

# Strategic Plan

2022-2027



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## Executive Overview

SISN was formed in 2015 to promote and support the application of implementation science in solving nutrition problems in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). Led by a volunteer Board of Directors and a small, part-time Secretariat, SISN's inaugural five-year strategic plan (2016-2020) focussed on establishing the Society's governance structures and supporting technical work and knowledge exchange to advance theory, methods, conduct, and capacity for implementation science in nutrition. During this period, SISN published a framework for and perspectives article about implementation science in nutrition, collaborated with partners on projects to advance the field (e.g. Implementation Science Initiative, KI3 Initiative), and carried out a range of knowledge exchange and promotional activities.

In 2021, the SISN Board initiated a strategic refresh. Priority concerns underlying the next multi-year strategy included ensuring SISN's financial viability and that it is effectively engaging and serving LMIC colleagues.

Through listening sessions with a range of stakeholders, we confirmed that people recognize the value of implementation science in strengthening the delivery of nutrition actions but numerous constraints prevent its uniform, systematic, and impactful application. Stakeholders identified current unmet needs for 1) stronger linkages and effective communication between all stakeholders and levels of implementation, 2) implementation research activities embedded within programs, 3) adequate training and expertise to apply implementation science and research in LMICs, and 4) effective translation, dissemination, and exchange of information at all levels (especially locally).

SISN is well positioned to foster interpersonal networks, build skills and exchange expert, contextual, and implementation research-generated knowledge across global, national, and sub-national communities of researchers, practitioners, policy leaders, and funders. Over the next 5 years, SISN will work towards the following three strategic goals:

1. **Connection:** Build meaningful relationships between decision-makers, researchers and practitioners interested in doing implementation science in nutrition and facilitate sub-communities for peer-to-peer learning and exchange
2. **Capacity Building:** Strengthen the ability of practitioners and researchers, particularly those in contexts with less access to skills-building resources, to conduct and contribute to implementation science in nutrition, and foster future leaders who will advance the field
3. **Communication:** Promote the importance and value of implementation science in nutrition and ensure that it is clear and visible to diverse stakeholders including donors, policy makers, researchers, and implementers

Efforts to attain these goals will center around four strategic activities, namely:

1. Formation of regional, national (or sub-national) networks for implementation science in nutrition
2. Global learning conference
3. Train future leaders in implementation science in nutrition (fellows program, small grants for graduate students/trainees)
4. Continued knowledge exchange efforts

SISN is committed to delivering on these goals but recognizes the limits of the current organizational model with a volunteer Board and part-time Secretariat. We also know that the needed cross-cutting activities are unlikely to be funded through project-centric sources of revenue (e.g., a single donor). SISN

needs a new organizational model to achieve continuity, coordination, and diverse and sustainable funding. To be sustainable, SISN must work collaboratively with partners and donors whose goals are aligned with the Society. Securing multiple donor commitments that can support a full-time Executive Director to lead the implementation of the Strategic Plan is a crucial first step.

## Background

There is growing recognition in the nutrition community of the importance of implementation science to potentiate the translation of policies, programs, and interventions into population-level impact.

The Society for Implementation Science in Nutrition (SISN) was formed in 2015 to promote and support the application of implementation science in nutrition, with a focus on undernutrition in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Specifically, SISN's mission has been to *"To convene, advocate, disseminate and promote dialogue among scientists, policy leaders, government officials, funders and practitioners to advance the science and practice of nutrition implementation world-wide"*.

SISN is a U.S. registered non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation and is governed by a [volunteer Board](#) comprising of eight members led by the President. Board members have a strong and diverse portfolio of knowledge in implementation science in nutrition and represent academia and practice. There is a small team of part-time, virtual consultants providing day-to-day operational support. The Society operates on a [modest budget](#) primarily via grants and third-party sponsorship with a nominal contribution from membership fees.

