

MEASURING POLITICAL COMMITMENT FOR FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY



Implementation of a rapid assessment approach to measure political commitment and opportunities to advance food and nutrition security among the joint programmes of the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund

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PREFACE

The Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) was established with an agreement between the Government of Spain and UNDP on behalf of the UN system. The aim was to accelerate progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through the United Nations system. The MDG-F has supported 130 joint programmes in 50 countries in eight thematic areas. These joint programmes purposefully bring together United Nations agencies, national government institutions, non-governmental organizations and civil society to achieve their goals equitably.

The ‘Children, Food Security and Nutrition’ thematic area received the largest allocation, more than \$135 million, to support 24 joint programmes. This significant investment in child nutrition reflects the MDG-F’s recognition of the critical importance of nutrition in attaining the Millennium Development Goals. All joint programmes actively worked to strengthen the supporting environment for nutrition. Working at the policy and legislation levels, joint programmes supported advocacy efforts to build national commitment for food security and nutrition using awareness-raising and communication strategies and varied capacity-development modalities. Joint programmes also provided technical input for the development of national policies and planning and supported the adoption and implementation of such policies.

In order to assist the advocacy efforts of the joint programmes, the Knowledge Management Initiative of the MDG-F commissioned research on the agenda-setting process for food security and nutrition. Through this work, a Rapid Assessment Tool was developed to help joint programmes measure political commitment and identify opportunity to advance food and nutrition policy initiatives. During this project, the Tool was piloted and implemented among select joint programmes. This executive summary presents the key findings of this work.¹

Through the MDG-F Knowledge Management Initiative, this Tool has been made freely available in multiple languages.² It is hoped that this new tool and research will contribute to enhancing the sustainability of policy initiatives and in influencing future policy and planning by 1) benchmarking and monitoring the level of political commitment to food and nutrition security policies, 2) supporting the design of strategies to increase the level political commitment to food and nutrition by national governments and increase the political priority afforded to these issues, 3) identifying opportunities to advance food and nutrition policy on the governmental agenda, 4) supporting efforts to influence national nutrition policymaking and planning, for example, through providing technical expertise, generating the evidence base to aid decision-makers, and supporting advocacy efforts. It is hoped that this innovative work will support future joint programmes and future efforts to advance food and nutrition security policies in the post-2015 era.

MDG Achievement Fund Secretariat

¹ The research paper and Rapid Assessment Tool are available from the Knowledge Management Initiative on request at nutrition@unicef.org and at www.mdgfund.org.

² The tool is available in English, French and Spanish.

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Measuring Political Commitment and Opportunities to Advance Food and Nutrition

Security: A Rapid Assessment Approach

Abstract

There is a growing consensus among nutrition researchers and advocates that a lack of political commitment is a primary reason for the low priority that food and nutrition interventions receive from national governments relative to the high disease burden caused by malnutrition. Researchers have identified a number of factors that contribute to food and nutrition's "low-priority cycle" on national policy agendas, but few tools exist to rapidly measure political commitment and identify opportunities to advance food and nutrition on the policy agenda. This paper presents a theory-based rapid assessment approach to gauging countries' baseline level of political commitment to food and nutrition and identifying opportunities to advance food and nutrition on the policy agenda. The rapid assessment tool was completed by food and nutrition policy makers and planners in 10 low and middle income countries in April-June 2013. Food and nutrition commitment and policy opportunity scores were calculated for each country and strategies to advance food and nutrition on policy agendas were designed for each country. The paper finds that in a majority of countries, political leaders had verbally and symbolically committed to addressing food and nutrition, but adequate financial resources were not allocated to meet specific programs. In addition, whereas the low cohesion of the policy community has been viewed a major underlying cause of the low priority status of food and nutrition, the paper finds that policy community cohesion and having a well thought out policy alternative were present in most countries. The paper concludes by comparing this metric of political commitment to other tools that have been recently developed to measure national commitment to advancing food and nutrition and discussing ways that the tool can be used to further food and nutrition policy agendas.

Introduction

Improvements in food and nutrition are fundamental to child survival, with long-term benefits for improved health, cognitive development, educational attainment and productivity later in life (UNICEF 2013). A number of effective interventions to reduce malnutrition exist (Bhutta *et al.*, 2013; Heaver 2005); yet, despite the cost-effectiveness of interventions to address child malnutrition, and their high cost-benefit ratios (Hoddinott *et al.* 2012), food and nutrition policy is often not prioritized as highly on government agendas as other health and development issues. Countries with high rates of malnutrition continue to under-invest in food and nutrition policy (SUN 2010; Heaver 2005). In facing this pattern of underinvestment, the food and nutrition community has increasingly come to agree that building political commitment is essential to furthering food and nutrition on government agendas (Bryce *et al.* 2008; Heaver 2005; Natalicchio *et al.* 2009; Mejia-Acosta 2011; Pelletier *et al.* 2012; Gillespie *et al.* 2013).

