THE GLOBAL NUTRITION CLUSTER TECHNICAL ALLIANCE

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Technical Alliance

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document lays out the Strategic Intent - vision, purpose and focus - of the Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) Technical Alliance for the period 2021-2023. It describes:

- The vision of, rationale for, the purpose and functioning of the GNC Technical Alliance (the Alliance)

- How success of the Alliance is defined, and what the Alliance is accountable for delivering

- The roles and responsibilities of the Alliance Leadership Team members and partner organizations, as well as the two streams of work under the Alliance.

The strategy aims to foster greater participation and support for the work of the Alliance, by enabling partners, including national governments, NGOs, UN agencies, donors, academics and technical staff to identify common goals and opportunities for collaboration.

The strategy will be reviewed at minimum every 12 months, and more regularly as required.

BACKGROUND

The Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) review[1] and the Rapid Response Team (RRT) Evaluation[2] identified serious gaps in the mechanisms put in place to address nutrition technical needs in humanitarian contexts. The reviews agree that historically, the nutrition community has lacked an "overarching

technical platform which could provide strategic direction on how to prioritize and address technical capacity gaps at country level".[1] The capacity gaps included; insufficient on-the-ground expertise to translate existing guidance into practice; a lack of predictable processes to address technical areas where no normative guidance exists; and an absence of leadership and coordination for the provision of nutrition in emergency technical expertise to countries. Further, it has been difficult to bring actors together to align approaches that will bridge the humanitarian-development divide.

While the Global Nutrition Cluster Coordination Team (GNC-CT) worked to fill this gap, there was no clarity on how the GNC collective as a whole should address gaps in technical training, guidance and support, nor was there a clear system for addressing technical operational gaps with an agreed level of legitimacy to respond to country level emergency nutrition responses.

Over the years, the absence of such a modality led to ad-hoc initiatives by different agencies and various models linking country, regional and global level technical expertise. This has resulted in disconnected resources, unclear processes, duplication of efforts and over-reliance on personal networks. The Technical Rapid Response Team (Tech RRT) is one such initiative established by an NGO led consortium to ensure the availability of deployable expertise to improve the technical quality of nutrition responses in emergencies and protracted crisis situations.

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1   Le Cuziat, G. and Frize, J. (2015) *Position of the GNC on Providing Technical Support to Country Clusters.* Save the Children USA, GNC and UNICEF

2   Richardson, L. and Ververs, M. (2015) *Evaluation of the support provided by the GNC to National Coordination Platforms.* GNC and UNICEF.

For UNICEF, addressing this challenge was particularly critical. As Nutrition Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) UNICEF is the provider of last resort to meet technical needs within the cluster. The pace and complexity of this task requires that the technical strengths and capacities of all cluster partners are leveraged in an efficient and coherent manner.

In 2015, a technical taskforce led by UNICEF and the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), with membership of GNC partner agencies was convened to address this challenge. The taskforce reviewed the experiences of the Health, WASH, Child Protection and Food Security clusters in the provision of technical support. Based on these analyses, potential models for technical support provision were shared and discussed with GNC partners. Following a consultation period, the GNC Technical Alliance (formally named the Global Technical Assistance Mechanism) was endorsed by the Global Nutrition Cluster in March 2017.

OUR VISION AND PURPOSE

Our vision is of a world where practitioners working in humanitarian nutrition contexts are equipped to address their ever-changing technical needs by leveraging the expertise of the entire nutrition community as well as other relevant technical actors.

Our purpose is to improve the quality of nutrition preparedness, response and recovery, by enabling and providing coordinated, accessible and timely technical support through multiple channels where gaps exist.

OUR USERS and CONTRIBUTORS

The **'Practitioner'** refers to anyone who is working on humanitarian nutrition programming, which includes preparedness, response, or recovery.

The **Practitioner** may be working in any number of settings, including emergencies, humanitarian or protracted crisis, fragile and conflicted affected contexts, and areas where there is a high burden of malnutrition or a risk of nutritional deterioration.

