

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Netherlands Working Group on International Nutrition

Introduction

In 2023 we continued with the development of a new strategy based on the results of the evaluation and strategy workshop from 2022 and the resulting new mission and vision.

In 2023 we organised 4 plenary meetings, starting with a hybrid meeting in February. The second plenary meeting was held in May and took the shape of an online prioritization workshop. In addition, we organised 2 other regular online plenary meetings in September and November while new sub working groups emerged from the prioritization workshop and started meeting before summer 2023. Next to this internal process the main activity in 2023 was the sponsored symposium that NWGN presented at the Micronutrient Forum (MNF) Nutrition for Resilience (N4R) Conference in The Hague in October.

Co-chairs and secretariat continued their monthly calls with the colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) who are also members in NWGN. We also continued our regular meetings with the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP), to coordinate activities and discuss opportunities for collaboration albeit not as regular as before, pending the strategy review and new sub-working group recommendations for action. NFP contributed a case study presentation to the NWGN session at the MNF N4R conference. Towards the end of the year contact was sought again to invite NFP to jointly organize a Nutrition and Climate event in 2024 which they accepted. Many members had expressed their interest during the November 2023 meeting to organise a session or event around this urgent theme and a first brainstorm was held among members in December.

At the end of 2022 none of the other NWGN members was available to succeed Leonie Barelds (UNICEF/LBI) as co-chair and she kindly accepted to continue for another (third) year, next to Arine starting her second term this year. To prevent having two new co-chairs at the start of 2024 Arine agreed to stay on for another year after her normal 2-year term ends at the start of 2024. As Leonie could not spend the same amount of time on her co-chair role in 2023 it was agreed that Arine could invest slightly more time if needed.

GAIN NL continued to allocate (MFA) budget for both the NWGN secretariat and the activities (GAIN period from January 2022 till mid-2024) and has actively supported the co-chairs (first Mieke van Reenen, since summer 2023 Onno van Manen, both GAIN NL Directors) as NWGN secretariat. Linda Charmaine Engelbrecht supported the NWGN secretariat in GAIN and the co-chairs with administration and communication.

Towards a New NWGN Strategy

In 2022 the NWGN had determined to focus on two main routes to build on the expertise of our platform: Strengthen Nutrition Related Efforts and Knowledge & Information Exchange. To further decide on the most impactful potential activities we proposed a three step approach: (1) run a gap analysis per stakeholder group to better understand the added value of the network to support each stakeholder group to transit from their current situation to what we see as the ideal situation in accordance to our vision; (2) prioritize from the different gap analyses results where NWGN has the most added value taking into account the limited resources in time availability, expertise and sphere of

influence of the members; (3) monitor nutrition achievement, by making use of existing tools in relation to our own work, for example if applicable and relevant we can publish (part of) the outcomes of the gap analyses for external awareness, but at least internally to be able to prioritize wisely and create more focus. The first two steps were conducted successfully, as described below. However, it turned out difficult to use the gap analyses results as a baseline to monitor progress (step 3). However, the results were used to prioritize activity areas on which new sub working groups have been launched which has created some new focus and momentum.

Gap Analyses per stakeholder group

A first exploration by NWGN members Herbert Smorenburg and Inge Verdonk, who were contracted to develop the gap analysis methodology, showcased that it is difficult to find one uniform method for the gap analyses as the stakeholder groups are too different from each other. They decided to focus on the NGO group as a first test and example which could also inspire the other groups. As there were no volunteers to conduct the gap analyses for the other stakeholder groups, the co-chairs and secretariat took the lead in conducting the gap analyses for government, knowledge institutes and private sector supported by small sub working groups. This resulted in constructive discussions which were summarised in quick scans.

The results from the four stakeholder group gap analyses are available at: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GA4uuC40jcysS-Ddi-wk3rn5HTcGKWYQ>

In an interactive face to face session in March 2023 the co-chairs and secretariat reflected on these results to draw the main overarching directions for our future strategy. During an online follow up session two red threads emerged. These reflect the two main clusters of activities: ‘NWGN as one voice’ and ‘NWGN as expertise centre’ (see: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JU-TijwEhKoYAuHmoqdQCfdaeKSylFJG>)

Based on these clusters the co-chairs and secretariat supported by Herbert and Inge came up with the following 10 priority actions for the NWGN to pursue, for which we adhered to our four overarching principles, namely “To end all forms of malnutrition, with a focus on SDG”; “Nutrition interventions are part of a food systems approach”; “Nutrition policies and strategies should have a strong evidence base and NWGN focuses on Dutch stakeholders who are active in low-and middle-income countries”:

1. Develop 10 recommendations for sound nutrition interventions.
2. Map NL Funding in nutrition (LMIC) in relation to other thematic funding.
3. Stimulate exchange of knowledge on business cases for healthy foods.
4. Follow up on urban learnings.
5. Follow up on recommendations and monitor usage.
6. Organise regular NWGN sessions at external events (MNF23)
7. Organise thematic Knowledge exchange sessions.
8. Develop NWGN communication strategy.
9. Collaboration with other networks.
10. Collaboration with the NL Government.

These are further described in: [Gap Analysis activity list](#)

Prioritization

The general meeting in May was used to prioritize 5 out of the above 10 action areas. The meeting was designed as an online workshop, prepared by Herbert and Inge together with the co-chairs. Herbert was the main facilitator for this workshop which benefitted from logistic support from Anouk de Vries (GAIN)

who participated on behalf of the GAIN secretariat. During the meeting members voted and volunteered for the activity area of their interest and started to discuss in breakout rooms (between brackets the facilitators):

Room 1 - Organise thematic Knowledge exchange sessions -Herbert

Room 2 - Map NL Funding in nutrition - Arine

Room 3 - Stimulate exchange of Knowledge on business cases for healthy foods - Leonie

Room 4 - Collaboration with other networks - Inge

Although not resulting from this vote, also the action area “10 recommendations” was considered important by members as emerged during the final discussion of the online workshop, as it shows where we stand and therefore underlies many of the other action areas. Absent members were given a chance to vote and volunteer online afterwards, which caused a slight change in the prioritized action areas resulting in the final top 5:

- Stimulate exchange of knowledge on successful business cases for healthy foods.
- Organise regular NWGN sessions at external events (e.g. MNF23)
- Collaboration with other networks.
- Collaboration with the NL Government.
- Develop 10 recommendations for sound nutrition interventions.

Next to that two ongoing action areas remain important:

- Organise thematic Knowledge exchange sessions.
- Develop NWGN communication strategy. More work is needed for NWGN to become more visible and known in order to increase our impact.

New sub working groups

Based on the outcomes of the evaluation and the strategy workshop in 2022, and the gap analyses and virtual prioritization workshop in 2023 four new sub working groups started to meet in order to discuss opportunities and plans for the newly prioritized action areas around summer.

As “collaboration with other networks” (e.g. NFP, SUN) is often closely related to NWGN’s “collaboration with government” it was decided to address both in one sub working group: “Collaboration with government and other networks”. In total four new subgroups started meeting at the beginning of summer 2023 (coordinator in brackets):

- Collaboration with government and other networks (Arine)
- Stimulate exchange of knowledge on successful business cases for healthy foods (Leonie)
- Organise regular NWGN sessions at external events, e.g. MNF 2023 (Herbert)
- Develop 10 recommendations for sound nutrition interventions. (Arine)

Another subgroup had started early 2023 to prepare for the NWGN contribution to MNF N4R in the form of a symposium. Herbert was contracted to coordinate this symposium on behalf of NWGN and was therefore requested to also support the corresponding new sub group “Organise regular NWGN sessions at external events”. Until the end of 2023 the co-chairs coordinated the other new sub groups due to a lack of volunteers.

Existing and earlier sub working groups

The Knowledge Exchange Session coordination sub working group continued throughout the year and members like to see this continue (see Knowledge exchange subheading below). Meanwhile the earlier Indicator / Results Framework sub group had been in hibernation since they published their last guide update in 2021. The aim is that another update will follow in 2024. Among the 10 priority action areas was also “Develop a NWGN communication strategy”. Some years ago a communication sub group was active. During 2023 the co-chairs and secretariat developed a new NWGN flyer and reviewed the website, but developing a communication strategy will help to make NWGN more visible and known.

Knowledge and information exchange

Knowledge and information exchange is one of the most important NWGN activities. In 2023 Iris Bollemeijer (IMC) continued to coordinate the subgroup on the knowledge exchange sessions (KES). Due to delays in organizing the second session on food safety we only had two KES sessions this year, instead of three:

- Nutrition profiling (March 7, 2023)
- Food safety at different stages of the value chain for different foods (Sept. 28, 2023)

Both sessions were well attended and provided relevant information to members. For 2024 we are looking for a new coordinator as Iris will no longer be available to coordinate this subgroup and plan to open the access to the KES sessions to a broader audience.

