

IGNITE in Action:

Perspectives on Gender and Nutrition Integration in African Agriculture



Impacting Gender and Nutrition Through
Innovative Technical Exchange in Agriculture

IGNITE Partners

Tanager, an ACDI/VOCA affiliate, is a global development organization that empowers people to realize life-changing economic and social opportunities. We have 30 years of experience implementing gender-transformative and nutrition-sensitive agriculture approaches, connecting actors across the production supply chain, fostering knowledge and access for women and other marginalized groups, and unlocking sustainable, climate-smart economic opportunities for all.

Laterite is a data, research, and advisory firm dedicated to providing high-quality research services for social impact in East Africa. We provide technical advice on the design and implementation of research projects, development interventions, and socio-economic policies. We strive to deliver impactful research that helps decision-makers find solutions to complex development problems.

60 Decibels is a tech-enabled social impact measurement and customer intelligence company, spun out of Acumen. We make it easy for companies and organizations to listen to the people who matter most. Using our Lean Data approach, we collect social impact and customer feedback data through phone surveys and other methods.

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Abbreviations

AATF	African Agricultural Technology Foundation
ABAC	Association Burkinabè d'Action Communautaire
AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
APMI	African Poultry Multiplication Initiative
APSPD/BF	Association Professionnelle des Systèmes Financiers Décentralisés Burkina Faso
CBM	Caisse Baitoul Maal
CMBF	Caisse Mutuelle Du Burkina Faso
EIAR	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research
F&S	Fair and Sustainable Consulting
IGNITE	Impacting Gender and Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange in Agriculture
LSP	Local Service Providers
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
PACA	Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa
PRODIA	Promotion du Développement Industriel, Artisanal et Agricole
SAA	Sasakawa Africa Association
Sahel-ALDDN	Advancing Local Dairy Development in Nigeria
TADB	Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
Y 2 (3)(4)(5)	Year 2, 3, 4, 5

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CHANGING LIVES – The IGNITE Experience and Impact

Social and economic empowerment for women is linked to improved outcomes in agricultural productivity and household nutrition¹. In 2022, about 20 percent of Africa’s population was undernourished and 868 million people were moderately or severely food-insecure². It is therefore critical to prioritise women’s empowerment across the agricultural sector in Africa to improve the continent’s food, nutrition, and economic security.

The Impacting Gender & Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange in Agriculture (IGNITE) project was a technical assistance mechanism designed to strengthen the ability of African institutions to integrate gender and nutrition into their operations and agricultural interventions. The six-year project was implemented by Tanager and two learning partners, Laterite and 60 Decibels. The project provided a range of gender and nutrition

technical services, delivered through Tanager’s team of technical experts and a network of IGNITE local service providers (LSPs). Through this network, African agricultural institutions can receive technical assistance services related to gender and nutrition, which guarantees the sustainability of IGNITE interventions across the market system.

Between 2018 and 2024, Tanager, through IGNITE, engaged with more than 35 African institutions in 18 countries. The project sensitised staff on gender and nutrition issues, brought about inclusive policies that better integrate women into the agricultural sector, provided gender-specific agricultural extension, and facilitated education around and access to nutritious foods across Africa. These positive impacts have cascaded to more than 2 million individuals across the continent.

¹ Lufuke, M., Bai, Y., Fan, S., & Tian, X. (2023). Women’s Empowerment, Food Security, and Nutrition Transition in Africa. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010254> (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9819006/>)

² FAO, AUC, ECA and WFP. 2023. *Africa - Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023: Statistics and trends*. Accra. (<https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/0db03746-74e1-4b78-9508-70b9f661859c>)

A 360-Degree Review

Nevertheless, technical assistance delivery benefits from continual learning.

IGNITE also aimed to identify models that efficiently increase equitable consumption of safe, affordable, and nutritious diets year-round, and women's empowerment in agriculture. Tanager and its learning partners consistently surveyed IGNITE clients, interviewed LSPs, and analysed findings to determine what works, and what doesn't, in technical assistance delivery.

This compilation is one of the results of this effort.

IGNITE in Action: Perspectives on Gender and Nutrition Integration in African Agriculture, offers a 360-degree review of the IGNITE technical assistance model. The compilation features lessons and findings gleaned from the experiences of those involved in receiving and delivering IGNITE's technical assistance. (A partner compilation, **IGNITE: Gender and Nutrition Technical Assistance in Practice**, presents case studies that delve deeper into the technical aspects of the IGNITE mechanism, including monitoring and evaluation practices, learning and outcomes, and tools and approaches.)

This volume is anchored by the IGNITE Journey, an assessment of several clients' institutional changes throughout the course of their engagement with IGNITE. It is supplemented by the perspectives of an IGNITE client, two LSPs, and Tanager's own gender and nutrition technical experts. The IGNITE Journey relies primarily on client diagnostics and lean data client feedback surveys. Multiple individuals were interviewed for each of the supplemental case studies, answering questions on the challenges and opportunities that arose from being involved with IGNITE.

The results offer insights from across the IGNITE technical assistance landscape:

- **Client Perspectives | The IGNITE Journey**

African agricultural institutions that engaged with IGNITE inevitably evolve in their institutional integration of gender and nutrition. This case study assesses the effectiveness of IGNITE's technical assistance provided to clients, drawing from a variety of feedback from those supported by the project.

- **Client Perspectives | From Farmer Satisfaction Representative to Gender Expert: Spotlight on Damilola Ogunsiji of Amo Farm**

Amo Farm Sieberer Hatchery Limited in Nigeria was an IGNITE client during the first phase of the program. At the recommendation of her supervisor, Amo Farm employee Damilola Ogunsiji, made a career transition to become the company's gender focal point. The experience, particularly within Nigeria's cultural context, has contributed to both her own personal growth and the company's business growth.

- **LSP Perspectives | IGNITE's Impact: Spotlight on PanAfricare**

PanAfricare, a non-governmental organization in Burkina Faso, had limited in-house gender expertise when it first became an IGNITE local service provider (LSP). Its path to becoming an exemplary LSP offers lessons in developing technical assistance providers.

- **LSP Perspectives | Leveraging IGNITE to Expand Technical Areas: Spotlight on Fair & Sustainable**

As a consultancy firm, Fair & Sustainable deepened its expertise in gender and nutrition during its time as an IGNITE LSP in Ethiopia. This spotlight examines the benefits and limitations of the IGNITE LSP model.

- **Technical Expert Perspectives | Threading the Needle: Spotlight on IGNITE's Technical Experts**

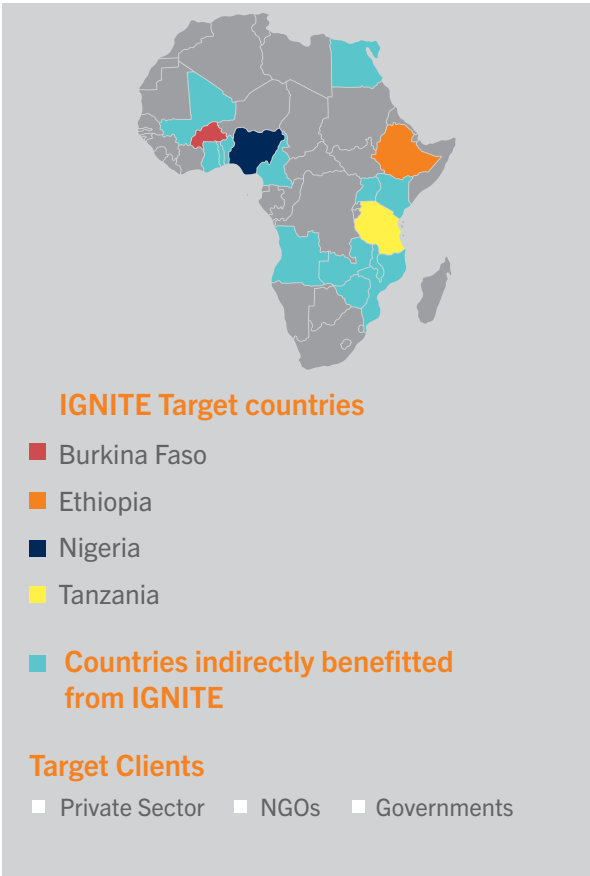
Delivering technical assistance goes beyond technical knowledge. Tanager's IGNITE technical experts share insights from their six years of implementing the IGNITE project, from what can affect technical assistance delivery to how to create demand for technical assistance services.