The **GNC Technical Alliance Partners** are the organizations that make up the GNC, and other individuals, organizations, initiatives and academia at global, regional and country levels that hold nutrition technical expertise across the humanitarian and development spheres. Alliance partners can contribute in different ways including:

• Participating in Global Thematic Working Groups (GTWGs) as thought leaders and technical experts to inform the development of interim consensus driven guidance

• Bringing existing gaps from country level experience to the collective knowledge of the Alliance, and participating in prioritization of work for GTWGs

• Making expertise available to Practitioners to broaden the technical support possibilities, including by acting as 'suppliers' of technical expertise for in-country and remote work.

In support of the localization agenda, the Alliance endeavors to meet the specific needs of practitioners working within national organizations and governments. There is recognition that the support requirements of practitioners working in national organizations may differ to those working in international organizations, and that how the Alliance ensures technical support is accessible to, and appropriate for national organizations and governments will require on-going analysis, learning and adaptation.

OUR WORK

The Alliance is a technical assistance platform that responds to technical requests, by leveraging and building on existing nutrition resources, capacities, initiatives and coordination structures.

The Alliance supports practitioners by delivering the following services:

1. Access to high-quality information, capacity strengthening resources, guidance and learning that has been curated by global nutrition specialists and agencies;

2. Where guidance is limited, timely access to interim consensus driven guidance for emerging technical issues in humanitarian nutrition, including guidance on program adaptation;

3. Access to experienced nutrition technical specialists to answer questions, or to provide more in-depth support (remote or in-country).

In order to deliver these services, the Alliance will:

1. Connect practitioners to the most relevant nutrition resources and guidance.

2. Facilitate (through the GTWGs) a consensus driven process to develop timely interim guidance or expert advice on emerging nutrition technical issues or areas where guidance is lacking/evidence inconclusive, linking with World Health Organization (WHO) rapid or longer-term normative guidance development mechanisms where appropriate.

3. Develop and disseminate high quality learning and capacity strengthening products (webinars, trainings etc.) that are informed by country-level technical priorities and fill an identified gap.

4. Answer practitioners' questions with technical experts providing timely responses referring to the latest available guidance.

5. Provide in-depth remote support or an in-country deployment.

6. Establish a Knowledge Management system that:
   ✤ captures the gaps in technical guidance and information in order to guide activities within the Alliance
   ✤ consolidates existing guidance and identifies appropriate country experience, where required, in response to identified gaps
   ✤ curates and disseminates technical knowledge and learning

✤ captures learning related to the workings of the Alliance itself and its various components.

The GNC Technical Alliance aims to create value for partners by:

- Establishing a collaborative, efficient and inclusive way of working that creates opportunities for partners to work together to best meet their organizational objectives while furthering the interests of the collective

- Establishing a platform whereby partners can access support to meet their technical needs

- Providing a platform whereby partners can contribute to the provision of technical support (deployments, technical expertise etc.)

- Providing partners with access to information on emerging technical issues/trends, latest related thinking and potential actions needed.

OUR LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The GNC Technical Alliance is led by UNICEF and co-led by an NGO partner. The NGO co-lead arrangement aims to ensure independence, neutrality and transparency, while supporting UNICEF in fulfilling its responsibilities as Nutrition Cluster Lead Agency. The NGO co-lead is World Vision International (WVI) for the 2020-2023 period.

The Alliance is supported by the Leadership Team, composed of UNICEF Programme Division, WVI, the Global Nutrition Cluster Coordination Team (GNC-CT), Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) and International Medical Corps (IMC). The Leadership Team will manage the day to day functions of the Alliance.

The Leadership Team is the primary forum for decisions relating to the structure, function and strategy of the Alliance. In line with UNICEF's responsibilities as the Cluster Lead Agency, UNICEF has the authority to take any final decisions for the Alliance. A Decisions SOP describes the decision-making processes in more detail.

OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS

To effectively deliver technical support it is necessary for the Alliance to engage and coordinate with strategic partners. The Alliance Engagement Plan will detail the interdependencies, and opportunities for collaboration between the Alliance and other organizations and initiatives in more detail. Specific actors of relevance to our work include:

- **World Health Organization.** The WHO is a Global Nutrition Cluster Partner and the normative agency for nutrition policies, guidelines and protocols for nutrition. The WHO nutrition focal points will be engaged in discussions about development of interim guidance and alerted to emerging technical needs.