Despite this agreement, the concept of political commitment for food and nutrition is rarely adequately defined or empirically measured (Fox *et al.* 2011; Goldberg *et al.* 2012). Existing tools to measure political commitment have been proposed previously in food and nutrition, but these efforts have typically relied on lengthy desk reviews and qualitative assessments that are cumbersome, time consuming, and difficult to analyze empirically (e.g., Engesveen *et al.* 2009; Chopra *et al.* 2009), or on indices that rely primarily on secondary data, which often lack the local knowledge needed to capture policy nuances within countries (e.g., te Lintelo *et al.* 2013; Save the Children 2012).

How to build commitment is even less studied than how to measure it. A small but growing body of research has described the factors associated with the low prioritization of food and nutrition policy, leading to increasing consensus over those factors most critical to advancing food and nutrition on governmental agendas and enhancing commitment to this issue (e.g., Heaver 2005; Pelletier *et al.* 2012). The primary reasons that food and nutrition are not prioritized include the problem's specific issue characteristics (invisibility and irreversibility), diverse policy solutions (little agreement over the problem and appropriate policy solutions, fragmented and disparate policy solutions), low actor power (policy community dispersed due to the lack of an institutional home, low engagement of experts, low voice of those most affected), and political contexts (lack of donor or national ownership of the problem) (Heaver 2005; Natalicchio *et al.* 2009; Mejia-Acosta 2011; Pelletier *et al.* 2012; Reich and Balarajan 2012). Few studies, however, have endeavored to examine the factors associated with successfully generating political commitment and attention to food and nutrition. The Mainstreaming Nutrition Initiative found only one of twelve factors explored to be crucial to building political commitment across five countries: the existence of credible indicators of the problem (Pelletier *et al.* 2011).

Existing commitment indices, while building global accountability, are not designed to identify strategies to overcome low levels of political commitment or take advantage of opportunities to advance food and nutrition. This rapid assessment tool, by contrast, is intended to assist national governments and development partners in developing more politically feasible strategies for policy reform and in doing so improve the effectiveness of the agenda-setting process.

This paper presents the results of a theory-based survey designed to assess political commitment and opportunities to advance food and nutrition, completed by knowledgeable representatives from ten countries. The survey can also be used by policymakers and planners to formulate country strategies to advance food and nutrition on governmental policy agendas. The paper first presents the theoretical motivation behind the development of the questionnaire and then presents the results from the survey and compares this method with other metrics of political commitment to food and nutrition.

Overview: A Theory-Based Rapid Assessment Approach to Advancing Food and Nutrition Policy

The primary goals of the Political Commitment and Opportunity Measurement Rapid Assessment Tool (PCOM-RAT) are to measure a country's level of political commitment and identify opportunities to advance food and nutrition on governmental agendas. Health policy research has been criticized for its lack of methodological focus and underuse of existing literature informed by strong theoretical and analytical frameworks (Buse 2008; Walt *et al.* 2008). To develop a theory-based tool, the PCOM-RAT builds on existing literature on political commitment and two influential agenda-setting frameworks: Kingdon's (2003) agenda setting model and Shiffman's (2007) global initiative priority-setting framework and incorporates elements of Reich's (1996; 2002) method of stakeholder analysis and political strategy design. Methodologically, the survey uses two major approaches: health policy "effort" surveys and stakeholder analysis. The theory behind these frameworks is described below and the measurement approach is described in the methods section.

Political commitment. The measure of political commitment employed in the PCOM-RAT draws from existing literature on political commitment. Studies from other health issues have suggested that political commitment can be measured along three dimensions (Fox *et al.* 2011; Shiffman 2007): **Expressed Commitment** (verbal declarations of support for an issue by high level, influential political leaders); **Institutional Commitment** (specific policies and organizational infrastructure in support of an issue); and **Budgetary Commitment** (earmarked allocations of resources towards a specific issue relative to a particular benchmark). Expressed commitment on its own without policies or budgetary allocations to back it up can be thought of as rhetorical commitment whereas the latter more demonstrable commitments signal a "credible" commitment

from the government—one that becomes harder to disregard with time and larger investments (Fox *et al.* 2011).

Agenda-setting. Kingdon's (2003) well-known three streams approach suggests that for an issue to gain political priority on a governmental agenda, three independent streams need to converge: the *problem* stream, where an issue becomes perceived as a problem that needs to be and can be addressed; the *policy* stream, where a set of alternative policy solutions are proposed to address the problem; and the *politics* stream, where political events such as national elections or a change in leadership create a window of opportunity to advance new problems and solutions (Kingdon 2003). When these three streams converge, there exists an open "policy window" in which there is political space to advance a specific issue. Even with an open policy window, conversion to results is not guaranteed, however, and requires strategic positioning of problems and policy solutions (Gillespie *et al.* 2013). A variety of hidden and visible participants in this process can assist in seizing a policy window before it closes. Policy entrepreneurs are technical specialists in a given field that push for particular policy proposals or promote a particular framing of a problem, generally hidden from public view (Kingdon, 2003). These specialists are particularly influential for the policy solutions that they generate. Policy advocates or "champions" for a given issue or cause are generally visible high level actors such as the president or other well-known figures who bring attention to a given problem though rely on specialists to provide specific solutions (Kingdon, 2003). The agenda-setting framework has been applied, for example, to explain the heightened attention recently being paid by researchers and planners towards health systems strengthening (Hafner and Shiffman 2012).