SISN's original [five-year strategic plan](#) (2016-2020) outlined the goals that needed to be achieved to bring its vision of *"a world where actions to improve nutrition are designed and implemented with the best available scientific knowledge and practical experience"* to fruition. [During this time](#), SISN made significant progress towards realizing these goals. These important accomplishments included advancing the theory, methods, conduct, and capacity for implementation science in nutrition through the development and dissemination of a guiding conceptual [framework](#) and the conduct of the [Implementation Science Initiative](#), a 3-year project to generate knowledge concerning challenges and strategies in operationalizing the framework in Kenya and Uganda. A significant output of this work was the development of the [Implementation Science System Operational Model](#) to assist implementers and decision-makers in LMICs to apply implementation science and build the capacity needed for these endeavors.

In addition to these activities, SISN supported knowledge exchange through the creation of the [Knowledge Hub](#), a searchable database with over 400 resources including journal articles, papers, case studies, reports and trainings. SISN also hosted and participated in over 25 [webinars](#) and conference proceedings, distributed 20 quarterly newsletters to over 1000 subscribers per issue, and published monthly [blogs and news](#) items. Over the past five years, SISN has observed consistent growth in its website traffic and Twitter and LinkedIn followers, mirroring the expanding interest and needs of nutrition researchers and practitioners in implementation science (Appendix A).

SISN was originally envisioned as a member-based organization with members who actively contribute to the Society and pay annual dues. Membership has not proven, however, to be a core component of SISN engagement or financial support. To facilitate the uptake and use of SISN's products, all activities and resources are shared in the public domain which has limited the unique benefits offered to members. Consequently, active recruitment of new members and renewal of existing members has been temporarily suspended until the strategic refresh process is complete.

## Overview of the Strategic Planning Process

In 2021, SISN's Board recognized the need to revisit how the Society operates to ensure it continues to effectively engage and serve its intended audience, specifically colleagues in LMICs, and that SISN remains financially viable. Two half-day retreats were convened to initiate the development of the new five-year strategic plan and a process and timeline were established. This involved a listening phase (September to December 2021), a strategy drafting phase (January to March 2022) and a final dissemination phase (April to June 2022) (Appendix B).

A Strategic Refresh Working Group was created and charged with moving this process forward. The Working Group was composed of nine Board and Secretariat members. In addition, a six-member Strategic Refresh Advisory Group, engaging a range of implementation professionals from LMICs, was set up to ensure the diverse perspectives of people actively working in the space were represented at all stages of the strategic planning process (Appendix C).

As part of the listening phase, focus groups were conducted with members of the Strategic Refresh Advisory Group. Then, SISN Board Members, Strategic Refresh Advisory Group members and Secretariat conducted more than 10 one-on-one virtual interviews with stakeholders representing different geographies, organization types, and professional roles (Appendix C). An interview template was prepared to help guide these discussions and to maintain consistency of questioning and reporting (Appendix D). The outputs from all discussions were collated and summarized, details of which can be found below.

## Findings from Listening Phase of Strategic Planning Process

### The Unmet Need

Millions of dollars have, and continue, to be invested in implementing nutrition interventions and programs. The effectiveness of these efforts is inconsistent, however, and the intended impact on outcomes unrealized. Increasingly, researchers and implementers are turning to implementation science to advance their understanding of how nutrition actions work in real-world settings. There is an existing body of theories, models, frameworks, methods and resources to facilitate these efforts, and a growing collection of examples of how implementation science has been successfully applied to inform and strengthen nutrition program delivery. But...

- Implementation science activities remain fragmented, not consistently applied across and within programs, and often initiated in response to poor implementation rather than as part of planning and ongoing implementation.
- Implementers lack guidance and support on how to apply implementation science theories, models, frameworks, and methods to nutrition actions, and how to tailor and adapt implementation strategies to their unique context, specific needs of their organization, and type of nutrition action.
- Academic researchers often fail to fully engage implementers in planning implementation research, leading to research questions and findings that do not reflect the needs of real-world program implementers.
- Program implementers working within similar contexts often face similar constraints and obstacles but lack mechanisms for shared problem solving or support.
- Implementation lessons and research findings are infrequently shared across stakeholder levels. Consequently, higher-level decision-makers (i.e., policymakers and donors) have insufficient understanding of the complexity of the implementation process, and community-level implementers are unaware of data, tools, and resources that would support and improve their work.



