

Newsletter

### NIPN AT A GLANCE



1st Quarter, March 2021

### The First Quarterly MER SC Workshop in 2021 Held in Adama

Spotlight

Message from the 2

Coordinator

### News

The First Quarterly 1 MER SC Meeting

New Lancet Series on 3 "Maternal and Child Undernutrtion Progress"

NIPN at Arba
Minch

4

5

EPHI to conduct the Food and Nutrition Survey

### Experiences

Experiences from an Ethiopian PhD Student in Oklaho-ma, USA

#### **Articles**

| NIPN data reposi-<br>tory       | 6 |
|---------------------------------|---|
| NIPN documenta-<br>tion outputs | 6 |
| The NIPN WASH policy brief      | 7 |

The National Nutrition Program Monitoring Evaluation and Research Steering Committee (MER SC) was established to provide technical support and direction to generate evidence, monitor progress and inform timely decision making for the successful implementation of the National Nutrition Program (NNP). The MER SC is chaired by the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) and includes members from multiple sectors and various institutions (including state and non-state actors, and academia).

The first quarterly meeting in 2021 of MER-SC was held 30-31 March in Adama. It was organized with participants physically attending (with necessary COVID-19 precautionary measures) and in virtual format for those who could not attend physically.

The meeting was opened by Dr. Masresha Tessema, Acting Director of the Food Science and Nutrition Research Directorate (FSNRD), who reminded participants of the objectives of the MER SC. He noted its role in identifying gaps and opportunities to address nutrition problems, provide technical support to M&E of the NNP, and, to ensure that research findings are translated into practical interventions which address program implementation bottlenecks.



Dr. Masresha Tessema. Acting Director of FSNRD

The meeting was organized around key agenda topics:

• The Ethiopian Food and Nutrition Strategy overview and baseline survey status update

- Update on the UN Food Systems Summit
- The EIAR research strategy
- Status of the Nutrition Information System project
- Multisectoral scorecard implementation level and six-month sectors performance update
- NNP multisectoral coordination governance: the way forward (group work)
- Egg powder: Consumer research findings in Ethiopia
- National Nutrition Information Platform (NIPN): Status update
- Nutrition Data Mapping for Ethiopia: Assessment of the Availability and Accessibility of Nutrition-Related Data

Two general discussion sessions were facilitated to delve into challenges related to multisectoral coordination, the MER SC members' participation, and commitment, and into proposals for improvement of the MER SC functionality.

For instance, it was agreed that one or two sectoral representatives be assigned to participate in the meetings (to ensure continuity and institutional memory), for the members to revise the MER SC Terms of Reference, and for it to embrace the important role of universities.

The meeting was attended by 30 members from different sectors working on nutrition. The presentations of the meeting can be accessed via the NIPN website.



### Message From The Coordinator





Aregash Samuel (PhD)
Deputy Director of FSNRD and
NIPN Coordinator

The New Year arrived and NIPN was ready in the starting blocks with a series of core activities. The team completed the 2020 NIPN annual report which was shared with donors and key stakeholders. The 2021 annual planning was completed with key interventions set for the year. What a great start to a new and productive year!

In 2020, NIPN established the data repository on the Harvard Dataverse (open source, free online) platform. Through the data repository, the NIPN will share descriptive information on existing datasets (including study-level documentation or metadata descriptions, data-level documentation or codebooks, and additional resources such as the data collection tools questionnaires, reports, and related publications). The NIPN data repository can be accessed via the NIPN website and is intended for data users, policymakers, researchers, and nutrition stakeholders. We invite you to look at the NIPN repository on our website!

Early this year, the NIPN completed the second round of policy questions to be answered in 2021. To respond to these questions the NIPN data analysis team will conduct statistical analysis, systematic reviews, and meta-analysis of peer reviewed documents, and will produce research reports, research/policy briefs, and manuscripts.

Communicating research findings to policymakers and stakeholders for program and policy decision making, will be high on our agenda. Please watch our website, event invitations, and email communications for the latest updates!

