



On the Journey to Self-Reliance: Transitioning Nutrition Financing from USAID to Domestic Resources

Webinar Transcript

Yaritza Rodriguez

Hello everyone, and welcome to today's webinar. We will be beginning in about two minutes. Thank you for joining us today, and please continue to introduce yourselves via the chat.

Hello again everyone. Thank you for joining today's webinar to learn more about transitioning nutrition financing from USAID to domestic resources. I'm Yaritza Rodriguez, Knowledge Management and Project Coordinator for USAID Advancing Nutrition, the agency's flagship multi-sectoral nutrition project. Before I begin today's presentation, I want to mention that today's webinar is being recorded. Now, I will quickly review the Adobe connect environment and set a few norms for the webinar.

Today's webinar will be moderated by Natasha Ledlie, Senior Program Officer on the Global Nutrition Practice at Results for Development

After the introductory remarks, we will have a presentation followed by a panel during which the speakers will address your questions. All participants will be muted for today's webinar. If you are joining us via the telephone line, please remember to mute yourself as a courtesy to our participants and panelists. Make use of the chat box on the bottom right hand side of your screen to introduce yourself, ask questions, or ask for help with the Adobe connect during the presentation.

If you're experiencing difficulties, our technical support will respond to your questions privately. We will collect and save your questions from the chat box for panelists to address during the discussion period.

Your experience today may vary based on your internet connection and computer equipment. I will briefly go over a few troubleshooting stuff if you have technology challenges today.

If you lose connectivity or cannot hear, close the webinar. Reenter the meeting room using the link provided to you via email. So, please use a browser that is not Google Chrome. It's recommended that you either download the Adobe Connect App to join or join via Internet Explorer or Firefox. Remember to use the chat box to ask tech support for assistance. They will start a private chat with you and try to work for your issue.

I am now pleased to introduce Natasha Ledlie. Natasha is an international development professional with over eight years of experience conducting research and studying the gendered impact of nutrition, agriculture and social protection programs on reducing poverty in low- and middle-income countries. As

a senior program officer on the global nutrition practice at Results for Development. Natasha works on projects related to nutrition financing and evidence-based decision-making.

Natasha, over to you.

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks Yaritza. Warm welcome to USAID's Advancing Nutrition webinar on the Journey to Self-Reliance: Transitioning Nutrition Financing from USAID to Domestic Resources. My name is Natasha Ledlie, and I'm a senior program officer in the nutrition practice at Results for Development. Results for Development is a consortium partner for USAID Advancing Nutrition and I will be a moderator for today's webinar. I wanted to start by letting you all know what to expect from today's discussion.

So we will start with an overview of why the focus of this guidance is on sustainable financing for nutrition, and the approach that we took to develop this guidance. Next, our presenter Helen Connolly will share a Framework for financing transitions for USAID nutrition activities, as well as the recommendations that will be presented today for USAID missions and implementing partners. After each recommendation has been presented, you should see two poll questions show up on your screen. We'd love to hear from you during the presentation and get your input on these recommendations. Once Helen has presented all recommendations, we will invite our discussants Tomas Lievens and Debora Niyeha to share their thoughts on the guidance, and its application to different contexts. We'll then open up the discussion for questions and comments from the audience. This webinar will be recorded and the recording of the webinar and the accompanying slides will be available shortly after the presentation. As we begin the webinar, please do ask your questions or note your comments in the chat box as Yaritza mentioned. This will be monitored at all times and we do want this to be as interactive as possible, and we will try to answer as many of the questions as we can at the end of the presentation. With that, I would like to invite Elaine Gray, nutrition advisor at the Bureau of Global Health at USAID, to provide some openings remarks for the guidance.

Elaine Gray

Great, thank you Natasha. So briefly, to frame today's discussion, what do we mean by sustainable financing for nutrition? We also conceptualize the ideal scenario as the incorporation of USAID's funded integrating nutrition interventions into government managed services. We also come across terms like exit strategy, handover or transition. And certainly the term sustainability permeates much of our goals and investments. We wanted to take a closer look and develop this guidance on sustainable financing for nutrition, because the financing aspects of sustainability is crucial, yet, compressed, requiring proactive planning, consensus, continuous adaptation, constant engagement of and with our government partners, and a clear understanding of national planning and financial processes. The multi-sectoral nature of nutrition adds yet another layer of complexity to resource commitment and tracking, as funding has typically been managed by multiple ministries. Relying with USAID's vision or the Journey to Self-Reliance, to ensure a lasting impact of successful nutrition activities as well as accelerate progress towards a country's nutrition reliance objectives, we must think of systems to mobilize, allocate and spend resources in an effective, equitable, and accountable way as well as design programs and activities with the overall fiscal environment in mind.

