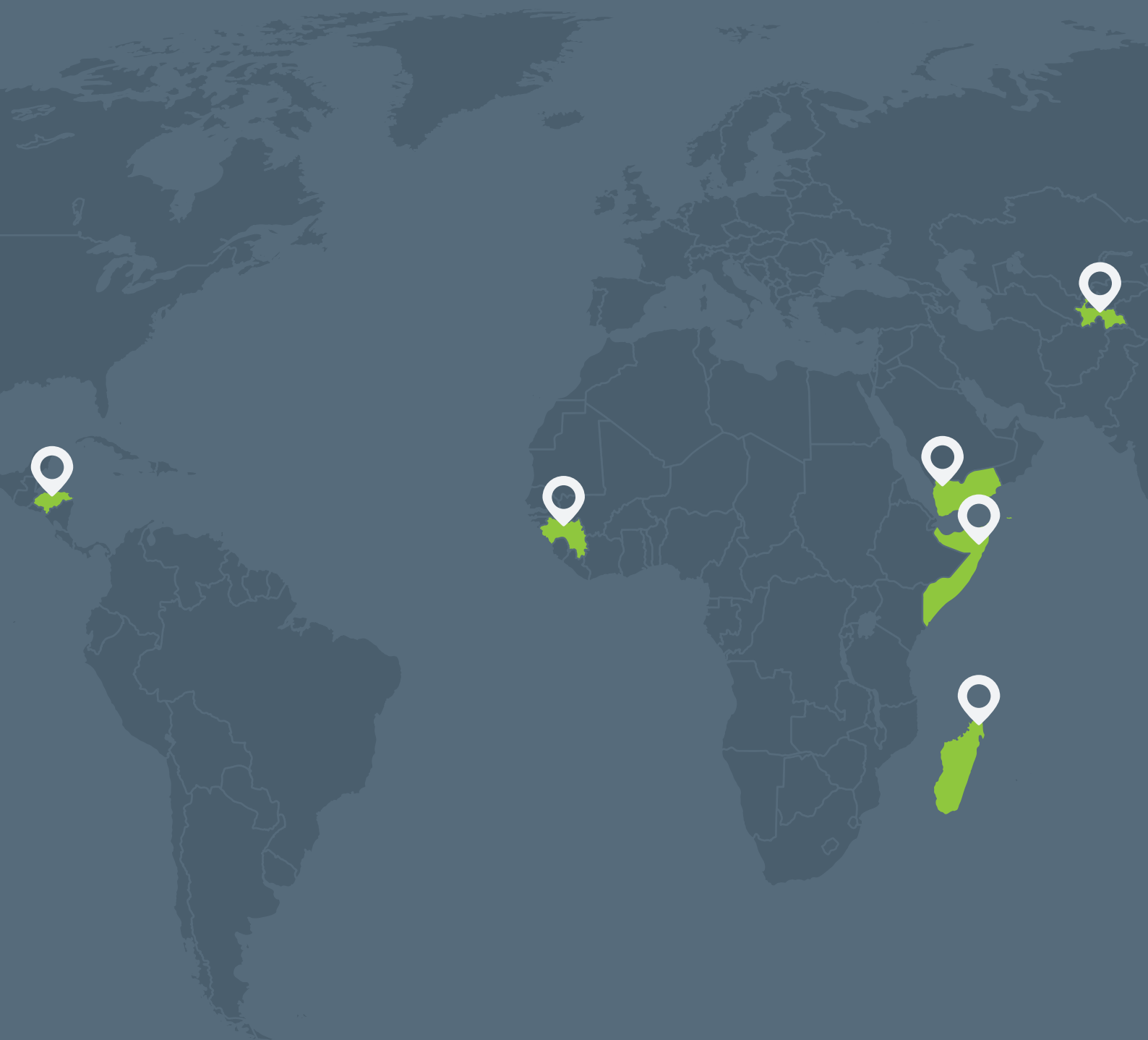


Guidance for Assuring Quality in the Design and Implementation of Technical Assistance for Nutrition

