



Capacity development in action: Online lessons meet face-to-face learning to strengthen capacity on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems

The issue

Malnutrition resulting from unaffordable healthy diets poses high social and economic impacts. In Eastern Africa, over three quarters of the population cannot afford healthy diets. As such, transforming agrifood systems to achieve food security and affordable, healthy diets for improved nutrition is especially critical for this region.

Following the global escalation in coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) rates, additional health measures precluded the organization of many in-person capacity development activities. However, it is crucial for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to meet the ongoing demands to strengthen capacities to mainstream nutrition in national policies, programmes, strategic and investment plans. The FAO Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa (SFE) thus continued capacity development through innovative modalities, such as the blended learning approach.¹ This approach combines aspects of online and face-to-face instruction and was used for trainings in two countries – Eritrea and Somaliland.

The action

The following activities were conducted in each country to enhance knowledge and skills on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems and to support mainstreaming nutrition within ongoing and future agricultural projects:

- 1) **Identified key national and subnational stakeholders** from relevant national institutions. For Eritrea, an inception mission was conducted. For Somaliland, key stakeholders were identified jointly by FAO country office and Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) focal person.
- 2) **Developed a country-specific blended learning programme** by adapting and applying existing FAO resources on nutrition and food systems (see Resources on page three).
 - a. **Assigned self-paced learning components** prior to and between workshop sessions using five modules from FAO's elearning Academy.
 - b. **Delivered presentations**
 - i. virtually, by FAO country offices, SFE and headquarters experts;
 - ii. in person, by technical experts from national governments.
 - c. Conducted face-to-face group sessions with remote and local facilitation, using tailored country case studies. Participants applied key concepts learned and shared experiences.

Quick facts on Eastern Africa, Eritrea and Somaliland

There are 125.1 million undernourished people in Eastern Africa.²

Eritrea

- Agriculture and fisheries contributed to 17.6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). 60-70 percent of the population are dependent on subsistence agriculture.
- 50 percent of children under 5 years of age are stunted.
- 38 percent of women of reproductive age are anaemic.³

Somaliland

- Crop production and livestock contributed to 8-15 percent and 60-65 percent of the GDP, respectively.
- 21 percent of children under 5 years of age are stunted.⁴

Location

Eritrea and Somaliland

Somaliland

Capacity development target groups:

The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Inter-ministerial committee, composed of 10 ministries

Duration: 11-14 April 2021

Eritrea

Capacity development target groups:

Four ministries, the National Standard Institution and members of the National Technical Committee for Food and Nutrition Security (NTC)

Duration: 18-22 January 2021

1. FAO. 2021. E-learning methodologies and good practices: A guide for designing and delivering e-learning solutions from the FAO elearning Academy, second edition. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/i2516e>

2. FAO, ECA and AUC. 2021. Africa – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: Statistics and trends. Accra, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7496en>

3. Provided by the Government of Eritrea. 2021.

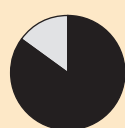
4. Provided by Government of Somaliland 2021. Central Statistics Department, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Somaliland Government 2020. The Somaliland Health and Demographic Survey 2020. <https://somalilandcsd.org/somaliland-health-and-demography-survey-slhd2020/>

The result

- **Individual capacity was developed** for 25 participants from Eritrea and 33 from Somaliland on incorporating nutrition goals and indicators in agriculture policies, projects and programmes, such as the Minimum Integrated Household Package in Eritrea, and to mainstream nutrition in relevant policies, strategies and investment plans.
- **Organizational capacity was strengthened** through improved availability and of methods and tools to appraise and mainstream nutrition, applicable for day-to-day activities to improve systematic action for nutrition. Nutrition mainstreaming culture is embedded in sectoral structures to enable better internal coordination, communication and knowledge sharing.
- **Enabling environment was strengthened** through increased collective awareness and commitment for nutrition-sensitive agriculture. In Eritrea, the National Technical Committee for Food and Nutrition Security was strengthened, with enhanced coordination of various sectors. In Somaliland, sessions delivered by national experts from the ministries leveraged in-country expertise and enhanced relationships among country stakeholders.

