

# **Strengthening the Capacity of SUN Countries to Scale Up Nutrition through 'Learning Routes'**

(October 2013)

**Procasur**

## WHAT?

- Improved knowledge of SUN members about successful initiatives in nutrition
- Better access to hands-on methods and tools to scale-up nutrition
- Strengthened partnerships
- Systematic and continued cross-fertilization

## WHY?

- Because enhancing joint learning and sharing contributes to better delivery of common results in nutrition, and to improved development effectiveness

## WHEN?

- Jan-Dec 2014

## HOW?

- By implementing a pilot programme of two international Learning Routes (in Peru and Senegal), and subsequent follow-up

## WHO?

- SUN members together with and PROCASUR Corporation and facilitation by SUN Movement Secretariat

## **I. Background and Rationale for Strengthening the SUN Government Capacity to scale up nutrition**

1. The Movement for Scaling Up Nutrition was launched in 2010 as a worldwide effort to support governments seeking major improvements in the nutrition of their people – particularly women and children under the age of two years. By September 2013, 42 countries, where half of the chronic malnourished children of the world live, had joined the Movement.
2. When they join the SUN Movement, countries indicate their willingness to focus national policies and actors on eradicating malnutrition for all their people. They seek ways to involve different sectors of government, as well as groups outside government, working together towards a collective response. They establish national common targets to guide this collective effort, reinforce their plans and budgets, improve implementation and monitor outcomes, both at national and local levels. They strengthen national platforms where different stakeholders come together, agree on a single set of expected results, and align their programmes so that implementation is as effective as possible.
3. Many SUN countries seek support to fully adopt these innovative ways of working. In its revised 2012 Road Map, the SUN Movement describes how it supports countries in their scaling-up nutrition process to enable stakeholders in the Movement to align, adjust and increase resources being invested in nutrition around agreed priorities. All countries, regardless their state of preparedness, should expect to benefit from participation in the Movement.
4. Within this process, exchange of knowledge and cross-fertilization are an essential element of the Movement's approach to help the Governments and their supporters to change in policy-advocacy-action, and to disseminate the most relevant innovations and expertise in nutrition.
5. In order to deliver lasting results, the SUN participating countries commence by building their own capacity and creating access to financing through national resources available. When necessary they can also rely on additional technical support through organizations that are part of the SUN Movement's networks of UN system agencies, civil society groups, development partners and business enterprises. The SUN Movement also creates opportunities for countries to share experiences and learn from each other, by identifying innovative and relevant practices that can be passed on in a systematic way to share expertise, to learn and review progress.

6. In September 2013, the SUN members met in New York during the first-time ever Global Gathering. This event gave the opportunity for the participants to get to know each other, and to share both success stories and challenges in improving nutrition. One clear message from the SUN participants was that there is an urgent need for sharing opportunities, enabling countries to learn from each others' experiences.
7. This proposal stems from a survey that was carried out by the SUN Secretariat in June-August 2013, to map the member countries' specific thematic interests for learning and sharing activities. Moreover, the proposal includes remarks and interests that were expressed by the participants in the Global Gathering.
8. This paper proposes the implementation of two 'learning routes' to support sharing and learning initiatives between national SUN multi-stakeholders platforms as convened by SUN Government Focal Points jointly working to scale up nutrition. The proposal sketches the main steps of the Learning Route cycle, and information on programme implementation. The proposed budget and timeline are found on separate sheets.

## II. About PROCASUR Corporation

9. PROCASUR Corporation is a not-for-profit international organization established in 1996 in Santiago, Chile. PROCASUR provides technical assistance and tools for effective and efficient knowledge management and capacity building for public and private actors engaged in the fight against poverty in the developing world. With its headquarters in Santiago de Chile, it connects the Global South through its three regional offices: Latin America and the Caribbean (Chile), Africa (Kenya), Asia and the Pacific (Thailand).
10. Since the mid-1990s, PROCASUR Corporation has been working in mapping the most successful innovations in rural poverty eradication, identifying local and national talents or champions, and linking their knowledge to the global community of development practitioners. Using a variety of knowledge management tools, PROCASUR works with several UN agencies (UNDP, FAO, IFAD, UNEP, UN-Women), national governments (Colombia, Peru, Rwanda, Vietnam, Nepal and others), research institutes (IDRC-CRDI, RIMISP) and the Ford Foundation, to improve development effectiveness and deliver concrete results on ground.
11. For more than 15 years, PROCASUR has been developing and testing several methodological approaches to systematically share experiences and contribute to adopt, adapt and replicate good practices in new contexts. Among the various approaches, the **Learning Route** (LR) has proven to be one of the most successful tools for efficient knowledge exchange and adoption. A recent external evaluation study

