



JOINT MONITORING & EVALUATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: OVERVIEW



M&E of Nutrition Programmes in ECD and Foundation Phase

Date: 21-10-2021

1. PRESENTATIONS (links given in the main report)

1	Title	ECD Nutrition Programmes: Starting the Conversation about Monitoring & Evaluation
	Presenters	Jessica Roonasen Baker (social worker and ECD researcher) & Anna-Marie Muller (DGMT)
	Key Theme	This presentation challenged CoP members to demystify data and how it can be used, citing that data should not intimidate, but support better decision-making in programmes. Through describing growth monitoring projects and funding experience, the presentation offered a practical approach to integrating and working with data in ECD nutrition programmes. This included a wider-ranging approach to monitoring.
2	Title	Evaluation of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)
	Presenter	Neo Sediti (Director of the NSNP in the Department of Basic Education)
	Key Theme	This presentation described the structure and operation of the NSNP, offering a breakdown of the grant framework that stipulates nutrition requirements and how the programme is monitored nationally and provincially, as well as the methodology, results and recommendations of the external evaluation of 2016.

The standard **SAMEA UPDATES** were given, and links to various **TOOLS AND RESOURCES** were shared.

2. PARTICIPANT TAKEAWAYS (88 participants)

- Benefits of sharing programme evaluations at different levels where the data will be useful.
- Challenges for M&E in the complex, interconnected ECD space, with its many intervening factors.
- The importance of moving forward timeously to provide nutritional support to children in both unregistered and registered ECD facilities, based on the strong evidence of the importance of good nutrition in the early years.
- The value of an organisational learning approach to data.
- The need to continue nutritional support to children reliant on school feeding during school closures.

Links to Presentations and Tools and Resources on the BRIDGE website are given in the report. Other resources shared include:

ELOM preschool child assessment tool: <http://elom.org.za>

Grow Great infographics and local survey results: ARTICLES & REPORTS <https://www.growgreat.co.za/resources>

NSNP Implementation Evaluation Report:

<https://www.dpme.gov.za/news/Documents/NSNP%20Report%20Final%2016092016.pdf>

Local government and ECD (Real Reform for ECD Campaign webinar): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8-Ta8CW1wE>

BRIDGE Joint Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) and Early Childhood Development (ECD) Community of Practice

Virtual Meeting held on 21 October 2021

M&E of Nutrition Programmes in ECD and Foundation Phase



Background and context

Nutrition plays a vital role in children’s holistic development, and appropriate nutrition during the early years lays a foundation for wellbeing in later life. In South Africa we continue to see high rates of growth stunting in young children, stemming from inadequate nutrition practices. There is also currently no solid nutrition strategy for children of 5 years and under, despite this being an imperative for the National Integrated ECD Policy.

Although ECD programmes are an important source of nutrition for many children, the government subsidy has a limited reach – and budget constraints, and at times a lack of knowledge, can result in children receiving inadequate nutrition.

These factors emphasise the importance of monitoring and evaluating nutrition practices in ECD programmes and the Foundation Phase, and raise questions around the M&E processes to be followed. In bringing together education and M&E interests to start a conversation around this topic, this joint CoP aims to share insights and experiences, and to demystify M&E methodologies in relation to nutrition programmes.

ECD has long been a key focus area for BRIDGE, which runs a national ECD CoP and three provincial (Western Cape, KZN and Mpumalanga) ECD CoPs. Due to its cross-cutting nature, the M&E CoP sometimes holds joint CoPs to explore M&E of programmes in a particular sector. The M&E CoP is led by BRIDGE together with its partners who bring M&E expertise to the team: Khulisa (Margie Roper: CoP facilitator), SAMEA as the association for M&E professionals, and Tshikululu as a funding body with a focus on M&E. This CoP is funded by the Zenex Foundation.

Mentimeter Quiz on Nutrition and Evaluation Terminology

This activity aimed to orientate participants to the topic by asking three questions:

- Why is the issue of nutrition important in learning and development?
- What are the three most important terms in the nutrition field for your work?
- From an evaluation perspective, what do you think would be the main indicator to track the progress and success of a nutrition programme?

Responses showed the group’s understanding of the strong links between nutrition and learning, and the diversity of programmes that participants are involved in. Illustrative examples have been recorded below (page 14).

“BRIDGE is a great platform because it brings together – like a bridge would – various platforms but also various stakeholders. There are some wonderful organisations represented here today. You only have to scroll through the attendance register to see how fantastic this community is.”