In addition to KES, we had several “Spotlight” sessions during the general meetings to allow members to present their work programmes, projects and products. On the agenda of the first two general meetings was an update from MNF N4R and in the third one in September members were requested to promote the conference and the NWGN symposium in their networks.

During the November meeting we invited Corné van Dooren, senior advisor sustainable diets WWF-NL for a guest presentation on WWF’s work in nutrition. The title of his presentation is: *Introduction Diet work WWF-NL* which can be accessed on the google drive where all documents and presentations for NWGN are stored and shared with members. For 2023 you can find this at: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1hSWWR3j9CBrB2yntUH_XJMRuCaCyMQMZ.

The NWGN newsletter also serves to stimulate information exchange between all NWGN member organizations and to inform members in an efficient manner on general international nutrition updates, such as new publications and relevant upcoming events. Like in 2022, four newsletters were shared in 2023.

Micronutrient Forum (MNF) Nutrition for Resilience Conference

NWGN contributed with a symposium to the 6th global conference MNF Conference that was held from 16 October 16 – 20 2023 in The Hague. Especially because this high profile nutrition event was held on The Netherlands it was a good opportunity for the NWGN to present itself to the international nutrition community and contribute learnings on multisectoral and multistakeholder engagement related to Dutch experiences and / or support. In addition, the co-chairs participated in the national host committee. Herbert Smorenburg was contracted to support NWGN in preparing and coordinating the symposium. Symposium fees and entry passes were sponsored by MFA. The link of the symposium to the conference programme was *Multisectoral engagement to make food systems deliver on nutrition and resilience* which was part of Program track: *Designing Enabling Environments for Micronutrients*. The session title was: *Multisectoral governance – learning from the Dutch national and international*

experience. This NWGN session turned out to be the opening session at 9.00 a.m. and was well attended. The agenda of the symposium was:

- Introduction to the session, Arine Valstar, NWGN Co-chair
- Improving the urban food environment in Ghana: a collective impact coalition, Nicole Metz, NFP
- The development of Food Based Dietary Guidelines for Ethiopia, Tesfaye Haile Bekele, WUR
- An analysis of Dutch municipal approaches to combatting childhood overweight and obesity, Leonie Barelds, NWGN Co-chair
- Panel discussion Moderator: Annie Trevenen-Jones, GAIN, Netherlands

Presentations and panel discussion were organised around the key questions derived from the “CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food systems and Nutrition” that was used as reference for recommended practice:

- *How is policy coordination and coherence by integrating food systems and nutrition into local, national and regional development addressed?*
- *How is an inclusive and transparent dialogue ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders and actors in the food system, giving special attention to small-medium enterprises and smallholder producers and to the most affected by hunger and malnutrition facilitated?*
- *What kind of accountability mechanisms and tools for monitoring and evaluation were used?*
- *How did you ensure the participation and inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities in food systems in the governance of your multisectoral collaboration?*

In addition to the audience in The Hague 43 participant joined online. The interaction of the panel with the public focussed on the participants at the venue. A knowledge product on the symposium is under development and will be posted on both the NWGN and GAIN website.

New members

In 2023, Karin Wilms has joined the NWGN on behalf of Heifer. In spring the NWGN said goodbye to Mieke van Reenen, who ended her work as GAIN NL director. Mieke had been actively involved in NWGN over many years and was a strong support to the co-chairs on behalf of the secretariat especially during the evaluation and strategy review in 2022 and start of 2023.

Finance

In 2023 the NWGN spent a total of € 60,446 against the forecasted amount of 65,000:

Category	Expenditure ¹ in Euro
Co-chairs (1) and secretariat	33,392
General supporting costs (e.g. website, meetings, hospitality)	4,873
Gap Analysis (carry over from 2022 activities)	13,188
Consultancy for MicroNutrient Forum contribution	8,993

The remaining budget of € 5004 will be added to the 2024 budget coming to a total of 56,000 available to cover the planned activities for 2024 till June. This does not include the UNICEF budget for the 2nd half of 2024:

Category	Budget ² in Euro
Co-chairs- (2) and secretariat (6 months)	33,000
KES session & Climate & Nutrition event with NFP	15,000
Other NWGN activities to be decided on in 2024	4,000
General supporting costs (e.g. website, meetings, hospitality)	4,000

