

Capacity building for the media puts nutrition onto the news agenda in Ethiopia

Inspired by participation in SUN CSN's Learning Route in Rwanda, Ethiopia's ECSC-SUN targeted media professionals in a bid to raise the level of coverage of nutrition

Ethiopia's media has been given a much-needed boost in terms of its interest in and awareness of nutrition issues affecting the country, following a two-day workshop organised by Ethiopian Civil Society Coalition for Scaling up Nutrition (ECSC-SUN).



Figure 1 ጠጉን የማጥባትን ባህል በጋራ ዘላቂ እናድርግ! (Let us make breastfeeding a lasting culture)

Message Developed during the training for the Breastfeeding Week

ECSC-SUN's efforts to raise media awareness were inspired by SUN CSN's learning exchange programme. Last year, they were one of nine civil society alliances (CSAs) that participated in the Africa Learning Route exchange visit to Rwanda, which took place in November 2016.

One of the examples of best practice showcased during the Rwanda visit was a powerful example of the effectiveness of behaviour change communications and use of the media as to channel key nutrition messages. At the end of the learning route, all participating CSAs developed Innovation Plans based on their learning and reflection on approaches could be replicated in their own countries. Inspired by their Rwanda experience, ECSC-SUN decided to focus its Innovation Plan on nutrition-related training for media professionals.

Seed funding for innovation

ECSC-SUN's Innovation Plan for 'Nutrition Visibility and Awareness through the Media' was one of three that won seed funding from SUN CSN. ECSC-SUN has now successfully implemented its Innovation Plan and given nutrition training and capacity building to some 30 media professionals.

Ethiopia is a country with a high burden of malnutrition and a large population. ECSC-SUN recognised how important media communications are to reaching communities to address the underlying causes of undernutrition and at the same time to influence decision makers.

In order to put nutrition higher on the public and political agenda, ECSC-SUN made media awareness and capacity building one of its main priorities. ECSC-SUN had previously developed communications materials specifically for the media – but found they were not understood or used properly. Lack of understanding among media professionals of nutrition issues and awareness of the scale of malnutrition meant there was little coverage in the country's media.

Strengthening capacity on nutrition

ECSC-SUN's Innovation Plan aimed to strengthen the capacities of media professionals (journalists and editors), including public relations and communications experts working in government, to ensure they understand and accurately report on nutrition-related stories – and to push nutrition higher up the news agenda.

ECSC-SUN, in partnership with of the Federal Ministry of Health, organised a two-day training session on nutrition in Addis Ababa in July 2017. The main purpose was to improve participants' knowledge on nutrition issues, in particular around child and maternal nutrition.

Journalists from a range of media houses took part, as well as public relations and communications professionals working in government. There were representatives from leading media firms as well as colleges from the National Nutrition Program, and communications staff from the following ministries: Health, Education, Water Irrigation and Electricity, Trade, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Livestock and Fisheries, Women and Children Affairs, and Labour and Social Affairs.

The innovation plan has also created a favorable platform for ECSC-SUN members in engaging and working with the media in their future activities.

The first day of the training included: a brief update on ECSC-SU; the basics of food and nutrition and why nutrition matters; and an overview of malnutrition in Ethiopia, including an introduction to the national nutrition policy, strategies, programs and Initiatives. Other presentations focused on the role of media in moving the nutrition agenda forward and, telling compelling nutrition stories.

On day two, participants were briefed on the importance of breastfeeding (with the 'news hook' of World Breastfeeding Week 2017), and the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life. Plans for media competition for best nutrition coverage were announced. The workshop ended with participants working together to develop an action plan and agree the way forward.

The training increased participants' understanding of issues of nutrition and malnutrition, and helped them to see how to frame the issue for media coverage. It also successfully identified and communicated the role of the public relations and communications experts at the National Nutrition Program and other government ministries and institutions. As an action point, the experts agreed to include nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive communication activities in their monthly and annual sectoral work plan and reports. The media award will also contribute towards motivating the media, public relations and communication experts to give attention to nutrition reporting and to ensure it features higher up the national media agenda.

The workshop was facilitated by members of the ECSC-SUN (Action against Hunger, Alive and Thrive, Concern Worldwide, CARE Ethiopia, FoNSE, IMC, Mercy Corps, NED, Nutrition International and Save the Children).

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