Global health priority setting. Shiffman's global initiative priority-setting framework has identified multiple variables that are associated with an enhanced probability that an issue will be placed high on a policy agenda, related to actor power, ideas, political context and issue characteristics (Shiffman 2007; Shiffman and Smith 2007). The variables identified from this framework were inductively derived from a study of maternal mortality across five countries (Shiffman 2007; Shiffman and Smith 2007), and this framework has been applied across other case studies of health issues including family planning (Shiffman and Quissell 2012), neonatal health (Shiffman and Sultana 2013) and newborn survival (Shiffman 2010). Pelletier *et al.* (2011) recently applied this framework to analyze political attention to food and nutrition in five countries. These frameworks have usually been used in conducting qualitative case studies of countries. The PCOM-RAT operationalizes these constructs to measure their presence or absence and organizes them according to where they fall in the problem, policy and political streams (see **Figure 1**).

Stakeholder analysis. The PCOM-RAT survey also contains questions permitting a rapid stakeholder analysis to assess the positions and power of major country-level actors in food and nutrition. Stakeholder analysis systematically examines the relative power, position, coalitions,

and perceptions of each stakeholder (Brugha and Varvasovszky 2000). Stakeholder analysis can assist in identifying strategies and opportunities to overcome roadblocks to advancing food and nutrition and engage relevant actors (Reich 1996; Reich 2002).

Methods

Survey design

The methodology of the PCOM-RAT survey is based on global health “effort” surveys, which aim to improve accountability and benchmark progress in setting the conditions necessary for improved health outcomes. Measures of a country’s effort have been developed for several conditions beginning with family planning effort scores, which have been measured since the 1970s, and more recently applied to maternal death and disability and HIV/AIDS using a similar methodology (Jain and Ross 2012; Ross and Campbell 2001; USAID 2003). These measures have been useful to show levels and trends, as well as regional differences, for different types of effort. Effort surveys typically measure commitment across different categories of indicators including several questions specifically pertaining to political support, mostly measuring expressed commitment. However, several other categories of questions such as ‘policy and planning’, ‘organizational structure’, ‘program resources’, ‘legal and regulatory and environment’ capture aspects of the institutional and budgetary components of political commitment (Goldberg *et al.* 2012).

Country effort surveys are typically overseen by a knowledgeable in-country consultant who selects experts from the government and from the private sector, civil society and other non-governmental sectors, who are considered appropriate to respond to each component of the questionnaire. Questions are primarily of a factual nature (yes/no responses) with a few requiring subjective, scalar judgments. Results are tallied and a single, standardized score assigned to each category and country. The main difference between effort surveys and other metrics gathered through secondary data is the use of expert interviews to generate country specific scores.

The PCOM-RAT questionnaire consists of close-ended factual and subjective (requiring judgment) questions, similar to the design of effort surveys, regarding expressed, institutional and budgetary commitment to food and nutrition policies and questions that capture the presence or absence of openings in the problem, policy and political streams (see **Figure 2**). The full rapid assessment questionnaire, score sheets and summary can be found at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/gform?key=0AiHVhI6KqmXRdFFqQ1d5TW1tV0dESHFTbGZIQnVoX3c#edit>. The rapid assessment tool is designed to be completed by 2-10 food and nutrition specialists per country via a group interview session in which a single survey is completed by the team agreeing on specific responses, coordinated by an in-country consultant. The team approach allows for discussion and agreement on both factual and subjective questions

in the survey. Participants should preferably represent diverse institutions including government, donors, and the non-governmental sector.

Variables

Measuring commitment. Pelletier *et al.* (2011) distinguish between political “attention” or symbolic commitment versus the translation of that attention into effective action. Here we draw on previous frameworks (Fox *et al.* 2011) to distinguish between *expressed* commitment, which may be rhetorical in nature, versus demonstrated *institutional* and *budgetary* commitment including the adoption of laws and policies supportive of formulating and implementing the food and nutrition agenda, and adequate resource allocations to accomplish programmatic initiatives. These questions are adapted from different sections of the global effort surveys.

Measuring opportunities to advance food and nutrition policy. The measures of opportunities to advance food and nutrition are new questions divided across the three streams framework (problem stream, policy stream, politics stream) and intended to capture the twelve factors identified in previous work as facilitating priority setting (Shiffman 2007; Pelletier *et al.* 2011). The goal of these questions is to assess whether an open policy window exists and to simultaneously assist respondents in identifying strategies that can increase the likelihood of food and nutrition being advanced on the policy agenda. Results can also help shed light on which factors are correlated with food and nutrition related outputs and outcomes.

Stakeholder analysis. The rapid assessment survey incorporates elements of the *PolicyMaker* software package (www.polimap.com), which employs methods of organizational analysis and rule-based decision systems to map stakeholders’ positions, power, and interests, and suggests strategies to advance the political feasibility of policy reform (Reich and Cooper 2010). Recognizing that even well intentioned policies to improve health and nutritional status of the population can meet resistance from groups or individuals who stand to lose materially or otherwise from policy change, the goal of these questions is to assess whether the number, intensity and power of supporters of food and nutrition policy outweigh the number, intensity and power of opponents.

