



**Knowledge for Nutrition: National Information Platforms for
Nutrition (NIPN) Contribution Study**

Protocol Report

N4D

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1. Introduction

This protocol report follows the contract commencement of the National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) Contribution Study with Germany's Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). GIZ, in collaboration with Capacity for Nutrition (C4N), a technical facility established by the European Commission (EC) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), commissioned N4D to undertake this assignment. It describes the approach, methodology and key considerations to undertake this Contribution Study and comprehensively achieve the objectives set out in the assignment's Terms of Reference (ToR).

1.1. Introduction to the NIPN initiative

The NIPN initiative was launched by the European Union (EU) in 2014. It aims to strengthen the capacity of countries with a heavy undernutrition burden to make use of multisectoral nutrition data to inform nutrition policy and programme design. It provides support to countries to strengthen their information systems for nutrition and to improve the analysis of data to better inform the policy and strategic decisions they are faced with to prevent malnutrition and its consequence. Please see Section 2 for more detail on the NIPN initiative and its evolution.

1.2. Introduction to the Contribution Study

The objectives of this assignment are threefold:

1. To evaluate the performance of the NIPN Phase I.
2. To understand whether any changes are needed to NIPN's approach to inform future implementation.
3. To provide actionable recommendations that inform the future implementation.

The assignment will comprehensively assess the (1) **relevance**, (2) **coherence**, (3) **effectiveness**, (4) **impact** and (5) **sustainability** of NIPN Phase I to understand how far it has increased demand for data-driven policymaking on nutrition within its target countries. While an important element of this assignment links to accountability, assessing whether NIPN is achieving and contributing to stated outcomes, it is also crucially a learning exercise. As such, the methodology presented below includes opportunities and mechanisms that enable internal reflection and learning as well as learning for actors beyond NIPN. The N4D team will therefore seek to publish the findings of the study in a relevant journal to inform broader sectoral learning.

While the ToR initially requested for the study to focus on (1) achievement of outputs and (2) contribution to outcomes, we believe this is an artificial distinction for evaluative purposes. Instead, we have focused on whether NIPN has (1) achieved intended results and (2) the extent to which it has or can achieve indirect outcomes. Through the theory of change (ToC) workshop facilitated during the protocol development period by N4D for C4N-NIPN staff and subsequent discussion in Section 3, we have highlighted the need for the existing Phase 1 ToC to be revised and a stronger differentiation between the results (activities and direct outcomes) NIPN can be expected to achieve and the indirect outcomes NIPN can contribute to. Based on this analysis of the ToC and the discussion with key stakeholders, we believe this clarification to the scope of the study to assess the achievement of results and contribution to indirect outcomes will maximise the learning opportunities for NIPN at country and global levels.

The study questions and sub-questions that will be answered are:

1. **Relevance: How relevant is the NIPN approach in driving optimal policy and programme approaches to address malnutrition?**
 - a. How relevant is the operational and institutional approach of NIPN to achieve its stated aims and objectives?
 - b. To what extent does NIPN respond to current and emerging needs and priorities within countries and globally?
2. **Coherence: To what extent is NIPN coordinating and collaborating with relevant initiatives and actors to achieve results?**
 - a. How far does NIPN partner with initiatives and actors within countries to ensure multi-sectoral coordination and to avoid duplication?
 - b. To what extent has NIPN engaged with other relevant actors and initiatives to communicate its approach and results to establish credibility, influence and avoid duplication globally?
3. **Effectiveness: To what degree is NIPN achieving its results?**
 - a. To what extent has NIPN achieved its expected results at national and global levels?
 - b. What factors enabled or prohibited NIPN in achieving its expected results?
4. **Impact: To what extent have NIPN activities implemented in Phase 1 contributed to indirect outcomes?**
 - a. To what extent have NIPN activities and outputs contributed to improvements in countries' ability to track nutrition progress and report progress globally?
 - b. How far has NIPN findings and analysis influenced policymaking on multisectoral approaches to nutrition?
 - c. To what extent has political commitment to use nutrition data to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability increased due to NIPN?
 - d. Which factors have contributed to the achievement of outcomes, and what factors impeded the achievement of outcomes?
 - e. Are there any likely unanticipated longer-term effects of the NIPN project?
5. **Sustainability: To what extent will results be sustained to strengthen national capacities for evidence-based nutrition policy and programming?**
 - a. To what extent will capacity building activities be sustained?
 - b. What proportion of NIPN costs are provided to government and national institutions? What proportion of NIPN costs are covered by government budgets?
 - c. To what extent have countries increased investments in nutrition due to NIPN activities?
 - d. How far has NIPN considered an 'exit strategy' to enable sustainability?

As requested by C4N and the EU Delegation (EUD) in Bangladesh, the study will also include a specific review of the NIPN platform in Bangladesh to understand factors that led to its closure in February 2022. As such, the N4D team will integrate this review into the overall approach and methodology. The findings from the Bangladesh case study will inform the Contribution Study to highlight the enabling and prohibiting factors influencing the achievement of the initiative's outcomes. A separate shorter report will be made available, highlighting the findings regarding the conclusion of NIPN in Bangladesh in addition to the Contribution Study report.

1.3. Protocol report structure

For detail regarding the steps undertaken during the protocol development phase, please refer to Section 4.1. The rest of the protocol report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** provides a detailed overview of the NIPN initiative.

- **Section 3** presents NIPN's current ToC and an assessment of its limitations. A revised high-level ToC is provided which will be used as the basis of this evaluation.
- **Section 4** presents the evaluation approach, including the evaluation framework, which will be used to drive the methodology and analytical approaches throughout the evaluation.
- **Section 5** details the methodology that will be used to answer all evaluation questions. It also details the final countries to be included as deep-dive countries and the criteria that guided this selection process.
- **Section 6** presents an updated workplan for the evaluation.
- **Annex 1** details our alignment to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

2. National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) initiative

This section provides an overview of the development and evolution of the NIPN initiative. It details NIPN's approach and operational cycle.

2.1. Background and evolution

The NIPN initiative was launched in 2014 by the EU with the goal of supporting partner countries who are part of the global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement and are committed to deliver evidence-based programmes to improve human nutrition.¹ In 2015, NIPN became co-funded by the UK's former Department for International Development (DFID), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the European Commission (EC). Its initial objective was to "support countries in the SUN movement to strengthen their capacity to bring together existing information on nutritional status with information on factors that influence nutritional outcomes, including policies, programmes and investments, in order to track progress towards international global targets; to analyse data to understand better how malnutrition can be prevented; and to inform national policies and improve programmes."² The current mission statement of NIPN on its website states that it "provides support to countries to strengthen their information systems for nutrition and to improve the analysis of data so as to better inform the strategic decisions they are faced with to prevent malnutrition and its consequences". In the first phase, the initiative had a budget of €35 million over 2015-2022.

The EC initially used the Agrinatura network to provide overall coordination of the NIPN, who in turn contracted Agropolis International to implement the initiative. Agropolis International was therefore responsible for creating and hosting the Global Support Facility (GSF), tasked with developing the delivery framework and lead its implementation. The role of the GSF has evolved over time, but was originally intended to³:

- Coordinate the initiative between countries
- Support the design and establishment of each NIPN
- Design the analytical platform and support capacity building and technical assistance
- Link with the SUN movement and other initiatives to ensure coherence

An Expert Advisory Group (EAG) was also formed to provide technical guidance and advice throughout the project. It consists of 16 members from United Nations (UN) organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs), the SUN movement Secretariat and research institutions. It aims to represent different disciplines and sectors that can inform nutrition policymaking. The main role of the EAG when initially created was to⁴:

- Advise on the establishment of NIPNs and link with other initiatives and agencies
- Provide specialist technical advice and undertake critical reviews
- Provide links to networks of experts and identify technical consultants

In January 2020, the GSF moved out of Agropolis International and NIPN was integrated into the Joint-Action "Capacity for Development" (C4N). C4N aims at supporting the EC, BMZ and partner countries to increasingly strengthen evidence-based approaches and strategies for nutrition-related programming and policymaking. At EC level, C4N responds to the commitments from Nutrition for Development (N4D),⁵

¹ NIPN Annual Report, Global Support Facility, 2019.

² NIPN Inception Report, 2016.

³ NIPN Inception Report, 2016.

⁴ NIPN Inception Report, 2016.

⁵ Note that the EC level N4D is not the same as the organisation carrying out this work which is N4D Ltd.

which underpin the implementation of the EU “Action Plan for Nutrition” (APN). N4D is aligned with the three core strategic priorities identified in the APN. The specific objectives of N4D are⁶:

- (i) enhanced governance and accountability for nutrition at global, regional and national levels;
- (ii) sustained improvement in capacities that enable scaling up of effective, equitable and sustainable policy responses at global, regional and national levels; and
- (iii) uptake of improved knowledge and evidence informs nutrition policy development and implementation.

C4N-NIPN is now the global coordinator and provides global support to the NIPN initiative and its respective countries. Following the commencement of C4N’s role, NIPN consultants were hired to provide technical assistance and support to countries. While the GSF was enveloped into C4N, the EAG remained as a separate entity, under the coordination of C4N-NIPN.

2.2. NIPN approach and operational cycle

NIPN aims to be rooted within existing national institutions and multisectoral coordination systems for nutrition. From the analysis of available and shared data within each country, it generates evidence that is used by (sub-)national stakeholders for developing policy, designing programmes, and allocating investments, through the NIPN operational cycle. This consists of three elements that aim to constantly revolve and feed into each other:

- **Question** formulation based on government priorities;
- **Analysis** of data to inform the questions;
- **Communication** of the findings back to government.

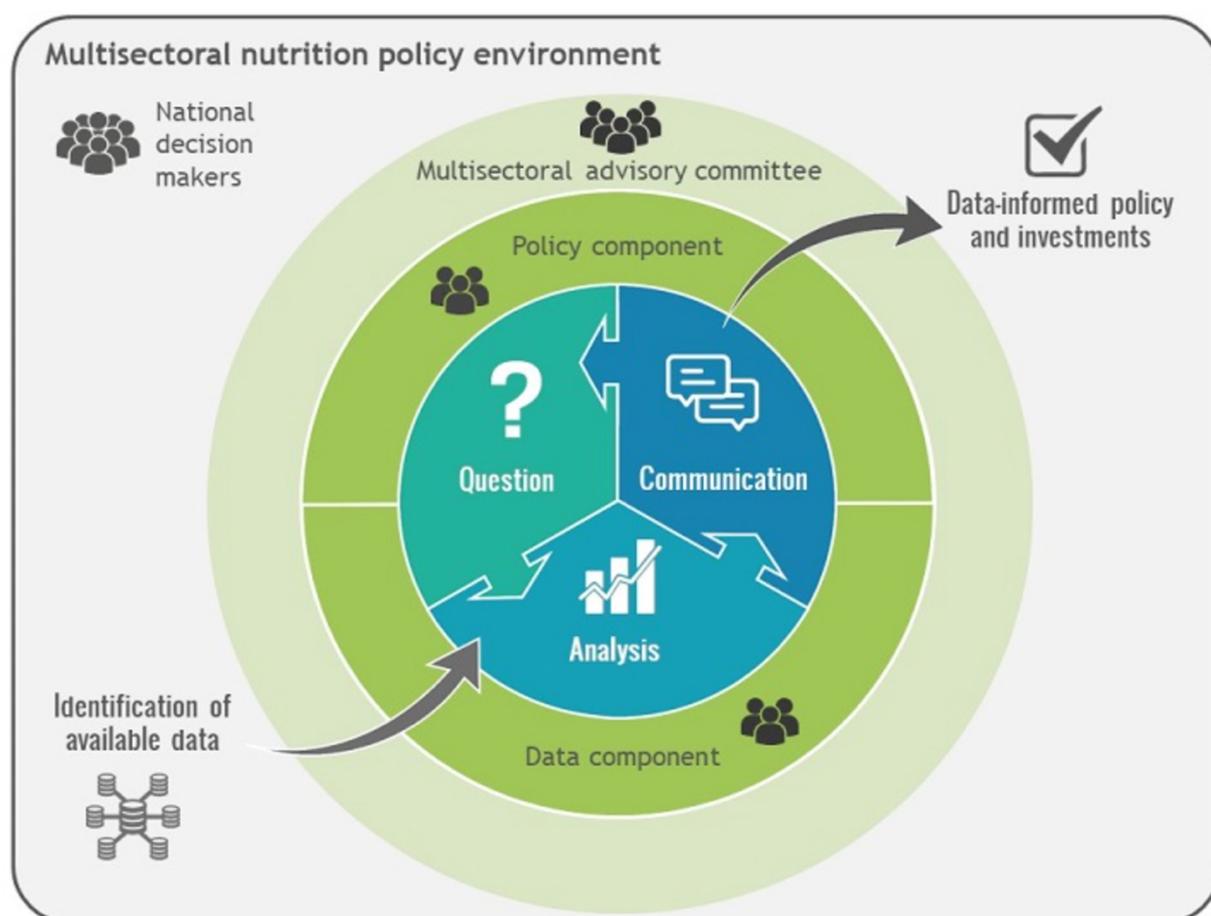
The NIPN operational cycle is supported by the national NIPN structure made up of:

- Actors within a **policy component** which convenes and facilitates a multisectoral advisory committee, playing a key role in policy question formulation, interpretation of the results of data analysis and communication of findings.
- Actors within a **data component** that collates multisectoral data in a central repository and analyses the data.

