

# Effectiveness of Technical Assistance:

How has assistance provided to SUN countries by MQSUN+ (2017–2020) contributed to efforts to scale up nutrition?



Yemen

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#### Key Findings

- Fragile, conflict-affected Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) countries require a unique type of support from the SUN Movement and technical assistance (TA) providers. In the case of Yemen, an approach which included both factions was considered most appropriate.
- Remote support from MQSUN+ to the Yemen SUN Secretariat worked well; did not compromise the quality or effectiveness of TA provision; and facilitated better government leadership of processes and ownership of the resulting outputs. Clarity and consensus on the objectives of the process, preparation, and robust design of tools for collecting information were key enabling factors.
- Capacity strengthening efforts could be enhanced with the provision of dedicated expertise in gender, equity and social inclusion, and nutrition.
- TA outputs were of good quality but complex and not accessible to all. The further development of abridged, more digestible resources and tools can help to promote awareness, uptake and utilisation, particularly to lower levels of government and partners at sub-national level.

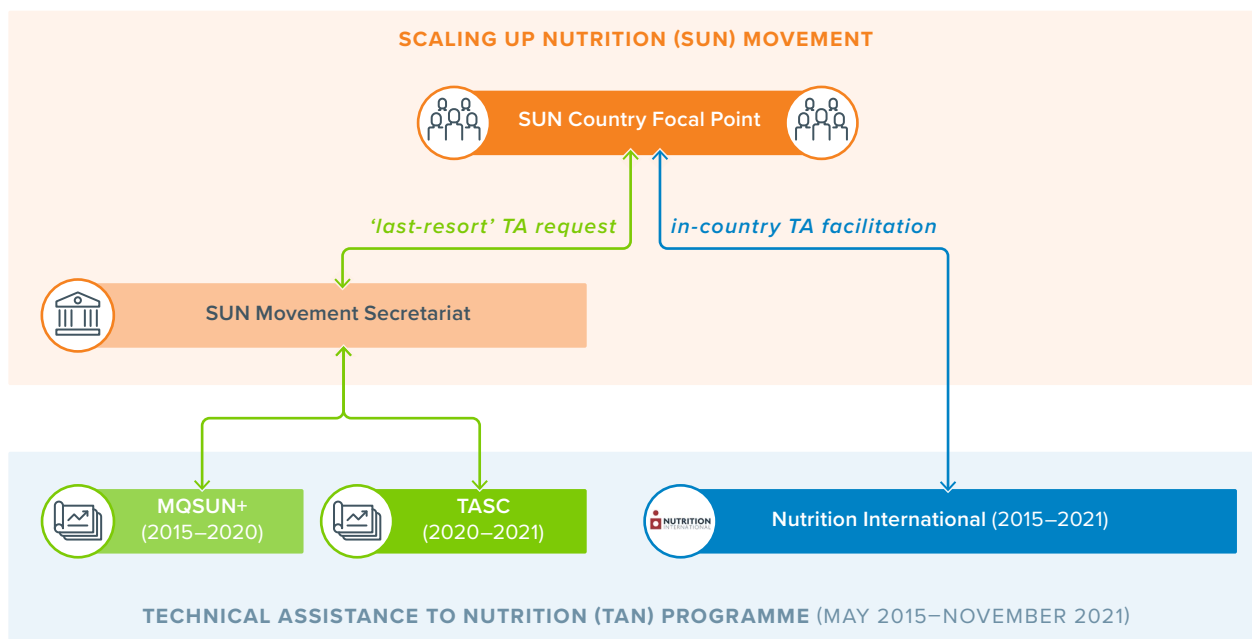
## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Technical Assistance for Nutrition programme

The Technical Assistance for Nutrition (TAN) programme is a 6.5-year (May 2015–November 2021), £35.8 million Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)-funded initiative that provides support to the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and FCDO staff. The Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+) programme was a Technical Assistance (TA) facility within the larger TAN programme which SUN countries could access from 2015 to 2020. MQSUN+ was designed a last-resort TA provider (i.e., where no other options or capacity for meeting TA needs were available at country level) and received context-specific expertise requests from the SUN Focal Points through the SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS). This facility promoted a ‘demand-driven’ model, whereby technical support and expertise were available to overcome capacity gaps in the design and delivery of national multisector nutrition plans and other key elements of the government’s planning and implementation cycle. Following the end of MQSUN+ in 2020, the Technical Assistance to Strengthen Capabilities (TASC) project was established as a follow-on TA facility with a similar approach, led by DAI with NutritionWorks and Development Initiatives as consortium partners.

In addition to MQSUN+, countries were able to access TA through Nutrition International’s Nutrition Technical Assistance Mechanism (NTEAM), under the TAN programme. Nutrition International (NI) provides longer-term in-country support, responding to direct requests from the SUN Focal Point and agreed through prioritisation exercises with members of multi-stakeholder platforms.

