

Recommendations on Local Governance as a resource for nutrition

Suaahara's results demonstrate that local government resources can be utilized to support nutrition interventions for women and children. Through an ongoing process of planning, implementation, and monitoring of governance and development activities, programs can help communities identify priorities, implement corresponding actions, and monitor the use of resources to achieve expected results. The Social Mobilization and Governance process also allows communities to hold the local government accountable for nutrition-sensitive planning and resource allocation.

While the results are encouraging, some constraints related to the process in Nepal have been identified:

- ▶ Delayed VDC council meetings for approving the annual programs and budgets can delay the release of the Block Grant to VDCs.
- ▶ Failure to sufficiently fund DAG-targeted programs may be due to poor representation of DAGs in the project selection process.



Photo: Dipak Sharma/JHUCCP



Photo: Suaahara Program/JHUCCP

- ▶ User groups have limited capacity in recording and reporting of nutrition related activities, which can hinder the effective use of Block Grants and there is a risk of mismanagement, misappropriation and fund manipulation.

To address these constraints, the following opportunities have been identified for future programs:

- ▶ Encourage VDCs to hold council meetings to approve the next year's plan and budget before the start of the next fiscal year to facilitate the release of Block Grants.
- ▶ Create awareness and facilitate demand creation among DAGs to increase their access to local government resources.
- ▶ Provide training to user groups and simplify the financial rules to facilitate procurement at the local level.

1 The Local Self Governance Act 1999.

2 National Planning Commission, Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (2013-2017). Kathmandu: September, 2012.

3 To gather data and assess the allocation of grants for nutrition-related goods and services, Suaahara conducted a document review of district and VDC planning documents, meeting minutes, VDC block grant implementation plans, and held in-depth discussions with VDC Secretaries. Suaahara monitors the use of the VDC block grant through joint supervision and monitoring workshops with the Nutrition Food Security Steering Committees.

4 Exchange rate used: 1 USD = 95 NPR

5 Data sources include Policy Environment and Governance (PEG)

system study as a part of Process Evaluation studies and routine monitoring.

6 Citizen Awareness Centers (CAC) bring together disadvantaged people to discuss and take action on issues that affect them. There is one CAC in each VDC that meets weekly.

7 Ward Citizen Forums (WCF) are established to increase community participation in local-level planning. There is one WCF in each ward made up of approximately 25 people representing community organizations, women, child clubs, DAGs among others.

8 Village Nutrition and Food Security Committees are tasked with multi-sectoral coordination, analysis and endorsement of nutrition and food security plans. They are made up of representatives from the community including from health centers, schools and WCFs.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE A KEY RESOURCE FOR NUTRITION IN NEPAL

Program Information

Suaahara is a USAID-funded five year (2011-2016) project led by Save the Children in partnership with Helen Keller International, JHPIEGO, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Communication Programs, Nepal Water for Health, Nutrition Promotion and Consultancy Services and Nepali Technical Assistance Group.

The project provides local, national and global expertise and experience to address the causes of under-nutrition in 41 out of the 75 districts in Nepal by uniquely integrating nutrition with agriculture, sanitation, and health care interventions. It works to influence behavior of individuals and communities through community-based behavior change programming with a focus on gender and social inclusion, in order to improve the nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and children under two.

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Photo: Suaahara Program/HKI



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Nutrition Governance in Nepal

Strengthening local governance is a key strategy to support scaling up improvements in nutrition. In Nepal, local government bodies, like the Village Development Committee (VDC), have substantial powers for planning and programming as well as access to resources for local level development activities that can include nutrition.¹

One mechanism by which the Government of Nepal (GON) funds local development is through annual grants to each VDC referred to as 'Block Grants'. VDCs must decide how best to use these funds. They are required to ensure certain portions are allocated for the benefit of vulnerable community members, including women, children and disadvantaged groups (DAGs) (See Box 1).

