

Technical assistance impact in Scaling Up Nutrition countries



MQSUN+ retrospective case study (September 2019)



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

The [Scaling Up Nutrition \(SUN\) Movement theory of change](#) illustrates a transformational pathway to realizing the vision of an end to malnutrition (Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, 2016). It depicts how collaboration across sectors and actors can lead to better-aligned implementation and investment in nutrition. This, in turn, translates to effective results and improved nutritional status, contributing to the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In line with this pathway, Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+) provided demand-driven technical assistance (TA) to countries in support of their multisectoral planning efforts. While the assistance varies across countries, MQSUN+ TA broadly fit within four key areas: (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 plan; (3) supporting cost estimation and budget analysis to facilitate resource allocation, mobilization, and tracking; and (4) supporting implementation planning and alignment to an endorsed plan.

MQSUN+ principles for driving progress

The mandate of MQSUN+ was to be a 'last resort' mechanism for TA, particularly in fragile contexts when in-country partners and resources are insufficient. To this end, MQSUN+ energized progress in countries that otherwise may not have had the resources or capacity to advance their SUN priorities.

MQSUN+ applies a set of guiding principles across TA that enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and quality within and across countries:

- *Leveraging global learning for adaptive TA:* With over seven years of experience and learning, MQSUN+ developed an adaptive approach to supporting countries through the SUN roadmap and planning cycle based on leveraging global learnings and positive practices and applying them to different country contexts. This was informed by MQSUN+'s robust knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and the practice promotes cross-country learning for success.
- *Ensuring a country-led process:* MQSUN+ encouraged and promoted government leadership throughout each stage of TA from conceptualization through to closeout. MQSUN+ found that working closely with countries to develop their country-specific frameworks and roadmaps for multisectoral planning was instrumental in building an understanding of how SUN fits in each unique country context, ensuring existing country platforms and strengths are leveraged, and identifying potential roadblocks or areas where TA can help accelerate the process.
- *Supporting a contextually informed process:* To ensure TA was tailored to the specific country context, MQSUN+ placed particular emphasis at the start of TA to analyze and document the nutrition situation and political context to ensure this was understood and validated with country stakeholders and leveraged throughout the TA. This supported evidence-based planning and prioritization and informed the identification of roadblocks preventing progress in the SUN planning cycle, as well as the key strengths/opportunities that can be leveraged.
- *Facilitating inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement:* MQSUN+ encouraged the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. This included facilitating consultations across activities and encouraging the inclusion of vulnerable groups throughout the process to support buy-in and accountability.
- *Prioritizing capacity building:* Throughout MQSUN+ TA, opportunities for close collaboration and capacity building were kept at the forefront. MQSUN+ applied a 'learning-by-doing' approach to encourage relevant country stakeholders to work alongside MQSUN+ in the process to ensure understanding and buy-in to take the work forward. MQSUN+ often developed country-specific guidance and templates to facilitate a country-led process of gathering and validating inputs for the planning process. This approach facilitated enhanced ownership and sustainability.

MQSUN+ TA as a catalyst towards impact

MQSUN+ TA acted as a catalyst to accelerate SUN countries' progress along the pathway and to contribute to the enabling environment and to nutrition impact. The applied cross-cutting principles contributed 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, prioritization, and coordination to achieve common results. This, in turn, contributes to the effectiveness of aligned implementation for nutrition. The hypothesis is that effective and aligned multisectoral implementation for nutrition facilitates greater gains along the nutrition pathways towards reducing malnutrition and contributing to the global SDG of zero hunger, as well as other SDGs that are contingent on healthy and nourished families.