Figure 1: Country Requests to MQSUN+, TASC and NI



## 1.2. Purpose / objectives of the case study

To understand the effectiveness of TA design and provision, TASC undertook a series of case studies of TA provided by MQSUN+ to a number of countries, selected according to a set of pre-defined criteria.<sup>1</sup> The studies were undertaken in consultation with PATH, the MQSUN+ consortium lead, but without their direct involvement. These case studies will be used to identify best practices and lessons learned, to inform the future design and provision of TA.

Using the pre-defined criteria, the review team selected six case study countries from a list of 14 countries where MQSUN+ provided TA between 2017 and 2020. Yemen was selected based on its location, emergency/humanitarian context, the provision of 'remote' TA (versus in-country visits) by MQSUN+ international consultants, and the range of deliverables produced (costed Common Results Framework (CRF), Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan (MSNAP), monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan, and an advocacy and communication plan).

The case studies aimed to assess effectiveness across the TA process, including design, provision, production of outputs and onward uptake and utilisation and considered the following elements:

- Relevance and responsiveness to country context, priorities and needs
- Country capacity to contribute to and absorb TA outputs
- Quality and accessibility of outputs
- Contribution of TA outputs to: scale, enhancing GESI outcomes, governance, multisectoral coordination and collaboration, enhanced quality of programmes and policies, improved monitoring of progress in nutrition, effectiveness at leveraging resources.

Key lessons learned from this study will feed into a synthesis report and a guidance note for use by those requesting TA (e.g. country governments and other partners) and those providing TA (SMS, national and international TA providers, United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), academia).

<sup>1</sup> Stable/fragile conflict-affected context; long-term/short-term TA provision; types of support provided (national nutrition plans/policies, advocacy/communication strategies, M&E plans, costing, development of roadmaps etc.); 'remote' versus in country provision; geographical location and language

## 2. Case Study Background

### 2.1. Yemen nutrition situation

Yemen has experienced major political and civil unrest since 2011. Since 2015, this has escalated into a widespread civil conflict and increasingly severe economic instability and unemployment, contributing to a steep rise in food and nutrition insecurity. Caught up in one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, at the time of writing it is estimated that more than two thirds of Yemen's population currently require humanitarian assistance, of which an estimated 7.4 million people are in need of food assistance.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, Yemen is off-course to meet the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets for all indicators for which there is adequate data.<sup>3</sup> With almost half of children under five stunted (46.4%), the country has one of the highest stunting rates in the world. The prevalence of child wasting is also alarmingly high at 16.4%. Two million children are affected, of whom 360,000 suffer from severe acute malnutrition. Only one in ten infants is exclusively breastfed and only 15% of children aged 6–23 months are fed a minimum adequate diet. At the same time, Yemen's adult population also faces nutrition problems: 69.6% of women of reproductive age have anaemia, while 53.3% of women are overweight, of whom 22% are obese, highlighting an existing triple burden of malnutrition in the country.

Depletion of government financial resources has resulted in the discontinuation of many public services, including in relation to health and education. In 2019, it was estimated that only around half of the health facilities were functional.<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 has only served to exacerbate this situation.

Yemen joined the SUN Movement in November 2012. At the time, attention had been brought to the scale of the malnutrition problem when an emergency response was launched due to conflict in the north of the country, causing internal displacement of the population. The high-level commitment of Yemen to address issues of malnutrition was signified by the immediate appointment of the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation as the SUN Government Focal Point.

### 2.2. MQSUN and MQSUN+ technical assistance to Yemen

Between 2013 and 2020, first MQSUN (2013-2016) and later MQSUN+ (2017-2020) provided intermittent TA to Yemen, working in close collaboration with the Yemen SUN Secretariat based in Sana'a (operating under the official government). This has included:

- Support to the preparation of a national nutrition framework document;
- A draft intervention impact projection (2013-2016);
- Updating of the nutrition contextual analysis in 2017 to reflect the consequences of the conflict on the humanitarian situation in the country;
- Updating a costed Common Results Framework in 2018; and
- Development of a Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan,<sup>5</sup> monitoring and evaluation plan, and an advocacy and communication strategy, which were finalised and launched in mid-2020.

This support was managed through the SMS and provided as a 'last resort' (i.e. no other TA providers available in-country were willing or able to undertake this support).

2 UNOCHA <https://www.unocha.org/yemen/crisis-overview>

3 Global Nutrition Report 2020 <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/western-asia/yemen/>

4 Yemen crisis overview, OCHA <https://www.unocha.org/yemen/crisis-overview>

5 [https://mqsunplus.path.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Yemen-MSNAP-FINAL\\_29April2020.pdf](https://mqsunplus.path.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Yemen-MSNAP-FINAL_29April2020.pdf)

### 3. Methods and Limitations

An outline framework was developed for consultation with country stakeholders through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) or focus group discussions.