Data Collection and Analysis

This rapid assessment tool was implemented with representatives of 10 countries where the Millennium Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) has Joint Programmes for Children, Food Security and Nutrition. Further details about the MDG-F and the individual Joint Programmes (JPs) are available at <http://www.mdgfund.org>. These Joint Programmes brought together multiple UN agencies to work jointly with national governments on shared goals to improve food security and nutrition in order to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs. Importantly, each of these Joint Programmes is designed to build a supportive enabling environment for nutrition, for example, through supporting advocacy, policy development and implementation. The PCOM-RAT was implemented as part of a broader training session on applied political

analysis designed to assist Joint Programme representatives, who typically do not have training in this area, in how to better advance food and nutrition policy. Thus, the dual goal of the PCOM-RAT survey was to collect information on countries' efforts to advance food and nutrition, but also to provide country-specific feedback on ways to strengthen food and nutrition policy advocacy. At the same time, the group exercise of completing the survey can assist countries in designing political strategies to overcome resistance and build coalitions, and thereby enhance the political feasibility of proposed policies.

The rapid assessment tool was first pilot tested in Timor-Leste, and minor modifications were made to the survey instrument based on feedback from nutrition specialists. The tool was made available to the full set of 24 Children, Food Security and Nutrition Joint Programme coordinators (in English, French and Spanish), and was completed by half of these Joint Programme officers at workshops held in the Lima, Peru and Bangkok, Thailand in the summer of 2013.

After a short introduction to applied political analysis and the tool, representatives from each Joint Programme and a government counterpart completed the tool for their respective countries. The country teams consisted of at least one UN agency and one national government agency representative, each of whom were working in the field of food security and nutrition with detailed knowledge of working in country programs. Respondents completed the questionnaire jointly, allowing for discussion over subjective questions and verification of answers to factual questions. Verbal consent was obtained at the time of completion, and this study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Harvard School of Public Health. Copies of completed tools were made available to the country teams, as well as a summary of the findings. Ten countries representing Latin America and Asia completed the full questionnaire: Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

The results of this study are presented in three ways. First, descriptive statistics were generated for each question and are summarized according to the various survey domains. The results were also analyzed according to a scoring algorithm available online. The scoring system takes a subset of questions targeted at directly measuring political commitment to food and nutrition along three domains (expressed, institutional, and budgetary forms of commitment) and opportunities to advance food and nutrition summarized according to questions designed to measure key elements of the three streams model (problem, policy and political opportunities). Each selected question was assigned a score of 1 or 0. For factual yes/no questions, a yes was assigned a 1. For questions presented on a scale of 1-10, a response of 7 or higher was assigned a 1 and for budgetary questions with a 0-3 scale, a 3 was assigned a 1 signifying adequate resources. Total scores were computed for political commitment and opportunities assigning one point for each question. These points were then tallied to provide a picture of how many

countries had different elements present and to compare countries on a common scale. In this current version, questions are unweighted and each assigned a score of one based on specific coding criteria.

Results

Political Commitment to Food and Nutrition in 10 Countries (see Table 1)

Expressed commitment. Nutrition received a high level of attention in most countries in the survey. In all countries except El Salvador, at least one high ranking “visible participant” had spoken publicly about food and nutrition at least twice in the past year. In 8 out of 10 countries this was the head of the government and in every country except El Salvador the First Lady (or first spouse) had spoken about food and nutrition at least twice in the past year. In every country attention to food and nutrition was reported to be on the rise. In every country except Bangladesh, respondents gave an overall rating of current political support for food and nutrition programs of 7 or higher. Colombia, Guatemala and Timor-Leste ranked the highest in terms of their overall expressed commitment to food and nutrition.

Institutional commitment. Most countries had in place fundamental legal and institutional provisions. These included a national food and nutrition policy (9/10), national nutrition guidelines (9/10), intersectoral mechanism that coordinates multisectoral food and nutrition programming (8/10), and national food and nutrition plan of action (8/10). All countries had a national nutrition plan or strategy that is part of a national development plan. In some cases these policies were proposed but not yet in effect. Only three of the 10 participating countries were SUN countries. Timor-Leste ranked the lowest on institutional commitment with only a national nutrition plan that is part of a national development plan, but no other nutrition institutions. Half of the countries reported having all of the institutions asked about.

Budgetary commitment. With regards to budgetary commitment, in most cases, there was a budget-line for nutrition in the budget. However, only the Philippines rated the current resources available for food and nutrition programs as adequate to meet needs and no country rated 3 or more food and nutrition programs as having an adequate budget. Half of the countries said that if the government had an extra 5 million dollars for health initiatives, they would put this money towards nutrition.

