

Sun Business Network Case Study 2: Kenya governance structure

1. Introduction

The SUN Business Network (SBN) is the private sector branch of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and aims to support businesses to grow the role they play in improving nutrition and to support SUN countries in developing national business engagement strategies.

The Partnering Initiative (TPI), working together with the SBN, has developed four case studies which explore SBN engagement of business towards improved nutrition. These case studies focus in particular on how SBN facilitates and supports the role of government in catalysing/steering private sector action. Across a range of countries and contexts, the case studies aim to explore this approach to tackling the Sustainable Development Goals, and to identify lessons learned – both good practice and challenges – to share within and outside the SUN network.

This case study explores the unique governance model of the Kenya SBN, in particular the formation and role of the multi-stakeholder secretariat. This brings together the public and private sectors, as well as United Nations organisations, to support and guide the network's mobilisation of business to build food security.

2. Country & SBN context

Kenya is a lower-middle-income country, but social and economic inequalities mean that one third of Kenyans live below the poverty line, and over a quarter of children in some areas are affected by stunting. 80% of the land is arid or semi-arid, yet agriculture remains the primary economic driver. Nutrition levels are affected by climate change, population growth and poor food systems. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the country hard, with repeated waves and social distancing rules leading to loss of livelihoods, and a shortage of labour to work in the fields.

In 2021, around 21 million people face extreme food insecurity, particularly in the arid areas of the country. Drought over two years, two waves of locusts, conflict over diminishing resources, livestock sickness, and the impacts of the pandemic, have led to increased food prices in urban areas, and acute shortages in rural areas¹.

The Sun Business Network in Kenya was founded in 2014, with the aim of empowering the private sector to contribute to the reduction of malnutrition in Kenya by supplying safe and nutritious foods to consumers, especially the most vulnerable. It now has over 70 business members, and seeks to mobilise business to align with the Government's goal of achieving 100% food and nutrition security.

SBN Kenya's strategy for 2019-2023 includes 5 strategic pillars:

- i) Finance for micro, small and medium enterprises,
- ii) Technical Assistance,
- iii) Work Force Nutrition,

¹ Information from: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000128982/download/>
<http://www.fao.org/kenya/news/detail-events/en/c/1418809/> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/sep/15/drought-puts-21-million-kenyans-at-risk-of-starvation> all accessed 15/09/2021

- iv) Policies and Advocacy and
- v) Market and Demand.

This case study explores SBN Kenya’s innovative approach to the governance structure, which has been put in place to support SBN Kenya's ambitious strategy.

3. Governance model adopted by SBN Kenya

In Kenya, the SUN Focal Point in the Ministry of Health guides the formation and functioning of six country networks, including the SBN. At the national level the network is co-convened by GAIN and WFP. It is supported by an independent multi-stakeholder secretariat, which brings together the public and private sectors with representations from business member organisations, the Government, and United Nations Organisations.