The NIPN capacity strengthening activities will continue and various trainings are planned to address monitoring, evaluation, research, communication, and advocacy skill gaps. We intend to engage and reach a wide range of stakeholders for their professional development and skills upgrade.

NIPN also plans to continue its policy and research outreach events through webinars. Through this large NIPN platform, we endeavor to bridge the gap between researchers, academics, and partners. This year's topics will be multisectoral, and we aim to tap into the global and in-country momentum around Food Systems Transformation to make them timely and interesting.

In March 2021, the global NIPN held its annual global gathering, in which all the NIPN implementing countries participated. This year, the meeting was hosted virtually, with several high-level speakers from the SUN Movement, the European Commission, and the German Government in attendance. NIPN countries spent several days learning from each other and shared tips and ideas to improve the effectiveness of the NIPN's implementation.

NIPN Ethiopia's experiences were picked up by other countries who expressed interest to learn more from us on a one-to-one basis. We are glad to do that, and we are ready to learn from others.

We received fantastic news in this first quarter - the NIPN will continue a second phase in 2022!

This second phase will last for three years and will build on existing investments, achievements, whilst driving for institutionalization and sustainability. Pre-planning meetings were held with the NIPN team, the European Union, IFPRI and GIZ, and NIPN Ethiopia shared our preliminary ambitions. The third quarter will see the development of the new NIPN 2.0 project.

Finally, the Ethiopian Public Health Institute is planning to conduct a baseline survey for the Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS) this year. The NIPN team has been involved in these preparations and will also support finalizing of data collection instruments, training of data collectors, and data collection.

This is an enormous endeavor for the country as this survey brings together three separate surveys into one (micronutrient survey, food consumption survey, and coverage of nutritionsensitive and specific interventions).

There is a lot to do to this year and we look forward to your sharp and fruitful engagement as always!

Stay Safe!!!

"NIPN Ethiopia's experiences were picked up by other countries who expressed interest to learn more from us on a one-to-one basis."

Ist Quarter, March 2021 Page 2

# The New Lancet Series on "Maternal and Child Undernutrtion Progress" Calls for a Renewed Commitment to Address the Unfinished Undernutrtion Agenda



### Contributed by Meron Girma (PhD)

The launch of the first Lancet series in 2008 brought nutrition to the center of the global development agenda and led to increased commitment and investment to address malnutrition.

In 2013, the second Lancet series identified ten evidence-based interventions that can be implemented to reduce undernutrition. It also provided a framework that guided action since its release. On March 7th, 2021, the Lancet released the latest series on "Maternal and Child Undernutrition Progress". The authors concluded "despite modest progress in some areas, maternal and child undernutrition remains a major global health concern, particularly as recent gains may be offset by the COVID-19 pandemic". Findings from the series are highlighted below.

### Limited and uneven progress was seen in the reduction of child undernutrition. Stunting and wasting remain public health problems in low-income countries.

Globally the prevalence of stunting declined from 33 % in 2000 to 23 % in 2017. However, the decline was limited in low-income countries. Wasting has remained stable, reducing from 10% in 2000 to 7.3% in 2017.

Additionally, 4·7% of children are simultaneously affected by both stunting and wasting, which is associated with a 4.8 times higher risk of mortality. New evidence shows that the peak incidence of stunting and wasting occurs in the first six months of life, emphasizing the need for continued emphasis on the first 1000 days. Limited data is available to track progress in the reduction of low-birth -weight.

However, existing evidence shows

that the decline in low-birth-weight is slow. Although undernutrition among women declined, it was coupled with an increase in overweight and obesity. No improvement was seen for anemia. Micronutrient deficiencies among children continue to be of public health importance.

## Eleven evidence-based interventions that can be used to address malnutrition.

In 2013, the Lancet series identified ten direct nutrition interventions. Since then, more evidence has been generated to support the implementation of these interventions. The current series adds a new intervention to the list - smallquantity lipid-based nutrient supplementation (SQ-LNS) - to support optimal child growth. Some adjustments made to the previous ten interventions include a stronger recommendation for prenatal multiple micronutrient supplementation instead of iron-folic acid supplementation alone and targeting micronutrient supplementation to populations with low dietary intakes.