The review team contacted the SUN Secretariat in Sana'a to organise a first consultation and to obtain a full list of stakeholders who were involved at different stages in providing TA and/or using the TA products. A total of 25 stakeholders were contacted, from Yemen SUN Secretariat and networks, sector ministries, UN and civil society agencies, the private sector, as well as MQSUN+ former TA providers. A total of nine stakeholders (three women and six men) participated in the exercise, including representatives from the Yemen SUN Secretariat, SUN network representatives, government ministries (Sana'a), UN agencies and a former MQSUN+ consultant.

This exercise was conducted remotely via Zoom calls and was limited to discussions with stakeholders based in Sana'a, in official government-held areas, where the Yemen SUN Secretariat is based (under the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC)) and where MQSUN+'s TA was focused. A number of stakeholders could not be reached, including representatives from the Ministry of Health and UNICEF, key agencies responsible for national nutrition planning and implementation.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. TA design

##### 4.1.1. Demand for TA and priorities

Representatives from the Yemen SUN Secretariat described how in 2017 needs for TA were defined through a country-led process, in close collaboration with five main sector ministries (Health, Agriculture and Industry, Water and Energy, Education, and Fish Wealth), as well as UNICEF and WHO, who were very collaborative and supportive. Following the change in context in Yemen, it became necessary to update the contextual analysis and develop a costed CRF and MSNAP with associated M&E and advocacy plans, in order to address the increasingly complex nutritional needs in the country, from both a humanitarian and development perspective.

A two-phase Terms of Reference (TOR) for TA to these processes was developed. This was supported by the UNICEF country office, who played a key role in connecting the Yemen SUN Secretariat with the SMS, who then approached MQSUN+ with the request for TA. MQSUN+ and the Yemen SUN Secretariat jointly developed an expression of interest based on the TOR. The Yemen SUN Secretariat considered the process followed to be satisfactory and that TA needs were well defined. They also considered the TA design and implementation to be sensitive to the political situation in Yemen, and the resulting outputs to provide the right level of analysis and reference to this context.

##### 4.1.2. National capacity to support and contribute to the TA process

In terms of national capacity, an initial rapid capacity assessment meeting (not following a formal format) was conducted by the Yemen SUN Secretariat, in collaboration with sector stakeholders and UN partners (UNICEF, WHO) to define existing capacities (both technical and logistical) to support the development of the TA outputs. SUN Secretariat representatives noted that a more formal capacity assessment tool to guide and improve this process would have been helpful.

Whilst government agencies had very limited technical or logistical capacity, UNICEF were able to provide support to the implementation of national activities relating to the TA (meetings, workshops, recruitment and funding of a national consultant). MQSUN+ was required to provide multisectoral nutrition expertise and support to the development of deliverables, skills which were not considered to be available in-country. A national consultant was hired by MQSUN+ to support the development of the different deliverables with country partners, aided by the international consultants. A key aim of this was to support national capacity development and promote sustainability.

### 4.1.3. International consultant capacity

Country stakeholders considered previous experience of developing plans and CRFs to be essential. In particular, important prerequisite skills included: firstly, the ability to work with sectors on how to adapt or design interventions to ensure a clear link/objective in terms of improving nutrition, providing examples from other countries; and secondly, the ability to map and highlight how sectors can link together nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions to reach the most vulnerable groups. Country stakeholders noted that they would have liked to have been consulted on international consultant profiles to ensure they had the necessary experience and skillset. MQSUN+ acknowledged this had not been done, noting this as a lesson learned.

### 4.1.4. Involvement of government ministries

The TA was conducted in collaboration with the SUN Secretariat in Sana'a, under the 'official government'. The SUN Secretariat representatives have made continuous efforts to communicate with stakeholders in Aden (under the 'de facto' government) on the development process of the various outputs and to share these at different stages. On reflection, both SUN Secretariat representatives and the TA provider felt that more efforts should have been made to include both sides from the initial negotiation and design stages onwards, despite the great logistical and organisational difficulties involved. This approach would have been more 'neutral' and inclusive, and would have reduced the security risks for the SUN Secretariat staff associated with travelling between the two sides. It was also suggested that the need for UN agencies to remain neutral in the context may have affected their support, engagement and subsequent buy-in to the outputs produced, as the TA process supported Sana'a stakeholders only.<sup>6</sup> The SUN Secretariat suggested that UN and development partners working with both sides could assist in ensuring the inclusion of each in such processes.

A number of key sector ministries from the 'official government' and other stakeholders were involved from the start in the TA design and development of deliverables. However, representatives from the Yemen SUN Secretariat noted that involvement of further key stakeholders at this stage would have significantly improved the breadth and content of the outputs produced. This includes, for example, stakeholders from social protection, civil society, Chamber of Commerce and the private sector. The absence of these actors and inputs was realised only later in the process, when the MSNAP had not provided a suitable basis from which to develop guidance/strategies, for example in the area of targeting social protection to nutritionally vulnerable groups. The Global Action Plan (GAP) on wasting involved the Ministry of Social Protection and Social Welfare fund in the design of activities for nutritionally vulnerable groups, although these were not included for the MSNAP. These sectors and actions have subsequently been added to the CRF and MSNAP.

