods and inadequate land to cultivate foods since Kisoro is a very small district with a high population density • Poor feeding practices, e.g. eating unbalanced diets • High workload for women and mothers • Male heads of household work in Kampala, leaving their families without financial support • Cultural practices related to food, e.g. men given eggs rather than children; malnutrition is considered witchcraft | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household food insecurity related to three factors: high alcohol consumption leading to selling food, poverty leading to selling food, and commercialization of agriculture leading to the production of high-cash yielding foods rather than diverse foods for household consumption • Poor knowledge of how to prepare nutritious foods • Climate change leading to low yields • History of war and political instability • Cultural factors • Diseases caused by poor hygiene and sanitation • Poor access to health services |

When secondary analysis was done of district level survey data collected by USAID's Nutrition Innovation Lab, it corroborated several of these perceived barriers, while uncovering some others (Table 2). According to the data, about one third of women in Kisoro attend four or more antenatal care visits compared to 56 percent of women in Lira. Health-related indicators in Lira suggest better family planning services, greater access to protected water sources, and lower diarrhea rates than are seen in Kisoro. Food security and nutrition-related indicators are no different; about 10 percent of households were classified as experiencing moderate or severe hunger in Kisoro as compared to 8 percent in Lira. Consumption of animal source food is very poor in Kisoro (5 percent) compared to Lira (21 percent). See SPRING's [District Snapshots](#) for a full analysis of UNAP indicators and drivers of nutrition.

Table 2: Barriers to Better Nutrition at the District Level

| Barriers | Kisoro--% | Lira--% |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Attend 4+ ANC | 34.5 | 56.0 |
| Diarrhea Prevalence in Children <5 | 43.6 | 20.3 |
| Proper food hygiene* | 27.8 | 28.8 |
| Protected water source | 39.2 | 79 |
| Family planning use | 14.0 | 46.4 |
| 3+meals/day(6-23months) | 64 | 26 |
| Food secure households | 9.7 | 8.1 |
| Moderate or severe hunger | 73 | 55.9 |
| Consumption of Animal source foods** | 4.7 | 20.7 |
| Poor households | 78.6 | 72 |
| <p>* Proper food hygiene is defined as achieving any four of the following five behaviors: handwashing with soap after defecation/toilet, after cleaning the bottom of young child, before preparing food, before eating, and before feeding a child</p> <p>** Animal foods include milk, meat, organs, eggs, fish/fish powder, or insects; fed to children 6-23 months 24 hours before the survey</p> | | |

Overall, the UNAP is known as a strategic policy document intended to help the DNCC in both Lira and Kisoro districts address undernutrition. However, some local government stakeholders, civil society organizations (CSOs), and development partners interviewed still considered nutrition to be a health sector issue; mostly because they have minimal to no involvement in UNAP implementation at the district level.

Prioritization of Nutrition at the District Level since the UNAP

Changes brought by UNAP

At the district level in both Kisoro and Lira, officials are committed to implementing the UNAP. One indicator of this commitment is the establishment and orientation of DNCCs and SNCCs. The responsibilities of the committees include coordinating and monitoring the implementation of nutrition

"....the Office of the Prime Minister is seriously pushing the local governments for [nutrition], I think the commitment is there but it needs strengthening..."

--CSO stakeholder, Kisoro

“For us as (agriculture) production department, we look at our activities all as nutrition sensitive. The district did not address nutritional issues with a clear cut budget strictly for nutrition but it would appear as cross cutting whereby when you come to department of agriculture you find we are supporting our community through food security...”

--Government stakeholder, Kisoro

activities. At the time of follow-up, Kisoro district with support from SPRING Project had rolled out a nutrition multi-sectoral working group to the parish level with the formation of Community Mobilization Teams (CMTs). CMTs played a large role in sensitizing the communities, though the structure is not part of the UNAP coordination structure.

Kisoro district with support from SPRING Project developed and costed a District Nutrition Action Plan 2014 intended to guide the rollout of the UNAP in the district and help secure funding from partners for its implementation. No nutrition-specific activity, as indicated within the UNAP, had been included in the

district or sub-county annual budget and work plan at the time of the baseline interviews. Lira district, on the other hand, had included a few nutrition activities in department work plans, though it did not have a separate District Nutrition Action Plan. Even without these action plans, however, districts were undertaking some nutrition-related activities. At follow-up, both districts were implementing nutrition promotion and community empowerment activities, and had rolled out ready-to-use therapeutic foods at lower health centers for treating acute malnutrition. According to the budget analysis by SPRING and DSW, discretionary funds at the district level are very limited beyond the existing activities covered by conditional central grants. This severely restricts the district’s ability to implement new nutrition activities as a result of the UNAP. This has been true in both the 2013/14 and 2014/15 fiscal years.

How activities are prioritized?