I'll now hand that over to Natasha for further describe the work that USAID's Advancing Nutrition has undertaken in this area.

Natasha Ledlie

Many thanks Elaine, that's very hopeful in framing this discussion. So, what does this all mean? At a higher level, in order to transition nutrition programs over to the government, USAID needs to ensure

that their activities are aligned with the government priorities and plans, that the agency needs to understand both the planning and budgeting framework of host governments, as well as understand how funds that do not go through government budgets are managed, and identify strategic entry points in the process to support governments.

Today's presentation will focus on three recommendations for USAID to incorporate sustainable financing considerations into nutrition plans and programming.

Work with governments to develop a transparent, achievable, long-term transition plan for sustainability

Work with governments to plan for implementation in accordance with the cyclical government processes and in alignment with the long-term transition plan

Ensure that there's transparent and shared data, monitoring, evaluation, and learnings not just for the interventions and the activity, but also for the transition.

To come up with these interventions, we conducted three activities: developing the framework, a literature review, and looking at USAID case examples.

Under the framework development, we researched national planning and budget cycles for nutrition, and we looked at the USAID's program cycles to develop a framework for sustainable financing for USAID nutrition programs. We refined this framework and validated it by having some consultations with experts across some organizations. We then conducted a review of the literature on donor transition and sustainable financing focusing a lot on the global health sector, but with examples from nutrition and agriculture where they were available. And lastly, we conducted a desk review of activity documents and interviewed colleagues from five recent or current USAID nutrition activities.

With that, I'd like to invite Helen Connolly, a Principal Economist at AIR, with over 30 years of experience on economic research to present the corresponding steps and details for each of the recommendations. Helen has worked with multiple country governments and many partners to support developing national nutrition plans and improvements in public finance for nutrition.

Welcome Helen and thanks for being with us today.

Helen Connolly

Thank you Natasha, I'm really happy to be here and participate in this webinar, and to provide more details on the three recommendations that you've described. So, the framework that was developed in the first activity of this projects laid the groundwork for recommendations to follow. Some recommendations for transitioning to sustainable nutrition will be most useful when they are fully aligned with activities at the national level. The framework starts with the national planning and budgeting cycle. This cycle, shown here, adapted from the SUN Framework for national nutrition planning, identifies various items that need to be considered through each budget cycle, when developing and implementing a multi-year transition plan. The primary categories of this budget cycle include reviewing policies and strategies relevant to nutrition programming, creation and adjustment of policies and costed nutrition action plans, budget formulation and allocation for nutrition programs, and the monitoring, evaluation and learning from nutrition programs implementation and outcome. Other considerations include the fiscal and budgetary space for nutrition, as well as the level and types of decentralization in the country. The national budget cycle provides the basis for planners to identify entry points for transitioning to sustainable domestic financing.

This figure depicts the overlap of the components of the national planning cycle shown in the outer ring, with four main components of the USAID program cycle in the inner colored ring, which are:

Country/regional strategic planning

Project design and implementation

Activity design and implementation, and

Monitoring and evaluation.

This alignment shows potential pathways for connecting USAID program cycle with the national activities. This framework was designed based on the concept that it's important that USAID's programs align with governments priorities and plans throughout the strategic planning processes in the country. It's important that monitoring, evaluation, and learning are implemented and shared to promote government take-up and ownership of effective programs. And it's important that transition activities are designed to address knowledge gaps, strengthen the evidence base, and feed back into the transition planning processes.

So given the framework and its guiding concept, three primary recommendations were developed. These recommendations are focused on two of the Agency's program cycle components:

1/ activity design and implementation, and

2/ monitoring, evaluation and learning

These areas were identified as the most effective entry points to promote sustainable transition. But before reviewing the recommendations for transition planning, I'd like to discuss one theme that emerged across the information sources. That is in order to provide support for sustainable transitioning of activities to domestic resources at the mission level to pass what is required within the agency itself. This means developing agency tools to help missions plan for transitions at the country level. It also requires training for a shared understanding of the basic requirements for sustainable financing, as well as information on how to identify, and plan for project and activity level transition. This includes ensuring that missions have their own internal transition plans for staff changes that clearly articulate how new staff will be informed of, and trained on, the activity transition plans and processes. A unified USAID understanding of definitions, goals, and processes regarding transition of sustainable domestic financing, will help missions adapt to better prepare and support transition plans. With this understanding, and based on the framework development, the literature review and case study examples, the three recommendations were developed.