made of the Learning Routes and carried out by IDRC<sup>1</sup> shows the potential of the Routes both for increased dissemination of new knowledge and as a trigger to major attitudinal and organizational changes within participating organizations with substantive contribution to scaling up of public policies.

### III. The Learning Route Methodology

12. A **Learning Route**<sup>2</sup> (LR) is a planned journey with training objectives geared towards capacity building on the basis of two central components: i) The interest (of an individual or organization) or need for knowledge; and ii) The identification of relevant experiences through which other people or organizations have dealt with similar problems in innovative ways, with successful results and whose accumulated knowledge is potentially useful to others. Tailor-made to each client, and thematically structured around specific learning objectives, the Routes promote experiential exchange and interaction, through which local people become trainers to their peers.
13. The Learning Routes can be used in two ways: As an **inspirational** means to showcase novel practices and spark the Learning Route participants' interest to do something similar back home (addressing the "what"); or as a way to **train and deepen the knowledge** of already sensitized people and organizations in more hands-on methods (addressing the "how"). In both modalities, peer-to-peer learning constitutes the pillar of a Learning Route. Based on feedback received from the multi-stakeholder nutrition platforms, this proposal is based on the more pragmatic approach, thus enabling the LR participants to acquire very practical tools to scale-up nutrition in their home countries.
14. The concept of 'learning routes' has been applied in various development sectors. The aim is to transfer knowledge from one local context to another, and to build capacity effectively, efficiently and systematically. Through a learning route, practical experience is translated into transferable know-how, which in turn is used to build the knowledge and capacity of others.
15. Concretely, this process involves identifying the local and national examples of good practices which match the pre-identified areas of in-country capacities to be strengthened. The countries (or individuals or organizations) hosting the most innovative and relevant experiences are asked to receive visiting delegations from other countries, after having prepared the visit according to the learning needs expressed by the visitors. When delegations return to their own countries they adapt

---

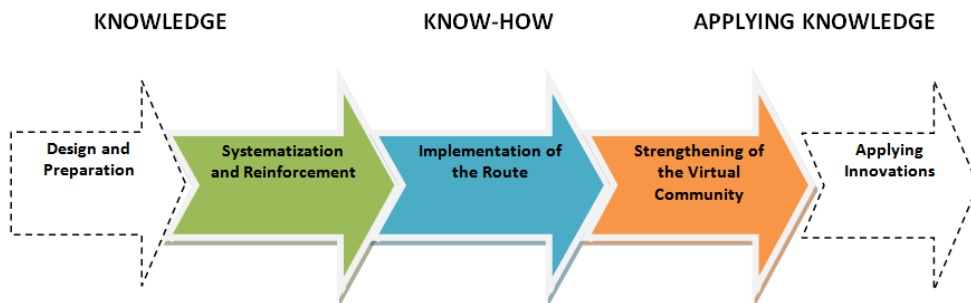
<sup>1</sup> Girardi and Herrera: *The Learning Routes as Tools to Scale Up and Disseminate Innovations*. IDRC, Montevideo (2012).

<sup>2</sup> For a simple description of the Learning Route journey, please refer to: [http://asia.procasur.org/portfolio\\_item/learning-route-cartoon/](http://asia.procasur.org/portfolio_item/learning-route-cartoon/)

the newly acquired knowledge to their own contexts, and are supported through on-going exchange.

16. The process of implementing a Learning Route Process unfolds into three basic phases, as described below:

**Stages of a Learning Route:**



Experience in PROCASUR shows that there is higher degree of success when the Route blends into a pre-existing change process to which it contributes, and subsequently when the organization conceives the Route as a useful tool for its own objectives in innovation and/or scaling-up. In short, a Learning Route can clarify and shorten the journey for scaling up of best practices.