- **Other UN Agencies including FAO, UNHCR and WFP.** UN agencies with a nutrition mandate will be partners of the Alliance. Their specific areas of expertise in humanitarian nutrition will be leveraged to contribute to both workstreams.

- **Scaling up Nutrition Movement:** The SUN Movement is a Government-led initiative to collaboratively end malnutrition in all its forms. Different suppliers of technical expertise are engaged to meet the technical support demands of SUN countries, and coordination with SUN technical expertise suppliers will be necessary for effective cross referral of technical support requests that respect the humanitarian focus of the Alliance, and the development focus of the SUN.

- **Financial partners:** The donors who support the efforts of the humanitarian nutrition community will be closely engaged through the leadership team and updated on technical trends and country level priorities.

OUR AREAS OF WORK

The GNC Technical Alliance Leadership Team oversees the two streams of work: 1) Provision of technical support and; 2) Thought leadership. Although the streams are interconnected, the support and coordination for these work-streams are managed by specific Leadership Team members, namely IMC and ENN (figure 1).

Provision of Technical Support

The Technical Support Team aims to meet the specific needs of the practitioner in a timely, cost effective, and sustainable manner. The coordination of the different modalities for the provision of technical support for the 2020-2023 period is under the supervision of UNICEF and International Medical Corps (IMC), in coordination with a steering group of NGO partners.

The core Technical Support Team currently includes:

- Two UNICEF-hosted, deployable Emergency Response Team members

- Four NGO hosted deployable Technical Advisors

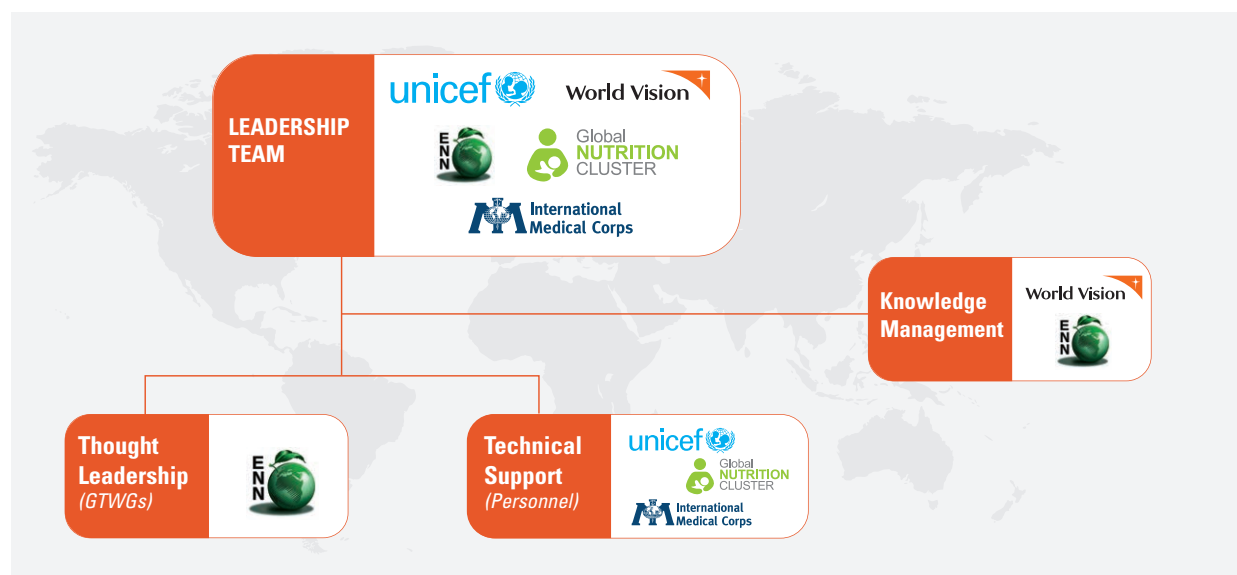- One UNICEF-hosted Help-Desk Technical Advisor

Figure 1: GNC Technical Alliance Structure

- Two NGO hosted Coordinators of the Technical Support Team.

