

# How can local NGOs receive technical support?



This brief aims to highlight to local NGOs how the GNC Technical Alliance (the Alliance) can support their technical needs by describing how support was provided to the African Relief Development Initiative in Somalia in 2021.

*This 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.*

## The African Relief Development Initiative's request for technical support from the Alliance

The African Relief Development Initiative (ARDI) is a non-governmental, non-profit and voluntary 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 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 urgent need to address the technical gaps in the nutrition team – a capacity 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 non-technical areas (including programme management, financial management and resource mobilisation). 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 (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.

## What is the Alliance?

The Alliance is a global mechanism that aims to provide predictable, timely and coordinated nutrition technical assistance to meet the nutrition needs of people affected by and at risk of emergencies. The Alliance supports nutrition practitioners by offering remote support from a broad range of consultants and technical advisors, in-country deployment of advisors and access to global experts on a number of thematic areas to develop interim guidance in the absence of available guidelines or when support is needed to contextualise existing guidelines.

## How can you access support from the Alliance?

ARDI was able to discover the GNC and the Alliance through a general Google search which led to the Alliance website. The information on the website enabled ARDI to see the work of the Alliance and to find the 'Request Support' button which ARDI's CEO, Abdi Moge Mohamed, used to request technical support. He promptly received

feedback from a member of the Technical Support Team (TST) and a conversation began as to how the Alliance could best support ARDI.

Abdi noted that he was initially surprised that the Alliance was able to offer support, having previously unsuccessfully approached a number of international NGOs for support with capacity strengthening and training packages.

## What support can the Alliance offer?

The Alliance offers technical support in a number of areas including, but not limited to, assessments, IYCF-E, the management of small and nutritionally at-risk infants and mothers, the community-based management of acute malnutrition, assessments and SBC. When determining how the Alliance can support organisations, it listens to the requester describe their programmes and gaps and works with them to develop appropriate strategies to meet their support needs.

In the example of ARDI, the conversations on how the Alliance could support were made easier by the fact that ARDI had already conducted a capacity gap analysis with staff members and thus had a good understanding of where they needed support. Like many local NGOs, ARDI had many needs, particularly in relation to institutional capacity building and the Alliance worked closely with ARDI to prioritise those gaps that could be addressed. It was determined that a step approach would be used whereby IMAM training would be given initially and potential follow-up training on IYCF would be considered.

ARDI also had a number of non-technical needs including support with programme management, financial management and resource mobilisation. As the Alliance focuses on technical needs, it was not in a position to accommodate these requests. However, with needs outside of the scope and mandate of the Alliance, the Alliance connected ARDI with other entities of support such as the SUN Civil Society Network in Somalia and the Somalia Nutrition Cluster. These connections will hopefully help ARDI with some of its non-technical needs. While the Alliance cannot always support with all requests, it aims to facilitate partnerships with organisations that provide such non-technical training and capacity building and who may be able to offer that support.

*'Local NGOs can reach areas that iNGOs can't access, they have local understandings, are closer to communities. The only problem is that they lack skills and need much more resources.'*

**- Abdi Moge Mohamed**

## What are some of the challenges that local NGOs face and how does the Alliance work to overcome these?

Working in emergency contexts is often very challenging and those working within local NGOs face unique difficulties. Recognising this, the technical support given to ARDI was flexible, for example by shifting the timings of training and adapting training methods when needed. To enable a rich understanding of the challenges and context, the Alliance aims to use technical experts from the local, national or regional context. For the support provided to ARDI, it was not possible to identify a Somali expert, however Martha, the TST's IMAM expert, based in Uganda and a fluent Swahili speaker, was available. This helped to bridge some linguistic and cultural divides.

While Martha spoke Swahili, there were still some language barriers (a likely challenge with support to many local NGOs) and the Alliance tried to overcome these barriers by engaging members of the ARDI team who could act as translators for those who did not speak English or Swahili and by modifying training to make it more accessible and relevant to the ARDI team. Making resources accessible in as many languages as possible is currently an ongoing priority for the Alliance.

Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the training was conducted remotely and challenges were faced in terms of access to computers and internet connectivity issues. During training, these were mitigated by trainees sharing or borrowing laptops and Martha was flexible in shifting training to times when internet connectivity was less challenging. While this format was not ideal, it showed that it is possible to conduct training remotely and offered lessons for future support.

## What about funding?

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 learnt during training and capacity building. On the other hand, there is a potential that increased technical skills and capacities can make local organisations more attractive for future funding opportunities for programming. Such aspects are considered when developing a support package for local organisations and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

In the example of ARDI, it was felt that, given its vision and enthusiasm, technical support could leverage and increase the portfolio of funding available to it. ARDI saw the support as a potential catalyst for future funding and showed commitment to the training by offering some of the organisation's own resources to ensure that volunteers attended all the training sessions.

As the Alliance is not in a position to fund technical support to all local organisations, it needs to ensure that it is using its resources well. 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 happens after support is provided?

The Alliance is intended to be a stopgap technical support mechanism for emergency contexts. As such, support tends to be short term (6-8 weeks). The Alliance aims to create the conditions for local NGOs, following training and support, to carry out work to a high standard of quality or find further support through other mechanisms (such as through SUN Civil Society Networks). That being said, the Alliance does maintain a relationship post-support and is available to advise if future technical needs are identified although it aims to do so in a way that empowers local NGOs to support themselves.

In the example of ARDI, following training, staff were able to train caregivers and other community members to screen and refer children for malnutrition 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 malnourished children to health facilities and contributed to children being presented earlier which impacted positively on treatment outcomes. Through the support, Abdi Moge Mohamed was also able to establish broader links with the GNC and participated in the GNC Annual Meeting. This engagement facilitated networking opportunities for ARDI with numerous iNGOs and provided a platform to share ARDI's experiences for others to learn from.

*'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.'*  
- **Abdi Moge Mohamed**

## What is next for the Alliance in supporting local NGOs?

The Alliance is committed to supporting local NGOs to meet their technical needs. It is currently exploring different support packages and ways of effectively supporting such NGOs to meet their goals and objectives.

From the experience of working with ARDI, the Alliance has been reflecting on the importance of finding good language support 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 TST partner local offices) in an efficient manner. The Alliance is also looking to partner with other organisations 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 at: [technicalalliance@nutritioncluster.net](mailto:technicalalliance@nutritioncluster.net)