Recommendation 1: work in concert with governments to develop a transparent, achievable, long term transition plan for sustainability. The first recommendation is to ensure that transition goals and plans are transparent across all partners. Literature on donor transition consistently points to collaborate transition planning between donors and countries as the best practice. Plan development should include basic shared definitions of the meaning of sustainability and the meaning of financing. Goals should be clearly defined and there needs to be a realistic assessment of what it would take to achieve these goals. Timelines should be built around these activities, and we need to recognize and plan for the fact that these timelines may not fit neatly with an existing country planning cycle. In addition to measuring progress against timelines, there should be agreed upon benchmarks with their own estimated timeline. Flexibility needs to be built into plans when benchmarks are not met and to adapt for delays and challenges. The plan should account for the capacity development needed to both transfer program activities to local resources and also to account for the additional temporary capacity that may be needed for the administration of the transition and for technical assistance during the handover.

The resiliency of the RING project highlights the benefits of these recommendations. RING was a government-to-government-funded activity that supported district government multi-sectoral nutrition, agriculture, livelihoods, and WASH interventions. RING worked closely with the government to ensure a sustainable transition and RING interventions were incorporated into districts annual plans and budgets. Projects that started with the engagement of the government from the beginning of the project

include significant involvement during the activity design phase that was critical in transition success. This includes incorporating data into government systems, so they have control and ownership of project information and resources. Another important component was assessing the ability of the government to incorporate activities into government plans. In the case of RING, district staff were well equipped to implement the RING program, but governance at higher level that was needed to ensure accountability, transparency and staff effectiveness was not well established.

Recommendation 2: work in concert with the governments to strategically plan for implementation in accordance with cyclical government processes and in alignment with the long-term transition plan. This second recommendation is to make sure that transition plans that are put in place align with the country processes. This means recognizing that transition plans may be longer term, but government may operate on shorter budget cycles. Planning needs to account for all stakeholders involved in implementation and financing. Planning also needs to consider the incremental nature of budget processes, as well as the decentralized nature of implementation and financing. Transition plans should take advantage of the national cyclical budget process to incrementally strengthen systems and build capacity. In addition, as USAID transitions responsibilities to domestic sources, they need to transfer ownership and branding as well. Whole branding at the beginning of the activity helps promote local ownership and responsibility. Round the entire transition process, USAID needs to remain engaged at the appropriate levels of government and with the appropriate levels of support. So how did the project follow this guidance? So how to initiate the government in implementing the interventions that are in the multi-sectoral nutrition plans, including maternal, infant and young child nutrition, WASH, and nutrition for agriculture interventions? Project staff stated that working to align activities into nutrition plans helped them getting support from the government. They also maintained communication with the government throughout the project to make sure everyone understood and agreed to planned activities. And the challenges were also discussed and addressed. Maintaining flexibility was also identified as a key issue. Situations change, and issues arise that require adjustments to agreed-upon plans. This may require slight alterations to activities or could require delays in transition. The project team also noted that coordination needs to happen at all levels of government and the way they provide multiple levels of support. This includes policy and planning meetings such as aligning in your work plans with governments and your plan. This also means providing TA and transition support. Project staff noted that transitions need to include measures to ensure local capacity to implement the planned activities and that the government improves systems for accountability.

Recommendation 3. Ensure transparent and shared data monitoring, evaluation and learnings for the activity, interventions, and the transition.

The third primary recommendation was to ensure the continuity of monitoring, evaluation, and learning throughout the transition process. This includes monitoring, evaluation and learning of the activity processes, outcomes and impact. Activities need to be transitioned along with program implementation.

But it's also important to monitor the transition process itself. The transition process has an agreed-upon timeline for the benchmarks to be met. What are the barriers to successful transition? How are they being addressed? In the five cases we reviewed, monitoring, evaluation, and learning tends to be a weakness. All project staff reported that a lot of data collected on the activity is not effectively shared with or transitioned to government. There's very limited information collected around the transition itself.

So this concludes the discussion of the three main recommendations that came out of this project. Next, we're going to hear from discussants who'll share their thoughts for the guidance and its application to different contexts.

Natasha?

