4SD Approach to Synthesizing Nutrition Dialogues

4SD Foundation | 16 September 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From Dialogue evidence to country interpretation and action

Nutrition Dialogues generate rich qualitative evidence about how people experience nutrition challenges, how they understand the connections between them, and what they believe could change. When many Dialogues take place in one country, the challenge is to bring this evidence together without losing the differences between communities, participant groups and individual Dialogues.

4SD has developed a systematic country synthesis approach to do this. Building on experience from the Food Systems Summit Dialogues and the first phase of Nutrition Dialogues, the approach was made more explicit and reproducible in 2026 and tested across five different country evidence sets.

What the Country Synthesis does

The Country Synthesis asks a deliberately focused question: What picture emerges across these Dialogues?

Each Dialogue is first understood on its own terms before evidence is compared across the country set. The synthesis identifies the issues participants raise, the connections they describe, what children and stakeholders bring into view, differences and locally specific findings, and the actions participants propose.

It does not treat Dialogue findings as nationally representative, turn recurrence into prevalence, add relationships that participants did not describe, or convert participants' ideas into recommendations.

A structured Human–AI approach

Artificial intelligence supports the systematic reading, organisation, comparison, traceability and production of evidence across many Feedback Forms. It operates within methodological and editorial rules developed by 4SD.

AI supports the process; it does not determine the methodology or interpret the country context. 4SD retains methodological and editorial responsibility and undertakes quality assurance of the country outputs.

This combination allows substantial qualitative evidence to be processed more systematically and consistently while retaining human judgement where it matters.

From consolidation to interpretation

A central feature of the approach is the deliberate separation of two stages:

1. **Consolidation: What do the Dialogues reveal?**

4SD prepares the Country Synthesis Report from the Feedback Forms, undertakes quality assurance and invites the World Vision country team to review whether the resulting picture feels faithful to the Dialogues and to flag anything that should be revisited.

2. **Interpretation: What does this evidence mean in our context?**

Once the synthesis is finalised, an accompanying Interpretation Guide supports country teams and partners to bring the Dialogue findings into conversation with national and sub-national data, policy, research, programme experience and local knowledge, and to consider implications for learning, accountability and action.

Keeping these stages distinct helps protect participants' contributions before they are interpreted through existing institutional, programme or policy perspectives.

What has now been established

By September 2026, 4SD has established a documented synthesis methodology, structured analytical protocol, Human–AI workflow, defined country products and quality-review process. The approach has been tested across five differently structured country evidence sets, with full report production and quality assurance undertaken for Ghana, Sri Lanka and Lebanon.

The result is a repeatable approach that can support Nutrition Dialogues across different country contexts without forcing different Dialogue evidence into the same story.

4SD Approach to Synthesizing Nutrition Dialogues

How the approach evolved and how Country Synthesis Reports are prepared

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Nutrition Dialogues Country Synthesis Reports bring together what emerges when a set of dialogue records is read as a whole. They help readers make sense of participants' collective evidence while preserving differences between communities, participant groups and individual dialogues.

The approach reflects 4SD Foundation's wider practice of helping people navigate complex challenges: making sense of how systems work, keeping different perspectives and relationships visible, and creating a sound basis for dialogue and collaborative action. In 2026, 4SD made its synthesis practice more explicit, systematic and reproducible for repeated country-level work, supported by a structured Human–AI workflow.

The methodology did not begin with AI. AI became useful once 4SD had made explicit what the synthesis needed to look for, what distinctions had to be protected, what claims the evidence could support and where human judgement remained necessary.

1. Why synthesis is needed

A dialogue creates value by enabling people to describe their experiences, perspectives and ideas in their own context. When many dialogues take place, a second challenge arises: how can those individual conversations be brought together without flattening their differences or turning qualitative evidence into a false national average?

