

# Providing Technical Assistance for SUN Countries

## Ways of Working Within the TAN Programme

### Technical Assistance for Nutrition (TAN) Programme

The Technical Assistance for Nutrition (TAN) programme, funded with UK aid from the UK government, is a mechanism to provide technical assistance to Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) country governments and build capacities towards advancing their multisectoral nutrition agendas, in line with the SUN Movement principles and roadmap. TAN also strives to generate, learn from, adopt and disseminate knowledge of what works within and across countries in the SUN Movement. TAN partners are the SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS), Maximising the Quality of Scaling up Nutrition Plus (MQSUN+), Nutrition International (NI), and the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN). MQSUN+ and NI provide TA to SUN countries, while ENN provides knowledge management (KM) support to SUN countries, the TAN programme and SMS more broadly. MQSUN+ and NI TAN also support the SMS as needed.

Countries that have joined the SUN Movement can access TA delivered by MQSUN+ and NI. Most requests are generated through the SUN Focal Point (FP) and multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) members in order to facilitate a 'demand driven' model in which technical support and expertise reach countries in a timely, context-specific and relevant manner.

MQSUN+ is a consortium, led by PATH, of five expert organisations namely: PATH, Aga Khan University, Development Initiatives, DAI Global Health and NutritionWorks. TA requests are channelled to MQSUN+ from SUN Focal Points via the SMS. The MQSUN+ project builds on the previous MQSUN project which began in 2012 and provided TA to both DFID and SUN countries on the design, implementation and evaluation of evidence-based, nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programming and policies. TA by NI is provided through NI's Nutrition Technical Assistance Mechanism (NTEAM) through which government actors and other nutrition stakeholders at the country level can access NI's team of technical experts to deliver technical support. MQSUN+ and NI provide TA through different mandates, as described in the following section<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> MQSUN+ supports a wide range of countries including those deemed fragile and conflict affected states, where at times, remote support is given. They have supported Afghanistan, Burundi, Gabon, The Gambia, Guatemala, Guinea, Kyrgyz Republic, Madagascar, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Togo, Vietnam, and Yemen as well as budget analysis support for Bangladesh, Central Africa Republic, Gabon, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Togo and Zimbabwe. NI provides support to 20 SUN Countries, namely: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Lao PDR, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Within these countries, NI generally has an existing country presence or regional experience which facilitates a rich understanding of country realities and key country actors.

The TAN TA partners provide governments with short and long-term expert advice and support on best practices for scaling up their nutrition programmes on a wide range of topics including:

- Contextual analysis and policy review,
- Common results framework (CRF) development,
- Development of plans and reviews,
- Scale up support,
- Costing and financial tracking support,
- Advocacy,
- Evaluation and monitoring support, and
- Surveillance.

## The TAN approach to TA to SUN countries

### THE TAN TA PROCESS

The diagram below highlights the TA development process within TAN, outlining how the two TA providers receive requests.

For NI, TA requests are received through the SUN FPs and/ or country-level actors often as a result of consultations within the MSP, which facilitates the prioritisation of technical support needs. NI is an 'in-country' solution and does not receive requests from the SMS for in-country TA support.

In general, MQSUN+ TA is a mechanism of 'last resort.' Requests are made by the SUN focal point