17. The present proposal has been developed following preparatory work done with the SUN Movement Secretariat from June to August 2013 in order to ensure its design fits and builds on ongoing Movement efforts to facilitate the strengthening of in-country capacities to deliver results in SUN countries. This proposal is based on areas the government-led multi-stakeholder nutrition platforms had identified as the ones where in-country capacity is constrained or deemed so.

#### **iv. Areas of in-country capacities to be strengthened**

18. The areas where in-country capacities need to be strengthened, were spelt out by national multi-stakeholder platforms, and identified through a joint survey undertaken in mid-2013.
19. SUN Focal Points, appointed by their governments to coordinate the scaling-up nutrition process in their countries, identified six key areas where greater sharing of experiences and strengthening of capacity would enable them to move forward their plans to scale up nutrition. These are themes that have consistently been raised by SUN countries during regular SUN Country Network calls and during a more detailed survey undertaken by the SUN Movement Secretariat in July 2013. Moreover, the

same themes were used as starting points for the group sessions during the SUN Movement Global Gathering. They are:

- **Nutrition sensitive multi-sectoral approaches:** Enhancing people's nutritional status through developing nutrition-sensitive strategies and actions within different sectors. The focus is on negotiating and agreeing Common Results Frameworks at national and sub-national levels, as well as the engagement of multiple sectors and actors.
- **Costing of national nutrition plans and the identification of funding shortfalls:** Reinforcing the quality of plans for enhancing nutrition within different sectors through developing, costing and budgeting these plans. Indicating how different stakeholders are responsible for their implementation, using the plans as a basis for mobilizing both domestic and external investment, and (if requested by countries) validating the assumptions and projections in the plans.
- **Scaling up and rolling out implementation of plans with a focus on district and community levels;** Moving forward with implementation of prioritized interventions for improving nutrition, as set out in the Common Results Frameworks and national plans, to ensure that results are achieved at community, local and national levels.
- **Tracking of domestic and external funding:** Keeping track of, and recording, the mobilization and use of domestic and external investments, checking against prior commitments, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively, and linking investments made to results achieved at various levels.
- **Demonstration of results through inter-sectoral monitoring and evaluation:** Strengthening systems for monitoring implementation at local and national-levels, using the Common Results Framework as a template, so contributing to global nutrition information systems with data that are credible and recognized as valid by international authorities.
- **Advocacy and communication to sustain high-level engagement:** Galvanizing leaders, including national parliamentarians and local councilors, to act for nutrition; encouraging synergy among programme personnel across multiple organizations and sectors, and mobilizing resources around the Common Results Frameworks – through effective advocacy and targeted communication.

***BOX Survey to SUN countries national multi-stakeholder platforms on areas of in-country capacities to be strengthened:***

*An email from SUN Coordinator following discussions in bi-monthly phone calls with national multi-stakeholder platforms in June 2013 invited Focal Points to spell out and rank their preferences on areas where they would wish their capacities to be further strengthened to scale up national plans by involving additional members of national platforms as needed*

*More than 60 people responded the survey, representing altogether 28 countries participating in the SUN Movement. In 23 cases submission came directly from national focal point – in most of the cases jointly with other members of platform. All regions responded (4 from LAC; 5 from Asia and 19 from Africa). In case of multiple submissions from same country, a two-track approach was followed: (i) Focal Points replies were considered first (ii) all replies were considered then by using median of all replies received. Results are largely consistent as for the ranking of the areas needing strengthening.*

20. The Survey sent out by the SUN Secretariat provided the following additional insights:
- SUN Country Focal Points have emphasized that where possible they would like to learn of experiences from other SUN countries. This means identifying routes through which SUN countries can offer expertise to each other and learn from experiences across the Movement, while ensuring access to responsive technical assistance that will help apply the learning through the SUN Movement networks, or through specially-created task teams and regional resource hubs.
  - In that respect 23 countries have considered they have at least one practice that is worth-sharing as it worked in their own context. 52 good available practices were shared altogether by 28 countries. In a number of cases countries offered additional material/document to support their own practices, including names of resource people that can be activated in case a learning exercise moves forward.

**v. Scope of the pilot learning routes within the SUN Movement**

21. As a pilot, the now proposed Learning Routes should focus on hands-on sharing across the SUN country national platforms. It is important to primarily target the thematic areas that best match numerous available practices with high interest in strengthening in-country capacities.
22. Most of the good available practices illustrate the ongoing in-country efforts to work across sectors and actors towards nutrition-sensitive multi-sectorial approaches, and



to link different policies around a common framework of results at national and decentralized level.