Agenda Setting: Opportunities to Advance Food and Nutrition

Problem stream. Most countries had some activity in the problem stream, with the most commonly cited being civil society groups that actively promote food and nutrition issues (10/10), policy advocates and/or high level officials citing indicators showing the extent of food and nutrition problems to advance food and nutrition policy (9/10), and some form of a focusing

event occurring in the past year that had drawn attention to food and nutrition (9/10). Most countries (7/10) reported having a high-level “champion” or influential individual who has taken on food and nutrition. Although most countries noted that high level officials had cited indicators of the extent of food and nutrition problems, no country reported credible indicators of food and nutrition status having been cited in media reports and few reported unfavorable comparisons with other countries on food and nutrition progress. In addition only Timor-Leste said that the topic of food and nutrition had received substantial attention through other forms of public discourse such as protest and social media. Furthermore, although all countries reported having civil society groups promoting food and nutrition, only one country reported that these groups were very cohesive. Bangladesh and Cambodia scored the lowest in the problem stream both of which lacked a champion and cited low levels of media attention to food and nutrition.

Policy Stream. A majority of participating countries had a well thought out policy alternative to address food and nutrition, and a “policy entrepreneur”—an individual within the policy community who had been especially influential in promoting a particular food and nutrition policy or set of policies. Half of the countries felt that the policy community was very cohesive overall. For instance, most countries reported that food and nutrition policy experts: agree on the responsibilities of various ministries and organizations; ; do not diverge in their support for multisectoral versus focused approaches, and agree on a single framing of the issue and on a common set of indicators. Vietnam, Timor-Leste and Bangladesh had the lowest score in the policy stream—each lacking a well thought out, coherent policy proposal and reporting low levels of cohesion in the policy community.

Politics Stream. Most countries reported an opening in the politics stream with presidential and/or legislative elections happening within the year or having occurred within the year (6/10). Three countries where elections were not occurring had a budget scheduled within the next year, which could open space to advance the food and nutrition agenda. Only three countries reported having received financial and technical support from international agencies to address food and nutrition problems. In every country, the number and power of the supporters of food and nutrition security were rated as exceeding the number and power of opponents suggesting that key food and nutrition stakeholders did not believe that they faced insurmountable opposition from powerful groups to developing food and nutrition policies.

Country Commitment and Open Policy Windows. Overall, political commitment and priority setting opportunities were found to be highest in the Philippines and Guatemala and lowest in Vietnam and Bangladesh (**Table 2**). Based on the scoring of selected response items, Colombia and the Philippines were considered to have open policy windows to advance food and nutrition. These countries had a core set of factors in the problem, policy and politics streams that indicated potential to advance food and nutrition on the government’s agenda. For each country, a customized report was generated with specific recommendations on how to strengthen political

commitment and build additional opportunities to advance food and nutrition as a priority area on government agendas.

Discussion

Political commitment. Most countries had a high degree of expressed commitment and institutional commitment, but a low degree of budgetary commitment. This may reflect generally low budgetary outlays and underfunding of programs rather than a lack of prioritization per se, but may also reflect an unwillingness of countries to actually “put their money where their mouth is” when it comes to scaling up food and nutrition policy. Countries may be willing to put up window dressings in terms adopting plans of action and multi-sectoral programs, but not convert these programs into meaningful action—reflecting the challenges of implementation. On the other hand, half of the countries did report that if the government had an extra 5 million dollars for health initiatives, they would most likely allocate those funds to food and nutrition, suggesting that absolute resource constraints may be hindering further budgetary allocations in these instances.

Opportunities to advance food and nutrition. Most countries were found to have important elements in place to compel attention to food and nutrition. In the problem stream, most countries had visible, high-level “champions” to draw attention to food and nutrition issues, at least one focusing event (e.g., conference, food related crisis) that drew attention to food and nutrition, and civil society groups focused on food and nutrition. However, food and nutrition had weak coverage in the media and advocacy groups did not emphasize food and nutrition and were not cohesive.

In the policy stream, whereas the lack of cohesion within the food and nutrition policy community has frequently been cited as a challenge in the food and nutrition sector (Heaver 2005; Natalicchio *et al.* 2009), half of the countries in this study reported that their policy communities were very cohesive. Policy communities universally agreed on the responsibilities of various ministries and organizations, and a majority did not diverge in their support for multisectoral versus focused approaches, and agreed on a single framing issue to advance food and nutrition. Most countries also had a well thought out policy alternative contrasting with the findings from prior studies that the diversity of policy solutions impedes policy advocacy.

The 5-country case study by Pelletier *et al.* (2011) found that having a coherent, evidence-based policy was not critical to garner attention to food and nutrition and instead found that policymakers could be swayed in their attention through messages regarding the extent of the problem that resonate with other political priorities they are tackling, especially during periods of political transition. Having credible indicators was the only factor that held across the 5 cases in

the study by Pelletier *et al.* (2011). By contrast, although most of the 10 countries in this study did report that high level officials had cited indicators of the extent of food and nutrition problems, no country reported credible indicators of food and nutrition status having been cited in media reports and few reported unfavorable comparisons with other countries on food and nutrition progress.