We hope this compilation adds to the existing knowledge base on technical assistance delivery and contributes to the much-needed discourse on gender-inclusive and nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

These case studies were authored by Tanager staff Mayu Mishina, senior director of strategic communications; Dr Samwel Oando, research manager; Mary Kate Cartmill associate manager II, nutrition and food systems; and Sharon Anyango, communications and knowledge management manager. We appreciate the extensive review from Tanager gender and nutrition experts and strategic guidance from Team Lead Maureen Munjua, Tanager Kenya country representative.



About IGNITE



The Impacting Gender and Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange in Agriculture (IGNITE) project was a technical assistance programme, implemented by Tanager and its learning partners, in four African countries from 2018–2024. The project supported 35 African agricultural institutions across 18 countries to integrate gender and nutrition into their business operations and agricultural interventions. Specifically, the project aimed to:

- Strengthen the institutional capacity of African agricultural institutions to integrate nutrition-sensitive and gender-integrated approaches into their policy priorities, project interventions and way of doing business
- Identify models that effectively and efficiently increase both equitable consumption of safe, affordable, nutritious diets year-round and women’s empowerment in agriculture
- Cultivate a network of local service providers (LSPs) and identify key mechanisms and drivers of demand for gender and nutrition technical assistance for greater gender and nutrition impact.

IGNITE was designed to provide institutional support, programmatic level support, or both in the following ways:





Tanager worked with five LSPs as its implementing partners in the four target countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania. These LSPs were instrumental in cascading the lessons learnt and tools developed by IGNITE to clients in their respective countries.

Through IGNITE, Tanager offered a range of services in policy, culture, and capacity, including:

-  Staff sensitisation and trainings
-  Policy and strategy development
-  Institutional audits on gender and nutrition capacity
-  Research and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including identification of relevant gender and nutrition

indicators, development of inclusive results frameworks, building of gender dashboards for tracking progress

-  Tool development
-  Budget review and planning

Tanager worked with its two learning partners, Laterite and 60 Decibels, and interested clients to design and conduct specialised research to examine gender and nutrition components of the client organisation’s agricultural programming. The findings allowed IGNITE clients and key stakeholders to use evidence to analyse how their programming was impacted by gender and nutrition outcomes. Some of these studies have been translated into the case study compilation, **IGNITE: Gender and Nutrition Technical Assistance in Practice**.





The IGNITE Journey: Catalysing Change in Mainstreaming Gender and Nutrition

Gender equality and women's empowerment, along with the provision of food for households, have a significant impact on people's right to food, which is a crucial component of their right to a decent standard of living¹. Tanager implemented the Impacting Gender and Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange in Agriculture (IGNITE) mechanism to increase women's empowerment and nutrition outcomes at the household level.

This case study highlights some of the interventions by IGNITE and the effectiveness of its technical assistance, based on the feedback received from its client institutions.

Methodology

This case study used the contribution analysis method to track the project's progress. This approach is commonly used in monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) to understand how interventions and specific efforts contribute to desired outcomes².

The case study utilises data from three client diagnostics, a meta-analysis of lean data client feedback surveys, and an evaluation of technical experts' experiences in providing technical assistance to clients. The study addresses the project's learning agenda on improving the effectiveness³ of IGNITE's technical assistance and service provision.

¹ FAO, AUC, ECA and WFP. 2023. Africa – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023: Statistics and trends. Accra, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8743en>

² Health Systems Strengthening Practice Spotlight. December 2021. Contribution Analysis: Capturing the Effects of Complex Health System Strengthening Activities. Washington, DC: USAID. Available at: www.LHSSproject.org.

³ Learning agenda defines effectiveness as having the intended outcome of mainstreaming gender and nutrition-sensitive agriculture approaches at the target institutions.

It answers the following questions:

1. Which IGNITE services were most effective in driving the observed changes?
2. Which environmental or institutional factors were important in facilitating progress?

IGNITE’s Theory of Change (ToC)⁴ recognises the potential complexity in the agriculture ecosystem that may hinder improved gender and nutrition outcomes. This complexity limits the ability to make definitive conclusions from the study on the attribution of impact and causality. The ToC also acknowledges that the journey to institutionalise gender and nutrition may go beyond the six-year project, as maintaining and applying good policies and practices is an ongoing and long-term process.

IGNITE diagnostic assessment

This section seeks to identify the most effective activities or sequence of activities for encouraging clients to adopt and comply with gender and nutrition-sensitive agriculture policies and approaches at the institutional level.

To ensure that IGNITE services were customised to the unique needs of each client, a diagnostic assessment was conducted as an essential first step. IGNITE conducted the assessment to identify institutional capacity gaps and opportunities, and to evaluate the client’s capacity at baseline, and determine their goals and aspirations for technical assistance. It also identified activities that could support agricultural institutions in progressing along their journey of gender mainstreaming and nutrition integration. The process was collaborative, with IGNITE facilitating the assessment based on the client’s inputs, allowing for mutual understanding of improvement areas.

The assessment focussed on six domains (see **Box 1**), each consisting of sub-domains that contribute to the overall score of the domain. If an institution incorporates gender in its operational framework but does not focus on nutrition, it is considered to have met the minimum standard for gender but not for nutrition in that specific sub-domain. The score for each domain is determined by averaging the scores of its sub-domains. Each sub-domain is assessed on a binary scale, with a score of 1 indicating that the minimum standards have been met and 0 indicating

they have not been met. Most sub-domains have separate minimum standards for gender and nutrition. For example, if a domain has four sub-domains, with two meeting the minimum standards and the other two not meeting them, the average score would be 0.50 (i.e., $[1 + 1 + 0 + 0] / 4 = 0.50$). The domain score is then converted into a percentage score, which is used to position the institution along the nutrition and gender spectrum (refer to **Figure 1 below**).

The spectrum has five levels namely: Nascent ($\leq 26\%$), Emergent (27%–53%), Expanding (54%–79%), Advanced (80%–89%), and Institutionalized (≥ 90) (Figure 1.3). With a domain score of 0.50, an institution would be considered Emergent (50%).

IGNITE worked with 35 clients in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania, providing both institutional capacity building and programmatic intervention support. These interventions were tailored to each client’s specific needs and goals related to gender mainstreaming, women’s empowerment, and improved nutrition.

Over the course of the project, IGNITE successfully conducted diagnostic (baseline) assessments for the following eight client institutions.

- African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)
- Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA)
- Solidaridad East and Central Africa
- Advancing Local Dairy Development in Nigeria (Sahel-ALDDN)
- Association Professionnelle des Systèmes Financiers Décentralisés (APSF)
- Promotion du Développement Industriel, Artisanal et Agricole (PRODIA)
- Caisse Mutuelle Du Burkina Faso (CMBF)
- Caisse Baitoul Maal (CBM)

End diagnostic assessments were only conducted for SAA, Solidaridad, and AATF, the only clients that IGNITE had engaged for at least three years.

A mix of activities were identified during the baseline stage. These included institutional development,

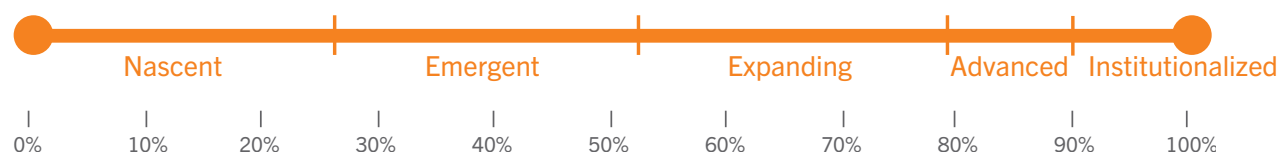


Figure 1: Nutrition and gender spectrum

⁴ IGNITE (Impacting Gender & Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange in Agriculture) program Theory of Change, Draft document, 2020.



Figure 2: Series of interventions

gender and nutrition analyses, audits and assessments, skills development, and generating evidence through research, monitoring, and evaluation support as outlined in **Figure 2**.

