TECHNICAL STRATEGY
2016-2020
COPYRIGHT

© ACF International – February 2017

Reproduction is permitted providing the source is credited, unless otherwise specified. If reproduction or use of textual and multimedia data (sound, images, software, etc.) are submitted for prior authorization, such authorization will cancel the general authorization described above and will clearly indicate any restrictions on use.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Overall purpose</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Guiding principles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conceptual framework</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Generating technical knowledge</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Managing technical knowledge</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3. Utilising technical knowledge</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strategic priority areas (2016-2020)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Putting knowledge at the heart of the organization is critical to the success of our Operational, Advocacy and Communication efforts.
INTRODUCTION

Despite significant improvements in child health in recent years, undernutrition remains widespread: 165 million children under five years of age are still suffering from stunting, and 52 million from wasting; and more than 2 billion people have micronutrient deficiencies, mainly vitamin A, iron, iodine & zinc. The scale and nature of the problem make it one of the greatest global health challenges faced by humanity today.

While many of these problems are technical, scientific and programmatic in nature, their solutions are often political. Accelerating and improving efforts to address undernutrition in all its forms will require Action Against Hunger to build on its technical capacity more than ever, translating evidence into knowledge and knowledge into operational and influencing action.

This five-year strategy (2016-2020) was developed by our Technical Departments to help define the role of our technical work in a changing landscape. It describes how putting knowledge at the heart of the organization will be critical to the success of our Operational, Advocacy and Communications efforts. The Strategy acts as a critical means of bringing together other key organisational documents:

- **Action Against Hunger International Strategic Plan (2016-2020):** our strategic plan provides the overall purpose and vision of the organization (the why and what). The Technical Strategy aims to define the technical challenges, solutions and ways of working (the how).

- **Action Against Hunger Research Strategy (2016-2020):** our Research Strategy provides a framework to guide and prioritise the contributions of our research for generating evidence. The Technical Strategy articulates how the will be complemented by other sources to generate the organisational knowledge base.

- **Action Against Hunger Technical Agendas:** our different Technical Agendas developed by technical teams will provide a time-bound roadmap for critical actions in specific domains. The Technical Strategy will provide a broader framework to describe the sources of information for the preparation of these Agendas and the means by which they will be implemented and rolled-out.

In addition, the Technical Agendas will be aligned with similar strategies developed by the Operations, Advocacy and Communications Departments.
OVERALL PURPOSE

1. OVERALL PURPOSE

The overall purpose of this strategy is to outline ways in which Action Against Hunger can work that maximizes and optimizes our entire organisational technical capacity. The strategy redefines our technical remit. Rather than a departmental responsibility, Action Against Hunger’s technical work is a mainstream feature of the organisation as a whole. Therefore, the strategy does not belong only to the Technical Department or the International Management Group (IMG); it is a cross-cutting strategy for all staff across Action Against Hunger.

At the heart of this vision is a recognition that knowledge – how it is generated, managed, exchanged, and disseminated – will be critical to our success in the next five years. The effective and systematic management and use of knowledge will inform analysis and decision-making which in turn will lead to the implementation of informed, relevant and innovative actions. Knowledge is what will ensure that Action Against Hungers actions are relevant, and knowledge will provide the guidance on when why and how to generate new ideas and models.

The role of the Dechnical Departments in this context is to become enablers in the different processes, guiding and supporting them as necessary across the organisation. This strategy provides a framework for how this support can and should be provided.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The relevance of this Technical Strategy over the next five years will demand tactical and practical flexibility but also the capacity to consistently apply a set of core guiding principles that will define our own approach. In implementing this strategy, Action Against Hunger’s technical work will consistently be:

• **Action-Driven**: our technical work is a means to a greater end. Achieving global impact will demand political and operational action, and our technical and research identity should be driven first and foremost by what is relevant and needed by those delivering frontline services.