4SD's synthesis approach addresses this challenge. A Country Synthesis Report is not a summary of each dialogue in turn, and it is not intended to provide a statistically representative picture of nutrition in a country. It is a structured qualitative synthesis of what participants discussed, experienced, observed and proposed across the dialogues included in the evidence base.

The central question is: **What picture emerges across these dialogues?**

Questions about what that picture means in the wider country context, how it relates to other data and knowledge, and what should happen in response are considered separately during country-level interpretation.

2. How the 4SD approach evolved

2.1 From practical dialogue synthesis to Nutrition Dialogues

4SD's approach grew from practical experience of synthesising large dialogue processes, including the Food Systems Summit Dialogues and the first phase of Nutrition Dialogues. This work established an important orientation that continues to shape the method: synthesis is not simply aggregation. It requires disciplined judgement about what can be brought together, what must remain distinct and what the available dialogue records can reasonably support.

The 2024-2025 Nutrition Dialogues extended this practice specifically to nutrition. For the global synthesis prepared for the 2025 Nutrition for Growth Summit, 4SD used a substantially human-led analytical process. Established nutrition thinking, including the UNICEF conceptual framework, provided initial analytical scaffolding, while the synthesis remained grounded in what dialogue participants had actually raised.

2.2 Making the method explicit for country synthesis

The move in 2026 from a global synthesis to repeated country syntheses created a new methodological requirement. A process that experienced analysts could previously carry partly through judgement needed to be unpacked so that it could be applied consistently across countries, reviewed by others and repeated without losing its analytical discipline.

4SD therefore made the analytical process more explicit: each dialogue is first understood on its own terms; evidence is then systematically compared; recurring and differing findings are retained; participant-described relationships are examined; and the analysis distinguishes clearly between what the dialogue evidence supports and what belongs to subsequent interpretation.

2.3 Testing and strengthening the approach

The first country applications were used as practical calibration cases, testing both the analytical method and how the resulting evidence should be communicated in a Country Synthesis Report. Human review returned closely to the underlying dialogue evidence (the Feedback Forms) and identified places where apparently reasonable analytical moves could go beyond what the records actually supported, as well as where greater analytical discipline risked becoming too visible in the reader-facing report.

Those lessons were incorporated into the methodology before wider country application. In particular, 4SD strengthened source traceability, the treatment of relationships and pathways, attention to language and evidence provenance, recognition of possible source-production effects, the distinction between dialogue type (Children's workshops and Stakeholder dialogues) and actual participant voice, the treatment of recurrence, and controls on analytical inference.

Rather than simply correcting an initial report, the strengthened method was then designed to be applied afresh from the source evidence. This helped test whether the approach itself could produce more disciplined and reproducible results.

2.4 A repeatable country synthesis process

By September 2026, this progression has resulted in a documented methodology, a structured analytical protocol, an Evidence Consolidation Package, a Human–AI workflow, defined country products and a quality-review process. The analytical method was tested across five differently structured country corpora; Ghana, Sri Lanka and Lebanon were also taken through complete V1 production and document quality assurance. This established a stable process that can be applied repeatedly without forcing different evidence bases into the same substantive story.

The methodology remains the intellectual core. The production process exists to apply it consistently; it does not replace methodological judgement.

3. What the methodology is designed to protect

- Participants' contributions remain primary. The synthesis begins with what is documented from the dialogues, not with an external explanation of the country's nutrition situation.
- Each dialogue is first understood on its own terms. Cross-dialogue comparison begins only after dialogue-level analysis.
- Recurrence is not prevalence or importance. An issue raised in many dialogues is not automatically more important than a serious or distinctive issue raised once.
- Difference is evidence. Divergence between places, participant groups or views is preserved rather than averaged away.
- Relationships must be supported by the dialogue evidence. The synthesis does not add connections simply because they appear plausible from external nutrition knowledge.
- Participant-proposed actions retain participant ownership. They are not silently converted into recommendations by 4SD or implementing partners.