The involvement of sub-national actors in Yemen was challenging due to state fragmentation and the ongoing conflict. This prevented visits and workshops with governorates in the TA design and delivery. To counter this, the SUN Secretariat invited representatives from Sana'a-controlled governorates to participate in workshops and consultations at national level. These include community representatives, sub-national women's committees, experts working with coastal women, etc.

### 4.1.5. Involvement of international actors

WHO and UNICEF were actively involved in the TA design and outputs development stages, whereas WFP and FAO participated in some of the stakeholder workshops to support development of the outputs, but otherwise were not proactively involved. One UN representative highlighted how UN agencies (FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO) had jointly worked on a 'call for action' for nutrition in 2018, outlining the commitment being made for Yemen for a three-year period from donors (including FCDO), UN, INGOs and government to address the malnutrition situation, with the main focus on acute malnutrition. This was then presented to the Yemen SUN Secretariat and the multisectoral planning team as a contribution to the MSNAP development.

<sup>6</sup> The team were not able to verify this with UNICEF.



Another UN representative interviewed noted that international organisations currently working in Yemen, including UN agencies and NGOs such as International Medical Corps and Save the Children, could have usefully contributed to planning discussions, but were seemingly not involved. Another stakeholder noted the need for international agencies to remain neutral in terms of their engagement with governments in the north and south of Yemen, which may have affected the engagement with MOPIC in Sana'a with relation to the MSNAP.

#### 4.1.6. Availability and use of data

The TA team used a range of data sources to inform the contextual analysis, the design of the TA and development of deliverables. These included Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) reports, SMART surveys, indicators collected by different sectors and a rapid capacity survey. Data collection focused particularly on women of reproductive age and children under five, as well as some specific marginalised groups. It was realised later on that a key group missed from the data collection and analysis, and ultimately from the outputs, was adolescent girls. Another key constraint linked to data collection is that in Yemen much of the data and information on nutrition-related activities is collected by UN agencies and development partners, who were reportedly not able to provide all the information required.

#### 4.1.7. Gender, equity and social inclusion considerations

Stakeholders reported that gender had always been a consideration linked to nutrition since signing up to the SUN Movement. Women participated in developing the nutrition action plan and were a clearly-identified main target of the plan, with gender well integrated into its sectoral components. Representatives from marginalised groups (e.g. coastal populations) also participated in planning workshops. However, representatives from the SUN Secretariat noted a lack of emphasis on practical ways to link nutrition, gender and equity. They suggested that more expertise and orientation would have been welcome at the design stage, drawing from experiences and studies from other countries and using existing resources such as webinars, guidelines and country case studies. Stakeholders observed that gender/equity expertise and the use of a specific framework would also have facilitated a better incorporation of gender and equity issues in the contextual analysis; within subsequent stakeholder workshops and consultations; and in defining outcomes, indicators, activities and target groups.

### 4.2. TA provision process

#### 4.2.1. Remote TA provision

MQSUN+ TA consultants provided remote support to the Yemen SUN Secretariat and the national consultant via email and Zoom, which was considered to have worked very well. This mode of support was not felt to have compromised the quality or effectiveness of TA provision, and in fact facilitated better government leadership of processes and ownership of the resulting outputs. The international consultant team supported national consultants and stakeholders in the preparation and facilitation of workshops and consultations, for example in terms of tools and resources to be used, objective setting, defining outcomes and write-up. The SUN Secretariat representatives highlighted the importance of clarity and shared consensus on the objectives of the process, preparation and robust design of tools for information collection.

The MQSUN+ international TA consultant noted how working remotely constrained their ability to gain insights on the dynamics of field implementation and outreach work, limiting possibilities to propose realistic and scalable solutions. This required the use of available evidence and experience to make estimates, which were then cross-checked and validated by country stakeholders. Costing the plan was conducted in a similar manner, building on information gathered online and through discussions.

#### 4.2.2. Capacity strengthening through the TA process

Stakeholders reported they had learnt a lot from both the international and national consultants providing the MQSUN+ TA. However, given very limited existing knowledge and capacity in nutrition in Yemen at the start of the TA process, it was highlighted by a number of respondents that an initial phase of capacity strengthening for all stakeholders concerned (including sector ministries, private sector, civil society, academia, media) would have been extremely beneficial as part of the design phase and before the development of deliverables. As was pointed out by the SUN Secretariat representatives, although the roles that different sectors and stakeholders play in addressing malnutrition may be clear to TA providers, they are not necessarily clear to someone who, for example, has worked for 25 years in the agriculture sector. Suggested topics included: basics of nutrition; a whole of government approach to improving nutrition; specific examples of nutrition-related action within each sector; latest updates, information and evidence on nutrition; how to integrate gender, equity and social inclusion (GESI) and nutrition; an introduction to multisectoral nutrition actions and plans; and sharing a few key supporting reference documents and examples from other countries.