Both components are hosted by national organisations. The NIPN country team, comprising staff from the national host organisations, staff on contract and technical advisors, is embedded within these two components and is responsible for implementing the NIPN approach. The NIPN Multisectoral Advisory Committee (MAC) guides the country team, validates its work, and ensures information flows between NIPN and the national multisectoral mechanisms for nutrition. The below diagram represents NIPN’s approach and cyclical nature that aims to inform multisectoral policy and investments on nutrition.

⁶ NIPN Annual Report, C4N-NIPN Global Support, 2021.

Figure 1: NIPN's approach



Based on this approach, a results framework (RF) was developed that guides the operational cycle of the NIPN approach both nationally and globally. This approach was developed iteratively, which therefore changed the focus of the RF, building on experiences at national and global level. While this overview does not capture all of the developments and iterations, below we present the results framework that has been predominately used to capture results (note the R refers to the results areas in the RF):

- **R1:** National host entities have the capacity to operate and maintain the NIPN;
- **R2:** Countries track nutrition progress in meeting their national objectives on undernutrition reduction and in monitoring nutrition investments;
- **R3:** Countries are able to translate NIPN findings into nutrition related policies; and
- **R4:** GSF effectively established and providing technical support to NIPN countries, as well as effective global dialogue and coordination on data and information for nutrition

Specific to R4, which concerns the activities of the global coordination and technical assistance of NIPN (previously provided by GSF under Agropolis International and now C4N-NIPN), workstreams were created to guide subsequent reporting. The following workstreams were relevant to GSF under Agropolis:

- **R4.0:** Programme and Team management
- **R4.1a & R4.1b:** Technical assistance to support NIPN countries
- **R4.2a & R4.2b:** Communication (including annual NIPN meetings and other international events)
- **R4.3:** Coordination and strategic collaboration
- **R4.4:** Engagement with Expert Advisory Group

In 2018, following an external Mid-Term Review (MTR) commissioned by Agropolis International, a ToC was developed which integrated the above results areas and operational cycle within a logic model to guide the initiative and highlight underlying assumptions (Section 2.4). Following the MTR, the GSF proposed a revised RF which was believed to better capture progress towards achieving the goals of the NIPN programme. This also occurred at the time C4N-NIPN took responsibility for global coordination and programme management. The revised RF reframed the results areas as follows:

- **R1:** NIPN institutional framework is functional and capacitated
- **R2:** Countries implement NIPN operational cycle to track nutrition progress
- **R3:** Countries engage in a continuous policy dialogue facilitated by NIPN
- **R4:** GSF coordinates between countries, donors and global experts, provides support to countries, captures lessons learned and positions NIPN in global data-for-nutrition landscape
 - **R4.1:** Continued capacity development
 - **R4.2:** Intensive country support
 - **R4.3:** Capturing experience and lessons learnt
 - **R4.4:** Coordination, collaboration and facilitation
 - **R4.5:** Strengthen the global position of NIPN

While a revised RF was proposed in 2019, Quarterly Monitoring Reports are continuing to use the previous version to capture results.

2.3. Summary of findings from NIPN's Mid-Term Review

In this section we summarise the findings from the 2018 MTR conducted by Mokoro.⁷ While all the findings were not categorised by the following criteria, we have presented the findings in the below format for ease of linkages with the scope of this evaluation.

Relevance:

- There was widespread consensus at national and global levels that NIPN is relevant and important and has the potential to add value.
- The added value of NIPN is in compiling existing information from multiple sectors on a national information platform that is embedded within and builds upon existing national structures developing methods for analysis and reporting; providing evidence for policy and programming decisions; and supporting and strengthening cooperation among existing initiatives.
- NIPN responds to needs at the country-level and there are examples of specific country NIPNs being responsive to country contexts.
National statistic agencies are not necessarily the appropriate body for data analysis in all country contexts.

Effectiveness:

- Progress at the time of the MTR was largely limited to completion of set-up and progress on establishment of operational structures which took far longer than anticipated or planned. By July 2018, most countries had made progress in establishing operational NIPN structures, but only two countries were implementing activities.
- The degree of country ownership varied across countries and within countries. Evidence of ownership was stronger where the strategic lead of the NIPN was the institution mandated to coordinate on nutrition within the country.

⁷ With thanks to Mokoro for sharing the Mid-Term Review and relevant documentation with N4D. Mid-Term Review of the European Commission's National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) initiative, Final Review Report, October 2018, Mokoro, unpublished.

- The achievement of NIPN's outcome objective of 'Countries are able to translate NIPN findings into nutrition related policies' is likely to be very difficult to achieve.
- NIPNs' contribution to more efficient nutrition information systems was possible but was going to be dependent on addressing data quality and access, and complementarity challenges.
- Political and policy advice are important to help break down institutional and political economy barriers to effective NIPN processes.
- Technical assistance at the national level is important to support collaboration and capacity building efforts.
- Context is a critical influencing factor for the set-up and implementation of a NIPN at national level. The complex institutional landscape, inter-sectoral relationships, capacity and resource challenges and the political environment were all factors identified that could impact implementation.
- The institutional arrangements and functional coordination structures are critical for the success of NIPNs. The need for NIPN platforms at country level to be owned by country institutions was identified as crucially important.
- The GSF was not set-up with sufficient authority to impact set-up processes at national level.
- The GSF could not be held accountable for delays in contracting, as it was outside of its control, but stakeholders felt the GSF could have provided better support to the countries to progress timelines.
- Views were more negative on the GSF's individual country support since contract signature, with the exception of the global technical gathering, which was welcomed as a helpful exercise.
- Promotion of NIPN and ensuring its coherence with other global initiatives was not effectively undertaken.
- Many planned GSF outputs were only partially delivered, or not delivered at all.

Efficiency:

- Complex set-ups relating to the composition of the data and policy components may have created inefficiencies, particularly as NIPN coordination burden increased with such set-ups, which required strong leadership to function.
- Where NIPN platforms were attached to a high office at national level, institutional conflicts could be managed more efficiently.
- A joint project steering committee and dedicated project financial and management capacity assist transparency and effective management of the NIPN.
- The GSF was seen as too small and had insufficient capacity to provide the right support to countries during set-up phase.
- Additional support should have been provided by DEVCO C1 and Agrinatura to manage capacity and leadership issues within the GSF.
- Risk management of the GSF and achievement of GSF's objectives was weak.

Sustainability:

- NIPNs are likely to prove more sustainable where they build on existing systems and institutional arrangements, but the MTR was conducted too early to determine this clearly.
- Countries with high-level (political) support are more likely to sustain NIPNs.
- The data management component of NIPNs' work is more easily sustainable than the analytical component that leads into evidence-based policy.

Coherence:

- Country-level platforms were broadly coherent with the concept of the global initiative.

- NIPNs were generally coherent with national policy in the nutrition sector, but coherence with other initiatives was more problematic.
- Coherence with other international initiatives, such as SUN's monitoring and evaluation efforts, showed promise.
- The GSF's vision of NIPN was not fully coherent internally, or with experts within the EAG.
- Programme documentation did not support internal clarity or coherence relating to the design of NIPN, the priorities at country level or support implementation.

2.4. Development of NIPNs

Currently, there are eight NIPNs operational globally. Due to the various activities and long timeframe needed to set up a NIPN at country level, most country platforms only became functional between mid-2018 and mid-2019. The table below details the development and institutional arrangements of each NIPN platform targeted in Phase 1.

Table 1: Details of NIPN countries in Phase 1

Country	Duration of project set-up ⁸	Details
Niger	March 2016 (1st GSF mission) – October 2017 (19 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by the Secretariat of the presidential initiative "Les Nigériens nourrissent les Nigériens" (I3N). • NIPN data component is hosted by the Institut National de la Statistique (INS). • Technical assistance is provided by SOFRECO. • It is supported by the EUD and managed by INS.
Ethiopia	December 2015 (mission) – December 2017 (24 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy and data components are hosted by Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI). • Technical assistance is provided by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). • It is supported by the EUD and managed by EPHI.
Burkina Faso	April 2017 (GSF initial mission) – December 2017 (8 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by the Nutrition Directorate of the Ministry of Health. • NIPN data component is hosted by the National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD). • Technical assistance is provided by Agence Européenne pour le Développement et la Santé (AEDES) and ECORYS. • It is supported by the EUD and managed by INSD.
Guatemala	April 2017 (GSF consultant hired) – August 2017 (4 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by the Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security (SESAN). • NIPN data component is being implemented jointly with the SESAN of the Presidency of the Republic of Guatemala. • Technical assistance is provided by Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE). • It is supported by the EUD and managed by CATIE.

⁸ The period measured is from the first GSF assistance for set-up to the final contract signature. Mid-Term Review of the EC's NIPN initiative – Final Review Report, Mokoro, March 2018.

Côte d'Ivoire	January 2017 (GSF initial mission) – December 2017 (11 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy and data components are hosted by the Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food and Early Childhood Development (SE-CONNAPE). • UNICEF provides technical and programme assistance with the support from the EUD.
Kenya	February 2016 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (22 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA). • NIPN data component is hosted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). • UNICEF provides technical assistance. • It is supported by the EUD and managed by KNBS.
Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR)	March 2016 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (21 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by the National Institute for Economic Research (NIER) • NIPN data component is hosted by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Centre for Development Policy Research. • UNICEF provides technical and programme assistance, with support from the EUD.
Uganda	April 2016 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (18 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component is hosted by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). • NIPN data component is hosted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS). • UNICEF provides technical assistance. • OPM and the EUD provide management support.
Bangladesh	November 2015 (1st GSF mission) – December 2017 (25 months) The NIPN was closed in February 2022.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIPN policy component was initially hosted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies. • The NIPN data component was initially hosted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. • Technical assistance was provided by Helen Keller International.
Zambia	March 2017 (1st GSF mission) No NIPN established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) in Zambia identified as host organisation. • The NIPN platform in Zambia was not started due to lack of consensus between EUD and NIPN host institution. • GSF put engagement with Zambia on hold in April 2019 in agreement with DEVCO C1.⁹ Engagement has now restarted to scope out the possibility of establishing a NIPN in Zambia.
Mali	September 2018 (1st GSF mission) No NIPN established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scoping mission was undertaken to Mali upon request of the EUD. It was concluded a full NIPN in Mali would not be possible. • Considerations of a 'NIPN light' in Mali have been ongoing but political context has become a barrier.

⁹ NIPN Annual Report, C4N-NIPN Global Support, 2019.

3. NIPN Theory of Change

This section explains the programme objectives and expected results based on the initiative's current ToC, the N4D rationale for revising it and how this will support C4N-NIPN and the overall evaluation. It then outlines how the ToC could be enhanced before presenting the approach used to develop a revised ToC that will be further developed and tested during this evaluation.

3.1. Introduction and purpose

A key principle of theory-based evaluations is to identify the causal pathways between inputs and outputs, activities and outputs, outputs and direct outcomes and indirect outcomes and impact, helping to identify the processes that need to occur for changes to take place. This is usually represented in a visual ToC and accompanying narrative, with a Logical Framework (log frame) providing a more practical tool for implementers to manage progress through specific objectives and indicators of success.

During the protocol phase of this evaluation, we reviewed and made early refinements to the existing ToC for NIPN. This process enabled us to reflect with key stakeholders on whether the existing ToC is a useful tool to guide programme implementation and whether it adequately represents the objectives both at country and global levels. We will build on this process as evidence of results and outcomes are gathered throughout the evaluation, helping us to understand what the programme is achieving and why, the degree to which key aspects of the ToC do or do not hold true, and whether this was because of: a) false beliefs about causal pathways in the programme design (known as theory failure); b) aspects of programme implementation which were difficult in practice (implementation failure); or c) the influence of contextual factors underpinning causal pathways, such as political-economic factors and power structures.