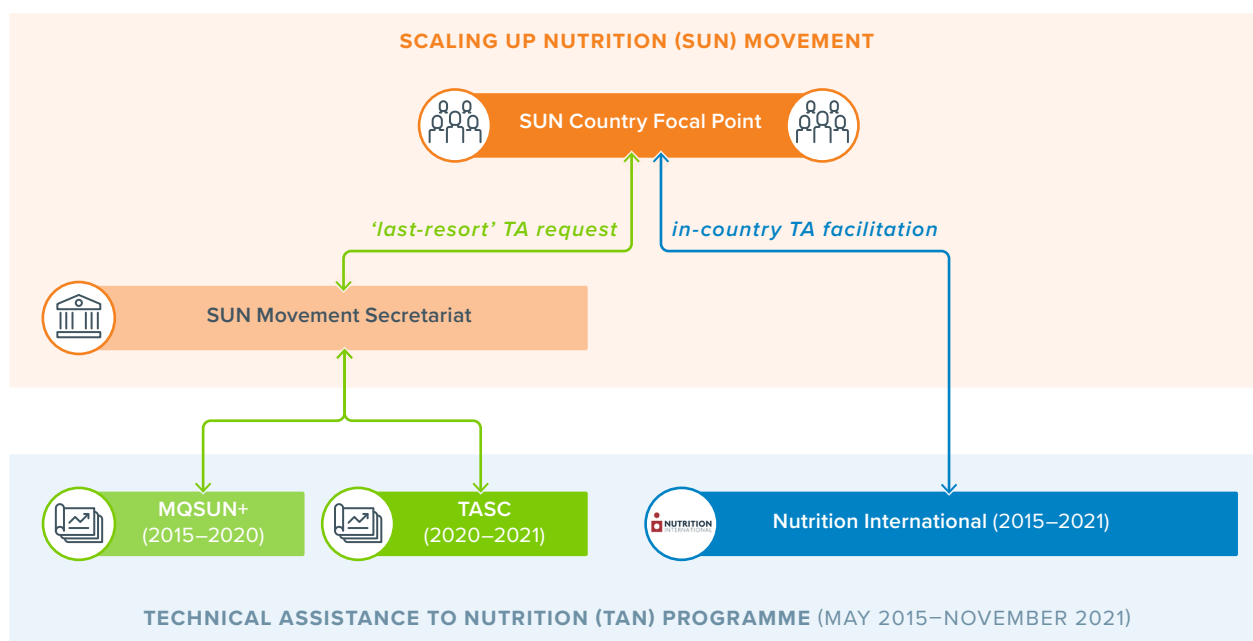


Introduction

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+)¹ programme was a technical assistance (TA) facility within the larger TAN programme which SUN countries could access from 2015 to 2020. MQSUN+ was designed as 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),^{2,3} under the TAN programme. Nutrition International 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



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. These case studies are designed to identify best practices and lessons learned to inform the future design and provision of TA, and to be used by requesting country governments and agencies involved in providing TA.

Six case study countries were selected according to a set of agreed criteria,⁴ from a list of 14 countries where MQSUN+ provided TA between 2017 and 2020: **Guinea, Honduras, Madagascar, Somalia, Tajikistan and Yemen.**

1 <https://mqsunplus.path.org/about/>

2 <https://www.nutritionintl.org/project/technical-assistance-for-nutrition-tan-project/>

3 <https://www.nutritionintl.org/learning-resource/external-progress-assessment-technical-assistance-delivered-nutrition-internationals-tan-project/>

4 Stable/fragile conflict-affected context; long-term/short-term TA provision; type of support provided (national nutrition plans/policies, advocacy/communication strategies, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans, costing etc.); ‘remote’ versus in country TA provision; geographical location and language

The case studies aimed to assess effectiveness across the TA process, including design, provision, production of outputs, and onward uptake and utilisation. They 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 gender, equity and social inclusion (GESI) outcomes; governance; multisectoral coordination and collaboration; enhanced quality of programmes and policies; improved monitoring of progress in nutrition; and effectiveness at leveraging resources.