One ministry official noted this was the first time a multisectoral plan was developed with the participation of so many different stakeholders. The exercise represented a steep learning curve for country participants, covering areas such as setting a Theory of Change and objectives, agreeing targets, defining indicators and designing activities in relation to these. Different planning procedures were followed within government ministries, using specific models and templates. Stakeholders appreciated the introduction to a new, multisectoral mode of planning, based on tools used in other countries and contexts. Interviewees indicated that it is anticipated that the plan, along with the advocacy and communication strategy, will help significantly with resource mobilisation for nutrition across the sectors.

#### 4.2.3. Guidance and tools

Stakeholders noted that it would have been helpful if toolkits and guidance that were used by the TA team had been shared and discussed with national stakeholders upfront, rather than at the end of the design process. For example, data collection forms, training tools, GESI integration tools, stakeholder/capacity mapping and costing tools. This would have helped inspire the national stakeholders and facilitate their improved contribution to the TA design and implementation, and ensure the best tools and resources were used to suit the country context and needs. In fairness, it should be noted that during the MQSUN+ TA provision, many tools were being developed simultaneously to enhance country support, based on the evolution of the TA process, and were therefore not readily available at the outset for sharing. However, for future TA provision, this would be a realistic proposition.

#### 4.2.4. Stakeholder participation

Interviewees noted that, as with the design process, some key actors were missing from the TA stakeholder engagement process, for example, the nutrition cluster and the Chamber of Commerce; the latter of whom came on board later in the process.

Stakeholders from sector ministries reportedly provided very positive inputs for defining actions and indicators for nutrition, both for the multisectoral plan and for integration into their own sector plans, as well as the range of public and private sector stakeholders to be engaged. It was stated that draft outputs had been widely shared for review and validation with stakeholders, and inputs were considered to have been well-integrated in the final versions.

#### 4.2.5. Gender, equity and social inclusion

To ensure inclusion of the voices of women and other marginalised and vulnerable groups such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), and rural and coastal dwellers, MQSUN+ and the Yemen SUN Secretariat promoted their representation in workshops, advocacy events and bilateral consultations throughout the TA process. For example, representatives of the National Committee for Women, from the women's units within sector ministries, and from groups representing IDPs or



rural/coastal populations were invited to attend meetings, as these agencies hold responsibility for their inclusion in government policies. Workshops to support the advocacy plan development included GESI considerations, for example through an exercise to discuss how women can lead and advocate for nutrition at district level, involving sub-national women's groups and women's committee representatives.

SUN Secretariat representatives felt the international consultant team did not provide expertise in designing and integrating sectoral activities which specifically aim to enhance nutrition through improving equity and social inclusion, or vice versa. It was suggested that specific expertise and training sessions are required on these issues, as well as the development of a checklist / guidance note with criteria, to improve the inclusion of gender, equity and nutrition within national nutrition plans.

### 4.3. Quality of TA outputs

The stakeholders interviewed all reported that the MSNAP developed through the TA by MQSUN+ was generally of good quality, succinct but sufficiently elaborated. The plan is considered to be realistic and with accurate and sensitive reference to the political and economic situation in Yemen, with the right level of analysis, given that the documents were to be shared with governments in both Sana'a and Aden. One respondent highlighted the inclusion of innovative private sector approaches in the plan, which has provided inspiration and examples during engagement with this sector. As noted above, some additions have been required to include technical areas previously absent (e.g. standardisation and quality control relating to food safety and food fortification, adolescent girls' nutrition).

Several stakeholders noted that a description of cost calculations was missing from the costing component of the plan, with the same costs repeated year by year. This has raised questions among UN agencies and within ministries around costing methods, with potential ramifications for consideration of the plan as a serious prospect for financing. The TA consultant noted the difficulty of conducting costing remotely, but stressed that all relevant material available to inform the exercise had been used, including donor costing information, previous sector costing exercises, and materials available online, cross-referenced through stakeholder discussions. The consultant also suggested that for shaping donor pipeline preparations, a more practical and strategic approach than a costing exercise would have been to identify available funding and opportunities to leverage more, coupled with a financial gap analysis relating to nutrition priorities.

One respondent remarked on the complex nature of the outputs, which are accessible only to well-educated individuals. They proposed the further development of more digestible resources and tools to promote uptake and utilisation, particularly to lower levels of government and other partners at sub-national level, whose technical knowledge may not be as strong.

The SUN Secretariat and other stakeholders reported facing issues with a large number of errors in the Common Results Framework, requiring some significant adjustments. This included for example, weaknesses in the formulation of objectives, activities and outcomes, which were found to be too simplistic when it came to developing proposals and adapting plans to implement these (e.g. in response to the EU call for proposals for CRF implementation). Some respondents felt that the CRF included very limited linkages between the activities of different sectors, and did not provide sufficient detail to guide implementation, such as priority communities for targeting (e.g. based on malnutrition rates/figures). Large sections of the MSNAP document have reportedly been further developed under the supervision of the Yemen SUN Secretariat in collaboration with local experts. However, the TA representative noted that CRFs were not intended to be detailed but serve rather to provide 'top line' aspects for further elaboration in next steps, such as the development of sector-specific plans, proposals or thematic summaries. Informal sector briefing notes were prepared by the TA team, highlighting priority actions by sector. Both the TA provider and the SUN Secretariat representatives suggested that providing example proposals for each sector could have supported onward elaboration and implementation of activities proposed in the CRF.