Dr Jessica Roonasen Baker



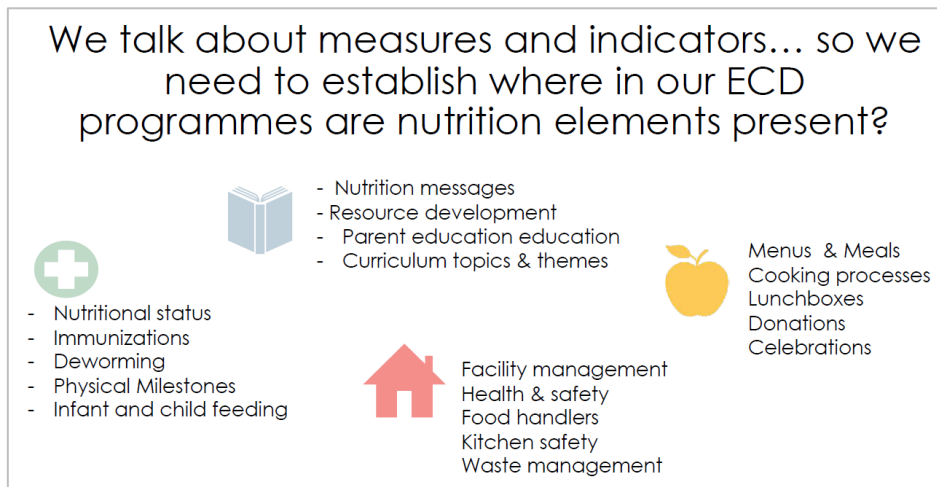
Presentation: ECD Nutrition Programmes: Starting the Conversation about Monitoring & Evaluation (Dr Jessica Roonasen Baker [social worker and ECD researcher] & Anna-Marie Muller [DG Murray Trust])

Click [here](#) to see presentation

This collaborative presentation combined a practical, wide-ranging approach to monitoring in the ECD space with insights on funder and public health nutrition perspectives.

MONITORING IN THE ECD SPACE

Jessica led with the idea that nutrition is not just about feeding. It slots into many different elements of ECD programming – and can hence be monitored in many different ways. This is a relatively new idea, whose value lies in exploring how nutrition fits into ECD and what these different areas and ways of monitoring are.



Together, monitoring and evaluation are about learning and improvement. Monitoring shouldn't be a policing activity, but an opportunity for learning about what works – and funders need to be open towards incorporating changes aimed at improving provision.

What nutrition elements can we monitor?

In the past, NGOs tended to take a donor-focused, mainly quantitative approach to M&E, concentrating on, for example, the number of beneficiaries reached – but there are many other elements of programmes, and other ways of doing M&E that can be considered. Jessica shared a variety of thoughts to trigger ideas, such as:

- Budget often dictates what evaluations are done.
- Qualitative feedback is a valuable form of monitoring that is often neglected.
- A participatory approach that involves beneficiaries in the evaluation process is valuable for due diligence in terms of using donor money accountably.
- Analysing policy is a useful form of M&E within our own organisations.
- Resource mapping can help determine sufficiency and appropriateness of resources used.

“This is another conversation to be had: often pressure is put on NGOs to do massive evaluations, when really we should be thinking about why and what we are evaluating – and how we can use the data in a helpful and meaningful way.”

- The components that are measured will be different for every organisation and programme, and every organisation will monitor and evaluate differently.
- A health focus provides many opportunities for monitoring. Jessica cautioned that conversations on monitoring children’s health and physical development ‘can become uncomfortable’, but that it is critical to be open about these issues in order to bring about improvements (e.g., growth monitoring that identifies children suffering from malnutrition enables appropriate referral).
- The *Road to Health* booklet provides a valuable entry point for monitoring – it is a useful tool and an ideal data source that addresses a range of indicators. “It is data waiting to be utilised.”
- Nutrition messages are a useful basis for monitoring. Are they aligned with the *Road to Health* booklet? Are they relevant to beneficiary communities?

Some examples of nutrition-related monitoring

To illustrate, Jessica referred to several projects in the Nelson Mandela Bay area where monitoring a wider range of elements had benefitted both implementers and beneficiaries.

- **The IMAP Project** (nutrition training for ECD practitioners). The initial monitoring focused on practitioner attendance and pre- and post-testing, but this grew (together with the project) to include growth and health monitoring and parent involvement. Post-training, many practitioners began their own initiatives to collect and interpret data and establish gardens.
- **Sekha Esethu** programme (community support groups for nutrition and breastfeeding). This is an example of the value of qualitative feedback from parents and caregivers. Sharing pictures and recordings of interactions with the donor adds to the validity of the data.
- **The Phila Baby Campaign** (DoH). Participant feedback led to some significant changes to resources (e.g., the addition of prompts to the backs of posters to assist facilitators).

Using M&E as a basis for organisational learning

Jessica emphasised the importance of removing the fear around data, and seeing M&E as a learning process that builds understanding within organisations and the sector. While NGOs do not need to understand all the technicalities around data, as they can bring in expertise, she encouraged organisations to find creative ways of using technology, supporting the development of new skills and ways of thinking, and working collaboratively.

Creating an organisation that learns..