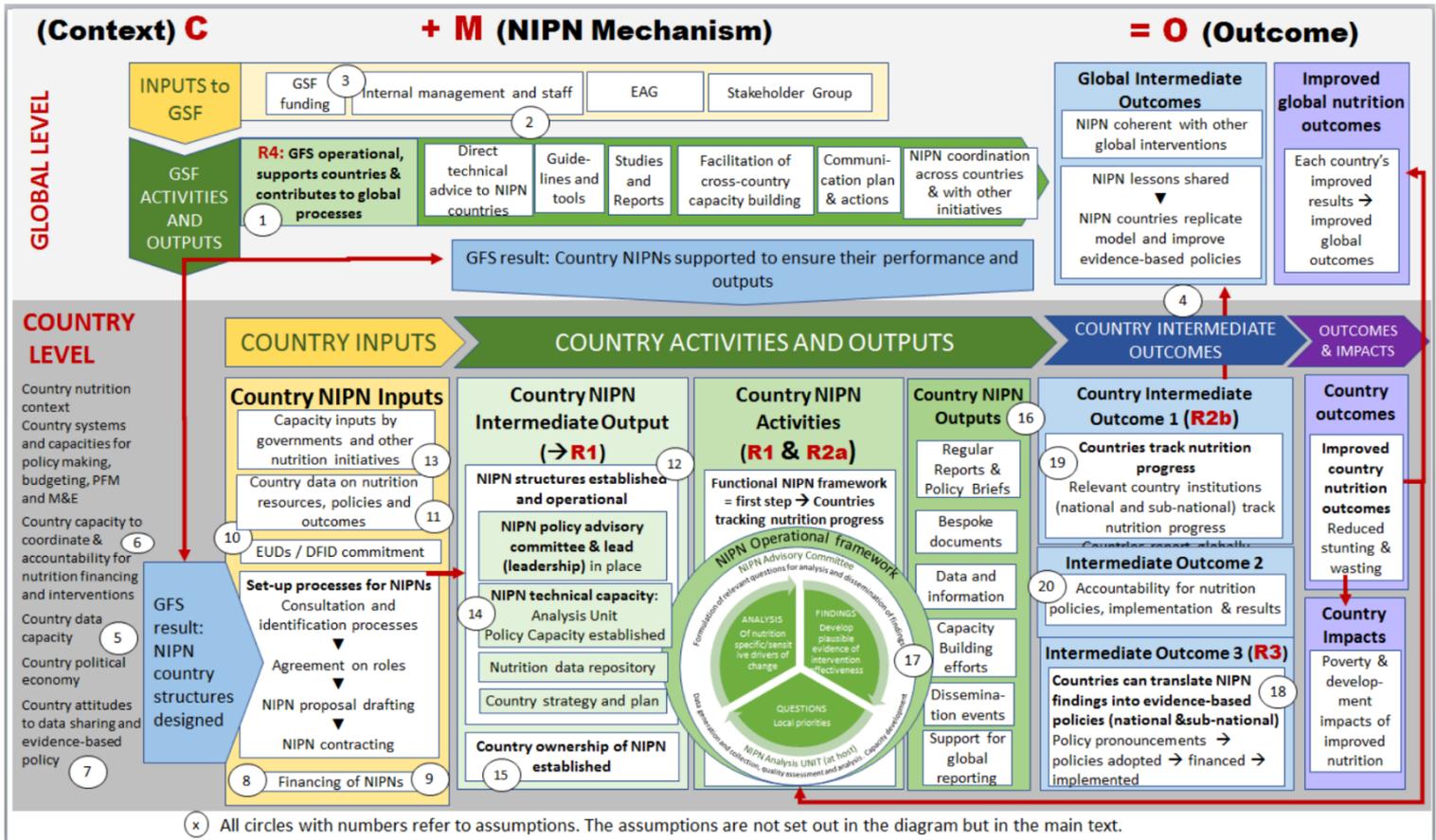
Refining the ToC has also been a critical first step in our Contribution Analysis approach, enabling us to form and evidence a 'contribution story' of how change happens and NIPN's specific contribution to this (see Section 4.5 for more on our evaluative approach). ToCs vary widely and although there is general agreement on their usefulness as models depicting how interventions should work, there is little consensus on what a ToC entails, how it should be represented or how it can be used. However, as a minimum a ToC should encompass the following:

- The context for the initiative, including social, political and environmental challenges, barriers, necessary pre-conditions and other actors that may influence change
- The long-term change the initiative seeks to support, and who will benefit from it
- The causal pathways that connect inputs to outputs and outputs to outcomes, thus creating the required conditions for desired long-term change
- Assumptions describing salient events or conditions necessary for a particular causal pathway to be realised. If an assumption does not hold true, then an expected effect may not occur.

3.2. NIPN's existing Theory of Change

NIPN seeks to strengthen the capacity of data analysts, information systems and policymakers to improve the analysis of data to inform multisectoral policies that aim to combat malnutrition. The ToC, developed by Mokoro during the MTR in 2018, below aims to represent how its objectives will be achieved and what causal assumptions need to hold true for successful implementation.

Figure 2: NIPN Theory of Change



The global results chain related to R4 of the NIPN design, which was previously led by the GSF and is now part of the scope under C4N-NIPN, is detailed in the top section of the diagram, while the NIPN country projects results chain – R1, R2 and R3 to which most of the global results chain is expected to contribute – is set out in the bottom half of the diagram.

The MTR team interpreted R2 as having two components that fit at different levels of the results chain. It argued that a functional NIPN (an output level result of the NIPN initiative) would represent a significant change in whether and how the country tracks nutrition progress (R2a). However, a functional NIPN would also contribute to broader progress in country institutions tracking nutrition, outside the direct activities and outputs of NIPN (R2b). The NIPN logical framework acknowledges this duality insofar as it sees strengthened capacities in the NIPN countries to monitor progress towards reduced undernutrition as an outcome of the intervention.

The position of the key assumptions of the NIPN initiative necessary for the results chain to materialise are indicated by circles on the diagram, with the assumption number displayed. The assumptions themselves have been copied in the table below.

Table 2: ToC assumptions

ToC position	Assumptions
GSF → NIPN projects → global results chain assumptions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> GSF is established promptly and operates for an appropriate period. GSF can attract and retain the right capacity to support country platforms and engage at the global level. GSF is well managed and manages resources well.

ToC position	Assumptions
	4. NIPN countries are willing for nutrition information to be shared amongst country-level stakeholders.
Country Context assumptions	5. Sufficient political will to tackle malnutrition. 6. There is sufficient leadership and coordination on nutrition issues to support agreement on NIPN arrangements / overcome inter-agency rivalries. 7. The country context for policy making, budgeting and programme implementation, as well as the overall institutional structure, is conducive to evidence-based policy making, particularly in nutrition.
Input and input → output assumptions	8. External support is of sufficient size, duration and ability to institutionalise the NIPN. 9. There is readiness to co-finance and eventually finance NIPN from country resources. 10. The EU and DFID country offices sustain interest in NIPNs long enough for them to be embedded and institutionalised in country systems and budgets. 11. Country data is available, including that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is a good cooperation and data sharing between NIPN stakeholders at country level, across sectors, including between the national and sub-national level; • there is sufficient country statistical capacity to produce or maintain the production of statistical datasets. 12. NIPNs are set up timeously to build and sustain momentum. 13. There is sufficient readiness and capacity of country government institutions and other nutrition initiatives to support NIPN project implementation. Government institutions make their own staff/resources available for NIPN implementation. 14. External policy and analysis advisors are competent and can work with counterparts building capacity. 15. TA does not hinder ownership and engagement of country actors in NIPN.
NIPN projects output and outputs → intermediate outcome assumptions	16. The various NIPN outputs are appropriately disseminated and made available at the right levels for decision-making to take place. 17. Governments are committed to support NIPN efforts towards updating nutrition related policies and dissemination of findings. 18. Key decision makers have the capacity or are willing to develop the capacity to use NIPN-generated analysis. 19. Countries maintain and update NIPN systems in the medium to long term. 20. Civil society and media have capacity to engage with nutrition information and opportunities / freedom to engage political leaders, policy makers and programme implementers on programme choices and implementation.

3.3. Possible enhancements to the existing Theory of Change

Informed by our consultations to date, including an internal ToC workshop conducted with key C4N-NIPN stakeholders, two possible ways of strengthening the country level ToC have been identified as described below. These possible amendments will be tested during this study and other amendments are likely to be identified, including how NIPN global support capacity contributes to country level activities, outputs and outcomes.

Use the terminology “direct” and “indirect” outcomes and more clearly distinguish between them to identify what NIPN is directly accountable for.

Direct outcomes are effects that are largely achievable by NIPN through its own activities and outputs. Indirect outcomes are ones that NIPN contributes to but cannot achieve on its own - rather, they require other stakeholders to be playing their roles.¹⁰ Clarifying direct outcomes will help NIPN to manage external expectations of what it can achieve on its own and where it needs to work in partnership with others in order to contribute to collective (indirect) outcomes. It will also help NIPN to measure its success, as well as prioritise and focus its activities and outputs on those that are most critical for achieving outcomes. Following the ToC workshop and a review of previous assessments of NIPN, the following emerged as possible, specific, measurable and achievable direct outcomes of NIPNs activities and outputs:

- A functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems
- Political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability for nutrition
- Strengthened institutional capacity to collect, analyse and communicate nutrition data and evidence
- Effective partnerships with other stakeholders to ensure that data and evidence are used to inform policies, investments and accountability for nutrition

The country intermediate outcomes and impacts in the current ToC could then be considered as indirect outcomes and impacts – we have provided edits to the wording of these under indirect outcomes in the revised ToC below. NIPN can contribute to create an enabling environment for evidence-based policies, tracking nutrition progress, strengthening accountability of nutrition policies and can help to increase political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence but cannot directly achieve these outcomes. The following are what we see as the indirect outcomes NIPN contributes to by creating an enabling environment through its direct outcomes:

- Countries track nutrition progress
- Nutrition data and analysis is used to inform multisectoral nutrition policymaking, implementation and accountability
- Evidence-based multisectoral policies are developed, financed and implemented
- Accountability for nutrition policies, implementation and results is strengthened

Clarify causal pathways, i.e. how activities will lead to outputs and how outputs will lead to direct outcomes.

The ToC should reflect intended causal pathways rather than NIPN's operational cycle in order to clarify causal pathways. The current ToC needs to describe what is needed for change to take place between each step. Furthermore, the ToC could be strengthened through further differentiation between:

- Institutional activities: activities that aim to build the institutional arrangements of the platform at national level
- Operational activities: activities that are part of the implementation of the platform
- Institutional outputs: the product/service created by institutional activities (for example policy advisory committees and steering committees)
- Operational outputs: the product/service created by operational activities (for example reports and policy briefs; nutrition data repository)

¹⁰ We have noted that direct outcomes are 'largely' achievable by NIPN as the contextual factors will likely have an important role in building capacity of stakeholders, which are outside of NIPN's control. Indirect outcomes require more engagement and collaboration with other stakeholders/initiatives to achieve and are logically not achievable solely by NIPN.

The diagram below presents a zero draft revised ToC relevant to the logical model of NIPN at country-level which will undergo further revision. In particular, we anticipate that the activities and outputs will undergo further elaboration and that the need for country-specific adaptation will become increasingly apparent and will be included at the end of the evaluation. We believe the ToC for C4N-NIPN global support is adequate and this will be adapted to integrate into the revised overall NIPN ToC at the end of the evaluation.

3.4. Revised Theory of Change

Figure 3: Revised NIPN Theory of Change

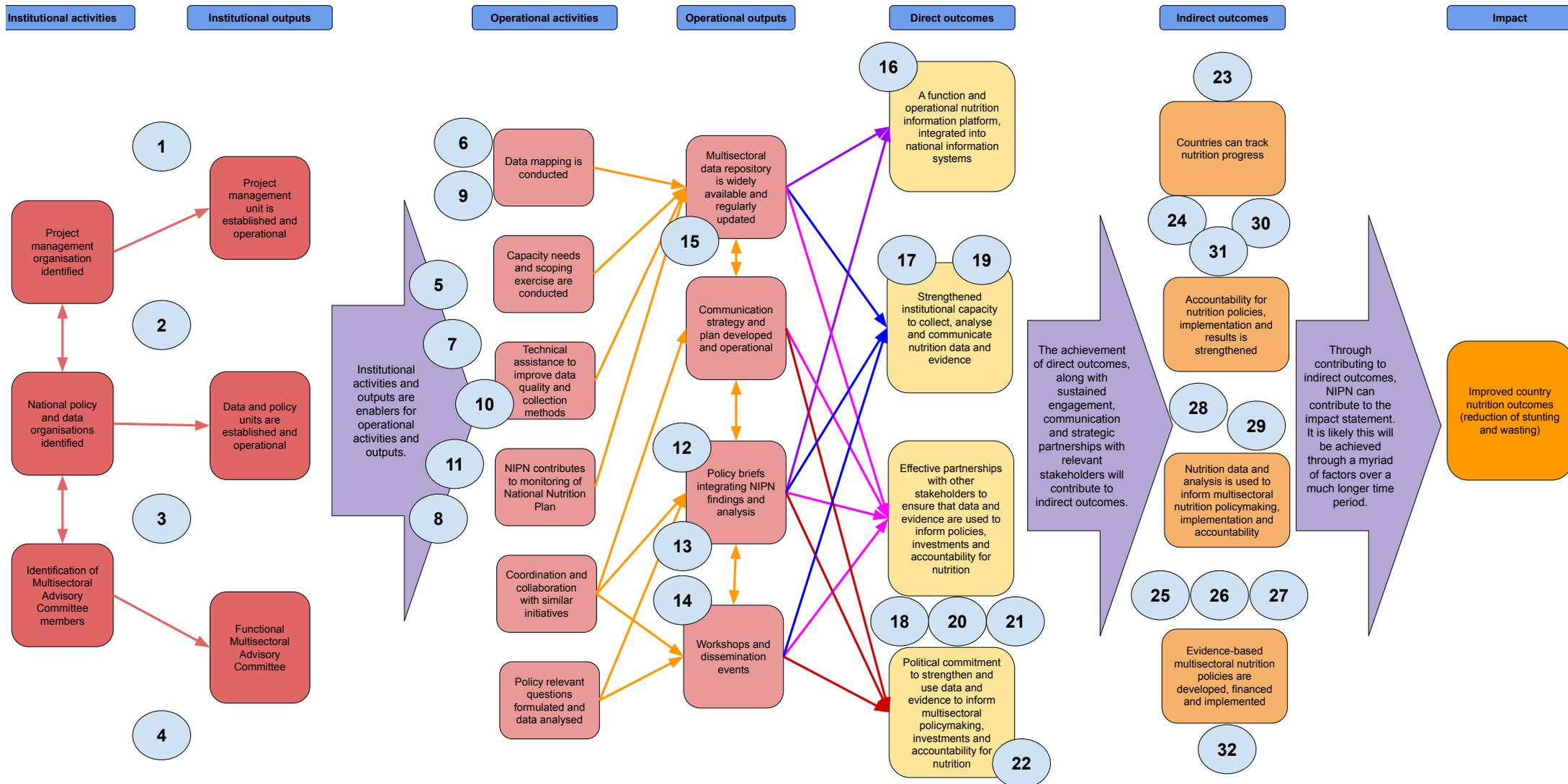


Table 3 provides further detail regarding potential causal assumptions between each level of the revised ToC. Each number in the table corresponds to the numbers in the ToC. These will be explored, investigated and further refined during the evaluation.