IGNITE identified local service providers (LSPs)⁵ and trained them to promote sustainability and develop local capacity for providing technical assistance to different clients in their respective countries. The LSPs, using their knowledge of local contexts, supported IGNITE to build institutions’ (Clients) capacity for gender and nutrition-sensitive agriculture programming.

IGNITE services most effective in driving observed changes

The following sections describe the changes observed through IGNITE’s technical assistance.

Changes reported in end diagnostic assessments

The first set of changes is derived from the end diagnostic surveys conducted with the three clients (SAA, Solidaridad, and AATF). The changes are presented according to the domains evaluated for each of the three clients as follows:

Domain:1	Adopt a Gender Equality Policy and a Nutrition-Sensitive Approach
Domain:2	Organizational Culture and Capacity for Gender Equality and Nutrition-sensitive Approaches
Domain:3	Budget for Nutrition-Sensitive Approaches
Domain:4	Evidence Collection for Gender and Nutrition
Domain:5	Analysis and Use of Gender and Nutrition-sensitive Evidence
Domain:6	Do No Harm

Changes observed for AATF

The initial diagnostic assessment primarily focused on the integration of nutrition, as this area showed the most significant changes for AATF. The end diagnostics results show that overall, training activities aimed at transforming organisational culture and capacity for nutrition-sensitive approaches were most effective for the AATF. For nutrition, there was only a slight movement from the emergent stage (0.43) to the expanding stage (0.67) reported in Domain 1.

The most change was observed for Domain 4, with scores progressing from the expanding (0.73) to the institutionalised stage (0.9), indicating substantial improvement in AATF programming. In Domain 2, AATF had moved from the emergent stage (0.40) to the advanced stage (0.89). This was followed closely by changes in scores for Domain 3, which improved from the emergent stage (0.29) to the expanding stage (0.75). However, low scores were recorded for Domain 5, with a movement from the emergent stage (0.38) to the expanding stage (0.75). The lowest score was recorded as nascent (0) for Domain 6.

Gender integration was not assessed during the initial diagnostic phase because IGNITE had recently completed a gender audit that identified key areas of support. To avoid duplication, the domain scores for gender were only evaluated during the end-diagnostics (**Figure 3**).

Regarding risk mitigation, the diagnostics assessment revealed that AATF has a risk mitigation plan in place for project operations to guide staff members, demonstrating its commitment to managing potential risks. However, there is currently no evidence of a risk mitigation strategy for AATF’s implementing partners and target beneficiaries. This presents an opportunity for AATF to develop a comprehensive risk mitigation strategy that considers all stakeholders involved in their initiatives.

Fortunately, the AATF strategic plan can provide guidance for future programs in integrating gender and nutrition. Additionally, the existing gender and nutrition strategies present a great opportunity for all AATF initiatives to prioritise the integration of gender and nutrition, ensuring that these important aspects are incorporated throughout their work.

⁵ The LSPs, were local NGOs or local consulting firms, who received training and support from IGNITE, with a view to scale up the similar technical support to IGNITE clients.

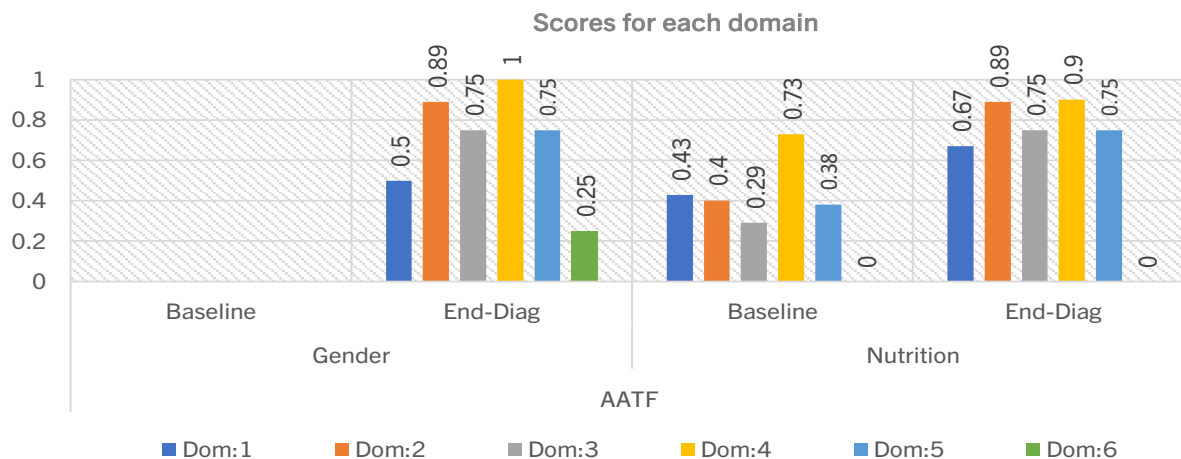


Figure 3: Domain Changes in AATF

Changes at SAA

The greatest change at SAA was observed in Domain 2 (Organisational culture and capacity for gender equality and nutrition-sensitive approaches) for scores of both gender and nutrition. The scores moved from ‘emergent’ (0.27) to ‘expanding’ (0.67) for gender, and from ‘emergent’ (0.36) to ‘advanced’ (0.89) for nutrition. Scores for Domain 4 have also attained ‘institutionalised’ state (score of 1) for both gender and nutrition. This shows that training activities focusing on organisational culture and capacity for gender equality and nutrition-sensitive approaches were the most effective, followed by support in tools development for evidence collection for gender and nutrition.

There was no change noted in Domain 6 which points to the huge gap in the level of awareness by staff regarding the ‘Do No Harm’ strategy for both gender and nutrition domains. While a staff risk mitigation strategy exists, there was no clear ‘Do No Harm’ strategy for SAA engagement with its stakeholders. Similarly, gender and nutrition are not mentioned in the organisation’s core values and mission, despite nutrition being one of the core pillars of its 2021–2025 strategic plan.

Changes for Solidaridad

The diagnostic assessments indicate that Solidaridad had made noticeable headway in refining its policies for gender integration (Domain 1). This was supported by an existing institutional strategy for 2021–2025, which already identified the need for gender inclusion in programming. Integration of nutrition approaches also demonstrate major improvement on Domain 6 — the ‘Do No Harm’ strategy — indicating it had been institutionalised at endline. This change connects to an existing risk register, which helps the client to track operational risks for both gender and nutrition programmes. This view is supported by qualitative information, which reported that Solidaridad had a risk assessment budget catering for all program activity lines, including gender and nutrition domains.

During the end diagnostic assessment, it was noted that Solidaridad had successfully implemented a digital learning platform called JiFunze to support continuous learning and organisational training for their staff. However, the reports did not specify if any specific activities by IGNITE contributed to the improvements in Domains 1 and 6, which relate to gender and nutrition respectively. It is important to highlight that Solidaridad had already developed internal strategies and instruments for these areas, with minimal technical assistance from IGNITE.

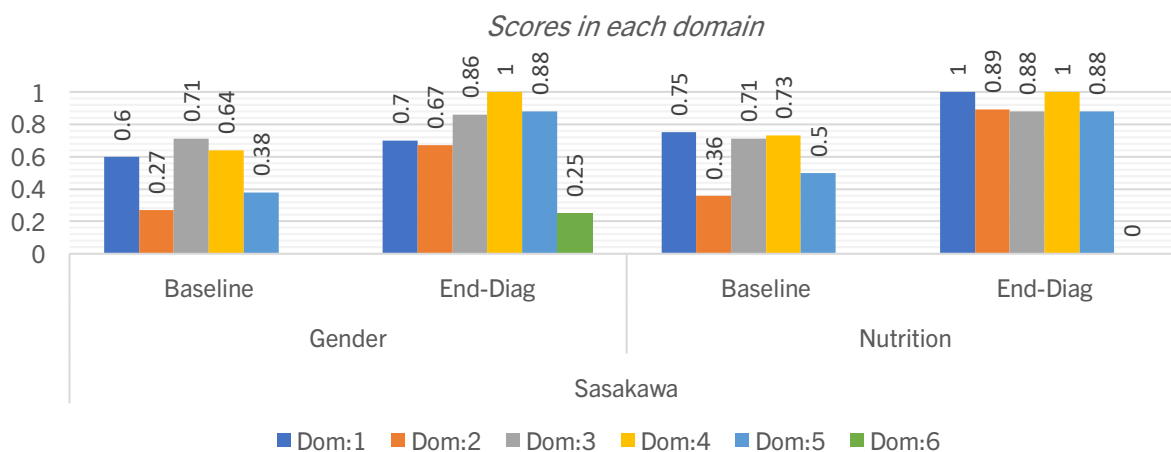


Figure 4: Domain changes in SAA

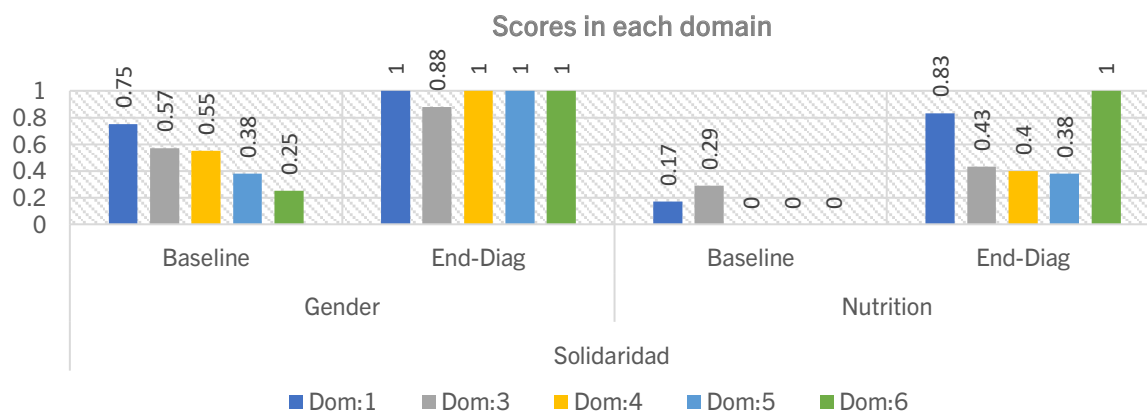


Figure 5: Domain changes in Solidaridad

Changes reflected in the client feedback surveys

The IGNITE client feedback surveys were conducted annually between July and August each year to gather feedback and insights from clients about their experiences working with the project. The surveys assessed clients’ satisfaction with IGNITE services and gathered evidence of IGNITE’s impact and contribution⁶ to their organisations. The data was collected through interviews and surveys conducted by IGNITE’s learning partner, 60 Decibels. The survey participants included the key individuals responsible for gender and nutrition and senior management staff from the client institutions. The total sample size for the surveys was 86 participants, selected from 17 out of the 20 client institutions over a four-year period between Year 2 and Year 5. **Table 1** provides

information on the frequency (number of times) of participation in the surveys by the different clients.

Five clients — AATF, Solidaridad, Digital Green, Sasakawa, and Sahel-ALDDN — participated in all four years of the survey. Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) dropped off in Year 4, while the African Union’s – Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) entered the study in Year 3 and had respondents through Years 4 and 5. The Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank (TADB) and Association Burkinabè d’Action Communautaire (ABAC) joined the survey in Years 4 and 5 only. Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) was interviewed in Years 2 and 3, and Heifer only in Year 3. The rest of the clients, especially those who joined the partnership late in Year 4, participated only once in the survey. Below are some key highlights of changes reported on the IGNITE client feedback surveys.

Client Institution	2020 (Y2)	2021 (Y3)	2022 (Y4)	2023 (Y5)	Total Data Points from Client (Y2–Y5)
AATF	5	2	3	3	13
Solidaridad	4	3	3	2	12
Digital Green	3	4	2	1	10
Sahel-ALDDN	2	2	3	3	10
Sasakawa	2	3	4	2	11
AGRA	1	2	1		4
African Union – PACA		1	3		7
PRODIA				1	1
CMBF				2	2
APFSD-BF			1		1
Silverlands (Former APMI)				1	1
ABAC			1	1	2
TADB			2	1	3
Amo Farms				2	2
Heifer		2			2
Baitul-Maal				1	1
EIAR	3	1			4
Total Respondents	20	20	23	23	86

Table 1: Sample size for client feedback surveys

⁶ Attribution in these findings refer to direct claims made by the client staff regarding any change recorded.



Allocation of budget for gender and nutrition

Many respondents believed that leadership buy-in had contributed to the changes in budget allocation for gender and nutrition experienced in some institutions. They attributed this to the training provided by IGNITE, especially the training of board members, which is believed to have played a crucial role in increasing awareness among top management.

‘I would say there are two primary changes we have observed from institutional strengthening by IGNITE. One is that now nutrition and gender have a budget.’
— Focal point person, AATF

Respondents from other institutions, particularly the microfinance associations in Burkina Faso, Association Professionnelle des Systèmes Financiers Décentralisés Burkina Faso (APFSD/BF), also emphasised that their organisations were actively incorporating gender and nutrition as integral components of their project design and implementation strategies.

Improved gender policies and nutrition approaches

Across the project years, the percentage of institutions who reported to improve gender policies and nutrition approaches was higher than those reporting ‘No change.’ For example, in Y5, there is a significant percentage of respondents who reported that policies and strategies for gender and nutrition had ‘Very much improved’ (52%). In contrast, the percentage of respondents reporting ‘No change’ in the intervention strategies decreased from 31% in Y4 to 22% by Y5.

‘We have developed proper indicators for policy implementation that are being monitored in the project. These are great changes because our intervention has shifted from just being an individual team effort, to an institutional effort whereby all the projects now have indicators.’ — AATF

These views were shared by respondents from other client institutions (like SAA, Sahel-ALDDN, ABAC, Digital Green, Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank TADB, Amo Farm Sieberer Hatchery (Amo Farms), and PACA) who reported that strategies, plans, and accountability measures in their institutions had ‘Very much improved.’ Most of these respondents attributed the changes to the support offered by IGNITE through the development and review of strategies, feedback mechanisms to ensure accountability, and indicators to track performance.

Staff capacity on implementing gender and nutrition

Between Y2 and Y3, there was a significant increase in the proportion of participants reporting that staff capacity had ‘Very much improved,’ from 35% in Y2 to 60% in Y3. Similarly, Y5 recorded the highest percentage of respondents reporting staff capacity as ‘Very much increased,’ at 74%.

‘Within our department at the African Union (AU), I would say we have seen a significant increase in consideration of gender as part of our programming because of IGNITE training. Now our staff have seen how to go about gender mainstreaming, whereas before it was just rhetoric.’ — Programme Officer, PACA.

Respondents reported that their organisations were developing new tools and guidance, or reviewing existing ones, to integrate gender and nutrition, following support from IGNITE.

‘IGNITE provided continuous training to our team on the ground in reviewing all of the various tools that we use including the training document and curriculum that we’re using to build the capacity of farmers.’ — Sahel-ALDDN.

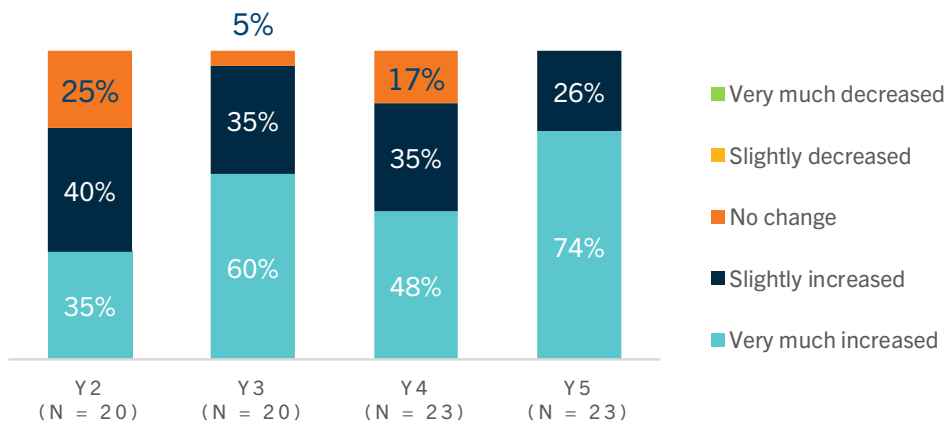


Figure 6: Changes in staff capacity

In Burkina Faso, some point persons reported that they have since started to develop their own tools CMBF, for example, acknowledged the support they received from IGNITE LSP PanAfricare, which it believes will enable the institution to incorporate gender and nutrition topics in planning and strategy development for the future.