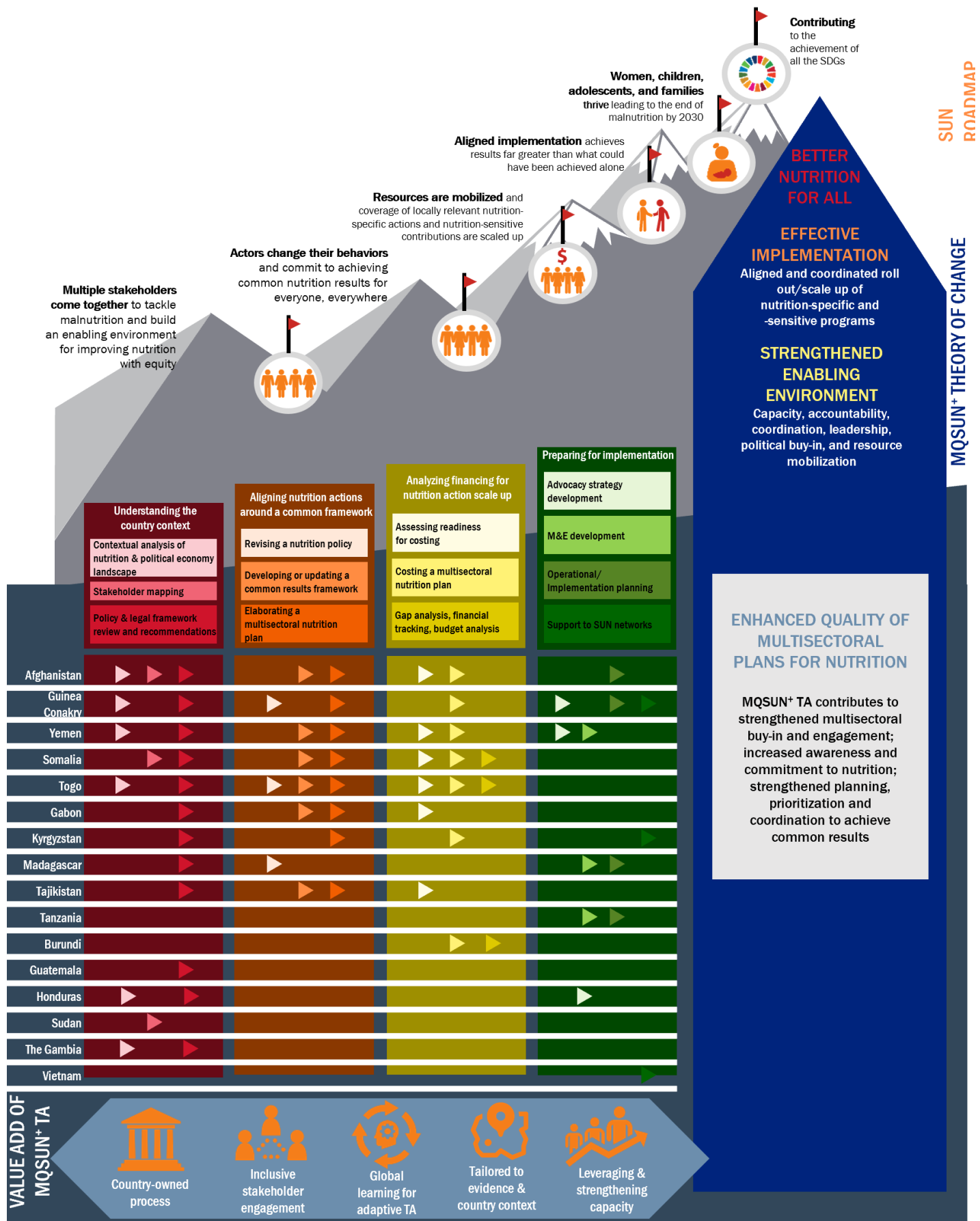
It is also important to note that MQSUN+ was a last resort mechanism; therefore, it supported countries that otherwise may not have had the in-country resources or capacity to advance their SUN agenda as intended. MQSUN and now MQSUN+ contributed to advancing the SUN agenda in over 20 SUN countries

and moving them along the SUN Movement transformational pathway. This support is highlighted, for MQSUN+ TA to SUN countries only, in **Figure 1**.

For many of the countries that MQSUN+ supported, a key first step is building an in-depth understanding of the nutrition context in the country to facilitate an evidence-informed multisectoral planning process. This was typically informed by conducting a contextual or situational analysis using the most up-to-date data, reviewing existing nutrition-related policies and plans, and doing a mapping and analysis of nutrition-related stakeholders. This background was critical to supporting country stakeholder understanding and consensus on multisectoral nutrition action, as well as informing the TA. Politically informed, inclusive, and adaptive TA can energize progress by supporting countries to develop a country-specific framework and roadmap for action (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019). For example, in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Plan indicates the roles and responsibility of government and nongovernment stakeholders and identifies the required coordination structures, at national and subnational levels, which can facilitate the activities outlined by the Plan itself. This is crucial for the success of the plan and allows for strong coordination between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive activities and their targets.

Figure 1 helps explain the role of MQSUN+ as a catalyst of country progress along the SUN roadmap by providing TA that is adaptive, inclusive, contextually informed, and country-led.

Figure 1. Explanation of MQSUN+'s role as a catalyst of country progress.



Abbreviations: M&E, monitoring and evaluation; MQSUN+, Maximising the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus; SDG, Sustainable Development Goal; TA, technical assistance.

References

- Cox, M., & Norrington-Davies, G. (2019). Technical assistance: New thinking on an old problem. *The Lancet* 324(8399), 385. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(84\)90552-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(84)90552-x)
- Scaling Up Nutrition Movement. (2016). *SUN Movement Strategy and Roadmap 2016-2020*. <https://scalingupnutrition.org/news/from-inspiration-to-impact-a-new-sun-movement-strategy-and-roadmap/>

Acknowledgments

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