- Program implementers lack the funding, communications skills, and technical support required to disseminate their findings to external audiences (e.g., journal articles, webinars), resulting in frequently missed opportunities to advance the field of implementation science in nutrition and to improve implementation.

Four recurrent themes were identified as being vital to addressing these unmet needs and for improving the implementation of nutrition actions:

<p><b>1. Create strong linkages and highly effective communication between all stakeholders and levels of implementation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging decision-makers fosters political will, which drives national co-ordination of implementation efforts and program funding</li> <li>• Community-based participatory engagement must also be applied from the beginning to ensure appropriate local adaptation of actions and that the needs of diverse communities are met</li> <li>• All stakeholders must be included as not including a group of players can create bottlenecks later in the implementation process if their input is not sought and considered in initial plans.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Embed implementation research activities in all nutrition actions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All stakeholders must be involved in co-creation of evidence to ensure research questions are timely and relevant to local programmatic realities and that data generated is useful for informing policy and decisions at all levels</li> <li>• Implementation research can be applied to track program progress, identify issues and make adjustments as they arise</li> <li>• Resources and tools on how to conduct and improve implementation research activities are needed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Strengthen capacity for applying implementation science and research in LMICs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness and knowledge of implementation science in LMIC contexts</li> <li>• Need to communicate SISN framework in a way that stakeholders can understand and apply</li> <li>• Provide training on how to apply implementation science in specific contexts and geographic locations</li> <li>• Facilitate cross-learning and knowledge sharing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Provide effective translation, dissemination, and exchange of information (emphasis on facilitating local and contextualized exchange but also at country and global levels)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing findings about what does and does not work for implementation</li> <li>• Fostering networks with common implementation focus and/or geographic context</li> <li>• Access to exemplars and how-to guides so implementation teams can learn from one another</li> <li>• Support researchers and implementers in development and dissemination of outputs from implementation research for diverse audiences</li> </ul>

**Strategic Refresh Advisory Group members and interviewees indicated that moving forward there is a role for SISN to foster interpersonal networks and meaningful exchange of expert, contextual, and implementation research-generated knowledge across global, national, and sub-national communities of researchers, practitioners, policy leaders and funders.**

The unmet needs, themes, and potential roles for SISN that emerged through the listening phase mirrored the results of a SISN member survey conducted in May 2019, where networking events and communities of practice were highlighted as preferred ways of engaging with the Society. Building the ability and capacity for implementation science in nutrition and building community were also highlighted as priorities by SISN Board members during the initial strategic planning retreats.

Furthermore, the broader movement within global health towards decolonization and national institutional strengthening lends additional support to SISN positioning itself as a convener and supporter of more localized networks of people engaged with implementation science in nutrition.

## SISN's Strategic Goals and Activities

The outputs from SISN's inaugural (2016-2020) strategic plan established a strong foundation. What we heard during the listening phase of our strategic refresh process was consistent with the content of the [Lazio Declaration](#) published by SISN's founding members at the inception of the Society in 2016; confirming that SISN's vision and mission remains relevant. However, we heard that it is time to refocus our goals and activities away from defining what implementation science is to supporting collective action. We will expand on what we have learned through past activities to provide guidance on how to practically use the existing body of theories, concepts, frameworks, and methods to optimize implementation efforts and learning.

Our stakeholder interviews confirmed that membership was not particularly valued by individuals due to the limited benefits exclusive to members. We heard important ideas about alternative operational models from leaders of organizations with related missions and target audiences including the Micronutrient Forum and "CORE Group". These conversations underscored strong leadership as a vital component of success and fulfilment of SISN's mission.