Program design and implementation

From Y2 to Y5, the proportion of respondents reporting changes in program design as having ‘Very much improved’ tripled, from 20% in Y2 to 61% in Y5, as illustrated in Figure 8 below. The main reason cited for the changes was an increase in the level of importance their staff put on integrating gender and nutrition in programmatic activities after they were trained by IGNITE.

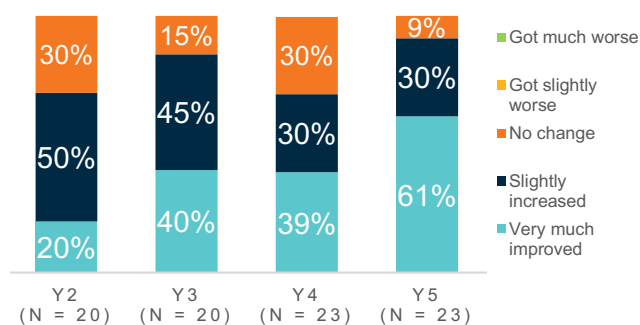
For example, Digital Green reported a new focus on gender programming, which improved over the period of engagement with IGNITE. Gender considerations were also integrated more often into quality assurance checklists and project design for new initiatives. Similarly, TADB singled out the training by IGNITE on a proactive approach for collaboration and comprehensive data collection, highlighting commitment to impactful change in gender and nutrition models for interventions. Qualitative evidence supports with these findings.

‘Through IGNITE’s guidance and support, we have been able to incorporate gender perspectives into our TI3P project, ensuring that we address the specific needs and challenges faced by women. This has led to the development of more targeted activities to promote gender equality. IGNITE also trained our staff on nutrition programming including on SBC.’ — TADB

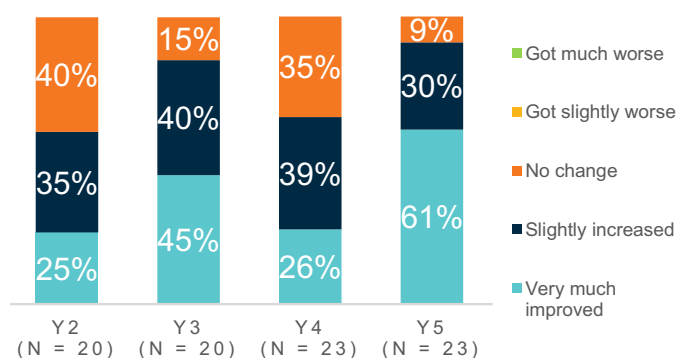
These sentiments demonstrate institutional commitment to mainstreaming gender and nutrition integration through strategic changes, which include defining precise objectives during programme design. These changes show that many institutions have adopted mechanisms for aligning their funding decisions with sustainability and business approaches for positive outcomes.

Institutional leadership buy-in

Leadership buy-in demonstrates willingness by the institutions to mainstream gender and facilitate integration of nutrition approaches into their respective project activities. Ninety-one per cent of respondents across 13 client institutions reported buy-in by their institutional leadership. Among these, 65% reported that they had witnessed changes in their organisations due to capacity building on gender mainstreaming by IGNITE technical experts.



Changes in Gender & Nutrition in Programming



Inclusion of Gender & Nutrition in Program Design & Implementation Due to Working with IGNITE

Figure 7: Changes reported on programming by clients

Overall, the feedback survey showed that staff awareness and capacity were the major changes reported by the different institutions across Y1 and Y5. Other changes reported in Y2 and Y3 include a spike

in adopting new strategies, plans, and accountability measures alongside staff awareness. Similarly significant milestones were achieved in the design of programme activities to adopt the gender and nutrition approaches. Clients also reported achievements in tools and guidance.

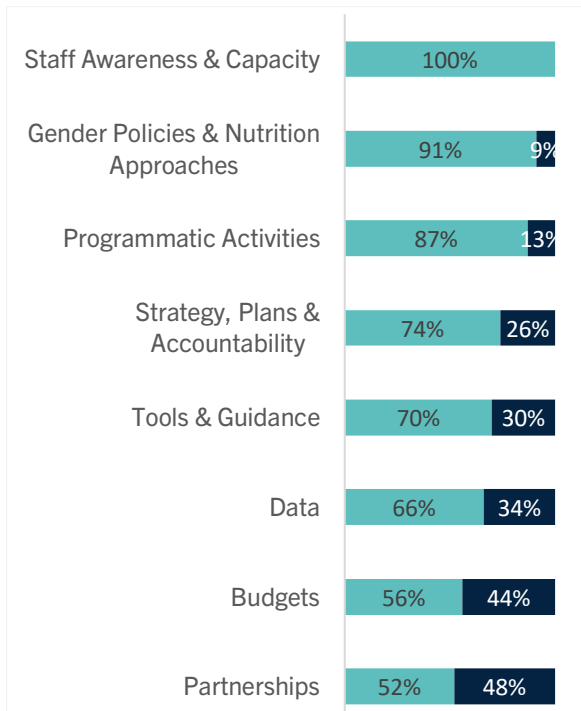


Figure 8: Areas of institutional improvement

Institutional factors affecting IGNITE gender and nutrition mainstreaming interventions

This section responds to the learning agenda on factors that affect gender and nutrition mainstreaming, and what types of technical assistance are most appropriate for different institutions?

IGNITE worked with various agricultural institutions, such as non-governmental organisations (NGO), government entities, and private sector institutions, each with its own unique context, mission, and

capabilities. IGNITE provided tailored technical assistance and capacity building services to its clients, including strategy development, formative research, training, sensitisation, and the development and dissemination of tools and guidance documents. Clients reported that these customised packages of services were effective.

One key factor that influenced institutional environments was the different goals and objectives of private sector partners, compared to NGOs and government organisations. Private sector players often prioritised profitability over integrating gender and nutrition approaches, while government organisations and NGOs focused more on securing programme financing from donors. Furthermore, while NGOs had experience working on gender as a crosscutting issue, nutrition goals were not always central to their missions. Government and private sector organisations also did not always prioritise gender and nutrition as key goals.

Availability of client staff also affected the delivery of technical assistance. While clients, especially government and private sector organisations, may express enthusiasm for assistance, it does not necessarily mean they are available on agreed-upon timelines. This challenge led to trade-offs between achieving long-term sustainability and maximising the short-term impact of integrating gender and nutrition. Overcoming long-standing trust issues, whether related to politics, history, or cultural and social undercurrents, also took considerable time and effort.

Finally, decision-making processes were often more protracted in government agencies and the private sector, compared to NGOs. Once a decision was made, the private sector clients sometimes expected quick implementation without consideration of the constraints of project-based funding. IGNITE staff frequently experienced delays in delivering technical assistance, as government clients and focal point staff were sometimes unavailable for meetings or planned activities.



Lessons and Recommendations

1. Managing different expectations by IGNITE clients

A notable insight derived through IGNITE’s work is that agricultural programmes implemented by various institutions often lack a specific focus on meeting gender and nutrition objectives. Instead, these programmes may prioritise productivity and income generation as their primary goals. This observation became apparent in the course of IGNITE’s provision of technical assistance, as it became evident that institutions’ plans were heavily influenced by the availability of funding, and whether or not gender and nutrition mainstreaming was a prerequisite for funding approval. It is important to note that simply having funding for these services does not automatically result in a clear pathway for integrating gender and nutrition-sensitive support.

‘Most of our demands usually feel like it is IGNITE-driven because we (IGNITE staff) are the ones to identify the gaps for the institutions, and then we take the client through a process to understand why, and what it takes for them to address those gaps’ — Winnie Osulah, Gender Expert.

The discussion with technical experts also suggested that IGNITE played a significant role in generating demand for its services. Further, the source of funding can unexpectedly impact client commitment and expectations. For instance, clients referred to the IGNITE partnership by a donor were more likely to come with predefined expectations of guaranteed services. On the other hand, technical experts noted that clients who approached IGNITE voluntarily often had a good understanding of what IGNITE could offer and what they (clients) needed to contribute to the relationship.