Table 3: Causal assumptions of revised ToC

ToC position	Assumptions
Institutional activities → institutional outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Countries have the willingness and pre-existing organisations/mechanisms to host a NIPN. 2. Donor support is leveraged to enable formation of institutional mechanisms/outputs. 3. Countries receive relevant and timely support from C4N-NIPN. 4. C4N-NIPN has ultimate authority and sign-off to enable institutional outputs/mechanisms to be formed.
Institutional outputs → operational activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. NIPNs are set up timeously to build and sustain momentum. 6. There is sufficient country statistical capacity to be included in NIPN units. 7. There is sufficient readiness and capacity of country government institutions and other nutrition initiatives to support NIPN project implementation. Government institutions make their own staff/resources available for NIPN implementation. 8. Leadership for the NIPN is identified within national structures and oversees the operational cycle. 9. Country data is available, and there is a good cooperation and data sharing between NIPN stakeholders at country level, across sectors, including between the national and sub-national level. 10. External policy and analysis advisors are competent and can work with counterparts building capacity. 11. TA does not hinder ownership and engagement of country actors in NIPN.
Operational activities → operational outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Leadership is provided to guide development of outputs. 13. NIPN actors have the capacity to generate outputs and are supported by C4N-NIPN where needed. 14. Partners and other stakeholders are willing to collaborate and engage with NIPN to generate joint analysis, reports and other outputs. 15. NIPN platform is able to monitor the progress of the National Nutrition Plan with pre-existing datasets.
Operational outputs → direct outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. The NIPN operational cycle has been completed and the platform is fully operational with leadership embedded within national structures. 17. NIPN outputs are relevant to the needs of stakeholders and have been communicated in a timely manner. 18. Stakeholders have an appetite to receive and use relevant analysis, data and evidence. 19. Stakeholders have resources to engage in capacity building activities. 20. NIPN actors build the capacity to engage with and facilitate other stakeholders and initiatives. 21. Stakeholders and initiatives have the appetite to collaborate and engage with NIPN actors. 22. Governments have the appetite to improve approaches to nutrition data and evidence and strengthen commitment to data-driven policymaking.
Direct outcomes → indirect outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 23. NIPN actors develop capacity and stay within NIPN structures to track nutrition progress. 24. Data repository is continuously updated to enable tracking of nutrition progress. 25. NIPN analysis, data and evidence has been clearly communicated in a timely manner at the right levels for decision-making to take place.

ToC position	Assumptions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 26. NIPN analysis, data and evidence is relevant and up to date to be used for policymaking. 27. NIPN has coordinated with other initiatives and has strong partnerships to catalyse political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence for policymaking. 28. Governments are committed to support NIPN efforts towards updating nutrition related policies and dissemination of findings. 29. Key decision makers have the capacity or are willing to develop the capacity to use NIPN-generated analysis. 30. Countries maintain and update NIPN systems in the medium to long term. 31. Civil society and media have capacity to engage with nutrition information and opportunities / freedom to engage political leaders, policy makers and programme implementers to strengthen accountability. 32. Governments have the financial resources for nutrition policies to be developed and implemented.

The causal assumptions behind the indirect outcomes to impact stage have deliberately not been articulated. This is due to the myriad factors that can influence and effect changes in population level nutritional status outcomes such as child stunting and wasting. As stated in literature, “effecting changes to nutritional outcomes can take a much longer timeframe which may be beyond the scope of a single programme.”¹¹ As such, it is important to conceptualise NIPN as an enabling actor that supports other catalysing actions that can lead to improved nutritional outcomes.

¹¹ Nutrition, for every child; UNICEF Nutrition Strategy, 2020-2030, UNICEF, [link](#).

4. Evaluation approach and framework

In this section we present our overarching methodological approach for this study, followed by the evaluation framework. The ToR for the assignment originally had two distinct objectives: to assess the performance of NIPN Phase 1 by focusing on achievement of outputs and to assess the contribution of the programme. Following a review of the ToC, Results Framework (RF) and initial consultations with stakeholders, we believe that the scope could be strengthened with a clearer differentiation between assessing the achievement of intended results (outputs and direct outcomes) and NIPN's contribution to indirect outcomes. This will enable the enhancements to the ToC to be central to the evaluative approach. We are committed to ensuring the Contribution Study is a learning exercise for NIPN and believe this slight shift in focus will enable NIPN to reflect on the enabling and prohibiting factors that lead to the achievement of direct and indirect outcomes, as well as being a useful accountability exercise. This section also includes the approach to the Bangladesh review, which will be integrated into the stages of the methodology.

4.1. Evaluation purpose and scope

The evaluation will assess the performance of Phase 1 of NIPN between 2016 to 2021 across all target countries (achievement of outputs and direct outcomes) and its potential contribution to indirect outcomes. Based on a comprehensive assessment of performance, actionable recommendations to inform the set up and implementation of NIPN Phase 2 and potentially Phase 3, as well as help inform strategic design and provide lessons for other relevant initiatives. The findings and lessons learnt will be communicated more broadly, possibly through a presentation at the NIPN Global Gathering in 2023 (virtually or in person depending on timing and resources) and through publication of findings in a relevant journal.

4.2. Evaluation questions and approach

The NIPN initiative - in its original design - is a multifaceted programme that aims to achieve several different outcomes: influencing multisectoral policy on nutrition; developing capacity of researchers and policymakers to track nutrition progress; increasing the demand for data-driven policymaking and ultimately, to improve nutrition outcomes. However, as highlighted in Section 3.3, the previous iteration of the programme logic as represented by the ToC is an outdated depiction of the operational model or intended results at national level. The inclusion of revised direct and indirect outcomes in the revised ToC provides a helpful clarification of what NIPN aims to achieve directly, while also including outcomes that NIPN will contribute to. This revised ToC will be the basis of our evaluation.

As the aims of this assignment focus on assessing the performance of NIPN Phase 1 and its contribution to indirect outcomes, we will use a theory-based approach. Theory-based approaches use explicit theories of change to gather evidence and draw conclusions about whether and how an intervention has contributed to observed results, whether these are in line with anticipated results and the key factors influencing this. We see all the evaluation objectives as interconnected, tied together by the revised ToC, which will be used as the basis to conduct the evaluation. We will assess the extent to which NIPN Phase 1 achieved its stated activities and outputs and whether any unintended results arose. We will also investigate how far activities achieved direct outcomes and contributed to indirect outcomes as stated in the revised ToC and assess whether any evidence highlights that NIPN has contributed to outcomes in the previous iteration of the ToC. This will support strengthening the NIPN initiative following the findings of the evaluation.

We propose to use the evaluation framework (Section 4.5) below as a basis for the assignment. To ensure a comprehensive assessment of NIPN performance and to assess the extent to which NIPN has or can contribute to direct and indirect outcomes, we will draw on data from all NIPN countries. We will firstly assess how far all NIPN countries have achieved target activities, outputs and direct outcomes during Phase 1. We will then delve further into three country case studies to understand how far NIPN activities contributed to indirect outcomes. We will include the global support provided by C4N-NIPN as a key area of interest to assess how far this mechanism has enabled countries to achieve its results and contribute to direct and indirect outcomes.

We have organised the main research questions (including the NIPN-C4N framing questions identified in the study ToR and questions relevant to Bangladesh) by the overarching categories of (1) **relevance**; (2) **coherence**; (3) **effectiveness**; (4) **impact** and (5) **sustainability** in line with the OECD-DAC definitions for these criteria.¹² We have added a coherence question since the application stage as this will enable a richer assessment of how NIPN platforms have coordinated and collaborated with other national actors and initiatives to achieve stated objectives. The relevance question has been reframed to focus on the design and approach of the NIPN initiative and how far this is relevant to achieve its stated objectives. In addition, we have chosen to include an ‘impact’ question, which focuses specifically on whether NIPN has contributed to indirect outcomes. The ‘effectiveness’ question will highlight the extent to which outputs and direct outcomes have been achieved.

Below we present the methodological approach that will be used. The evaluation framework (Section 4.5) provides an overview of how these approaches will be used for each evaluation question.

4.3. Approaches to measure results (activities, outputs and direct outcomes)

To evaluate the results of NIPN Phase 1, we will focus on assessing how far expected results have been achieved. We will evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, coherence and sustainability of NIPN’s results. In relation to relevance, we will assess whether the design and approach of the initiative is fit-for-purpose to achieve its stated aims and objectives. We will also assess whether the activities, outputs and direct outcomes of the initiative have been achieved across all countries during NIPN Phase 1 i.e. the effectiveness of NIPN. To comprehensively assess this, we will draw on internal monitoring data and existing assessments that detail the performance of NIPN Phase 1. We will then triangulate this with data from key informant interviews (KIIs) that will highlight how far each country achieved intended results.

In addition to focusing on assessing the relevance and performance of NIPN, both at global and national levels, we will also assess coherence i.e. how far NIPN has coordinated and collaborated with other relevant initiatives and actors. We will assess how NIPN partners with initiatives and actors within countries and how NIPN has advocated for data-driven multisectoral policymaking on nutrition globally. We will also include an assessment of whether achieved results will be sustained.

Specific to the Bangladesh review, we will assess the efficiency of the platform. We will assess whether financial and human resources were sufficient (quantity) and adequate (quality) to achieve stated objectives.

As NIPN aims to strengthen the institutional capacity of host organisations, as well as the collaborative capacity to enable multisectoral partnerships, we will draw on the World Bank’s Intermediate Capacity

¹² *Evaluation Criteria*, OECD Development Cooperation Directorate, [link](#).

Outcome (ICO) framework¹³ to measure the types of capacity being developed. Within this approach, the World Bank highlights that real capacity change can only be achieved if ‘change agents’ (individual stakeholders or host organisations) influence, manage and initiate the change process. Their ability to do so is defined by six areas of Intermediate Capacity Outcomes (ICOs).

Using the ICO framework (see Table 4 below) allows us to assess not only capacity of host organisations, but also whether individuals engaged in NIPN have developed capacity because of activities. It provides a comprehensive, multi-layered conception of capacity that allows for an understanding of ‘building’ the capacity of others (i.e. sustainably transferring or institutionalising skills, knowledge and achievements within a host organisation, building responsibilities for key staff to take initiatives forward and deliver on objectives) rather than just ‘providing’ capacity (e.g. seconding experts or consultants to carry out work). The ICOs will enable us to measure how capacity is being used and applied by individuals and host organisations (for instance, through individuals and host organisations working together to operationalise new policies or roll out new data systems).

The ICOs represent a strong sub-framework for assessing intermediate capacity changes and measure: 1) **Raised awareness** (which also includes attitude, confidence, motivation); 2) **Enhanced knowledge and skills**; 3) **Increased implementation know-how** (factors that control or influence the ability to put into practice learning or skills); 4) **Improved consensus and teamwork** (which includes factors such as communication, coordination, cohesion and contributions by individuals and groups); 5) **Strengthened coalitions** (improved collaboration between individuals or groups that share a common agenda, such as within an organisation), and 6) **Strengthened networks** (improved collaboration between individuals or groups that do not necessarily share a common agenda, such as different organisations in a network). For this study, we will also include a seventh ICO to assess the extent to which 7) **Leadership** capacity has been developed as a result of NIPN activities and outputs. The previous MTR identified this as critical to enable performance and thus is critical to include within this framework. The table below provides additional detail for each of the ICOs we will examine, which will be embedded in our evaluation framework to allow a light-touch assessment of how far ICOs have been achieved.