### A revised framework for action

The new series also proposes a revised framework for action that emphasizes the importance of multisectoral action delivered within and outside the health sector to address undernutrition.

The new framework categorizes nutrition actions into direct and indirect health and non-health sector interventions. The framework also includes cross-cutting strategies that emphasize data system strengthening and monitoring and evaluation for accountability.

#### A global call for action

Despite some progress, most countries are not on track to meet the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets.

Progress in the reduction of maternal and child malnutrition requires both indirect and direct interventions. However, the coverage of direct nutrition interventions is variable and is inequitable. More evidence has been generated since 2013 to support the impact of indirect nutrition interventions on underlying determinants of undernutrition.

To assess progress towards targets and accountability to commitments, more investment in data systems is needed. Between 2015 and 2017, donor spending in nutrition has increased. However, the investment needed to reach global targets was not met. Additionally, domestic spending in nutrition declined.

The series' authors forwarded a call for action focusing on:

- Accelerate financial commitments (both from donors and governments) to undernutrition.
- Increase coverage of direct and indirect interventions.
- The focus should be placed on improving the quality of service delivery and addressing inequities.
- Identify and address immediate and underlying determinants for action.
- Foster and sustain an enabling political and regulatory environment.
- Invest in monitoring and learning systems at national and sub-national levels.

Continue on Page 7



1st Quarter, March 2021 Page 3

### NIPN Ethiopia at Arba Minch



In February 2021, the NIPN team spent a few days in one of the greenest towns of Ethiopia; Arba Minch.

From 26-27 February 2021, Arba Minch University, together with Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), Traditional and Modern Medicine Research Directorate (TMMRD), Addis Ababa University (AAU), and other partners, organized a dissemination workshop called "Multisectoral interdisciplinary research findings on *Moringa Stenopetala*" at Arba Minch town.





The workshop was attended by over 200 participants from EPHI and various Directorates (the Director Gen-

Visitors to the NIPN Booth in Arba Minch and NIPN material display (26-27 February 2021)

eral, Public Relations, Food Science and Nutrition Research Directorate, Public Health Emergency Management, clinical chemistry, pathology laboratory, laboratory technologists to name but a few), from Arba Minch and Addis Ababa Universities, investigating team members, sectoral offices, community elders/leaders, and moringa cooperatives.

The NIPN team decided to use this workshop to promote the project to a wide range of stakeholders.

The team set up a booth and presented the NIPNs objectives, expected outcomes and key activities of the project. The team distributed brochures and research abstracts on the areas of nutrition. The NIPN booth was visited by top EPHI Managers and key researchers and approximately 200 participants. There was a lot of interest in NIPN and the team was ready to provide the visitors with explanations.

### EPHI to Conduct The National Food and Nutrition Survey in 2021

The Government of Ethiopia endorsed its first Food and Nutrition Policy in 2018. Since then, the government has been working to translate the policy into action by developing a Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS). At the request of the implementing Ministries, the Ethiopian Public Health Institute will conduct the first-ever National Food and Nutrition Survey, which will serve as baseline survey for the FNS.

The general objective of the survey is to produce information on anthropometric status, dietary intakes, and micronutrient status of different population groups in Ethiopia, and also assess the coverage of nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions.

This survey is different from previous national nutrition surveys as it combines the assessment of dietary intakes with the determination of micronutrient status/biomarkers and nutritional status in the same study population. It will provide vital information on nutritional indicators for adolescents and school-aged children, which are often not included in other nationally representative surveys.

The major components of the survey are nutritional status (anthropometric measurements), nutrition-

specific and nutrition-sensitive indicators, micronutrient status, dietary assessment and soil elements. The survey will be nationally and regionally representative. Urban and rural representation also is ensured for the survey. A total of 639 Enumeration Areas (EAs) are included and overall, 16,596 households will be covered. The target groups in this study are children under five years of age, school-age children (6-12 years), women of reproductive age (15-49 years), and adolescent girls.