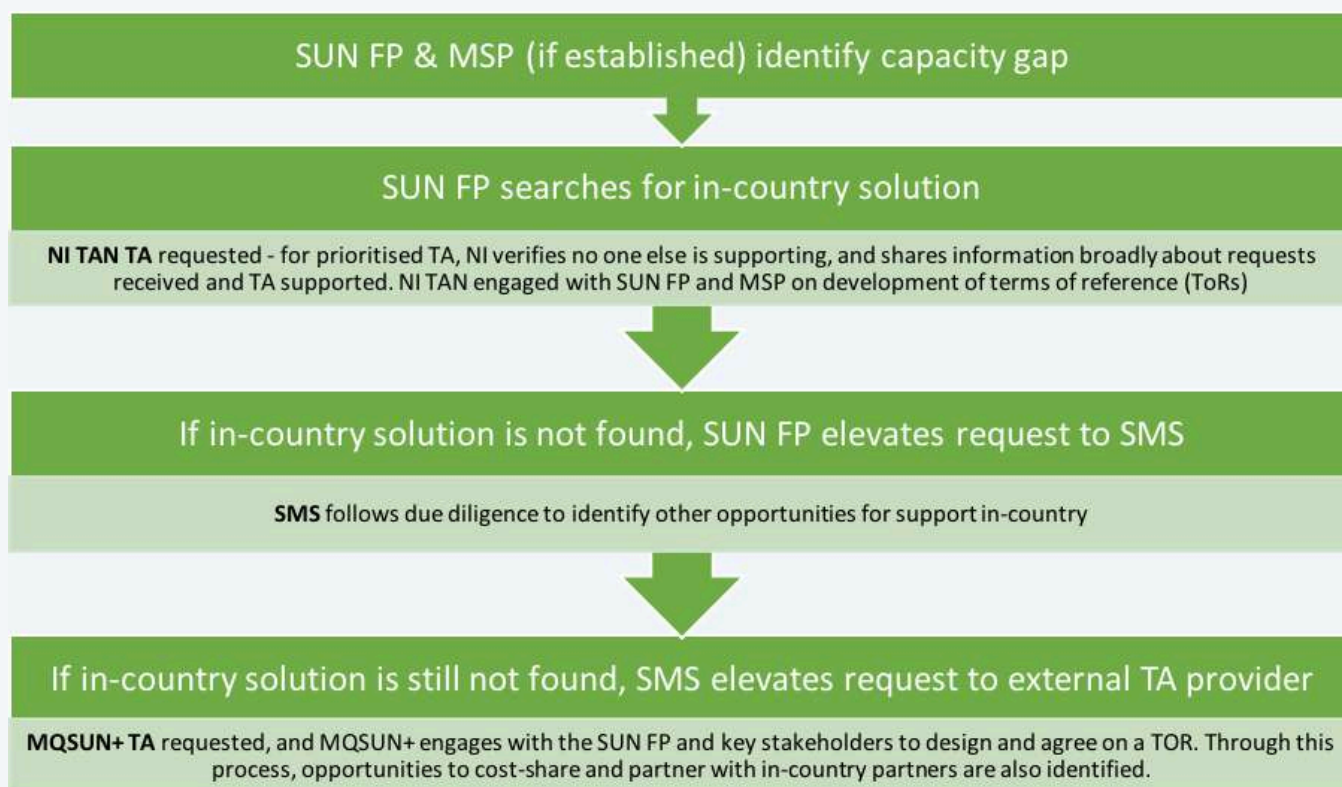
through the SMS in situations where in-country partners and resources are not sufficient or available. In both mechanisms, the country leads on the request and prioritises needs to be addressed.

An emphasis is also placed on first trying to find country-level solutions to capacity gaps—recognising that this is the most optimal solution to country challenges. A request may be modified or rejected by the SMS/ NI as part of a 'due diligence' process to assess country needs.

The process of developing a 'scope of work' is critical to ensure that all involved have a thorough understanding of the TA outputs and ways of working. The terms of reference (ToR) is developed together with the SUN FP and other country-level actors to document the intended scope of work. With MQSUN+ TA requests, ToRs are also approved by the SMS and DFID. Consultants for TA provision are then selected based on the identified skillset.

### THE EVOLUTION OF TAN TA APPROACHES

One of the major evolution threads within the TAN TA approach has been an evolving understanding of needs and structuring TA provision accordingly. For MQSUN+, this has meant shifting from providing ad hoc TA to a more **step-wise approach where phased TA is provided** to align with the SUN



## YEMEN

MQSUN and now MQSUN+ has been providing intermittent support to Yemen since 2013 to support the assessment of their nutrition situation and the development of their multisectoral national nutrition plan. From the beginning, MQSUN+ and Yemen decided to use a phased—and thereby adaptive—approach in the TA provision to allow for flexibility in the changing country context. As the ongoing conflict situation has shifted over the course of the TA, at the beginning of each new phase of work, MQSUN+ has been able to revisit where the country is—for example, by updating the country’s contextual analysis using new data—and thereby consider the most recent and relevant knowledge to inform the next steps of the process. This approach has also proven to be an asset allowing MQSUN+ to be more responsive to the country’s priorities and capacity needs.