- Synthesis and interpretation remain separate. The Country Synthesis establishes what the dialogues reveal; country interpretation can subsequently bring that evidence into conversation with other knowledge.
- Dialogue type is retained for provenance, but the synthesis examines whose perspectives the recorded evidence actually represents.
- Dialogue event dates remain separate from Feedback Form publication dates. The event date determines whether a Dialogue belongs in the defined country period.

4. The analytical journey

The Country Synthesis follows a common reader-facing progression:

Stage	*Question*	*What it adds*
Issues	What nutrition issues emerge across the dialogues?	Identifies what participants experience, observe and are concerned about.
Connections	How do these issues connect?	Examines evidence-supported relationships described by participants.
Children's perspectives	What do children tell us?	Shows what children's experiences, concerns and agency bring into view.
Stakeholder perspectives	What do stakeholders tell us?	Shows what stakeholder experience and institutional perspectives add to the picture.
Actions	What actions do participants propose?	Makes participants' priorities, ideas and agency visible.
Synthesis	What do the dialogues help us see?	Draws deeper substantive understanding from the picture as a whole.

These stages build on one another. Issues identify what is present; connections examine how participants relate those issues; children's and stakeholder perspectives show what different groups bring into view; actions show what participants believe could change; and the final synthesis asks what becomes clearer when those dimensions are considered together.

Country Synthesis Reports use this common reader facing progression across countries, while country specific findings, substantive subheadings, examples and narrative ensure that each report remains grounded in its own dialogue evidence.

5. What evidence is used?

The analysis is based on Feedback Forms completed following Nutrition Dialogues, for both Children's Workshops and Stakeholder Dialogues where these have been held. Before analysis begins, the XML evidence file is checked for completeness, readable structure and essential metadata. The evidence base for each country is then explicitly defined using verified Dialogue event dates, kept separate from Feedback Form publication dates, so that it is clear which records and period are included.

Feedback Forms provide structured accounts of what was discussed during each dialogue. They are not transcripts. They already reflect processes of listening, facilitation and documentation by those involved in the dialogue.

The synthesis therefore considers both what is recorded and the characteristics and limitations of the available evidence. These may include the number and types of dialogues, geographic and socio-economic coverage, participant groups, languages used, missing or inconsistent information and how the dialogues were documented.

Feedback Forms are analysed in their source language wherever possible. Where translation or language transformation is required for analysis or reporting, the meaning, attribution, uncertainty and tone of the source must be preserved. External information is not used to fill gaps in what participants said.

6. How the evidence is analysed

Each Feedback Form is first examined individually so that the dialogue is understood on its own terms before comparisons are made.

The evidence is then organised systematically to capture the issues participants discussed, their experiences and observations, relationships they described between issues, differences of perspective within and across dialogues, and ideas or actions participants proposed.

Only after this dialogue-by-dialogue work is complete is evidence compared across the country corpus. The analysis looks for recurring themes, convergence and divergence, locally specific findings, differences between participant groups and findings that may be important even when they appear in only one or two Dialogues. It also tests whether apparent recurrence may reflect shared facilitation, translation, summarising, copying or editorial production rather than independent convergence.

The analysis then examines evidence-supported pathways between issues. A relationship is retained only where it can be traced back to the dialogue evidence. Plausible connections drawn from general nutrition knowledge are not added.

Finally, issues, connections, children's and stakeholder perspectives, and participant-proposed actions are read together to ask what the dialogues help us see when considered as a whole.

7. How AI is used

Artificial intelligence supports the analytical and production process, particularly where systematic reading, organisation, comparison and checking across many qualitative records would otherwise be highly time-consuming.

AI can support consistent organisation of evidence, comparison of recurring and divergent findings, source traceability, checking for omissions or possible overstatement, maintenance of structured analytical records and controlled production of the country documents.