Data collection is scheduled to take place from April 2021 -September 2021. Survey tools are developed and translated into five local languages. About 17 modules are prepared for data collection. The questionnaire consists of household characteristics, health background, anthropometry, laboratory sample collection (blood, stool and urine), dietary intake, nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific intervention coverage for the different age categories. Salt samples will be collected from study households to determine the level of adequate iodine. A one-day quantitative multiple-pass 24-hour recall, with repeat recall for sub-samples, will be conducted to assess dietary intakes. This survey will also assess the agricultural soil nutrients contents from each EAs. Data will be collected using Open Data Kit. A 15-day training will be given for data collectors and supervisors on the survey implementation. (Continue on page 7)

Ist Quarter, March 2021 Page 4

### Experiences from an Ethiopian PhD Student in Oklahoma, USA



Solomon Eshetu is a PhD fellow in a joint program between Addis Ababa University and Oklahoma State University. The NIPN Communications Officer had an interview with Solomon to learn about his experiences abroad. The interview is captured below.

### You are a PhD student funded by the NIPN project, tell us what it feels like to be in the US as a stranger?

I am a beneficiary of the NIPN project's capacity building component in the dual degree program between Addis Ababa University and Oklahoma State University.

Prior to going to the US, I travelled to different countries in Asia, Europe, and West Africa, to attend trainings and participate in meetings. My recent trip was different though; it was the first time I travelled to the United States and it was the first time I was away from my family and country for such a long time. For me, the hardest part was leaving my little daughter, who lit her first candle on her first birthday on the same day I left. It was heart-breaking for me to miss such an important family gathering.

After a very long flight, with a transit in Washington D.C., I arrived in Edmond City, in Oklahoma State. This is where I stayed for three months for short-term training. I receive a very warm welcome from Professor Barbara J. Stocker. This calmed me a lot and gave me a feeling of being in safe hands.

### Were there challenging times during your stay in the US? What did you miss the most from home?

In fact, the first two months were lonely even if my colleague Yosef was with me. We were feeling like we were the only black people in the whole white community of Edmond city. Freezing weather and cooking were big challenges, especially the lack of Injera. This was a big miss for me throughout my stay, and I realized that I am totally dependent on Injera!

### How were the studies going since you arrived at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis?

The 2020 spring classes began as in-person (physical) classes on January 13. This helped me to meet many people from different countries. I had classmates from the US, Nigeria, Brazil, India, and Spain. We did several course assignments together in different small groups, which gave me the opportunity to learn about their cultures, history, languages, accents, etc. However, following the COVID-19 lockdown early in March 2020, we were forced to stay at home which was very depressing. I missed my lovely family, Ethiopian social life, Injera, and was faced very bad weather. The thought of staying at home for six months, was awful! During these times, virtual classes for spring and summer semester sessions continued. These were very different from physical classes.

However, we adjusted to the new format, and benefited from a lot of learning and from diverse experiences.

In August 2020, the university decided to start a face-to-face class with the necessary COVID-19 precautions. Thousands of US-based students



came back to the university, and things were looking bright again. We applied social distancing, used facemasks and hand sanitizer in each class; it became the "new normal". We were very happy to meet with classmates again, and to enjoy the in-person classes and activities.

### What is it like to study there? Is it different from studying in Ethiopia?

For the PhD program in Oklahoma State University, a student must enrol at least 45 credit hours for courses and 15 credit hours for dissertation. The University has a weekly continuous assessment method for evaluation and grading. All professors kept their course syllabus, and while they may have different marking scales (out of 500 or 600 or 700), the grading system is fixed. This means 90% and above for an A grade, 80-89% for a B, 70-79% for a C, 60-69% for a D, and below 60% for an F grade. So, students must work very hard every week of the semester to pass with good grades.