The support centred on targeted technical guidance, structure and tools to enable the SUN-Yemen team to lead and facilitate in-country action and

collaboration for each step of the process. For example, during the previous phase of work, MQSUN+ conducted a costing readiness assessment<sup>2</sup>—adapted from a tool developed in Tajikistan—to support Yemen in gathering costing inputs and building stakeholder understanding of the requirements for full costing and prioritisation.

Based on the results of the assessment, the country used the identified gaps and provided guidance to convene stakeholders and gather consensus on the needed inputs. Since then, Yemen noted “the multisectoral plan has been updated and any new activities have been added to the common results framework, and soon we will start the [full] costing process.”<sup>3</sup> This ongoing capacity-building approach has supported the sustainability and uptake of the TA, as well as encouraged the country to move forward in multisectoral planning on their own.

<sup>2</sup> Costing Readiness Assessment - [mqsunplus.path.org/resources/assessing-readiness-for-costing-of-a-common-results-framework-or-national-nutrition-plan-guidance-note/](https://mqsunplus.path.org/resources/assessing-readiness-for-costing-of-a-common-results-framework-or-national-nutrition-plan-guidance-note/)

<sup>3</sup> Podcast on Conducting a Costing Readiness Assessment - [enonline.net/mediahub/podcast/yemencostingreadiness](https://enonline.net/mediahub/podcast/yemencostingreadiness)

planning cycle and roadmap. TA to a country is structured to build upon each preceding phase to continuously adapt to the country context as well as MQSUN+ global learnings. This allows for a tailored approach based on the country realities, priorities and capacities and validates adaptation to the

changing nature of these aspects. A phased approach further allows for flexibility and time in between phases in which countries can carry work forward themselves. NI has also seen the value of

sequencing and aligning TA provision in order to advance the nutrition agenda in certain countries. Offering a package of TA support (i.e., multiple

ToRs) or sequencing TA enables leveraging support and reinforces other ToRs that are being implemented within a similar timeframe.

Both MQSUN+ and NI TA processes have evolved to place more emphasis on an initial engagement and scope of work definition process with the SUN FP and county stakeholders. MQSUN+ has increasingly recognised the importance of this stage to define and agree on the practicalities of the TA—building on both existing country structures/ opportunities and identified capacity needs as well as MQSUN+ TA implementation knowledge from cross-country experience. For NI, this evolution has focused on broadening in-country discussions on need identification and prioritisation. This shift from primarily engaging with the SUN FP to consulting with the broader MSP helps to:

- Ensure a greater understanding of needs,
- Enhance communication with key partners,
- Grow acceptability amongst local stakeholders, and
- Increase transparency within the TA provision.

Both TA providers have also evolved thinking in relation to sustainability of work following TA provision. Using **local consultants** and ensuring that



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clear country counterparts are brought into TA processes have been prioritised as **mechanisms to enable sustainability**. For NI, the process has shifted to strong engagement with the SUN FP in selecting a TA provider. Throughout the TA assignments, both NI and MQSUN+ continuously use a ‘learning by doing’ approach, refining what works well and what needs to be adjusted in order to offer truly effective and adaptive TA in countries.

## TAN ‘Ways of Working’ within TA provision

### FOSTERING COUNTRY OWNERSHIP, LEADERSHIP AND A DEMAND-DRIVEN APPROACH TO TA PROVISION

One of the key principles of TA provision within the TAN programme is that of **country ownership**—recognising that when governments are the active party in identifying, selecting and overseeing TA, **the prospects of success and sustainability are likely to be much higher**. First and foremost, country-level actors are responsible for identifying their priorities for scaling up nutrition and consider where they require external TA. This ensures that the TA provided is truly seen as a priority within the country and the TA is driven by countries themselves rather than simply being seen as meeting global-level demands. During the ToR development, both MQSUN+ and NI place emphasis on collaborating with country stakeholders to define the scope of work, expectations and responsibilities during the TA provision. It is the government that is given the ultimate authority to sign off on outputs and milestones that have been achieved.