23. The following **12 countries** have indicated their interest in sharing relevant and successful practices both in nutrition-sensitive multi-sectorial approach and in their roll-out to district level. Also, they have shown strong interest in strengthening their own capacity by reinforcing their learning potential. They have done so by having the Country SUN Focal Point actively participating in the preparatory phase, by organizing a country-led input to the survey, and by sharing their results actively during the SUN Movement Global Gathering in New York. They are: **BENIN; BURUNDI; GHANA; GUATEMALA; LAO DPR; MADAGASCAR; NIGER; PERU; SENEGAL; SIERRA LEONE; SRI LANKA; and TANZANIA.**

24. The following countries –from the larger group above- have been **pre-identified as host countries** for visiting delegations, taking into account the success and relevance of their experience in scaling up nutrition; the expression of interest of other member countries to learn from them; geographical and linguistic balance; and additional elements as emerging from material available in the SUN Movement Secretariat (see table below). They are:

- A. **Peru** (with a Learning Route to be offered in Spanish and English)
- B. **Senegal** (with a Learning Route to be offered in French and English)

**BOX: Elements to assess the available best practices and their suitability for LRs**

IMPACT	>>Experience brought about verifiable changes in society (e.g. reduced stunting)
	>> Is experience documented?
	>>Any assessment of the experience available
SUSTAINABILITY and INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING	>>One or more of the following has been strengthened as a result of the experience: institutional frameworks; sectoral policies and/or strategies; governmental processes
INNOVATION	>>The experience created new solutions to the issue and documentation is available
	>>The experience generated new technical/scientific knowledge on the issue and docs are available
REPLICABILITY	>> How specific is the experience?
	>> How important was the institutional capacity in the success?
SUN CONTEXT	>> Leadership and commitment by Gov and FP responsiveness
	>>Political landscape in foreseeable future
	>>Additional assets (LG members; CSA work well; UN-donors well aligned etc.)

LOGISTICS	>>Security conditions in country
	>>Easy to fly in/out
	>>Material available in En/Fr/Spa or multiple languages

25. Chapter 6 specifies the main steps of the Learning Routes, and the proposed follow-up for ex-post follow-up. The proposal was agreed with the SUN Movement Secretariat to allow a proper design and cost estimation of the proposal by PROCASUR.
26. Each Learning Route will have an effective duration of a maximum of **eight days (7 nights)**, with technical and methodological assistance from PROCASUR, both before and after the factual trip/exchange visit.
27. Each Learning Route will include a several-day field visit, preferably outside the capital city, to see how multi-sectoral nutrition sensitive approaches are working in practice, especially at community level.
28. Each Learning Route is expected to directly benefit a group of **five national teams** coming from some of the 12 above mentioned countries, composed of **three participants per country** (as decided by the SUN focal point from within the national multi-stakeholder platform). At least one participant needs to come from the Government. All of the participants from national platforms will have to respond to some requirements as recommended by PROCASUR in the implementation of this proposal so as to ensure they can bring about change in their own contexts when back from the exchange visit<sup>3</sup>.
29. Members of the SUN MPTF Management Committee can delegate 1 person per stakeholder group (Donors, UN, CSO) to take part of the pilot. One person from the Sun Secretariat is expected to accompany the group during the exchange/learning experience along with PROCASUR staff.
30. The expected number of people on each Learning Route will be, therefore, **26**, including 15 participants from the SUN countries, three from the stakeholder groups, one from SMS, four Procasur staff (Project Leader, Technical Coordinator, Methodological Coordinator, and Logistical Coordinator), a communications crew of two, and two translators.

---

<sup>3</sup> Research has shown that organizational changes take place when there is ownership of the innovative proposals by the directors and members, and an active group or community is formed to act as the vanguard for change. The processes for social learning and change are generated more easily when: i) Participation on the Route is not individual but rather involves a group of stakeholders, with different profiles including persons with decision-making power on the suggested innovations; and ii) When the participants have the capacity to motivate the rest of the organization towards the proposed changes. IDRC (2012).