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks so much Helen, to keep up our discussion, we'd like to invite Tomas Lievens, an experienced social policy economist with much of his work focusing on public systems and expenditure performance and a special interest in equity in financing and outcomes. **[Technical problem, no sound]**.

Tomas Lievens

I will sort of discuss briefly within 5 minutes three or four points. I think the first point regarding the capacity assessment and development of the Agency is really spot on. I think this is often underestimated when people think about transitioning. And, I think this has got to do with the fact that people and organizations mainly think this is about additional skills and competences. And it is about skills and competences, but it's also about capabilities. And, I think that has got to do with understanding that if you transition, you are moving to a different role. You are moving from a program designer, and implementer, and spending role to essentially what is an adviser and influencer role. And with a shift in that role, changes also position of power in the eyes of the stakeholders you work with. And so, this is a long-term game and this is not easy to pull off, I think. So, I think capacity development is very important to recognize. Practically, I've seen a very beautiful example here, from UNICEF Morocco, who have struck a long-term agreement with the government through... underpinned by a memorandum of understanding. Two elements strike me in that memorandum of understanding. One, it is not only with the Ministry of Health, as this concerns health activities, but it includes the Ministry of Finance as well. And that is just to recognize the important role that ministries of finances play in transitioning. So it's a tripartite MOU, firstly. Secondly, the elements regarding training, these have been transitioning jointly between UNICEF staff and the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance staff. And I think this is really beautiful in recognition as well as this is a joint journey. Ministry and counterpart staff also need to change roles when USAID transitions.

The second point is regarding Recommendation 1: Work in concert with governments to develop a plan for sustainability. I couldn't agree more. I've got actually very little comments to the substance of this recommendation. I will just highlight the possibility that USAID might find itself facing a trade-off between wanting to transition its nutrition activities and coming in to the view that once it does transition these nutrition activities, the government actually wouldn't implement them according to its own standards, so USAID expectations in nutrition space. So you get a trade-off between one thing to transition on the one hand, and effectiveness of government owned and funded nutrition activities. And I think there is good experience in the Global funding, GAVI has got quite a lot of experience with transitioning now, who initially in my view focused on the fiscal aspect of transitioning, but increasingly recognize that this is a long game, and that fiscal transitioning, i.e. the sustainable funding of activities and global funds, and GAVI in this particular case, need to be accompanied by health systems strengthening by advocacy, by flexible TA budgets to sort of help troubleshoots that process.

My third point concerns Recommendation 2: Plan in accordance with cyclical government processes. Again I think this is excellent, I think it's well codified in the note and explained by Helen. I wanted to just sort of emphasize a bit... I think Helen did mention that... but emphasize that we really need to be cognizant of the fact that a cyclical government process on paper and in official national budget documentation is often different in reality. And you see that very well in the budget formulation stage where the reality, regardless of what the documentation says, is very often quite historical budgeting... incremental budgeting, actually driven by ceilings set by the Ministry of Finance, whatever the budget documentation says, even if we claim we do very active program budgeting. I think we need to be cognizant of that. Secondly, we see that in the budget execution stages as well, where the release of funding and expenditure is often much more *ad hoc* and not according to expectations. What I think the

general point here is the solution is that many... I think there's good experience with embedding advisors in ministries. So Recommendation 2 is brilliant, but would probably be further effectively implemented if accompanied by embedding advisors in ministries to come very close to the implementation of these transition plans and to be able to sort of help where required.

And my last point regarding the MEL activities, I really agree with the gist of the recommendation which recognized that this is not done systematically enough, and I actually believe that this is a role that would help USAID in the transitioning, because if you make available valuable MEL insights to government counterparts, you really immediately position yourself as having value also when the role changes, and it helps, in my view, reposition yourself from an implementer and a funder to what's an advisor and an influencer in a positive way. Thank you.

Natasha Ledlie

Thank you so much Tomas. Next, I'd like to invite Debora Niyeha, who is Chief of Party at USAID Advancing Nutrition in Tanzania, with 13 years of experience in program implementation, management, and oversight, specifically in the areas of health and nutrition, food security, food fortification and large-scale evaluation of health and nutrition policies and programs. Thank you for sharing your experience with us Debora.

