This learning brief highlights some advocacy successes, as well as lessons learnt in strengthening the voice of civil society organisations (CSOs) to advance food and nutrition security (FNS). Implemented by the six-country Voice for Change Partnership (V4CP), the project sought to enhance civil society advocacy in the three interrelated areas of: sustainable access to quality food for all; health and well-being of the most vulnerable groups, and consumers in general; and improved livelihoods for small-scale farmers.

The Brief discusses how the Partnership mobilised broad-based alliances of farmer groups, community champions, young people, consumers, and others to: influence the development and implementation of FNS policies; hold decision makers accountable; strengthen institutional capacities; and create a lasting momentum for change.

Overview of FNS advocacy interventions

*Poor diets and resulting malnutrition are not simply a matter of personal choices. Most people cannot access or afford a healthy diet or quality nutrition care [Global Nutrition Report, 2020]*

Sustainable Nutrition for All

While Rwanda¹ and Burkina Faso² have made progress in addressing chronic malnutrition, there is a need to improve performance on some key FNS indicators. Data for both countries³ shows that more than one-third of children aged below five years are affected by stunting. Priorities for V4CP-supported CSOs in Rwanda included advocating for increased fortification of staple foods to increase their nutritive value, and championing diversified nutritious foods. The CSOs also coordinated advocacy efforts aimed at enhancing service delivery by government and the private sector, and increasing budget allocations for the sector.

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1 Rwanda Democratic Health Survey (2014-2015) and CFPSA (2015)
2 Ministry of Health (2018) and SUN-BF (2020)
3 ibid
In **Burkina Faso** the V4CP CSO alliance advocated for improved inter-sectoral collaboration – including among stakeholders in the health, agriculture, transport, and education sectors – to ensure a systemic response to the FNS challenge.

The focus of V4CP-supported CSOs in **Ghana** was on “localising” national FNS policies in regions that were lagging behind on key FNS indicators. Partner CSOs facilitated the establishment and strengthening of nutrition coordination structures in four Districts in northern Ghana affected by high levels of child stunting.

With a hunger index of 13.2, and ranked 59 globally⁴, CSOs in **Honduras** contributed to revitalising FNS planning roundtables at the municipal level (known as “mesas municipales SAN”) by disseminating evidence, and bringing in diverse perspectives to influence FNS policy, plans, and budget allocation at the national level.

According to official government data, as many as eight million (roughly 30%) children in Indonesia are affected by stunting⁵. Building on findings from an IFPRI-supported study⁶, **Indonesian CSOs** contributed to the government’s efforts to reduce this high prevalence by advocating for the development, and implementation of inclusive FNS regulations at the sub-national level.

CSOs advocate for food fortification policy in Rwanda.
**Post-harvest loss**

As part of their efforts to create enhanced awareness of how to tackle post-harvest losses (PHL), CSOs in Ghana established a multi-stakeholder platform focused on the Upper West Region. The region is reported to be one of the worst affected by food losses, estimated at 14-18% for maize and cereals. CSOs involved private sector actors, and sought to influence smallholder farmers’ access to warehousing and other PHL technologies taking advantage of the unique expertise of each member of the platform. In Kenya, it is estimated post-harvest losses could be as high as 50% for some horticultural crops, owing to poor handling and storage.

Actions taken by V4CP CSOs included: increasing public awareness about the impacts of PHL in the potato value chain; pushing for implementation of national potato regulations; and ensuring the inclusion of smallholder farmers in decision-making processes.

**Food safety**

The poor enforcement of food quality standards in Kenya has long been a source of concern. A study by partner IFPRI study found that 43% to 96% of milk samples at selected sites exceeded safe microbiological levels. While effective controls are in place for important export sectors, such as horticulture, this is not the case for local markets. Based on these, and related studies, the V4CP coalition presented an agenda for action to county-level decision makers. They also played a key role in establishing active consumer watch groups, as well as multi-stakeholder food safety platforms to ensure sustained policy attention at local and higher levels. A key goal in these efforts is to ensure the establishment of an overarching national food safety authority to effectively enforce food standards.

