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Strategic Roadmap for the SUN Business Network in Asia

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Introduction

In 2010, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement was launched to support national leadership and collective action to scale up nutrition¹. As of October 2021, a total of 65 countries and four Indian States had signed up to the SUN Movement. The SUN Business Network (SBN) that grew out of the Movement is one of the four global networks that supports SUN countries (along with the UN, Civil Society and Donor Networks)². The SBN is co-convened by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP)³. It is further supported by a global secretariat based in London.

The SBN aims to reduce malnutrition in all its forms through engaging and mobilizing businesses to act, invest and innovate in responsible and sustainable actions and operations to improve nutrition. The SBN provides a neutral platform to broker partnerships and collaboration between businesses and all actors on nutrition via the SUN Movement at a national, regional and global level. Since its inception, the SBN has helped small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya's food system improve their positions across the agri-value chain, launched an urban food system innovation challenge in Bangladesh, and supported the food industry in addressing gender-based inequality in Nigeria, among many other successes.

Over the past six years, 13 national SBNs have evolved in the Asia region to harness the power of business to improve nutrition, and four additional countries are assessing the potential to establish a Network. Within this region, the private sector is the engine behind many fast-growing national economies.

In December 2020, the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement Strategy 3.0 (2021-2025) was approved by the SUN Movement

Lead Group and is currently being operationalized by SUN countries at a national level⁴. An SBN 3.0 Strategy has been also developed; this Roadmap is aligned to the Strategy.

The purpose of this document is to provide a Strategic Roadmap to support the advancement of SUN Business Networks in the Asia region, with the overall aim of increasing engagement of the private sector in nutrition⁵.

The Roadmap articulates the way forward to engage the private sector and grow SBNs in Asia at country and regional levels, including through the establishment of a regional platform/ coordination mechanism to support national SBNs and identify opportunities with key regional players. It outlines how nutrition trends and evolving markets create opportunities for more effective engagement with the private sector, through SBN, in the region.

This document provides a brief overview of key findings obtained during extensive consultations with various SBN coordinators and members, including insights on the challenges and opportunities SBNs face and potential actions that can support their growth and deepen their engagement with the private sector. It also describes additional opportunities for private sector engagement at the regional level, including strategic alignment with existing private sector-led coalitions and consortia such as the UN Global Compact⁶. Although national SBNs are autonomous networks with agendas driven by national nutrition priorities, this document recommends the establishment of a regional platform to help facilitate implementation of the Roadmap and support national SBNs more effectively.

Context for Engaging Businesses on Nutrition in Asia

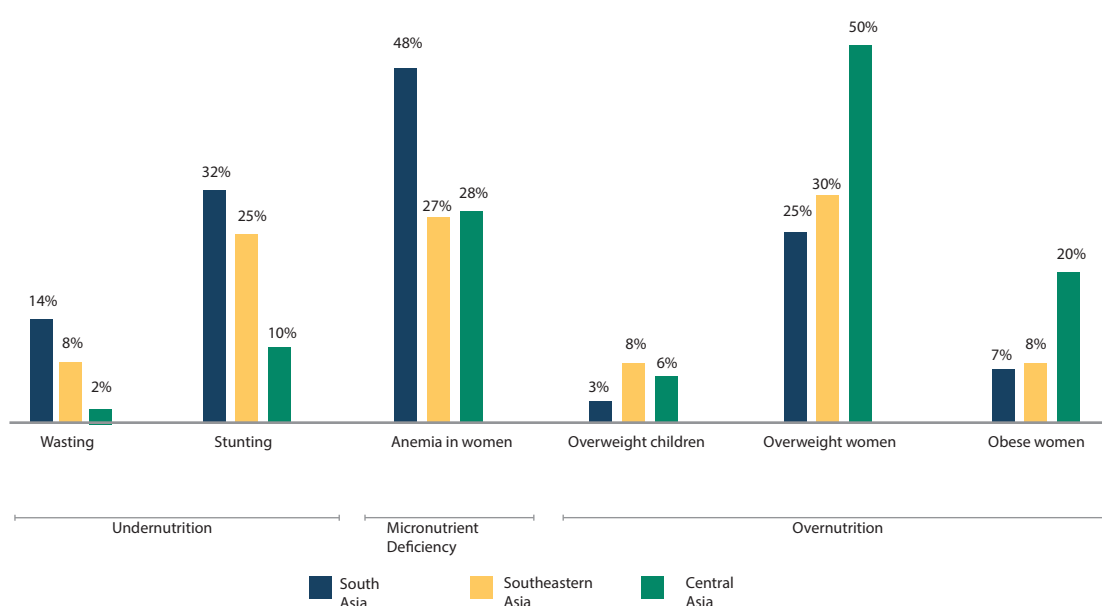
Globally, nutrition receives less than one percent of official development assistance (ODA). The percentage is even less in Asia, where many countries are moving from low- to middle-income status, but huge nutritional challenges persist. Despite socioeconomic gains, malnutrition remains a significant barrier to further progress in many countries. The approach to addressing malnutrition in these contexts requires stronger Private Sector engagement to move the needle.