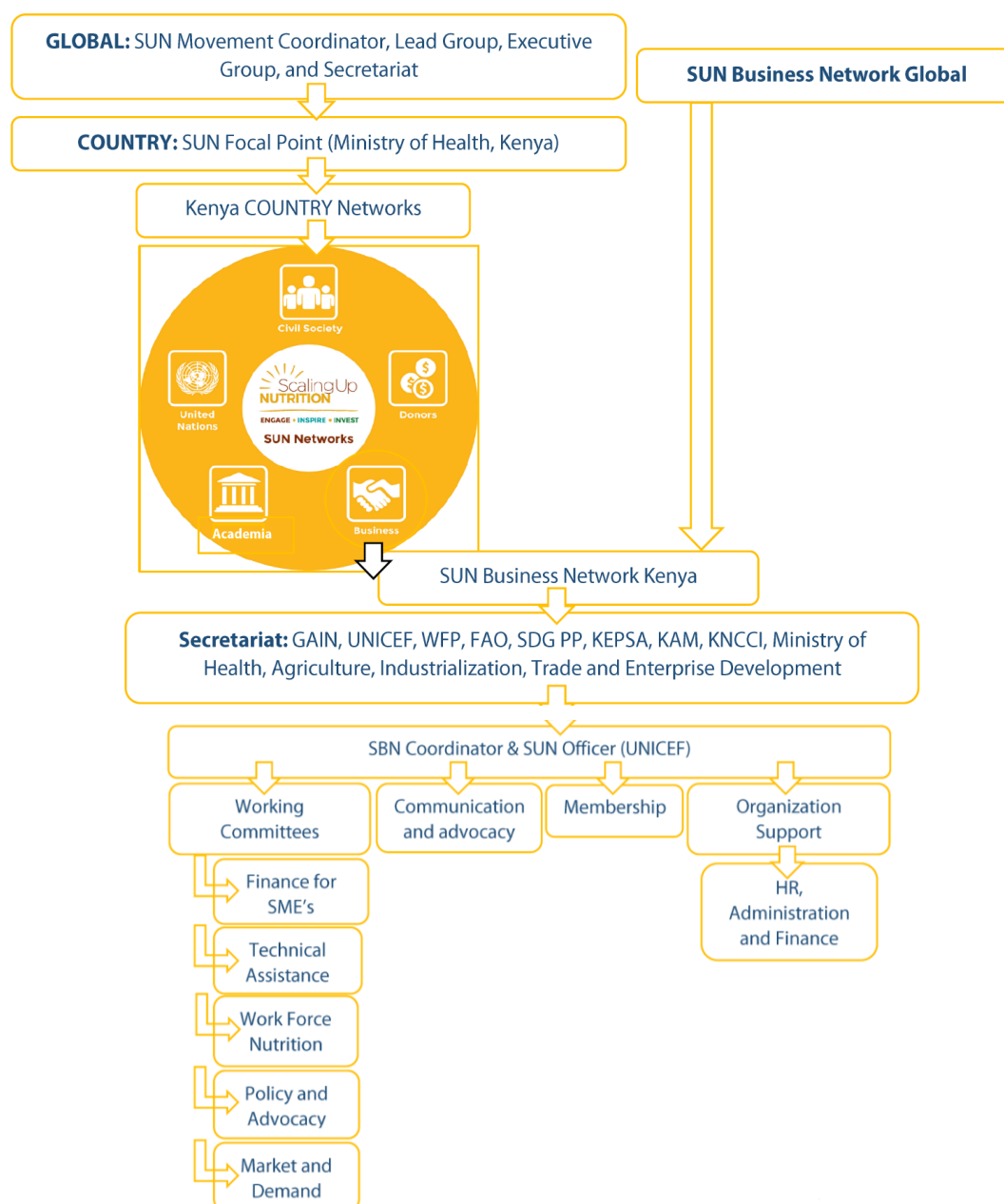


Figure 1: SBN Kenya Governance Model

4. Kenya SBN timeline

- 2014: SBN Kenya launched, convened by GAIN and WFP
- 2014-18: Fairly inactive phase, due to challenges with network management and funding
- 2018: SBN re-strategised, with a multi-stakeholder independent secretariat to drive the process going forward.
- 2019: The network initiated a membership drive, which led to the signing up of micro, small, medium and large enterprises from across the food value chain and across counties.
- March 2021: The representation of business in the secretariat was strengthened, with an election for companies to identify business members who would represent them as secretariat members. A chairperson, secretary and vice-chair were selected from business members.

5. Organisations involved, roles and relationships

The SBN secretariat brings together the public and private sectors, and development actors, represented by the following members:

- The Food and Agriculture Organisation Kenya (FAO)
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
- Sustainable Development Goals Partnership Platform (SDG Partnership Platform)
- Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA)
- Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI)
- Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM)
- Ministry of Health,
- Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives
- Ministry of Industrialization, Trade and Enterprise Development
- Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS)

The secretariat members meet once a quarter and are responsible for providing overall collective strategic guidance, advice and oversight. They have a wide remit which includes:

- Supporting SBN in the development and implementation of projects, proposals, business models and partnerships that can deliver private sector sustainable nutrition impact,
- Championing the role of business in multi-stakeholder approaches to scaling up nutrition at both national and sub national levels within the country,
- Coordinating SBN activities,
- Identifying new opportunities for business contributions to nutrition,
- Recruiting new members to the network,
- Resource mobilisation and fund management,
- Developing and managing the partnerships with the network stakeholders, including government, donors and others.