### ITERATIVE AND FLEXIBLE APPROACHES BY TA PROVIDERS TO CREATE IN-COUNTRY CHANGE

Recognising that national policy making is unpredictable and subject to numerous factors beyond the influence of TA providers, there is a need for a flexible and adaptive approach to TA provision. The TAN partners recognise the need to be responsive to the realities in country and adjust ToRs, timelines and workplans accordingly. This flexible approach to TA provision is particularly

## GUINEA

Since 2014, MQSUN+ has supported Guinea to review and update their multisectoral nutrition action plan and corresponding policy. Recent TA has focused on mapping high-impact interventions and opportunities for scale up and on strengthening advocacy and communication efforts for nutrition.

Through country-designated priorities, MQSUN+ and Guinea have been able to build on what already exists in-country—including a National Food and Nutrition Policy and draft Multisectoral Strategic Plan for Food and Nutrition. Across a series of country visits and consultations, the team facilitated dialogue and collected key data to map current nutrition-related interventions and relevant stakeholders to determine the roadblocks and opportunities that Guinea continued to face, which informed the update of the national nutrition policy and multisectoral strategic plan as well as the development of the nutrition advocacy and communication strategic plan.

The local consultant was vital in this process, as he was able contribute useful information to the mapping exercise from his extensive knowledge of the country context. MQSUN+ and Guinea utilised multiple participatory validation workshops to substantiate the updates to the key nutrition documents from relevant government ministries and country stakeholders. These workshops were co-funded and supported by UNICEF and the World

Food Program—which demonstrates a commitment from other country actors to contribute to and invest in this process.

Gender integration and vulnerability were also considered during the development and review of the nutrition policy and strategic plan, specifically looking at male involvement in nutrition activities, women’s empowerment and disabled persons—all proposed actions were considered for their

gender sensitivity and the role of men and women.

At validation workshops, men and women were both well represented, including in the sub-working groups and in the role of moderators. Responding to a country-identified need for broader advocacy capacity-strengthening, MQSUN+ recently conducted an advocacy training with key stakeholders, which aimed to ensure the participation and support of key audiences in advocacy efforts and resource mobilisation to implement the Multisectoral Strategic Plan for Food and Nutrition.



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## BANGLADESH

NI TAN began providing TA to Bangladesh in 2017, adopting an iterative engagement approach to better respond to the evolving needs of government. Initial TA supported the revitalisation and restructuring of the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC), the body responsible for nutrition governance, policy coordination and leadership, to fulfill their mandate to guide national level nutrition actions in the country. This government priority was aligned with the newly released Bangladesh National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN2) 2016-2025, which emphasizes the need for strengthening of multisectoral, multi-level collaboration and coordination under a revitalised BNNC.

In 2018, NI initiated new TA to support BNNC with specific aspects of the NPAN2, including development of the Advocacy Plan for Nutrition (aligned with Social and Behaviour Change Communication Strategy), and support to strengthen multisectoral nutrition monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Plans and resources developed under these TA (advocacy, MER) are

critical in longer term TA requests where government priorities and capacities may shift throughout the duration of the TA. A flexible approach underpinned by regular and clear communication among all parties helps to balance risk while ensuring value for money. This further enables TA provision to build on what already exists in country.

As part of this flexible approach, the **TAN partners recognise the importance of adapting to lessons learnt**. Both MQSUN+ and NI provide opportunities for TA consultants to feedback and document key learnings. Through such mechanisms, the TAN partners regularly reflect on what is working well, what needs to change and how best to adapt in the near-term, while being clear on what challenges remain in TA provision and adapt future TA based on these learnings.

### **STRENGTHENING EXISTING IN-COUNTRY MECHANISMS & UNBLOCKING 'ROADBLOCKS'**

TA provision aims to identify and strengthen what is already in place in countries, while at the same time, recognising that given that multisectoral

now being used by current TA (2019-20) to support broad operationalisation of the NPAN2.

