Guiding Nutrition Governance in Ethiopia: Delphi Study Insights on Multisectoral Coordination

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite Ethiopia's strong policy frameworks to improve nutrition outcomes - such as the National Food and Nutrition Policy and the Seqota Declaration - progress remains limited due to persistent challenges in multisectoral coordination. This policy brief presents key findings from a two-round Delphi study involving national and subnational experts, aimed at identifying barriers, enablers, and actionable priorities for strengthening nutrition governance. The study revealed broad consensus on the need for politically neutral leadership, stronger subnational capacity, and the implementation of a unified Common Results Framework (CRF). Addressing these gaps is critical to transitioning from fragmented efforts to coherent, accountable, and results-driven coordination across sectors.

THE PROBLEM

Ethiopia faces persistently high malnutrition rates, especially among women and children, despite strong political and policy commitments. Implementation is hindered by weak leadership, fragmented accountability, and competition between sectors like health and agriculture. Subnational structures often lack capacity, resources, and clear mandates, while data systems remain disjointed and poorly utilized. Over-reliance on donor funding further limits sustainability. These challenges result in siloed planning, inefficient resource use, and limited impact on nutrition outcomes, underscoring the urgent need for stronger governance, integrated systems, and increased domestic investment in nutrition coordination.

KEY FINDINGS

The Delphi study generated strong consensus among experts across ten thematic domains, highlighting the following key insights: -

- **High-Level political commitment** is vital.
- **Neutral Coordination Body** is essential to mitigate sectoral competition.
- **Subnational Weaknesses** persist, including lack of dedicated staff, resources, and coordination structures.
- **Siloed Data Systems** hinder integrated monitoring and decision-making.
- **Sustainable Financing** through treasury allocation is a priority.
- **Community Engagement** and accountability are underutilized but critical for lasting change.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The lack of clear leadership, institutional mandates, and accountability systems severely

limits Ethiopia's ability to implement effective multisectoral nutrition action. Unless structural reforms are enacted:

- Sectoral turf wars will continue to undermine collaboration.
- Subnational implementation will remain fragmented and under-resourced.
- Donor-driven efforts will lack sustainability and ownership.
- Nutrition outcomes will remain stagnant despite policy progress.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Legal and Institutional Reform: A politically neutral apex coordination body should be established under the Prime Minister's Office or the Planning Commission to provide overarching leadership. In addition, coordination roles and mandates must be formally codified within civil service proclamations to ensure institutional permanence and continuity.

2. Finance and Human Capital: Domestic budgets for nutrition coordination should be ring-fenced at all administrative levels to reduce reliance on donor funding. This must be complemented by the deployment of technically trained nutrition focal persons across all relevant sectors and tiers of government.

3. Monitoring and Accountability: A unified Common Results Framework (CRF) dashboard should be developed and integrated with existing systems such as DHIS2, AMIS, and other sectoral MIS platforms. Furthermore, joint planning and review mechanisms must be institutionalized to foster shared accountability across sectors.

4. Subnational Strengthening: Flexible operating budgets should be allocated to regional and woreda-level coordination offices. Capacity-building efforts should also be embedded into routine government systems to enhance implementation readiness at subnational levels.

5. Data and Community Engagement: Ethiopia must cultivate a stronger data-use culture by establishing real-time feedback mechanisms to guide decision-making. In parallel, community engagement should be institutionalized through mechanisms such as public scorecards and local accountability forums to ensure grassroots involvement and transparency.

In addition, several cross-cutting mechanisms are essential to ensure effective implementation of the CRF, such as allocating at least 2% of sectoral budgets to nutrition coordination, embedding CRF roles in legislation, aligning the dashboard with national data systems, providing regular capacity-building, and promoting community accountability through participatory tools like scorecards and public forums.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The research report from which information for this policy brief was drawn from is available on the NIPN website (http://www.nipn.ephi.gov.et/). Detailed descriptions of findings and statistical methods used are included in the research report.

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