AI does not determine the methodology, add external knowledge to the evidence base, resolve uncertainty silently or independently decide what the findings mean.

The process follows rules developed by 4SD that define what may be inferred from the Dialogue evidence, what must remain uncertain, how products remain distinct and where human judgement is required. Country products are produced by 4SD with artificial intelligence. 4SD retains methodological and editorial responsibility; the World Vision country team reviews the Country Synthesis Report V1 for factual accuracy and fidelity to the Dialogues before 4SD completes final editing.

8. Why readers can trust the process

Trust does not depend on claiming that qualitative dialogue evidence is more representative or precise than it is. It depends on being clear about the evidence base, disciplined about what can be inferred and transparent about limitations.

- The evidence corpus is explicitly defined rather than assembled informally during drafting.
- Individual dialogues are analysed before cross-dialogue patterns are constructed.
- Substantive findings and analytical relationships are kept traceable to the underlying records.
- Convergence, divergence and locally specific findings are retained rather than forced into one account.
- Possible effects of facilitation, translation, documentation or common reporting practices are considered where they may shape apparent patterns.
- Uncertainty and alternative readings are recorded rather than silently resolved.
- Material limitations are communicated where they affect what can responsibly be concluded.
- 4SD methodological review, rendered-document quality assurance and World Vision country-team evidence review remain defined parts of the production process.

These safeguards do not remove the inherent limitations of dialogue evidence. They help make those limitations visible and ensure that the synthesis stays within what the evidence can reasonably support.

9. What a Country Synthesis can - and cannot - tell us

A Country Synthesis can reveal patterns, experiences, perspectives, relationships, proposed actions and differences visible across the dialogues conducted. It can bring attention to locally specific or less frequently expressed findings that might otherwise disappear in a national summary. It can also show how participants themselves understand connections between problems and where they see possibilities for change.

It cannot establish the prevalence of an issue across the country, demonstrate that participating communities are representative of the national population, or prove causal relationships beyond those supported by the dialogue evidence.

The scope of every synthesis is therefore determined by the dialogues and Feedback Forms on which it is based.

10. From synthesis to country interpretation and action

The Country Synthesis Report V1 first establishes a disciplined account of what the Dialogue evidence itself reveals. After 4SD quality assurance, the World Vision country team reviews whether it faithfully represents the Dialogues. 4SD then assesses the comments and completes the Final Country Synthesis Report.

Once the report is finalised, country teams and relevant partners use the Interpretation Guide to bring that evidence into conversation with other forms of knowledge: national and sub-national data, programme experience, policy information, research, community knowledge and the experience of practitioners and stakeholders.

The synthesis asks: What picture emerges across these dialogues?

The interpretation process asks: What does this evidence mean in our context?

Keeping evidence consolidation, country-team verification and subsequent interpretation distinct helps ensure that participants' contributions remain visible before they are interpreted through existing programmes, policies or institutional priorities. It also creates space for country actors to consider what the findings and participant-proposed actions imply for further enquiry, programme learning, accountability and action.

In summary

The 4SD approach has evolved from practical experience synthesising large dialogue processes into a more explicit, systematic and reproducible methodology for country-level qualitative synthesis. Its development has progressively clarified how to move from individual dialogue records to a coherent picture of the issues participants describe, the connections they make between them, what children and stakeholders each bring into view, the actions participants propose, and what becomes visible when the dialogues are read together, while maintaining clear boundaries around what the evidence can support.

The approach has been formalised through repeated country synthesis work, tested against source evidence, strengthened through human review and operationalised through a structured Human–AI workflow. AI strengthens systematic application and controlled document production; it does not replace 4SD's methodological reasoning or responsibility, the country team's evidence verification, or country actors' role in interpretation.

The methodology determines how the evidence is analysed. The Country Synthesis communicates what the Dialogues reveal. Country-team review verifies fidelity to the Dialogues. Country interpretation then explores what the finalised findings might mean and what should happen next.