Given the multi-stakeholder, multisectoral nature of the work, NI is working closely with BNNC to improve collaboration and cost-sharing with multiple in-country partners (UNICEF, WHO and Save the Children), supporting local ownership of TA outputs, and promoting nutrition leadership of BNNC. TA underway will enhance BNNC's institutional capacity through strengthened internal processes and systems, and locally owned resources which support improved long term planning and implementation of nutrition actions.

As requested by the Government, to build local capacity and ensure nutrition action at the local level the TA is strengthening subnational structures to effectively incorporate nutrition into their development plans, such as the District Multisectoral Nutrition Coordination Committees (DNCCs) and Upazilla Multisectoral Nutrition Coordination Committees (UNCCs). The suite of TA support to BNNC is enabling them to fulfill the mandate, supporting transition from national nutrition policy and leadership into nutrition actions at sub-national levels.

nutrition planning is still in its infancy, many countries face barriers in driving forward SUN processes. TAN partners help countries overcome such obstacles, such as a lack of high-quality data or limited in-country technical capacity. By placing emphasis on conducting a situational or contextual analysis at the start of TA provision, systems to be strengthened and roadblocks are identified and targeted TA activities to address specific barriers are developed—thereby enabling countries to make progress on multisectoral action plans to scale up nutrition. Ongoing assessments of risks, challenges and opportunities throughout TA provision also help TA providers adjust their approach and 'course-correct' to optimise chances of success.

### **FOCUSING ON CAPACITY STRENGTHENING OF IN-COUNTRY PARTNERS/ TA RECIPIENTS**

Capacity building is at the center of TA work and the TAN partners place tremendous emphasis on **strengthening the functional and technical capacity of country stakeholders**. TA providers identify key stakeholders in country to provide technical input and mentoring to, to ensure the transfer of skills to

the right individuals. TA providers identify gaps and work to strengthen capacity throughout the provision of the TA. Further emphasis is placed on recognising existing functions and capacities, and opportunities for incremental improvement are encouraged. Building capacity, particularly across varying sectors, also boosts the uptake, success and sustainability of TA activities. As part of the TA support in country, a plan is developed to ensure the uptake of work following the completion of the TA—with particular emphasis being placed on identifying in-country experts who can drive forward recommendations made by the TA consultants.

### **PRIORITISING COLLABORATION WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

MQSUN+ and NI (and ultimately TA providers) place critical importance on collaborating with in-country actors to ensure that **TA provision is well-aligned with and contributing to country-led plans** to improve nutrition outcomes and that there is no duplication of work amongst partners and government actors. The focus on collaboration also helps to identify opportunities to leverage in-country presence of partners to catalyse TA provision and develop cost-sharing plans. Cost sharing—such as through partners offering in-kind support, logistical support or co-funding for consultancies—fosters partnerships which contribute to the longevity of TA work. TA partners place emphasis on the ‘follow through’ of TA provision so the TA reinforces progress towards nutritional impact. Collaboration to ensure that the momentum is not lost is critical, and cost-sharing mechanisms can facilitate this. Engagement with existing country partners is vital given their experience, relationships and potential for valuable collaboration in support of government objectives.

### **AN EMPHASIS ON PEOPLE SKILLS FOR SUCCESSFUL IN-COUNTRY TA LEADERSHIP AND UPTAKE**

While technical expertise is vital for conducting successful TA, critical importance within the TAN programme is given to **dialogue and building partnerships founded on trust, transparency and mutual accountability**. TAN partners recognise that it is essential for TA consultants to build strong country relations, develop trust and facilitate political buy-in for successful TA implementation.

## **KENYA**

In 2017, NI TAN supported TA to conduct an in-depth review of the 2012-2017 National Nutrition Action Plan (NNAP) which provided important learnings and recommendations for development of the next NNAP.

In 2018, subsequent TA support responded to the identified gaps through the development and finalisation of costing, financial tracking, M&E and enabling environment components for the 2018-2022 Kenya Nutrition Action Plan (KNAP) by incorporating initial NNAP Review TA recommendations. This work contributed to the overall development of the multisectoral KNAP - a process led by the Kenyan government - and was aligned with, and complementary to work of multiple stakeholders supporting the 2018-2022 KNAP (UNICEF, World Vision Kenya, Concern Worldwide).

