Technical assistance to enhance capacity in Somalia and Yemen to assess costing readiness

MQSUN+ retrospective case study (September 2018)

This retrospective case study is part of a brief series on Assumption maps to assess signs of impact of short-term technical assistance.

A multisectoral nutrition action plan must have sufficient detail on activities, targets, and coverage before a full costing can be conducted to define the resource needs. Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+) developed a tool to assess whether a common results framework (CRF) or multisectoral plan has the required level of detail in the activities, targets, and coverage to allow for costing. This later evolved into a guidance tool to build capacity (including MQSUN+'s own) for multisectoral planning and costing. Capacity building is a focus of MQSUN+ technical assistance (TA).

Technical assistance implementation

This case study considers how MQSUN+ TA is contributing to enhanced capacity and sustainable actions for scaling up nutrition in Somalia and Yemen. It reviews how the MQSUN+ costing readiness assessment has built country capacity, by assessing the MQSUN+ capacity-building theory of change (TOC) (**Figure 1**) in line with the overall MQSUN+ assumptions map (**Figure 2**) for costing readiness TA activities.

MQSUN+ first conducted a costing readiness assessment in Tajikistan, where it proved successful in identifying gaps; that assessment then informed consultations for detailed multisectoral planning and prioritization. Based on this experience, MQSUN+ adapted the costing readiness assessment into a guidance tool for its TA to Yemen and Somalia (described in **Table 1**).

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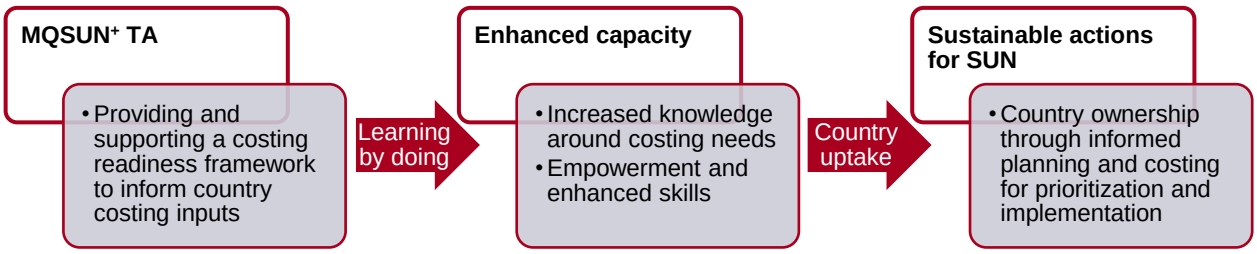
Figure 1. Capacity-building theory of change.



Abbreviations: MQSUN+, Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus; SUN, Scaling Up Nutrition; TA, technical assistance.

Table 1. Assumption assessment and signs of impact.

	Trajectory and evidence of change
MQSUN+ TA costing readiness assessment	For **Yemen**, MQSUN+ developed a costing readiness tool to help the country align actions and understand the level of inputs and detail needed for a full costing. The Yemen country team used this tool to collect the required costing inputs. The Somalia team is using the same approach. • **Yemen and Somalia:** Based on the guidance provided and gaps identified per the tool, SUN Yemen independently conducted a series of sectoral costing workshops to collect the required inputs. The MQSUN+ tool provided the structure and guidance necessary to facilitate this country-led action. In Somalia, the country team—supported by an MQSUN+ local consultant—is undertaking similar exercises to collect the costing inputs. • **MQSUN+:** The project refined the costing readiness assessment into a guidance tool. Building on the continuing experience and success, it became a standard step in MQSUN+ TA to assess a plan's readiness for costing, and ultimately inform a plan's operationalization.
Enhanced capacity	Providing countries with a guidance tool for costing (1) facilitates improved knowledge and understanding of the level of detail required for a full costing, and (2) gives the structure and information needed to independently undertake the exercise, with limited MQSUN+ input. This facilitates a **learning-by-doing** approach to capacity building and has led to **increased knowledge** around costing and **country empowerment and capacity** to take this work forward. • **Yemen:** A country representative reported enhanced country capacity for costing—noting that the MQSUN+ collaborative support was very helpful and of high quality. '*We learned from [MQSUN+] on how to prepare costing and the whole MSAP.'* It was also highlighted that *'the costing readiness assessment [developed by MQSUN+] has pushed the Yemen team, in all relevant sectors, to focus on the details and develop the activities.'* • **Somalia:** While the TA and costing inputs in Somalia were ongoing, the growing understanding around costing became apparent in weekly country calls. Prior to the assessment, the country was asking for an unrealistic timeline for costing and did not understand the inputs required and time intensiveness of the process. Once they initiated the collection of costing inputs using this framework, the country representatives noted to MQSUN+ that the process would take time and suggested a more realistic timeline. A local consultant was engaged to assist the government in this exercise with the intention of building local capacity for future costing. Beyond costing, the exercise supported a growing understanding of the level of detail required to operationalize a multisectoral plan. During a workshop, the country appointed someone to elaborate the operational details within the plan. • **MQSUN+:** Through the experience of implementing the costing readiness assessment, MQSUN+ has enhanced its own capacity and understanding of the time, inputs, and details required for high-quality costing. MQSUN+ also trained its international and local costing consultants to use this approach and to transfer skills to country counterparts.