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7 Sapong et al. (2008)
8 IFPRI (2019) Post-harvest losses in fruits and vegetables: The Kenyan Context
9 IFPRI (2018) Regulatory compliance in the Kenyan dairy sector: Awareness and compliance among farmers and vendors
V4CP coalitions drive increased investments in FNS priority areas

Despite the budgetary constraints related to the security crisis and its consequences on the budgets allocated to the various ministries, advocacy by V4CP CSOs in Burkina Faso yielded some concrete results. The government raised budgetary allocations for family farms by 6.58%, from CFA 15.2 billion (EUR 230 million) in 2018 to CFA 16.2 billion (EUR 245 million) in 2019. CSO advocacy also helped raise spending by Regional Councils on improved seeds, fertilisers, equipment, and agricultural extension for family farms. The role of the Partnership was publicly acknowledged by the Minister of Agriculture, during commemoration of National Peasant Day, and other high-profile events.

In Rwanda, as a result of budget tracking by partner RDO, CSOs successfully advocated for a rise in the allocation for FNS in the national budget, from 1% to 1.3% (equivalent to an additional €62 million).

V4CP achievements

Spearheading multi-stakeholder platforms to drive FNS policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring

V4CP-supported CSO alliances were instrumental in launching, or strengthening, multi-stakeholder collaboration to address key FNS challenges in the six countries. An immediate benefit of the collaboration with IFPRI was that V4CP CSO partners in the six countries were able to make effective use of available evidence, while also building their capacity to generate locally-relevant evidence. Such analysis sought, in particular, to highlight policy gaps, advocate for increased budget allocations, and mobilise investments from other stakeholders to address FNS priorities.

In Rwanda, the V4CP-supported CSOs brought together private sector, media, and other actors, to form the National Fortification Alliance in 2017. One of the milestones of this joint advocacy platform was the adoption of a mandatory food fortification law in 2019.

“The initiative of the high-level panel is all the more commendable that it comes from CSOs who, in their role as citizen control over public actions, are helping the government to take more responsibility for its citizens. For an effective and efficient food and nutrition security intervention and the better use of state resources, we need to rethink the food and nutrition security coordination model and under which ministry it would fall. Our government is committed to supporting this. The president himself underscored the importance of this undertaking.” - Mr. Simon Compaore, Minister of State, Burkina Faso

The Kenyan CSO partners were closely involved in a campaign involving private sector, research, and government agencies to roll out KS1758 – the national horticulture standard for fruits and vegetables. Similarly, a collaboration with dairy value chain actors facilitated the completion of four county-level policies addressing milk safety and post-harvest loss, three of which are currently operational.

Indonesian CSOs successfully contributed to the development of inclusive Food and Nutrition Action Plans in four districts and two provinces. Under the umbrella of multi-stakeholder partnerships, the V4CP-supported CSO alliances worked in close coordination with local governments, youth, people living with disabilities, and other stakeholders, to develop and promote these regulations.

CSO partners in Ghana collectively shared evidence garnered by IFPRI calling for decisive measures to ensure the integration of PHL across all relevant agricultural programmes, as well as cross-cutting policy initiatives, such as ‘Planting for Food and Jobs,’ and the Ghana Agricultural Engineering Sector policy. By putting the spotlight on this issue, the advocacy platforms were successful in increasing the engagement of parliamentarians, as well as ensuring the prioritisation of PHL in district-level development plans. V4CP-supported CSOs also contributed to the establishment of the first-ever Post-Harvest Management Platform, with the aim of coordinating awareness-raising efforts among farmers, as well as streamlining the dissemination of appropriate PHL technologies.
Advocating for strengthened local institutional capacities and collaboration to implement inclusive FNS programmes

Through its focus on influencing FNS planning processes at the sub-national level, as well as related policy and legislative frameworks at higher levels, the Partnership played an instrumental role in triggering broader political will and institutional collaboration to implement FNS policies, and leverage resources for FNS programmes (see box).

In **Rwanda**, V4CP CSOs played a key role in the enhancing of the effectiveness, and accountability of sub-national FNS structures. A V4CP-supported assessment of the functionality of existing District Plans to Eliminate Malnutrition (DPEMs) found that the associated coordination committees remained ineffective due to, among other factors, their lack of inclusive membership, poor understanding of the local drivers of malnutrition, and weak coordination at higher levels. A year later, as a result of this collaboration, the **DPEMs successfully adopted a unified nutrition strategy**, with specific targets, monitoring indicators, and a focus on improving gender and social inclusion, as well as coordination of different stakeholder groups. The strategy also addressed the need for increased budget allocations to implement the decentralised plans.

In **Burkina Faso**, research supported by partner IFPRI\(^\text{11}\) found that weak coordination between the ministries of Health and Agriculture – with each having parallel FNS policies and institutions – was a major bottleneck in tackling high malnutrition rates. As part of their advocacy strategy, CSOs **facilitated a fact-finding mission to neighbouring Benin** to learn about the country’s success with intersectoral coordination. Following the visit, which drew decision-makers from the two ministries, as well as representatives of the Prime Minister’s Office, and the National Assembly, the government established a high-level panel for food and nutrition security stakeholders to explore a suitable coordination model for Burkina Faso. A decree for the establishment of the coordinating council has since been drafted.

In **Honduras**, V4CP CSOs played a key role in strengthening the thematic and advocacy capabilities of FNS Municipal Tables. One of their strategies was to engagement with municipal authorities at an early stage, in order to convince them about the need for more inclusive policies, especially in the southern region of the country. The CSOs also established close links with other advocacy alliances, such as women’s and youth networks in order to bring diverse voices into these processes.

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11 IFPRI. Burkina Faso, histoires de changement en nutrition: Leçons apprises

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FNS learning and exchange visit in Rwanda, with CSOs from six countries, SNV and IFPRI.
Through the efforts of the CSO-driven advocacy platforms in Ghana, nutrition targets were included in seven district-level Medium Term Development Plans, and multi-stakeholder Community Nutrition Technical Teams established to oversee their implementation.

In Kenya, V4CP-supported CSOs played a key role in pushing for stronger enforcement of food safety regulations at the national, and local levels. Building on a SNV-developed business case for the dairy sector, CSOs promoted the concept of quality-based milk payments to incentivise the production and consumption of safe milk. As a result, Nakuru county has incorporated quality-based milk payments in its Dairy Sector Strategic Plan. While the process to establish an overarching National Food Safety Agency is still underway, food safety committees have been established in three counties, with three draft food safety policies in development.

In Kenya, CSO partners worked closely with the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry to raise awareness on food safety as a key value-added for agribusinesses. In the dairy sector, collaboration with the Kenya Dairy Processors Association helped to launch a national community of practice to promote self-regulation by milk processors and other actors. The platform played a key role in triggering a rigorous review of the national dairy industry regulations for milk safety.

In Rwanda, food processors and other private sector actors actively contributed to the multi-stakeholder effort that saw the adoption of a national law on food fortification. To ensure compliance, companies are putting in place strategies to adapt their manufacturing, as well as marketing processes, to ensure more consumers have access to fortified products.

In Ghana, the involvement of private sector actors in decentralised nutrition committees, as well as multi-stakeholder PHL advocacy platforms, helped open up spaces for their continued role during the implementation phase. In Nanumba Municipality, for example, a private company was selected to partner with the government to establish a district-level warehouse to reduce PHL.

In Burkina Faso, V4CP advocacy has contributed to a greater alignment between FNS priorities, and the government’s drive to modernise smallholder (family) farming through improved access to technology and knowledge, farm inputs, financing, and insurance, and other

**Leveraging private sector investment, and know-how**

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**Emerging Voices: Millennials shaping FNS agendas**

Centennials and millennials represent almost one third (30%) of Indonesia’s 238 million population. Through a broad-based youth platform, dubbed “Millennials’ Voice” the Partnership introduced a youth-oriented advocacy approach that combined digital advocacy and social media, with events, competitions, and other activities. One of the core objectives was to increase awareness on FNS, and encourage healthier lifestyles among young people. These campaigns also provided a platform for millennials, and other young people, to articulate their needs, ideas and priorities, around FNS themes. The platform has also spurred youth-led social enterprises focused on behaviour change communication, youth-led research, public awareness, and a broad range of initiatives to address child stunting, and other FNS challenges.
support. A notable success in this was the role that a partnership between CSOs, micro-finance institutions, and government institutions, in the creation of the Agricultural Bank of Burkina Faso.