• **People-Centred**: our technical work will be driven by people for people. This demands a people-centred approach that ensures the questions we tackle are those that matter to the people they affect, and that those that are tasked with doing it are adequately supported by the organisation.
• **Simple-Put**: our capacity to operate at scale and have a truly global impact will force Action Against Hunger to tackle increasingly complex challenges. Our technical input must enable the organisation to generate solutions that are as simple as possible and as complex as necessary.

• **Quality-Focused**: our technical efforts will optimize the impact and effectiveness of all our interventions. In a continuous process of adapting and learning we will seek new opportunities, tools and techniques to change undernutrition and hunger.

• **Jointly-Done**: our technical leadership will be determined by our capacity to complement the work of others and to collaborate in the implementation of our own work. The question is therefore not *if* we engage others in our technical endeavours, but *how we do so*.

Knowledge – how it is generated, managed, exchanged, and disseminated – will be critical to our success in the next five years.
The Technical Strategy is framed around our most important technical asset: knowledge. It focuses on how knowledge is generated and how it is used and promoted. The first part centres on the internal and external mechanisms for generating evidence and translating it into knowledge. The second part focuses on the ways in which this knowledge is used to guide the way Action Against Hunger works across its three core areas as outlined in the Theory of Change (ISP 2016-2020): Action Against Hunger own programmes (Operations), its technical support for others (Exchange) and its influencing initiatives (Advocacy).
3.1. GENERATING TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

One of the biggest and most significant challenges faced by a technical organization like Action Against Hunger is ensuring the relevance of the knowledge we generate. To succeed we must balance two critical elements. The first is the timely identification of technical questions, both at a global and a local level. The second is the capacity to generate new ideas that complement existing answers provided by others. If we succeed in managing these two elements we can ensure that the technical information generated is as robust as it is useful, and we can become a leading technical organisation by not only answering the critical technical challenges of today, but also anticipating and addressing the challenges of tomorrow. This process begins with a capacity to monitor performance and learn from our own experiences in the field.
Increasing beneficiary engagement in the monitoring and evaluation process will be crucial for integrating their perspectives in our analysis.
In the next five years we will:

- **Improve the uptake of new technologies**: We must harness the power of new technologies and build on the successful application of tools such as ODK, KACHE, mHealth, geographic mapping and the application of other data collection and analysis tools. In the 2016-2020 period we will promote and accelerate the uptake of these technologies.

- **Improve our evidence on impact**: Our monitoring and evaluation mechanisms provide a wealth of information on input, process and output indicators. We will invest in the harmonisation and systematisation of information systems, as mechanisms to assess the outcomes and impact of our work, integrating intelligent data management in our approach. In the 2016-2020 period we will improve our outcome monitoring and invest in new methodologies for impact assessment embedded in programmes.

- **Expand our evidence on cost-effectiveness**: Action Against Hunger’s investments in Cost-Effectiveness Analysis over the last five years have already helped us to generate unique information about our capacity to offer measurable value for money. In the 2016-2020 period we will continue and expand these investments, growing our evidence base about the different cost calculations options of our interventions, and maximising dissemination as part of our organisational evidence on value for money.

- **Increase beneficiary engagement**: We are increasingly matching investments in quantitative data collection with investments in more qualitative, participatory mechanisms for engaging with communities that we work with. This will reinforce not only their autonomy, but also our accountability to foster a culture of exchange with the targeted populations. In the 2016-2020 period we will increase our investment in socio-cultural analysis and strengthen mixed-method approaches that successfully integrate beneficiary perspectives in our analysis.

- **Improve the formulation of hypotheses**: Information generated through M&E systems and ad hoc assessments are critical in enabling us to identify emerging themes and questions. In the 2016-2020 period, we will strengthen the capacity of these systems to measure progress and become a constant source of critical and innovative hypotheses to guide our research initiatives.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE (B)

M&E systems and assessments should provide Action Against Hunger with a unique source of technical information, questions and hypothesis. How we respond to this information is critical and, in many ways, begins by triangulating this information with existing evidence generated by other organisations. Improving our ability to do so will not only support frontline programmes by linking them with the latest technical thinking, but it will also be critical to optimising our own research activities.