2. Adopt an iterative approach with critical junctures

Developing any tool requires continuous learning. IGNITE thus benefitted greatly from its iterative approach⁷ to tool development, which included critical junctures⁸ that provided clarity and allowed the IGNITE team and clients to move forward with key interventions. **Figure 4** illustrates the components of the iterative approach used by IGNITE for tool development.

According to a diagnostic case study developed in 2020, IGNITE’s iterative approach benefitted greatly from two critical junctures:

- (1) an early kick-off meeting and
- (2) a pilot implementation.

The kick-off meetings proved highly valuable as they provided external opinions on designing methodology and content of interventions, validated assumptions in the ToC, ensured the interventions aligned with all stakeholders’ requirements, and instilled confidence in the client. The piloting or validation process was highly valuable in illuminating gaps and assisting the technical experts to re-consider terminologies, presentations, and framing of intervention packages. It also allowed the client teams to gain further confidence in their work and on the IGNITE approach.

3. Take a proactive and structured approach to interventions

To work successfully with LSPs, it was necessary to identify opportunities for improvement by the respective organisation and to focus on supporting clients, as well as to act proactively when pursuing any opportunities identified from diagnostics assessment. IGNITE technical experts

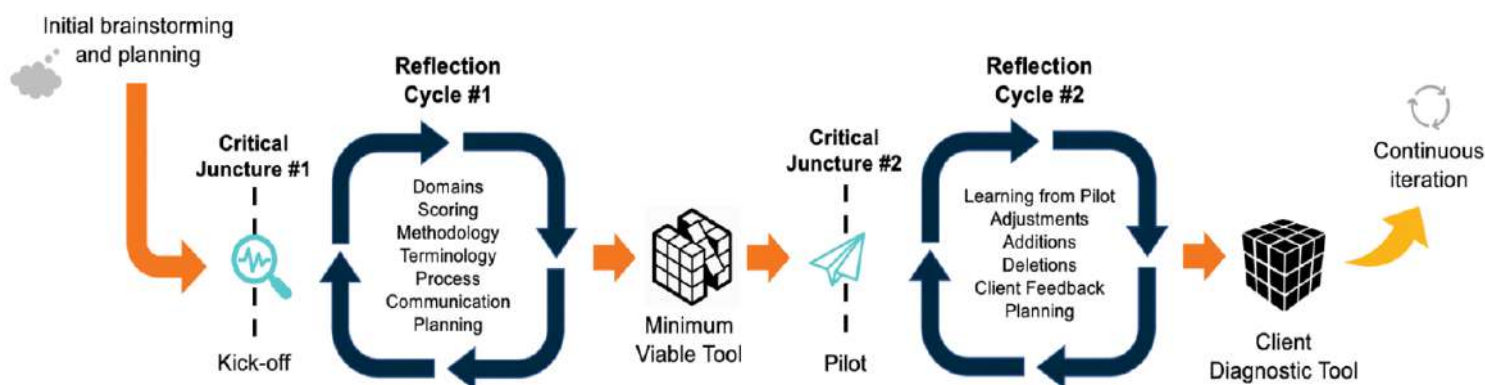


Figure 9: Iterative Process for Tool Development

⁷ An iterative approach allows a team to make mistakes, learn from those mistakes, and make improvements based on what works and what does not.

⁸ Critical junctures are turning points that alter the course of evolution of, or changes in some processes. This includes events and developments in the distant past, generally concentrated in a relatively short period, that have a crucial impact on outcomes later in time.

observed that taking a proactive and strategic approach to action planning helped to ensure opportunities were addressed in a methodical and prioritised manner and that momentum was not lost. Categories of opportunities included:

- (1) opportunities where a client needed external assistance by IGNITE;
- (2) opportunities where clients could handle interventions by themselves; and
- (3) backburner opportunities, where there was disagreement, lack of consensus or goodwill, or lack of resources.

This categorisation made it clear where the client is responsible and where a partnership could be forged for better outcomes.

4. Ensure clarity of engagements

Experience from diagnostic assessments demonstrated that many institutions often lack clarity on mainstreaming gender and integration of nutrition approaches, especially with respect to institutionalising⁹ their operations and culture (their ‘way of doing business’). This gap bears great impact on their interventions and expected results from internal programs. Feedback from the learning workshop with IGNITE technical experts (Oct 2023) indicates that the diagnostic assessments were particularly helpful in raising institutional consciousness about the gender and nutrition model of interventions ‘because, [for example,] institutions often ‘think’ they’re doing gender, whether they actually are or not’ [...] These assessments were helpful to letting the institutions ‘see’ [understand] the gaps they have in programming’ (Sokhna Gaye, IGNITE gender expert).

5. Have adequate human resources

Feedback from IGNITE technical experts indicated that it was important for the project to have adequate human resource capacity if it was to strengthen agriculture institutions, some of which may not have diverse skills in their

staffing. For the success of planned activities, it was imperative to have thematic expertise in gender, nutrition, and MERL. Additional skills needed for the delivery of most activities included conducting interviews, basic data analysis, and project management.

Different skills were also needed at different phases of the IGNITE project through creating, implementing, and conducting Technical Assistance and capacity building, based on the findings of diagnostic assessments. **Figure 9** illustrates the various skills that were most critical for IGNITE. These considerations would be particularly important for LSPs in the transition of the technical assistance and capacity building service provision to clients in the future.

Conclusion

The IGNITE journey presented a mix of challenges and learning through the six-year period. The changes noted in the levels of client satisfaction, which was higher in Y5 compared to Y4, are likely to be attributed to some clients having seen tangible results from the engagement with IGNITE. It could also be due to new clients, whose interaction with IGNITE had transformed their approach to gender and nutrition issues. Activities that were most effective in driving observed changes can be linked to Activity 1— Strengthening African institutions.

A key mechanism, which enhanced institutional expertise and professionalism, was co-creating products and services with clients. This helped to foster client ownership and built their capacity to undertake the activities in the future. Nonetheless, knowledge transfer through the LSPs took longer than anticipated. Only one LSP, PanAfricare, based in Burkina Faso, somewhat managed to integrate the entire technical assistance support package to the client institutions, with minor support by IGNITE technical experts. Another LSP — Fair & Sustainable, based in Ethiopia — gradually picked up, but still needed significant support of the IGNITE technical support to operate.



Figure 10: Resourcing the team with necessary skills

⁹ By institutionalised, IGNITE means gender policies, nutrition approaches, and the systems that support the adherence of those policies and approaches, are established as a norm and a part of the culture within an organisation.



From Farmer Satisfaction Representative to Gender Expert: Spotlight on Damilola Ogunsiji of Amo Farm

IGNITE client
Amo Farm Sieberer Hatchery Limited

Profile:
Producer of high-quality day-old chicks and point-of-cage pullets in Nigeria.

Working with IGNITE since:
2020

Offices:
Nigeria

Typical Clientele:
Smallholder farmers in Nigeria

Tanager and Amo Farm Sieberer Hatchery, a leading producer of day-old chicks for poultry farmers in Nigeria, first became acquainted through the African Poultry Multiplication Initiative (APMI) project. Under APMI, Amo Farm supplied the rural poultry sector in Nigeria with its Noiler breed, a dual-purpose chicken that can be reared both for eggs and meat.

As an APMI partner, Tanager provided gender and nutrition technical assistance to three poultry companies supported by APMI, which contributed to improved women’s empowerment, improved household nutrition outcomes, and increased earnings from the sale of eggs and chicken. (Tanager was already providing a customisable array of gender and nutrition technical services to African agricultural institutions, many of which were applicable to APMI as well).

‘We strengthened the package for them—we used the IGNITE model for Amo Farm,’ Catherine Macharia-Mutie, IGNITE deputy team leader.

Institutionalising gender expertise

Tanager's support to Amo Farm was based on priority: the first was to hire a gender specialist to oversee gender integration within the business. Tanager developed terms of reference (TOR) for the role and assisted in the recruitment process. Amo Farm interviewed a few of the applicants, 'but at the end of the day, we could not really get somebody who understood our processes, what we do, and hit the ground running,' explains Korede Afolabi, head of business and coordinator of the company's APMI work. Amo Farm therefore considered an internal hire.