The GON has committed to scaling up a set of evidence-based interventions to reduce chronic malnutrition through its Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (MSNP)². The MSNP includes a package of interventions with priority strategic objectives by sector, comprising health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), agriculture, local governance and education.

In its MSNP, the GON recognizes that it is necessary to mobilize additional resources for the improvement of nutrition in Nepal. It calls for formation of a coordinated process for the allocation of local development resources, including VDC Block Grants, to improve nutrition.

Box 1: VDC Block Grant Allocation for Vulnerable Groups

- ▶ 10% for Women
- ▶ 10% for Children
- ▶ 15% for Disadvantaged Groups (DAGs)

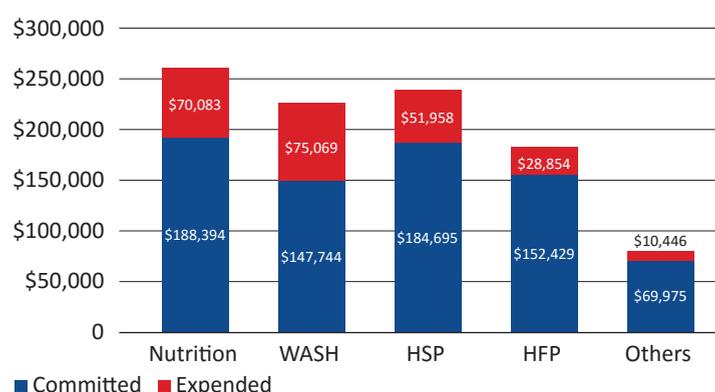
Suaahara's Local Governance Achievements³

Suaahara's results show that local resources can be mobilized to promote nutrition for women, children, particularly those from DAGs.

During the planning process from June 2015 to June 2016, 665 VDCs of 25 districts committed a total of \$743,237⁴ for integrated nutrition interventions through VDC Block Grants (see Figure 1).

Of this total amount, \$256,410 has been provided to 18,000 pregnant women and children for agricultural support, poultry vaccination, anthropometric equipment, and counseling rooms at health facilities.

Figure 1: Budget committed and expended through VDC Block Grant (FY15/16)



For more results on nutrition governance see the Fact Sheet⁵ on Creating an Enabling Environment for Health and Nutrition.

Suaahara's Local Governance Interventions

Social Mobilization and Governance is one of *Suaahara's* three cross-cutting strategies. The project works through local government structures and community platforms to create awareness of the importance of nutrition and to enable community groups to advocate for nutrition and access government resources for integrated nutrition programming.

The key local governance interventions are:

1. Strengthening coordination on nutrition among existing government structures

At the national, regional, district, and VDC levels *Suaahara* orients and trains government staff on integrated nutrition programming.

2. Building community knowledge of nutrition and awareness of local government processes

At the VDC and ward levels, *Suaahara* conducts training on nutrition and activities to empower the community to advocate for VDC Block Grants (and particularly the 35% allocated for vulnerable groups outlined in Box 1) as a resource for integrated nutrition goods and services for women and children, specifically those from DAGs.

3. Mobilizing local governance structures for nutrition

Suaahara works with District Development Committees to mobilize local governance structures made up of community members (e.g. Citizen Awareness Centers⁶ and Ward Citizen Forums⁷, and Village and Municipality Level Nutrition and Food Security Steering Committees⁸) to identify gaps in integrated nutrition goods and services. Based on the gap analysis, the local governance structures make recommendations to the VDC to prioritize the nutrition agenda and allocate fund from the Block Grant to address the gaps.

4. Supporting formation of user groups to manage VDC block grant funding

Once VDCs allocate the Block Grant funds, *Suaahara* works with them to support existing user groups (e.g. WASH Committees, Child Clubs and Forestry Committees) who become the direct grant beneficiaries. The user groups are required to implement the projects in compliance with the VDC Development Plan and Guidelines, including submitting detailed implementation plans and budgets.