## 4.4. Utilisation/outcomes of TA provision

### 4.4.1. Launch and dissemination of outputs

The MSNAP was officially launched by MOPIC (led by the SUN Secretariat) in late 2020. This had to be conducted online due to COVID-19. The MSNAP has since been widely disseminated at national level to high-level government stakeholders, ministerial representatives, UN agencies, development partners, private sector and donors. The package of TA outputs has also been shared with MOPIC and other stakeholders in Aden. SUN Secretariat representatives stated they have the impression that the outputs were well-perceived. However, stakeholders reported that beyond this, there has not been much publicity around the outputs.

The online launch and dissemination via email were viewed to perhaps have been overwhelming for country stakeholders, and a series of face-to-face workshops and consultations would have been more optimal to promote the uptake and utilisation of the outputs. A number of additional events with donors and other potential partners had been planned to encourage financing and implementation of plan activities, but to date this has not been possible due to COVID-19. Long-term lack of funding of the SUN Secretariat staff and other government staff has also severely restricted possibilities to conduct activities for plan promotion, dissemination or implementation. As MOPIC/SUN Secretariat were not able to publish the MSNAP online, they greatly appreciated that MQSUN+ profiled the plan on their website, together with a link to the document, making it easily accessible and retrievable with a web search.

### 4.4.2. Capacity

All stakeholders described how the TA provided by MQSUN+ has made a huge contribution to improving knowledge, awareness and capacity of country stakeholders around nutrition and its multisectoral drivers in the Yemen context. It is hoped that this will empower stakeholders to take some action, even in the midst of a very challenging humanitarian context.

One stakeholder remarked on the benefits of having a common platform for nutrition for all stakeholders to jointly agree on a shared vision and plan. In addition, the experiences of the different sectors in developing the MSNAP has strengthened their capacity to contribute as a group to other nutrition-related processes, such as the GAP on wasting. However, in terms of taking the MSNAP into consideration in different sector policies and promoting joint implementation, it is felt that there is still some way to go in shifting mindsets from separate sector goals and priorities to a shared concern.

Participants stressed that continued advocacy and capacity building are still needed to ensure further progress in implementing the outputs and in scaling up nutrition. Capacity strengthening needs include management and coordination; consolidation of activities across sectors; mainstreaming GESI; monitoring and reporting; conducting surveys and assessments; developing fundraising strategies; writing proposals; and identifying financial resources. The potential to work with national academic institutions was highlighted by some stakeholders interviewed, in order to build knowledge and capacity in nutrition more sustainably.

### 4.4.3. Gender, equity and social inclusion

Respondents noted that it is too early to comment on utilisation of the outputs to improve gender and equity outcomes with relation to nutrition. Although target groups are clearly delineated in the MSNAP, more specific examples of actions which mutually reinforce nutrition, gender equality, equity and inclusion would be welcomed. More involvement and participation from sub-national actors representing these groups and gender experts is felt to be needed for translating the plan into effective action.

### 4.4.4. Scale

Although an increase in coverage of nutrition programmes has reportedly not yet been achieved as a result of the plan development, some government representatives noted some encouraging

developments that are ultimately contributing to this. This includes an increase in the number of ministries and actors involved in and committed to nutrition, as well as the approval of plans to increase nutrition-related capacity within sector ministries. It is expected that this will facilitate an increase in nutrition-sensitive action across sectors, underpinning ongoing nutrition-specific actions. This is considered a great achievement in a context where making adaptations to the ministerial structure is very complex. It was reported that the MSNAP has been shared with stakeholders in the south (Aden), with the resulting establishment of a SUN Secretariat; this should facilitate further roll-out and utilisation of the TA products.

#### 4.4.5. Buy-in/utilisation from international actors

A key issue encountered during the review was the reported difficulty in communication and collaboration between state and international community actors in Yemen, impeding a common understanding of priorities and generating a sense of ‘external interferences’ in the nutrition sector. Although WHO and UNICEF were actively involved in the TA design and provision process, it was noted by some of the stakeholders interviewed that their support has since significantly reduced. One government stakeholder noted a “total disregard” for the MSNAP by international agencies, rather than a willingness to review the plan and coordinate accordingly with the relevant country stakeholders, taking pride in what has been achieved by the government with the support of partners, and supporting its implementation. As noted above, some key international stakeholders did not participate in the exercise and hence their perspective on these views cannot be represented here.

