

Global Technical Assistance Mechanism for Nutrition



Advice | Guidance | Expertise | Learning

QUARTERLY DIGEST | Q1: 1 January – 31 March 2020

The Global Technical Assistance Mechanism for Nutrition (GTAM) is a common global mechanism endorsed by over 40 Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) partners to provide systematic, predictable, timely and coordinated nutrition technical assistance in order to meet the nutrition rights and needs of people affected by emergencies. It is co-led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Vision International (WVI), in collaboration with a core team (GTAM-CT) consisting of Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) as the knowledge management (KM) partner, the GNC-CT and the Technical Rapid Response Team (Tech RRT). When country and regional capacities are exhausted, unresolved technical issues can be escalated to the GTAM. Depending on the issue, the GTAM will provide technical advice, facilitate the development of consensus-driven guidance through Global Thematic Working Groups (GTWGs) and normative agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), and provide specialised technical expertise. Wherever possible and appropriate, the GTAM seeks to leverage existing technical support mechanisms. For further information, visit: <https://gtam.nutritioncluster.net/>

SUMMARY

During the first quarter of 2020, the GTAM Core Team (GTAM-CT) continued to refine ways of working within the different elements of the mechanism, particularly in relation to communication with the Global Thematic Working Groups (GTWGs), who are looked to for direction on technical questions falling outside existing guidance. A process of reviewing the GTAM-CT Standard Operating Procedures began that aimed to solidify roles and responsibilities within the core team and for the GTAM as a whole. A face-to-face meeting with the GTAM-CT in February further helped galvanise work within the GTAM, serving as an opportunity to finalise workplans, and focused specifically on progressing the development of the [GTAM website](#). The GTAM-CT aimed to launch the GTAM website towards the end of the second quarter of the year and was able to make the GTAM website live in the first week of June. The website will serve as an easy-to-use platform where countries and nutrition practitioners can request technical advice

when facing a technical question related to nutrition in emergencies (NiE) and on-site support in the form of remote support or advisors supporting directly in-country. During the quarter, the GTAM was called on to rapidly mobilise and organise relevant actors to respond to demands for technical support relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. This highlighted the mechanism's important role in bringing unresolved country and regional technical issues to the global level and facilitating action to resolve such issues. This work began in March with the compilation and release of a summary of guidance on NiE relevant to the COVID-19 context. GTAM activities relating to COVID-19 were rapidly scaled up in the beginning of the second quarter of the year.

(UNICEF)). This enabled progress in relation to core workstreams. Processes between the GTAM and GTWGs were further consolidated through the development of an escalation and closure form and discussion with all the group co-chairs in relation to the escalation of questions. The requirements and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the GTAM were also further refined during the quarter, alongside the detailed development of the GTAM website.

2. Global Thematic Working Groups (GTWGs)

Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (IYCF-E): The IFE-Core Group agreed to be the GTAM GTWG on IYCF-E in the second quarter of 2019; currently 23 organisations and eight individual members are represented. The GTWG has a terms of reference (ToR) and workplan.

Wasting: This quarter saw the Wasting GTWG progress in its establishment with two new chairs (Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) and UNICEF) replacing

FIRST QUARTER ACHIEVEMENTS

1. GTAM Processes and Governance

During this period, the GTAM-CT continued to engage regularly through fortnightly coordination calls (co-chaired by World Vision International (WVI) and the United Nations Children's Fund

Progress in establishment of GTAM GTWGs



Key: 100% - fully operational, with co-chairs in place, clear membership, terms of reference (ToR) agreed, workplan (WP) developed. 75% - co-chairs in place and clear membership, ways of engagement/ToR agreed, no WP developed yet but some meetings held. 50% - co-chairs in place, group formed with clear membership and ToR development ongoing/ways of engagement being discussed. 25% - no formal engagement yet, but tentative agreement with potential leadership and/or membership identified.

the interim chairs (WVI and GNC). A ToR outlining ways of working will be finalised and agreed in the following quarter. The Wasting GTWG held two meetings during the reporting period and, based on aspects highlighted in the GTAM baseline report, agreed on four workstreams, with leads being identified for each of these. These sub-working groups were: 1. Wasting according to risk and context, led by ENN; 2. Management of wasting by community health workers, led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC); 3. Programming in the absence of therapeutic products, led by Action Against Hunger (ACF); 4. Process for community management of acute malnutrition malnutrition (CMAM) national protocol revision, led by UNICEF. A full workplan will be developed in the next quarter.

Nutrition Information Systems (NIS):

The NIS GTWG is now fully established, with chairs and co-chairs elected (Action Against Hunger and UNICEF), regular monthly meetings, and a finalised and agreed ToR.

Nutrition-Sensitive: In mid-2019, the Intercluster Nutrition Working Group (ICNWG) took on the GTWG role on a trial basis. In this quarter, discussions began on the future shape and direction of the ICNWG and its role within the GTAM. As the group is in the process of defining its strategic direction, it is envisaged that, following this process, the configuration and functioning of this group in relation to the GTAM will be defined.