In the next five years we will:

• Capitalise on our engagement with inter-agency platforms: We are involved in a range of technical and operational platforms and groups, including Clusters, Technical Advisory Groups and other formal and informal technical consultation groups. In the 2016-2020 period we will improve the way in which emerging thinking from these different platforms informs our policy and practice on key areas of work.

• Improve our understanding of available evidence: A comprehensive understanding of the state of evidence will be difficult to achieve and sustain unless it remains focused. In the 2016-2020 period we will generate ongoing evidence-mapping on critical areas of work including (but not limited to) the prevention and treatment of acute undernutrition leading to achieving nutrition security for all.

INTERNAL RESEARCH (C)

The more we understand the contexts we work in, generate hypotheses, and cross-check existing evidence to identify potential solutions already available, the more we can ensure that our investments in research are operationally relevant. But we must go further; we must also ensure that our research is complementary and useful to the wider sector, and that we are able to generate evidence that influences opinion in our areas of expertise. If we succeed in doing so, our research function can become pivotal in helping us to improve the quality of the sector and contribute to its effectiveness and competitiveness.

---

¹ Research uptake includes all those activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policy-makers, practitioners and other development actors (DFID 2013).
² More details can be found in ACF research guidelines (ACF 2016).
³ ACF Research Guidelines provide further details on how to create and integrate a research uptake strategy (ACF 2016).
In the next five years we will:

• **Reposition research within our broader ways of working:** We will frame the introduction of new ideas and the development of solutions not as the end of the process but rather as the beginning of learning and excellence. In the 2016-2020 period we will reposition research as a reflective pathway, an ongoing learning and feedback loop, where the statement “we have always done it like that” is no longer sufficient to guide our work.

• **Strengthen research partnerships:** In 2015, Action Against Hunger had an estimated 62 research partners, including academic institutions and implementing partners. Many of these partnerships have extended over multiple research projects, creating the conditions for more strategic collaboration. In the 2016-2020 period Action Against Hunger will identify and strengthen partnerships with academic partners, in particular those in its countries of operation. Partnerships will aim to strengthen the design and the implementation of research activities, and to increase the visibility, outreach and standing of Action Against Hunger as a research actor.

• **Increase availability and uptake of research findings:** Maximising the impact of Action Against Hunger’s research will begin with improving the way in which studies are designed, which in turn will improve the capacity to generate policy-changing outputs including (but not limited to) peer-reviewed publications. Ensuring that these papers are accessible and used is equally important; Action Against Hunger has historically been effective at generating scientific evidence but rarely has the organisation matched the investments made on evidence-generation with similar commitments to its subsequent uptake and use. In the 2016-2020 period we will increase the emphasis on research uptake by ensuring that all research projects have a clearly defined (internal and external) research uptake strategy and the resources to deliver it. We will explore the utilization of new tools and channels to disseminate the evidence generated in our research projects according to the targeted audience in order to ensure dissemination and utilisation.

### 3.2. MANAGING TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

Action Against Hunger’s capacity to translate strong technical knowledge into action depends largely on how knowledge is managed and disseminated both internally and externally. Although these are stages in a continuum, separating them out may can help to identify concrete needs and actions.
**KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (D)**

Action Against Hunger has a wealth of technical knowledge and information, yet this can be difficult to access and tap into. When it comes to our technical knowledge; i) it is often undocumented and residing with individuals or teams; ii) when it is documented it may be part of narratives that make it difficult to extract the implications or applications in other contexts, and; iii) there is no open repository of all documents produced. These challenges must be addressed in order to promote wider uptake and the use of available knowledge within the organisation and beyond.