Table 4: World Bank ICO definitions

ICO	Definition and Operational Attributes
Raised awareness	<i>Increased disposition to act, through, for example, improved: Understanding, attitude, confidence, or motivation</i>
Enhanced knowledge and skills	<i>Increased ability to act, through: Acquisition or application of new knowledge and skills</i>
Improved consensus and teamwork	<i>Strengthened disposition or ability to act through improved collaboration within a group of people tied by a common task. This may involve for example, among team members, a stronger agreement or improved: Communication, coordination, cohesion, or contributions by the team members to the common task</i>
Strengthened coalitions	<i>Strengthened disposition or ability to act through improved collaboration between individuals or groups with diverse objectives to advance a common agenda. This may involve, for example: Stronger agreement on a common agenda for action, increased commitment to act, improved trust among members, or improved ability of the coalition members to leverage their diverse strengths</i>
Enhanced networks	<i>Strengthened disposition or ability to act through improved collaboration between individuals or groups with a common interest but not a formal common agenda for action. This may involve, for example: Improved processes for collaboration, stronger incentives for participation in the network, or increased traffic or communication among network members</i>
Increased implementation know-how	<i>Strengthened disposition or ability to act, arising from: Formulation or implementation of policies, strategies, or plans This may involve, for example, discovery and innovation associated with learning by doing.</i>

¹³ *Guide to Evaluating Capacity Development Results: A Collection of Guidance Notes to Help Development Practitioners and Evaluators Assess Capacity Development Efforts*, World Bank (2012), [link](#).

4.4. Approaches to measure contribution to direct and indirect outcomes

While NIPN is engaging in capacity building activities to strengthen institutional and collaborative capacity, it is also seeking to inform policymaking and create a broader demand for increased data and evidence. The causal pathways that lead to these longer-term outcomes are complex and myriad, involving numerous interactions, stakeholders and factors that are often outside the control of one programme. Therefore, assessing and measuring the contribution of the activities of one initiative to these longer-term, collective outcomes is difficult.

The lack of metrics available to judge the success of capacity building programmes and the lack of consensus regarding what data is adequate to build an evaluative approach to assessing capacity building programmes is an additional challenge for evaluations that seek to identify causality from activities. In relation to NIPN, and as highlighted in Section 3.4, measuring the platform's influence on policymaking can only be done through a subjective (albeit triangulated approach) understanding of the interactions between data analysts, data repositories and policymakers at national and sub-national levels.¹⁴ It is very difficult to collect relevant data in relation to NIPN's current stated outcomes due to its focus on capacity building and how these capacity building interactions result in increased demand for data to inform policymaking.¹⁵

Given these challenges, it is useful to move beyond understanding the causal pathways in terms of a linear trajectory, but to focus on what happens in the process of knowledge production, and the role of different stakeholders.¹⁶ This will enable an understanding of *how* policy influence is or can be achieved, rather than focusing on whether it *has* been achieved, supporting strategic learning internally.

Borrowing terminology from Sapeen and van Drooge (2011), we will identify and investigate the 'productive interactions' between stakeholders that contribute to indirect outcomes. We will investigate interactions and exchanges between NIPN and associated data analysts and researchers and other stakeholders (namely policymakers). We will apply Sapeen and van Drooge's definition of a productive interaction to identify how NIPN can impact policy and increase the demand for data: "An interaction is productive when it leads to efforts by stakeholders to somehow use or apply research results or practical information or experiences. Social and policy impacts of knowledge are behavioural changes that happen because of this knowledge".¹⁷

Through using this framework, we can differentiate between three types of productive interactions¹⁸:

- **Direct interactions:** 'personal' interactions involving direct contacts between humans, such as interactions that revolve around face-to-face encounters.
- **Indirect interactions:** interactions that are through a material 'carrier', for example through reading a policy brief or analysis (interaction between the target audience and an output).
- **Financial interactions:** when stakeholders engage in an economic exchange, for example, a research contract, a financial contribution, or a contribution 'in kind' to develop analysis and policies.

¹⁴ Frongilo, E. A. and Escobar-Algeria, J. L. (2021) 'Advancing Use of Nutrition Knowledge to Improve Practice by Policy and Program Communities in India During a Political Transition', *Current Developments in Nutrition*, [link](#).

¹⁵ In more traditional research initiatives, where a team of researchers produces findings that is disseminated directly to policymakers, quantitative data can often be found through citation tracking. While there are some limitations with this, it is possible to highlight the extent that a research output directly influenced a policy.

¹⁶ Sapeen, J. and van Drooge, L. (2011) 'Introducing 'productive interactions' in social impact assessment', *Research Evaluation*, 20(3), [link](#).

¹⁷ Sapeen, J. and van Drooge, L. (2011) 'Introducing 'productive interactions' in social impact assessment', *Research Evaluation*, 20(3), [link](#).

¹⁸ Sapeen, J. and van Drooge, L. (2011) 'Introducing 'productive interactions' in social impact assessment', *Research Evaluation*, 20(3), [link](#).

These three types of ‘productive interactions’ can be seen as intermediate indications of de facto contribution. These indications refer to contributions and uptake by data analysts, researchers and stakeholders and can be used to understand what the interaction was used for and serve as proxy for impact.

As there are several difficulties with attributing cause and effect to specific programme activities, we will use Contribution Analysis (CA) as the main evaluative method. CA will enable us to focus on how direct and indirect outcomes can be achieved, as well as assess whether there is any evidence to suggest NIPN activities have contributed to outcomes. CA is theory-based approach designed to increase clarity about the contribution of the programme by building understanding of:

1. why observed changes have occurred
2. the role played by the programme and
3. any other internal or external factors in creating this change.

This approach is particularly well-suited for this assignment as it supports the development of evidence-based recommendations to deliver NIPN’s ToC moving forward. CA is particularly useful to understand how far activities and outputs contribute to the direct and indirect outcomes vis-à-vis other factors. Typically, there are six steps to completing CA in an evaluation.¹⁹ Practically, these six steps will be integrated into our research process as follows:

1. Set out the attribution problem to be addressed

This step involves identifying the key outcomes that the NIPN initiative intends to improve or change, with a clear accompanying rationale. This was discussed in the ToC workshop and is captured in supporting narrative in Section 3.

2. Develop a Theory of Change and outline risks to it

The second step outlines the logic of the initiative and how it expects to realise the outcomes identified in Step 1. This should identify the main factors that are supposed to account for observed outcomes in a systematic way, including barriers to implementation, prominent risks, external factors and causal pathway assumptions. Our ToC developed with relevant stakeholders in the ToC workshop sets out causal pathway and assumptions that, if not verified, could undermine the intervention’s ability to realise desired outcomes.

3. Gather existing evidence against the Theory of Change

The third step involves the systematic mapping of existing evidence against various components of the ToC. We will collate relevant evidence from the desk-based review, initial interviews with NIPN stakeholders and government stakeholders, and use these to identify evidence of outcomes, test the validity of assumptions and highlight other significant factors that have had an influence on results.

4. Assemble and assess the contribution story, and challenges to it

Once the initial data has been collected, we will start to build a contribution story through additional KIs during the data collection phase to strengthen our assessment of which contributing factors have led to observed outcomes. This will support our overall assessment of whether the causal pathways in the ToC are reasonable. We will do this through:

- Developing a contribution matrix with judgement criteria that assesses the strength of evidence behind each contribution related to an outcome

¹⁹ Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect, Mayne, J., [link](#).

- Testing the strength of the ToC causal links, how credible the story illustrated by the ToC is and identify the main weaknesses
- Where there is not enough information to make a judgement, we will record and signal these gaps for further investigation

Please refer to Section 5.3 of the methodology for further detail regarding the analysis of the contribution matrix to answer the impact question.

5. Seek out additional evidence

The fifth step ensures that the contribution story is developed and strengthened through in-depth analysis. We will identify three deep-dive country case studies where we will undertake fieldwork and in-depth KILs to assess how far NIPN activities have contributed to outcomes. This will be an opportunity for stakeholders to validate, verify or challenge the initial contribution story. We will also ensure any additional evidence that is needed to build the contribution story is collected throughout these three deep-dive case studies. Data and analysis from the country case studies will be integrated into the overall assessment of the NIPN initiative.²⁰

6. Revise and strengthen contribution story

Following the country visits, we will incorporate new evidence to the contribution matrix and develop a comprehensive contribution analysis against the key objectives, causal pathway assumptions and outcomes identified at the start of the review. We will use the finalised contribution matrix to structure the findings for questions relating to effectiveness. This final stage will structure our final report and support in developing recommendations.

4.5. Evaluation framework

The evaluation framework is presented in Table 5 below and highlights key research questions, research areas and our proposed methodological approach and data collection methods. More detailed questions will be developed for data collection tools and frameworks based on this overarching evaluation framework.

²⁰ Country case studies will not be delivered as separate outputs with the exception of Bangladesh. The EU Delegation in Bangladesh has requested a short report on the development and conclusion of its NIPN platform.

Table 5: Evaluation Framework

Research question	Judgement criteria/indicator	Evidence sources and approach
1. Relevance: How relevant is the NIPN approach in driving optimal policy and programme approaches to address malnutrition?		
1a. How relevant is the operational and institutional approach of NIPN to achieve its stated aims and objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far the theory of change, technical guidance and operational documents enable countries to establish platforms and achieve objectives • Evidence of target stakeholders believing design and approach enables the achievement of objectives • Evidence of different institutional arrangements influencing achievement of objectives • Evidence of changes, adaptations and learning from original approach which has enabled achievement of objectives • Evidence of assessments of risk to NIPN progress and mitigation strategies put in place 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN concepts and activities, such as ToC data landscape analysis and annual reports.</p> <p>Primary data: Key informant interviews (KIIs) with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p>
1b. To what extent does NIPN respond to current and emerging needs and priorities within countries and globally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of context analysis and needs assessment to inform adaptations to NIPN approach and design and whether this is happening periodically to inform further adaptations • Evidence that target stakeholders within countries and globally believe NIPN approach and design responds to their needs and priorities • Evidence that target stakeholders have informed the design and approach of NIPN at country level • Evidence that national NIPN platforms align with nutrition data and policy needs and priorities 	<p>Approach: Assessment of the relevance of NIPN design at country and global levels to meet needs of target stakeholders and to meet the aims and objectives of the initiative.</p>
2. Coherence: To what extent is NIPN coordinating and collaborating with relevant initiatives and actors to achieve results?		
2a. How far does NIPN partner with initiatives and actors within countries to ensure multi-sectoral coordination and to avoid duplication?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of relevant initiatives and actors within each case study country • Evidence of NIPN engaging and coordinating with relevant actors and established technical and policy focussed coordination initiatives • Evidence of newly established Policy Advisory Committees or equivalent to coordinate the prioritisation of nutrition related policy needs • Evidence of broader stakeholders in countries agreeing NIPN adequately coordinates with relevant actors and initiatives and avoids duplication • Evidence of partnership/coordination strategies and planning at country level • Evidence of coordination and collaboration leading to specific outputs/events 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN concepts and activities, such as ToC, data landscape analysis, annual reviews.</p> <p>Primary data: Key informant interviews (KIIs) with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p>
2b. To what extent has NIPN engaged with other relevant actors and initiatives to communicate its approach and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far global level coordination has a focus on partnerships • Evidence of NIPN having mapped global partners and initiatives • Evidence of partnership and communication strategy and plans • Evidence of NIPN engaging in and informing global events 	<p>Approach: Assessment of coherence of NIPN at country and global levels to enable collaboration and partnerships with relevant actors.</p>

<p>results to establish credibility, influence and avoid duplication globally?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of NIPN using data and policy relevant analysis to inform global debates/discussion • Evidence of NIPN using approach, data and analysis to advocate for strengthening multi-sectoral approaches to malnutrition • Extent to which stakeholders believe NIPN adds value globally • Evidence of coordination and partnership activities seeking to avoid duplication at global level 	
<p>3. Effectiveness: To what degree is NIPN achieving its results?</p>		
<p>3a. To what extent has NIPN achieved its expected results at national and global levels?</p>	<p>A functional and operational nutrition information platform, integrated into wider national information systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of project management, policy and data analysis units are fully operational • Evidence NIPN structure is embedded within government institutions with relevant mandates to action objectives of the platform • Evidence NIPN is embedded in the existing multi-sectoral committee and has capacity to guide platform • Evidence of NIPN leadership provided by national institutions/mechanism • Evidence data landscape assessment has been completed and is regularly updated • Evidence that countries have progressed with policy question formulation plans • Evidence that policy questions were formulated so they can be answered using existing quantitative data and available capacity • Assessment of policy questions that were not or could not be progressed and reasons for this, e.g. lack of data • Evidence of policy-relevant outputs being produced and communicated to stakeholders in a timely manner <p>Strengthened institutional capacity to collect, analyse and communicate nutrition data and evidence, integrated into wider national information systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development plan is developed • Evidence that target stakeholders informed the capacity development plan • Evidence that target stakeholders agree main capacity gaps have been captured • Evidence that actions were created to address capacity gaps and are being implemented 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of existing monitoring data on NIPN performance, logical frameworks, annual reviews, strategic documents and evaluations and assessments.</p> <p>Primary data: KIIs with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p> <p>Approach: Assessment of the extent to which NIPN has achieved its desired results across all countries through triangulation of monitoring data with KIIs at global and country levels, with a focus on identifying factors that enable/prohibit success.</p> <p>ICO framework to assess types of capacity being developed. 'Productive interactions' framework to see how NIPN actors are engaging with stakeholders.</p> <p>Contribution Analysis in three country case studies to assess how far NIPN activities have contributed to direct outcomes (e.g. how activities have developed institutional capacity).</p>

- Evidence of host individuals and organisations demonstrating improvements in line with ICO dimensions (e.g. operationalising skills and expertise) and NIPN having contributed to these changes