## VI. Proposal for Strengthening the Capacities of SUN Countries to deliver Results through Learning Routes: Main steps

31. The following describes the main five (5) steps for piloting the implementation of a Learning Route Programme within the context of the SUN Movement.

### A. Soft systematization of best practices

32. For this initiative to be successful, the first step is to identify and systematize the best practices in nutrition in Peru and Senegal, to be showcased during the Learning Route exchange visits. The aim is to identify the spaces, drivers and opportunities for scaling-up nutrition in these specific contexts, from a multi-stakeholder perspective, as offered by the national platforms.

33. Therefore, the work will start with a state-of-art analysis, focusing on the challenges and future perspectives of the stakeholders belonging to the national platforms. This exercise will be carried out by PROCASUR, and it will build on the existing information available. It will imply primarily a three-steps approach:

**STEP1** includes: (i) Desk review of existing documentation for the selected practices; (ii) Interviews with in-country key actors and experts to have additional views on the same; (iii) Additional interviews with global experts in nutrition, to assess the global value of the practice in other contexts.

**STEP2** includes an in-country visit by PROCASUR of approximately 5 to 7 days in each selected host country. This will offer an opportunity to PROCASUR to interact closely with key actors in the host country. Ideally, the SMS would release a staff member to accompany the systematization process. If this is not possible, the SMS and the national focal points will help PROCASUR in making the first contacts for the proposed experiences, and participating in the validation of the systematization documents.

PROCASUR will invite and involve the local actors in the soft systematization documents process in order to increase their ability to share their own knowledge with the visitors. If training is needed, PROCASUR will provide support to local actors (for example with ad-hoc training on public speaking and/or other basic pedagogical and methodological tools to share their knowhow).

**STEP3** includes the production of easy-to-use pedagogical documents needed to activate a Virtual Learning Community (VLC) prior to the exchange visit itself. Each of the experiences identified above will be packaged and disseminated through the activation of

a moderated Virtual Learning Community, available not only to the LR participants but also to the wider SUN public<sup>4</sup>. Whenever possible, PROCASUR will make use of not only written documents, but also of audiovisual materials such as video footage of the experiences, etc.

The case systematizations, a technical scoping paper and other background documentation will be included in an electronic Field Blog, to be updated both before and after each Route and accessible through the open-access VLC.

34. This first phase of systematization will be accompanied by the selection of the participants for each of the Learning Routes. For the success of post-Route learning, sharing and scaling-up, the participants play a key role: They must be both interested and engaged, and also have the power to promote change in their home country. Each participant should be explicit about his/her motivation for the training and exchange, and make visible the context where s/he could eventually replicate, adapt and scale up any newly acquired learning. The participants will be requested to present a sketch of activities to which s/he commits before, during and after the route.

35. The early selection of participants will enable to gear each LR to their specific learning and sharing interests, and to advance in the travel arrangements, helping to achieve budgetary cost-efficiency.

### **B. Preparation of the trip**

36. After the systematization of the best experiences, PROCASUR will define the detailed training and logistical schedule of the Learning Route(s), including: (a) The finetuning of the specific learning objectives for each route and each case; (b) The most suitable training methodology for each session during the route; (c) The selection of the training tools; and (d) The administrative and logistical organization of each route, including travel and accommodation arrangements.

### **C. Implementation of the exchange visit**

37. During this phase, the selected participants, from a maximum of five SUN national teams, will travel to the host country of each route (Peru or Senegal), with the objective to learn, in-person, how their peers (other practitioners or decision-makers) have implemented successful practices to scale up nutrition, resolving problems and achieving good results.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ideally, the VLC will be hosted by the SUN Movement web platform.