Debora Niyeha

Thank you Natasha. I'd like to share our experience in Tanzania with the rest of the group, and I would like to share my contribution, which aligns with Recommendation n°2 of the guidance document. So in terms of implementation of nutrition activity, guided by the plan that is called National multi-sectoral nutrition action plan, which we call NMAP. The first plan was developed in 2016, expected to end next year, 2021. So, during the mid-term review of the Nutrition multi-sectoral Action Plan in 2019, we observed a good progress in terms of most of the key result areas, most of outcomes and output level. However, there was a challenge, especially in financial resources, where it was only 41 per cent of the resources that were sent at the mid-term review. So, now the Recommendation n°2 fits in to what we are doing currently, because now we are in the preparatory stage for developing the second round of the plan, which will now run from 2021 to 2026. And USAID Advancing Nutrition in Tanzania and our technical partner, Results for Development, are working with the government of Tanzania under the leadership of the Prime Minister Office to develop a domestic resources mobilization strategy. And this strategy for us is very key, since it will guide both the government and the nutrition stakeholders to understand how financial resources that will be needed now for the implementation of the second round of the plan will be mobilized. So you can see that this Recommendation is kind of timely, because at one place, we developed a very good plan, but you could see that at the mid-term review, we were only 41 percent regarding the financial resources that were set to implement the NMAP. So, we were kind of half way of what was envisioned. So, I wish we had this idea before, so maybe whatsoever that we see as a progress by the mid-term review would have been doubled or tripled, if we at all we had all the [] at the same time, which will now tell us how the financial resources will be mobilized, and that will help the country maybe to move further than how we were. But we expect now, since we are developing the second round of the plan, then we hope by 2026, when we are evaluating our second round of the plan, maybe things will be different... things will have kind of... the plan will have the activities and the resources needed, because most of us, we know, we are very good at planning, but maybe sometimes we forget... yes, we have good indicators, we have good proposal interventions, but how do we fund those? Sometimes, it's a very big challenge. So I [] this is a guidance document and I comment the setting up of recommendation n°2 which is in line with was we are doing in Tanzania.

Thank you Natasha, back to you.

Natasha Ledlie

Thank you so much Debora. And thank you really to Helen, and Tomas and Debora for sharing all of that with us. Let's look at the results, if we can, from the poll that we had on the questions. So, it seems, in most cases, looking at the poll as prior responses whether this recommendation resonates with you, and they seem to be quite high, I think we have basically about 75%, and even 100% for the second recommendation. So where things seem to be less... sort of you know... everyone saying yes, this is actionable, but the problem is how do we actually get to use recommendations to work on the ground, given the actual in-country work and USAID reporting requirements and government priorities, etcetera. And this is something where going to our next round, which is sort of the discussion from questions and comments from the audience, I'd really like everyone to sort of look at the survey question that we have below, which is: What additional support or information do you need to make these recommendations actionable? Because that part of the guidance is to make sure that these recommendations are not hard on people, and that we do have applications for people to actually use this, especially USAID missions and implementing partners. So, we'd love to hear from you. Thanks for much to everyone who put their questions in the chat box or comments, and please feel free to respond to our additional survey questions as well as to send us any further information that you have or you'd like to share with us at the email address that's listed on the slide.

So, with that, let's go to our first question, which was really a comment, but we'd love to have a discussion on this. We hear from [] that government priorities shift. So we want to think of how to accommodate that and how to work with lower levels of government as well. So, I'd like to pass that to Tomas to respond to that, but I also know, you know, through some of our case studies that we did, and interviews, we spoke with [] I know you'll have to deal with this during your transition work. So if you have any comments, please put them in the chat box. But I'll hand over to Tomas to please respond to this comment.

Tomas Lievens

It just highlights how complex this is because...I think if you ... indicate they are already... when you say the government priorities... what is the government when you talk about nutrition? It is multi-sectoral, so there are many bits of the government whose priorities can shift... whom you are working with now. That's a lot of complexity, and obviously the decentralization of sub-national governments have quite a lot of devolved power when it comes to nutrition in many cases. So particularly complex. And it's important to recognize the complexity of that in these transition plans. That's one first thing I wanted to say. I think the other point that I would like to answer here is that ... we need to really emphasize in my view that your position shifts with transitioning, you lose... you need different types of power, so the power that comes from funding is gone and you need to replace that power with soft power. And that comes from being otherwise valuable. For example, the MEL activity, as I said, to really position USAID as a valuable partner within stakeholders, you can play coordinating roles as well amongst stakeholders, and I think in the transitioning you need to shift your position to what's being otherwise valuable, and through being otherwise valuable, being ...acquiring power so when these governments priorities shift, be able to have a say, and say we might... we would like to have a dialogue with you to see whether we think this is a good idea. The second element is I think is to be very close to the implementation of the transition plan, because then you will see quickly when priorities shift and when things are maybe implemented in a way different or initially thought or agreed.