Effective partnerships with other stakeholders to ensure that data and evidence are used to inform policies, investments and accountability for nutrition

- Capacity development plan is developed
- Evidence of collaboration/communication plan to engage with relevant stakeholders and initiatives
- Evidence of the different types of 'productive interactions' and whether these have increased due to NIPN activities
- Evidence that stakeholders see NIPN as adding value and regard NIPN as a strategic partner

Political commitment to strengthen and use data and evidence to inform multisectoral policymaking, investments and accountability for nutrition

- Evidence of policymakers advocating for data-driven policy design
- Assessment that the right data is harnessed and analysed to deliver high quality outputs to inform policy dialogue
- Evidence of new or scaled up programming as a result of NIPN analysis
- Evidence of NIPN data informing monitoring and evaluation of national nutrition plans
- Evidence of coordination between NIPN platforms and national nutrition entities with oversight of policies and plans adapting due to NIPN
- Evidence of public commitments to strengthen and use data and evidence to inform policymaking (for example through SUN knowledge management and learning processes)
- Evidence of previous commitments being updated and revised with a focus on the importance of data and evidence

GSF coordinates between countries, donors and global experts, provides support to countries, captures lessons learned and positions NIPN in global data-for-nutrition landscape

- Evidence of facilitation of cross-country learning
- Evidence of engagement at global level with relevant partners and global nutrition ecosystem (see evaluation question 2b)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of relevant, timely and adequate technical assistance provided to countries based on assessment of their needs • Evidence of Expert Advisory Group being sufficiently engaged and supported to provide timely and appropriate expert advice 	
<p>3b. What factors enabled or prohibited NIPN in achieving its expected results?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors influencing the achievement of results • Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors prohibiting the achievement of results 	
<p>4. Impact: To what extent have NIPN activities implemented in Phase 1 contributed to indirect outcomes?</p>		
<p>4a. To what extent have NIPN activities and outputs contributed to improvements in countries' ability to track nutrition progress and report progress globally?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of increased in-country capacity to track nutrition progress through national and domestic human resources/capacity • Assessment from national stakeholders that capacity to track nutrition progress has increased since the implementation of NIPN Phase 1 • Improvements in nutrition tracking data in GNR and other equivalent initiatives for NIPN countries • Evidence of challenges in contributing to improvements in ability to use and analyse data to track nutrition progress 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN's performance, existing financing data for country case studies, data on stunting and wasting (and possibly other data if available on other forms of undernutrition) within countries and information on nutrition-related policies in countries since establishment of NIPN.</p>
<p>4b. How far has NIPN findings and analysis influenced evidence-based policymaking multisectoral policymaking and investments on nutrition?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of the different types of 'productive interactions' created due to NIPN activities and whether they have contributed to increase in policymaking • Evidence that analysis provided credible causal claims leading to nutrition policy decisions • Evidence that policymakers regularly use NIPN data to inform policy outputs and discussions (references in advocacy pieces, policy briefs, speeches etc) • Evidence of humanitarian programmes/activity informed by NIPN • Evidence of sustained and meaningful engagement between data analysts and policymakers (regular meetings, coordination, involvement in working groups etc) • Has the country MSNAP been modified as a result of NIPN analysis? • Evidence that data and analysis generated informs policies focused on gender and youth considerations (i.e. nutritional challenges for boys, adolescent girls and females of childbearing age and associated policies/interventions) 	<p>Primary data: KIIs with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as civil society representatives and government stakeholders.</p> <p>Approach: Contribution Analysis in three country case studies to assess how far NIPN activities have contributed to indirect outcomes vis-à-vis other relevant contributory factors. 'Productive interactions' framework to assess how far interactions have enabled data and evidence to inform policymaking.</p>
<p>4c. To what extent has NIPN enabled an increase in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of data curated and analysed by the platform and accessible on the country dashboard: 	

<p>stakeholders using nutrition data and analysis to inform multisectoral nutrition policymaking, implementation and accountability?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Population survey data (MICS, DHS, Agriculture, Household budget surveys etc) ○ Nutrition sentinel, cross sectional or monitoring data ○ Routine programme data ○ Financial allocations and expenditure data for nutrition ● Assessment of how relevant the data and evidence generated by NIPN is to stakeholders ● Assessment of how timely collaboration with other stakeholders has been to disseminate data and evidence ● Evidence of sustained and meaningful engagement between data analysts and policymakers (regular meetings, coordination, involvement in working groups etc) 	
<p>4c. To what extent has NIPN contributed to increased accountability for nutrition policies, implementation and results?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evidence that NIPN data and analyses are used by national and international actors including government, civil society, academia and non-government actors ● Evidence of national multisectoral nutrition policies and plans during this period have been monitored by NIPN in collaboration with other stakeholders 	
<p>4d. Which factors have contributed to the achievement of outcomes, and what factors impeded the achievement of outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors influencing the achievement of outcomes ● Assessment of institutional, contextual and operational factors prohibiting the achievement of outcomes 	
<p>4e. Are there any likely unanticipated longer-term effects of the NIPN project?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is it likely there will be unanticipated positive medium to longer-term effects of NIPN activities? ● Is it likely there will be unanticipated negative medium to longer-term effects of NIPN activities? 	
<p>5. Sustainability: To what extent will results be sustained to strengthen national capacities for evidence-based nutrition policy and programming?</p>		
<p>5a. To what extent will capacity building activities be sustained?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How far have NIPN activities built sustained capacity to analyse data and increase demand for data-driven policy analysis and decision-making? ● Has capacity development been integrated into ongoing training courses in countries ● Evidence of countries taking ownership of processes, systems and partnerships established through NIPN (see evaluation sub-question 3a) ● Evidence that governments are both engaged and capacitated to maximise use of the platforms to inform their decision making 	<p>Secondary data: Desk review of key strategic documents and data related to NIPN's performance.</p> <p>Primary data: KIIs with key global NIPN stakeholders, other relevant global stakeholders (e.g. SUN Movement and multilaterals), country representatives, in-country local actors, such as</p>

		civil society representatives and government stakeholders.
<p>5b. What proportion of NIPN costs are provided to government and national institutions? What proportion of NIPN costs have been enveloped into government budgets?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of NIPN financing arrangements within two ongoing country case studies and the percentage of funding to government institutions vis-à-vis other partners • Evidence of governments in case study countries taking financial ownership of aspects of NIPN platform (e.g. staff, website, dashboard) • Evidence of financing plans for government to take on more financial ownership 	<p>Approach: Assessment of the extent to which NIPN results have been or will be sustained, leading to sustained and integrated systems and increase in investments.</p>
<p>5c. To what extent have countries increased investments in nutrition due to NIPN activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far has funding increased for nutrition-related programmes and have these increases (if any) been influenced by NIPN activities? • Has there been increased interest in and financing for multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition and has this interest (if any) been influenced by NIPN? 	
<p>5e. How far has NIPN considered an 'exit strategy' to enable sustainability?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What consideration has NIPN given to exiting countries to enable results to be sustained at country and global level? • Specific to Bangladesh: If developed, was the exit strategy properly implemented to ensure the continuation of positive effects as intended? 	

5. Evaluation methodology

We plan to approach the study through seven distinct methodological steps: (1) Protocol development; (2) Data collection; (3); Analysis and validation (4); Drafting report; (5); Consultation and finalisation; (6); Presentation of the findings (7); Preparation of the draft papers for peer review.

5.1. Step 1: Protocol development

The main objective for this initial research phase has been for N4D to develop a strong understanding of NIPN and to finalise the protocol in agreement with C4N. This initial step has provided the opportunity to clarify the specific attribution problems that will be investigated for the contribution study ([Contribution Analysis Step 1](#)). This has included the following activities:

Global Gathering 2022: C4N recommended that the N4D team travel to Kenya to join the NIPN Phase II Global Gathering. A parallel Global Gathering happened in Cote d'Ivoire. The Global Gathering included a series of meetings of three days for NIPN stakeholders to learn from another and to formally launch Phase II of NIPN. This provided a unique opportunity for members of the N4D team to meet with key stakeholders to better understand the NIPN programme cycle and areas for further investigation.

Kick off meeting: Following the commencement of the study contract and participation in the Global Gathering, N4D held a kick off meeting with C4N colleagues on 25th October 2022. During this meeting, we provided an overview of the methodology and approach to the assignment, discussed priorities and expectations for the assignment and the addition of including a shorter Bangladesh case study, as requested by the European Union Delegation in Bangladesh, to undertake an audit of the factors and events that led to the end of the NIPN platform.²¹

Collation of existing data: We have collated all available documents that are on the NIPN website that relate to technical guidance on establishing and implementing NIPN activities, national policy briefs and data assessments. C4N also shared internal documentation and data, such as monitoring and annual reports.

Initial Desk Review: An initial desk review of essential documents (e.g. NIPN technical guidance, ToC, evaluations and annual reports, country reports) has been undertaken to further refine N4D's understanding of NIPN, the available evidence, and key areas of focus for the review to feed into the final protocol design. This has provided a deeper understanding of NIPN's objectives and the causal assumptions linking outputs with direct and indirect outcomes. This also included a rapid review of five NIPN country dashboards to understand the scope, type, currency and level of aggregation of data curated for the NIPN platforms.

Targeted interviews: Building from our initial desk review, we have also undertaken targeted global level informal interviews with NIPN Expert Advisory Group members, EU, GIZ, C4N-NIPN Global Support Unit, and former DFID stakeholders. These informal interviews have further clarified the study framework and questions to feed into the final protocol design. The draft protocol has been reviewed by the external QA consultant for N4D.

Agreeing the research approach for the target journals: A previous attempt at publishing an article in a peer review journal about NIPN was not successful, seemingly because of administrative obstacles. During the protocol phase, N4D has begun to identify potential journals to approach for accepting papers for publication including the Journal of Global Health. N4D will proceed to make progress on this output

²¹ The NIPN platform in Bangladesh was closed in February 2022.

by contacting the journals to ascertain their interest in receiving papers for review and once established, co-authors will be identified from two of the three deep dive countries, from C4N-NIPN and drafting the papers according to journal requirements will begin in June ready for the first submission in August. Once the journals are identified, the precise costs of publication will be known and conveyed to C4N-NIPN. In the meantime, a nominal sum has been earmarked to cover the costs of publication. As journal acceptance, editorial changes and readiness to publish can take considerable time, it will be important for N4D to ensure a detailed handover of this activity to C4N-NIPN should the need arise.

Finalisation of methodology and approach: Using the information gathered from the activities outlined above, we have finalised the draft protocol. As well as describing the methodology and approach, this protocol report details the sampling criteria to generate the case study countries for the contribution study. We have also included additional detail regarding the key stakeholders that will be engaged for key informant interviews.

ToC workshop: Through the initial desk review and targeted interviews we have developed a better understanding of the attribution problem to be addressed ([Step 1 of Contribution Analysis](#)). Based on this understanding we worked together with C4N and other relevant stakeholders to develop a revised ToC that details NIPN's causal pathways from inputs to indirect, collective outcomes and frames the scope of the evaluation ([Step 2 of Contribution Analysis](#)). The revised ToC will be the basis of which to conduct the Contribution Analysis and assess how far NIPN outputs contribute to stated outcomes.

5.2. Step 2: Data collection

Following the submission of the finalised protocol, the data collection activities will continue. Below we highlight specific data collection tasks for the output achievement study as well as contribution assessment study.

Expanded desk review: We will build on from the initial desk review undertaken in the protocol step to complete an expanded desk review, including (1) incorporating learning from other nutrition information platforms and developments globally aiming to inform policy making and programme priorities, (2) a review of all NIPN progress reports across the target countries, including monitoring data, documents, and the data environment across all NIPN countries. We will also aim to review documentation relating to the GSF and C4N-NIPN to assess how this mechanism supports countries achieve intended results. Understanding the current scope and focus of complimentary nutrition information platforms will be important to locate the NIPN project within the nutrition ecosystem and to 'unpack' NIPN's added value, unique approach, and potential synergies for the remaining NIPN Phase II period. Examples of other global initiatives we will include are the N4G Data Accountability workstream, SUN MEAL, the Global Nutrition Report (GNR) and related products including the country profiles, in NIPN countries classified as fragile and conflict affected (FCS), we will also look at the emergency platforms informing response including the IPC and Cadre Harmonise and strong examples of nationally adapted early warning systems.

Reviewing performance reports and monitoring data in detail will be critical assessing results achieved in Phase 1. For the effectiveness question, we will seek to understand the extent to which NIPN has achieved its intended results in Phase I documented through internal performance monitoring. This will provide a basis for delving further into the factors that enabled or prohibited success through KIIs. For the impact question, reviewing existing performance data will deepen our understanding of NIPN's progress and contribute to [Step 3 of Contribution Analysis: Gather existing evidence against the ToC](#).

Country document and dashboard review: Whilst we will include three deep-dive countries, the remaining NIPN countries also have rich insights and learning to inform the evaluation. We will assess the extent to which all NIPN countries have achieved intended results during Phase 1. We will review key documents

which will help us to understand the performance of all countries and how far they have progressed the NIPN operational cycle. We will explore the extent to which the platforms reflect national policy priorities, the range and quality of data analysed, the linkages between data and policy questions, country dashboards and capacity development plans. We will rely on internal monitoring data, available assessments and additional outputs for each country.