**Linking FNS to other sustainable development priorities**

Food and nutrition security is closely linked to other sustainable development priorities, such as public health, gender equality, sustainable consumption and production, and combating climate change.

CSOs in Honduras made efforts to ensure that FNS policy processes were closely linked to climate change plans, especially in the southern region. Their coalition contributed to inclusive municipal planning processes by contributing to the development of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) guidelines and policies to mainstream minority rights in these processes.

A key focus of the V4CP project in Indonesia was bringing in the voices of young people, who are routinely left out of FNS planning, and implementation, despite bearing the brunt of food and nutrition insecurity. The Partnership V4CP launched “Millennials’ Voice” a platform for millennials and other young people to articulate their needs, ideas and priorities, around FNS themes (see box).

In Kenya, V4CP support has created opportunities for women farmer champions to play an increasingly prominent role in articulating gender perspectives in the formulation of agricultural, and other relevant sector policies.

**Lessons learned on advocacy for FNS**

**A “big tent” approach facilitates inclusive FNS policy development and implementation**

Food and nutrition insecurity is a “wicked problem” that requires sustained action on numerous fronts. The journey towards the adoption of regulation to promote food fortification in Rwanda serves an example of the importance of building system-wide alliances for change. Concerned about the persistence of household food insecurity, despite efforts to address policy gaps, a broad-based partnership bringing together CSOs, government institutions, and the private sector, spearheaded a national campaign to raise awareness among key stakeholders, and encourage increased investments by food processors in food fortification.

Similarly, the Alliance for Stunting Movement (Genting) platform – launched by the nine Indonesian V4CP CSOs in 2019 – underscores the importance of bringing in diverse interests and perspectives to drive FNS planning and implementation. The platform has helped revitalise the public agenda on food and nutrition security issues, while ensuring the inclusion of important constituencies, including women, people living with disabilities, and the youth.

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To be honest with you, as a newly established entity [the Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority] this was not on our list of first priorities. But because ADECOR kept pushing we had to listen to them and now here we are with the regulation. I congratulate them for the courage and patience. - Dr. Charles Karangwa, Director-General, Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority
Moving from research to action requires building trust

When it is carefully packaged, and presented, to the right audience, good evidence can "move mountains." Well-researched data makes decision makers more confident about making policy choices, and "putting their money where their mouth is." Across the six countries, IFPRI played an instrumental role in supporting partner CSOs to build a strong case for raising the policy priority for FNS issues.

Once convincing evidence has been marshalled, successful advocacy requires painstaking efforts to bring all critical players on board, and ensure that they remain engaged in the long term. One of the core focus areas of the Partnership was ensuring that CSOs had the requisite skills to understand, and strategically engage in, such complex institutional dynamics.

This was certainly the case in Burkina Faso where representatives of legislators, the ministries of finance and agriculture, and CSOs reached an unprecedented agreement to scale up funding for the smallholder farmers. It took considerable efforts by each CSO member of FNS alliance to gain the President’s approval to include CSOs in the newly-created national nutrition council.

In Honduras, CSOs did not only make efforts to generate compelling evidence from the local and regional level, but also adopted a proactive attitude in working with policy makers, with constant communication and information sharing with both middle-level technicians, and key decision makers.

CSOs in Kenya have become increasingly adept at seizing opportunities to align their advocacy activities with the county government calendar. An example of this was the critical role played by CSOs in pushing for the inclusion of food safety
and PHL targets in three county-level integrated development plans. Furthermore, following sustained advocacy by consumer networks, the Kenya Consumer Protection Advisory Committee – a government agency – has adopted food safety as one of its priority areas.