The GNC-CT is responsible for the management and resourcing of the second arm of the Technical Support Team which is comprised of technical resources to support cluster coordination and information management. This arm includes:

- Two Rapid Response Team Sectoral/ Cluster Coordinators and Information Management

- Four Helpdesks for Sectoral/Cluster Coordination, Intersectoral/Intercluster collaboration, Information Management and Nutrition Information Systems

Types of technical support provided include:

- 'Quick' remote technical support

- 'In-depth' remote technical support

- In-country technical support

- Provision of humanitarian nutrition consultancy rosters

The core Technical Support Team brings a wealth of knowledge and experience, on issues including (but not limited to) Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies, Early Detection and Treatment of Child Wasting, Social Behavior Change (SBC) and Nutrition Surveillance and Surveys. The GNC-CT managed arm specializes in cluster/ sector coordination, intersectoral/intercluster collaboration, information management and nutrition information systems.

To expand the supply of technical support and to capitalize on the breadth of technical expertise within the GNC Technical Alliance partners, the Technical Support Team has established partnerships with NGOs and a comprehensive
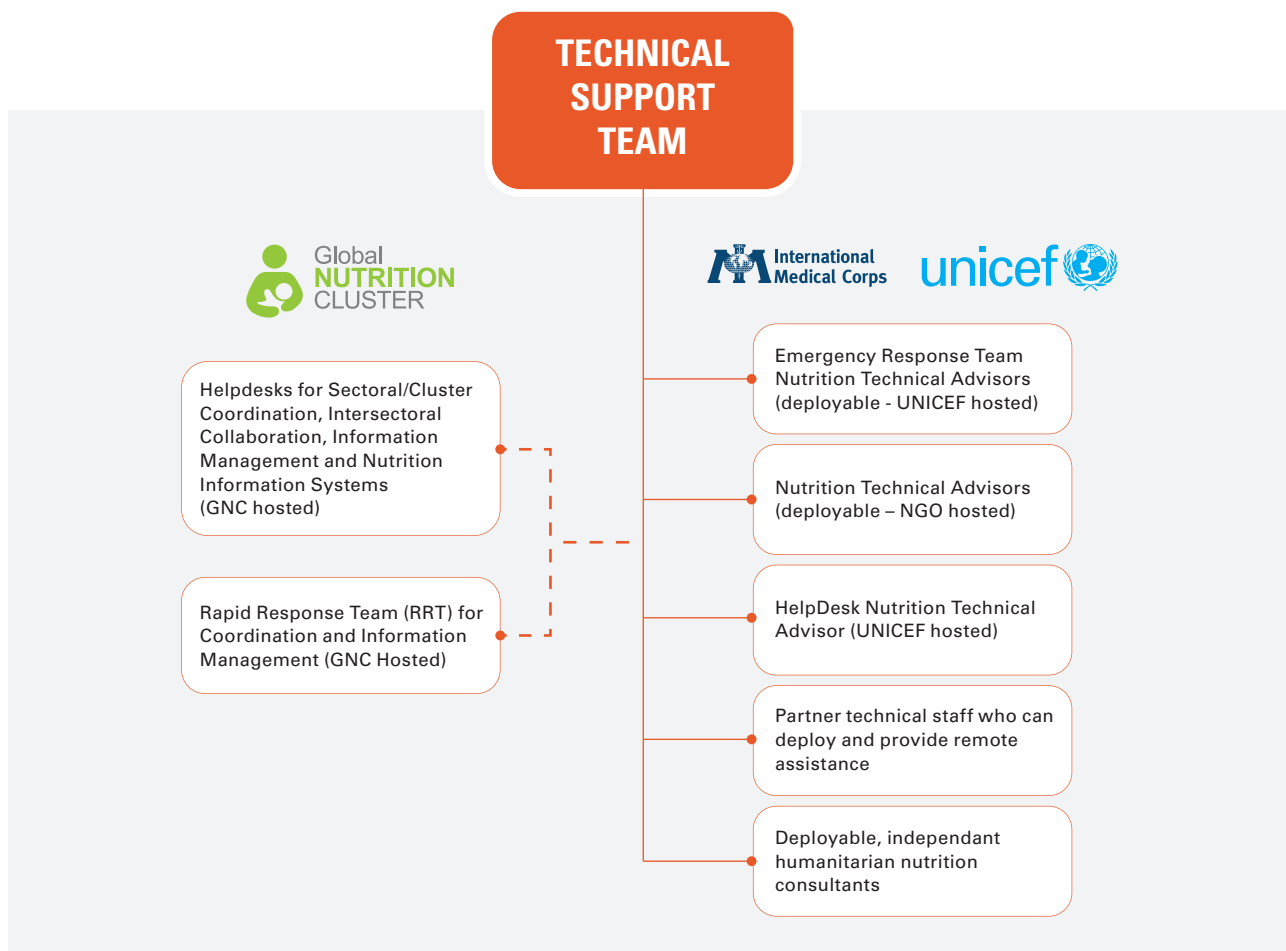
Figure 2: Technical Support Team Structure

roster of vetted consultants for more specialized technical expertise which can be mobilized to meet the technical support request requirements.

The Technical Support Team will coordinate closely with the GTWGs to:

- Find answers to technical questions that require more consultation with experts, and when necessary identify appropriate backstops for technical support.

- Develop and disseminate priority learning events.

- Share information on trends in technical requests and learning from providing technical support to monthly learning review meetings.

The Standard Operating Procedure for the Technical Support Team contains more detail.

Thought Leadership (GTWGs)

To cover a broad range of technical areas, the GNC Technical Alliance oversees a series of Global Thematic Working Groups (GTWGs) comprised of key experts specializing in specific technical areas of nutrition in emergencies policy and practice. This currently includes Wasting, Infant Feeding in Emergencies (filled by the already existing IFE Core group) and Nutrition Information Systems. Under each of these Working Groups, additional, more specialized subgroups will be created to explore specific sub-themes and issues, when needed. New working groups may be added if technical issues are emerging in additional thematic areas. In this case where a related group already exists outside of Alliance they may be invited to fulfil the role.
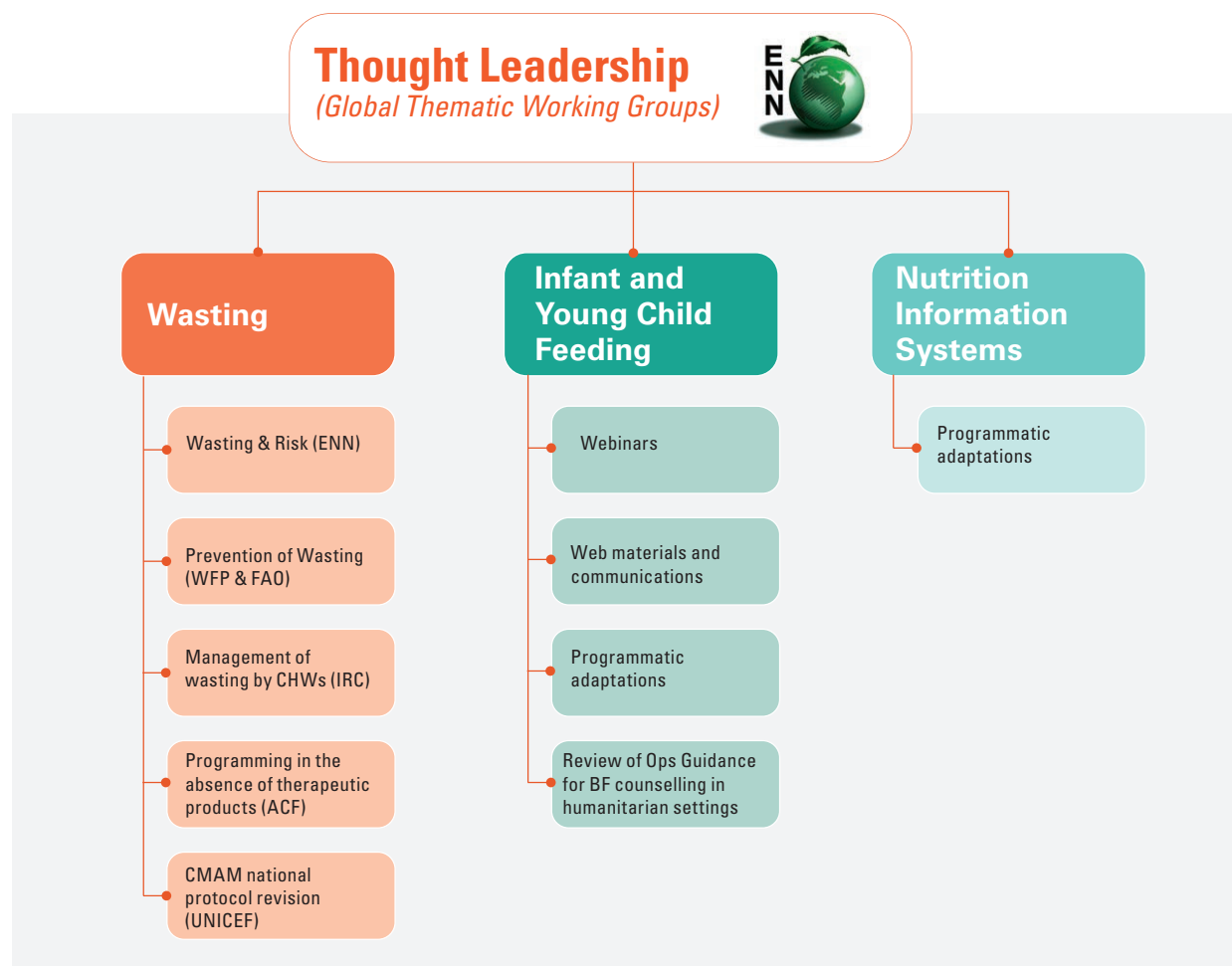