- Build a Culture of shared learning [leader led & feedback loops]
- Create a learning environment – PLAY
- Prioritise self development & team development [remove fear]
- Structures, processes & products to preserve institutional memory [community of practice]
- Communication & creativity
- Tools & Technology
- Encouraging staff to gain new skills [innovation & green thinking]
- Research should be a part of our organization learning
- Collaboration means you don't have to be an expert on every topic

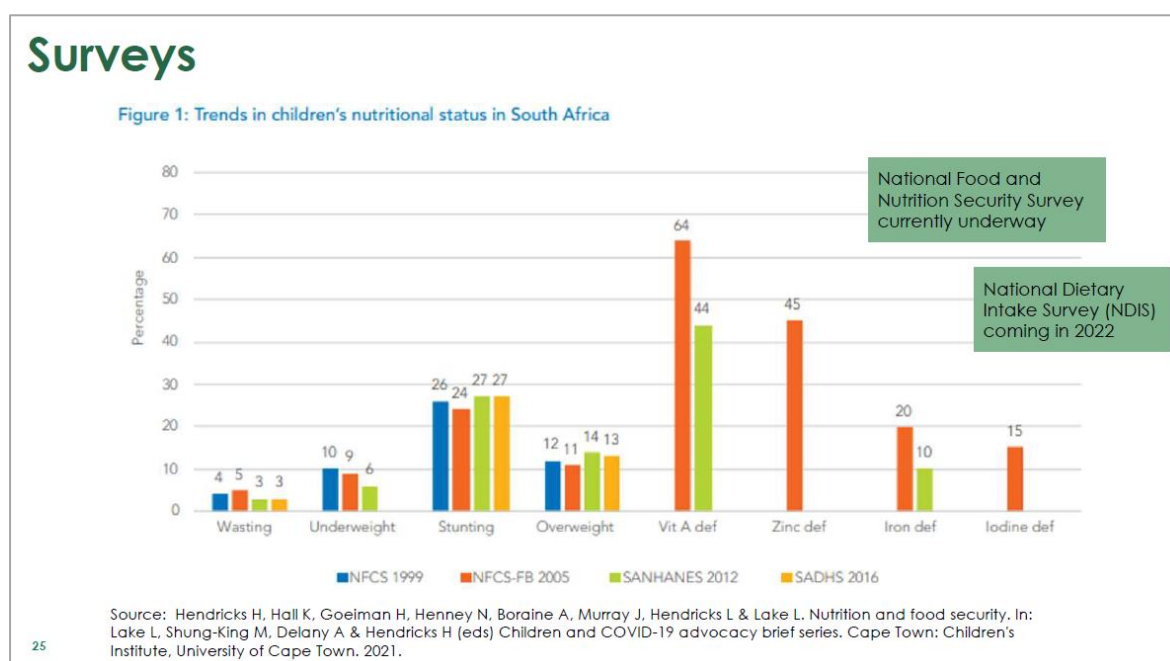
“We should be sharing what we discover, not only with our donor but also with each other – which is the point of a community of practice. In ECD we always speak about play being important for learning, and I want to challenge all of you to start to play with the way you use data. Team development can improve your learning, so use your reports for more than just donor purposes or as a tick-box exercise.”

FUNDER AND PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION PERSPECTIVES

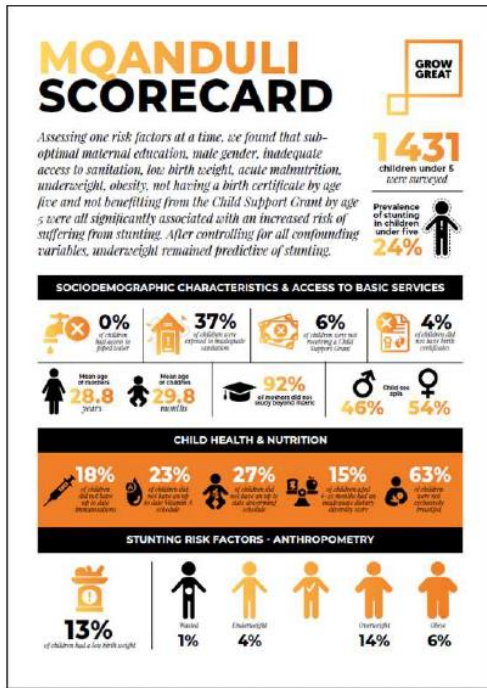
Anna-Marie began with a reflection on the roles of national and local nutrition surveys.

Different purposes and uses of national and local surveys

National surveys provide snapshots of population level data that enable comparisons over time. The high-level data they provide is important for internal processes (e.g., for the national Department of Health), and for external processes (e.g., relating to the SDGs). As can be seen in the example below, national surveys on children’s nutritional status have demonstrated a lack of progress in terms of stunting since 1999. They do not, however, provide direction in terms of action to be taken.



Local surveys, on the other hand, allow us to use data in powerful ways. The examples below from the Grow Great Campaign show how data from two community surveys not only indicates the prevalence of stunting, but also identifies the drivers of the stunting in each community – and hence enables a targeted response that can change the outcomes for affected children. The surveys used the same questionnaires and same methodology in both settings – but found the drivers of stunting to be very different.



National surveys cannot give this type of gritty, on-the-ground detail as they extrapolate from fairly small samples (e.g., in the South African Demographic and Health Survey of 2016, the Western Cape sample was less than a 100 children).

Information from local surveys can lead to significant change. The Worcester survey (see above) led to community health workers being provided with scales after it demonstrated the important role that weighing plays in accurately identifying problems and referring children appropriately.

“Data is an important tool that we can use in interesting ways. Data shouldn’t just sit in a report – we really have to use it.”

Using data to advocate for nutrition in ECD

Anne-Marie explained that donors want to see the impact of the programmes they fund, but also to learn from the data and to understand how it can be used to bring about change. She also cautioned against putting data on a pedestal; no collection of data would ever give the complete picture, as other factors that had not been tracked might have played a role in generating that impact.

We should be exploiting the advocacy firepower that data gives us to greater effect. There are many anecdotal accounts of the role of nutrition for children’s cognitive outcomes – and tools such as the Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) confirm this. Stories of this kind should be elevated from just the anecdotal and used more prominently in intervention planning and to highlight the crucial importance of nutrition for cognitive development.

“When NGOs talk to donors it is important to say holistically that in order to thrive, children need both mental stimulation and nutrition. These elements are not in competition, but complementary – so NGOs should not be made to choose which is more important. NGOs need to sell that argument and then to engage in a conversation and show that nuance in their application. Donors really want to see how things intersect with each other because it is in that grey, messy area where the magic often happens.”



Q&A: Discussion Takeaways

- The point about sharing programme evaluations at different levels where the data will be useful is crucial. There is an ongoing debate in the M&E CoP about how to share data, specifically data from contracted monitoring and evaluations. In response, Anna-Marie observed that for Grow Great, it was important not only to present the results of community surveys formally, but also to share the information with practitioners and communities. Conversations with practitioners assist in bringing out the meaning of the data and how it can be used.
- In addition to nutrition, it is important to consider other elements that impact wellbeing such as sleep, relationships, physical activity (the concept of primary and secondary foods), poverty and the influence of primary caregivers – all of which provide additional indicators. Many bad eating habits stem from the home, so finding ways to integrate primary caregivers and households into nutrition interventions would have a significant impact on the nutritional status of children.

CoP facilitator Margie Roper (Khulisa) observed that some additional issues relating to the M&E of child nutrition were how to engage with government, and importantly, how to break down the silos that exist in the education and health spaces.



Evaluation of the National School Nutrition Programme (Neo Sediti, Director for the NSNP in the Department of Basic Education)

Click [here](#) to see presentation

Neo gave an overview of the inception, structure, funding and monitoring of the programme, and discussed the 2016 implementation evaluation and how its recommendations are being addressed.