Our future strategic goals are driven by what we have heard from stakeholders actively working in nutrition implementation. Collectively these goals will **enhance the scale up and operationalization of implementation science in nutrition globally.**

Over the next 5 years SISN's activities will contribute to the following strategic goals:

- **CONNECTION:** **Build meaningful connections** between decision-makers, researchers and practitioners interested in doing implementation science in nutrition and facilitate sub-communities for peer-to-peer learning and exchange
- **CAPACITY-BUILDING:** **Strengthen the ability of practitioners** and researchers, particularly those in contexts with less access to skills-building resources, to conduct and contribute to implementation science in nutrition, and **foster future leaders** to continue to advance the field
- **COMMUNICATION:** **Promote the importance and value of implementation science in nutrition** and ensure that it is clear and visible to diverse stakeholder groups including donors, policy makers, researchers, and implementers

Our efforts to attain these goals will center around four strategic activities, namely:

### **1. Formation of Regional, National (or Sub-national) Networks for Implementation Science in Nutrition**

Communities of Practice and similar networking models are most successful when participants are able to form relationships that add genuine value to their work. Often this happens in more localized contexts where implementers are facing common barriers and access similar resources. SISN will catalyze local networks to provide connection and support for researchers, practitioners and others supporting the implementation of nutrition programs within specific geographic and/or thematic areas. These networks will encourage communication and knowledge exchange. SISN will host and moderate an online platform for sub-network exchange and connect sub-networks to global resources. SISN will also support networks to host formal and informal engagement activities including virtual and in-person convenings or workshops.

### **2. Global Learning Conference**

While there have been meaningful advances in virtual engagement including webinars, it can be challenging for implementers to preserve time to fully participate in these online forums. Stakeholders value the focused and uninterrupted time, diversity of knowledge sharing, and interpersonal connections that can be fostered via an in-person global meeting. SISN will organize a 1-2 day conference with a focus on knowledge exchange across different sectors, regions and thematic areas within the global network, capacity-building through interdisciplinary education and training sessions, and facilitating interactions between implementation science champions including leaders of local networks. This conference could be planned as a side-event of another conference that also attracts SISN's target audience (e.g. Micronutrient Forum). Ultimately, this global conference will generate energy and enthusiasm for implementation science among attendees, subsequently accelerating the growth of local networks and leading to greater engagement with online activities such as discussion forums, events and training. This model would include components for income generation.

### **3. Train Future Leaders in Implementation Science in Nutrition**

SISN will improve diversity and inclusion in implementation science leadership through a Fellows Program targeted at the professional development of early to mid-career implementers from LMICs. Fellows will receive special training, experiential learning opportunities, mentorship, and peer support over a term of 1 to 2 years. Fellows will also be tasked in the program committee guiding the content of the global conference and to take a leadership role in establishing and facilitating local communities of practice and networks for implementation science in nutrition.

In addition to the Fellows Program, professional development opportunities will be targeted at graduate students with an interest in implementation science. Such trainees have been identified as a group who are scattered across training programs that may, or may not, have strong implementation science and/or nutrition components. Trainees will benefit from connecting with other like-minded graduate students, opportunities to pair with implementers and organizations conducting or in need of implementation research, funding through small grants programs, and more specialized methods training.

### **4. Continued Knowledge Exchange Efforts**

SISN will improve and expand its existing knowledge exchange activities including the Knowledge Hub, implementation science system toolkit, webinars, and newsletters. These global resources can be used by individuals as well as support sub-national and content area networks. The implementation of a new content and communications strategy will optimize the impact and usefulness of all outputs. A human-centered design process to prototype and refine platform design will be explored.



## Organizational Model

SISN has been operating as a U.S. registered non-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation for 5 years. The Board is entirely voluntary and is supported by a small, efficient Secretariat that manages communications, contracts, funding, and day-to-day operations. The Society is governed by a strict set of [bylaws](#) and [values](#). While the Society has accomplished many of its goals, these achievements have been delivered by placing a large burden on a voluntary Board (and sometimes voluntary working group members). Reliance on a small group of volunteers has created significant bottlenecks in operationalizing some activities and achieving financial sustainability. As part of the strategic refresh, we consulted with leaders of organizations that have successfully transitioned in their scope and engagement including Micronutrient Forum, which has identified that recruiting an Executive Director was a critical step in towards meeting strategic goals.