The key lessons learned and recommendations summarised in this guidance note were exclusively drawn from the six country case studies which were selected to be included within the scope of this study, rather than drawing from examples from other country TA provision experiences. The guidance is intended for use by those requesting and those providing TA.⁵ Country case studies are available separately.

Key lessons and recommendations from country case studies

1. TA Design

1.1 Setting TA priorities

- Ensure there is high-level political commitment and political interest in tackling nutrition challenges. This is critical in demonstrating buy-in and guaranteeing participation and action led by country stakeholders. Examples include engaging senior representatives from presidential or prime ministerial offices from the prioritisation and design stages of TA; conducting high-level parliamentary/ministerial awareness-raising events; encouraging the participation of senior politicians in events such as the SUN Global Gathering and related regional events; and organising visits for politicians to observe achievements of other SUN countries.
- Ensure the definition of TA priorities is country-led and jointly agreed with the TA provider through a process of rationalisation, considering which priorities can be met with existing in-country capacity.
- Encourage multi-stakeholder platforms to use the SUN Joint Annual Assessment (JAA) process to identify and prioritise TA priorities. Having this jointly developed can enhance the coordination and support provided by national, regional and global TA providers.

⁵ Government SUN Focal Points and other country stakeholders, SMS, United Nations (UN) agencies, donors, TA providers, development partners, academic institutions

1.2	Understanding national capacity with relation to TA priorities and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where feasible, TA providers can conduct a capacity assessment⁶ of existing in-country skills and knowledge across sectors (both technical and functional) to support both the development and implementation of the TA outputs. • TA providers should identify gaps with country stakeholders and include an initial phase of orientation and capacity strengthening, including sector-specific activities, and activities relating to GESI and nutrition. This is an important step in raising awareness and engaging a range of sector stakeholders on nutrition. • Map the range of TA provision options, including in-country and regional sources, available to respond to the needs identified. Ensure those requesting TA are aware of these. • Ensure sufficient funding is available for logistical costs of the TA process (e.g. for workshops, launch events, communications, training, printing, transport), where possible locally. Cost-sharing can help to secure country ownership and stakeholder participation and accountability. Cost-share arrangements should be agreed and formalised with relevant stakeholders, e.g. with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
1.3	Assembling the TA team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the SUN Focal Point and colleagues in the TA consultant recruitment process, defining profiles required, sharing CVs and selecting the best fit for the work. • Include national consultants to build capacity and promote sustainability. • Ensure the team has the required skills relating to multisectoral nutrition implementation (in sectors including agriculture, social protection, education, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene) including points of convergence between sectors, GESI and nutrition. • Consider bringing in specific expertise in areas including GESI, monitoring and evaluation and advocacy/communications.

⁶ Examples of tools include the MQSUN+ Toolkit <https://mqsunplus.path.org/multisectoral-nutrition-planning-toolkit/> and the UNN Guidance Note for Nutrition Capacity Assessments <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/CA%20Guidance%20Package%20-%20Guidance%20Note-EN.pdf>