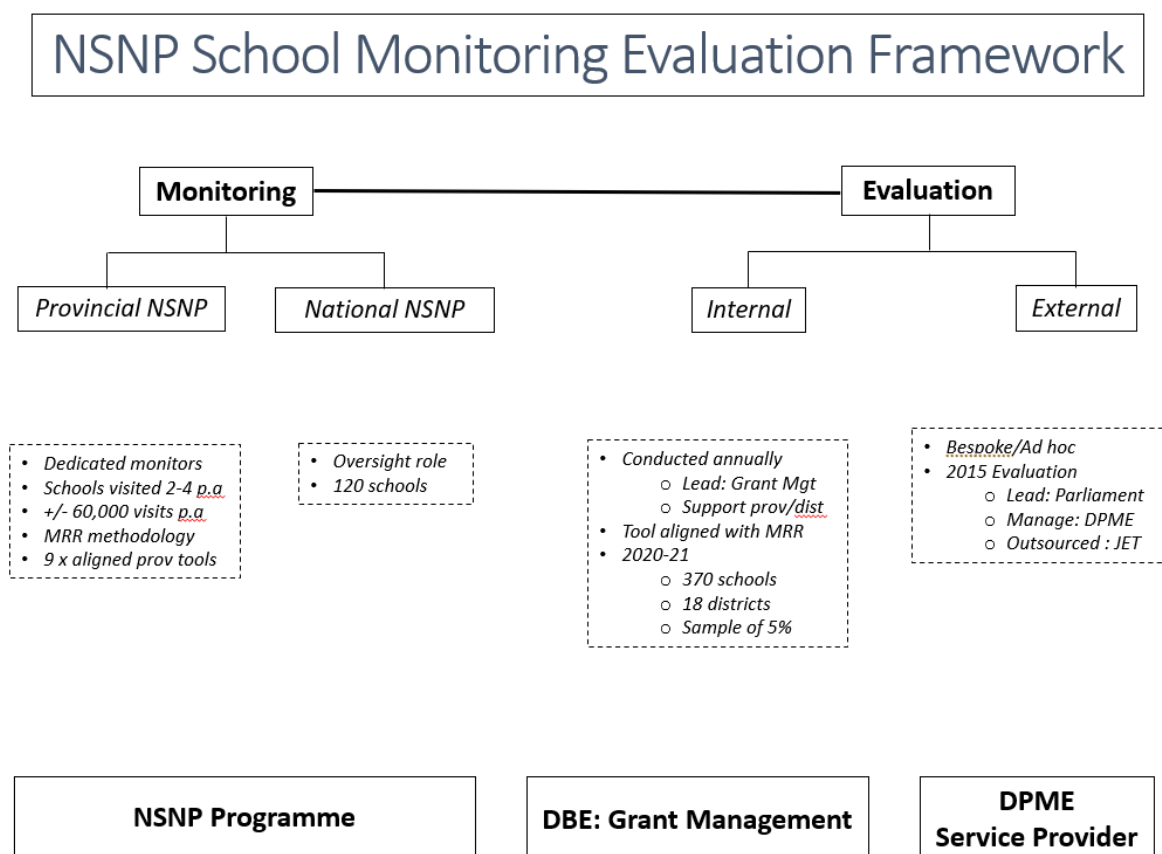
Overview of the NSNP

The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) began as a Presidential Lead Programme in 1994. In 2002 it was transferred from the DoH to the DBE. Initially it targeted primary school learners but has since been extended to secondary schools and some special schools. The NSNP currently reaches over 9.6 million learners in approximately 21 000 schools located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. The programme is funded by a Conditional Grant from Treasury and implemented in terms of a Conditional Grant Framework (Slide 4). Procurement can either be centralised or decentralised, and meals are prepared and served at schools by voluntary food handlers appointed by SGBs.

Key objectives

The NSNP provides nutritious meals to learners in identified schools with the aim of enabling disadvantaged learners to access education while improving school attendance and learning ability. In addition, the NSNP promotes nutrition education within schools and amongst school communities, through nutrition awareness campaigns and activities.

The NSNP Monitoring and Evaluation Framework



The monitoring system is a continuum towards evaluation. Monitoring takes place at all levels of implementation: national, provincial and district. At national level the NSNP has an oversight role and directly monitors a sample of 5% of schools on the programme. At provincial/district level, dedicated monitors visit schools 2 – 4 times annually to monitor relevant indicators, using a Monitoring, Reporting and Responding (MRR) approach. Monitoring tools have been developed/modified to be commensurate with the indicators and needs related to each level of implementation.

Impact of Covid-19 on monitoring – Neo noted that data collected during unannounced observation visits had greater authenticity and served to validate data provided by PEDs and districts. Covid-19 has made such visits difficult, and monitoring is currently being carried out telephonically, using a modified version of the monitoring tool to collect relevant data that allows for extrapolation.

Internal evaluations are conducted annually (this is mandatory for Conditional Grant recipients). The NSNP is assisted to conduct the internal evaluations by the DBE Grant Management Directorate and the organisation Feed, Uplift, Educate and Laugh (FUEL).

External evaluations are conducted approximately every five years. These involve other government departments such as the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), and international agencies such as UNICEF.

Monitoring, Reporting and Responding (MRR) methodology

Essentially, MRR consists of collecting relevant data to measure and assess whether the programme is performing successfully, analysing, understanding and sharing the information in an appropriate way, and using the information to improve performance (Slide 8).

In practice, for district level monitors, MRR means working with school principals to complete the monitoring tool which measures the key performance indicators (KPIs), identifying any gaps, and then engaging with the principals on steps needed to bring about improvements.

The KPIs relate to the quality, quantity and serving of meals. Health and safety is an important supporting indicator. Neo observed that not all school kitchens comply fully with health and safety standards, so measuring this indicator enables the programme to engage SGBs, districts and provincial departments on supporting schools to improve this aspect.



Nutrition guidelines

The NSNP derives its mandate from the Conditional Grant Framework (CGF) which stipulates what has to be provided on the plate on a day-to-day basis. The food specifications follow the South African based dietary guidelines of the DoH.

Nutrition Guidelines

Nutrition related requirements: Grant Framework

- comply with recommended food specifications and approved menu > starch, protein and fresh vegetable/fruit
- fresh fruit/vegetables should be served daily and vary between green, and yellow/red
- a variety of protein-rich foods should be served > raw sugar beans be packed separately from samp
- soya mince should not be served more than twice a week
- pilchards should be served at least once a week.
 - High quality protein products can replace pilchards (social acceptability)
- UHT / pasteurised fresh milk or maas should be served once a week..
 - comply with dairy standards set by Milk South Africa



The 2016 NSNP Evaluation

This was an implementation evaluation using a mixed-methods design (Slide 10). The aim was to assess whether the NSNP was being implemented in a way that was likely to result in significant health and educational benefits for learners. (An impact evaluation cannot be conducted due to the unavailability of reliable baseline data – a result of the DBE taking over the programme ‘as is’ from the DoH).