A priority goal is for SISN to secure sustainable funding through diversified sources to support the proposed activities. Project-centric funding opportunities do not conventionally support cross-cutting connection, capacity-building, and communication functions. We will need to capitalize on different funding revenues such as grants from donors, sub-grant contracts with implementing organizations for specific services (e.g., technical assistance), institutional memberships, and activities that include cost recovery (e.g., courses, conferences, certification). We will also explore opportunities to more formally affiliate or collaborate with well-established institutions who could provide strategic connections and potentially operational support (e.g., Micronutrient Forum, academic societies such as the American Society for Nutrition).

To catalyze these efforts, we may choose to focus our next strategy around thematic areas (e.g. women's health), type of nutrition actions (e.g. multiple micronutrient supplementation), or geographic locations (e.g., India and focal countries in Africa) that are current priorities in the nutrition field.

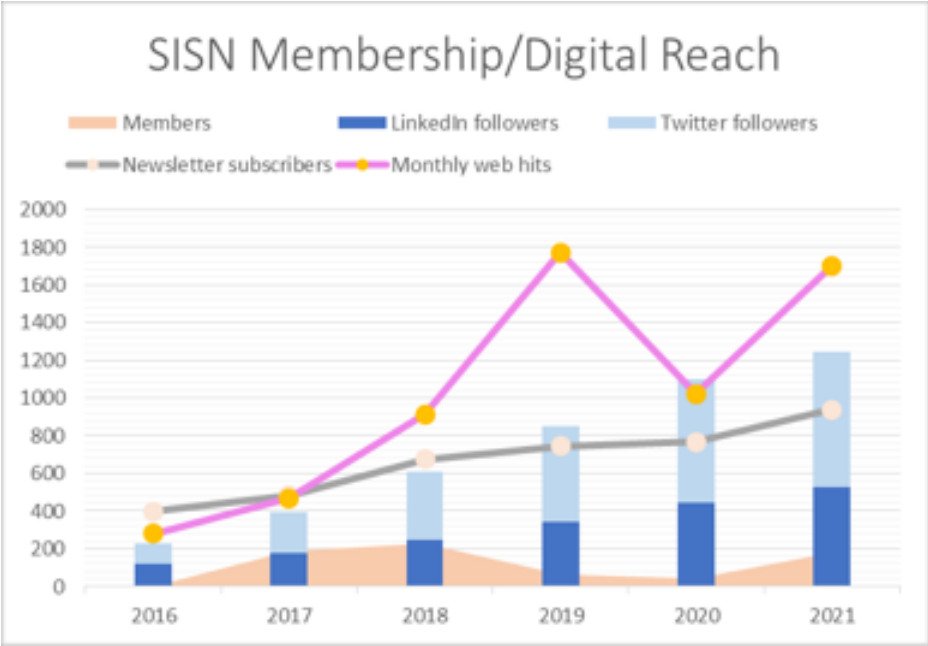
## Next Steps

The successful implementation of SISN's strategic goals and activities is dependent on SISN having a robust organizational model, sustainable revenue, and a detailed action plan with clear performance indicators and timelines. Consequently, the following are crucial next steps:

