



PROVIDING COUNTRY-OWNED, INCLUSIVE AND ADAPTIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SUN COUNTRIES

Technical assistance (TA) has long been used as a form of development assistance to support countries, however, its success, approach and purpose vary widely. There is growing interest in understanding TA delivery models and the elements that drive their implementation.^{1,2} In 2012, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) initiated a new programme approach to provide flexible TA for nutrition policy and programming, through the Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition (MQSUN) project. Under this mechanism, for the first time, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) countries were able to request TA if they did not have the country capacity, technical expertise or in-country TA to support their nutrition planning efforts.

Since 2012, under PATH leadership, MQSUN and now MQSUN+, have provided demand-driven TA to more than 50 SUN countries as well as broader global support. We support countries to adapt and incorporate the global [SUN Framework and Roadmap](#) in their national strategies, policies and programmes, based on their unique country context and priorities. At the start of MQSUN, there was no existing framework for how to successfully deliver such TA. Utilising robust monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management, MQSUN+ documents key learnings and positive practices to inform an adaptive TA process. Over the past seven years, we have strengthened and refined our TA approach, based on our implementation experience.

MQSUN+ has found that contextually-informed, inclusive and adaptive TA energises progress by supporting countries to develop a country-specific, country-owned framework and roadmap for action in reducing malnutrition. Whilst the work varies across countries, MQSUN+ TA broadly fits within four key areas (**Figure 1**): **1) assessing the country context in preparation for multisectoral planning; 2) facilitating a consultative process to align nutrition-related actions around a common framework and/or national plan; 3) supporting cost estimation and budget analysis to facilitate resource allocation, mobilisation and tracking; and 4) supporting implementation planning and alignment to an endorsed plan.** This brief details a set of guiding principles MQSUN+ has identified and applies to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and quality across TA to accelerate progress towards global and country-specific nutrition action.

This brief is a condensed version of a comprehensive technical brief on the MQSUN+ approach. Available here: <https://mqsunplus.path.org/resources/providing-country-owned-inclusive-and-adaptive-technical-assistance-to-sun-countries/>

¹ Cox M & G Norrington-Davies. Technical assistance: New thinking on an old problem. *Open Society Foundations*: Jan 2019. <https://agulhas.co.uk/our-work/technical-assistance-new-thinking-old-problem/>

² Price R. Technical assistance and capacity building in institutional reform: lessons learned. *Institute of Development Studies*: Oct 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5db8125d40f0b637a38efaa5/669_TA_and_institutional_reform.pdf

Figure 1. How MQSUN+'s technical support and value add contribute to the SUN roadmap.



When a country joins the SUN Movement, they are committing to ensure that programmes in all sectors are sensitive to nutrition and to increase coverage of proven interventions that improve nutrition for women and young children—following the [SUN Framework and Roadmap](#). Aligning to this process, MQSUN and now MQSUN+ supports countries to bring stakeholders together in order to build an enabling environment for nutrition through the development of high-quality multisectoral national nutrition plans. Thus far, we have supported 15 SUN countries through various stages of this process, and as such, those countries are much closer to being able reduce malnutrition through improved implementation of multisectoral nutrition action. **Figure 1** illustrates how MQSUN+ TA is delivered and informed by our guiding principles to catalyse progress along the SUN Roadmap.

MQSUN+ guiding principles for accelerating progress toward nutrition action



Ensuring a country-owned process

MQSUN+ encourages country leadership throughout each stage of TA from conceptualisation through to closeout. MQSUN+ works closely with the SUN Government Focal Point, Technical Focal Point(s) and other key stakeholders to build understanding of how SUN fits in their unique country context, ensuring existing country platforms and strengths are leveraged and identifying potential roadblocks or areas where TA can help accelerate the process. To this end, the following have been particularly instrumental:

- **Supporting government-led priorities and actions:** We support countries to translate their nutrition goals into a country-specific roadmap for action based on the unique country needs, priorities and requests.
- **Providing structure and guidance to advance progress:** Our approach includes identifying key strengths and roadblocks and then providing structured guidance and tools to facilitate country-led action.
- **Leveraging nutrition champions:** Identifying and closely collaborating with key nutrition champions is critical in bringing together stakeholders, elevating the nutrition agenda and driving forward the TA.