'Damilola was that person who the cap fits,' Afolabi says, referring to Damilola Ogunsiji, then working as a farmer satisfaction representative for Amo Farm's Noiler Business Unit. 'She was one of my brightest rural sales persons,' Afolabi adds.

Farmer satisfaction representatives operate as resource officers and sales representatives in the rural communities targeted for Noiler uptake. In Southwest Nigeria, where she was stationed, Ogunsiji had reportedly amassed one of the largest rosters of smallholder farmer customers within Amo Farm. However, at that time she lacked specific gender training.

Ogunsiji is also quick to point out that she did not volunteer to interview for the gender specialist position. In fact, she had reservations when Afolabi suggested that she would be good for the role.

'Coming from this part of the country, women are not supposed to say [certain] things,' Ogunsiji explains. 'Would I now be tagged as a feminist? There is this misconception about feminism, extreme feminism. I

saw that as a challenge, as a typical African woman who is married to a typical African man. How do I strike the balance, against being seen as though I was maybe empowering women to be rebellious and report against their husbands?'

Gender lens vs. internalised beliefs

It turns out that Ogunsiji had already—without knowing it—been performing her work through a gender lens of sorts.

'When I was a farmer satisfaction representative, I saw it as a passion to encourage more women' to participate in poultry keeping, she explains. 'I'd go around to advertise Noiler to them, and the level of enthusiasm from women would not be encouraging. I started to take it upon myself to encourage more women to participate in this Noiler production so that at least they'd have something to call their own. They will not be so dependent on their husbands for sustenance and everything like that.'

Even so, the new gender specialist discovered she had unwittingly bought into the region's gender stereotypes, making it difficult at first to take in Tanager facilitated gender-sensitisation training.

'I had some myths that I was carrying from my environment,' Ogunsiji says. 'I had some untrue things that I believed that the training opened my eyes to—especially with gender roles, gender norms, all those things that are just socially constructed. So, I had to break that down within myself, digest it, and internalise it. I knew that I would not be able to preach what I did not understand myself, so I had to work on myself to break down the myth personally before I was able to delve fully into the training and the message.'





Structural adjustments

As Ogunsiji was doing the hard work of transitioning from farmer satisfaction representative to a full-time gender specialist, Amo Farm's management was working with Tanager to solidify her transition within the organisation.

Having a gender specialist was new to Amo Farm, so a business case for the role wasn't necessarily obvious, says Afolabi. He recalls coordinating with other units within Amo Farm and drafting a proposal that outlined what the gender specialist might do and how the position would help Amo Farm's APMI projects. He met with the human resources department, which developed documentation that outlined not only the specifics of the role but also the reporting structure and advancement possibilities. The management also reviewed the onboarding process.

'That was done at that time so that we have a proper structure for Damilola to grow,' Afolabi explains.

More recently, Tanager co-created a gender strategy with Amo Farm, outlining steps that the company can take, over a four-year period, to fully mainstream gender across the organisation.

'None was existing before, and that's what you want: leadership support, gender processes, how do you integrate gender? All those things are to be considered,' explains Afolabi. Tanager credits the development of the strategy, in part, to the support provided by Ogunsiji and other Amo Farm key personnel.

Among the efforts undertaken, in accordance with the strategy recommendations, was a review of the recruitment process to ensure female candidates were given more consideration at Amo Farm.

De facto gender officers

All of Amo Farm's farmer satisfaction representatives have now undertaken basic training on gender, nutrition, and social behavior change from Tanager. Over the past three years, Tanager has provided Ogunsiji with more comprehensive capacity building, through monthly coaching and mentorship calls. These formal, one-hour calls between Ogunsiji and Tanager's technical experts provide her with direct feedback and engagement where she can ask questions and understand how best to use the information to support the farmer satisfaction representatives. Tanager also linked her to short online courses on gender. Finally, Tanager provided Ogunsiji, and, by extension, Amo Farm, materials and curricula for the add-on training she provides to staff and communities.

Today, Ogunsiji proudly declares herself Amo Farm's gender champion, 'preaching the gospel of gender.' She observes: 'Because gender-based issues are key to achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria, this role has afforded me the opportunity to meet with people that matter in the society.' She mentions that, in her new capacity, she is able to discuss gender issues with key stakeholders who have influence in the community, including governors' spouses, state leaders, and non-governmental organisations.

Her colleagues, meanwhile, serve as extension of Ogunsiji's efforts.

'We have farmer satisfaction representatives that I would boldly say are gender officers,' Ogunsiji says. 'They are the ones in the 36 states of the federation. I cannot be everywhere at the same time, and this messaging has to go to the grassroots.'

Messaging is tailored to the cultural norms of the region. As Ogunsiji explains, ‘Especially up North, we might have some kind of a, how do I say it, a pushback or maybe [participants] might not accept our messages if we do not carefully present them.’ (Northern Nigeria is largely Muslim and culturally conservative.)

Despite Ogunsiji’s initial reservations, her messages were well received. She recalls being anxious about an early gender sensitisation training she oversaw with Amo Farm staff. ‘I was quite worried that the messages would not sink in,’ she says. ‘But right after the training, I would say that those that initially stood against gender training, they are now the ones taking the messages even to the hardest parts of Nigeria.’

Gender and nutrition integration as a game changer

According to Afolabi, having a full-time gender specialist on staff has made an obvious, outsised impact on Amo Farm.

‘You have touched [on] a very critical part, which we will use to justify the role of Damilola as gender specialist at any time anybody comes up to say anything about it,’ the Noiler business head says.

As Afolabi explains, the Noiler initiative in Nigeria had a rough start. ‘In fact, there was a point [where] we thought it was not going to proceed,’ he says. Approaching the initiative through a gender lens allowed the company to manage ‘some very sensitive cultural norms’ such as land ownership.

Amo Farm previously had strict prerequisites for smallholder farmers wanting to get into the Noiler business. Potential business owners had to own land, and they needed to have a structure on that property to raise the birds. While Amo Farm’s farmer satisfaction representatives would provide the necessary training, farmers still faced other potential startup barriers: ‘You have to give [the chickens] feed, and you require money to give them feed. You need some vaccinations; you must get money for them. So, a woman [interested in Noiler birds] has a lot she needs to do to get a business running,’ Afolabi says.

Cultural norms, however, meant that women in some parts of Nigeria could not own land.

After a gender-oriented review, Amo Farm adjusted its requirements. The Noiler business unit was able to make a business case for Amo Farm to promote a portable poultry pen that could be picked up and relocated if an owner had to vacate a property at any point.

The gender-based approach ‘changed the game’ in another critical way, according to Afolabi. Previously, Amo Farm required farmers to purchase a minimum of 2,000 Noiler birds to launch their business. After the gender review, it lowered the number to 300.

‘We drilled it down to say a minimum capacity of 300 [birds] is what is required, so that many women who are financially incapacitated can now participate,’ Afolabi says.

‘When 2,000 was the minimum capacity, it was only the men that were coming first, because they had the financial muscle to buy in, to set it up, do all that,’



says Afolabi. At that time, the ratio of male to female customers launching a Noiler business was 70 to 30.

Once the minimum requirement was reviewed, Afolabi says, the ratio shifted entirely in the other direction, with about 85 percent of Noiler business owners being women compared to about 15 percent men. Many of the women who started the business with 300 birds ended up growing their capacity to maintain as many as the 2,000 birds initially required by Amo Farm.

As Ogunsiji says: ‘We are now a gender-centric business unit, and the results have been quite fantastic. Now both men and women see the collective reason to participate in household programs, agricultural practices.’

Lessons and Recommendations

The interviews with Ogunsiji, and Afolabi offer lessons for Tanager and other agriculture organisations on how to institutionalise gender commitments by having a full-time gender specialist.

1. Depending on priorities and preferences, hiring an internal candidate may yield greater long-term success for the institution.

Amo Farm provides lessons on how companies can fill the gender specialist gap without having to hire an external expert. The company took a member of its staff, who grew into the role with coaching and mentoring from Tanager on gender issues.

Tanager, through its IGNITE technical assistance capabilities, can fully support clients in recruiting, interviewing, and selecting qualified gender specialists. In the case of Amo Farm, for example, Tanager provided a full gender specialist recruitment toolkit, which outlined the terms of reference for the position, provided a sample writing test, suggested specific interview questions, and offered candidate assessment post-interview.