Cash (Reference Group): It was decided in 2019 that this would be a time-bound reference group (rather than a GTWG) to work with a consultant on a 'Cash in Emergencies for Nutrition' position paper and case studies. A ToR was finalised and agreed.

3. Technical Advice

The GTAM aims to rapidly answer technical questions from the field that cannot be adequately answered by existing agency-specific technical support mechanisms or by existing guidance or experience. In this quarter, the GTAM-CT continued to make progress in further refining processes by which technical requests from the field are either answered by the GTAM's first-line service portals¹ (where sufficient guidance exists), or escalated to the relevant GTWG when existing guidance is insufficient to answer the specific question. Pending the launch of the GTAM website, and in recognition of the emerging increase in questions from field level relating to COVID-19, a contact form (managed by the GNC Technical

Helpdesk) allowing country-level programmers to bring technical questions to the global level was developed and uploaded to the GNC website.

During the January to March period, 40 requests for technical advice were submitted to the GNC Technical helpdesk, largely still via email, from over 25 countries. The questions tended to relate to IYCF-E and programme adaptations in light of COVID-19 (particularly in March). During March closer links were made between the ENN team managing the en-net forum and the GNC helpdesk to ensure questions not covered by existing guidance that were emerging from the field via the en-net forum, Tech RRT or the GNC helpdesk could be consolidated and appropriately escalated to the GTWGs or to the World Health Organization (WHO) for interim guidance, or raised with the GTAM co-leads for coordinated action if no relevant GTWG was in place. The above-mentioned contact form will be placed on the GTAM website in the next quarter and all questions captured to ensure they are answered or escalated in a timely manner.

4. Consensus-driven Guidance

The GTWGs aim to tackle emerging technical issues in a timely, coordinated and collaborative way, identifying areas where technical operational guidance is required to address emerging issues.

In response to COVID-19, during this quarter UNICEF (in consultation with the GTWGs and other key stakeholders) led the rapid development of two technical briefs, [Management of child wasting in the context of COVID-19](#) and [Infant and young child feeding \(IYCF\) programming in the context of COVID-19](#). Both were released by UNICEF/GNC/GTAM at the end of the quarter. They will be updated periodically and emerging updated guidance will be published on the [GTAM website](#).

Progress was made by the GTWGs during the quarter on a number of different areas:

- **Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (IYCF-E):** During the reporting period three monthly meetings were conducted, during which issues related to IYCF-E were discussed. The IYCF-E GTWG experienced a shift in priorities due to needing to step up COVID-19-related responses. As a result, guidance relating to programming for breastmilk substitute (BMS) dependent infants and operational guidance on IYCF in the context of Ebola virus disease have been delayed and are currently pending funding. Instead, during the quarter the following steps

were taken to develop consensus-driven guidance:

- **A template for the Joint Statement on IYCF in the context of COVID-19** was developed following a request from the GNC. The document aims to help countries develop immediate, coordinated, multi-sector actions on IYCF in line with adopted IYCF guidance in the context of the COVID-19 response.
- A significant number of IYCF-E GTWG members contributed to the review of the above-mentioned UNICEF/GNC/GTAM IYCF programming in the context of the COVID-19 brief.
- The development of a flow chart on infant feeding/breastfeeding in the context of COVID-19 targeting healthcare providers began during the quarter, in addition to the update of [WHO Frequently Asked Questions on breastfeeding](#).
- The update of the UNICEF Community IYCF Counselling Cards for mothers and caregivers in the context of COVID-19 was initiated by UNICEF, with contributions from the IYCF-E GTWG members.
- Beyond COVID-19-related activities, IYCF-E GTWG members contributed to the review of three pieces of work triggered by the findings of the baseline assessment report: a technical brief on supportive spaces for IYCF-E (awaiting publication), a [Nutrition in Emergencies checklist for IYCF-E](#) and a note on IYCF-E Cash and Vouchers (awaiting publication).
- **Wasting:** As identified through the baseline assessment, four priority areas are currently needing consensus-driven guidance; sub-working groups were therefore initiated to further develop corresponding workstreams (sub-working groups previously highlighted):
 - Alternative moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) management;
 - Clear guidelines on what to do in the absence of a therapeutic product;
 - Clarity/guidance on simplified protocols/combined protocols/expanded criteria using ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF)/ready-to-use supplementary food (RUSF) for the management of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and MAM;
 - Better integration of SAM screening for infants under six months of age for community volunteers.

As with the other GTWGs, the Wasting GTWG rapidly shifted to accommodate COVID-19-related questions arising. It was agreed among the group that the 'Wasting according to risk and context'

¹ The GTAM's first-line service portals are the GNC Technical Helpdesk, UNICEF HQ, World Vision International and en-net.

sub-group would be allocated the role of responding to escalated questions. A weekly call was established to accommodate the increase in escalated questions. Active collaboration with WHO was established to ensure that key questions are brought to its attention and answers cross-checked. During this quarter seven questions were escalated and addressed in relation to wasting and COVID-19.