Tailoring the process to the country context and evidence base

To ensure TA is tailored to the specific country context, MQSUN+ places particular emphasis at the start of TA to analyse and document the SUN country's nutrition situation, political economy³ and existing related policies and strategies. This effort supports context-specific and evidence-based planning and prioritisation and informs the identification of roadblocks preventing progress in the SUN planning cycle or key strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged. Beyond this standard process, other key factors include:

- **Helping countries understand the SUN process and navigate through roadblocks:** MQSUN+ supports countries in contextualising the global SUN principles to a country-specific framework.
- **Assessing the availability and quality of country data and information:** Understanding this early on can inform what a country is able to track and support advocacy for better data collection and analysis.
- **Bridging global and national-level evidence:** We support countries in translating global evidence and guidelines to individual country contexts and local data to inform and prioritise nutrition actions.
- **Using the contextual analysis to raise awareness on nutrition:** A workshop to present the results of a contextual analysis is instrumental in raising nutrition awareness and encourages multisectoral buy-in.



Facilitating inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement

MQSUN+ encourages the involvement of all relevant stakeholders throughout the TA. This includes facilitating a consultative process across TA activities and encouraging representation of minority and vulnerable groups to support inclusiveness, buy-in and accountability. This can be done through:

- **Collaborating to develop a well-defined scope of work:** MQSUN+ collaborates with all relevant partners (e.g. government, UN, donors) as defined by the SUN Focal Point(s) to identify TA priorities and develop a scope of work that clearly describes the technical approach, work plan and roles and responsibilities.
- **Leveraging stakeholder mapping:** A stakeholder mapping can help identify key actors to engage and understand their priorities, existing nutrition-related efforts, interest and influence.
- **Facilitating cost sharing:** Sharing financial or in-kind costs with government or other organisations helps foster country ownership, encourages stakeholder collaboration and ensures accountability.

³ DFID, *Political Economy Analysis How To Note*. July 2009. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/3797.pdf>



Leveraging existing capacity and prioritising capacity building

Building capacity is inherent to MQSUN+ TA, which strives to deliver sustainable support to SUN countries. Opportunities for close country collaboration and capacity building are kept at the forefront throughout the TA. As much as possible, MQSUN+ identifies key capacities of in-country actors and maximises their role and participation to leverage existing skills and knowledge. The MQSUN+ approach to capacity building is to be adaptive and responsive to the country/stakeholder needs as they unfold during the implementation and to tailor our approach accordingly. Key components of this approach include:

- **Fostering functional and technical capacity strengthening:** We apply a “learning-by-doing” approach to encourage relevant country stakeholders to work alongside MQSUN+ to support both technical and functional skills building and facilitate understanding and buy-in to take the work forward.
- **Engaging global and in-country perspectives in the TA team:** MQSUN+ forms TA teams that pair international and national consultants to bring the global SUN perspective, while building local capacity for continued nutrition efforts and supporting sustainability of the work.



Continuously monitoring and learning for adaptive TA

MQSUN+ has developed an adaptive approach to supporting countries through the SUN Roadmap and planning cycle by leveraging cross-country and global learning. In the last seven years of MQSUN/MQSUN+ implementation, we continuously captured positive practices and lessons learnt to refine our TA. MQSUN+ fosters a collaborative process by creating opportunities for our TA teams working across different countries to come together on a regular basis to share learnings, tools and approaches and problem solve together. This supports cross-country learning, capacity building for multisectoral planning and leveraging existing tools and approaches for efficiency, including the following:

- **Utilising innovative M&E and knowledge management for adaptive technical delivery:** MQSUN+ fosters continuous collection of and discussion on key learnings for real-time learning and adaption.
- **Providing global support to inform the larger SUN strategy and guidance:** MQSUN+ also provides TA to the SMS to develop guidance for SUN countries, support global SUN efforts and inform the SUN Strategy. These efforts and learnings reinforce MQSUN+ country TA.

Conclusion: MQSUN+ TA as a catalyst for nutrition impact

MQSUN+ TA acts as a catalyst to accelerate SUN countries’ progress along the SUN transformational pathway and ultimately contribute to nutrition impact (**Figure 1**). Our applied cross-cutting principles contribute to enhanced quality of multisectoral planning for nutrition through: (1) strengthened multisectoral buy-in and engagement; (2) increased awareness and commitment to nutrition; and (3) strengthened planning, prioritisation and coordination to achieve common results. This, in turn, contributes to a strengthened enabling environment and effectiveness of aligned implementation for nutrition. Effective, aligned multisectoral implementation can facilitate greater gains towards reducing malnutrition and contributing to the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of zero hunger and other SDGs that are contingent on healthy and nourished families. Further, given MQSUN+’s mandate as a last resort mechanism, we are also enhancing global SUN progress by supporting countries who otherwise may not have had the in-country resources or capacity to advance their SUN agenda as intended.

About MQSUN+

MQSUN+ provides technical assistance and knowledge services to the UK Government’s Department for International Development and the SUN Movement Secretariat in support of pro-poor programmes in nutrition. MQSUN+ services are resourced by a consortium of five nonstate organisations leading in the field of nutrition: PATH (lead), Aga Khan University, DAI Global Health, Development Initiatives and NutritionWorks.

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