As part of this we will build on the initial review of country dashboards to more systematically analyse curated data on the country dashboard. Key variables for this analysis include; currency of surveys, types of indicator curated (nutrition and related sectors), level of aggregation of data (geographic and by population group including by gender, age and physiological state), types of indicator for which there are monitoring or surveillance data and timeliness and quality of these data, causal analysis presented to interpret outcome data and trends, existence of programme coverage data and nutrition financing data. This review will also describe how the dashboard data are presented, i.e. in relation to monitoring and evaluation needs of multi-sector nutrition plans or UNICEF causal framework for nutrition.

We will review the policy question formulation and decision-making process for each NIPN country based on documents and KIIs (see below). It will be important to understand the scope and range of questions formulated in each country, and how and why these were selected. We will also review the extent to which data availability and analytical techniques were able to furnish answers to selected and prioritised policy questions.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): KIIs will be undertaken in two stages. The first will focus on the achievement of results for each country. We will aim to speak to at least three country stakeholders per country representing government and from the NIPN platform/s to inform the effectiveness question and validate findings through the country document review. The second stage will entail country visits with in-depth country interviews from which we will seek to gain in-depth data relating to the contribution of NIPN activities to indirect outcomes (see section on country case studies below).

All interviews will seek to build on evidence gathered during the initial and expanded desk review, the global level targeted interviews, and to help assess the achievement of results, clarify the pathways and assumptions guiding NIPN and the relative contribution of the NIPN as framed through the evaluation framework. We will also aim to explore the contribution of NIPN to the enhancement of national technical capabilities, political and programme decision making and perceived and actual ownership of NIPN as per the ToC.

We have developed a stakeholder mapping, with inputs from the C4N Project Manager, to identify key internal and external stakeholders to approach. As appropriate, we will also use a snowballing sampling approach during the data collection step to identify additional potential respondents while still working to ensure a good balance in diversity and stakeholder categories engaged. We will give added weight to ensure the ‘voices’ of national government actors are heard as a key question for the study is to understand whether NIPN activities and outputs are meeting their priorities and needs. The evaluation framework will be used to inform KII questions and topic discussions. Table 5 below provides examples of the types of questions that will be used per stakeholder group.

Table 6: KII questions for stakeholders

Stakeholder group	Stakeholders	Indicative research topics
C4N-NIPN team	Any individual that has worked to implement and coordinate the NIPN initiative since C4N's engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evolution of NIPN and changes in design, strategy, and relevant frameworks (i.e., results framework or ToC). The performance of NIPN in Phase 1 and potential enabling or prohibiting factors.

Global Support Facility (GSF) & Expert Advisory Group (EAG)	Any individual that has provided technical inputs into the NIPN initiative during Phase I and was a member of the GSF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of technical guidance and provision of capacity building activities. • The extent to which C4N-NIPN and the EAG enable success within countries. • Development of dashboards and linkages with policymaking. • Extent of coherence and collaboration with relevant initiatives to drive effectiveness and impact.
National host organisations	Relevant representatives from host organisations of country NIPN platforms, including government stakeholders and multisectoral committees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far do NIPN platforms enable increased data-driven multisectoral policymaking on nutrition? • The relevance and effectiveness of using pre-existing data to inform policymaking. • Which activities are seen to be most helpful in achieving direct and indirect outcomes? • How far is NIPN collaborating with other relevant initiatives within countries? • To what extent will the activities and successes of NIPN be sustained within countries? • How well has NIPN ensured national ownership of processes and direction? • What are the limitations to the NIPN operational cycle and design? • To what extent will NIPN be hosted by national organisation/government following the end of external funding?
Donors	Past and present donors of the NIPN initiative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the added value of NIPN? • To what extent can NIPN help drive global attention and reform on multisectoral approaches to nutrition? • How far is NIPN collaborating or aligned with other relevant initiatives globally? • What have been the main successes of NIPN in Phase I? To what extent will these be sustained following the end of donor support?
Implementing partners	Organisations that implement and provide technical assistance to NIPN platforms within target countries (including sub-nationally).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective is the operational cycle of NIPN? • To what extent do activities lead to direct outcomes? Have there been any unintended outcomes as a result of NIPN? • What are the main challenges with establishing and implementing a NIPN platform? • How far will capacities be sustained? • To what extent does NIPN collaborate and align with similar initiatives within countries?
Target audience	Policymakers and other stakeholders outside of NIPN mechanisms that are interested in using NIPN data and evidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent does NIPN successfully produce timely and relevant data, evidence and analysis to inform policymaking? • What are the biggest contributions NIPN has made thus far? • How could the NIPN approach be adapted to better serve needs of policymakers? • To what extent do policymakers in other sectors, beyond nutrition and health, engage with NIPN data, evidence and analysis?
Relevant and interested organisations and initiatives	Representatives from similar and interested organisations and initiatives that aim to increase data-driven multisectoral policymaking on nutrition,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of collaboration and alignment with NIPN. • What is the added value of NIPN? • How sustainable is NIPN's approach? • Level of duplication between NIPN's approach and other relevant approaches. • Are there opportunities NIPN has missed?

	including DataDent, National Evaluation Platform, EC's Nutrition Information System and the Global Nutrition Report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How NIPN can engage more pro-actively with relevant initiatives?
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Building on the expanded desk review and KIIs, the initial contribution story will be created (**Step 4 of Contribution Analysis**). This will provide a foundational basis to understand NIPN's potential contribution to outcomes but will likely need additional data to ensure a comprehensive assessment. As such, country case studies will be critical to fill any gaps in our assessment and understanding of both NIPN's achievement of results and the contribution of these results to outcomes (**Step 5 of Contribution Analysis: Seek out additional evidence**).

Country case studies: Country case studies enable deeper research into complex problems and causal pathways by focusing on a small number of cases. It allows for comparative analysis between cases, as well as intensive study of a single case through multiple qualitative interviews. Due to the variance between geographical areas and between the progression of platforms within countries, the impact of NIPN activities will be more easily investigated at the country level. We will therefore conduct three country case studies. Country case studies will involve in-depth desk review and semi-structured interviews through country visits. In each country, we will explore:

- The development and progression of the platform and the factors that enabled or prohibited the development of the platform.
- The level of national ownership of the platform.
- The extent to which capacity building activities have increased stakeholders' ability to analyse data and use it to inform policymaking with detailed analysis of policy questions and how well these were addressed through the platform
- The extent to which the platform is comprehensive and accessible to relevant stakeholders.
- Success factors, both external and internal to the initiative.
- The likelihood of the platform and capacities being sustained following the end of external funding/support.

Country case study selection: The case studies to be conducted were agreed with C4N during the protocol phase. We have used the following selection criteria: region and context, progress of the platform, design and implementation of the platform against the backdrop of known trends in the burden of malnutrition.

1. **Region and context:** As NIPN is an initiative of global relevance present in eight countries in Africa, Asia and Central America, selection criteria includes regional diversity. There are six active platforms in Africa, one in Asia and one in Central America. The platform in Bangladesh was closed in February 2022. Some of these NIPN countries are fragile and conflict affected situations and it is therefore important to assess the extent to which NIPN has adapted to these particularly vulnerable and high burden contexts.
2. **Progress of the platform:** Each platform has different timelines and thus the progress of the operational cycle varies between countries. We will include three countries that have difference in terms of the development of the platforms to provide a richer assessment of the factors that contribute to intended outcomes. C4N and the EUD in Bangladesh have requested that Bangladesh be included to provide an assessment of the factors that led to the loss of the platform.
3. **Technical and Programme Management Support Arrangements.** In Ethiopia and Niger, GIZ delivers the technical and programme management assistance whereas in Burkina Faso,

Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lao PDR and Uganda, UNICEF provides this assistance. In Guatemala the Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE) delivers assistance. We will include a variety of NIPN designs and implementation mechanisms to provide a richer analysis. We have selected two countries which are either supported by UNICEF or GIZ to better understand the different modalities, strengths and constraints.

4. **Burden of malnutrition:** As per the ToC, the NIPN initiative ultimately aims to reduce the burden of malnutrition through increasing evidence-informed policies, investments, and programmes on nutrition. As such, it will be important to assess whether and how NIPN activities have contributed to informing this in these different regional and country contexts where the trends, spatial distribution, burden, and types of malnutrition can vary.

Based on these criteria and through consultations with internal NIPN stakeholders, we have selected the following three countries:

1. **Bangladesh:** C4N and the EUD in Bangladesh have requested that we include Bangladesh to understand the factors that led to its closure. Malnutrition in Bangladesh has seen levels of child stunting decrease from 30.9% in 2018 to 28% in 2019, yet levels of child wasting have increased from 8.4% in 2018 to 9.8% in 2019.²² The prevalence of overweight children under 5 years of age is 2.4% and an estimated 6.2% of adult (aged 18 years and over) women and 3.0% of adult men live with obesity.²³
2. **Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR):** Although the platform in Bangladesh has closed, the progress of the platform in Lao PDR has progressed quickly and has completed activities and progressing many activities according to intended timeframes.²⁴ Lao PDR and Bangladesh have different socio-political and nutrition governance contexts and therefore offer an interesting with region comparison. Lao PDR has experienced some delays to NIPN due to the lockdown measures introduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As with Bangladesh, Laos PDR has seen levels of child stunting decrease from 35.5% in 2015 to 33.1% in 2017 and unlike Bangladesh, declines in child wasting from 9.7% in 2015 to 9% in 2017.²⁵ An estimated 8.5% of adult (aged 18 years and over) women and 5.2% of adult men are living with obesity. The prevalence of overweight children under 5 years of age is 3.5%.²⁶
3. **Niger:** The platform in Niger has completed the main activities of the operational cycle and is regarded as one of the most successful NIPN platforms. It also represents a different context, West Africa, which provides an interesting comparison to Southeast Asia. The policy and data components are hosted by separate initiatives, but both within national institutions. The policy component is hosted by the Secretariat of the presidential initiative "Les Nigériens nourrissent les Nigériens" (I3N). The data component is hosted by the Institut National de la Statistique (INS). As with Lao PDR and Bangladesh, levels of child stunting have decreased from 48.5% in 2018 to 44.4% in 2021; however, this follows an increase in 2016 between 2016 – 2018 from 41.3%.²⁷ Levels of child wasting have decreased from 14.1% in 2018 to 11.5%. An estimated 10.5% of adult (aged 18 years and over) women and 3.1% of adult men live with obesity.²⁸

5.3. Step 3: Analysis and validation

²² Bangladesh Country Nutrition Profile, Global Nutrition Report, [link](#). Data on child nutrition status is only available up to 2019.

²³ Bangladesh Country Nutrition Profile, Global Nutrition Report, [link](#).

²⁴ Quarterly Performance Monitoring Summary, Q3 2022, C4N.

²⁵ Lao PDR Country Nutrition Profile, Global Nutrition Report, [link](#). Data on child nutrition status is only available up to 2017.

²⁶ Lao PDR Country Nutrition Profile, Global Nutrition Report, [link](#). Data on child nutrition status is only available up to 2017.

²⁷ Joint Malnutrition Estimates, UNICEF, WHO, World Bank, Niger, [link](#).

²⁸ Niger Country Nutrition Profile, Global Nutrition Report, [link](#).

Our approach to analysis will be guided by the following general principles and processes in analysis all primary and secondary data sources:

- **Synthesis:** this will involve bringing together evidence from both the desk review and key informant interviews into a common understanding of activities, outputs, direct and indirect outcomes and lessons learned, both with regard to activities and the NIPN programme cycle.
- **Triangulation:** given the qualitative focus of this evaluation, it will be important to take steps to increase the rigour of findings. Triangulation facilitates the verification of data through cross-verification of two or more sources, ensuring stronger findings from data and analysis. Throughout our analysis, results from the desk review and key informant interviews will be triangulated to verify and strengthen contribution claims and link programme pathways to outcomes.
- **Utility-focused:** our final report will be utility-focused, providing actionable recommendations for future design and implementation of the NIPN initiative. As highlighted in our workplan, we will also seek to present the findings from the assignment at the 2023 Global Gathering. This will be an opportunity for NIPN stakeholders and partners to engage with the findings and discuss the utility of draft recommendations.

Due to the focus being on whether results have been achieved and the factors that have either enabled or prohibited NIPN's performance, we aim to draw mainly on existing performance and monitoring data. We will then use KIIs to triangulate and verify the internal monitoring data to ensure that our final assessment is robust. In addition to assessing whether activities and outputs have been achieved, we will also assess the relevance of NIPN concepts and activities. The evaluation framework will be used as the primary tool to assess qualitative data against all questions.

The focus of CA is to build a credible and comprehensive contribution story that explains whether key activities have contributed to the achievement of outcomes at both the global and country levels. Following the initial data collection to gather existing evidence against the ToC and build an initial contribution story, we will then develop a draft Contribution Analysis matrix. This will help us to incorporate all of the empirical evidence about how NIPN activities have contributed to direct and indirect outcomes. The matrix collects evidence from all data sources to triangulate links between inputs/activities/outputs and the outcomes identified in the ToC as well as external influencing factors affecting each causal pathway. We will develop a code to structure our data sources clearly, numbering documents, case studies and interviewees to easily identify where evidence comes from. This will help us assess the strength of the evidence and the strength of contribution. We will also include unintended outcomes that are not reflected in the ToC. The matrices and entries are iterative and can be updated throughout the evaluation, in light of further information arising from the desk-based review and interviews with different stakeholders, providing country stakeholders the opportunity to directly inform the contribution story. Using an indirect outcome, an example of the contribution matrix is presented below in Table 6 including detail of the scale to be used to assess strength of evidence and contribution.