In both districts, during both time periods, nutrition activities (mostly nutrition-sensitive) were being implemented by the local government and CSOs alike. However, the majority of these activities were not being implemented or monitored with UNAP in mind, but rather as department/sector-funded priority areas. The primary guiding documents for prioritized activities at the district level in 2014 were the following: District Development Plans that feed into the National Development Plan; individual sector plans like Health, Agriculture, Education, Gender, Local Government and Water; and Sector Strategic Investment Plans. These plans were defined by community priority needs identified through community dialogues and national-level core priorities with attached funding. Thus, the activities prioritized through the District Development Plan were sector-specific to health, production/agriculture, education, social development, works (including water, transport, and communication), and planning and finance. Similarly, activities implemented by both the government and partner CSOs were dictated by the District Development Plan and other national sector development plans. With

little budget for nutrition activities in both Lira and Kisoro districts, DNCCs, SNCCs, and partner CSOs focused their work on sensitizing the communities on the importance of nutrition. Informing communities of positive nutrition behaviors was perceived as low-cost and low-resource intensive, making this type of advocacy for nutrition possible at the community level, despite limited resources. This is possibly one of the sustainable activities that key informants thought could be integrated easily into district plans without specific nutrition funding.

District Financial Resources for Nutrition Priorities

Available funding

“We have the grants and local revenue but it’s not much money. Grants are [usually conditional funds]. As a department, we are not allocated money on nutrition... [having] a clear cut budget would help so much to streamline...”

-- Government stakeholder, Lira

“Operating a fixed budget and fixed funds makes implementation of multisectoral approach a bit complicated...”

--Government stakeholder, Lira

The level of funding for nutrition priorities in Kisoro and Lira districts is closely linked to the districts’ ability to prioritize nutrition activities. Our data does not indicate specific funding for nutrition activities.² Districts’ plans and budgeted activities are based on budget circulars provided by the central Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. Central government transfers—which form the bulk of available district funds, are conditional, and generally biased toward key national core priority areas—do not prioritize nutrition. Nevertheless, these central government funds make up over 85 percent of all nutrition funding

in the districts; the majority were conditional. Unlike nutrition, other cross-cutting issues (such as gender, HIV, and environment) benefit from specific funds provided mostly by donors, which increases their visibility. Across all sectors, nutrition activities were not prioritized, planned, and budgeted for in a coordinated way. Most of the support for nutrition is due to the presence of nutrition partners who fund DNCC quarterly meetings and collaborate with key DNCC members to implement and monitor nutrition activities in partner-supported sub-counties. They also promote community sensitization in both districts and nutrition advocacy among district leadership in Kisoro district.

² Lukwago, Daniel, Diana Tibesigwa, Matthias Brucker, Abel Muzoora, Nancy Adero, Alexis D’Agostino, and Amanda Pomeroy-Stevens. *District Technical Brief: Summary of Findings on Nutrition Financing in Lira and Kisoro Districts, Uganda – 2013/2014 and 2014/15 Financial Years. Pathways to Better Nutrition Case Study Evidence Series.* Arlington, VA: SPRING project.

Alternative funding approaches

When UNAP was launched, districts presumed the plan would be accompanied by designated funding for nutrition. Given the lack of a specific budget for nutrition, both districts are reliant on funding from sectors that complement the nutrition activities outlined in the UNAP, as well as on support from partners. For example, in Lira district, officers affiliated with sectors relevant to UNAP implementation were encouraged to include nutrition sensitization in their routine activities. Similarly, in Kisoro, nutrition activities are largely implemented by partners, based on the District Nutrition Action Plan. The key observation is that many of the activities considered nutrition activities were those implemented and funded under the district's annual work plan and budget, and not prioritized on the premises of UNAP. It should be noted that Kisoro's District Nutrition Action Plan expired in 2014 and both districts have developed and costed a five year (2015/2020) district nutrition action plan with support from FANTA Project, though dependent on external sources of funding.

"... graduated tax was scrapped and that was our main source of income. We are hands tied waiting for the Center [central government] to release something that is when we can talk..."

--Government stakeholder, Kisoro

In our follow-up interviews, respondents mentioned a graduated tax that provided additional discretionary funds to the districts. However, this additional funding source was scrapped by the GOU at all levels, which has made the districts largely reliant on conditional transfers from the central government. They do have however, a local revenue tax that is not adequate to fund nutrition needs in the districts, but if strengthened could be a source of funding for a few nutrition activities.

Respondents thought including nutrition-specific and sensitive indicators in the output-based budget tool (OBT) developed by Ministry of Finance and Local Government could incentivize districts to spend more of their limited funds on nutrition activities. If the indicators were included, they would be used to measure the districts' performance and make funding decisions since OPM and Ministry of Local Government require districts to report using the OBT system.

District Strengths and Opportunities for Nutrition and the UNAP

Interviews with key informants at the district level revealed several strengths that may help district and sub-country local governments overcome barriers to prioritizing and funding UNAP activities:

- The **presence of existing structures** at the district and lower local government levels, e.g. the DNCC and SNCC can be used as platforms to create community demand for nutrition services.
- Verbal **willingness and commitment** from district officials and a few political leaders offers an opportunity to advocate for nutrition in the districts.
- Health, Food Security and Nutrition CSO and project partners in the districts are sources of **technical support** and funding for nutrition.
- Districts have local resources in place, including 1) **human resources in key departments/sectors** already implementing nutrition-sensitive and specific activities, and 2) **some local revenue** collected as taxes in the districts that could be allocated to nutrition.