The implementation aspect was purposefully selected for the information it would provide on the operationalisation of the NSNP. The programme is large and has many variables. Key indicators and evaluation questions were identified through the development of a logframe and refinement of the Theory of Change. Some key evaluation questions were:

- Is the programme being implemented as planned?
- Are procedures effective for timely delivery?
- Are learners receiving quality meals and services?
- Is the programme reaching intended beneficiaries?

Data collection and analysis methods included a document and literature review, survey interviews with a variety of stakeholders, school observations, and an analysis of cost and output data. JET was the commissioned research agency.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The key findings confirmed the overall success of the programme and reaffirmed the NSNP's mandate (Slide 12). Broadly speaking, the findings indicated considerable variation across provinces, the advantages of decentralised procurement, a problem of unintended beneficiaries, and some shortcomings in the timing and composition of meals.

Recommendations for improving fidelity and efficiency included developing norms and standards for staffing and resources, enhancing training for volunteer food handlers, and developing guidelines and tools for business processes.

Action Taken in Response to the Evaluation

The NSNP initiated a range of interventions in response to the evaluation-(Slide 13). These included:

- Improvement plans to address recommendations. Progress has been noted in quarterly reports aligned to annual performance plans.
- Task teams to address all areas indicated in the findings and recommendations (e.g., protein alternatives; infrastructure and equipment; a nutrition referral system; a 10 am feeding time; the integration of food gardens and local procurement of fresh produce; the monitoring strategy).
- Policy and strategy changes based on learnings from the evaluation (e.g., progressive introduction of breakfast meals, a more varied menu, and a wider range of protein alternatives – including piloting of canned chicken liver as a soya alternative).

Extending the NSNP to ECD

To conclude her presentation, Neo shared an update on the extension of the NSNP to the ECD sector once the mandate is transferred on 1 April 2022. Planning is underway. The NSNP has been working with stakeholders, including the DSD, in the area of health and nutrition, to prepare for this new responsibility. The recently launched census of registered and unregistered ECD centres will identify the scope and establish a baseline to work from.

"I am glad to have been introduced to this BRIDGE Community of Practice – and that the participants have joined together to add value to what they are doing. Each and every one of us can contribute and add value to the evidence-based data collection that has been presented this morning."

Neo Sediti, DBE (NSNP)

Neo noted the importance of this topic for many CoP participants, and expressed interest in engaging further in the future.



Q&A: Discussion Takeaways

Invited by the facilitator to comment, Anna-Marie noted that:

- The kinds of evaluations that one would do for school-aged vs younger children are different. It is important to pick the right outcome indicators for the beneficiary cohort being monitored.
- Many of the issues in ECD are complex and interconnected, and it is important to have realistic expectations about what can be achieved within a certain time period.
- Children should have adequate quality access to all 5 parts of the essential package of ECD services. In response, Neo acknowledged the need for differentiation in M&E. Data would be helpful towards redesigning the NSNP programme to fit within ECD. DSD capacity would be absorbed into the DBE, ensuring a transfer of skills and the sharing of knowledge and available data. The existing programme would continue, and ongoing learning would enable the nutrition aspect to be strengthened.

“It is great to hear the DBE talk about their responsibility towards nutrition following the Function Shift, and we are excited to keep the conversation going.”

Gary Campbell (FUEL Trust, partner in the NSNP) shared views on providing nutrition in ECD, drawn from his experiences with the NSNP and various initiatives aimed at providing affordable nutrition in the ECD space:

- There are some learnings from the NSNP that can be applied to ECD. There is enough international research showing that providing nutritious meals to young children does have impact, to justify moving forward on this – although obviously, it needs to be done properly.
- The DoH has developed norms and standards for nutrition, which we should try to simplify for ECD practitioners. The biggest challenge is funding, and meals must be made as nutritious as possible with limited resources (e.g., R2/R3 per child per day). We need to commit to following through on this as there is sufficient evidence that it will enable children to develop and learn. We shouldn't over-focus on M&E, although we do need to monitor and track growth, etc.
- Referring to the Function Shift, Gary noted the need for all stakeholders to understand how different the schooling and ECD systems are. The (public) schooling system is regulated, run and funded by government. ECD is essentially a private system, with policy and regulation falling under several different government entities.
- Bringing ECD into the DBE is about much more than just having grade R classrooms at schools – but we need to simplify and 'get going'.

Facilitator's Reflections on the CoP

The CoP produced important insights about sharing learning, and about tools and mechanisms that can be used to improve nutrition-related M&E in the ECD sector. These have relevance for practitioners, programme implementers and evaluators, and government. A significant part of this

CoP was the exploration of this nexus and the relationships and engagements between the actors and the stakeholders.

Both presentations stressed the importance of an evidence-based approach and, crucially, of using the results of M&E processes. It is both affirming and encouraging for evaluators to see their recommendations being taken forward into implementation plans and ultimately being followed through to improve outcomes for beneficiaries.