And lastly obviously, I think you need to be ready to adapt the plan. Because ultimately this is when we say this is owned by national governments, then we also need to recognize that sometimes we have just to go and accept that directions taken are legitimate and we will have to adapt and adapt our plan.

Thank you

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks, Tomas for that. And our next question is again ... I open it to anyone... because the question is: Depending upon relation in the country for the subnational government also have to be supported and their priorities also need to be supported through the transition, and I know in Nepal there was a change in sort of the decentralization and the government structure. So, I'll hand over the Debora to share her thoughts on that question, so anyone again, who is online and that would like to comment on the chat box, that would also be very appreciated

So Debora, with that I'll hand it over to you.

Debora Niyeha

Thank you Natasha. I think the question... and it's like a suggestion, and it's very important because what I think... I think national governments like the local levels are very important, and that also depends on how countries assess and how the implementation of activities are happening in different countries. So to give an example... for example, in Tanzania, we have a lot of plans and how we are following kind of decentralization processes in planning and budgeting, so a lot of kind of funding at the lower level, where the lower level, the regions and the districts are having the big mandate of ensuring that they're implementing activities that they run. But now, when we are talking now, we are developing this strategy for example, we are developing it with the ministerial levels, at the higher level where they're able now to share and learn from the local level and put something that will be important for all levels. But at the end, we expect that the higher level will also support the lower level to ensure quality assurance and to ensure that they are delivering according to their mandate. So I agree with the point, and the subnational levels are very important and participants have said support from the higher level is very key.

Back to you Natasha

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks Debora. Our next question then is on sort of national nutrition platforms. So, Helen I'll pass the question to you but there's a comment that the implementation of information systems for nutrition is critical to have one national nutrition platform for reporting... So this is something we heard a lot through our different case examples in terms of different reporting requirements for governments and USAID reporting requirements, but Helen, any idea from you on that?

Helen Connolly

It's definitely something that came as a weakness across the different projects that data were being collected but were not integrated into government structures. So, that would be... you know part of the transition process would be understanding where the information that's being collected can be transitioned to government platforms, and with that the creation of information platforms for nutrition that should be part of the plan as well. So the idea would be that the platform that is used to collect the information should be the most useful to support the planning, and to support the transitioning of that plan.

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks Helen. And for your next question, I'm going to direct to Elaine given that you are at USAID. And so, one of our participants says: we have to acknowledge that transitioning nutrition financing to domestic resources is a long-term process. Past experience shows that at least a ten-year process is needed and political will on the part of US government to support this long-term process will be

needed. And this is also something that came up through some of our case examples, where the five-year kind of cycle that USAID has might be too short. So, Elaine if you could comment on that please?

Elaine Gray

Yes, thank you very much for that comment. And I do want to acknowledge that it is a continuing challenge, that there's a bit of dissonance between the cycles that we use within our programming and planning at USAID and processes of national planning and how we construct long-term solutions. So I think what we're trying to discuss here today looking at the USAID decisions on the journey to self-reliance hopefully... we're shifting a bit to really understand the long-term solutions that are needed, the timeframes that are needed, and I think what's coming out... what will be coming out in this guidance and progress right now which we are presenting today, so hopefully thanks very much for your feedback and important questions... it's to be also mindful of timelines on our planning, and what is realistic and feasible over the long-term, and this may be one of the comment [] for that effect as well. I think we are seeing this more... particularly with certain missions that do have this long term view, and that we look a little bit different in terms of how we try to accommodate that within the limitations of our program cycles, whether that's multiple iterations and multiple adaptations of our programming from one cycle to the next to try to... try to fix that... these long-term goals throughout multiple programs [] and working closely with our Nepal mission. But I would say finally overall, I think what's really at the heart of the purpose of this guidance is to elevate this conversation about financing and the sustainability of financing is something that should be at front of our minds when we're thinking about what happens when we reach the end of our cycle. And I think there's no one way to do it, and I think it's highly context-specific and requires much thoughtful constant adaptation and flexibility as we meet a lot of different challenges. Some I'm hoping again that this guidance and that this discussion today is a way to really actively think about how we can better bring this to the front of our minds, and advocate within USAID and governments, as well as partners and stakeholders to make sure this is central to our planning and discussion.