In addition to having a coherent evidence based policy not being crucial, Pelletier *et al.* (2011) also found that external resource provision and civil society mobilization were not consistently related to attention to food and nutrition. In the present study, a majority of countries reported having civil society groups that promote food and nutrition issues; however, only one country said these groups were cohesive. Thus, though it may be common to have civil society groups dedicated to food and nutrition, it is less common for them to be working in concert towards a common goal, which could hinder their effectiveness. Previous research on food and nutrition's low priority status has also suggested that actor power in food and nutrition has been diluted by the fact that no single international agency (e.g., UNICEF, FAO, WHO, World Bank) has ownership of nutrition, with each organization having its own distinct nutrition programming (Reich and Balarajan 2012). Despite this "multiplicity of owners" problem, only 3 countries reported receiving a great deal of financial and technical support from international agencies to address food and nutrition problems.

Qualitative case studies to date have been unable to determine whether certain combinations of the multiple variables in Shiffman's (2007) global initiative priority-setting framework are more influential than others. In general, none of these variables on its own is considered either necessary or sufficient to explain why certain health conditions ascend in priority. If repeated across more countries over time, the PCOM-RAT has the potential to shed additional light on identifying factors that are more or less influential. However, the current analysis did not aim to accomplish this and the tool is not a substitute for in-depth case study approaches, which may be necessary to confirm the validity of the rapid assessment findings.

Stakeholder analysis. Surprisingly, the stakeholder analysis did not reveal any groups who were actively opposed to reform of food and nutrition policy. This may reflect an optimistic bias among the expert respondents who are working in this field, or political caution concerning the ramifications of labeling groups as opposed. Future iterations of the survey may require further prompting to assist respondents in identifying stakeholders who may also be on the losing end of advancing food and nutrition policy. Furthermore, the lack of budgetary commitment suggests that in practice there are groups that are opposed to increasing expenditure on food and nutrition.

Comparisons with other measures. The PCOM-RAT shares commonalities with other food and nutrition indices. Engesveen *et al.* (2009) and Chopra *et al.* (2009) have developed a framework for determining a country's commitment, capacity and readiness to adopt food and nutrition

policy. Engesveen *et al.* (2009) and Chopra *et al.* (2009)'s framework involves different activities to generate a complete Landscape Analysis: 1) development of a Nutrition Landscape Tracking System (NLTS); 2) classification of countries according to "readiness to act" through desk review; and 3) implementation of in-depth country assessments. The Nutrition Landscape Tracking System provides information on nutrition outcomes (Nishida *et al.* 2009). The readiness to act measure, closest to the method proposed in this study, uses desk review and content analysis of a country's Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSP) to assess recognition of undernutrition as a development problem (Engesveen *et al.* 2009). The Landscape Analysis complements these secondary data collection activities with in-depth case studies based on qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and checks at the national and sub-national level. The Landscape Analysis is thorough and comprehensive; however, data collection using this method is also lengthy and time-consuming. The PCOM-RAT relies on expert interviews with in-country respondents, but can be complemented with other measures using desk review and country case studies.

The Nutrition Barometer sponsored by Save the Children and World Vision (2012) as well as the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index from the Institute of Development Studies (2013) are additional tools that analyze country commitments to food and nutrition, which rely primarily on secondary data. Both include measures of institutional and budgetary commitment such as policies, laws and international norm adoption to fight hunger and undernutrition and government spending on health and nutrition. Neither of these indices includes information on relevant in-country stakeholders nor on more targeted information about the expressed commitment of key leadership to food and nutrition issues.

The Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index includes measures of state capacity in addition to capacity-neutral measures of commitment such as international norm adoption. To account for capacity, the Nutrition Barometer distinguishes countries where commitments match outcomes and where commitments exceed outcomes and makes specific recommendations for addressing these cases. The questions on the PCOM-RAT, by contrast, were designed to be neutral to a state's overall resources levels or type of governance structure to the extent possible to allow for direct comparability across countries at different levels of economic development. Nonetheless, analysis linking the PCOM-RAT with outcomes could account for state capacity by controlling for country resources levels. The PCOM-RAT can also be combined with measures derived from secondary data both as a validation exercise and to add additional items to the measure.

Each country was given a customized report with specific recommendations based on the rapid assessment for how they might strengthen the level of commitment and priority given to food and nutrition. Five overarching recommendations were proposed, given the results found across the 10 countries:

- 1) Support existing food and nutrition champions, which most countries had in place.
- 2) Use focusing events that bring attention to food and nutrition as opportunities to advance agreed upon policy proposals.
- 3) Strengthen cohesion within civil society groups that focus on food and nutrition issues.
- 4) Work with the mass media and social media to give food and nutrition issues greater public attention and prominence.
- 5) Build greater consensus within policy communities on food and nutrition indicators and multisectoral approaches.

Strengths and Limitations. To overcome the shortcomings of existing methods of measuring political commitment that are lengthy and resource intensive, the PCOM-RAT builds on existing efforts at measuring political commitment and prioritization. This new rapid assessment tool can be administered within a short time frame to gauge a country's current level of political commitment to food and nutrition and to assess whether an opportunity exists to advance food and nutrition policy on the governmental agenda. Importantly, the survey is not currently testing which of the agenda setting variables are causally related to political commitment or associated with nutritional outcomes. However, if repeated over time the survey has the potential to test the relationship between policy opportunities and political commitment and nutritional outcomes.

