Summary
From a programmatic point of view, the scale-up of strategies and interventions for improved maternal and child nutrition is largely depending on whether it is accepted by government as an integral part of the primary health care basic services package. Recognizing the importance of nutrition commodities in scaling up nutrition interventions in the prevention and management of the various form of undernutrition, it is anticipated that full integration of the corresponding supply chain system (e.g. for vitamin A capsules, micronutrients supplements, RUTF, Therapeutic Milk, ReSoMal, etc.) is required to ensure sustainability and accountability by relevant national authorities.

During the last couple of years a range of independent nutrition supply chain reviews have been conducted at country level to identify ways to optimise the nutrition supply chain operations and integrate (part) of the operation into the mainstream national and government driven supply chains1. These reviews are mainly conducted on one aspect of nutrition programming – the management of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) – given the volumes and the pressing needs to understand the implications of current practices, challenges and opportunities for optimization and integration into health supply chain systems. Many of the principle findings are however applicable for nutrition supply chain management in general.

Based upon the above mentioned country reviews, the Nutrition Supply Chain (NSC) Practitioners Exchange Forum will convene national practitioners and partners to share knowledge, experiences, innovative solutions and best practices in managing the nutrition supply chain including transition of third party driven operations into the mainstream national supply chain.

Further, the Forum will seek consensus for global directions mitigating bottlenecks for optimizing and/or integrating nutrition supply chains into national systems.

Background and Introduction
The attention to combatting undernutrition continues to grow with an increasing number of organisations and alliances involved in nutrition and food security programmes in health, education, water and sanitation and agricultural sectors. The long-term effects of maternal and child undernutrition on economic development are, increasingly, better documented and understood. Addressing undernutrition is defined by set of strategies, policies, interventions that aim at scaling up the prevention of all forms of undernutrition, the promotion of adequate

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1 Nutritional Supply Chain Integration Study (UNICEF, October 2015).
(accessible and quality) services for nutrition and the management of acute forms of malnutrition seen in development and humanitarian settings.

In the last few years, and independent of each other, a number of countries have initiated reviews to inform how they can optimise existing nutrition supply chains and integrate them into the national supply chain systems. This has led to a better understanding of how the different element of the supply chain – product selection, quality assurance, forecasting, procurement, inventory management, distribution and end user monitoring – can be optimised. These reviews are mainly conducted on one aspect of nutrition programming – the management of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) – given the volumes and the pressing needs to understand the implications of current practices, challenges and opportunities for optimization and integration into health supply chain systems. Many of the principle findings are however generally applicable for nutrition supply chain management.

Following the general premise of these reviews, it is noted that the programmatic shift from facility-based treatment of SAM to Community-based Management of Severe Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) early in this century was made possible by the introduction of Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) and Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC), which facilitated the scaling-up of treatment of severe acute malnutrition at the health facility and community levels. From a programmatic point of view, scaling-up of CMAM and other nutrition programmes is leading to gradual integration into the primary health care basic services package. Full integration of the nutrition programme corresponding supply chain system is however pending in most countries.

In most sub-Saharan African countries, UNICEF and partners have been instrumental in ensuring the supply of nutrition products. To illustrate the magnitude of the operation, UNICEF procured more than 8 million cartons of RUTF and a range of other nutrition related products in Africa corresponding to up to +8 million treatments for SAM during the period 2012-2015.

**Figure 1: RUTF procured and distributed by UNICEF by country, 2012 – 2015**
For various historical stop gap reasons, development partners have taken the lead in delivering life-saving commodities in the different countries. In many cases, these partners are responsible for all, or substantial parts of, the supply chain for nutrition products. Nutrition products are therefore often seen by government health staff as ‘external’ or emergency response products. Integration of the nutrition products supply chain in the regular supply chain is therefore an important contribution toward normalisation of these products leading to national accountability and sustainable systems.

Analysing the recent country experiences (UNICEF, October 2015), it is noted that integration is often limited to integrating the storage and distribution elements, while other Supply Chain Management elements are overlooked. Thorough knowledge and awareness about the full supply systems and its linkages to the broader health system contributes to better prospects for sustainable results.

A key element for ‘normalisation’ of nutrition products identified is inclusion on the National Essential Medicine List or similar regulatory mechanisms. Across the country reviews, this is seen as an important driver for mobilisation of other SCM elements typically managed by the local Central Medical Store in collaboration with relevant ministries.

It is further generally noted that for integration to take place, the need for health system strengthening efforts becomes inevitable. However, especially within nutrition programmes, funds for system strengthening interventions are not easily available. Most nutrition related funding is focused on procurement and programme issues typically related to emergency response or preparedness. This makes general supply chain planning and long term integration efforts difficult.

Most major nutrition funders indicate support to integration initiatives and are willing to invest in the necessary health systems strengthening, even when these are not directly linked to the nutrition programme. At country level, a large variety of integration processes are ongoing, often for parallel supply chains linked to the Immunization, HIV, Malaria and tuberculosis programmes. Thus, several opportunities for support to health system strengthening activities exist, if linkages are made and supply chain objectives clearly defined.

**Objectives of the NSC Practitioners Forum**

The Forum will convene NSC partners and practitioners from a number of countries to exchange knowledge, practical experiences, challenges, best practices, and outcomes from implementing NSC improvement initiatives whether related to optimization of existing nutrition supply chains or integration into mainstream national supply chains.

Specifically, the objectives of the NSC Practitioners Forum are:

- To provide an update on the recent Nutrition SCM optimization and integration studies and progress so far in implementing recommendations.
For countries to share knowledge and experiences around managing the Nutrition supply chain, implementing improvement initiatives and integration; what works well, what is not working and what are the opportunities.

For countries to have an opportunity to discuss innovative solutions to their specific challenges that will inform the way forward in implementation of recommendations, and how UNICEF and partners can support.

To explore the nutrition supply chain in the context of the health system strengthening environment vis a vis the emergency environment and moving towards broader more sustainable interventions.

Being hosted by UNICEF Supply Division (SD), the Forum will take advantage and include input from the core competencies and technical knowledge in SD as required, including related to quality assurance and ‘normalisation’ of nutrition products, system design, HR management, forecasting, warehousing and inventory management, supply chain monitoring and performance management.

Expected outcomes

1. Participants get an insight to how peers manage and monitor the nutrition SC, and how they have operationalised and monitored the supply chain
2. NSC transition initiatives - including what works well, and what does not work so well.
3. Participants have an understanding of the NSC in the context of HSS and opportunities for alignment and leveraging resources
4. A community of NSC practitioners is established and supported so that participants will have access to a community of NSC practitioners where theoretical and practical experience of the different countries and experts.
5. Forum statement related to NSC optimization and integration is presented and incorporated as part of the upcoming regional Nutrition Deep Dive meeting.

Participants
Supply Division / East and Southern Africa Regional Office / West and Central Africa Regional Office will invite countries selected with reference to ongoing and planned NSC projects. The initial Forum will be facilitated in English and include participation from Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia.

The Government participants include national Nutrition Managers, CEO of Central Medical Stores, and/or Members of a National Logistics Working Group. Typically two participants are invited from each country as nominated by Ministries of Health.

Donors, UN Agencies and other Partner Organisations/NGOs concerned with Nutrition Programmes including CIFF, DFID, EU, FFP, ECHO, OFDA, WB, WFP, ACF, MSF and SCF


**Country Case Stories**

Templates and support will be provided for country participants to prepare pre-workshop country case story assignments within three categories, such as (1) Designing the Supply Chain, (2) Managing the Supply Chain and (3) Funding the Supply Chain