Tools and Resources

Terminology Resource

The terminology resource shared with the aim of facilitating discussion in this CoP can be found at <https://bit.ly/3w9Jfat/>

Example of a Theory of Change (ToC) for scaling up integrated nutrition best practices

Benita Williams (SAMEA) introduced this example that shows: i) integration across different components in the agriculture, health and education sectors; ii) the importance of ensuring that solutions are scalable; and iii) different ways of depicting ToCs. Benita noted that there is value in looking at programmes that can be scaled up (like the NSNP) and how they can be extended to ECD – and reminded the CoP of the importance of looking at ways of integrating projects.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266788414_A_theory_of_change_for_scaling_up_integrated_nutrition_best_practices

Due to time constraints the CoP was not able to do the reflection activity on the ToC; however, reflection questions and some examples of M&E nutrition outcomes can be found at <https://bit.ly/3nMP89G>

Tools and resources shared in the chat

ELOM preschool child assessment tool: <http://elom.org.za>

Grow Great infographics and local survey results: ARTICLES & REPORTS

<https://www.growgreat.co.za/resources>

Evidence for the importance of good nutrition and early stimulation and how the two go hand in hand: https://blogs.worldbank.org/impactevaluations/play-your-kids-and-make-them-richer?CID=WBW_AL_BlogNotification_EN_EXT?cid=SHR_BlogSiteShare_EN_EXT

Nutritional status of children during the lockdown: <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/10.-Van-der-Berg-S.-Patel-L.-Bridgman-G.-2021-Hunger-in-South-Africa-during-2020-Results-from-Wave-3-of-NIDS-CRAM-1.pdf>

Scope and coverage of the NSNP:

<https://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/NationalSchoolNutritionProgramme.aspx>

NSNP Implementation Evaluation Report:

<https://www.dpme.gov.za/news/Documents/NSNP%20Report%20Final%2016092016.pdf>

Local government and ECD (Real Reform for ECD Campaign webinar):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8-Ta8CW1wE>

SAMEA Update

Benita Williams gave an update on SAMEA in her capacity as a SAMEA Board member.

- SAMEA is a home for people interested in M&E. Members enjoy various benefits, and non-members who register an account on the website receive news and information (www.samea.org.za).

SAMEA
South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association

SAMEA is a national Voluntary Organisation for Professional Evaluation, founded in 2005. SAMEA strives to cultivate a **vibrant community that will support, guide and strengthen the development of M&E** as an important discipline, profession and instrument for empowerment and accountability in South Africa.

- ACCESS RESOURCES, JOB OPPORTUNITY POSTINGS, AND DISCUSSIONS**
Special member access to information
- PROMOTE YOUR SERVICES, SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND SEEK ADVICE**
Showcase your work and services
- ACCESS LIVE, VIRTUAL DISCUSSIONS, DEBATES AND PRESENTATIONS**
Learn from your desktop
- SAVE COSTS ON EVENT PARTICIPATION**
Register in time for upcoming events.
- BECOME A SAMEA MEMBER**
Become a SAMEA member and be part of our community
- BUILD YOUR NETWORK CAPITAL**
Networking through face-to-face and online platforms

Website: www.samea.org.za Twitter: [@SAMEA_ZA](https://twitter.com/SAMEA_ZA)
SAMEATalk: talk@www.samea.org.za EduCOVID TIG: educovid@www.samea.org.za

- SAMEA has been running an evaluation hackathon as an innovative way of co-creating solutions for South Africa's M&E challenges, building M&E capacity, and strengthening the M&E community. The Hackathon covered the types of topics listed above.

- Evidence gap map
- Guideline and definition of criteria on equity and environmental sustainability
- Rapid Evaluations
- Virtual M&E
- M&E of emergency crisis funds,
- African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Evaluation

Next M&E CoP

A 'Super CoP' is planned for 24 November, which will bring together the various BRIDGE M&E CoPs and SAMEA chapters. It will include unpacking reflections and best practice in conducting M&E during Covid-19, as well as future directions for the sector.



Final Thoughts from Participants

We have included Mentimeter responses and Chat comments/ questions here, as these are very useful and could provide an agenda for further discussion.

MENTIMETER ACTIVITY RESPONSES

Q1: Why is the issue of nutrition important in learning and development?

- Children can't learn optimally on empty stomachs.
- Poor nutrition leads to poor growth, and this impacts cognitive development.
- Healthy eating and living contribute to the holistic development of children.
- Poor nutrition can hinder development and have a negative impact on learning outcomes.
- Hungry children can't learn. Often there is no food at home, therefore it is critical to their growth and development.
- Most African children are experiencing hunger/poverty at home, so they need food for their learning and focus.
- It encourages children to go to school and helps them concentrate while learning is in progress. It also helps their bodies and brains to develop optimally.
- Hungry kids have a discipline problem.
- Nutrition is a key building block for the early years and lays a foundation for cognitive development and health and well-being in later life.
- When children are food insecure, they become stunted and face malnutrition. This has an impact on their learning and ability to read.