This study has a number of limitations. The instrument presented here is designed specifically for the agenda setting stage of the policy cycle and therefore the explanatory power of the survey is limited to this initial attention phase. Other stages, such as policy formulation and implementation, may require different metrics. Our focus is also on political factors related to agenda setting and therefore does not explicitly capture certain variables related to policy formulation or the capacity to implement policies, which other frameworks assess (Pelletier *et al.* 2011).

The quantitative nature of this tool necessarily reduces a complex set of information to a summary measure, which may give a false sense of certainty about a complex and dynamic political process. Recommendations derived from the rapid assessment tool will necessarily be cursory. The rapid assessment approach can be complimented with in-depth case studies to “dig deeper” and produce more country-specific recommendations. The tool is also intended to be used in the context of broader political analysis training to assist food and nutrition experts and food and nutrition policymakers in formulating more systematic strategies to advance food and nutrition on government agendas and build political support for food and nutrition, rather than as a stand-alone indicator.

The results of the tool may also be influenced by the selection of participants and their own cognitive biases and frames. As food and nutrition experts, they may be more likely to view the government's support for these issues in a more optimistic or pessimistic manner. In addition, a number of the proposed questions rely on the judgment of experts. Respondents in different

countries may use different frames of reference in responding to certain items, which may create difficulties in comparing scores across countries. These issues have been identified in previous effort surveys (USAID 2003).

This study does not distinguish between hunger-related policies and nutrition-related policies. Other indices have found that the relative commitment to hunger reduction does not predict the relative commitment to nutrition (te Lintelo *et al.* 2013). This suggests the two need to be separated, whereas in this instrument, we have combined questions pertaining to both.

Next steps include collecting more country profiles and validating results from the rapid assessment survey against more comprehensive desk reviews and secondary measures. In addition, results from the rapid assessment can be combined with other measures of political commitment such as the Nutrition Barometer and Hunger Commitment Index as well as outcome measures from the Mainstreaming Nutrition Initiative's Nutrition Landscape tracking system for a more comprehensive set of indicators.

Conclusions

The Political Commitment and Opportunity Measurement Rapid Assessment Tool approach is a promising new method to benchmark country progress on advancing food and nutrition security and prospectively evaluate the unfolding political environment of policy change so as to support stakeholders to more effectively engage in policy processes. This study finds that most of the 10 countries studied have a high degree of expressed and institutional commitment to food and nutrition, but a low degree of budgetary commitment. Most countries also have a more cohesive policy or set of policies proposed than previously believed, and three countries have a combination of factors that would suggest that a window of opportunity exists for reform.

This work comes at an opportune time: momentum around the Scaling Up Nutrition movement is galvanizing support for country-led action to address nutrition. Improving our understanding of the politics around the enabling environment for nutrition and developing capacity for applied political analysis at the country-level is critical to achieving the movement's goals. As Gillespie *et al.* (2013:1) state: "political commitment can be developed in a short time, but commitment must not be squandered—conversion to results needs a different set of strategies and skills." The PCOM-RAT is a theory-based survey that can be applied to both academic questions and the practical challenges of scaling-up nutrition program in developing countries. The tool can be particularly useful in training food and nutrition experts, who frequently have little training in policy or political analysis, to work prospectively with governments in advancing food and nutrition policy in the post-2015 era.

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Figure 1: Factors Operating in the Problem, Policy and Politics Streams that Shape Agenda-Setting

PROBLEM STREAM	POLICY STREAM	POLITICS STREAM
Competing Priorities Focusing Events Issue Framing (External) Policy Advocates or Champions/Leadership Credible Indicators of Severity Civil Society Mobilization Competing Priorities	Policy Community Cohesion (agreement on internal framing of problem/solutions) Guiding Policy Institution Viable Policy Alternatives Policy Entrepreneur Effective Interventions	Political Transitions Interest Group Mobilization External/Global Influences (norm promotion, resource provision)

Source: Adapted from Balarajan and Reich 2012.

Figure 2: Schematic of the different components of PCOMRAT

Political Commitment & Prioritization of Food and Nutrition Policy	Stated Commitment
	Institutional Commitment
	Budgetary Commitment
Policy Windows of Opportunity	Problem Stream
	Policy Stream
	Politics Stream
	Other factors: External Influences
Stakeholder and Institutional Analysis	Stakeholders and Institutions
	Existence of powerful opponents and proponents
	Ideological character of government
	Number of veto players

