

A Day in the Life of Patrizia Fracassi

Patrizia Fracassi is Senior Nutrition Analyst and Strategy Advisor for the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Secretariat. She discusses her remit within the Secretariat and the wider role of the SUN Movement as it celebrates the first five years of its existence and prepares itself for the next five.

Sight and Life (S&L): *Patrizia, the SUN Movement has developed immensely since it was first created in 2010, but perhaps not all our readers might be familiar with it. Could you start by explaining what the acronym “SUN” stands for, and what the Movement is about?*

Patrizia Fracassi (PF): SUN stands for “Scaling up Nutrition.” It’s not an initiative or a program or an agency, but a combination of all of the above and more! The SUN Movement is essentially country-owned and country-led. Currently it has 56 country members, Sudan being the most recent to join. Governments sign up to become members of the SUN Movement. It’s not a grassroots movement as such, but we believe that solutions must come from within each country in order to achieve the best possible results, and we strive to encourage this mindset. Bottom-up, country-led dialogue is what the Movement was founded on.

The SUN Movement aims to bring stakeholders together – from different government sectors, national and global civil society organizations, businesses, and the UN system, as well as researchers and scientists – to contribute to improved nutrition outcomes. It aims to provide all these stakeholders with a collaborative space for sharing, aligning and coordinating actions and approaches. The emphasis of the SUN Movement is on the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach, with clear recognition of the unique role and expertise of each sector and stakeholder.

S&L: *What is your role within the SUN Movement?*

PF: I’m the Senior Nutrition Analyst and Strategy Advisor in the

SUN Movement Secretariat and as such my role covers content management and coordination. Essentially, I maintain an overview of the core aspects of the Movement. My main tasks involve advancing the country-led agenda on effective multi-sectoral approaches for planning, costing, managing and monitoring implementation, tracking financing and mobilizing resources.

Most recently I’ve been working on the 2016–2020 mutual accountability and monitoring & evaluation frameworks for SUN. This involves making sure that everyone is reading from the same page, albeit in many, many different languages. You’d be surprised how many different perceptions exist sometimes, even in the one language!

S&L: *What’s your background, Patrizia, and what brought you to SUN?*

PF: Before joining the SUN Secretariat, I worked in Ethiopia with UNICEF on strengthening nutrition information systems and for the World Bank on linkages between the Productive Safety Net Program and the National Nutrition Program. I also worked for UNICEF Uganda as a nutrition specialist, and previously for the Italian humanitarian organization CESVI and Oxfam Italia in Vietnam as Country Representative, specializing in community-based nutrition, primary health care and livelihoods.

I started my professional career in Mumbai with the Indo-Italian Chamber of Commerce, working on female entrepreneurship. As a student, I spent nine months in Ethiopia studying participatory community methods, and I ended up doing my dissertation on the importance of formal and informal education.

I have an MA in Human Sciences and an MSc in Development Management, which I did at the Open University UK while working. I am currently a Doctoral candidate in Health Research. It’s challenging to work and study at the same time, but it helps put things in perspective. I believe one should always be open to question things, including one’s own assumptions. It keeps you sharp and focused.



Patrizia Fracassi on the road in Uganda

I came to SUN by chance. I was looking for a job in Europe and this sounded interesting. The interview with David Nabarro – who was Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Food Security & Nutrition and SUN Movement Coordinator at the time – was very eye-opening. I felt I came out of it having learned a lot.

S&L: *What is the remit of the SUN Movement Secretariat?*

PF: Our main remit is to empower countries to take the lead in their fight against malnutrition. We provide them with a platform where they can share their experiences, articulate their needs and also be challenged on what they do and how they do it. A lot of the work we've been doing requires continual adaptation. We don't have all the answers and solutions, but we can all learn from different shared experiences. We always try to work with what we have, and aim for continuous improvement. In reality, there's never a perfect way forward, so part of our role is to make sure that we do at least "move forward" – then we can see where we are!

S&L: *Where does the SUN Movement Secretariat fit within the wider framework of the United Nations?*

PF: The SUN Movement Coordinator is an Advisor of the Secretary-General. We work with the UN Agencies and with the other UN initiatives, but we also work with donors, NGOs and the private sector. We're neither a normative agency nor an implementing one. We could be considered a catalyst, because we exist to move the process along.

S&L: *Could you describe your office and your normal working day?*

PF: My "normal" working day is never that normal, actually! I work with colleagues within and outside the SUN Movement

Secretariat – mostly outside. My job involves a lot of communication, analyzing available data and information, working on common understandings and approaches, and always trying to find a way to move things forward. This requires a good balance between theory and practice, looking at the feasibility of ideas but also at their acceptability. I'm a bit of a troubleshooter too, making sure all the right cogs are oiled in the engine room.

S&L: *What projects are you currently working on?*

PF: I'm finalizing the 2016–2020 SUN Roadmap at the moment, focusing on the core of what the SUN Movement aims to achieve, which is to translate plans into successful impacts. My activity builds on the work countries are doing around planning, budgeting, financing and delivery. The project aims to find a simple way for decision-makers to look at these elements together as a coherent framework so that the results reflect the work of the various different sectors and stakeholders. This is no small task! There's a lot still to be understood, and many implications and assumptions of which we are unsure. But transparency and openness can help to identify any warning signs and help us to learn, adapt and, as I've said before, "move forward." "Always move forward" is my motto: if you don't, you stagnate.

S&L: *What do you enjoy most about your job, Patrizia?*

PF: I enjoy collaborating with people, especially experts from different disciplines. I have the privilege to work with people who are passionate about what they're doing. I've found collaboration with these people – who range from international experts through country focal points to local activists – incredibly liberating and creative. I also like to work with people who have a client-focused ethos, especially when working on requests from member countries. Their drive is exhilarating!

S&L: *What would you change about your job if you could?*

PF: I'd like to spend more time in the countries once more. That's where I started, with four years in Vietnam, two in Uganda, and four in Ethiopia. Back to implementation, in other words: I miss that aspect of my previous work. I'd like to have the opportunity to spend some time in the communities and look at the details on the ground, examining what works, and what doesn't, and all the implications. There's a lot to be said for working with local communities. You get to see the real effect of what you are doing.

S&L: *Does your work with the SUN Movement Secretariat involve extensive travel?*



Patrizia Fracassi with Benin Minister of Development Marcel de Souza at a workshop on Costing and Financial Tracking in Benin, October 2014



Patrizia Fracassi leading a focus group discussion on infant and young child feeding (IYCF) in Uganda

PF: Yes, I travel all the time. Mostly to participate in workshops around the world.

S&L: *What has been your best moment since joining SUN?*

PF: I've really enjoyed the journey I've been on since joining SUN. Great memories are of the first SUN Movement Global Gathering in 2011, which was very emotional, and of the Nutrition for Growth event in London in 2013. From a professional perspective, my most rewarding moments have been the regional workshops that have been organized with UNICEF and other partners since November 2013. We've always tried to take these workshops as an opportunity to unjam sticking-points. Last year it was great to see that 30 countries participated and that they were investigating nutrition in their own national budgets.

S&L: *What, in your opinion, are the biggest challenges currently facing the SUN Movement?*

PF: The biggest challenge is also, in many ways, the biggest opportunity. The "Movement" needs to ensure that it continues to be country-owned, with all operative parts of the constituent societies wholly committed to improving nutrition across the board. I think that the role of civil society alliances is pivotal in making nutrition an issue of justice. In other words, it's the "multi-stakeholder" aspect that's both the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity. This requires working with multi-disciplinary teams while looking at scientific, practical and political aspects as well as the legal implications.

S&L: *What are your interests outside work?*

PF: I love travel, the sea, socializing, playing tennis, dancing, music and cinema. And my husband, of course, without whose support I wouldn't be able to do any of the above! He is my rock.

S&L: *Has working for the SUN Movement influenced your relationship with food?*

PF: It's made me more aware of the different food systems existing in the world today – the origin of the foods we eat, that is to say. But I come from Italy, and the concepts of "slow food" and of food as identity are part of our way of life. In fact, I think that the cultural aspects of eating and of food should play a bigger part in any discussion about nutrition!

S&L: *Is there a book on nutrition that you would recommend to our readers?*

PF: *The Road to Good Nutrition*, edited by Manfred Eggersdorfer, Klaus Kraemer, Marie Ruel et al, and on which you yourself worked, is a pretty good one, I'd say. I would recommend *From Field to Fork: Food Ethics for Everyone* by Paul Thompson. And also, not directly related to nutrition, *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* by Alex de Waal.

S&L: *Do you have a hero or heroine, Patrizia?*

PF: I've always been fascinated by the jazz singers Nina Simone and Billie Holiday. Their passion and struggle were completely expressed by their music. The female activists that were killed last year and the years before for speaking out are also my heroines. In 2015 alone, Joan Kagezi, Nadia Vera, Norma Angélica Bruno Román, Catherine Han Montoya, Losana McGowan, Intisar al-Hasairi, and Angiza Shinwari were murdered for defending human rights. And of course, Nelson Mandela is a hero of mine. I can never get enough Mandela!

S&L: *If you could have been anything in this life, what might you have become?*

PF: I wanted to become a documentary-maker. The first time I went to Ethiopia for my research, I turned down the opportunity to attend a documentary school in Marseilles. There's still time, though. Who knows – maybe I'll pitch the idea of one that covers the origins of the SUN Movement. It's a story worth telling, don't you think? And I've certainly got plenty of material!

S&L: *Thank you, Patrizia, and the best of luck with that concept and with all your current work for the SUN Movement.*

PF: Thank you, Jonathan.

Patrizia Fracassi was interviewed by Jonathan Steffen, February 2016