

Reflections on Nutrition Leadership Capacity Development

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As we enter a new phase in history with the acceptance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and we continue our quest for a better world, it is appropriate to reflect on how we will shape this new future amid immense optimism but also significant skepticism.

For many years, capacity-building efforts have focused on amassing technical and physical capacity at the expense of capabilities that are more often associated with improving effective team functioning. Although significant strides have been made in building capacity, it is also safe to say that we have not been completely successful in shaping our world.

Consistently, including in the recent Lancet 2013 series on nutrition, capacity development and leadership development are recognized as key to the success of scaling up interventions.¹ A 2011 capacity assessment of mid-level nutrition workers² showed that one of the challenges faced in the workforce environment is the lack of effective leadership, management, mentoring and supervision skills to improve quality standard and performance.

The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has created an unprecedented willingness to improve nutrition at a global and national level. An abundance of evidence exists regarding the interventions that would be efficacious in alleviating various forms of undernutrition. Over the past few decades, dedicated attention has been given to building capacity, with a focus on technical knowledge and skills. At the same time, the nutrition community has come to the clear realization that the solutions to many nutritional problems lie in an effective multisectoral and trans-disciplinary approach.³

It has also been recognized that the ability to convert well-constructed plans into action, at the *program implementation level*, is a critical success factor. Strategic plans, and the nec-

essary resources, are vital for creating strong implementation systems, which are all prerequisites for the eventual success of nutrition interventions. However, the structured attention necessary for building the required leadership capacity has been lacking.

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Among the ten key recommendations of the Global Nutrition Report (2014)⁴ is the recommendation that governments, international partners, and businesses should “*invest strategically, systematically, and in a sustained manner, in nutrition leadership programs to scale up the numbers and reach of nutrition champions (the African Nutrition Leadership Programme is a good example of a program that has the potential for scale-up).*”

We often erroneously use the terms leadership and management interchangeably. Prof. John Kotter explains the difference as follows: “Management is a set of well-known processes, like planning, budgeting, structuring jobs, staffing jobs, measuring performance and problem-solving, which help an organization to predictably do what it knows how to do well. Management helps you to produce products and services as you have promised, of consistent quality, on budget, day after day, week after week. In organizations of any size and complexity, this is an enormously difficult task. We constantly underestimate how complex this task really is, especially if we are not in senior management jobs. So, management is crucial – but it’s not leadership.”⁵

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Diversity makes for stimulating learning environments. ANLP participants from Sudan, Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and South Africa.

Kotter goes on to state that: “leadership is entirely different. It is associated with taking an organization into the future, finding opportunities that are coming at it faster and faster, and successfully exploiting those opportunities. Leadership is about vision, about people buying in, about empowerment and, most of all, about producing useful change. Leadership is not about attributes, it’s about behavior. And in an ever-faster-moving world, leadership is increasingly needed from more and more people, no matter where they are in a hierarchy. The notion that a few extraordinary people at the top can provide all the leadership needed today is ridiculous, and it’s a recipe for failure.”

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Another error in reasoning is to argue that management must be replaced with leadership. This is incorrect: they serve different, yet essential, functions. Kotter says that we need superb management but we need more superb leadership. We need to make our structures, systems and organizations reliable and efficient. We also need to take them into the right future – into this new vision that we have created in the SDGs, the vision that we have described in the SUN. When we talk about leadership, we are not referring to those people at the top of a hierarchy; we refer to a set of orientations and behaviors that enable us to achieve change. Leaders are required throughout the whole system, and they lead from where they stand.

Leading change

At the African Nutrition Leadership Programme (ANLP), we are continuously refining a model of leading change that was originally developed by Prof. Leon Coetsee from the North-West University Business School in South Africa. The validation of the model in a multisectoral working environment is an ongoing process. The model consists of a number of principles that are applied in a non-sequential manner and include steps to:

- > Determine the reasons for a change process, and the outcomes it should deliver;
- > Determine if the defined end-purpose reflects a real need for change;
- > Perform a stakeholder analysis and plan to create stakeholder-aligned commitment to the purpose and process of change, by applying the aligned commitment equation and using embedding mechanisms to sustain energy and effort;
- > Ensure the availability of a wide range of transformational leadership skills and grow transformational leadership orientations, attitudes, skills and other competencies;
- > Diagnose current effectiveness issues (strengths, weaknesses, threats, opportunities, problems, conflicts and dilemmas) that need to be addressed;
- > Integrate the planned implementation of the other eight principles into a comprehensive change intervention plan focused on attaining envisioned purposes and specifying all the necessary activities;
- > Grow knowledge and skills to identify the sources and nature of resistance and the ability to effectively manage resistance to change;
- > Enable an environment and orientations that will facilitate the execution of future change demands; and
- > Develop and perform checks and evaluations to detect obstacles and measure progress, along with the eventual achievements, in order to redirect and/or adapt change interventions.

This model has proven particularly useful for leading change in multisectoral settings, where it often has to be driven by individuals with delegated duties.

Core assumptions for leadership capacity building

The African Nutrition Leadership Programme consists of a range of leadership capacity development programs. The ANLP approach to leadership capacity development asserts that:

1. Leadership is a body of orientations, attitudes and behaviors that can be acquired and developed;
2. Leadership is not related to a position; leaders lead from where they stand;

TABLE 1: Typical program content for nutrition change interventions

Growth and development at individual level	Multisectoral team growth and development, plus eventual nutrition (-sensitive) intervention outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create an awareness of own leadership orientations, strengths and gaps > Discover own locus of control, personal values and purpose > Grow specific management and leadership orientations and skills such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Conducting stakeholder analyses > Communication skills > Conflict resolution skills > Decision-making and problem-solving > Designing effective intervention plans > Managing resistance to change > Leading from where you are > Create and implement a personal leadership development plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Formulate a purpose statement and evaluate the necessity for change (any kind of change) > Develop skills to gain aligned stakeholder commitment to a shared purpose > Diagnose team effectiveness and other problems and dilemmas > Formulate a comprehensive results-oriented action plan to grow and develop the team and to achieve the overall purpose of change process (intervention) – e.g., enhancing team effectiveness and reducing stunting (NB two elements are involved) > Manage resistance to change > Build a team culture of continuous learning, thinking and growing > Skills and tools to monitor and evaluate progress on all fronts

3. Managerial leadership – a combination of management and especially leadership orientations, attitudes, skills and behaviors – is an important orientation to acquire;
4. Relationships with self and others must be founded on integrity and trust;
5. The result of leadership is to make team members (and thus the organization) successful;
6. Leaders have the responsibility to grow and develop more leaders;
7. The personal ability to change and grow continuously is a requirement for unleashing leaders' own potential as well as the potential of others;
8. Leaders and followers must be committed to serve and find meaning in what they do beyond their own self-interest;
9. Leaders focus team members' energy on achieving objectives that go beyond mere self-interest;
10. Leaders create environments which people want to be a part of rather than just working for the team/organization; and
11. The ability to lead and manage change (nutrition) interventions is a critical success factor and an essential competence in Africa.

Leadership capacity development programs may have a number of general goals, but should include:

- > Creating an awareness of one's own leadership orientation

and ability, and how it influences team and personal effectiveness. All change initiatives start at an individual level;

- > Creating an environment in which individuals can experience their strengths and growth areas and receive feedback on their behavior and their growth;
- > Creating an environment that allows for growth from awareness to attitude to behavior;
- > Promoting an internal locus of control;
- > Developing a personalized action plan for growth beyond the capacity development program;
- > Creating an awareness that leadership is a behavior and not a position;
- > Creating an awareness of the importance of developing others for the greater good rather than to compete;
- > Creating a sense that leaders are accountable to themselves for their own growth;
- > Establishing the practice of reflection as a basis for continued self-discovery and growth;
- > An experience of how leadership capabilities affect team performance and work performance; and
- > An experience of working in diverse teams (cultural, technical, gender etc.).

African Nutrition Leadership Programme

The African Nutrition Leadership Programme is a program developed and hosted by the Centre of Excellence for Nutrition at North-West University in South Africa. The ANLP undertakes two categories of leadership capacity development activities:



Experiential learning, teamwork and case studies are effective tools for leadership capacity development.



1. An annual 10-day leadership development immersion course aimed at developing individuals' leadership capabilities. This has been running for 14 years and has 325 alumni spread over 34 African countries.
2. Tailor-made needs-based leadership capacity development programs focused on developing the abilities of individuals to lead the implementation of nutrition-related interventions as members of multisectoral groups and teams operating on national and district level.

The tailor-made leadership development programs are developed using current best practice from the disciplines of organizational development and change management leadership, as well as from practical experience gained working in Kenya, Zambia, Uganda and Rwanda with multisectoral teams responsible

for nutritional interventions. The programs are all based on real and expressed participant needs as well as their stakeholders' needs, and are designed to be relevant to the target audiences they serve.

Both individual and team growth – in terms of orientations, attitudes, specific leadership skills and transformational leadership applications – are prerequisites for effective nutrition program implementation and the successful achievement of the specific goals and targets. Individual growth feeds into multisectoral team development, and the effective functioning of these teams is then instrumental for implementing nutrition change interventions – which comprises yet another skillset to master. A summary of the typical general program content required is set out in **Table 1**.

In 2010–2011, the ANLP worked with the Kenya Food Fortification Alliance to assist in implementing mandatory food fortification in Kenya. Later, and with support from *Sight and Life*, work was undertaken with the Zambia National Food and Nutrition Commission. In 2015, the ANLP entered into partner-

ship with UNICEF and started working with five multisectoral district teams in Uganda and Rwanda. Another major part of this cooperation agreement was to develop a group of master trainers who will eventually be able to offer leadership development training. By so doing, they will enlarge the capability of the ANLP to offer leadership capacity development programs in Africa.

Developing leadership capacity at all levels is a critical success factor in scaling up nutrition interventions and delivering on the SDGs. Understanding the function and importance of good leadership as well as good management is critical. Change is a process that must be led and developing the capacity to do so effectively at scale requires a long-term commitment and starts at an individual level. Furthermore, it calls for a variety of expertise not necessarily associated with nutrition. If the nutrition fraternity is to effectively make use of the existing momentum to change the nutrition landscape, we will have to invest more effort in developing those individuals who will lead the way at every level.

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