

CSOs Convene in Botswana to Tackle Funding Gaps and Food System Failures Amidst Rising Hunger



The different CSOs represented at the Scaling Up Nutrition Eastern and Southern Africa Civil Society Network (SUN ESA CSN) Forum in Botswana. Photo:(SUN ESA CSN)

"According to the World Food Program(WFP) 2026 Global Outlook, released in November 2025, "a staggering 318 million people face crisis levels of hunger or worse, more than double the figure recorded in 2019". The report warns that global humanitarian funding is declining, forcing the agency to prioritize assistance to roughly one-third of those in need." Scaling Up Nutrition Eastern & Southern Africa Civil Society Network

As the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warns that 318 million people globally are facing crisis levels of hunger, civil society organizations from across Africa have gathered in Gaborone for a five-day regional meeting to tackle the funding shortfalls and systemic failures perpetuating malnutrition on the continent. Running from the 2nd to the 6th of March 2026, the meeting is hosted by Food Bank Botswana under the auspices of the Scaling Up Nutrition Eastern & Southern Africa Civil Society Network (SUN ESA CSN).

The forum, themed "Strengthening Accountable Food Systems for Nutrition Security," has drawn delegates from Eastern, Southern, Western, and Central Africa, as well as island nations. Key participants include the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) and the Food Rights Alliance (FRA) from Uganda, who have joined regional peers to share experiences and coordinate advocacy efforts.

A Region in Crisis: Conflict, Climate, and Underfunding

According to the WFP, Eastern and Southern Africa remain critical hotspots where conflicts, climate shocks, displacement, economic pressure, and severe funding shortfalls converge to drive food insecurity. The situation is exemplified in Somalia, where 6.5 million people are facing high levels of acute food insecurity. Compounding the crisis is a significant resource gap; the WFP reports it requires **US\$13 billion** to reach 110 million vulnerable people globally in 2026, but funding forecasts suggest the organization may receive close to only half of this amount.

In response, day one of the Gaborone meeting saw participants examining the paradox of a region rich in agricultural potential yet plagued by persistent hunger. Discussions focused on how post-harvest losses and disrupted supply chains undermine food access, while spotlighting indigenous solutions such as drought-resistant crops and community-led school feeding programs as viable pathways to build resilience.

Strengthening Accountability and Public Finance

The primary objectives of the regional gathering are to strengthen collaboration among SUN Civil Society Alliances, review progress on commitments made since the 2024 regional engagement, and define a shared identity for enhanced coordinated advocacy and nutrition accountability.

For organizations such as CSBAG, a member of the SUN CSN Uganda, the meeting is a critical opportunity to advance its mandate of promoting accountable public finance management. Christina Namubiru, a Programmes Associate attending from CSBAG, emphasized that their participation focuses on ensuring national nutrition commitments translate into tangible results.

"We are here to ensure that promises for better nutrition translate into real, well-funded, transparent, and accountable budgets for all Ugandans," she stated. "With global funding shortfalls threatening progress, it is more important than ever that every dollar committed to nutrition reaches the communities that need it most."

Day Two: Deep Dive into Advocacy and Accountability Tools

The second day of the meeting marked a significant step forward, moving from broad-stroke discussions into technical capacity building. The focus was on strengthening advocacy communication and navigating legal and policy entry points. Participants moved beyond just talking about evidence to explore how alliances can translate complex technical data into persuasive messaging that influences decision-makers. Key lessons included the critical practice of tailoring messages for specific audiences, such as Members of Parliament, Ministries, and the Media.

The afternoon session was hands-on, as participants put an accountability framework tool into practice. This session built on four prior online trainings and focused on tracking national Nutrition for Growth (N4G) commitments. The tool, designed to harmonize monitoring across ESA countries, support national and regional reporting, and strengthen CSO advocacy with hard evidence, allowed participants to learn how to track political commitments, identify credible data sources, and use outcome-based monitoring.

Day Three: From Frameworks to Action

Building on the previous day's technical training, Day 3 was highly practical. Participants worked in-country teams to translate their specific N4G commitments into actionable accountability-tracking frameworks and develop concrete engagement plans.

This session marked a significant moment of certification and recognition for the advocates. Having participated in four online training sessions since January 2026, followed by this in-person training in Gaborone, participants were formally recognized for strengthening their capacities. Over the remaining days, participants will continue intensive workshops and experience-sharing sessions, aiming to conclude with a concrete, collective pathway forward. The meeting seeks to advance joint actions toward ending malnutrition and building resilient food systems capable of withstanding climatic and economic shocks across Africa.