Using a capacity building approach, and intending to facilitate eventual implementation at the subnational level, counties were involved with these TA, and operational guidelines were developed for counties to develop Country Nutrition Action Plans (CNAPs) as part of the KNAP development. TA underway in 2019 is now promoting local ownership and sustainability as these guidelines are being operationalised at county level; with NI supporting to select counties to develop their own CNAPs.

This suite of TA is helping translate national nutrition policy into local action. By providing TA support to help move from the KNAP to CNAPs, NI TAN TA support is helping strengthen local capacity, foster ownership and multisectoral collaboration, and identify relevant, contextualised county led nutrition actions – a major step towards improved nutrition results ‘on the ground’.

Building trust and developing important relationships within the TA consultancy further ensures government ownership of the entire process, supports the development of mutual accountability and ensures that the TA is not seen only as a side project but integrated into government plans and processes.

The TAN partners have noted vital competencies around:

- Diplomacy,
- Consensus-building,
- Negotiation,

- Facilitation,
- Listening and
- Strong communication skills.

In the majority of TA, TAN partners also include local consultants. These individuals are critical as they understand the specific country context and current nutrition landscape and often already have established relationships with government representatives and other nutrition stakeholders. This is important for navigating through the government structures and processes in order to advance the country's nutrition agenda.

### PRIORITISING AND SUPPORTING GENDER INTEGRATION INTO TA DELIVERY

Gender equality is a central pillar of the SUN Movement, and TAN partners are committed to including gender equality considerations in TA. TA provision in nutrition presents an opportunity to help 'move the needle' on gender equality in SUN countries. TAN partners aim to drive forward conversations on gender equality in countries they work in, while meeting countries 'where they are at' and taking into consideration cultural sensitivities, norms and standards. TAN partners recognise that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to this work and aim to ensure gender equality and the gender dimensions of nutrition are discussed and considered throughout the country-led TA process. The aim of TAN TA is not to change gender norms in countries per se but rather to encourage stakeholders to discuss and consider how they can influence such gender norms and dynamics in the context of the multisectoral nutrition agenda. MQSUN+<sup>4</sup> and NI<sup>5</sup> have both developed tools to facilitate such discussions.

### THE ROLE OF KM FOR AN ADAPTIVE APPROACH TO TA PROVISION

Throughout the TA process, the TAN partners capture and share learnings. A continuous process of documenting what works and what challenges are being noted allows for continuous learning, at the individual country level and more broadly to inform future TA. Within this process, ENN supports broad knowledge capture in SUN countries and within the TAN programme to develop a deeper understanding of country realities and how TA has facilitated and contributed to country-level progress. The SMS further collates experience from multiple countries to facilitate the collection of global evidence. While MQSUN+ and NI lead on TA work within the TAN programme, the collaboration around learning through knowledge capture highlights how all TAN partners work together.

### Global level TA support by MQSUN+ and NI

In addition to country-level TA, both NI and MQSUN+ support global level TA for the SMS. This support happens primarily through the development of tools and resources and the provision of guidance that can serve multiple SUN countries on common challenges or capacity gaps. This work enhances and complements the work being done at the country level. For example, MQSUN+ has worked at the global level by strengthening SUN countries' capacity to conduct the budget analysis exercise, ensuring its sustainability and use, and by reviewing country nutrition plans in order to provide a broad overview of country progress. NI has provided critical support in the development of a toolkit for strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms and providing support for the development of the SUN Movement Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system.

<sup>4</sup> MQSUN+ gender brief - [mqsunplus.path.org/resources/gender-in-multisectoral-nutrition-action-plans/](https://mqsunplus.path.org/resources/gender-in-multisectoral-nutrition-action-plans/)

<sup>5</sup> NI guidelines on Integrating Gender Equality into Technical Assistance ([bit.ly/2MSNx0B](https://bit.ly/2MSNx0B))  
 NI background document on Gender and Nutrition ([bit.ly/2BRRdK0](https://bit.ly/2BRRdK0))  
 NI PowerPoint Presentation (Gender 101) ([bit.ly/31YrREZ](https://bit.ly/31YrREZ))



