

SBN member commitments case study

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. 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.

As part of its commitment to increase the number of businesses co-investing in nutritious and safe foods, one of the approaches promoted by SBN global and used by SUN business networks at country level is the introduction of business member commitments. This involves new members agreeing to one or more commitments focused on improving nutrition in the country, in particular through the formulation of new or improved nutritious foods, accessible pricing, increased distribution, and awareness raising.

Nigeria, Mozambique and Tanzania SBNs (see overview below) adopted the member commitment approach early on, and provide useful data from which to draw initial learnings about this approach. This case study examines the results of the annual assessments carried out in these three countries in 2020, looking at the extent to which members were able to make progress against their commitments, what some of the key challenges were, and any recommendations for future commitments. This is SBN's first internal attempt to assess members' progress against commitments and partnership formation since the network started.

Country SBN overview

Mozambique	Nigeria	Tanzania
Joined SUN in 2011. SBN formalised in 2015. Recruiting members since 2016.		
104 members	150+ members	140+ members
Majority small scale SMEs	Majority SMEs	Majority small-scale SMEs
Partnership with Confederation of Mozambican Business Associations (CTA), who will take over hosting the SBN in 2023.		

Assessment process and methodology

Progress towards commitments is assessed through an annual survey, and the primary indicator is the number of businesses having made verified improvements to quality, price, and/or volume of nutritious and safe foods. The annual review aims to collect data on intra-network support (partnerships facilitated by the SBN) and on activity towards achieving commitments (improved production of nutritious foods, supportive or good practices around nutrition, and any other commitments). The review should also verify the above and requests suggestions and feedback on how the network can better support members.

The assessment in Nigeria was conducted by Blue Advisory, in Tanzania by Africa Insight Advisors, and in Mozambique by consultant Vasco Langa (MSc AgroEconomics). Assessments were based on SBN

templates, and used a mix of interviews and questionnaires, but the 2020 review was carried out virtually rather than in-person in all three countries, due to restrictions related to COVID-19.

Mozambique	Nigeria	Tanzania
The assessment consultant reached out to all 104 members in 8 regions, aiming for a full sample, but with varying response rates: 100% in four regions, 80%, 67%, 33% and 3%. The final sample includes all companies who responded. Final sample: 65 members	51 of 150+ members surveyed. A stratified sampling method was used for the selection of members to assess to achieve a representative and informative spread. It was based on geographical location, date of joining the network, industry and gender. Final sample: 51 members	Out of 140 members who had made at least one initial commitment, 20 had engaged with a further process of making these specific, detailed and measurable. These 20 were contacted for the assessment, and 13 responded. Final sample: 13 members
Interviews and questionnaires.	Interviews and questionnaires.	Interviews and questionnaires.
Whenever necessary commitments were updated into SMART commitments.		
Work initially to include drafting action plans with members, but due to COVID restrictions has been postponed.	Action planning element was postponed.	Research team supported companies to develop detailed action plans for the next year with SMART commitments.

Breakdown of final member samples

Mozambique	Nigeria	Tanzania
Business area of members in final sample (including percentage of sample members in each, where provided)		
7 business categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food processing (33%) Food production (23%) Professional services (18%) Farming suppliers (7%) Farming and agricultural production (7%) Supply distribution (6%) Retail and distribution (3%) 	8 industries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture, Food & beverage, Health, Manufacturing, Professional services, Transport / logistics, Non-profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 out of 13 companies are involved in the processing and selling of fortified products 6 out of 13 deal with lobbying and consumer education and nutrition awareness programs
Geography (including percentage of sample members from each region, where provided)		
Sample included members from all regions (with response rate for region in brackets): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maputo Province: 3% (33%) Maputo city: 8% (5%) Sofala: 18% (80%) Manica: 22% (100%) Tete 15%: (100%) Nampula 9%: (100%) Cabo Delgado: 12% (67%) Zambezia 12%: (100) 	Sample included members from 12 states across 5 of the 6 geo-political zones: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> North-East: 0% North-West:18% North-Central: 20% South-West: 47% South-East: 6% South-South: 10% 	Final sample included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 companies based in Dar es Salaam 8 companies from the following regions: Mbeya, Dodoma, Tanga, Kilimanjaro, Shinyanga, and Arusha

Commitments and progress towards achieving them

The countries in the case study have taken different approaches to applying commitments in their network; in all three the commitments were mandatory but voluntarily selected as part of enrolment in the SBN. The number of commitments and type varied:

- In **Mozambique**, members were given a shortened list of 20 commitments to choose from, selected from ATNI recommendations for business, under the four broad categories: “improve the nutritional profile of products under the company portfolio, develop new nutritious products, improve product pricing and distribution, and implementation of a workplace nutrition program”. Companies were asked to select at least one commitment.
- In **Nigeria**, members were encouraged to make a SMART commitment to improving nutrition in Nigeria. They are not provided with commitment criteria or a set number of commitments. Instead, commitments were flexible, open ended, and voluntary.
- In **Tanzania**, members select a maximum of four corporate commitments from a set of 18 goals across 7 categories: corporate strategy and management, delivery of affordable, accessible products, appropriate formulation of products, responsible marketing policies, supporting healthy diets and lifestyles, product labelling and use of health claims, and engagement with policymakers.

SMART commitments

Nigeria SMART statistics	Tanzania KPI statistics
<p>In the Nigerian sample of 51 members, 25% of members have SMART commitments and 75 % of remaining (non-SMART) commitments fit into at least one smart category:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96% members have specific commitments • 56% members have measurable commitments • 96% members have attainable commitments • 94% members have realistic commitments • 25% members have time-bound commitments 	<p>Information about which commitments are SMART was not part of the report. However, in terms of the Tanzanian sample of 13 members, 7 members formulated KPIs for their commitments and used them to track progress over the last year.</p>

Good practice examples of SMART commitments are included in the action planning section below.

Progress on commitments

Progress was self-reported and due to COVID-19 assessment challenges, statements were not verified.

Mozambique	Nigeria	Tanzania
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31% of initial commitments completed • 31% of initial commitments in progress • 18% no progress <p>Plus 10 additional commitments, 8 complete, 1 in progress, 1 no progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 84% members made progress on commitments • 6% members did not make progress • 8% members changed their commitment (achieved initial commitment and made another) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 54% demonstrated measurable progress • 46% achieved low levels of success due to a lack of funding, limited knowledge of obligations, and insufficient technical expertise
Nutritional food development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% of commitments were on development of new nutritional products. 54% of these were completed (7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49% of members have developed new products with nutritional advantage and launched them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of the sample of 13 members, 1 had developed a new nutritional food product or improved an existing product.

<p>members) and 38% in progress (5 members)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19% of commitments were on improvement of products. 38% of these were completed (6 members) and 38% in progress (6 members). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 46% improved nutritional content of existing products 19% have developed new products not yet launched 32% have not developed new products 	
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Progress insights

Mozambique
<p><i>“The companies that reported progress on all commitments, in Maputo City and Province, could be explained by the fact that most of the companies located in these regions are well structured, economically stronger and generally larger than the ones from the other provinces.”</i></p> <p>It can be noted that these two provinces (the capital city and the province surrounding it) also had the lowest response rate (15% City and 33% province), although Maputo City has by far the highest number of members of any province (33 members, more than twice as many as the next largest region in terms of members).</p>
Nigeria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% members who achieved commitments understand SUN goals 95% of those indicated commitment was aligned with overall business goal 84% members were business as usual 76% members said support helped to achieve commitments 50% of those who indicated lack of progress said this was due to inadequate support

Support to members from SBN on commitments

The Nigeria assessment report identifies three types of support to members: technical support including guidance and trainings, business development support, and financial support, of which 72% of members received at least one.

Conversations with country teams in Tanzania and Mozambique supplied information on support provided by those networks. In Tanzania the SBN provided technical support to members based on assessment forms filled in at enrolment, as well as providing financial support through a programme of grants for members. The SBN also runs an annual pitch competition, encouraging businesses to come up with innovative ideas, and the winners receive technical support to develop their business ideas.

In Mozambique, funding from the UK Government via the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)¹ secured for the network’s first three years made it possible to fund activities in support of members including advocacy, business to business linkages, workshops, trainings, roundtables, and other forms of discussion. The funding has now ended so the SBN is looking at other investment options for the technical support. Technical support is provided on business models, processes and finance. The SBN has also supported communication with members / between members via WhatsApp groups, catalysing member engagement and sharing initiatives.

In addition, the Nigeria assessment survey and interviews included questions about perceptions of support and benefits of SBN membership, as seen in the spotlight box below. This information was not included in the Tanzania and Mozambique reports.

¹ Formerly the Department for International Development (DFID)

<i>Spotlight: Nigeria SBN support to members</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 72% members received support from within the network • 29% of members have not received any support (66% of those said they were not aware that the network provides the support that they require) 	<p>Forms of support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tech support 64% (guidance on SOPs, trainings, workshops) • Business development support 23% • Financial support 20% <p>Note: 11% had all 3 forms of support, 32% had two.</p>
<p>Majority of members received support from SBN, other major facilitators among SBN partners included: GAIN, SUN movement, FATE foundation, DSM, HarvestPlus.</p>	
<i>Perceptions of support / benefit of SBN membership</i>	
<p>72% said they benefited from being part of SBN</p> <p>Non-recipients of support mentioned improved communications, training, networking.</p> <p>Recipients of support mentioned: technical support, collaborations, financial support, networking.</p>	<p>28% said they had not benefited</p> <p>28% said no significant benefits or support relating to business and nutrition goals. Just over half of these were medium to large enterprises with basic infrastructure, facilities and resources required to achieve goals.</p>

Challenges

The main challenges identified by members were very similar across the three countries, and highest in the lists are:

- Lack of financial resources (mentioned as a main challenge in all three reports by the highest proportion of assessed members: 65% in Mozambique, 41% in Nigeria, and 70% in Tanzania)
- Lack of technical knowledge and support
- Lack of guidance, tools and tracking mechanisms, and lack of formalised business procedures
- Insufficient human resources

This list is perhaps unsurprising given that the majority of members in all three countries are SMEs at the smaller end of the scale. Other challenges mentioned centred around:

- (Related to lack of resources) cost of raw materials, fortification, production, or distribution
- Insufficient SME mobilisation by SBN: absence of regular check ins / oversight on commitments, limited follow ups to track progress, advise, or support
- Inadequate infrastructure, difficulty in accessing markets
- Regulatory challenges
- Lack of awareness or engagement by communities / consumers (and lack of control over their lifestyle) resulting in low demand for fortified / nutritionally improved products
- Lack of equipment, storage or production capacity or transportation challenges
- Difficult business environment

Covid 19 challenges

The Nigeria and Tanzania reports highlight the impact of COVID-19, seen as having diminished business capacity to implement / complete their commitments during the year under assessment, through disrupted cash flow, decreased product demand, reduced staff levels, and in many cases minimal activities or complete cessation of operations over a period of several months. In Mozambique the assessment took place in 2020, covering member engagements in 2019, so while the assessment process itself was hampered by COVID-19 restrictions, the engagement period was not during the pandemic.

Context-specific challenges

Nigeria: In Nigeria, insecurity was mentioned by 15% of respondents as a significant challenge to business operations and achievement of commitments, and inflation was mentioned by 12%.

Mozambique: North and Centre regions of the country were severely affected by cyclones IDAI and Kenneth, and at the time of the survey, the companies were reconstructing infrastructures with no or limited activities.

SMART Action Plans

The annual review process usually includes an action planning exercise, led by the consultant or agency conducting the review, to support the business in developing a concrete action plan to be implemented within the next 12 months to achieve existing commitments, including a set of SMART goals and specific actions relating to each commitment.

In Mozambique, due to COVID-19 constraints at the time of assessment, this action planning was postponed. In Nigeria, the network is in the process of reviewing how commitments will be made going forward, so the action planning element was omitted this year.

In Tanzania, where a small group of 13 companies formed the final assessment sample, it was possible to prepare action plans with them and include them in the report. For each commitment, the plan details commitment progress; indicators used or suggested indicators; challenges and opportunities. The action plans themselves include specific, measurable goals relating to some of the commitments, with one or more specific actions for each, details of who is responsible, what the time period is, who the stakeholders are, what resources are needed, and what constraints are foreseen.

Goals and SMART actions tended to focus on:

- Decreasing cost of materials and stabilising supply through out-growers schemes, buying direct from farmers; starting own greenhouse farming
- Diversifying products (formulate new corn-soy product; research unique organic flour)
- Increasing business production capacity through equipment purchases (peanut grinder, solar dryers, juicing machine) or facilities (new factory)
- Increasing production capacity through staff recruitment
- Increasing distribution capacity / reach through purchasing vehicles (motorcycles / vans)

Constraints identified were quite similar across members, with lack of funds mentioned by all members for a majority of the actions included in the plans.

Below is an example of SMART goals and actions developed by one of the Tanzania business members with the support of the Africa Insight Advisors consultant.

Tanzania Example SMART commitments

The company had made three commitments:

- **Commitment #1 on product pricing:** Making products affordable by introducing smaller packaged products and launching an out-growers scheme.
- **Commitment #2 on product formulation:** Developing and selling fortified products and products inherently high in micronutrients aimed at specific undernourished groups. The company plans to produce bread made from Orange Flesh Sweet Potatoes on a large scale once the TBS permit has been obtained.
- **Commitment #3 on product distribution:** The commitment involves improving the distribution and accessibility of products specifically formulated or appropriate for specific undernourished groups. The company aimed to make sure customers can easily access products by selling across five regions in Tanzania.

