

**Consultation Process on SUN Movement Engagement:
Preventing and Managing Conflicts of Interest**

**El Salvador Enhanced Learning Experience
17-18 July, 2014**

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This report summarizes a number of conclusions drawn from the El Salvador Enhanced Learning Experience, part of the consultation process of the Global Social Observatory (GSO) Reference Note and Toolkit to develop policies and procedures to prevent, identify, manage and monitor conflicts of interest.

The El Salvador Enhanced Learning Experience (July 17-18, 2014) brought together over fifty different stakeholders linked to the goals of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. Representatives from government offices and agencies, members of civil society organizations, and two representatives from the private sector attended the two-day exchange of ideas.

Participations from the learning experience may be summarized as three tensions found at the onset of the scaling up nutrition multi-sector and multiparty platform in El Salvador: the cultural shift that needs to occur, the gap between theory and praxis, and the disparity between what the actual rules are and what they ought to be. In all three tensions, an ethics perspective may prove useful to offer a common ground of understanding.

By framing the multiple views present in this early stage of the Salvadoran nutrition movement as tensions, we acknowledge that its common purpose and problem-solving approach is still developing. This evolving process must answer a number of questions in order to move forward. As evidenced during the multiparty exchange, some of the questions need to be framed as a collective endeavor rather than a disperse set of sectorial concerns, even if those questions are only hypothetical in nature. Tensions need not be completely resolved for the movement to advance, but the movement will be better positioned to pursue its objectives after agreeing on a roadmap to solve them.

The first of the tensions, underlying the initial stages of the nutrition movement in El Salvador, refers to the cultural shift the movement needs to take root, and which may have already begun. The two-day gathering may indeed be an initial symptom of this needed paradigm change. Multiple interventions acknowledged the essential challenge of viewing the process of building a scaling-up nutrition agenda in El Salvador as a collective enterprise. To date, this has been an initiative led primarily by the government. Bringing other stakeholders to the table will require respect of, and perhaps even compromise, with other viewpoints.

Clear rules to prevent and solve conflicts of interest need to be an early consideration of the new dynamics of the platform, as members interact with one another and with third parties. Different interventions during the learning experience demonstrated that the movement will benefit from a governance scheme that not only acknowledges conflicts of interest, but also provides clear rules and processes to manage them. Framing these rules on commonly-agreed values (a value-based ethics), would provide adequate conditions for a fair and balanced result.

The second tension pertains to questions relating to the means to structure a multi-sector and multiparty platform with clear rules for addressing conflicts of interest. These questions may also be linked to a broader question of validity: whether it is possible to build and deliver results with such a broad-based coalition.

While parties might agree on the essential goal of the nutrition coalition, the means of pursuing that agreement have not been entirely determined. For example, the subject of who should be invited to join and why was raised a number of times at the gathering. Another concern was about who needs to be sitting at the table in order to increase the possibilities of success for the platform. The gathering participants raised procedural inquiries like: how will the coalition guarantee that those sitting at the table share the common goal of advancing better nutrition? How do we make sure all actors are playing under the same rules? A follow-up question, picked up at the working tables, was whether it would be possible to exclude actors that pursued conflicting objectives. Altogether, these procedural and ethical questions and the mixed reactions they garnered, denote the tension present in the learning process the group has to traverse to bring about the implementation of what it considers an otherwise sound initiative.

The third and last tension captures yet another major theme present in a number of interventions from participants. How can we be sure of what the applicable rules should be? Who is responsible for asserting these rules? How do we go about changing rules that do not serve the purposes of our movement? While these questions may be construed as yet one more implementation challenge, they also speak of the primordial uncertainty of the movement. How can the movement be sure of which are the rules governing its fundamental objectives? What do the applicable rules imply for the purpose of the coalition? How does the applicable law mold the type of relations that may take place between actors of the coalition, especially where public and private actors come together? More specifically, does the law offer guidance for preventing or solving conflicts of interests? If the movement is to jointly draw a roadmap for stakeholder collaboration, it needs to ascertain what the applicable law is and how it shapes its purposes and interactions.

These three salient tensions characterize the early stages of the better nutrition movement in El Salvador. While they imply challenging questions, they are also an indication of the momentum and expectations of this stage. From an outsider's perspective, the organizers may want to consider a number of pressing tasks to capitalize on the early enthusiasm of the initial stages of the movement.

Clarifying what the applicable legal rules are is an early task that will facilitate the work of the movement. Participants expressed concerns regarding the mandate of government actors, and particularly about which rules of engagement condition their interaction with civil society and the private sector. The effort should result in identifying, understanding, and organizing the set of applicable policies and rules. Correspondingly, the end result should point to the strengths and weaknesses of the policy and legal framework, thus providing a foundation for future reforms. By systematizing the pertinent rules, in an effort akin to legal due diligence, actors can at once begin the process of learning the ground rules, and begin to identify how to improve them together.

There appeared to be a consensus among those attending the two-day learning experience that the rules of engagement need to be laid out from the outset, and that the future governance of the movement will benefit from the inclusion of clear rules to prevent and solve conflicts of interest. Selecting clear working principles and rules from the onset of the movement is an unquestionable need. Given the initial concerns expressed at the learning experience, the rules should also include transparent policies and procedures to prevent and manage conflicts of interest, which in turn should be based on commonly agreed values.

A third task at hand is the building of local capacity to manage the complexity of the platform. The multi-sectorial and multiparty nature of the initiative will require strong managerial competences to plan, organize and deliver results. Equally important, actors will benefit from honing their negotiating and mediating skills, given the transactional dynamics likely to occur between them and with third parties. In particular, a shared knowledge of conflict resolution among members of the platform can provide an equal basis to prevent and resolve all sorts of conflicts, including conflicts of interests. Capacity building for the members of the platform should be viewed as a systematic endeavor, and should thus be built into the planning and resources allocation. Academia and individuals and organizations with analogous experiences elsewhere could provide important insights and support to this process.

The enhanced learning experience served its purpose to examine the validity of the GSO-SUN Reference Note and Toolkit to develop policies and procedures to prevent, identify, manage and monitor conflicts of interest. A number of interventions reflected the learning experience's general usefulness, urging the platform to adopt and adapt the framework and the tools to the local nutrition platform purposes. Moreover, the consultation process was an excellent opportunity to identify some of the pressing questions the platform actors will need to undertake, and to assess the underlying ethical, conceptual and procedural challenges and opportunities that their joint effort will face in the coming stages.