Table 7: Example of the contribution matrix

Indirect outcome: Nutrition data and analysis is used to inform multisectoral nutrition policymaking, investments and accountability on nutrition						
Activities/ outputs	Evidence of programme contributing factors				Summary assessment on strength of contribution (0 to 3)	Summary assessment on strength of contribution (0 to 3)
	Documenta ry evidence	Evidence from interviews with NIPN staff	Evidence from government representativ es	Evidence from external stakeholder s		

Policy briefs and outputs	Strong evidence in document review (policies informed by NIPN policy briefs and outputs).	The majority of NIPN staff stated that outputs were used by national policymakers to inform decision-making.	The majority of government representatives claimed that technical reports supported the development of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition.	Strong evidence of contribution to technical reports being taken up by host organisations and national partners.	3 Strong evidence of activity/output contributing to outcome.	3 Strong: sole or most significant reason for change observed.
High quality data collected and analysed					2 Moderated evidence of activity/output contributing to outcome.	2 Medium: one amongst many reasons of equal strength.
NIPN dashboard completed and accessible						
Capacity development activities implemented					1 Weak evidence of activity/output contributing to outcome.	1 Weak: one minor reason amongst other factors that have contributed more strongly to the outcome observed.
External influencing factors					0 No evidence of activity/output contributing to outcome.	0 No contribution can be argued, or no evidence.

After creating the draft Contribution Matrix, we will then undertake country visits and seek out additional evidence that will strengthen or challenge the ToC. We will then incorporate data from the in-depth country case studies to the matrix, triangulating evidence from different sources to verify and strengthen contribution claims, synthesising findings and compare the final contribution story to the causal pathway assumptions developed. This assessment will inform our understanding of the extent to which NIPN activities and outputs contribute to direct and indirect outcomes and whether the causal pathways are

accurate. A plausible narrative is considered to have been developed when four different conditions are met:

- The intervention is based on a sound ToC with plausible assumptions.
- The activities of the intervention were implemented properly.
- There is adequate evidence showing that change occurred at each level of the ToC.
- The relative contribution of external factors or other development interventions can be demonstrated.

To comprehensively judge the strength of evidence, we have developed judgement criteria in Table 7 below.

Table 8: Judgement criteria to assess the strength of evidence

Score	Descriptor	Judgement criteria
3	Strong evidence	▶ Clear, direct causal association between specific NIPN inputs/activities/outputs and outcomes (whether positive or negative), with detailed examples provided as to how the initiative has supported change. Corroborated by multiple sources and stakeholders, including relevant documentation (e.g. policy, strategy or programme documentation) and at least five stakeholder interviews
2	Moderate evidence	▶ Some indication of direct causal association between specific inputs/activities/outputs and outcomes, although link is inferred rather than concrete, whether positive or negative. Corroborated by more than one source (e.g. documentation and two-three stakeholder interviews), but with limited examples as to how the programme has supported change
1	Weak evidence	▶ Indication of direct causal association between specific inputs/activities/outputs and outcomes, but no detailed examples of provided as to how the programme has supported change. Only cited by one-two sources (e.g. one stakeholder or unofficial documentation)
0	No evidence	▶ Very limited/no information to form judgements about the pathway between inputs, activities and outcomes

Validation: After the analysis period, the N4D team will develop and deliver a validation presentation to share the initial findings and recommendations to the C4N team for the two objectives as well as any additional internal stakeholders involved in the review. This approach will also enable us to identify any remaining gaps in the NIPN output achievements and contribution assessment study so that we can verify our initial findings and inquire about additional evidence that may support in filling any gaps prior to starting the main analysis.

5.4. Step 4: Drafting report

After completing analysis and validation, we will draft the final reports following the structures agreed upon with the C4N Project Manager. Reporting will consist of a maximum 40-page report that incorporates all analysis across the evaluation framework. We will present the main findings, the evidence and weighing the strength of that evidence as well as assessing the significant/importance of changes observed and judging the degree attributable to NIPN. The draft report will then be submitted to the C4N Project Manager for review and feedback compiled by the project manager from relevant internal stakeholders. We would envisage allowing a two-week turn around period to receive comments.

5.5. Step 5: Consultation and finalisation

Following this, we will present findings to the C4N team as an initial opportunity to understand our assessment and to external stakeholders as required. Ideally, time and costs will allow us to present findings (remotely or in person) at the 2023 Global Gathering for all NIPN stakeholders to attend.

5.6. Step 6: Dissemination of the findings

N4D will also invite stakeholders from Niger and Laos to country-specific presentations to allow for tailored learning opportunities. N4D will seek to hold a de-briefing session in Bangladesh if time allows. N4D will also consider an additional presentation of the findings to broader interested stakeholders before the study is published if time and resources allow. Materials used for these presentations will be shared in advance.

5.7. Step 7: Preparation of papers for peer review

We will target two to three journals with a track record in accepting descriptive analysis-based papers early into the data collection phase so we can judge appetite, cost and timeline for drafting with co-authors, submission and publication. As described above, N4D cannot guarantee acceptance of a paper but will take this process as far as possible in the contract period. C4N-NIPN may need to take this process over once N4D has completed the drafting and submission.

6. Workplan and outputs

▲ key milestones	2022												2023																									
	October			November			December			January			February			March			April			May			June			July			August							
C4N (sign off/review)	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
Public holidays																																						
1. Protocol development phase																																						
Global gathering participation																																						
Kick off meeting																																						
Logistics for interviews and stakeholder outreach																																						
Initial desk review																																						
Targeted global interviews																																						
Finalise research framework																																						
Country selection criteria and sampling framework																																						
Review theory of change and causal assumptions																																						
Protocol report drafting																																						
QA																																						
Submit protocol report draft 1																																						
Feedback and revisions																																						
Submit final protocol report																																						
Weekly catch ups with C4N																																						
2. Data collection phase																																						
Finalise data collection tools & analysis frameworks																																						
QA																																						
Expanded programme document review																																						
Review of relevant nutrition information platforms																																						
Country document review																																						
Virtual Key Informant Interviews																																						
Build initial contribution story																																						
Country visit 1																																						
Country visit 2																																						
Country visit 3																																						
3. Analysis and validation																																						
Analysis of monitoring and performance data and triangulation with KII data and evaluation framework																																						
Analysis of performance data and triangulation with KII data and evaluation framework																																						
Develop contribution matrix																																						
Review and strengthen theory of change and causal pathways																																						
Validation meeting with NIPN and C4N team																																						
4. Drafting report																																						
Agree final report structure																																						
Report drafting																																						
QA																																						
Submit draft final reports																																						
5. Consultation and finalisation																																						
Feedback and revisions																																						
Update and QA final reports																																						
Submit final reports																																						
6. Dissemination of findings																																						
Development of dissemination materials																																						
Presentation to core NIPN team																																						
7. Preparation of papers for peer review																																						
Logistics and preparation, including finalising journal participation																																						
Article drafting																																						
QA																																						
Feedback and revisions																																						
Submission																																						

Annex One: Approach to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

N4D's Technical and Organisation Measures (TOM) for Data Protection are underpinned by a set of principles which apply to the holding and processing of personal data (including that of employees, associates, suppliers and partner organisations), as well as any personal data which we handle or process as part of our international project work. They also apply to technical data and information that N4D acquire as part of project work which may be relevant to countries and stakeholders working in those countries. The obligations of N4D and those working on our behalf in relation to any data we hold, or process include the following:

- **Confidentiality:** protecting data from unauthorised access and disclosure;
- **Integrity:** safeguarding the accuracy and completeness of data;
- **Availability:** ensuring that data and associated services are available to authorised users ONLY when required.

There are four main types of information/data N4D handles which have different levels of protection as follows:

Information Category	Classification	Examples
Public		
Unclassified Public	Information is not confidential and can be made public without any implications	Widely available published reports designed for wide/global dissemination which do not warrant data protection measures as these are open sources. NIPN reports and documents that are on websites or in the peer reviewed or grey literature fall under this category.
Proprietary	Information is unrestricted internally and unrestricted externally with prior authorisation and/or acknowledgement of the source.	N4D projects, contracts and any policies and procedures or other actors reports and information which warrant clarity of source. Most actors whose information is available expect acknowledgement of the original source in any related publication or report.
Confidential		
Personal Data	Any information that identifies an individual, organisation or entity.	Names, addresses, including IP addresses, country location, a persons professional position, curriculum vitae must be protected.
Confidential Data	Information shared with N4D with the explicit understanding that it is to be anonymised and never assigned to any individual, organisation or initiative.	Views expressed about another person, organisation, authority or initiative are kept entirely confidential and are not referenced in any way that can lead back to the data source. This is very important when considering data sensitive contexts such as in fragility

		<p>and conflict affected states or amongst marginalised population groups. Data from country information systems may often not be in the public domain and in this instance falls under a category of 'highly confidential' (e.g. unpublished NIPN).</p>
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N4D is committed to processing data in accordance with its responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679) ("GDPR") and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018.

Confidentiality (Article 32 Paragraph 1 Point b GDPR)

N4D is a very small company committed to maintaining confidentiality of information by ensuring the anonymity of participants and data storage in accordance with safeguarding principles. One member of the N4D team acts as the Data Protection Officer (DPO) and is responsible for protecting data in line with GDPR regulations. Whilst this person is not a GDPR specialist and recognising that N4D does not outsource its data management or data protection, this person holds responsibility for maintaining the data integrity of the company. Data is processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate measures as follows;

- ⇒ Access to personal data is managed and controlled. Personal data (for example, contact details, addresses) is stored in a password protected folder and is not shared with other stakeholders via email without prior approval.
- ⇒ No member of staff will have access to systems containing personal protected information without authorisation.
- ⇒ Where access is authorised, such authorisation is set to the minimum needed to perform work functions.
- ⇒ When staff or contractors, leave, their system and security access needs are revoked.
- ⇒ Furthermore, N4D standard contracts clearly state that employees will have entered into a confidentiality agreement in that no information about the work being undertaken is shared with a third party.
- ⇒ N4D employees must also treat as confidential any information communicated to them in connection with any of the project activities in accordance with contract requirements.
- ⇒ N4D ensures that responsibilities under data protection legislation are understood by all members and abide by it when processing data.
- ⇒ N4D will ensure right of access for 'data subjects' i.e. interviewees, meeting attendees etc can make what is known as a Subject Access Request ("SAR") to ask N4D for information we hold about the data subject.

Integrity (Article 32 Paragraph 1 Point b GDPR)

Collected data will be analysed and reviewed transparently and with sensitivity to local power dynamics. We will support the responsible presentation and communication of evidence, ensuring it is agreed with participants, shared in accessible formats, highlighting acknowledgments where due (unless anonymity is requested), and ensuring methodologies, analysis, varying judgements, and any potential biases are explained. This means that personal data shall be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to individuals. N4D will ensure:

- ⇒ Personal data is collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes;

- ⇒ Further processing for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes shall not be considered to be incompatible with the initial purposes;
- ⇒ Data used is adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed;
- ⇒ Every reasonable step will be taken to ensure that personal data that are inaccurate, having regard to the purposes for which they are processed, are erased or rectified without delay;
- ⇒ There is no unauthorised reading, copying, changes or deletions of data with electronic transfer or transport, e.g. electronic signatures.
- ⇒ Data subjects have a right to require that we remove data we hold about them, unless we have reasonable grounds to refuse the erasure.
- ⇒ Data subjects can request that we no longer process their personal data in certain ways, whilst not requiring us to delete the same data.
- ⇒ Data subjects can ask us to provide copies of personal data we hold about them in a commonly used and easily storable format.

Availability and resilience (Article 32 Paragraph 1 Point b GDPR)

N4D will ensure appropriate back-up and recovery solutions are in place. In the event of a breach of security leading to the accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration, unauthorised disclosure of, or access to, personal data, N4D shall promptly assess the risk to individuals and determine the best course of action. If appropriate, a data breach might be reported to the individual/s concerned and N4D will notify them of the action/s taken. For example, if a member of N4D were to accidentally lose their laptop whilst travelling, these data would have been backed up in a security protected dropbox folder.

Procedures for regular testing, assessment and evaluation (Article 32 Paragraph 1 Point d GDPR; Article 25 Paragraph 1 GDPR)

N4D's DPO will review compliance will ensure updating of data protection practices based on data protection developments and ensure that N4Ds procedures meet with the requirements of all new clients as set out in contracts and brief new N4D team members regarding N4D data protection procedures.

N4D will ensure no third-party data processing as per Article 28 GDPR without corresponding instructions from the client. For example, in the event that N4D outsources the management of data for a particular contract, the provider would be under N4Ds control, and this arrangement would be underpinned by a clear and unambiguous contractual arrangement. To date, N4D has not outsourced any data responsibilities and has no future plans to do so.