In my final week in the US, I had a qualifying exam which would determine if I continued as a student in the course or not. I prepared for the exam for more than two weeks. It was really very stressful but, in the end, I successfully passed! The next day, I took a COVID-19 test to travel with Ethiopian airlines back to Ethiopia. I was fearful that my travel would be cancelled if I tested COVID positive. Fortunately, the test result was negative. I flew back to Ethiopia on December 31, 2020 from Stillwater to Dallas, then New York and finally to Addis Ababa.

In general, none of these challenges stopped me from enjoying my travel and experiences. In fact, it gave me extra strength and energy to work even harder.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the EU, EPHI and the NIPN project for giving this opportunity to do my PhD.

Ist Quarter, March 2021 Page 5

### The NIPN Data Repository



One of the key outcomes of the NIPN is to establish a data repository that would be accessed by researchers, program implementers and policymakers. In Ethiopia, there are several challenges with open access data, including poor data use and demand for data, and insufficient data sharing across sectors. To address these challenges, the NIPN established a multisectoral nutrition data repository at EPHI.

To do data analysis, the data must be accessible. As such, the NIPN data repository is a central place where existing dataset descriptions are placed to be accessible to researchers, nutrition stakeholders, and policymakers, and includes information on how to access the actual datasets. For each existing dataset, a dataset description document (metadata), a codebook (or codebooks), data collection instruments/questionnaires, and relevant published articles related to the datasets, will be included on the data repository. This will allow data users to easily find and use the existing information to answer their own research questions. In addition, archiving descriptive information about the datasets will help prevent duplication of research and will optimize the use of existing resources.

Therefore, the main objectives of the data repository are:

- To promote the use of existing data sets for nutrition research.
- To archive dataset information obtained from different sectors, research institutions, and other NNP II/FNP partners.
- To facilitate data users' access to selected datasets by including contact information on the repository.

The NIPN data repository can be accessed via the NIPN website. <a href="https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/nipn">https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/nipn</a>



One dataset description (including the metadata documentation, codebook, and questionnaire) is available on the NIPN website. Metadata for two additional datasets will be loaded in April 2021. The NIPN team aims to upload metadata documentation for a total of 10 datasets this year.

### **NIPN Documentation Outputs**

Sustainability Plan: Safeguarding the sustainability of NIPN guided strategic programmatic decisions in the few years of implementation. In Ethiopia, the NIPN is largely embedded within the National Nutrition Program (NNP) II governance structure. In November 2018, the country approved a new national Food and Nutrition Policy (FNP). Since then, Ethiopia has worked to develop the Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS) to implement the Policy. The FNS is expected to be approved and launched in 2021. The implementation of the strategy may see some changes to the national nutrition coordination structure. Until the operational modalities of the FNS are clear, the NIPN continue playing an important role within the existing NNP II governance structure.

In 2021, the NIPN finalized its sustainability approach and action plan. The sustainability plan covers various topics including planning for the second phase of the NIPN, identifying additional resources to complement those received from existing donors, as well as institutionalization of the NIPN within EPHI.



Despite receiving the green light for the second phase of the NIPN, sustainability and institutionalization was and will remain a top priority for the NIPN in Ethiopia. The team will also pursue mobilizing additional resources to support implementation in NIPN 2.0 and beyond.

Monitoring and Evaluation Plan: In the first quarter of the year, the NIPN finalized its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan. This plan forms part of the implementation and project management of the NIPN. It describes the M&E approach and the system the NIPN employs to measure its progress in reaching the NIPN's indicators and targets. Ultimately, it measures the NIPN's contribution to the national effort of generating knowledge and learning in nutrition for data driven decision making.

Both these documents will be placed as resources for NIPN stakeholders and other NIPN countries on the NIPN website.

1st Quarter, March 2021 Page 6

### NIPN WASH Policy Brief





In 2020, the NIPN team worked on secondary analysis to respond to the policy question identified during the policy question formulation (PQF) cycle in 2019, namely: "Progress in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) coverage and its contributions to the reduction in stunting and diarrhea". After having completed the analysis, the scientific report writing, the NIPN team developed a policy brief called "Progress in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Service Coverage in Ethiopia: What More Do We Need to Do and Why?".