Source: Authors.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

POLITICAL COMMITMENT	
<i>Expressed Commitment</i>	
Head of the government has spoken publicly about food and nutrition problems at least twice. (1)	80%
First lady has spoken publicly about food and nutrition problems at least twice. (1)	90%
Other high officials, has spoken publicly about food and nutrition problems at least twice. (1)	50%
Public campaigns have been waged in the past year to raise awareness about food and nutrition related issues. (1)	90%
Attention of high level officials to food and nutrition problems has increased in the past year (1)	100%
Overall rating of current political support of the head of government for food and nutrition programs (7 or greater, assign 1)	90%
Speak about less often: HIV/AIDS (1)	70%
Speak about less often: Water and Sanitation (1)	60%
Speak about less often: Maternal mortality (1)	70%
Speak about less often: Child health (e.g., vaccinations) (1)	50%
<i>Institutional Commitment</i>	
An intersectoral mechanism that coordinates multisectoral food and nutrition programming exists (1)	80%
The country has adopted a national food and nutrition policy (1)	90%
The country has adopted a national food and nutrition plan of action (1)	80%
There is a multisectoral food and nutrition program currently operational in the country (1)	60%
There is a national nutrition plan or strategy that is part of a national development plan (1)	100.00%
There are published national dietary guidelines (1)	90%
SUN country	30%
<i>Budgetary Commitment</i>	
Overall rating of resources available for food and nutrition programs (if 3, assign 1 point)	10%
Rating of 3 for specific food and nutrition initiatives that the government has specifically prioritized (50%+ rated 3, assigned 1 point)	0%
There is a budget-line for nutrition in the budget (1)	70%
If the government had an extra 5 million dollars for health initiatives, which of the following categories would it be most likely to allocate the resources to first? (If nutrition, assigned 1)	50%
AGENDA SETTING	
<i>Problem Stream</i>	
Credible indicators of food and nutrition status have been cited in media reports on food and nutrition in the last 12 months? (1)	10%
Have policy advocates and/or high level officials cited indicators showing the extent of food and nutrition problems to advance food and nutrition policy in the last 12 months? (1)	90%
Have there been any major events in the last year that have drawn particular attention to food and nutritional problems in the country? (1)	90%
Thinking about public attention to the topic of food and nutrition problems, how much attention	40%

would you say this topic has received in the past year in the official [state] media? (1 point if substantial)	
How much attention would you say topic of food and nutrition problems has received in the past year through other forms of public discourse (e.g., protest, social media)? (1 point if substantial)	10%
How often do proponents of food and nutrition initiatives invoke each of the following in their advocacy efforts:	
Centrality of Food and Nutrition to Poverty Reduction (1)	90%
Cost Effectiveness of food and nutrition initiatives (1)	60%
Unfavorable comparisons with other countries on food and nutrition progress (1)	20%
Human rights (e.g., the right to food) (1)	70%
Quantitative evidence highlighting the extent of the problem (1)	60%
Qualitative experiences with the food and nutrition related health	30%
Is there a high-level “champion” or influential individual who has taken on food and nutrition as a cause that he/she is currently (or within the past year) promoting? (1 point if that person is influential, 2 points if it is the president)	70%
Are there civil society groups that promote food and nutrition issues? (1)	100%
In your estimation, how cohesive would you say are advocates of food and nutrition in this country? (if very cohesive, 1 point)	10%

Policy Stream

Current status of policy alternatives: 1 point if a well thought out, coherent proposal has been put forward	70%
In your estimation, how technically feasible is policy X to implement [technical feasibility refers to the practical feasibility given existing infrastructure, capacity and the need to coordinate across different sectors]?	60%
In your estimation how acceptable would policy X be to the public at large?	50%
In your estimation how financially sustainable would policy X be?	30%
Is there an influential individual within the policy community who has been especially influential in promoting a particular food and nutrition policy (or set of policies) in the past year?	60%
Cohesiveness of policy community: 1 point if very cohesive	50%
Food and nutrition policy experts agree on a single framing issue to advance food and nutrition policy (e.g., women’s empowerment, stunting, food insecurity, right to food). (1 point if frequently)	60%
Food and nutrition policy experts agree on a common set of indicators to advance the food and nutrition cause. (1 point if frequently)	40%
Food and nutrition policy experts diverge in their support for multisectoral versus focused approaches. (1 point if frequently)	30%
Food and nutrition policy experts agree on the responsibilities of various ministries and organizations. (1 point if frequently)	100%

Politics Stream (Including Stakeholder Analysis)

Major executive elections happened within the past year or will happen within a year. (1 point if within next year)	60%
Major legislative elections happened within the past year or will happen within a year. (1 point	50%

if within next year)	
When is the next budget scheduled? _____ (1 point if within next year)	80%
How much financial and technical support has the country received from international agencies to address food and nutrition problems? (If a lot, assign 1)	30%
# of supporters outweighs # of opponents (1 point)	100%
Power of supporters outweighs power of opponents (1 point)	100%

Table 2: Total Points per Section*

	Political Commitment				Agenda Setting			
	<u>Expressed Commitment</u>	<u>Institutional Commitment</u>	<u>Budgetary Commitment</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Problem Stream</u>	<u>Policy Stream</u>	<u>Politics Stream</u>	<u>Total</u>
Bangladesh	5	5	1	11	4	3	6	13
Bolivia	9	5.5	1	15.5	8	8	7	23
Cambodia	8	4.5	1	13.5	4	7	4	15
Colombia	10	5.5	1	16.5	6	7	7	20
El Salvador	2	6	0	8	8	5	6	19
Guatemala	10	6	0	16	8	9	6	23
Nicaragua	8	6	1	15	7	4	3	14
Philippines	7	6	2	15	11	9	7	27
Timor-Leste	10	2	1	13	11	2	6	19
Vietnam	6	6	0	12	8	1	5	14
Total Possible points`	10	6	3	19	15	10	7	32

* Points for each section are totaled from the questions outlined in Table 1.