The triple burden of malnutrition, undernutrition, overweight/obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies, is an increasingly complex issue across countries in Asia. A joint report published by UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank in 2021 estimates that about 33 million children under five-years-old are wasted (low weight), 79 million are stunted (low height), and 19 million are overweight⁷. Estimates of prevalence rates by subregion of Asia are displayed in Figure 1.

There are a range of factors that drive malnutrition in Asia, including:

- A large proportion of people lack access to nutritious, safe and affordable food: 1.9 billion people are unable to afford a healthy diet⁸. In addition, poor water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure persists which increases the risk of consuming contaminated food.
- Unhealthy foods are increasingly available, affordable and preferred. Processed foods, especially 'ultra-processed foods', such as savory or sweet snacks and sugar-sweetened beverages, now comprise a significant share of many diets in the region. The region's food landscape is rapidly changing, with roughly 20% of food systems in South Asia and 45% in Southeast Asia being dominated by large processing firms and supermarkets. This shift is driven and sustained by the surge in the urban population

Figure 1. Overview of nutrition indicators for Asia¹⁰



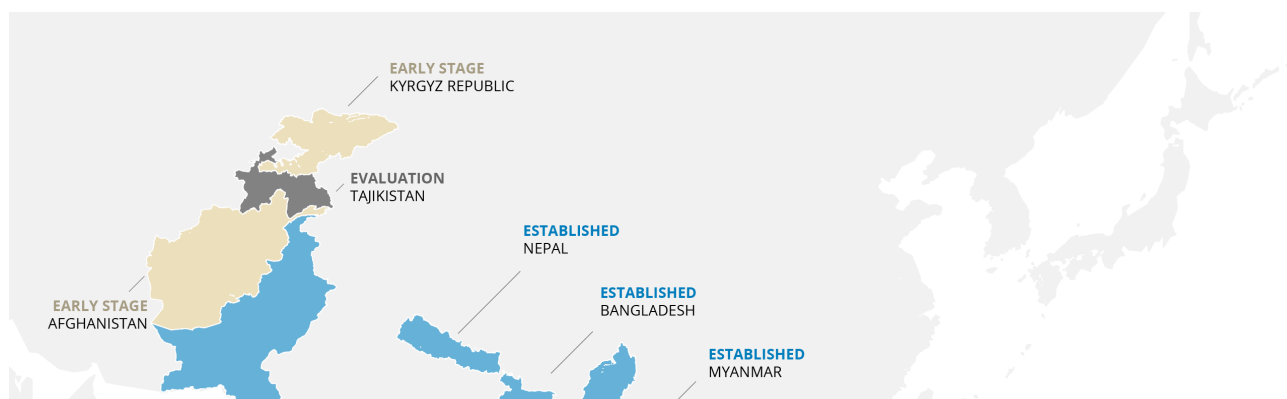
and the subsequent emergence of online grocery shopping and meal delivery services, which has had a direct impact on consumer choices and food preferences. As such, the fast food and ultra-processed food industries are thriving in Asia, driven by the demand for greater convenience and high purchasing power. These changes in dietary habits are being fueled by advertising and marketing that promotes unhealthy foods, snacks, and soft drinks.

- Livelihoods in Asia are frequently disrupted by shocks such as natural hazards, political crises or health emergencies. The whole food value chain from food production, processing, storage, and distribution can be negatively impacted by shocks. Markets may be interrupted and access to public food distributions and services may be impeded. In addition, the home environment which supports food preparation, feeding and childcare can also change. Shocks frequently result in a steep rise in consumer prices and excessive spoilage of seasonal perishable nutritious foods due to supply chain breaks where goods cannot be transported.

WHAT IS THE SUN BUSINESS NETWORK?

The SUN Business Network (SBN) aims to engage and mobilise businesses to invest responsibly in improving nutrition. The SUN and SBN 3.0 Strategies both recognize the need for a shift from a globally-driven SUN Movement and SBN to one that is centered at the national level, with strengthened support at regional level. See Figure 2 for a current map of SBN progress in the Asia region.

Figure 2. Map of SUN Business Network progress in Asia



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