**In the next five years we will:**

- **Strengthen documentation of lessons and support efforts to mainstream them across our activities:** While quantitative and project-based documentation continues to be done on a regular basis, documentation of experiences and learning is less so. This reflects a number of issues, including (but not limited to) the lack of time among many of those who undergo these experiences and limited support in doing so. The application and mainstreaming of the lessons that are identified has proven just as challenging. In the 2016-2020 period we will strengthen documentation of experiences and practices and will mobilise additional resources to support the process of incorporating lessons into regular programming.

- **Establish a centralised system for knowledge and information management:** Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) at Action Against Hunger is currently the responsibility of multiple teams across multiple layers of the organisation. Whilst KIM does and should continue to build on decentralised expertise across the organisation, we need a common system to act as a repository and exchange platform. This will improve overall performance, facilitate the sharing of lessons and encourage critical thinking, and reinforce the ability to apply past learning. In the 2016-2020 period we will design and launch a centralised KIM system with the support and participation of other key departments across the organisation.

**DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE (E)**

Strengthening our capacity to document experience and practice, and creating a more accessible repository of this information needs to be followed with proactive efforts to share this knowledge internally and externally. Action Against Hunger produces a wide range of publications but they rarely have comprehensive and resourced dissemination strategies. Ensuring that dissemination strategies are developed and resourced is critical, not only for improving the dissemination of knowledge, but also for ensuring that organisational thinking is operationalised and mainstreamed.
In the next five years we will:

- **Boost our contribution to communities of practices:** As a key mechanism for strengthening our knowledge management, we will contribute to a more informed dialogue with decision-makers through enhancing knowledge sharing and learning. In the 2016-2020 period we will accelerate the flow of knowledge, addressing knowledge gaps and fostering knowledge partnerships while emphasizing practical and active learning.

- **Improve access to existing material:** Action Against Hunger’s technical material continues to be valued by internal and external stakeholders, but accessing it can be a challenge. Establishing a centralized KIM system will address some of the internal challenges, but other challenges will remain. In the 2016-2020 period we will invest in and support the construction of a creative system to foster the systematic sharing of our technical outputs with external stakeholders. During this period we will also widen the range of outputs produced (e.g. policies, briefing papers, summaries and case studies) and improve translation as a means of facilitating access to key information by its intended audience.

- **Ensure the development and implementation of dissemination strategies for Action Against Hunger material:** As part of the process of determining whether new material is produced, and improving access to it, the production of all new material must include a carefully developed dissemination strategy. In the 2016-2020 period we will support our technical teams to ensure that all material outputs have a customised and resourced dissemination strategy. This will be closely linked to the research uptake strategies, and take a more coordinated and coherent approach to the organisation of internal events and participation in external ones (e.g. meetings, conferences), and our messaging and position therein.

### 3.3. UTILISING TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

The above sections have described how we will build on our technical expertise to generate information and knowledge, and how we will strengthen the way in which we manage and disseminate knowledge. But for these processes to facilitate actual change, we will need to optimise how our key pillars (operations, advocacy and exchange) are utilised towards the common aim of achieving nutrition security for all through multi-sectoral services delivered at a scale commensurate to need.
ACTION AGAINST HUNGER OPERATIONS (F)

Action Against Hunger’s technical knowledge can play a critical role in ensuring the relevance of our operations, by developing and adopting new approaches, and assessing the relevance and effect of these responses on the people they seek to support. These three elements alone will not drive a scale-up of our operations, but they remain critical to any organisational desire to increase our reach by supporting an operational loop of adaptation and change.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the next five years we will:

- **Increase the appropriateness and relevance of Action Against Hunger operations:** The knowledge generated by us about the scale of problems (e.g. prevalence of acute undernutrition) and the main drivers behind them (e.g. causal pathways) are critical to ensuring the implementation of relevant interventions. Our understanding of internal and external evidence is critical to steer how interventions are designed and configured based on evidence-based practices. In the 2016-2020 period we will increase the use and application of this information and strengthen the links between context analysis and programme design.