	Trajectory and evidence of change
Sustainable actions for SUN	Through its experience in Yemen and Somalia, MQSUN+ found that the costing readiness assessment process and tool (1) contributed to increased country understanding of and capacity for the multisectoral planning process and (2) facilitated country ownership around prioritization of activities and development of a fully costed plan. • **Yemen and Somalia:** Through existing signs of enhanced capacity and understanding for costing, MQSUN+ anticipates this work will contribute to sustained country capacity for multisectoral planning, costing, and financial tracking. Beyond facilitating costing, the readiness assessment requires countries to think through and document details, such as baseline coverage, annual targets, regional prioritization, etc. This supports realistic and evidence-based planning and conversations around prioritization that, in turn, will contribute to more detailed planning and effective implementation. • **MQSUN+:** Building on these successes, MQSUN+ formalized a costing readiness tool and guidance note as part of its knowledge dissemination TOR, to institutionalize and share this tool and process online for wider uptake by the SUN Movement Secretariat, SUN countries, and TA providers.

Abbreviations: MQSUN+, Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus; MSAP, multisectoral action plan; SUN, Scaling Up Nutrition; TA, technical assistance; TOR, terms of reference.

Assumption pathway to and measurement of impact

According to the broader MQSUN+ assumption map, country understanding, capacity, and ownership underlie many of the assumptions that facilitate progress along the impact pathway. To this end, this case study focused specifically on how TA to facilitate 'learning by doing' strengthens capacity.

Figure 2 presents a condensed snapshot of the MQSUN+ assumption map pathway for costing readiness. A key roadblock to the success of TA around costing is limited country understanding of data limitations. This gap can prevent informed and high-quality costing and contribute to delays. The costing readiness assessment, beyond being a practical activity, assists in removing this roadblock by giving countries a framework to better understand the required detail and to own the process of collecting data and refining their planning. This facilitates the process of moving countries from the CRF to the next phase—developing a fully costed multisectoral nutrition action plan.

Figure 1. Snapshot of MQSUN+ assumptions map for costing readiness.

Key activities	Assumption	Key outputs	Assumption	Key outcomes	Assumption	Signs of impact
Costing readiness assessment framework	**IF** the costing readiness assessment framework (1) informs collection of detailed costing inputs (e.g., unit cost, baseline, target, etc.) **AND** (2) assists in defining and agreeing on operational details of implementation, **THEN**	(1) Completed costing data to inform full costing and (2) Defined operational details (timeline, prioritization, implementers, etc.) to inform detailed planning	**IF** costing and operational details are fully defined and agreed upon, **THEN**	(1) Improved understanding among key stakeholders and funders of the agreed activities, financial costs and gaps and (2) Enhanced sectoral buy-in regarding planning, roles, and responsibilities	**IF** key stakeholders and government understand the resource needs and the prioritized goals and activities of the plan, **THEN**	Resources for the plan are mobilized and prioritized (e.g., government and donor commitments)

Acknowledgments

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