Q2: What are the three most important terms in the nutrition field for your work?

Stunting	Dietary diversity	Balanced meals	Correct allocations
Hunger	Whole foods	Vitamin deficiency	Height
Malnutrition	Obesity	Breastfeeding	Weight
Food safety	Micronutrients	Deworming	Nutrition support
High protein	Growth	Infant mortality rate	Intervention

Q3: From an evaluation perspective, what do you think would be the main indicator to track the progress and success of a nutrition programme?

Stunting levels	Milestones
Compliance to health and food safety standards	Serving nutritious meals on time
Anthropometric measures: height, weight, BMI	Changes in height-for-age over time
Muscle and mental development	<i>Road to Health</i> card
Referrals to local clinics	School / ECD attendance
Child performance	Breastfeeding numbers
Diversity of meal preparation	Measurement of upper arm circumference
Kitchen safety	Delivery of food to schools
Parent involvement	Exclusive breastfeeding
Parental knowledge of nutrition	Consistency of feeding

CHATBOX COMMENTS/ QUESTIONS

Using data

“Data is critical and if used appropriately can make a huge difference. Stories and more qualitative information are just as essential.”

“Data assists with adaptation in your approach to curriculum, teaching and assessment. As we go along, we should already get a sense of where the learners are going. What are they achieving, and how are they achieving this? Data should not be an end-all, but feed what we do at schools.”

“I really appreciate the language that the presenters are using, e.g., the ‘the learning organisation’ and the ‘learning process approach’.”

“There may be a silo issue that prevents the uptake of the recommendation to focus on Education and Health.”

“The extreme difficulty in the spaces we are working in is the myriad of intervening factors – attribution being one issue, as is using data to confirm our interventions are in fact working. It's complicated.”

“Nutrition data for young children is well documented. We should take initiative to use the data and convince our funders for quality nutritional support.”

Nutrition in ECD

“Experience has shown that learners who have nutritious meals at the appropriate time will perform better. We have seen this at schools where we have supported the nutrition program during holiday periods (spring, winter schools, etc). There is a direct link.”

“How and who will advocate the importance of nutrition to government?”

“The responsibility to advocate is really with all of us. Without the investment/prioritisation of nutrition we are setting the other investments up for poor returns. Other countries like Brazil, Senegal, Ghana, some parts of India, where there are strong nutrition champions, have seen the impact. We can do the same here if we're consistently making our voices heard.”

“What is the role of local government regarding nutrition and ECD sites? What more can be done at this tier of government closest to the community?”

“The early years are the most critical period for brain growth, and require nutrition building blocks to be in place. Whilst we aim to ensure all children attending Grade R and above receive nutrition support, it is in the most critical early years where children are not supported, given that the majority of SA's children who access ECD are in unregistered centres and therefore don't benefit from nutritional support. With ECD migrating to DBE, what is the DBE going to do to ensure no child is left behind?”

“The recently drafted National Social Compact for Social Cohesion and Nation-building includes an intervention in the themed pillar: Social Inclusion and Social Protection to ensure that pregnant women and children in their first 1,000 days be provided with adequate nutrition. Let's see how this plays out. ECD will need to guide the auditing of this going forward.”

The NSNP

“What measures are in place to extend the NSNP to ECD sites where necessary? This is the cohort where early intervention and prevention is the cure. Also, given the rampant corruption in the country, how do you M&E that the resources are going where they should?”

“What are your plans to ensure that children are still supported during pandemics, holidays etc? Last year, some children were out of school for 8 months and then went on vac. Also, hunger is not held at bay during weekends and holidays.”

“Have you measured the severe impact of the lack of access to the school feeding programme on the nutritional status of children during the lockdown last year?”

“Is there a specific focus on sodium levels of provided [menu] options?”

“In the Foundation Phase, the nutrition programme has immense benefits. Attendance is impacted, and learners learn socially accepted practices like 'cleaning up after meals'.”

School feeding

“There is a great example of using procurement of food for school feeding programmes to serve the local community from Brazil. Since 2009, the law guarantees that at least 30% of the budget for School Feeding is allocated to buy food from local producers – it would be amazing if our SA policies could also be designed in these ways.”

“Many parents are unemployed due to the pandemic. Yet many [high school] learners do not inform the school about this. This has a bearing on the dropout rate as learners become despondent and want to look for employment to support the family. Schools should be more vigilant about this as learners too have their pride and might not have the emotional intelligence to see the nutrition programme as a complement to their education.”

“How does high quality agriculture supply play a role in nutrition for schools? As in, is the quality and nutritional value of vegetables monitored in this process as well? Is education around growing your own high-quality food considered?”

.....
Please note: Our usual practice of including the list of participants and their organisations in the Meeting Highlights is under revision due to the POPI Act.