Following the assessment, the following action plan was developed:

- **Pricing:** *“Selling 1500 –2000 loaves of bread directly to customers per day”, between January and June 2021.* CEO is responsible, middlemen and staff are key stakeholders, necessary resources include funds, staff and machinery, and main constraint is lack of funds. *“Setting up an internal controls software system to improve efficiency”, between January 2021 and January 2022.* CEO is responsible, software developers are key stakeholders, resources needed are \$5,300 and staff, and constraint is lack of funds.
- **Formulation:** *“Register the bread made with Orange Fleshed Sweet Potatoes with Tanzania Bureau of Standards”.* Managing director is responsible, TBS is stakeholder, funds are key resource and main constraint.
- **Distribution:** *“Increasing distribution by delivering 200 loaves of bread using motorcycles”, between September 2020 and June 2021,* Production Manager is responsible, key stakeholders are the customers, key resource is motorcycle drivers, and constraint identified was dishonest suppliers. *“Buying 2 vans for delivery” between January 2021 and November 2022,* Managing Director is responsible, automobile suppliers are key stakeholders, resources needed are drivers and funds, and lack of funds is key constraint.

Plans for sustainability / future commitments

Country teams mentioned some of their plans going forward:

- The re-formulation of SMART commitments is key in all countries as a way to assess network direction and support needed, and to track progress and accountability of members and the SBN. The global team are developing new guidelines for commitments, which will aim to be more easily adapted, and more focused on the business.
- **Tanzania:** The focus for Tanzania SBN will be mainly on trying to engage the business to be aware of what they can do, using their modest resources, and making their commitments more simple and more adaptable to small scale businesses.
- **Mozambique:**
 - Will be refining the commitments, trying to get companies involved in food production to strategically choose 3 commitments: 1) on product content, 2) on packaging in relation to food safety, and 3) around communication.
 - In two years, the Confederation of Mozambican Business Associations (CTA), will take over the role of hosting the SBN, so the network will be fully driven and supported by business. This will make Mozambique one of only two networks (the other being Indonesia) to be led by the private sector.
- **Nigeria:** The SBN in Nigeria is in the process of determining how commitments will be made by members going forward, and whether these will be clustered under a specific set of targeted pillars, or whether their selection and formulation will continue, as now, to be left to the discretion of business members.

Recommendations

All three reports include recommendations by the consultant or agency that conducted the assessment, based on the analysis of the data collected. In addition, the Mozambique and Nigeria assessment reports include recommendations made by the members themselves:

- That the network needs to **strengthen and expand its presence in the country**, reaching out more widely, and including more rural communities in the network and support provision, including trainings.
- That SBN should **facilitate more access to funding for its members** (a source of major concern) and make this open to larger and smaller businesses. In addition, analysis shows that members need more information on access to grants and funds for SMEs.
- **Increased technical support**, in particular more accessible / **more widely available trainings** and workshops, and better communication around them to ensure members are aware and able to participate

- Supporting **more collaboration between members** as well as better networking opportunities, among members and externally, with information disseminated regularly on WhatsApp

Recommendations from **consultants** focused almost exclusively on support to businesses in achieving the commitments, emphasising that a commitment approach must be paired with a solid, structured support and follow up mechanism in order to be effective. Recommendations across countries were very much in line with each other despite differences in context and approach, suggesting that these recommendations would apply more widely as well.

- **Increased access to finance:** suggestions include providing direct support services including financial support; engaging and communicating more closely with members on funding options; capacity building programmes to support investor readiness in SMEs and unlock funding sources (as well as providing an incentive for members to join / take up commitments); and partnerships with local financial institutions to develop a package of financial support with grants and low interest loans;
- **Specific technical support:** technical support is seen as key to allow SMEs to grow and be sustainable, specifically, access to information, equipment, business advisory services, partnership and networking support;
- **Increased, targeted capacity building:** all three reports highlighted the need for a greater range of capacity building options, preferably customised / tailored to meet specific needs that could be identified through a pre-enrolment needs and capacity assessment. These would include: business practice training, including strategic implementation approaches, monitoring and evaluation, business health assessments, investor readiness; and specific training on nutrition and commitments;
- **Expanding coverage:** rather than focusing simply on expanding membership in terms of business numbers, consultants recommended expanding SBN presence/representation throughout the country in order to support most vulnerable SMEs in all geographical areas and across industries;
- **Engagement and communication:** improving interconnection with members to communicate new solutions, opportunities and news in anticipation of needs; as well as ongoing communication and follow up on key milestones, monitoring, tools and assistance, and implementation.

Other recommendations:

- **Closer and more focused support to members:** limiting the number of companies in the network to ensure closer support, in order to ensure commitments can be achieved; mentorship to support action plan development and implementation;
- **Clarification of roles and responsibilities:** a clear roadmap specifying roles, responsibilities and expectations with regards to membership and implementation of commitments;
- **Independent verification:** independent assessment and verification on progress made by members on their commitments;
- **Capability and needs assessments:** Before joining, SBN should systematically conduct a readiness assessment check to determine the capacity and capabilities of SBN members to uptake and implement nutrition-oriented commitments. In general, SBN should ensure it finds ways to identify business needs for finance, technical assistance, business development support, etc. and based on this can customise support programmes for members. It was not clear from the data to what extent this had happened for the samples analysed in this review.

This ties in with some of the country team suggestions. Firstly, that SBN needs to provide **training or awareness for the business before they sign up** so they are aware what it means for their business to make these commitments to improving nutrition. Secondly, that commitments need to be **adaptable** to the level of the business: SBN needs to sit with members and understand what the level of their business is, their level of engagement, what they can do and what is practical and affordable.

Reflections and lessons learned

The data from the assessment reports and interviews demonstrates several significant differences between the three countries in their approaches to commitment selection and formulation, and engagement and support to members. The lessons and considerations raised by the review process could be of benefit not only to country networks within SBN, but also more widely to other types of networks operating at country level where a commitment approach is being considered. This section offers some initial reflections on the different approaches and their implications.

Approach to commitments (including selection and formulation of commitments)

The varied approaches to commitment selection and formulation points to a multiplicity of legitimate options, which themselves reveal a range of perspectives on how SBNs in country conceptualise their engagement of business through the commitments. These different perspectives were highlighted also in interviews with SBN global and country teams. In particular:

- **Should commitments be pre-defined vs freely developed by members?** Both Tanzania and Mozambique provide members with pre-defined lists of commitments, with the Mozambique list derived from ATNI recommendations for business, and the Tanzania list defined with reference to the National Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan (NMNAP). By contrast, SBN Nigeria permits member businesses to freely develop their own commitments. The SBN Nigeria lead explains that “commitments are flexible, open ended, and voluntary. It is easier for the businesses to make commitments they can aspire to achieve. What we encourage them to do is make a SMART commitment to improving nutrition in Nigeria.”
- **Should commitments be aspirational or accessible?** SBN Mozambique’s approach is deliberately aspirational: as the Mozambique lead notes, they wish to provide businesses with goals to achieve and specific steps to take towards achieving them. By contrast, the country director of GAIN Tanzania explains that, due to fears of “scaring away SMEs from engaging with the network with strict and specific commitments, we tended to tone it down by asking SMEs to state commitments that are an expression of their business plan”.
- **Should commitments be SMART or flexible?** Similarly, for Tanzania, “there were calls to make the commitments SMART but we were always aware that pushing businesses that are trying to join the network with too much of a definitive goal or targets was going to be against our SME recruitment drive, [if businesses] who haven’t realised the benefits of the platform/network are being asked to make very defined targets”. It was considered important to “stick to the business trajectory at the start of the relationship, with a view again that as they engage, they will change their perspective, business plan and become more nutrition-sensitive and hence the business goals/commitments too.” For Nigeria, on the other hand, where formulation of commitments was left entirely to members’ discretion, it was deemed important to make them SMART.
- **How many commitments should be expected?** The number of commitments expected from members varies: Mozambique and Nigeria require one, while Tanzania expects between one and four. Given the challenges raised repeatedly by members of limited time and funding, it may be worth considering whether the number of commitments per company should be limited to 1 or 2 a year, so that companies can focus their resources and time on a specific action plan area, rather than spreading themselves too thinly by taking on more commitments. Commitments are of course often interlinked, but a gradual approach with increased alignment, and cumulatively increased support over time, could allow new commitments to be added in subsequent years.

Support to members

- **Nature of support.** The recommendations of members and consultants focused on 3 key types of support: access to finance; technical support; and capacity building.
- **Needs assessments.** Relatedly, data presented in the reports highlights the importance of needs assessments when businesses enroll, and the question around how closely the support that

businesses receive is matched to those assessments, to ensure that it is relevant, focused, and accessible.

- **Benefits and incentives.** The benefits to members of making and tracking commitments should be emphasised and explained early on in the enrolment process, particularly as smaller businesses may see them as another obstacle. Interviewees note: “there is a mandatory commitment, but the majority did not follow through because they did not understand them. The businesses are small scale, with low capacity. What they are looking for is survival” and mention the need to ensure that members know “what is in it for them” and understand how focusing on improved nutrition can benefit them as a business.
- **Understanding SBN and nutritional commitments.** Relatedly, the Tanzania report indicates that 8 of 13 businesses lacked basic understanding of the role of SBN / nutritional commitments, and concludes that “an unclear understanding of SME and SBN role limits knowledge dissemination, support systems, and delineation of roles and responsibilities, ultimately complicating the ability of businesses and SBN to execute nutrition-oriented commitments effectively.”
- **Initial support to joining members.** A certain number of businesses (of their own admission) made commitments purely in order to enroll, and did not make specific efforts to engage with them, raising questions around the value of SBN’s potential investment in these businesses, which could be increased if these members were supported to see the benefit to them in engaging more fully. But perhaps more crucially, it appears that members that would be willing to actively work towards contributing to improved nutrition are also disengaging from the commitment process or even the network, either because they are not sufficiently supported or brought on board at the outset, or because the requirements are too burdensome for them. As such, it is recommended that initial contacts with member businesses include either an initial training (virtual or face to face) or a call introducing the context of SBN and the nutrition related commitments, and clarifying expectations; and that some means of supporting businesses where capacity, technology, literacy or language might present an issue, be developed.

Final remarks

Overall, regardless of specific approaches to commitments and the type of support provided, the available data indicates an important need to ensure that the commitment process is made clearer and more accessible to members, both at initial enrolment and at assessment.

Further clarity is also required on whether the SBN approach places primacy on breadth or depth. Does it privilege expansion and awareness-raising, through rapid increase of membership with more modest commitment requirements and less comprehensive assessments, with the aim of achieving a critical mass of generally aligned businesses? Alternatively, does it prioritise more intensive and focused engagement with a smaller number of companies (with higher expectations and higher levels of support) with the aim of building more slowly a solid base of members with a strong understanding of SBN and nutritional issues, greater expertise and a more professional business model, and the means of ensuring, through support and monitoring, that truly meaningful targets are met?

This is all part of the wider theory of change for SBN business engagement generally, linking with questions around geographic spread versus more targeted, sustained focus; size and capacity of target members, and types of support offered. These questions will of course be discussed and unpacked further, and different country approaches reviewed, as part of the redesign of commitments over the coming months.

Methodology & acknowledgements

This case study presents a brief overview of the commitment approaches taken by three different countries in the SUN network. It is based on draft documentation from the latest annual review process, looking at member progress in 2020. The assessment documentation is being reviewed and finalised, so

the data this draws upon is not necessarily final. In addition, three conversations with key informants provided additional information and a more internal perspective.

Mozambique	Nigeria	Tanzania
First draft narrative report only	First draft powerpoint report only	First draft powerpoint report only
One interview	One informal interview	One interview, one informal call
SBN Mozambique website	SBN Nigeria website	SBN Tanzania website SBN Tanzania membership form

This team did not conduct any further research; as such, the case study does not aim to be comprehensive or evaluative, but instead seeks to provide a sense of some of the cross-cutting issues, challenges, insights, recommendations, and perspectives that emerge from looking at progress to date in the three countries. This can hopefully provide advice and direction to other countries / networks wishing to use a commitment approach, and food for thought for SBN internally, at global and country level, as they develop new sets of commitments going forward.

Many thanks to the SBN Global team for their insights and support, and to the SBN country leads for their precious time and inputs. With thanks also to the assessment teams for their work in challenging conditions in the context of Covid-19, and for their detailed and extensive reports and insightful recommendations.

- Nigeria assessment and report produced by Blue Advisory,
- Tanzania assessment and report produced by Africa Insights Advisors,
- Mozambique assessment and report produced by Vasco Langa (MSc AgroEconomics).

Annex I (INTERNAL): SBN Support to members towards achieving commitments

Most of the recommendations, from both members and consultants, in the three country assessment reports, focus on the need for increased, expanded, or better support to members. As such it is useful to look in more depth at how the needs of new members are assessed, and how these assessments then feed in to a structured and appropriate programme of support.

- **Nature of support.** The recommendations of members and consultants focused on 3 types of support that, in principle, SBN already offers: access to finance; technical support; and capacity building. All three countries confirm that at least some support of this kind is offered to members but only the Nigeria report provided some brief detail (types of support and percentages of members concerned, highlighting that 72% members surveyed had received at least one type of support, but that 28% had received none).

Consequently, it is not fully apparent where specifically the gaps in support are. It is recommended that reasons for this are explored and understood. When given, was support perceived as insufficient, or did a large percentage of members not receive support? Was it offered by partners but not directly by SBN (where SBN linked members in with funding opportunities or possible partners, for example)? It is possible that support was provided in the three forms noted above but did not match the expectations, capacities, or needs of businesses, or was provided in a form inaccessible to them?

Certainly, capacity at the smaller end of the membership spectrum seems to demand extensive support in all three areas, and one respondent notes “The businesses are small scale, with low capacity. What they are looking for is survival. So when we tell them they need to comply with this and have this certificate without specific support, they are not able to comply.”

- **Needs assessments.** Relatedly, data presented in the reports was also unclear about the extent to which needs assessments had been conducted when businesses enroll, and how closely the support that businesses did receive was matched to those assessments. Clarifying the content of any existing assessment template (for example, does it cover capabilities?) and the extent to which it has been rolled out, and reviewing the follow up process, may help ensure that support to business is relevant, focused, and accessible, even where such assistance is provided to groups rather than individuals. This step might be usefully incorporated within a future follow-up process.
- **Benefits and incentives.** It is recommended that the benefits to members of commitments, and incentives for enrolling, making commitments, and tracking them, are emphasised and better explained in future. Interviewees mentioned the need to ensure that members know “what is in it for them” and understand how focusing on improved nutrition can benefit them as a business. At present a significant proportion of members appear to be struggling to fully understand what is expected of them, what commitments will mean to them as a business, and how their businesses will benefit from participating.
- **Understanding SBN and nutritional commitments.** Relatedly, the Tanzania report looked at whether members had a clear understanding of the role of SBN and the nutritional commitments. The report indicates that 8 of 13 businesses lacked basic understanding of the role of SBN / nutritional commitments, stating that “some businesses forgot their commitments and said they had signed up only for enrolment”. There was no clear delineation of roles between SBN and SMEs, and different degrees of technical and financial support were expected.” The report concludes that “An unclear understanding of SME and SBN role limits knowledge dissemination, support systems, and delineation of roles and responsibilities, ultimately complicating the ability of businesses and SBN to execute nutrition-oriented commitments effectively.” One respondent noted “There is a mandatory commitment, but the majority did not follow through because they did not understand them.”
- **Initial support to joining members.** A certain number of businesses (of their own admission) made commitments purely in order to enroll, and then did not make specific efforts to engage with them,

raising questions around the value of SBN's potential investment in these businesses, which could be increased if these members were supported to see the benefit to them in engaging more fully. But perhaps more crucially, it appears that members that would be willing to actively work towards contributing to improved nutrition are also disengaging from the commitment process or even the network, either because they are not sufficiently supported or brought on board at the outset, or because the requirements are too burdensome for them.

For example, out of the Tanzania membership of 140, all of whom made at least one initial commitment, only 20 actively engaged with an initial detailed form, which aimed to refine the commitments, make them SMART and specific, and provide a monitoring framework. The country team indicated that there were accessibility issues in terms of the medium (email) and in terms of the content (including issues of both literacy and language). It is easy to see how members at the micro end of the spectrum, in more rural areas, might not have the capacity to engage remotely with this kind of process without assistance.

As such, it is recommended that initial contacts with member businesses include either an initial training (virtual or face to face) or a call introducing the context of SBN and the nutrition related commitments, and clarifying expectations. And that some means of supporting businesses where capacity, technology, literacy or language might present an issue, should be developed.

Annex II (INTERNAL): Annual review process

The data from the assessment reports and interviews demonstrates several significant differences between the three countries in their approaches to the annual review and assessment report (from sample selection to content, structure, and data interpretation). The data also provides insight into assessment processes and practices of data presentation.

The following section provides some initial reflections and some questions for future discussion within SBN global and country teams. SBN may find it useful to review the existing brief and whether more guidance for consultant assessment teams would be helpful.