¹ Not including year-end closure adjustments and pending final payment co-chair

² Based on actual costs of 2023 and estimated project activities

Reflection by the co-chairs

The strategy review process started in 2022 and continued throughout the first quarter of 2023. In this long period the workplan was largely on hold, although some ad hoc activities were undertaken. The co-chairs had to invest their time in the gap analyses and the subsequent analysis of results and prioritization of action areas. This meant spending much time in meetings and to develop minutes or quick scans which left less time for active engagement in supporting Dutch stakeholders and sharing knowledge. The assistance of the secretariat (Mieke), Herbert and Inge was much appreciated as other members only participated in the gap analysis process, but did not take a coordinating role for any of the four stakeholder groups. Jointly we prepared and facilitated the virtual workshop in May that paved the way for new sub groups/action groups and lead to new momentum.

However, member engagement remained a challenge in 2023. While the plenary meetings were mostly well attended it remained difficult to find members willing to coordinate the new subgroups. As this involves some time investment for developing the minutes, follow up and planning we may need to accept that this task belongs to the co-chair. There were no candidates to fill the co-chair vacancy in 2024 despite several calls. Only after the co-chairs actively started to approach individual members we managed to find a successful candidate, Diane Bosch from WCDI-WUR who has been a member for several years.

Due to the finalization of strategy review, the number of externally focussed NWGN activities was limited in 2023. The co-chairs and several other members participated the Inclusive Green Growth/ MoFA and GAIN network events. The main external event was our session during the MNF N4R conference. The presenters received positive feedback and next to the focus on multistakeholder and multisectoral governance the session succeeded in showcasing very relevant nutrition related experiences.

While NWGN has supported the last two MNF global conferences with great enthusiasm this does not mean that this is an automatic obligation. Organizing a symposium draws on time and financial resources of the NWGN, next to the considerable fees required to host this session which MFA has kindly sponsored. It was definitely a must in 2023 as the conference was held in The Netherlands. For future conferences NWGN should each time consider the theme and added value for the NWGN and for the international nutrition community and especially the ultimate impact on advancing nutrition (through sustainable healthy diets and food systems) in LMICs in relation to the required resources. Nevertheless, presenting in external events can provide an excellent and efficient opportunity to share knowledge and to promote and strengthen nutrition related efforts. The subgroup “NWGN session in external events” is tasked with identifying opportunities, looking beyond the nutrition community also towards agriculture, water, health and climate where nutrition sensitive action is cost effective and has a high potential.

Annex 2 List of current members

Name	Organisation	Name	Organisation
Anne Dorst	Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland	Linda Engelbrecht	GAIN NL
Annegré de Roos	Save the Children NL	Maaïke Groot	East-West Seed
Annoek van den Wijngaart	MoFA	Marijke de Graaf	MoFA
Ans Eilander	Unilever	Marinka van der Hoeven	Vrije Universiteit
Arine Valstar	Independent	Marjolijn van Leeuwen	UNICEF NL
Babs Ates	Access to Nutrition Initiative	Maya Muller	East West Seeds
Beatriz Neves	GAIN NL - secretariat	Miet Chielens	The Hunger Project
Diane Bosch	WCDI - WUR	Mona Dhamankar	KIT
Eline Minneboo	Rijksdienst Voor Ondernemend Nederland	Monique Beun	SNV
Efi Chatzinikolaou	Access to Nutrition Initiative	Nanneke Nix	AMREF
Eliane Vrolings	The Hunger Project	Nita Dalmiya	UNICEF HQ
Elise Talsma	Wageningen University	Nieke Westerik	Yoba4Life
Esther Busquet	International Medical Corps	Onno van Manen	GAIN NL
Florentine Oberman	DSM-Firmenich	Regien Biesma	Universitair Medisch Centrum Groningen
Heleen Bos	Rijk Zwaan	Sandra van den Berg	HAS
Herbert Smorenburg	Choices International Foundation	Saskia de Pee	WFP
Hinke Haisma	Rijks Universiteit Groningen	Saskia Osendarp	Micronutrient Forum
Inge Brouwer	Wageningen University & Research	Sophia Walser	HAS
Iris Bollemeijer	International Medical Corps	Stineke Oenema	MoFA
Karin Wilms	Heifer	Suzan van der Wilt	Max Foundation
Leen Nolte	Max Foundation	Yvonne Bakken	DSM- Firmenich
Leonie Barelds	UNICEF NL/ Louis Bolk Institute		