Figure 3: Thought Leadership Workstream Structure and Sub-Groups

The GTWGs are instrumental to the realization of the GNC Technical Alliance's vision and purpose. They provide the fora for transparent technical debate, examination of evidence, and subsequent development of timely consensus-driven interim guidance or resources in response to key technical gaps identified by GNC Technical Alliance. They aim to bring together a broad range of expertise and perspectives.

The three GTWGs are overseen by ENN, and each GTWG is co-chaired by two partners (see figure 3). There is variance in the breadth and depth of work undertaken by each GTWG, however broad functions of the GTWGs include:

- Development of interim consensus driven guidance (or other technical resources) in response to emerging technical issues based on review of evidence, knowledge of ongoing research, experiences and expert opinion.

- Incubation of new ideas and approaches to understanding and solving persistent areas of technical concern being raised at country level.

- Contribute to review of GNC Technical Alliance learning products or events and their dissemination.

- Contribute to evidence and learning capture, including the identification of programme learnings in the implementation of guidance or of adaptation in the face of changing and/or challenging contexts.

- Provision of technical backstopping, when agreed.

Monitoring and Knowledge Management

The success of the GNC Technical Alliance relies on effective knowledge management that includes good processes, appropriate technology and motivated people. A detailed plan will describe the KM objectives, activities and outcomes of the Alliance.

Knowledge Management, including monitoring and evaluation of the functioning of the Alliance will be led by WVI and ENN. The specific responsibilities of both organizations are summarised below.

World Vision

- Implementation and oversight of the Alliance Monitoring Plan, including consolidation of

insights and information from the website dashboard and capture of learning relates to how the Alliance functions, and how it can be improved.

- Overseeing the consolidation of information and insights from across the GNC Technical Alliance to facilitate learning. Proposed process for learning review: monthly meetings with workstream leads to review dashboard outputs (e.g. type of requests submitted by thematic area), en-net input, broader input from the technical support team and GTWG feedback. The purpose of this meeting would be to review technical issues emerging and identify priority actions, including where necessary, plans for learning products and webinars or the need for consensus driven guidance from GTWGs.