UN stakeholders highlighted how the current focus of operations is on responding to the emergency situation in Yemen, with the nutrition cluster becoming more dominant in terms of coordination (of international agencies), placing more emphasis on implementation of the GAP on wasting, and addressing other emergency needs. Although the UN Call for Action in 2018 had the longer-term intent to bridge the humanitarian-development divide, interviewees reported that in reality, the humanitarian response is increasingly the main focus of international actors. Interviewees stated that the MSNAP does not appear to have been used to inform this humanitarian action, although relevant components are included throughout. As the GAP relates to a global work plan and is contextualised in-country against this, its design in Yemen was conducted in relation to that, rather than in relation to the MSNAP, and no contributions were sought from the SUN Secretariat and sector ministries.

Although UNICEF and WHO supported the SUN Secretariat in accessing TA and resourced national-level activities, it was suggested that subsequent staff turnover has resulted in a lack of ownership of the TA outputs and engagement in related processes. UN partners interviewed were aware of the MSNAP and other TA outputs, but admitted they did not have detailed knowledge of these.

The absence of a SUN UN Network for Nutrition in Yemen was highlighted. The presence of a UN Coordinator who understands SUN could facilitate improved engagement and contributions from UN actors throughout the process; the dissemination of products to relevant actors, including donors; and the convening of events to discuss funding priorities. Stakeholders suggested that in a context such as Yemen, support from the international community for onward implementation of the MSNAP should be a criterion in assessing capacity to absorb and utilise TA products.

#### 4.4.6. Resource mobilisation

The EU issued a call for proposals at the end of 2020 to NGO partners for implementation of the CRF, for an amount of EUR 5 million. Apart from this, the Yemen SUN Secretariat and partners have had very limited success in mobilising funds for implementation of the plan since its launch. This is attributed to COVID-19 related restrictions and lack of staff capacity, together with a lack of interest and support from the international community. The SUN Secretariat reported how stakeholders involved in developing the MSNAP and associated documents have expressed their frustration at the lack of finance for implementation. A representative of the MQSUN+ TA team stated that plans are developed first and foremost for government use and not solely for the mobilisation of additional resources, but also for adjustment of existing budgets, policies and programmes. Such plans also enable better targeting and leveraging of existing/allocated donor funds

(e.g. FCDO emergency, finance for social protection and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); UN food security, health, WASH, social protection and education interventions) and development partner programmes to address nutrition priorities.

A representative from the SUN Business Network highlighted the potential for the UN mission to better support resource mobilisation and targeting, to support the achievement of plan objectives, given the UN's existing involvement in all sectors covered. This would promote greater synergy between humanitarian and development action, and between emergency and long-term strategies to improve nutrition. Annual Humanitarian Needs Overview (HMO) discussions between the humanitarian community and government ministries were highlighted as an opportunity to profile some key funding priorities from the MSNAP for inclusion in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).

#### 4.4.7. Empowering country-led action

COVID-19 has prevented face-to-face meetings since the beginning of 2020, hindering the extent to which the newly validated plan could be promoted to high-level government actors and potential donors. However, interviewees indicated that opportunities to promote the plan to high-ranking ministry officials have been used wherever possible. They regard the MSNAP as a strong advocacy tool for nutrition in facilitating focused discussions around funding and potential partnerships across the different sectors concerned. Given political preoccupations with the conflict, however, nutrition is not yet prioritised at the level of senior government nor adequately recognised in the Government of Sana'a's eight-year strategic plan (Yemen 2022-2030). Gaining commitment from politicians and making changes to outdated policies and legislation are therefore said to be very challenging at this time.

One UN representative suggested that TA providers should maintain involvement with country stakeholders until the outputs are validated and adopted at the highest level (e.g. through support to presentations, identifying key messages, facilitation of roundtables), and support the elaboration of roadmaps to facilitate implementation.

Despite delays to implementation since the launch of the MSNAP and associated documents, stakeholders described how the plan has been used as a key resource to support a number of processes. Box 1 below presents some examples.



### How MQSUN+ TA outputs have been used in Yemen to make progress in improving nutrition

#### National stakeholders

- Based on activities included in the MSNAP, the **Nutrition Information System has been improved** through the development of tools for measuring progress and reporting.
- The **Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)** has included nutrition within its **extension activities**, including referrals of malnutrition cases, school gardening, school meals provision, promotion of adolescent girls' nutrition, and integration of nutrition messages into social and behaviour change communication activities.
- The **Ministry of Standardisation** has used the MSNAP to **develop a new plan on industrial standards relating to nutrition**.

#### Private sector

- Although still at a very basic level, **public and private sectors are integrating nutrition-related indicators from the MSNAP into policies and plans** (e.g. relating to malnutrition rates and diet diversity). More **brainstorming and advocacy on the inclusion of nutrition considerations** is happening in both the public and private sector.

- The **SUN Business Network** for Yemen has used the MSNAP as a key resource in drafting a private sector plan for nutrition in Yemen, with active participation of different sectors. Under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce, the private sector has begun discussions around **nutrition integration** as well as consideration of potential conflicts of interests.