- **Promote the prototyping and piloting of new operational models:** Drawing from our technical knowledge to promote existing models of intervention will not be sufficient to meet new challenges, unless the knowledge can also be used to generate hypotheses about alternative operational models. This technical knowledge must be translated into technical guidance to support the implementation of new operational prototypes and models. In the 2016-2020 period we will strengthen the capacity of the organisation to generate new operational models and will work closely with Operations and Advocacy teams across the organisation to promote their piloting and application to maximise our reach and impact.

- **Improve performance tracking in Action Against Hunger operations:** Ensuring that our operations are relevant and appropriate will depend partly on their ability to successfully address the problems originally identified. Current M&E systems are able to generate information to document progress against agreed objectives, but this information is rarely used for real-time programme adaptation and outcome measurement. In the 2016-2020 period we will mainstream recently developed multi-sectoral M&E Guidelines to standardise the information available to programme managers and decision makers, and support them in the analysis of this information and its use to adapt programme design and implementation.

EXCHANGE & TRANSFER (G)

In the last decade the role of Action Against Hunger has increasingly shifted away from direct implementation to a broader function as technical advisors, facilitators and supporters of national and other stakeholders. Much of this role reflects the need to influence and strengthen national systems as a critical way of achieving sustainable impact at scale. Our technical knowledge has been a key asset driving this feature of our work. If we want to take this role further, we need to consolidate and strengthen our capacity and effectiveness in supporting an ever increasing range of partners, often with increasing scope.
In the next five years we will:

• **Empower Action Against Hunger staff to be technical facilitators:** If we are to grow our exchange and transfer of capacities, we need to move away from an approach built on the capacity of individuals to transfer their individual knowledge, to a model of institutionalisation and empowerment to transfer organisational knowledge. In the 2016-2020 period we will develop a comprehensive capacity building strategy to expand the capacity of our staff to act as facilitators in the transfer of knowledge. The development of this approach will be done in collaboration with Human Resources, Operations and Advocacy Departments, and is expected to include a variety of different tools, approaches and skills development for our teams and external partners.

• **Establish strategic partnerships with key global and national stakeholders:** Whilst NGOs continue to play a key role in the support of national authorities, other stakeholders, including UN agencies and academic bodies, continue to act as a primary conduit for technical direction. Over the last couple of years, Action Against Hunger has succeeded in formalising technical support partnerships with WHO, UNICEF and global and national academic institutions which in turn have enabled us to influence the definition and content of the official technical support provided by these agencies. In the 2016-2020 period we will build on these partnerships and expand them to include support at national level as a means of amplifying our technical inputs and steer.

Our technical knowledge has been a key asset for influencing and strengthening national systems
ADVOCACY & INFLUENCING (H)

Advocacy and influencing has become another critical means of delivering change at a larger scale and providing more sustainable solutions as part of national, regional and global policies. Action Against Hunger is in a unique position to build on its technical know-how to implement advocacy activities grounded on evidence, and to use this evidence to gain legitimacy when calling for change. To do so effectively, the synergies between our technical and advocacy work must be strengthened and closely coordinated.

In the next five years we will:

• Ensure that our advocacy priorities are guided by our technical knowledge: Action Against Hunger is regularly confronted with the need to influence policy and bring about political change in a range of areas including the political, economic and social causes of hunger. Our position on issues concerning our areas of operation must be grounded in our technical knowledge and priorities, and must strive, whenever possible, to be evidence-based. Technical teams will support the advocacy departments in the development of advocacy asks, ensuring their relevance and coherence with our technical and field experience. In the 2016-2020 period we will ensure that our influencing action centred on those areas and issues where we have a legitimate voice based on our technical expertise and frontline experience (see Strategic Priorities 2016-2020 below).

