

# Committing to nutrition: Advocacy strategies during Senegal's elections



Abdou Diouf

National elections present an important opportunity to raise the profile of nutrition on the political agenda.

**Ambarka Youssoufane**, ENN's Regional Knowledge Management Specialist for Central and West Africa, interviewed **Abdou Diouf** (left) about advocating for nutrition during recent presidential elections in Senegal.

Diouf is the Executive Secretary of the SUN Movement Civil Society platform, which brings together civil society organisations working on nutrition and food security issues in collaboration with government and other SUN networks, including UN agencies and the private sector.

## 1. You have stressed that the SUN Civil Society network is working to make nutrition a priority on the political and development agenda in Senegal. What are the country's main challenges for nutrition?

The two main challenges are coverage of nutrition interventions and mobilising resources. Although Senegal is not a large country, programmes do not reach down to all the local communities where they are needed, despite a large network of different players and interventions. The SUN Movement has enabled several hundred local authorities to be supported today, but it is a challenge to mobilise resources nationally to meet the needs that have now been identified at national and local level.

## 2. How do you prioritise which nutrition messages to focus on to bring about change?

The Civil Society platform developed a communication and advocacy strategy when it was set up in 2013. This was underpinned by an analysis of the nutrition situation that gave us our priorities for action, one of the first of which was coordination of the many interventions by various stakeholders. The situational analysis strengthened the work we did with the Government, including developing national policies such as the multi-sector strategic plan for nutrition. We also realised that we needed to provide a coherent framework so that civil society spoke with one voice, since the civil society organisations working in Senegal are quite diverse, even fragmented.

## 3. What about the role of the platform in holding the government accountable to the nutrition commitments made by Senegal at international and national level?

In relation to the Millennium Development Goals, Senegal committed from 2011 to mobilise 2.8 billion USD annually for nutrition until 2015 (and has spent more than 3 billion USD annually since then). The commitment has been more or less fulfilled, but it is not clear whether the money went directly to communities, to beneficiaries who really needed the services, or whether it has been absorbed into the operating costs of organisations responsible for nutrition. In addition to the specific actions on nutrition, there are other actions which should be addressed, where the country is perhaps not allocating enough resources, such as towards nutrition-

sensitive agriculture. We have realised that civil society needs to refine its analytical tools to create a more balanced reading so that it can challenge the figures on this type of commitment. The Government has made an investment case and now that we have this point of reference we may be able to make a sharper assessment.

## 4. You recently carried out advocacy with presidential candidates in Senegal, urging them to make commitments in favour of nutrition. Can you tell us about this action in particular?

Senegal held a presidential election in early 2019 and we developed a concept note in which we set out an assessment of the nutrition situation and what we considered to be strategic directions to be followed by political leaders, including the presidential candidates. We had wanted to organise a hearing on nutrition with the candidates or their representatives, but we were not able to do this with them due to tight deadlines. Instead, we organised a press conference and afterwards we sent the candidates' offices a formal call to action, along with the SUN Civil Society platform's assessment.

## 5. Why did you choose a press conference as an advocacy strategy to reach the presidential candidates?

Partly, it was due to time. The presidential election campaign is very short in Senegal – just three weeks – and we knew the candidates were extremely busy. We focused on online media, recognising its impact in getting information both to politicians and the public. By posting the call to action on the candidates' social media pages and feeds, we wanted to have an impact on them indirectly, but also directly because there was favourable press coverage as a result. This was a pilot exercise that we can refine, develop and organise better in the future, perhaps extending the media coverage.

## 6. Did any of the presidential candidates raise the issue of (mal)nutrition or make pledges for improving nutrition in their campaigns?

Apart from perhaps the President [Macky Sall, the incumbent president who won a second five-year term], the other candidates spoke only about the health dimensions [of nutrition] and we understand from this that a holistic view of nutrition is still not a reality among Senegalese politicians.

### 7. *Are there other countries that have inspired you in this type of advocacy work?*

We asked the SUN Movement Secretariat about what El Salvador had done a few years ago during the last presidential campaign and also Burkina Faso, but in both cases they had more time to prepare. Our opportunity was, indeed, the press conference, but we are aware of the drawbacks of such an action. Other [civil society] stakeholders in different sectors were able to organise citizens' interviews of candidates, but there were a lot of resources mobilised for this, which we still don't have at the platform level.

### 8. *Have you any lessons learned to share with other civil society networks about this work?*

The main lessons are to start early for any successful activity and that it requires a high level of preparatory technical work. Fortunately, we had support in drafting a concept note from our partnership with Action Contre la Faim, and with

them we were able to rapidly mobilise funds for printing and other activities.

### 9. *What are the plans for next steps?*

We are hopeful about our advocacy efforts as the President elected was in office when the policy and the multi-sector strategic plan for nutrition were developed. In Phase 2 of the Plan for an Emerging Senegal, nutrition is also mentioned in the second line of strategic action relating to human capital.

Since our call to action, the SUN Civil Society network has discussed with the SUN Movement Government Focal Point and Coordinator of the Malnutrition Cell about conducting a similar action to address prospective candidates at the local elections later in the year. We will be doing this through platform members who are closest to the local level across the country. We also have an opportunity to access funds through the SUN pooled fund for support for action by civil society at the community level that contributes to policy development.



## Multi-sector programmes at the sub-national level: Insights from Ethiopia and Niger

*ENN's SUN Knowledge Management team*

As part of ENN's knowledge management role to support the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, in-depth documentation on how multi-sector programmes (MSPs) are being implemented at the sub-national level began in 2017, initially in Kenya, Senegal and Nepal<sup>1</sup>. In 2018, ENN conducted additional case studies in Ethiopia and Niger. Countries were selected based on either national progress in reducing undernutrition; the presence of multi-sector structures and strategies at a national and sub-national level; or evidence of large-scale, multi-sector implementation at sub-national level. Although programming looks very different in each of these countries, they offer examples of how to develop coordination structures to enable MSPs at a sub-national level.

In Ethiopia, ENN, with the support of the Government of Ethiopia (GoE), examined sub-national developments in relation to the Seqota Declaration, a commitment made by the GoE in 2015 to end stunting among children under the age of two by 2030. In Niger, ENN looked at the 'Commune de Convergence' (C2C) approach, which offers a promising example of how the Government of Niger and partner agencies can improve convergence and multi-sector collaboration by working through communes (the lowest level of governance in the country).

FAO/IFAD/WFP/Michael Tewelde



Food distribution in Gode woreda, Dolo Baad distribution centre

<sup>1</sup> [www.ennonline.net/nex/9/mspkenyanepalsenegal](http://www.ennonline.net/nex/9/mspkenyanepalsenegal)