Barriers to District Coordination and Implementation the UNAP

The DNCCs and SNCCs in both Kisoro and Lira districts have been established. However, their functionality is weak due to several factors:

- **Because DNCCs and SNCCs do not receive specific funding** for coordination and implementation of nutrition activities they have limited resources for the coordination and monitoring of UNAP implementation (see Financing section for more details). DNCC members also feel that they **do not have enough expertise in nutrition to provide leadership** and coordination to community implementers. This lack of capacity has a negative impact on the ability of the DNCCs and SNCCs to plan, budget, and monitor lower local governments and partners implementing the UNAP in the districts. For this reason, the DNCCs have not been able to give comprehensive guidance to departments and partners on how to prioritize nutrition activities within the UNAP. Partners not engaged in nutrition also feel that they have limited knowledge about UNAP, which influences the prioritization and funding of UNAP activities. In addition, nutrition is still considered a health or agriculture issue by a few key informants among the local government and food security stakeholders. Some health implementing partners think there needs to be a specific sector/department focused on nutrition, which means that the multi-sectoral nature of UNAP is not yet fully internalized.
- With **no nutrition surveillance and monitoring mechanism** for either DNCCs or SNCCs, no data is being shared with the national level to facilitate feedback to the district level on the implementation of UNAP activities. This limits the ability of the districts to document impacts that could be used for advocacy and fundraising. Only districts that have nutrition

partners engage DNCC members in monitoring and supportive supervision of nutrition activities in selected districts of interest and facilitation of DNCC and SNCC.

- This is exacerbated by the fact that CSOs supporting nutrition related activities do not report to the DNCC or SNCC; rather, they report to various individual district officials in the sector associated with their activity. Although these officials may very well serve on the DNCC, the different sectors do not fulfill assigned roles related to nutrition activities. With **no clear roles and no accountability** to district and national level nutrition goals, the DNCC and SNCC are less able to serve as coordinating bodies and contribute to the success of UNAP.
- There is **limited engagement of partners and political leaders** in implementing UNAP at the local government levels, partially due to lack of clarity around roles of stakeholders in the district and weak coordination, which influences increased and sustained support for nutrition.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

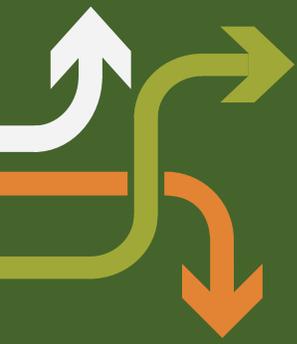
As part of the multi-sectoral approach to addressing undernutrition in the country, the government has established district (lower-level) platforms that will ensure effectiveness in implementing the UNAP. However, additional actions are needed to strengthen prioritization and financing of UNAP activities at the district level. Findings from the interviews point to the following recommendations for country stakeholders, UNAP implementing partners (government and non-government), and donors:

- Provide technical support to district nutrition coordination platforms and other district departments, partners and politicians to facilitate better planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring of the multi-sectoral nutrition strategies. The development and dissemination of planning and budgeting guidelines for DNCCs and SNCCs will aid the process of prioritization and financing of nutrition activities for inclusion in district development plans. In addition, Local Governments should recruit nutritionists to guide institutionalization and implementation of nutrition activities in districts and sub-counties at all service delivery points.
- Advocate for and mobilize resources/funds for district-level implementation of UNAP in two ways: 1) work with the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; partners; ministries/sectors; and local government to advocate for a budget line for nutrition, and 2) include clear nutrition specific and sensitive indicators in the district OBT, which will empower local government to integrate nutrition into their district work plans.
- Emphasize joint planning, budgeting, and collaboration among sectors and partners to synchronize resources for nutrition. Having clear roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder is critical for efficiency and effectiveness.
- Clearly define indicators to be collected and monitored at the district and below to help assess performance and gain buy-in and financing for a multi-sectoral nutrition approach.
- Gain a better understanding of how and why stakeholders are implementing multi-sectoral nutrition strategies; this will help Uganda push nutrition programs and financing to the top of the agenda.

“DNCC should be trained and given technical information. Even me, I would not say I have the information though am coordinating. During orientation, the key things that came out were the roles [of the DNCC] and the nutrition situation. If I went to the community and I am asked about nutrition, as a focal person, I cannot speak with authority because I am not technical.”

--Government stakeholder, Lira

- Utilize bottom-up approaches in developing future nutrition policy/strategy documents for political and local government ownership and commitment.
- Help districts develop and enforce nutrition-related ordinances/by-laws on issues such as communal granaries, production and consumption of nutrient-rich crops, and alcohol consumption.



ADDITIONAL PBN DOCUMENTS

To access the full complement of PBN reports, briefs, and snapshots, please go to www.spring-nutrition.org/pbn

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