▪ **Nutrition Information Systems (NIS):**

The NIS GTWG has also developed a workplan based on the gaps identified in the GTAM Technical Baseline Needs Assessment Report, which was costed in the quarter. A consultant was recruited through UNICEF HQ to update the estimation of the number of children with acute malnutrition. A draft document has been prepared and will be shared with the NIS GTWG for review and feedback in the next quarter. Guidance for conducting nutrition analysis for the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) is currently in the final stages of development (with the GNC taking the lead for drafting this) and will be disseminated in the next quarter. Towards the end of the quarter, the NIS GTWG began shifting priorities in light of the COVID-19 context.

▪ **Nutrition-Sensitive:** During the reporting period three monthly calls were carried out and a group workplan was discussed. Workplan activities during the quarter included implementation of the ICNWG training on integration for nutrition outcomes in selected countries and the elaboration of country cases on integration (including cross-country nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) experiences). The GNC helpdesk collaborated with the Nutrition-Sensitive GTWG on these pieces of work. Given the COVID-19 context, the existing face-to-face training material on integration was modified into a webinar training of trainers. A draft Yemen case study on integration was developed and the scope of a South Sudan case study on integration was agreed with country partners. Development of this case study will begin in the next quarter.

▪ **Cash (Reference Group):** The Reference group continued to make progress on a number of previously identified priorities during the quarter. An interim note on Cash Voucher Assistance (CVA) and IYCF was finalised and shared with partners requesting it. Case studies in relation to the documentation of experiences using CVA for nutrition outcomes in Nigeria and Somalia continued to be developed in the quarter, with interviews and document collection

ongoing. A first draft of guidance on CVA and nutrition has been developed and shared with reference group members for input.

5. Technical Expertise

Roster: The five GTAM consultant rosters (IYCF-E, Micronutrient supplementation in emergencies, Integrated nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, CMAM, Needs assessments and analysis for nutrition outcomes) were officially launched for use by the nutrition community on 21 January 2020. The rosters will be opened for a new phase of recruitment in April. Consultant vetting from the initial round of applications was finalised during the quarter. In total the following numbers of consultants were entered into the rosters: **27 CMAM consultants, 8 IYCF-E consultants, 13 Integrated nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions consultants, and 38 needs assessment and analysis for nutrition outcomes consultants.**

The GTAM consultant roster was called upon seven times during the reporting period. Three inquiries were informal in nature, while four were formal requests, leading to the shortlisting of three candidates for each of the formal requests, with one candidate recruited. Given that the consultant roster is still in very early phase of implementation, the GTAM-CT was pleased to see the mechanism beginning to be used and proving useful to countries.

Deployment: In this quarter, the Tech RRT facilitated the deployment of two advisers to Zambia for CMAM and Assessment technical expertise. Three additional deployments are underway; one in Ethiopia related to CMAM and ones in Venezuela and the Democratic Republic of Congo in relation to IYCF-E.

Remote Support: Remote support for assessments was ongoing to Action Against Hunger UK as well as IYCF-E and Social Behavior Change (SBC) support to Occupied Palestinian Territory. Planning for remote support for IYCF-E in Ethiopia was also carried out during this quarter.

Capacity Strengthening: During the reporting period, orientation webinars entitled 'Building Capacity to Manage At-risk Mothers and Infants (MAMI)' in English, French and Spanish, and 'Social Behaviour Change for Nutrition Outcomes' in English and French were developed and prepared for delivery in April. In addition, a capacity strengthening webinar entitled 'Protecting, promoting and supporting IYCF during the COVID-19 pandemic: Reflections and recommendations' was developed in preparation for delivery in April.

6. Knowledge Management

A summary of guidance for NiE practitioners in the context of COVID-19 was rapidly collated, released and circulated via the ENN and GNC websites and en-net during this quarter in response to an urgent need raised via the GNC helpdesk. Based on feedback, this was modified into a shortened resource list which, due to the rapid proliferation of guidance related to COVID-19, was then replaced by a COVID-19 section of resources on the GTAM website. Based on the needs outlined in the Baseline Technical Needs Assessment Report and discussed with GTWGs, ENN continued during the quarter to develop a GTAM technical brief on supportive spaces for IYCF-E, as well as a paper on Ebola and IYCF in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These will both be published in the next quarter.

ENN continues to explore opportunities to develop learning material in relation to GTAM activities; particularly in relation to the COVID-19 response.

7. Fundraising

During the quarter, discussions began on developing a two-page fundraising strategy note to inform future income-generation plans and activities.

Funding (in cash or in kind) for the activities of GTAM during this quarter came from: UNICEF, WVI, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), and the Eleanor Crook Foundation (ECF).

PLANS FOR THE UPCOMING QUARTER

- Discussions on fundraising processes within the GTAM-CT and mechanisms for fundraising defined;
- Further development of systems to accommodate the rapidly evolving COVID-19 response.