The brief is aimed at policymakers and key partners, including the private sector, and includes key findings with recommendations for program and policy changes. The policy brief has been shared with policymakers and can be found on the NIPN website.

#### In Summary:

Only 50% of rural and urban households in Ethiopia have access to basic water services (i.e., water from an improved source, with collection time not more than 30 minutes round trip), and 6% have access to basic sanitation facilities (i.e., an improved facility that is not shared).

Also, one in three households still practice open defecation. Only 10% of households have access to a handwashing facility with soap and water. Progress in WASH coverage was uneven across the country. For example, while some regions have already achieved basic water service coverage of 75% or more, in others, the proportion served is as low as 32%. Wide disparities also exist between urban and rural households (90% of urban households have access to basic water services compared to only 40% of rural households). The prevalence of diarrhea decreased from 24% to 12% whilst the prevalence of stunting decreased from 58% to 38%. Reduction in open defecation contributed to 7% of the total decline in stunting and 5% of the total decline in diarrhea in children aged 0-59 months.

To increase coverage of basic WASH services, additional financial investment needs to be generated, for instance, through taxes, tariffs (revenues from service users), and transfers (foreign aid or loans). Increased engagement of the private sector in WASH service delivery is also needed. Triggering components of the Community-Led Total Sanitation and Hygiene (CLTSH) program should be redesigned to improve effectiveness in regions where open defectation is still high. Implementation of hygiene interventions outlined in the CLTSH is currently low and should be strengthened.

## The National Food and Nutrition Survey (Continued from Page 4)

So far we have obtained about 80% of the funds required to conduct the survey. Partners funding the survey include UNICEF, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and Nutrition International (NI). The protocol was submitted and ethical approval obtained from EPHI's Institutional Review Board.

The findings will be disseminated to FNS implementing sectors through various conferences and workshops and issue briefs/policy briefs will be developed. The results of the survey will help sectors to monitor their implementation and will be used by policymakers to guide program implementation and policy direction.

## The New Lancet Series (Continued from Page 3)

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1st Quarter, March 2021 Page 7

# The National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN) Online Global Gathering 2021 "Strengthening NIPN approach into the national multi-sectoral governance for nutrition"

The NIPN Ethiopia team participated in the annual online Global Gathering from 22-25 March 2021 which was organized by the GIZ's Communication for Nutrition (C4N) program, (which serves as the support facility for the NIPN global initiative). This gathering brought together NIPN teams from all NIPN implementing countries. The launch of the gathering took place on the 18th of March with high-level key note speakers: Marjeta Jager (Deputy Director General, Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission); Martin Hoppe (Head of Division Food and Nutrition Security, Glob-



al Food Policy, Fisheries, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), and Gerda Verburg (SUN Movement Coordinator and United Nations Assistant Secretary-General).

The following week's agenda were centered around country-level learning and experience sharing related to several key topics, namely: NIPN's outlook from NIPN 1.0 to NIPN 2.0; Linkages between National Action Plans and Strategies for Nutrition and NIPN; Requirements and components for effective multisectoral multi-stakeholder coordination; Potential role of NIPN in relation to the Monitoring and Evaluation of National Plans for Nutrition. The teams also learned from other non-NIPN countries such as Tanzania. Each day started with a key note presentation on the topic of the day, followed by group work and plenary feedback. Each day NIPN country teams had to submit their key takeaways for the day. It was a wonderful learning moment and NIPN Ethiopia garnered interest from several NIPN countries with requests for additional 1:1 learning. The event organizers developed an online portal where presentations and documentation were shared and through which the online workshops were held. What a great feat and congratulations to the organizing team and country platforms!

For more information please see <a href="https://premc.org/NIPN-Gathering-2021/">https://premc.org/NIPN-Gathering-2021/</a>

Visit us on our Website Website: www.nipn.ephi.gov.et

We are on the social media too!!

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