• Focus our advocacy and influencing efforts to create the conditions for operational scale up: The technical knowledge and evidence generated by Action Against Hunger will go a long way to identifying needs and opportunities at country level. In many instances, these will serve to highlight the need to increase the reach of our operational responses. In the 2016-2020 period we will strengthen the process of translating technical evidence and information into clear operational recommendations for adapting and/or scaling-up operations, and using our advocacy capacity to ensure support and buy-in (internally and externally) for its implementation, to ensure that relevant solutions proposed by Action Against Hunger are implemented at larger scale by the organization or other actors.
4. STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS (2016-2020)

Action Against Hunger will continue to work in the necessary areas to achieve nutrition security for all, including but not limited to: prevention and treatment of undernutrition; resilience; system strengthening (health systems, water governance systems, seed systems, etc.); market-based programming; social behaviour change and communication; sustainable livelihoods and agriculture; early childhood development; social protection; and water, sanitation and hygiene. In doing so, we will continue to promote a multi-sectoral approach bringing together different approaches to effectively understand and address the context-specific drivers of undernutrition.

To support the implementation of these different efforts, we will generate a series of inter-related technical agendas for action. These will provide time-specific priorities for the organisation, assisting in the identification of concrete knowledge gaps and actions for Action Against Hunger to focus on during the 2016-2020 period. These are expected to include (but are not limited to):

- **SAM2020 - Scaling up Treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition**: The agenda outlines six critical steps to ensure the scale-up of SAM treatment worldwide as well as Action Against Hunger’s own contribution to making these happen. Key pillars of the SAM2020 Agenda include: 1) SAM must be redefined as a public health priority; 2) Resource mobilization for SAM globally and nationally must be increased; 3) The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of SAM management must be improved; 4) Availability and accessibility of SAM management services must be increased; 5) The capacity of health staff to manage SAM must be improved, and; 6) Quality, availability and utilisation of SAM information must be improved.

- **Wash, Nutrition & Health 2020**: The agenda aims to improve our health and nutrition outcomes by implementing strategies of integration within WaSH, health and nutrition by 2020. This technical agenda aims to: 1) formulate Action Against Hunger’s positioning, technical analysis and propositions on WASH, Nutrition and Health integration, and; 2) support our Health, Nutrition and WASH teams in developing Health programmes in missions. The agenda also describes four specific changes necessary to systematically consider or acknowledge, in order to ensure and improve the impact of these interventions on undernutrition. Based on the increasing commitment to adopt a multi-sectoral approach, specifically between WASH & Nutrition, it brings a broader vision by incorporating health concerns that require further attention and development of health programs in missions. This agenda analyses the main challenges faced and the best adapted solutions to overcome them as a common goal for 2020.
• **Climate Change Adaptation 2020:** The agenda aims to strengthen Action Against Hunger’s support for climate adaptation while outlining the way forward to achieve disasters and climate resilience through multi-sectoral interventions. The agenda encompasses programmes, research and advocacy. It is organised around six key pillars: 1) Improve the understanding of climate-related challenges on hunger and undernutrition; 2) Strengthen multi-sectoral surveillance and early warning systems; 3) Enhance preparedness in the face of climate-related shocks and seasonal hardships; 4) Manage climate-related risks and enhancing people and community resilience; 5) Establish disaster and climate risk finance as a development and humanitarian priority, and; 6) Enhance multi-sectoral coordination towards an improved preparedness.

• **Chronic Malnutrition:** Stunting, also known as chronic malnutrition, has been adopted as a target to develop within our interventions. To help in these efforts, the agenda provides seven distinct pillars to help Action Against Hunger in its efforts to address chronic malnutrition: 1) Redefine stunting as a nutritional impediment to achieve sustainable development; 2) Resource mobilisation for stunting globally and nationally; 3) The complexity of chronic malnutrition calls for a comprehensive analysis, a multi-sectoral approach and multi-level interventions; 4) Improve the quality of nutrition-specific and –sensitive interventions in a multi-sectoral framework against stunting; 5) Research must be improved/achieve our understanding of the relationship between micronutrient deficiencies and stunting; 6) Environmental enteric dysfunction must be adopted in order to defeat stunting, and; 7) A better understanding of the relationship between stunted and wasting is needed to design efficient programs.
We will continue to promote a multi-sectoral approach bringing together different visions to effectively understand and address the context-specific drivers of undernutrition.