IEG Brief: Community Dynamics

A Pivotal Success Factor of Senegal’s Nutrition Enhancement Program: Voices from the Field on a Decade’s Worth of Implementation

Introduction

Notable among factors contributing to the successful implementation of Senegal’s Nutrition Enhancement Program (NEP) are the strong dynamics and synergies at the local level. From the very outset, the NEP was effective in harnessing the experience of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), serving as community executing agencies (CEAs) to mobilize resource persons and people of influence in the target zones. The genuine involvement of administrative and local authorities was also instrumental in inciting a strong appropriation by the population and a resolute commitment of all field-based actors.

The Project Performance Assessment Report undertaken by the World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), entitled A Decade of World Bank Support to Senegal’s Nutrition Program (Report No. 110290, December 21, 2016) documents this phenomenon, drawing on its extensive fieldwork and interviews with local level actors and stakeholders. The viewpoints expressed by field-based actors reveal that NEP’s strategies for establishing a good community-level dynamic were effective. A broad range of actors is motivated to contribute to program activities and results in line with the community-based, multisectoral framework and principles established at the outset.

Administrative Authorities

Administrative authorities’ views, as expressed to IEG, are found to be consistent with their actions. They embrace their role as coordinators of the technical sectors and consider themselves responsible for the overarching mission of supporting development activities in their administrative zones. This sense of responsibility has translated into their strong commitment and growing capacity to oversee and guide the establishment and implementation of the Programme de Renforcement de la Nutrition (PRN) in their respective zones. To this end, they have become leaders and instigators of a truly multisectoral approach, which has taken hold at the decentralized level. In their own words.

“We are here to facilitate… [W]e constantly monitor activities of the CLM [Cellule de Lutte contre la Malnutrition] because we have the same focus and targets: our populations.” Prefet

“We have an obligation to accompany our partners in support of a good implementation of projects in the field.” Prefet
“Local authorities are responsible for accompanying projects…. [T]he results of the IEG evaluation constitutes a landmark for us and I salute the actors who supported the achievement of these encouraging results.” Prefet

“We cannot solve the problem of malnutrition without hygiene; clean food relies on hygiene and sanitation.” Sous-Prefet

“We are responsible for accompanying the sectors and we have the duty to accompany the populations.” Sous-Prefet

“We must continue this accompaniment, given the gap in financial resources, because the most important program is the NEP.” Sous-Prefet

“PASAV [Program of Support for Food Security in Vulnerable Households] is a project that eradicates malnutrition and definitely eradicates poverty…. [T]he choice of goats is very relevant and makes it possible to have milk, meat and even money when there is a viable production…. [T]he presence of the CLM and BER [Bureau Exécutif Régional] is a critical support to program implementation and contributes to the facilitation of its ownership by the population.” Sous-Prefet

Local Authorities

In the advent of the decentralization policy, which transfers health sector responsibilities to the local level, local authorities are increasingly aware of their roles and responsibilities in managing development projects. Even though their leadership role continues to evolve and develop, their commitment and catalyzing effect on other actors and implementers bode well for a better future. They contribute to the financing of activities despite their weak resource base and are working to institutionalize their financial support through the establishment of a dedicated budget line for health and nutrition. They also actively monitor program performance through their review and participatory discussion of quarterly performance reports prepared by the program, which are tools for problem solving at the local level. The following quotes from mayors and their representatives collected by the evaluation team illustrate their involvement and support.