Annual review process

- **Sample selection.** As interviews with country teams confirmed, the selection of sample data in the three reports was generally convenience-based or self-selecting, dictated by levels of responsiveness from members. Data in the reports should therefore be treated carefully as the sample is not necessarily representative of the broader membership. (For example, in Tanzania, the sample consisted specifically of the 13 members who had engaged most thoroughly with the initial commitment process. As such, while the sample provides excellent insights, it cannot be said to represent the wider membership of 140.) Consequently, it may be helpful to provide guidance on sample selection and size in relation to the overall membership, emphasising the importance of representativeness.
- **Template and content.** From the country reports, it was unclear if SBN had provided an assessment template. All three reports differed slightly in their content and, within specific categories, their methods of analysis and presentation of data. Some elements were absent: for example, no report included updates on responsible marketing strategy, while content on support to members and perceptions of benefit to members were only included in the Nigeria report. It is recommended that, in the future, data collection should be more harmonized as well as more focused on possible uses, particularly around further decision making. It would also be interesting to learn more from countries about reasons for not collecting data on all topics: was this due to a paucity of responses from members, for example, or because SBN or consultants decided not to ask certain questions?
- **Action planning.** The action planning exercise was very effective in providing targeted and direct support to help individual businesses refine their understanding of commitments and think in specific and practical terms about steps required to achieve them. It was unfortunate therefore that two countries were unable to implement the exercise. Going forward, it is recommended that guidance on action planning be revisited, and that attention is paid to the ongoing insights of the exercise and how participating members and their plans are supported. The Tanzania exercise involves 13 companies and is very instructive, with commitments and specific actions that are detailed, SMART, and targeted; however, it is impossible to know at this stage the extent to which those targets in Tanzania are realistic or achievable, and it is clear from the 13 plans that significant constraints, particularly in terms of expertise, resources, and funds, exist. Exercises with larger samples (Mozambique, for example, had 65) may prove more challenging and expensive to implement. Consequently, SBN and consultants may wish to ensure that action planning and its goals are targeted and aspirational, while at the same time realistic. Possible next steps may be to link action planning to **SBN requirements to support members** in meeting the commitments, and, if funding is a constraint, offer grants or identify additional sources of assistance such as Nigeria's funding masterclass. Support to members is further discussed below.
- **Verification.** It appears that progress statements were not verified this year, partly due to COVID-related restrictions. (Digital images had however been recommended as an option). It is recommended that the importance of verification be underlined and, relatedly, the function of the commitments clarified. Are commitments currently viewed as a kind of contract, with compliance emphasised, to ensure effectiveness? Or are commitments viewed primarily as an entry point to a

longer-term relationship in which businesses are supported to understand issues, identify potential benefits to be derived from achieving commitment goals, and move towards more ambitious commitments?

Annual review reports

- **Approaches to reporting.** As noted above, the different approach adopted by each country to selecting, presenting and analysing assessment data meant that the three reports are very different in terms of focus, representativeness, structure, content, data, and quantitative vs qualitative balance. This makes it difficult for a case study such as this to compare progress across these countries easily and effectively and reach specific and more widely applicable conclusions.
- **Qualitative vs quantitative focus.** Generally, the three reports had a quantitative focus. All reports included insights and recommendations, but in all cases further clarification had to be gained via interviews to clarify certain details and dig more deeply in order understand the contexts, motivations, challenges, and specific constraints that shaped the numbers provided. Similarly, there appeared to be possible overlaps between sets of quantitative data, which meant that, for example, it was difficult to understand how individual members were progressing towards individual goals, like the production of new foods. The importance of follow up opportunities provided by interviews, to fill gaps, clarify grey areas, and improve understanding of contexts should be underlined.

Interpretation of results and assessment of business contribution

- **Commitment alignment with business strategy.** The Tanzania report notes that “all businesses adopted nutrition-oriented commitments that aligned with their strategic objectives. Specifically, nutrition commitments are intertwined within companies' operational strategy in labelling, marketing, product formulation, and even distribution. The research identified no additional voluntary commitments undertaken by businesses.” In the reports and interviews, the question of alignment to strategy, and the idea of business as usual, came up more than once and may reveal tensions between business expectations and what SBN is aiming to achieve. Does SBN seek to support businesses with an existing focus on nutrition in becoming more successful and effective, or is it chiefly concerned with encouraging businesses to change their focus and develop their products with a view to adopting new nutrition related priorities? This has implications for assessing progress. If a business has made a commitment aligned entirely with its existing strategy and achieved it, to what extent can the commitment, or involvement with SBN, be said to have had a specific impact? Also, might aligning commitments too closely to existing strategy risk encouraging an attitude of ‘business as usual’?
- **Assessment of member and SBN contributions.** In conversation with the global team, this related question, which also points to the difficulty of gauging how SBN investment and support contributes to commitment achievements, was raised: How can we measure the extent to which members have “gone the extra mile or just done things they would have done anyway”, to which could be added the question of how to measure the extent to which support from SBN has allowed members to do the kinds of things they would have focused on anyway, but more effectively and with greater impact?