1.4	Involvement of national and sub-national stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA providers can develop a checklist to guide the set of stakeholders to be engaged in developing TA outputs (both at national and sub-national levels), e.g., through a context-specific mapping exercise. This will help ensure greater involvement of different sectors from the outset, and inclusion of GESI considerations. • To engage sectoral ministries (particularly those who do not see nutrition as central to their remit), TA providers can include a clear description of nutrition-related roles and responsibilities of country stakeholders in the checklist, and highlight the importance of their inputs, feedback and follow-up action at an early stage. • Ensure a thorough understanding of relevant coordination mechanisms (e.g. SUN Multi-Stakeholder Platform, National Nutrition Cluster, Food Security Cluster, high-level councils, development partner fora). This is crucial to understanding dynamics and relationships between government and non-government actors. • Consult sub-national stakeholders on the TA design and process, and involve them in TA processes where appropriate, to ensure their unique interests are also represented, improve their ownership, and increase the relevance and uptake of TA. • Encourage the participation of donors and development partners in the TA design and process, to support awareness of objectives and actions included, and promote alignment of donor/partner priorities and strategies with these. • Consider the need for bilingual consultants in countries with limited working English knowledge.
1.5	Contextual considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In contexts of state fragmentation, aim where feasible for TA to engage all parties from the outset, to promote inclusion and neutrality as well as ownership. • Agree on a realistic timeline based on an understanding of country planning and budget processes, as well as other commitments such as elections, and ensure flexibility in the TA design to allow for delays. • Research the political context and government protocol (e.g. official procedures, permissions required), to inform realistic timeframes and expectations for the TA. • Stakeholders requesting TA should aim to provide requested documents and facilitate contacts as early as possible to avoid delays.
1.6	Gender, equity and social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a GESI analysis to inform the design and operationalisation of all TA, and allocate sufficient time and resources for this. If it is not feasible to conduct a full GESI analysis, it will still be important to assess how the status of women, and vulnerable and/or marginalised groups relate to the underlying issue the TA aims to address. For example, it may be important to identify specific social/cultural beliefs and existing patterns of power and decision making that drive unequal access to or control over assets, resources, opportunities and services, and agree on what can be built into the TA design to address these.

2. TA process

2.1	Consensus on TA methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a reference framework outlining a choice of tools, resources and guidance available to support different sectors and processes, to promote consensus of in-country stakeholders on methods and ensure high-quality outputs.
2.2	Capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 and during their engagement in the development of outputs (e.g. through capacity assessments and tailored training sessions, as well as promoting ‘hands on’ learning approaches). Setting up sectoral working groups on nutrition can help to define/adapt specific sectoral actions to improve nutrition. Further TA could be provided in defining how relevant elements can be integrated into sector policies and plans (e.g. by sharing good practice examples from other SUN countries).• Promote a proactive and participatory approach to the TA process, adopting a ‘learning by doing’ approach. For example, by promoting the facilitation of workshops, stakeholder consultations and other processes by country stakeholders.• Include specific expertise and training sessions on aspects relating to GESI and nutrition, looking at practical ways to integrate nutrition, gender and equity into strategic documents, as well as relevant indicators to track progress. In addition, a checklist/ guidance note can improve GESI aspects of TA outputs. Ensure that both TA clients and TA providers are aware of and utilise existing resources to support integration of GESI with nutrition TA (e.g. Gender-Transformative Framework for Nutrition,⁷ Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis (SGBA): A Toolkit for Nutrition Programs⁸).• Use capacity assessments to inform the inclusion of capacity development activities within TA outputs, e.g. development of guidelines, awareness raising and training sessions on nutrition for relevant sector staff.• Maximise mutual learning and capacity strengthening of international and national consultants, including coaching/mentoring of TA providers by technical experts (e.g. those with gender expertise).

7 <https://www.gendernutritionframework.org/>

8 https://www.nutritionintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SGBA-Toolkit_Nutrition-International.pdf

2.3	Involvement of national and sub-national stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote better multisectoral buy-in, ownership and implementation of outputs, encourage joint leadership of the development of outputs by all sector ministries implicated, avoiding the predominance of one lead sector. • Continuously review the inclusion and participation of an appropriate mix of stakeholders throughout TA provision, including stakeholders with expertise relating to gender, and vulnerable and marginalised groups, as well as representatives of these groups. • Sub-national stakeholders can be engaged through decentralised workshops and consultations, hiring consultants to work at sub-national level, or inviting a range of stakeholders from regions and districts to participate in national-level events. • Consider involving local media, as this can help raise the profile of multisectoral consultation processes and promote more stakeholder engagement, particularly at sub-national level.
2.4	Contextual considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account the current political economy for nutrition, and proactively discuss with and support country stakeholders to consider how best TA outputs can reflect and respond to the current context. Use the TA process to strengthen linkages between stakeholder coordination groups (e.g. MSP and National Nutrition Cluster, SUN Networks).
2.5	Gender, equity and social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine ways in which the TA process can elevate GESI considerations, both with relation to nutrition and more generally. Ensure the inclusion of gender expertise in TA provision and the strengthening of local gender expertise, meaningful participation of women, and use of gender analysis to accurately identify priorities for action. • Ensure sufficient weight is also given to equity and social inclusion in TA processes. Where possible, include the participation of representatives from vulnerable and marginalised population groups in the development of TA outputs, particularly at decentralised level.