“The commune doesn’t have a lot of resources but our support is provided through logistics for outreach activities.” Mayor

“We receive all the activity reports and we study them to stay informed of the project’s state of progress.” Mayor
“We no longer see malnourished children in our commune.... We thank the project managers who come and report back to us every three months.” Mayor

“The local collectivity provided a dedicated budget line to support nutrition and health generally speaking.... The idea of establishing a structure to support the sustainability of activities is very relevant and we support it making sure that it is well anchored in the community.” Representative of the Mayor’s Office

“We appreciate the transparency and clarity, with which the project is managed.” Mayor

“It is our project because we have signed (the contract for its implementation) and people appreciate the arrival of this project, which is ours; it came to us in time.... The project has addressed the problem of poverty; at first people had misgivings about the viability of the project.” Representative of the Mayor’s Office

Actors in Charge of Implementation

Two categories of field-based actors implement different elements of NEP: public sector technicians representing various technical sectors at the local level and NGOs representing civil society. They fulfill essential and complementary roles in project implementation, monitoring, and financial resource management. They are also responsible for strengthening the capacities of community nutrition workers and for orienting other community leaders.

Public Sector Technical Staff

They assure technical leadership for training community actors, especially community nutrition workers and members of the local steering committee. They are also often present and active in the delivery of nutrition services by the community nutrition worker, assuring the adequacy of their knowledge and skills, guiding and assisting them in data collection, and providing an interface with relevant sector services and support.

“I assure the recuperation of malnourished children (moderate and severe cases); the supervision of social mobilization activities, community discussions, cooking demonstrations, and the guidance of community nutrition workers. We use the same tools as those used by community nutrition workers in their sites.” Nurse, Head of Health Post

“I save my best, drought-resistant seeds for the mothers—for their family gardens developed under the project.... When I see a malnourished child, I tell myself that I am not doing my job.” Agriculture Technician
“I assure the monitoring and care of the livestock provided under the project, after having supported their procurement. The purchase reflects my choice of goats who best adapt do the environment and assure the best production.” Livestock Technician

“In the fight against malnutrition, the school effectively participates through the sensitization of women to adopt key behaviors favoring a child’s health and the sponsoring of children to ensure their vaccination and good care.” Professor and Supporter of “Nutri-Ecole”

“We call to mind the importance of the nutrition project in schools for the development of the child.” Inspector of Education and Training

“It’s important to continue strengthening women’s capacities because malnutrition is not just a problem of poverty but also a problem of behaviors. Populations must be pushed to diversify cultural practices.” Departmental Head of Agriculture Service

“I appreciate the multisectoral dimension of the program…. [N]ot only did it reduce malnutrition considerably, it also had an impact on the awakening of students to the importance of hygiene and sanitation.” Inspector of Education and Training

Civil Society Actors

NEP design wisely opted to involve local NGOs in project implementation, responsible for operational planning, monitoring and evaluation, and financial management. In their capacity as CEAs, these NGOs also play a role of interface between central and local levels and among the various local level actors. As NEP contractors, they are held accountable for the timely execution of activities, as laid out in their contracts co-signed by the CLM and local authorities. CEAs are acutely aware of the importance of implementing planned activities to achieve good project performances and results. The following quotes provide evidence of their eclectic role.

“Up until now, the NEP relies on local collectivities and reports back to them every three months…. so the project can always accompany the populations…. [R]egarding human resources, all the basics are in place for ensuring sustainability.” CEA Representative

“We are constantly in the field to ensure the implementation of planned activities…. [T]he doors of the authorities are open to us and we solicit them each time it is necessary to respect the timetables for implementation.” CEA Representative

“We are obliged to report back to local authorities every three months, and we collect all the reports (in our catchment areas) to do this.” CEA representative
Community Leaders

Their status and functions within communities put them in a strategic position for social mobilization and resolution of conflicts and disputes. To this end, they play an essential role in sensitizing populations. They also foster the buy-in of traditional and religious leaders for projects established in their localities. These quotes provide testimony to this end.

“*The members of the local steering committee provide logistical support to community nutrition workers’ routine activities…. [T]hey assure and support sensitization activities and the organization of meetings…. [T]hey also play a mediating role to iron out difficulties that may arise between community nutrition workers and the population or between two or more community nutrition workers. The committee has become the first level of reference for the community nutrition workers.*” Leader and Member of Local Level Steering Committee

“My village has a very strong religious coloration, influencing all actions that happen here. The marabout promotes the ownership of development activities in the commune. The marabout is interested in nutrition activities and asked that they be monitored and so I am in contact with the Mayor’s office to monitor the work.” Representative of the Marabout, Village Chief

Community-Level Actors

The community nutrition workers are the essential links in the project performance chain. Their motivation and their standing in the community provide them with the stamina and will to succeed in the volunteer mission entrusted to them by the population. Their level of commitment, dynamism, and availability are unequivocal. Project results are attributable to them in large part, given that they carry out the majority of nutrition activities and strengthen the awareness, knowledge, and healthy behaviors of the beneficiaries. Their various quotes collected by the evaluation team during field visits are a testimony to their engagement and effectiveness, and raise the issue of the level of their remuneration, which is being explored at the local level.

“The project greatly supported us enabling us to contribute to the rehabilitation of malnourished children: the work is very hard indeed but we are motivated to work for the communities of which we are a part.” Community Nutrition Worker

“The program’s presence in the community since 2009 has been greatly beneficial to the community nutrition workers who are well trained. They carry out all the activities supporting the fight against malnutrition, which has seen a great decline in our zone.” Community Nutrition Worker
“We continue the process of rehabilitation of the malnourished child with home visits to ensure proper follow-up and respect of advice provided; however, even if we are personally motivated to do the work, we continue to request an improvement in the system of financial motivation. Even this issue, however, doesn’t dampen our enthusiasm for what we do.”

Community Nutrition Worker

Beneficiaries and Project Impact

Women (mothers and caregivers) are the principal targets of the NEP in its fight against malnutrition. The aim is to encourage their adoption of behaviors favoring a decline in malnutrition. A number of strategies are implemented to this end. In the various zones where the NEP has intervened, women have benefited from capacity building, financial transfers during the financial crisis on a pilot basis, other in-kind support, and close monitoring. These strategies have been greatly appreciated by the women and have for the most part produced the expected results. Quotes from women who shared their views with the evaluation mission provide more insight on the direct impact of the project to the target beneficiaries.

“My child was malnourished. He was rehabilitated by the community nutrition worker until he was totally recuperated, passing from red to green zones (on the growth chart), and he is well, thank God. Since that time, I, myself, became a community nutrition worker in my neighborhood and I advise all the women to bring their children.” Beneficiary

“My eldest child was severely malnourished and his life was saved by the project, which rehabilitated him. My younger children will never reach that level of malnutrition because now I have the knowledge and tools to keep them well nourished.” Beneficiary

“When I brought my child, they weighed him and gave him food. They showed me how to prepare meals that would improve his nutritional status, which is such a source of motivation for the women.” Beneficiary

“I took care of the child, bought chickens, and the eggs are used as food for the children. With the last tranche of a cash transfer which was received at the same time as an outreach activity, I registered the births of my children with the civil registry.” Beneficiary

“When I received the cash my child was critically ill. With this money, I brought the child to Darou Moustic, where he received health care and recovered.” Beneficiary

“I received four cash transfers. I was able to get health care for my child and to buy goods. Now I bring my children to the hospital.” Beneficiary
Conclusion

The different points of view of those interviewed during the evaluation mission effectively convey the existence of a good community dynamic – a result of solid and insightful project design and a learning-by-doing approach during implementation. The real involvement of all stakeholders was without doubt one of the reasons for the good performance and transparency of program management. Each actor did his part in achieving this success: administrative authorities facilitated and animated the participation of decentralized technical services, which assumed capacity building and formative supervision activities; community leaders contributed to social mobilization and mediation; civil society ensured interface across a range of actors and stakeholders and oversaw operational planning, monitoring and evaluation and budget execution. Finally, the populations benefited from community nutrition workers who raised their knowledge and awareness and from other financial and in-kind support, which, together, facilitated the adoption of behaviors favoring improved nutritional status.