### UN partners

- The **MSNAP is reportedly being used as a foundation for stakeholder discussions on the Global Action Plan on wasting**, with parts of the plan being integrated into the Humanitarian Response Plan. The **FAO** has promoted MSNAP components in their interactions with the MOA, including supporting interventions in schools to improve the diets and nutrition of adolescent girls and boys.

### Civil society

- Discussions are taking place with NGOs and CSOs to **establish a civil society network for nutrition**.

### Donors

- **The EU launched a call for proposals (EUR 5 million): ‘Strengthening inclusive nutrition approaches in Yemen.’** The specific objective is to implement sustainable, resilient and scalable nutrition-sensitive interventions, **aligned with the SUN Yemen Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan 2020–2023.**<sup>7</sup>

## 5. Key Messages and Lessons Learned from Yemen

### 5.1. TA design

#### 5.1.1. Understanding national capacity with relation to TA priorities and needs

- Jointly agree on TA priorities; carefully assess in-country capacity and identify gaps; and include an initial dedicated phase of orientation and capacity strengthening, including activities relating to GESI and nutrition.

#### 5.1.2. Assembling the TA team

- Share CVs/profiles of TA consultants, to ensure a good match of skills to needs and priorities, and include a national consultant to build capacity and promote sustainability. Ensure the team has the required skills relating to multisectoral nutrition implementation, including experience of sector programmes to address nutrition, and points of convergence between sectors and GESI and nutrition.

#### 5.1.3. Contextual considerations

- In contexts of state fragmentation, aim where feasible for TA to engage both sides from the outset, to promote inclusion and neutrality as well as ownership.

#### 5.1.4. Involvement of national and sub-national stakeholders

- Provide a ‘stakeholder checklist’ to the SUN Focal Point and team to promote the participation of a wide range of stakeholders from an early stage.
- Ensure the voices of citizens are heard and that they are meaningfully engaged. Where direct engagement with sub-national actors is not possible, invite stakeholders from this level to participate in national-level workshops and other events where feasible.

<sup>7</sup> <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?do=publi.welcome&nbPubliList=15&orderby=upd&orderbyad=Desc&searchtype=RS&apply=N&aofr=171399&userlanguage=fr>

## 5.2. TA process

### 5.2.1. Consensus on TA methods

- Develop a reference framework outlining a choice of tools, resources and guidance available to support different sectors and processes, to promote consensus on methods and ensure high quality outputs.

### 5.2.2. Capacity development

- Build capacity in nutrition as much as possible within the framework of the assignment, across sectors and stakeholders with relation to their specific roles, prior to their engagement in the development of outputs (e.g. through capacity assessments and tailored training sessions).
- Include specific expertise and training sessions on aspects relating to GESI and nutrition. A checklist/guidance note can improve GESI aspects of TA outputs.

## 5.3. Quality of outputs

- Where data gaps exist, draw on development partners to enhance contextual analysis in relevant outputs.
- Ensure that country requirements and expectations are well understood, including aspects such as format, content, level of detail, prior to drafting outputs.

## 5.4. Utilisation of TA outputs

### 5.4.1. Validation, launch and dissemination

- Support country stakeholders to plan for the launch and dissemination of TA outputs, e.g. developing resources (like roadmaps and handover notes); identifying key audiences, opportunities and resources to facilitate promotion and dissemination of outputs; and proposing means by which outputs and associated resources can be shared online, e.g. on country platforms, the SUN website, TA provider's website.
- Support country stakeholders to advocate to international partners to reference and align their funding, plans and actions with government plans.

### 5.4.2. Capacity development

- Work with national TA providers and academic institutions to identify priorities and opportunities for onward capacity development to support plan implementation.

### 5.4.3. Tools to support utilisation

- Provide abridged outputs which complement the key deliverables, to promote access/utilisation particularly by sub-national stakeholders.
- Include resources which support its onward utilisation of TA outputs, such as proposal outlines and practical examples by sector, in annex or a separate toolkit.

### 5.4.4. Resource mobilisation

- Support country stakeholders to identify ways to conduct a financial gap analysis for nutrition, and to identify opportunities to support plan implementation by leveraging existing sector budgets and plans, and UN, donor and development partner portfolios.



## Annex 1 – Abbreviations

CRF	Common Results Framework
CSOs	Civil society organisations
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GAP	Global Action Plan
GESI	Gender, equity and social inclusion
HMO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IMC	International Medical Corps
IPC	Integrated Phase Classification
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MQSUN(+)	Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition (Plus)
MSNAP	Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
SBN	SUN Business Network
SMS	SUN Movement Secretariat
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
TA	Technical assistance
TAN	Technical Assistance for Nutrition programme
TASC	Technical Assistance to Strengthen Capabilities project
TOC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of reference
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization

DEVELOPED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO STRENGTHEN CAPABILITIES (TASC)



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