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks Elaine. So Helen, the next question I'll ask is directed to you. So, I think this comes up quite a bit in a lot of the chat is that... you know, we know that nutrition is multi-sectoral and we've discussed it a little bit in the guidance. But how should the changes of process or plan navigate this multi-sectoral nature of nutrition? And if you can also comment a little bit on what about the kind of a phased transition, that would be really useful.

Helen Connolly

I think if you look at the overall picture, Recommendation 1 says: let's put a plan in place, let's think about our long-term goals and where we want to go. And that includes talking to all sectors involved and all implementing partners. So anyone who is part of this activity should be in this discussion. And so you set long-term goals and think about the timelines, and what benchmarks we need to achieve in order to get to the next phase. So, the second recommendation is really putting that more into action, and recognizing that, you know, sometimes we don't reach the benchmarks when we think we will. Sometimes COVID-19 will appear and things don't go quite as planned. So, you need to be flexible in the way that you approach your long-term goals. With this vision in mind that you want to get to the [] but knowing that in each cycle you might have to adapt and change. And some partners may transition in or transition out, but it all should be planned as part as this long-term vision.

Natasha

So Debora, kind of related to that question, if you don't mind responding to this question, which is that: governments do have other priorities outside of nutrition, and so especially when there are

emergencies, some of the budget being allocated to emergencies matters rather than nutrition. So, do you have any experience to share with us on this?

Debora Niyeha

Thank you Natasha. I think this is challenging to the nutrition community that most of the funding that is allocated to nutrition sometimes gets reallocated to other sectors and to other activities. But my experience in Tanzania as we are implementing nutrition, first of all, we have tried, as the government guidance document says, we have tried to do a lot of capacity-building, orientation, and sensitization to all levels, like nutrition at all levels, parliamentarians, the permanent staff, directors from different sectors, which are both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive sectors. And this I think has helped a bit, it has helped. It is not like they don't know. And it is not like they allocate all of it, but we have seen a lot of progress in terms of them processing nutrition funding, which I think is good because of the capacity-building that these people received. But there are other ways, for example, last week we were doing orientation of the management team from the Ministry of [] and one of the recommendations that they shared with the Prime Minister's Office is how nutrition resources can be reinvested within the government system. So that whenever it is allocated to nutrition, no one is supposed to touch. So I think it depends with the context. Everyone might opt to what is useful and what is relevant for them. For me, I think if all the Tanzanian nutrition community can be able to advocate, then we can have that reinvesting of nutrition funding like 100% of investing because if we're having 100%, then I think we'll reach somewhere. That's my comment, thank you.

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks Debora, thank you so much. So, the next question I'll comment I will pass to Tomas. We agree with Tomas with the idea of especially engaging all sectors from the government to make sure that there's sustainability and that this is very applicable in Ethiopia as they target some multi-sectoral coordination platforms from the federal level down to the lowest district level, and so it would be great to hear Tomas your experiences relating to programs that you've seen that are targeting these different sectors across different levels of government.

Tomas Lievens

Thank you, this is a complex question I think. I think the... again... in transitioning, we move... we shift roles... you shift role from a framework that has certain relationship with the government to actually... I think as part of the transition, you want to build up and strengthen the existing national infrastructure, including governance framework that will... at all levels... sort of like centralized level, decentralized level that will interact with that planning and budgeting process to ensure that nutrition activities find their ways from policies to plans to costing to budgeting and budgeting to implementation. What I've seen in other countries, I can't... I can't sort of pinpoint one specific experience which I believe nailed up particularly... I think it's a very broad question, it's a very good question, and it goes at the heart of the complexity of actually doing transitioning well. I think it is really recognizing that transition is not only about money, it is about systems strengthening, policy frameworks, planning frameworks, budgeting frameworks, governance, all these things come in and to actually answer the previous question as well around prioritization of nutrition funding within the national funding priorities, I believe it's also about advocacy, a different type of advocacy, a national level advocacy, building that up, working with parliamentarians, working with NGOs to make sure that everyone knows how important nutrition is and importantly how big the returns to investments in nutrition activities are. Thank you.

Natasha Ledlie

Thank you Tomas for that response. Next are some questions to Elaine. So, one of the ideas is lot of the USAID projects... or most of them are funded through a separate channel other than through government budget lines. Is there room to start putting money on government budgets as a step towards financing and transitions? And then there is a second question with the idea that some of the governments are now shifting the way they are providing financing, so where government need to meet certain milestones before funding is given and what do you think about these kinds of models noting that what we are discussing here in terms of transition is a move away from USAID or donor funding to eventually domestic resources. So it would be good to hear for the space for this in the journey to self-reliance.

