

GNC Technical Alliance experience of providing technical support to ARDI, a national NGO in Somalia

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SOMALIA

Key messages:

- The GNC Technical Alliance has developed technical support packages to best meet the technical needs of local NGOs. One of the first of such support packages was provided to The African Relief Development Initiative in Somalia in relation to integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) capacity strengthening.
- Key learnings from this experience include the importance of using technical experts based as locally as possible, the need to provide or link with organisational capacity strengthening, supporting the prioritisation of technical needs, and consider financial barriers.



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*This article has been developed from a **GNC Technical Alliance brief**¹ which explores how local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can receive technical support from the Technical Alliance and a **related podcast**². The brief was prepared for the Alliance by ENN together with members of the Alliance's Technical Support Team. We would like to extend special thanks to Abdi Moge Mohamed from ARDI for providing content based on his experience of receiving support from the Alliance.*

Background

The African Relief Development Initiative (ARDI) is a non-governmental, non-profit, voluntary local organisation operating in Southern Somalia. Since 2018, with support from UNICEF, ARDI has implemented a range of ad hoc small-scale nutrition interventions including malnutrition screening, counselling on infant and young child feeding (IYCF), the promotion of safe water, hygiene and sanitation activities, health promotion, and the creation of mother-to-mother and father-to-father support groups.

In an internal report in early 2021, the ARDI team acknowledged the need to address the technical gaps in their nutrition team and conducted a capacity assessment. This assessment indicated needs across the nutrition in emergencies thematic areas (infant and young children feeding in emergencies (IYCF-E), nutrition assessment and surveillance, management of acute malnutrition, and social behaviour change (SBC)), as well as other operational areas (e.g., programme management, finance and monitoring). The assessment showed that only three out of the 29 staff had ever received integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) training.

Given this, ARDI requested support from the Global Nutrition Cluster Technical Alliance (GNC Technical Alliance/the Alliance) to

strengthen the technical capacity of its team, initially focusing on IMAM training. ARDI hoped that such training would not only enhance its ability to carry out nutrition interventions to a high standard of quality but also put the organisation in a better position to secure future funding and partnerships having received support from the Alliance.

Technical support provision to ARDI

To meet this request for support, the Alliance's CMAM Advisor developed a tailored remote training package in order to meet ARDI's IMAM training needs and fill gaps in technical knowledge as identified through the IMAM capacity assessment and through a series of conversations with the ARDI Chief Executive Officer (CEO). From March to April 2021, the advisor offered online webinars and remote technical support, building on staff and volunteer's previous technical knowledge and training. Several pre-existing trainings were identified (such as **Agora's Acute Malnutrition in Emergencies Preparedness and Response**³ and **Basic training on Nutrition in Emergencies**⁴ and **MSF's online course on Basics of a Nutrition Programme**⁵) and participants had to complete them as part of the training. Prior to the training, participants were requested to complete an Online Learning Readiness Questionnaire⁶ to assess their ability and availability to conduct self-study as part of the training. A pre- and post-test was conducted. The average score prior to training was 41% and increased to 76% following the training. Unfortunately, because the trainings had to be remote (due to travel limitations due to the

¹ <https://www.enonline.net/gnctechnicalalliance/localizationlearningpackage>

² <https://www.enonline.net/gnctechnicalalliance/localizationlearningpackage>

³ <https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=28662>

⁴ <https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=22555>

⁵ <https://tembo.msf.org/course/info.php?id=506>

⁶ Online Learning Readiness Student Self-Assessment (psu.edu)

COVID-19 pandemic), there was no practical component, a typical part of IMAM trainings. The advisor had to employ creative mechanisms, such as a focus on case studies examples, the utilisation of group work, and discussions on the various challenges in implementation, to ensure that the theoretical learnings could be easily translated at a practical level.

Other challenges were also noted, particularly in terms of internet connectivity and access to computers for the ARDI team. This was mitigated through staff sharing and borrowing computers and training times shifting to when internet was more reliable. Another challenge noted was that of language barriers, with some staff members having limited understanding of English. This affected their ability to actively participate during webinars and share information when written materials were required. Fortunately, the advisor spoke Swahili, as did some members of the ADRI team and those within the team who had better English and Swahili skills were selected to support other members of the team with translation.