3. Quality of TA outputs

3.1	Coherence with other country policies and plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA providers must be familiar with other policies and strategies to ensure the overall coherence of TA outputs with overarching and sectoral documents.
3.2	Format and content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure time is taken to understand country-specific requirements and expectations are well-understood, including aspects such as format, content and level of detail, prior to drafting outputs.
3.3	Contextual analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where data gaps exist, TA can draw on development partners to enhance the quality of contextual analysis in relevant outputs.
3.4	Gender, equity and social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include dedicated sections in outputs which explicitly describe the integration of GESI considerations.

4. Utilisation of TA outputs

4.1	Validation, launch and dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss and agree with country stakeholders plans for validation, launch and dissemination of outputs from the design phase of TA, where feasible securing commitment for this; for example through a MOU and/or a dedicated stakeholder committee.• Support country stakeholders to plan for the launch and dissemination of TA outputs, e.g. by developing resources (roadmaps/handover notes, presentations, policy briefs); and identifying key audiences, platforms, opportunities and resources to facilitate promotion and dissemination (e.g. media events, existing government and development partner fora, conferences, webinars, and printing of paper copies, particularly for sub-national level).• Propose means by which outputs can be shared online (e.g. country platforms, SUN website, TA provider websites).
4.2	Capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with SUN Focal Points, the multi-stakeholder platform (including SUN networks), national TA providers and academic institutions to identify priorities and opportunities for onward capacity development to support plan implementation. Conducting capacity development and awareness raising activities on a regular basis (e.g. through pre-service, in-service and refresher training) can help ensure continued levels of knowledge and skills in the face of inevitable staff turnover.• Consider opportunities for continued TA (including in-country possibilities) to support the effective use of outputs, e.g. advocacy/communication, setting up budget tracking systems, support to roll-out at sub-national level.
4.3	Tools to support utilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the development of additional, abridged, outputs (including videos or podcases as well as documents) which complement key deliverables, to promote access and utilisation, particularly by sub-national stakeholders.• Signpost resources which promote onward utilisation of TA outputs, such as proposal outlines, practical examples of activities by sector, guidance on linking sector activities with nutrition and development of sector-specific implementation plans, in annex or as a separate toolkit.• Support the next phase of implementation of outputs at sub-national level, for example through the provision of tools (e.g. roadmaps, presentations and briefs) and foster a multisectoral approach at this level (e.g. through the set-up of multi-stakeholder platforms).• Support the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for multisectoral plans, including development of resources and tools to be used for tracking and reporting progress against nutrition objectives.
4.4	Resource mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support country stakeholders to advocate to international partners to reference and align their funding, plans and actions with government plans.• Support country stakeholders 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.

Conclusion

The guidance note outlines how quality can be incorporated into the design and implementation of technical assistance for nutrition. It outlines the steps and measures that can be undertaken throughout the TA process for optimal uptake and onward utilisation. Given the diversity of country contexts, it cannot be assumed that all recommendations and key messages will be applicable.

It can be used by:

- Those requesting TA including country governments and other partners
- Those providing TA including SMS, national and international TA providers, United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), academia.

DEVELOPED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO STRENGTHEN CAPABILITIES (TASC)



This document was produced through support provided by UK aid and the UK Government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies