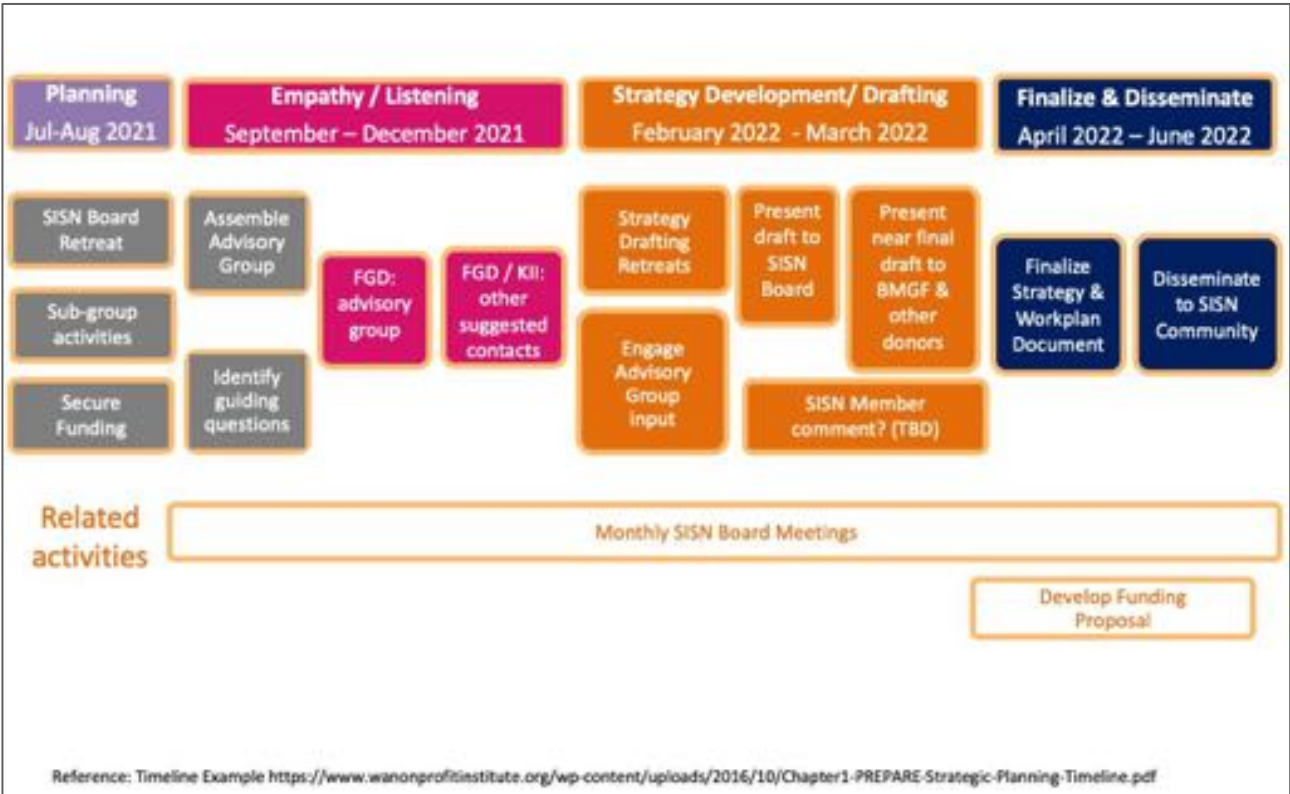
1. Develop provisional budgets to operationalize the 3-5 year plan
2. Secure buy-in from at least two funders
3. Recruit a full-time Executive Director to refine and operationalize the new Strategic Plan.
4. Discontinue individual paid-membership dues, but explore the value and feasibility of expanding the existing institutional affiliation membership and build a large set of non-paying affiliates interested in implementation science in nutrition.
5. Continue discussions and partner as appropriate with other organizations and societies to provide operational and strategic support and opportunities for scientists, practitioners, and other stakeholders to engage in dialogue and activities related to implementation science.

# Appendix A

## Growth in Audience Engagement 2017-Current



**Appendix B**



## Appendix C

### 1. Advisory Group Members

Name	Role and Institution	Location
Anabelle Bonvecchio Arenas	INSP	Mexico
Gladys Mugambi	Ministry of Health (Kenya)	Kenya
Debora Niyeha	Chief of Party USAID Advancing Nutrition (HKI)	Tanzania
Mini Varghese	Country director (NI)	India
Monica Muti	Nutrition Interventions Manager, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare	Zimbabwe/RSA
Zewdie Birhanu	Faculty, Jimma University	Ethiopia

