Abstract Title: Policy vs. Practice: Exploring a Mentoring Approach for Building Capacity to Implement Multi-sectoral Nutrition Policies in Tanzania

ABSTRACT PREVIEW

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Policy vs. Practice: Exploring a Mentoring Approach for Building Capacity to Implement Multi-sectoral Nutrition Policies in Tanzania

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Abstract

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Objectives
Tanzania launched a National Multisectoral Nutrition (MSN) Action Plan and placed Nutrition Officers in all districts and regions. Implementation of multisectoral initiatives is essential for improving nutrition, but challenging, particularly for new cadres. We explored mentoring as a novel, low-cost approach to strengthen knowledge and engagement in MSN activities in five regions.

Methods
Regional Nutrition Officers participated in a mentoring workshop, then mentored District Nutrition Officers to form “MSN action teams” of 2-3 officers from other sectors. Support calls and funding for basic expenses were provided. In-depth interviews with 31 regional and district personnel explored barriers and promising practices over one year. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Results
Regional Officers’ availability and capability varied but, overall, mentoring increased awareness of nutrition as cross-cutting and built collaboration for MSN. Nutrition officers were responsible for coordinating MSN, but clinical responsibilities and lack of authority had hindered integration of nutrition into other sectors. Other barriers were limited time, resources and conflicting supervisory expectations. In most districts, Nutrition Officers organized action teams across health, agriculture, community development and education departments. Benefits varied across districts. For example, learning about national policies and illustrative school-based or community-based activities helped officers outside health sectors see the relevance of MSN and encouraged engagement. Agricultural officers already conducting nutrition-sensitive activities welcomed opportunities to share experiences and avoid redundant activities. Recommendations to further strengthen MSN mentoring included enhancing collaboration at regional level, involving district personnel in initial workshops and mentor selection, and sensitizing department heads.

Conclusions
Implementation of MSN policies requires explicit capacity building. Technical training is insufficient without sensitization across sectors, appropriate workloads, and supervisors who prioritize MSN activities. Mentoring can enhance credibility and capacity of nutrition personnel expected to engage departments outside health in implementing MSN policies.

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