

# Committing to nutrition: Raising nutrition up the political agenda in Tanzania

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## Background

Tanzania joined the SUN Movement in 2010 and was among the so-called early riser countries. Lack of progress in reducing malnutrition, particular stunting, between 1990 to 2010, and President Dr Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete's involvement in global maternal and child health issues played a big part in the motivation to join the SUN Movement.

Prior to joining, Tanzania had two key nutrition networks: the Development Partners' Group for Nutrition and the Civil Societies' Platform (CSP). The CSP was supported by UNICEF and originally hosted by Save the Children International (SCI). The two networks were formalised to become SUN networks in 2010 and the CSP was registered in 2013 and officially named the Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania (PANITA), with support from Irish Aid. Today, PANITA has over 300 country members, both local and international, drawn from key sectors aligned with nutrition such as agriculture, water, health and community development. The organisation has a secretariat with nine full-time staff members. PANITA's vision is to see a well-nourished Tanzanian population and its mission is to realise the right to food and nutrition for all, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, such as children, pregnant mothers and those living in abject poverty.

Tanzania has since established SUN government, donor and business networks. The coordination of SUN resides within the Prime Minister's Office.

## Working with Members of Parliament



Tanzania's Parliamentary Group on Nutrition Food Security and Children's Rights (PG-NFSCR) was established in 2011. The group's formation was spearheaded by a Parliamentarian, a nutritionist by profession who wanted nutrition champions within Parliament to advance the debate around nutrition. PANITA (amongst others) has worked closely with the PG-NFSCR since its formation to achieve its objectives, including promoting investment in nutrition within the Councils' plan and in lead Ministries and advocating for mainstreaming and coordination of nutrition, food security and children's rights into policies and strategies across sectors. The group has a chair, vice chair and about 45 MPs across political parties.

Over the five years that PANITA has worked with the PG-NFSCR, it has primarily focused on raising awareness about nutrition among Parliamentarians in order to influence budgets and policies. Awareness raising also enables MPs to advocate for nutrition issues in their councils (district authorities in rural areas, including

district councils, village councils and township authorities all have powers to make by-laws, pass annual budgets and tax according to regulations within their area of jurisdiction). As a result, there has been an increase in the number of questions and quality of debates around nutrition issues in Parliament, which has been tracked by PANITA.

There has also been a recent positive trend in increasing budgets for nutrition as presented by councils during annual joint nutrition multi-sector meetings, in contrast to previous reports from the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI). The next review in 2017 should provide evidence of the impact of the PG-NFSCR's role (among others) on increased nutrition budgeting.

## **Developing recommendations: A nutrition lens for politicians**

A presentation in 2013 of the HANCI annual data to Parliamentarians stimulated discussion among MPs on how to increase political commitment on nutrition. Tanzania had a HANCI 2013 ranking of 7th out of 45 – one up from 8th place in 2012 – but the report's country analysis found that public spending had declined since 2011 and absolute budgets were weak for nutrition, with chronic malnutrition difficult to translate into political currency. One idea was to advocate for inclusion of nutrition issues in political parties' manifestos, as the country was approaching a general election and would have a new president, and possibly a new political party, in power. The reasons behind the initiative were twofold: firstly, to institutionalise the political will to support nutrition; and secondly, to create accountability for political parties as well as the government of the day.

The PG-NFSCR, with support from SCI and PANITA, engaged a consultant to develop a strategic plan and map out technical areas on which the group should focus. Recommendations detailed the type of actions for nutrition that should be included in all political manifestos. These included:

- Invest in infant and young child nutrition;
- Improve multi-nutrient mineral intake;
- Improve maternal and child nutrition;**on Nutrition, Food Security and Children's Rights**
- Address the needs of children, women and households in difficult circumstances;
- Promote household food and nutrition security;
- Prevent and control diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs);
- Invest in nutrition surveillance, surveys and information management;
- Increase investment on treatment of severe acute malnutrition (SAM);
- Promote and support research and development to improve nutrition; and
- Address nutrition in emergencies.

A booklet (in English and Swahili) was launched in February 2015 by the Deputy Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children at an event widely covered by the media. The Parliamentary group's Chair was tasked to meet Parliamentary standing committees to promote the recommendations, including to parties that do not have an MP. Having a committed Parliamentary champion was critical in disseminating the nutrition recommendations across Parliament.

Many political parties adopted the recommendations approved by PG-NFSCR, including Chama Cha Mapinduzi

(CCM, the current ruling party) and Chama cha Demokrasi na Maendeleo (CHADEMA). For CHADEMA, the manifesto was shared among the four other political parties under an umbrella organisation. As a result, there has been an increased understanding among MPs of how nutrition affects the country's development. In principle, MPs wanted to ensure that between 2015-2020, all political parties explicitly include a nutrition 'lens' in their manifestos, in line with Tanzania's National Nutrition Strategy and other national food and nutrition priority areas.

## Conclusion

PANITA has learnt many lessons from engaging with Parliamentarians in Tanzania, including:

1. MPs should be engaged to understand the nature of the problem and what can be done;
2. They need to be supported with expertise or technical tools, such as data in simple language, and fed with current, evidence-based information;
3. Engagement with MPs must be long-term and strategic, not short-term; and
4. Nutrition advocates from civil society organisations should be proactive in their engagement with MPs, keeping them in the loop on nutrition matters and pushing for nutrition to remain top of their priorities. This involves inviting them to meetings, one-on-one discussions and continuous sharing of information. In Tanzania, the SUN Movement has galvanised commitment to nutrition, especially from the President who called on ministries and other key actors to take actions, including increasing budgets for nutrition. The formation of the SUN

Multi-Stakeholder Platform at national and council level has enhanced open dialogue and participation on nutrition issues. For example, diverse stakeholders such as civil society, donors, UN agencies, business networks and academia participated in drafting Tanzania's National Nutrition Action Plan in 2016.

The PG-NFSCR began out of the passion that one MP had for nutrition and grew into a more formalised structure: today it is a healthy and vibrant organisation. Its existence highlights the fact that a higher level of political will is critical and should go beyond the executive branch (President, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ministers), as other pillars of the state (such as Parliament) are crucial in this endeavor.

Finally, the relationship between PANITA and the PG-NFSCR is grounded in the fact that poor and vulnerable citizens who are malnourished are the voters, and it is their MPs who represent them in Parliament. PANITA will continue to build on the achievements from the positive engagement with MPs to make sure political parties fulfill the promises made through their election manifestos.

See PANITA newsletter at [www.panita.or.tz/images/panita/events/docs/PANITA\\_Newsletter1.pdf](http://www.panita.or.tz/images/panita/events/docs/PANITA_Newsletter1.pdf)

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