Participants' evaluation from Somaliland and Eritrea

Completed self-guided learning before the start of the training:



85%

Eritrea



56%

Somaliland

Lack of internet access was cited as a common reason for non-completion

Rated overall experience as excellent



94%

Eritrea



79%

Somaliland

- Over 94 percent said that the training topics were well covered.
- Over 99 percent said they would participate in another blended learning training.

Recommendations for next steps and scaling up good practices

- Blended learning is a cost-effective methodology that can be as effective as in person learning, but its successful execution is dependent on:
 - a. Available technology – stable internet connectivity is required and engagement between presenters and participants who participate virtually may be limited during group work.
 - b. Presence of FAO qualified staff with good knowledge in nutrition-sensitive agriculture programming for guiding group discussion and facilitating feedback on group work.

The following actions are recommended:

- Organize similar capacity strengthening initiatives, including workshops following the blended learning approach, but tailor existing training materials for country specific needs to improve the efficiency and impact and ensure continuity and sustainability.
- Strengthen FAO's internal capacity on mainstreaming nutrition at country level through continued training, for example, training of trainers (TOT) workshops. This will enable in-country experts to lead and facilitate future in-depth face-to-face trainings on nutrition without relying on global and regional support.
- Conduct assessments and develop necessary organizational level capacities, especially on mobilizing resources to address gaps in human resources and financial needs to implement nutrition sensitive programming at country level.

In line with these recommendations, further capacity strengthening workshops have been held for FAO Kenya and South Sudan country office staff in September and November 2021. A ToT workshop was held in Somalia in March 2022. All workshops used the blended learning approach and adapted existing training materials.

Partners

In Eritrea:

Line ministries from Eritrea including Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Marine Resources, Ministry of Trade & Industry.

In Somaliland:

SUN Somaliland and the SUN Inter-ministerial committee composed of the Ministry of Health Development, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Finance Development, Ministry of Agriculture Development, Ministry of Trade Industry and Tourism, Ministry of Employment Social Affairs and Family, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Ministry of Water Development and Ministry of Livestock and Fishery.

Reflection from the participants

“The blended [learning] approach worked very well for us because even with the COVID-19 travel restrictions, we were able to tap into FAO resources by having different technical experts based in different countries participate and share their expertise.”

Dr. Zakaria Dahir, Senior Advisor to the Vice-President of Somaliland and the Somaliland Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Focal Person and Coordinator

“[Complementary to the training,] a thorough follow-up regarding technical and financial support is required from the FAO regional and subregional offices and headquarters to support sustainable nutrition sensitive agriculture.”

Asgedom Teklemariam, Assistant FAO Representative (Programme), FAO Eritrea

Resources used during the course

FAO. 2016. Toolkit on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems. In: FAO Food and Nutrition Division. Rome. Cited 14 July 2022. [fao.org/nutrition/policies-programmes/toolkit](https://www.fao.org/nutrition/policies-programmes/toolkit)

FAO E-learning modules:

FAO. 2015. Nutrition, food security and livelihoods. Basic concepts. In FAO elearning Academy. Rome. Cited 14 July 2022. elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=194

FAO. 2016. Improving nutrition through agriculture and food systems. In FAO elearning Academy. Rome. Cited 14 July 2022. elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=307

FAO. 2018. How to conduct a nutrition situation analysis. In FAO elearning Academy. Rome. Cited 14 July 2022. elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=393

FAO. 2020. Design and monitor nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems programmes. In FAO elearning Academy. Rome. Cited 14 July 2022. elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=603

FAO 2020. Sustainable food value chains for nutrition. In FAO elearning Academy. Rome. Cited 14 July 2022. elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=566



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