### 2. Stakeholder Interviews

Name	Role and Institution	Location
Monica Komboni	Nutrition Interventions Manager, Ministry of Health & Child Welfare	Zimbabwe
Rosemary Kayanda	PhD student, IMA World Health	Tanzania
Taren Swindle	Associate Professor, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences	USA
David Ma	Professor, University of Guelph	Canada
John Nicholson	John Snow International	USA
Audrey Tierney	University of Limerick	Ireland
Esther Choo	PhD Student, University of Washington	USA
Rufaro Madzima	Retired - Previously with the Ministry of Health	Zimbabwe
Kenneth Sherr	Professor, Department of Global Health, Implementation Science Program, University of Washington	USA
Anna Godfrey	Nutrition Specialist	Tanzania
Brad Wagenaar	Assistant Professor, Department of Global Health, Implementation Science Program, University of Washington	USA
Saskia Osendarp	Executive Director, Micronutrient Forum	Netherlands
Morankar Sudhakar	Department of Health, Behavior, and Society, Jimma University	Ethiopia

## Appendix D - Listening Phase Interview Guide Template

<b>Your initials:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Interviewee(s) Details (add/delete as applicable)</b>	
<b>Name</b>	
<b>Organization/role</b>	
<b>Org type* (add/delete as applicable)</b>	Gov/Academia/Imp/NGO/other
<b>Role scope* (delete as applicable)</b>	National/International
<b>Country</b>	
<b>Economic band* (delete as applicable)</b>	HIC/UMIC/LMIC/LIC
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Comments</b> i.e. personal /contextual factors of note when interpreting the responses	

Set up	Done
Introductions	
Ask permission for the meeting being recorded	
<b>Switch on recording</b>	
<b>Background (guide only, tailor according to your own preferences/audiences)</b>	
The mission of the Society for Implementation Science in Nutrition (SISN) is to promote and support efforts to improve implementation of nutrition actions world-wide. SISN has undertaken a process of refreshing our strategic plan to help determine how it can best achieve its mission while remaining a sustainable and financially secure organization. Hearing your thoughts and perspectives about implementation of nutrition actions and how we can collectively learn to improve implementation will be valuable for our understanding and planning.	
<b>1. Please tell me about an example of a nutrition action that was implemented well</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the signs that it was implemented well? How did you know?</li> <li>From what you know, what made it possible for it to be implemented well?</li> <li>How do you think that the implementers knew what to do to implement it well?</li> <li>Was any study or evaluation made about the implementation?</li> </ol>	
<b>2. What do you think is most important to do to improve implementation of nutrition actions overall in your country or situation? [Ask this non-directive question first and then use a-d as follow-up probes as needed.]</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would improving knowledge, skills, and/or practices help? What knowledge would be helpful? Skills? Practices?</li> <li>Would it be important to share knowledge, skills, and/or practices among implementers? Does such sharing currently happen? If yes, where, or in what forum?</li> <li>What prevents you or others who are implementers from accessing and applying knowledge, skills, and practices about implementation? Where do you or they get stuck?</li> <li>Where or to whom do you go to get ideas, input, or advice about improving and making decisions about implementation?</li> </ol>	
<b>3. Ideally, what steps need to be taken to inform decisions about how to improve implementation of nutrition actions?</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are these steps feasible?</li> <li>Why or why not?</li> <li>What could be done to help make carrying out these steps feasible?</li> </ol>	
<b>4. What do you think is the role and value of timely, research to improve implementation of nutrition actions?</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you give an example where either formal or informal research was helpful in improving implementation?</li> <li>What are three things SISN should consider in its revised mission and work plan that would help you or those around you in improving implementation?</li> </ol>	
<b>5. What needs to be done to improve implementation of nutrition actions and what could SISN do to help make that happen?</b>	
<b>Any other relevant comments/thoughts?</b>	
<b>Close down</b>	
Thank you / end call	

**Notes:** The interviewer should decide, based on how the interview unfolds, timing and the interviewees responses to Q1 and Q2, whether to ask Q3 and Q4 (including 4b) or to instead ask Q5.

Post call check list:	Done
Complete form / concise summary notes	
Download transcript ore recording (if applicable)	
Email both to NC/CS for them to collate or save to Dropbox here	
Send brief thank you note to interviewee	



# Feedback? Questions? Contact us



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