- Reporting on the functioning of the GTAM service against its objectives and accountabilities.

ENN

Development and oversight of the KM strategy in collaboration with the leadership team and overall technical learning oversight including:

- Through the learning review processes, identify potential KM and learning products, including learning pieces that consolidate existing guidance and in-country experiences, in response to identified technical gaps.

- Oversee subsequent KM product development/ Learning product development

- Support the dissemination of KM and learning products.

- Bring insights of the work of the GTWGs to inform learning review discussions.

OUR FINANCING MODEL

The GNC Technical Alliance's most important resource is its technical staff. Today, the Alliance relies on approximately 12 full time equivalent staff to pursue its mission and coordinate its work across its two primary streams of work. UNICEF Programme Division is committed to mobilizing internal funds to cover at least 50% of these costs every year. The support of donors and partners is therefore critical to cover the remaining 50%.

The capacity of the Alliance to generate, manage and disseminate knowledge and provide technical support requires additional funding. To meet these needs, the Leadership Team manages a central fund that supports the work of the two streams and their associated financial requirements every year. By centralizing these funds, the Alliance aims to facilitate the joint coordination and prioritization of investments into different products, outputs and technical support to countries.

UNICEF-PD will lead fundraising for the Alliance, with support from the Leadership Team. The resourcing of the GNC-CT managed technical resources is the responsibility of the GNC-CT.

Annex 1. Roles and Responsibilities

UNICEF

1. ***UNICEF internal engagement and communications.*** Ensures the engagement of UNICEF country offices, regional offices, Programme Division and EMOPs in the work of the GNC Technical Alliance as appropriate.

2. ***External engagement and communications***
   ✣ Ensures linkages with SUN, UNSCN and other relevant global initiatives in the humanitarian and development spheres.
   ✣ Ensures external communications for the work of the GNC Technical Alliance, providing reporting on activities to GNC partners, the GNC SAG and other bodies as appropriate.

3. ***Coordination of the Technical Support Team.*** Supports IMC in the effective coordination of the Technical Support workstream. The GNC-CT is responsible for the management and resourcing of the technical resources for cluster coordination and information management (see figure 2).

NGO Co-lead (WVI)

1. ***Workplan. Guide,*** oversee and monitor the implementation of the GNC Technical Alliance work plan.

2. ***Leadership team.*** Ensure effective coordination and functioning of the GNC Technical Alliance leadership team.

3. ***Communications plan.*** Oversees the implementation of the GNC Technical Alliance communications plan, including dissemination of technical learning together with the workstream leads.

4. ***Monitoring and knowledge management***
   ✣ Implementation and oversight of the Monitoring Plan, including consolidation of insights and information from the website dashboard and capture of learning relates to how the GNC Technical Alliance functions, and how it can be improved.
   ✣ Overseeing the consolidation of information and insights from across the GNC Technical Alliance to facilitate learning.

✣ Reporting on the functioning of the GTAM service against its objectives and accountabilities.
✣ Oversee annual reviews of the Alliance Strategy.

Leadership Team

In addition to the specific responsibilities of each organization outlined above, the Leadership Team will:

1. ***Strategic direction and decisions.*** Support leads in setting the strategic direction and taking key decisions related to the governance, structure and functioning of the Alliance.

2. ***Technical support coordination***
   ✣ Receive, triage and coordinate fulfillment of incoming requests for technical support
   ✣ Review identified technical gaps on a monthly basis to determine required action.

3. ***Oversight of work-streams.*** Oversight of the work-streams, and ensuring effective communication between the workstreams and the Leadership Team.

Annex 2: Supporting documents

- Decision SOP
- Knowledge management strategy
- Partnerships/ engagement strategy
- Technical Support Workstream SOP
- Thought Leadership Workstream SOP
- TOR for GTWGs
- TOR for GTWG chairs and guidance on membership and conflict of interest.