The functioning of the network is supported by ex-officio members to the secretariat: a network coordinator and a SUN officer seconded by UNICEF.

6. Financing / resourcing

SBN Kenya has no core funding, and is reliant on donors to function as a network. There is funding from agencies which targets SMEs, and some of this can be used to support specific initiatives or activities.

7. Strengths and success factors

Strengths / success factors

SBN Kenya's strengths arise from its cross-sector approach, convening the public, private and development sectors. It is private sector-driven, with three business members/associations on the secretariat, in three key roles. As a result of this, SBN is one of the most active SUN networks in Kenya. The diverse membership of the secretariat makes it very motivated to find solutions, *"They really want to succeed, and they want to find solutions to malnutrition. [...] Producing nutritious food is their business model. So they can lead within the value chain."*

With businesses now able to speak for themselves and articulate their issues, the more meaningful representation of business members on the secretariat is seen as "game changing". *"It has elevated the discussions, because now we have to ensure that the businesses are really aware of what has been planned."*

Innovations and successes

The recent membership drive for the network has been very successful, with a growing membership. A WhatsApp group has been set up for business members with daily sharing of opportunities, calls for proposals, webinars, and other relevant information. There is a high level of engagement and activity from members, with sharing of opportunities, and business-to-business engagement.

In June 2021 two regional chapters were created, devolving work to regional level to support engagement of SMEs further from Nairobi, and business to business linkages and support: *"You can zone them and put five counties together, like the regional chapters we have established, which are up and running. That has given them a lot of confidence, and they really feel that they can engage at that level"*. The chapters have WhatsApp groups that are already active and increasing engagement, with the added advantage to SBN that the increased visibility regionally allows the network to recruit more businesses which would not otherwise have heard of SBN. There has already been significant expression of interest.

This decentralisation is also a devolution of leadership: *"We can't just concentrate this in Nairobi and in the hands of a few people. We really must be able to create leadership at that level too, so that they can engage in common issues, and where they think they are."* It also brings benefits to local business, who can come together around value chains to form cooperatives and tap into opportunities.

Other innovative and successful initiatives are the inclusion of businesses (including women-led business) on the panel at conferences to provide their perspective; and a recent SBN pitch competition which has generated a lot of engagement and a high number of applications.

8. Key challenges

Challenges for SBN Kenya fall into two key areas, time and resources, and engagement and retention of members:

- The majority of respondents see finance and resource constraints as a significant challenge: *"A lot of our ambitions and the plans that we have, sometimes we cannot accomplish if we don't have the resources."* And with just one full-time and one part-time person in the dedicated SBN team, time is also a major constraint. One respondent also saw the lack of knowledge of nutrition among stakeholders as a problem.
- The recruitment drive has resulted in rapid growth of the network. However, motivating and retaining members, demonstrating the value of membership, and sustaining their interest in the longer term, requires innovative thinking: *"[SBN has] to be very dynamic, a bit more innovative, and have sustained conversations and really demonstrate that is the value of being this part of network."* *"We are every day trying to come up with new ideas on how businesses can really work together."*

9. Current gaps

Gaps in business engagement, knowledge and capacity

The SBN in Kenya is still quite recent, and the new, inclusive approach to the secretariat only began in spring of 2021, so there are still a number of gaps that the team are aiming to tackle. There is still further

work to be done on raising awareness about SBN activities, and the benefits of membership. Businesses still need quite a lot of support, particularly those outside of Nairobi – and the SBN team have agreed that this will be a key focus.

Most importantly, they are aiming to look at specific business opportunities around nutrition: *“We need to get better at helping the businesses to find their niche in addressing malnutrition. We have the SBN strategy, we are interacting with the businesses. But they might be the answer to come up with long-haul solutions that can prevent and treat malnutrition.”*

Gap in membership / engagement

The focus is currently very much on SMEs, with little engagement with bigger business. This is understandable, as WFP and GAIN start with the most vulnerable. However, there is also clear potential for SBN Kenya to strengthen relationships with bigger players such as DSM and Unilever, who can provide additional capacity. This, however, would necessitate being clear about their potential role, and the value to them of engaging: *“It requires a different approach, they are not looking for money or for technical support, you need to demonstrate specific value add”.*

Gap in SBN approaches

There are mixed perspectives on whether advocacy could be strengthened. One respondent felt advocacy was much stronger than previously, particularly since business members were elected to secretariat. Another respondent felt this was still a weakness, that there is a reluctance to get into conflict with government, and that business needs to form a block in order to advocate effectively – rather than attempting to do it through development partners.

10. Future initiatives / solutions and plans for sustainability

With the successful creation of the two new regional chapters, there are plans now to establish a chapter in the northern part of Kenya, to bring businesses together: *“so that they can mentor each other, they can share opportunities, they can learn from those that are a bit more advanced, they can tap into innovations, they can leverage... and tap into opportunities.”* This is part of a wider strategy, to move towards a more devolved model as the network grows, with oversight from Nairobi.

There are also aspirations to take the “business-to-business support” model beyond Kenya, pairing Kenyan businesses with companies in Geneva or Washington DC, for example, to provide mentoring and increase confidence.

The third planned area is to refine the value proposition for bigger businesses, and attract them to join as network members.

Business is likely to play a key role in the sustainability of the network in future. To address the funding challenges, the network is currently looking at programmes that exist externally beyond the immediate network: *“Can any other potential donor or fund or an investor develop interest in a business [which would need to be] prepared and investor ready?”*

11. Conclusions and recommendations

- The cross-sectoral nature, and the level of engagement of the secretariat offer huge potential to support and drive forward the work of the network. Maintaining that momentum and enthusiasm, and finding ways to implement key decisions and initiatives despite the stretched resources, is likely to be key in ensuring continued commitment.
- There are clear learning points from the actions taken by SBN Kenya since 2018, including the successful membership drive, the model of devolving responsibility to regional groups, the WhatsApp network, and- in particular – the multistakeholder governance model. These could be captured and shared with other networks, to map the way for similar initiatives.

- To maintain the commitment of the business members, it will be important to continue offering value for being part of the network. Different types of value also need to be identified and shared with larger companies, in order to bring them – and their resources – into the SBN.
- The hard work and commitment of the small central team is also a major factor in the recent successes of the network, and continued support and acknowledgement of this is important.
- The SBN Kenya central team is very small and over-stretched. To continue to support and grow the network, it will be important to find ways to enable the network to self-manage as far as possible.

12. Methodology and acknowledgements

This case study is based on interviews with three key stakeholders from the SBN Kenya national office, and WFP Kenya, together with written responses from a representative of one of the private sector secretariat members.

With support from the country SBN coordinator, a wider range of stakeholders from across sectors had initially been contacted but were not available for interview or had technical issues. As such the case study does not claim to present a comprehensive or fully representative account, but rather an overview of the initiative which draws out key points.

Many thanks to the SBN global team and Kenya country team for their continued support throughout the research, and to the interview respondents for their time and insights.

About the SUN Business Network

The SUN Business Network (SBN) is the world's leading private sector focused nutrition initiative: a neutral platform to foster partnerships and collaborations. It aims to engage and mobilize business at a global and national level to act and invest responsibly and to innovate in responsible and sustainable actions in emerging markets to improve the consumption of safe food and to make good nutrition more aspirational, accessible, affordable and available for all people.

Globally, the stewardship of the SUN Movement is enabled by the United Nations Secretary General nominations of a SUN Movement Coordinator, Lead Group, Executive Group and Secretariat. The SUN Business Network is co-convened by GAIN and WFP.

About The Partnering Initiative

The Partnering Initiative is a leading independent not-for-profit dedicated to unleashing the power of partnership for sustainable development. TPI was founded in 2003 around a passionate belief that only through collaboration among business, government, NGOs and the UN can we tackle the greatest environmental, development and business sustainability challenges, and make the systemic shifts necessary to eliminate poverty.

For 18 years, TPI has worked extensively with all sectors of society to drive effective collaboration. Throughout that time it has been internationally recognised as a pioneer in the theory and practice of cross-sectoral partnering, and in promoting the role of business as a partner in development.