38. During each visit, the previously identified host national champions will explain their experiences on implementing SUN strategies, their good practices and lessons learned. An environment of dialogue and exchange is created and each Route team-participant is encouraged to identify the most valuable lessons applicable to their own experience. During the exchanges, hosts and Route participants (the “routers” or *ruteros*) come together and have both structured sessions and informal time to share, compare and reflect on their experiences. It is important to note that the exchange visits should not only benefit the visitor or “ruterero”, but also the hosts and national champions, through a collective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each case.
39. Each case visit is preceded by a context-setting session, and concluded by another one dedicated to summarizing and analyzing the newly acquired learning. Each session will be methodologically coordinated by PROCASUR, with the support of the Technical Coordinator. The aim is to foster constant exchange (both formal and informal) of knowledge and experiences among the visiting delegations on one hand, and between them and their hosts on the other hand.
40. The implementation of each route is documented by bloggers, selected usually among the participants, who will share the LR learnings in real time with the wider public. During these Learning Routes, there will also be a two-person communications crew accompanying both routes and documenting the learning process. In order to reinforce the communication of results, and to further the impact both at an organizational and an individual level of the SUN national platforms, the material of the VLC will be made public and they will be updated throughout the journey. After the journey, all materials will be included in a USB Drive to be posted to the LR participants.
41. The LR final report and all Field Blog materials will also be distributed to the hosts and local champions with the aim to return the results to the visited experiences.

#### **D. From learning to action: the Take-Home Action Plans**

42. During the implementation of the LR journey itself, each national delegation will be requested to define and sketch a Take-Home Action Plan highlighting key elements to be applied/adapted in their home country. The objective of the exercise is to identify potentially useful innovations in nutrition-sensitive approaches as learned during the route, and to plan for their adoption and possible adaptation in the context of origin.
43. To support this task, the LR includes a series of sessions dedicated specially to guide and assist the elaboration of such Take-Home Action Plans. The stage is usually set during the first day of the Route, where each national team will briefly present their context, successes and challenges, and expectations for the journey. PROCASUR,

together with the Technical Coordinator with subject-matter expertise in nutrition, will help participants to elaborate such ideas prior to the Route and during the route by stimulating debate and peer-to-peer feedback. This task will be further supported by a Scaling-Up Specialist, who will review the proposed Take-Home Action Plans in their first versions, and provide constructive feedback to improve them.

44. All Take-Home Plans will be shared among participants. The draft final versions of the plans are usually presented and delivered to the organizers by the end of each LR trip. Each country team is then encouraged to share the plans and the overall experience with their stakeholders and SUN partners in their home country, and to validate the initial ideas among them.
45. The current programme design includes a Take-Home Action Fund of US\$ 12,000 as cash prize to incentivate the roll-out the proposed activities of the most promising Action Plans. Usually, the selection of the winner proposals is done by the LR participants, and in this case they could be endorsed through a public competition in the VLC. The awarding could also be in-kind, or if additional resources are available, in the form of a more tailored technical assistance visit to support the implementation of the Plan (eg. six months after the end of the trip).

#### **E. Follow-up and Evaluation**

46. The medium- and long-term follow-up of the implementation of the Take-Home Action Plans will lie on each SUN multi-stakeholder national platform. However, PROCASUR will monitor the achievements of the LR programme also after the actual Route(s). The ex-post follow-up will not only allow to support the in-country implementation and scaling up of the best practices in nutrition, but provide important lessons and recommendations for further initiatives. A specific evaluation of the routes will also suggest a way forward for possible further collaboration between SUN and PROCASUR.
47. The follow-up and evaluation will include, among others: i) A final virtual meeting (taking advantage of the VLC) with all the 12 countries participating, with the participation of the Technical Coordinators, international experts, national champions and the broader community of SUN practitioners; and ii) A more in-depth documentation of the scaling-up processes in nutrition after each Learning Route.
48. A small survey will be conducted 6 months after the implementation of the Learning Routes to assess quality of satisfaction towards the programme from the participating delegations with an appreciation of how 'usable' the acquired expertise proved to be in the aftermath of the experience. The results of this assessment will be made available to the SUN Secretariat.

**vii. Reporting and Accounting**

49. Close collaboration with the SUN Secretariat and SUN participating countries will enable constant monitoring of programme process. The specific evaluations done after each Route, will feed into the final programme evaluation, and to the subsequent elaboration of the technical and financial reports. At the latest during the last trimester of programme implementation, Procasur and SMS will come together to assess the outputs and outcomes of the programme, and to analyze the possible way forward.
50. For financial transparency, PROCASUR will open a designated bank account to receive SUN grant proceeds. Moreover, it will maintain separate records and financial accounts prepared in accordance with internationally recognized standards. For the preparation of the financial statements of the SUN programme, PROCASUR will use internationally recognised accounting principles, following the International public sector accounting standards (IPSAS) issued by the International Federation of Accountants.

**viii. Timeline and Budget** (see separate Excel sheets)