In Indonesia, V4CP’s investments made in generating accurate evidence on FNS gaps was validated by the government’s acknowledgement of the CSO alliance as a credible partner in the country’s drive to eliminate stunting, and all other forms of malnutrition.

In Ghana, following initial difficulties in convincing key government officials to prioritise PHL in policy agendas, the V4CP alliance resorted to “soft” advocacy to engage members of parliament responsible for monitoring Agriculture and Cocoa Affairs. Building on economic analysis from IFPRI\(^\text{12}\) the parliamentary committee succeeded in summoning the Minister for Food and Agriculture to explain steps being taken to address post-harvest losses.

(But) it takes time to consolidate successes and build a supportive institutional framework

One successfully adopted policy does not reveal the hundreds, even thousands of hours devoted to generating critical evidence, engaging key actors, and changing course when initial goals are not met. And promising change can evaporate in a moment of political controversy, or shifting policy priorities.

In Kenya, the substantial progress achieved in driving the FNS agenda at the county level has not been matched at the national level. A number of “triggers” - such as the rise of food-related disease outbreaks, and the rejection of Kenyan milk by neighbouring countries - have opened up a public conversation about food safety. Notwithstanding, lobbying by various vested interests has blocked progress on key policy frameworks, such as the national Dairy Industry Regulation and Crops Regulations, or a proposed quality-based milk payment system.
For **Rwanda**, establishing a district-level coordination structure was only the first step in a long journey to ensure that these institutions were functional, and had sufficient capacity to tackle FNS gaps at the local level. It took numerous CSO-facilitated consultations before district stakeholders took steps to, among others: strengthen coordination of district-level plans; ensure greater alignment with national FNS strategies, and put in place a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to support continuous learning and improvement.

After successfully contributing to the national policy framework, PyENSAN, in 2018, CSOs in **Honduras** had high expectations that their contribution would lead to real progress in addressing persistent FNS challenges. The subsequent lack of action by national authorities caused CSOs to change tack and focus the municipal level, so as to drive change from the ground up.

In **Burkina Faso**, despite securing multi-stakeholder commitments to support the transformation of the food and agricultural sector, the resurgence of extremist insurgencies has necessitated the reallocation of part of the budget earmarked for family farming. Covid-19 provides perhaps the best illustration that, even with political will and well-defined policies in place, emerging threats can undermine progress. After achieving considerable success in raising the FNS agenda in the six countries, CSO advocacy alliances are now shifting their focus to ensure that inclusive access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food is integrated into post Covid-19 recovery strategies. While the link between FNS, a healthy population, and other sustainable development priorities, are indisputable, the impact of the pandemic does underscore, once again, the critical need for capable, and agile, advocacy networks that can quickly adapt to emerging policy contexts.

Dairy sector work in Kenya.
CSO partners

Burkina Faso

Ghana

Honduras

Indonesia

Kenya

Rwanda
The Strategic Partnership at a glance

**Title:** Voice for Change Partnership (V4CP)

**Partners:** Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS), Embassies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and 50 civil society organisations (CSOs) in six project countries:

**Duration:** January 2016 - December 2020

The V4CP food and nutrition security (FNS) advocacy agenda

Ensuring universal access to safe food and nutritious food is at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recognising that each country faces its own set of systemic challenges in achieving food and nutrition security, the Partnership adopted a bottom-up, and demand-driven approach to identify its advocacy priorities in the six countries.

The focus in Indonesia, Honduras, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Rwanda was on SDG target 2.2, which seeks to end all forms of malnutrition, achieve internationally agreed targets on child stunting and wasting, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons.

Advocacy activities in Ghana and Kenya focused on preventing food waste, through reduced post-harvest losses along the entire food production and supply chain (SDG 12.3). CSO partners in the two countries further sought to contribute to the African Union’s Malabo Declaration, which calls on member countries to halve post-harvest losses by 2025.

In addition, the Kenya project addressed inclusive access to safe food as set out in SDG 2.1, as well as Article 43 of Kenya’s constitution, which aims to guarantee “food of acceptable quality” for all citizens.