ORIE Research Summary

Nutrition Research in Northern Nigeria

A stakeholder map for nutrition policy and programming in northern Nigeria

This summary highlights key findings from stakeholder mapping carried out to increase understanding of nutrition context, policy and programming in northern Nigeria; map organisations, systems and practices for nutrition knowledge sharing; understand information needs, barriers and opportunities amongst audiences; and inform strategies for research evidence dissemination.

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Approach

Two stakeholder mapping workshops were conducted in Abuja on 12 and 13 July 2012. These small participative sessions included participants from federal government, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), civil society organisations, academia, donor-funded country programmes, and consultancy. Individuals contributed their own perceptions, rather than necessarily those of their respective organisations.

The participatory interview technique Net-Map was used. This system enables participants to examine the ways in which different key actors interact with one another, and the relative influence those actors have within a system. Net-Map has the added benefit of bringing to the table the insights of those who are part of a process and understand it from the inside.

Key findings

National government agencies were assigned the highest level of influence by both groups of participants. Their influence is derived primarily from their national policymaking role, budget allocation, and close relationships with key bilateral and multilateral organisations.

Government partners have considerable power, particularly USAID, DFID and UNICEF. Although some have similar roles and linkages, they have different levels of influence. International NGOs were ranked lower than some bi- and multi-laterals. The WHO, USAID, the EU and DFID, were

considered to be as influential as national government agencies. Participants felt that bilaterals bring value to the nutrition policymaking arena through recognising policy gaps that are difficult to identify from within the government system. Frustration was expressed at the short-termism of some bilateral interventions, and sometimes lack of knowledge of what has been achieved by government and national NGOs.

State Government Agencies (SGAs): The Nigerian State Governors' Forum, a coalition of the 36 elected state governors, appears to have the most influence in this sector. It determines the level of funding assigned to local government, and was cited by one stakeholder group as the only actor with any influence at state level. The State Governors have the power to put the brake on any intervention, and every major decision at the state level must gain their approval. Participants identified a capacity gap within state governments, particularly around information and communication technologies (ICTs) and information-seeking skills.

Local NGOs are pro-active at targeting multiple stakeholders through advocacy, as well as being recipients for advocacy themselves. International NGOs support much of their work, and the local NGOs act as intermediaries between these larger organisations and programme beneficiaries. As one participant stated, 'they talk to everyone. In terms of advocacy, they are the most important'.

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Opinion leaders/shapers (including religious and community leaders, and former political leaders) have not so far reached their potential as advocates for nutrition. This group does however communicate with a range of actors. Stakeholders felt that, should opinion leaders choose to raise the issue of nutrition, those in power will be likely to listen. Religious leaders have a particularly strong level of influence, especially in the north – where religious and political agendas are more closely aligned.

Media: The regional, national and international media play an important role in advocating for nutrition policy in northern Nigeria. They are often commissioned and/or directed to cover nutrition in partnership with federal government as well as with bi- and multi-laterals. International media is generally perceived as having more credibility and influence than national media. Radio, particularly BBC Hausa, is considered the most influential with policymakers in northern Nigeria. Stakeholders felt that the media sector needs to recognise its role and potential to influence nutrition policy and programming.

The academic sector was found to have a striking lack of influence on nutrition policymaking in Nigeria. The academic sector does have a role in offering credibility to the policy decisions and advocacy messages of other sectors, but does not take an active role independent of these other actors. All stakeholders felt that this was the area in most need of development – closing the gap between the academic sector and the national policy level. Whilst some efforts have begun to bridge this divide, they have had limited impact.

Conclusions

Whilst only a snap shot of stakeholder perceptions, this exercise highlights the central role of federal government in determining the majority of policies, funding flows, advocacy messages and guidance on nutrition. However, the federal system in Nigeria means that state governments and their governors in particular, have considerable power and opportunity to influence upwards and downwards to federal and local government.

Additionally, the influence of government partners such as UNICEF, DFID and USAID cannot be overstated, with the power to determine the success or failure of government policy, particularly where government lacks technical capacity.

There is great potential in leveraging the support of key opinion leaders, the religious community, and the media to send clear messages to both the political class and the intended beneficiaries of any nutrition intervention. Work is required for the academic sector to form much needed linkages with policymakers at national and sub-national levels.

The findings are useful for WINNN to understand the influence and actual or potential roles of different actors, including potential change agents. ORIE has and will continue to draw on the implications of these findings to guide its approach to evidence dissemination and uptake in Nigeria.

ORIE and WINNN

ORIE is an independent component of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) funded Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria (WINNN) programme. WINNN is working to improve the nutritional status of 6.2 million children under five years of age in five states of northern Nigeria. ORIE is carrying out research to determine the impact of WINNN and generate important research on key evidence gaps regarding solutions to undernutrition in northern Nigeria.

Credits

ORIE is run by a consortium of UK and Nigerian organisations. In the UK: Oxford Policy Management, Institute of Development Studies, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Save the Children UK; in Nigeria: Food Basket Foundation International, University of Ibadan.

For any further information about ORIE please email **comms@orie-ng.org** or see the website **heart-resources.org/about/#orie**