



Conflict of Interest in the SUN Movement

Progress Report on the GSO Consultation Process

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The Global Social Observatory (GSO) is a non-governmental organization in Switzerland that provides a neutral space for multi-stakeholder dialogue. In 2013, the GSO received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to implement a consultation process on Conflict of Interest issues associated with the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, as requested by the SUN Lead Group. The GSO is submitting this progress report to describe the status of the project and to encourage feedback from the Lead Group. The progress report has three parts: (1) a description of the purpose and current state of the project, (2) some of the lessons learned at this stage in the process, and (3) some recommendations for the Lead Group to consider regarding its role in the process.

Purpose and Current State of the Project

The purpose of the project is to undertake an open and transparent process to address the issue of conflict of interest within the context of the SUN Movement, in order to ensure that all stakeholders can contribute fully to achieving the Movement's objective of delivering better nutritional outcomes for mothers and children. The intended outcome of the process is to have a Reference Note that the SUN Movement countries and participating entities may use as they address specific circumstances for preventing, identifying, resolving and monitoring conflict of interest. It is expected that the Reference Note will be a living document that will facilitate an ongoing learning experience.

At this stage in the process, a draft Reference Note and Executive Summary with an Annex have been prepared as a follow-up to two multi-stakeholder consultation events that the GSO convened on 13 June and 25 July 2013. A third consultation event is scheduled for 16 October to finalize the Reference Note and Executive Summary. As a living document, the Reference Note will serve as the framework for a preliminary series of learning exercises that the GSO will convene in 2014. These exercises will help to refine the Reference Note and any accompanying inventory of tools and mechanisms. A final report on the project will be presented to the Lead Group upon the completion of the learning exercises. Following that, the SUN Lead Group will be invited to review the outcome of the process and carry forward with the lessons learned.

The GSO started the project by mapping the issues regarding the Principles of Engagement and conflict of interest for the SUN Movement in a research paper. Working with the SUN Movement Secretariat, the GSO convened an advisory Steering Committee, drawing from the SUN networks and member countries. The Steering Committee has been active in supporting the preparation of, and follow-up to, the series of three planned consultation events to develop agreed guidance in the form of a Reference Note on conflict of interest for the SUN Movement. The first consultation event involved 23 participants plus the GSO project team and SUN Movement Secretariat staff; the second attracted 29 participants

plus staff. Participants in these consultations were selected and nominated through the SUN networks of country focal points and support networks.

Some Lessons Learned

a. The central role of governments

Although the SUN Movement encourages multiple parties to join together in a collective effort to combat malnutrition, the participants in the consultative process of the GSO project have regularly stated that national governments are central to the Movement. It is the governments that have the responsibility to align the divergent interests of participants at the national (and local) level around a common effort. The participants have emphasized that any global guidance for addressing conflict of interest in the SUN Movement must respect the primacy of national governments and accommodate the flexibility for governments to adapt their conflict of interest policies to their particular circumstances. The reference note reflects this centrality as it identifies the basic elements to prevent, identify, resolve and monitor conflicts of interest and to describe the contours of capacity building to apply these elements to a country's needs.

b. Reliance on adapting the SUN Principles of Engagement

The interactive dialogue of the two consultation events has also concentrated on the underlying foundation of the SUN Principles of Engagement. The participants were engaged in a series of “café politique” exercises to express their views on how these principles should operate for conflict of interest purposes, with a particular emphasis on the principles for inclusiveness and transparency but also mutual accountability and communication. In addition, participants have expressed the need to add three principles – on integrity, on mutual respect and on “do no harm”. The October consultation will review this expanded set of ten principles as the basic foundation for countries and participating entities to use in addressing matters relating to conflicts of interest.

c. Inclusiveness in the consultation process

Structuring the consultation process itself to be inclusive has required the GSO to work closely with the SUN Networks and to reach out to the member governments as well. Each group operates differently, but the objective of the consultation process is to include an appropriate mix of perspectives. Although the Reference Note is directed primarily to governments, the GSO recognizes that the all SUN stakeholders are developing their ways of working within the Movement. The consultation events, however, need to be supplemented with broader outreach through the internet and feedback from the Lead Group.

Recommendations for the Lead Group in the Reference Note

In the consultation process, participants have emphasized the central role of governments in dealing with conflicts of interest, but they have also noted the importance of the links to a global effort. There are several places in the draft Reference Note where a role is proposed for the Lead Group to provide an oversight and coordinating function. (The Lead Group is specifically mentioned in paragraphs 4, 36, 45, 56, 60 and 63.) Reference is made to the prospects of oversight by the Lead Group of a regular review process after the final outcome documents are submitted to the Lead Group at the conclusion of this particular consultation process (paras 4 and 56). The GSO recommends that the Lead Group give consideration to this proposed oversight role.

In addition, the GSO recommends that the Lead Group take note of its proposed involvement in establishing a model procedure through which disclosures of potential conflicts of interest can be reviewed at intervals and to provide guidance for appropriate action in situations that could give rise to a conflict of interests (para 36). A similar proposal refers to a stewardship role for the Lead Group in establishing a consistent standard for the criteria to be used in identifying conflicts of interest (para 45). The Reference Note also suggests that the Lead Group may wish to develop its own monitoring mechanism while also linking it to the monitoring that is performed at the country level (para 56).

The Lead Group also has an important role in supporting the cooperation among the SUN Networks, including in promoting trust and collaboration among stakeholders on conflict of interest issues (para 60). Finally, the Reference Note proposes an approach to external mediation when governments or other participating entities are looking beyond their country-level procedures and mechanisms for guidance and to include the Lead Group as part of the monitoring process for this external mediation.

Conclusion

At this stage in the consultation process on conflict of interest in the SUN Movement, the draft Reference Note is a work in progress. The GSO welcomes feedback from the Lead Group on the overall approach and on the possibilities for the involvement of the Lead Group that have been described here. The third consultation event scheduled for 16 October 2013 will take this feedback into account and will aim to produce a final Reference Note for presentation to the Lead Group in the coming months.