Despite these challenges, the training was deemed a success with ARDI's CEO, Abdi Moge Mohamed, noting in a recent interview: 'The support provided by the Alliance was beyond our expectations. The staff improved their skills and are now using the skills in the community. We've never had such support before.' Following training, staff were able to train caregivers and other community members to screen and refer children for wasting treatment. As a result, the coverage of treatment increased in the areas that ARDI serves despite the impacts of COVID-19, which in other areas were leading to reported reductions in the numbers accessing treatment. It was reported that the Ministry of Health was appreciative of how the training had helped to increase coverage and that it had led to greater admissions of wasted children to health facilities and contributed to children being presented earlier, which positively impacted treatment outcomes. Through the support, Abdi Moge Mohamed was also able to establish broader links with

the Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) and participated in the GNC Annual Meeting 2021. This engagement facilitated networking opportunities for ARDI with numerous international NGOs and provided a platform to share ARDI's experiences for others to learn from.

The Alliance's support to local NGOs

This was one of the first support packages offered by the Alliance to a local NGO and the need came at a timely moment when the Alliance was considering how it could better serve the localisation agenda⁷ and support NGOs working at national and subnational level. Some of the key principles the Alliance is now working towards in this regard include:

- **Using technical experts that are as local as possible:** To enable a rich understanding of the challenges and context, the Alliance aims to use technical experts from the local, national, or regional context if possible. This helps to bridge linguistic and cultural divides and offers opportunities for capacity-strengthening in ways not always possible with international experts who spend only a short amount of time in-country. For the support provided to ARDI, it was not possible to identify a Somali expert despite attempts to do so, however the CMAM expert, based in Uganda and fluent in Swahili, was available.
- **Support to prioritise needs:** Local NGOs tend to have numerous technical and non-technical needs and there is a need to prioritise and determine how the Alliance is best placed to support. Like many local NGOs, ARDI had many requirements so the Alliance worked closely with ARDI to identify the priorities the Alliance could support. ARDI also had several non-technical needs, including support with programme management, financial management, and resource mobilisation. As the Alliance focuses on technical needs, it was neither in its scope or mandate to accommodate these requests. However, the Alliance does aim to connect local NGOs with

other entities that might be able to find support, such as the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Civil Society Alliance and the in-country Nutrition Cluster. While the Alliance cannot always support with all requests, a key aspect of the localisation agenda is to build partnerships with organisations that provide such non-technical training and capacity-strengthening and who may be able to offer that support.

- **Consider funding barriers:** Local NGOs often struggle to access funding to implement nutrition programmes and the impact of the technical support given is less likely to be realised without local NGOs being able to 'put into practice' what they have learned. On the other hand, there is a potential that increased technical skills and capacity can make local organisations more attractive for future funding opportunities. Such aspects are considered when developing a support package for local organisations and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. As the Alliance is not able to fund technical support to all local organisations, it needs to ensure resources are being used efficiently. One way of doing this is by working with consortiums of local NGOs and through in-country Nutrition Clusters to provide broader support to more than one organisation at a time.

What is next for the Alliance in supporting local NGOs?

The Alliance is committed to working with local NGOs to meet their technical needs through a variety of approaches. The Alliance is constantly looking to improve this support. From the experience of working with ARDI, the Alliance has been reflecting on the importance of finding experts with the appropriate language skills and working closely with in-country experts. The Alliance is currently working on developing systems to allow it to tap into local resources (including consultants and the local offices of Technical Support Team partners) in an efficient manner. This is already happening in practice, for example Action Against Hunger Somalia is currently delivering support to another local NGO (Juba Valley Development Centre) on behalf of the Alliance on IMAM training. The Alliance is also looking to partner with other entities that focus on organisational capacity strengthening to complement the work that it does.

To find out more about the Alliance or to ask a question or request support directly, please click here:

<https://ta.nutritioncluster.net/request-support> or email a member of the Alliance team at technicalalliance@nutritioncluster.net



A mother and her child receiving a counseling session in Dolow, Somalia

⁷ The localisation agenda is part of the Grand Bargain, a set of 51 commitments made by governments and humanitarian aid agencies at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, which commits to "making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary.