



Abstract/Summary information for the Technical Meeting on Nutrition (TMN)

Subject Title	A review of nutritional surveillance systems, their use and value
Level of Relevance <i>Global /Regional/National</i>	National
Subject focus area <i>Research/programming/combination</i>	Combination
Sphere of interest <i>Humanitarian/Development/Cross-cutting</i>	Cross-cutting
Main nutritional focus <i>Wasting/Stunting/Micronutrient malnutrition/overweight and obesity</i>	Wasting/stunting
Identify which of the ten thematic areas it relates to	9) M&E, global and national systems; innovation, standardisation and alignment
Abstract/Summary information	
<p>Context and methods: Nutritional surveillance, meaning “keeping watching over nutrition, in order to make decisions which will lead to improvements in nutrition,” [1] is needed for policy-making and programming. But are nutritional surveillance systems - which involve regular collection of primary data, and which can be expensive - essential, or are ad-hoc surveys and monitoring of health services data adequate? This question was a focus of enquiry during a review of the purpose, value and use of nutrition surveillance information, commissioned by Save the Children, UK. Published and grey literature on nutrition surveillance were analysed, and key informants interviewed. Five surveillance systems were chosen as case-studies to cover differences in scale, objectives, methods and region.</p> <p>Main findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated food security and nutrition surveillance systems play an important role for early-warning in vulnerable areas. Increased automation in data collection, collation, analysis and dissemination will enhance this role. • In addition to the information they provide, surveillance systems can have benefits as capacity-building instruments. • Some important aspects of systems have not had sufficient attention and support. While data collection and analysis have been prioritised, sustainability and presentation and dissemination of information have not. The literature reveals that 	

many systems have not survived. Information from existing systems is often not optimally used due to weak communication to the full range of potential stakeholders.

- The sentinel surveillance approach and health services data can be useful for detecting changes in the nutrition situation. Other approaches for surveillance are required to estimate prevalence rates of under-nutrition for programming and policy making, and to monitor progress with respect to global targets.

Potential application of findings: To inform decisions about design of, and monitoring and evaluation of, surveillance systems.

Robustness of findings: High.

[1] Mason J, Habicht JP, Tabatabai H, Valverde V. Nutritional surveillance: World Health Organization Geneva; 1984.