Elaine Gray

Sure, I can try to address those really important comments together.

I think first for the funding channel... I think at the country level, [] that we have these off-budgets and on-budget resources, and trying to understand how we then calculate the totality of investments for nutrition. And it can be quite complex trying to track it off. In terms of the question about financing, how we finance the government, what we have included in the case study RAIN from Ghana which had an essential government-to-government component...but I think and I would welcome our colleagues from USAID missions and country offices to comment on this on the chat box. I think that this is a question that goes to our country level staff as well for how they work closely with governments, consistently engaging to try and make sure that our work aligns with government objectives and within their own programming. So, government-to-government and some of those memoranda of understanding that we have with governments in each country may look slightly different in each case. And so, I think there may not be one model that fits in every context, but it is something that we ideally do have faith for in the journey for self-reliance as something that would be along to solutions in [] about trying to transition investments, and management, financial management, and nutrition programming over to [] This is not an overnight ... a quick process, and so we do want to work together. I think milestones are discussed in this guidance document as well in terms of trying to have transparent comprehensive transition plans collaboratively with the government and trying to meet certain benchmarks to invest in this end of the process.

And finally, that's not an exact answer, but again, our country colleagues who work with the government to make sure that the organization of government to government funding assess their needs and relationship in the country.

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks so much Elaine, that's really hopeful. I know that there are some questions that are in the chat box and if anybody knows of these answers... so one of them: Are there any tools available to hold governments, donors and implementing partners accountable for results? And then another question from Noreen: Does anyone know any country that has successfully developed a national nutrition budget framework? I know people are responding in the chat box, [] we'll welcome those in the chat box.

If I could kind of ask one more question which is Nelly to Helen: If you can tell us a little bit about what the rule for implementing partners is in supporting transitions and how does this shift during the transition process?

Helen Connolly

Sure. I mean the implementing partners should be involved in the planning phases, because the transition is going to involve them. Maybe, partners will continue to implement just through different financing mechanisms, so the shift from USAID financing to government financing or maybe that they are being

financed through a different mechanism, or maybe that the implementing partners will change. So that really should be a discussion that is part of the longer-term plan and something that needs to be processed through the budget cycle of each year to make sure that that transition, either from the financing or the nutrition side, is done in a way that all partners agree to, and that the services are not being... are still being done in a quality way.

I would like to add... [] There are a lot of tools out there that will allow the governments and the planners to understand results and impact. They could also be incorporated as part of the planning processes. What are the accountability mechanisms that are going to be used as we transition from USAID to domestic resources? So accountability should be included as part of that process so that, you know, when benchmarks are not being met, what happens? Those kinds of accountability issues should be included as part of the whole plan.

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks Helen. And Tomas, I think if you want to add a little bit on sort of this accountability to government, we'd like to hear you on that.

Tomas Lievens

[] At the conceptual level, we should be thinking about accountability ... national accountability mechanisms surrounding the planning and budgeting process. So that is Parliament and this is any type of evaluation of budget activities, so activities, but also the MEL Recommendation number 3 can play a really important role to make available information and people would then... national mechanisms would then be used to hold account, I think. That's just what I want to highlight now. Thanks.

Natasha Ledlie

Thanks Tomas, I think it is time to close this discussion. But before we wrap up, I would really like to thank our presenters and panelists for sharing their time and that space today. Especially a large thank you to all participants for attending and for adding so much in this discussion that will help us in treating this guidance and making it, you know, hopefully more actionable and easy to use. So thanks for much, and Yaritza with that, I'll hand back to you for any meeting related stuff.

Yaritza Rodriguez

Thank you Natasha, and thank you once again to all our panelists, Natasha, Elaine, Helen, Tomas and Debora for a great discussion. In a few days, participants will be receiving an email with today's webinar reporting and materials. And as a reminder, you will also be able to find the event and resources on the USAID Advancing Nutrition website.

Thank you all once again and have a great afternoon, morning, evening, wherever you are.



USAID ADVANCING NUTRITION

Implemented by:
JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
2733 Crystal Drive
4th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202

Phone: 703 528 7474
Email: info@advancingnutrition.org
Web: advancingnutrition.org

USAID Advancing Nutrition is the Agency's flagship multi sectoral nutrition project, addressing the root causes of malnutrition to save lives and enhance long term health and development.

This document was produced for the U. S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared under the terms of contract 7200AA18C00070 awarded to JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. The contents are the responsibility of JSI and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.