For agencies in similar circumstances, an internal hire may offer more success for the institution in the longer term. Indeed, previous findings from an IGNITE-led study on focal points found that institutions, especially in the private sector, may trust internal candidates more to fill technical roles as they already understand the work culture and activities, in comparison to outside hires.

‘I never saw myself in this capacity, but the opportunity given to me to be here and meet a lot of gender experts in the field who have become mentors over the years—I see it as a great opportunity,’ Ogunsiji says. ‘And I think organizations should invite them. Let their own

grow.’

2. A formal review of the reporting structure and policy development is encouraged, including where and how the gender specialist may advance within the organisation.

To integrate the gender specialist role within the company structure, the head of Amo Farm’s Noiler business unit drafted an organogram—a chart that provides a graphic representation of the organisation’s structure—that showed the position and reporting lines for the gender specialist. Amo Farm further developed a reporting line structure that outlined opportunities for advancement and the roles the gender specialist could be promoted into. A review was also conducted of the employee onboarding process, to formally introduce the new role to the organisation, and a succession and support plan developed, to ensure gender priorities would not stall were the gender specialist to take leave or move onto another position. These actions ensure long-term success and smooth the integration of the role into the organization.

3. Management buy-in can play a big role in the gender specialist’s success on the job and at the institution.

With gender integration efforts still broadly considered by institutions as a ‘nice-to-have’ rather than a critical component of organizational success, support by management helps to pave the way for gender specialists to succeed.

At Amo Farm, Ogunsiji says that the management ensured that she received ‘every form of training that could make the transition easier’ from a farmer satisfaction representative to a gender specialist.

‘Even at times when I doubted the transition, they [management] said, ‘You can do it; we saw you can do it; that’s why we chose you.’ The management was very intentional about [encouraging me], and I must commend them for it.’

This corresponds to findings from Tanager’s IGNITE project, which show that management support is one of the influencing factors to the success of gender focal point persons within institutions. Management plays roles in:

- Championing institutional changes that align with gender and/or nutrition goals

- Influencing budgeting decisions to increase gender-related funding
- Communicating with staff to create a supportive organisational culture
- Pushing forward agendas on policy and strategy creation/implementation
- Cascading information on various gender initiatives across different institutional components.

Supportive management also helps in transitioning focal points to full-time experts, as given the necessity of allocating funds and prioritising new gender initiatives and capacity-building activities.

To build this buy-in, Tanager recommends including key leaders and management personnel in sensitisations and trainings on gender and nutrition mainstreaming, so that they understand the positive impact that this can have on their business.

4. Continued mentorship can maximise opportunities for success for a gender specialist in performing their role.

Providing opportunities for continued training, mentorship, and learning for gender specialists/focal points is an important step in building their confidence and gaining the skills needed to implement the full range of activities to mainstream gender within the organisation.

Tanager provided training and mentoring to ensure that the new gender specialist could perform the role effectively. Tanager staff had monthly mentorship calls with Ogunsiji and developed a customised portfolio of gender and nutrition services to ensure that she could begin implementing her role quickly and that Amo Farm could begin seeing positive impacts from having her in place. Tanager also helped Amo Farm to conduct an institutional gender assessment, develop a social behavior change strategy, and implement a communications campaign to support the work the gender specialist was doing.

Ogunsiji now feels comfortable leading the gender training with her colleagues. But she indicates it is not the same as the formal training and mentorship she received from Tanager, a powerful testament to the quality of its technical expertise: ‘I really would love that other people would benefit [from Tanager’s gender trainings],’ she says. ‘Maybe we [would want] to expand the gender office, have a beehive of gender officers. As much as I feel confident to pass the trainings

to my gender officers, I wish they’d hear it from the horse’s mouth.’

5. Having a business case for a full-time gender specialist helps ensure sustainability for the role, but institutions may require assistance in developing one.

To ensure long-term sustainability of the gender specialist role, institutions need to have a clear, compelling, and well-documented business case. The case should also identify how the role would be funded.

To ensure successful integration of the gender specialist at Amo Farm, the head of the Business Unit drew up a business case, which highlighted the gains and positive impacts the company would reap from having a gender specialist on board. This was used ‘to justify the role of Damilola as gender specialist at any time anybody comes up to say anything about it’ (Afolabi).

However, defining—and measuring—the business case is often easier said than done for institutions and requires an intentional effort to do so.


Tanager recommends identifying key tracking indicators related to gender in the business case, which can demonstrate positive impact over time, keeping in mind that the ‘business case’ is not always measured strictly in financial return. The business case can also be measured on how well gender integration helps to align an institution or company with its core values—whether that be in participant or customer well-being, access to new markets or donors, or in increasing revenue for a company.

Conclusion

Amo Farm’s experience demonstrates that institutions can successfully integrate gender into business or programme operations by tapping into already existing human resources. This requires commitment from the management to ensure that the role is fully supported to succeed and given the training and resources it requires. Tapping from existing staff will not only save money for institutions by eliminating expenditures and loss of momentum associated with recruitment, but it will also ensure a smooth transition and quicker onboarding process. The role of technical assistance as provided by Tanager is crucial in the process and can help the new hire learn quickly on the job through mentorship and coaching.



Local Service Providers



LSPs

- **Burkina Faso**
PanAfricare
Professional Association of Decentralised Financial Systems of Burkina Faso (APSPD/BF)
- **Ethiopia**
Fair & Sustainable (F&S)
- **Nigeria**
Centre for Gender Economics in Africa
- **Tanzania**
Nafaka Kilimo

Box 1: Five Local Service Providers

To ensure that IGNITE’s impact extends beyond the project timeframe, Tanager worked with a network of five local service providers (LSPs) in its implementing countries, to support gender and nutrition integration efforts (see box 1).

This compilation profiles two LSPs, PanAfricare in Burkina Faso and Fair & Sustainable (F&S) in Ethiopia, to highlight the progress made by Tanager in building their technical capacity and in co-delivering technical assistance to IGNITE clients. The two LSPs are highlighted due to their relative success, as assessed by IGNITE staff. The choice of the two, one a West African NGO and the other, an East African consulting firm, also offers helpful points of contrast between the two providers.

For each case study, Tanager staff interviewed multiple staff members from the LSP about their experiences. Supplementary interviews were also conducted with IGNITE technical experts who had worked with each organisation, for context. These findings will allow Tanager and other institutions involved in gender and nutrition integration to build on the successes highlighted in the case studies and address the challenges observed.



IGNITE's Impact: Spotlight on PanAficare

IGNITE LSP

PanAficare, Burkina Faso

Profile:

Independent nonprofit organisation (NGO) working to improve the health, agriculture, and capacity building of communities in Africa

Working with IGNITE since:
2021

Offices: Dakar, Senegal (HQ), Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe

Typical Clientele:

Private sector clients, Government actors and Local Organisations.

PanAficare already boasted experience in nutrition agriculture work when it first became a local service provider (LSP) for the Impacting Gender and Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange (IGNITE) project. In fact, this was one of the reasons the organisation was chosen as an IGNITE LSP in Burkina Faso.

'They had a nutrition expert long before we knew them,' says Clarice Kionge, IGNITE's institutional development manager, who managed the LSPs. And though PanAficare did not have expertise in gender, 'they wanted to learn beyond nutrition and build this service,' Kionge explains.

That was in late 2021, in PanAficare's early days as an IGNITE LSP.

Since then, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) has evolved into a leading LSP for IGNITE. It delivers gender and nutrition capacity strengthening activities to institutions working and investing in the agriculture sector in Burkina Faso, including the Burkinabe Association for Community Action, the Union of Cooperative Societies for the Marketing of Agricultural Products, and a cluster of microfinance institutions. It

sits in the planning meetings that IGNITE holds with clients. PanAfricare even independently performs client diagnostic assessments¹, in consultation with IGNITE experts. With a client roster of seven organisations up from four early on — and now offering 50% more services than the other IGNITE LSPs, PanAfricare serves as an example of IGNITE's direct and cascading impacts.

Interim measures to address organisational gaps

In the beginning, PanAfricare had noticeable institutional gaps in its gender competencies, according to Sokhna Gaye, IGNITE's gender expert in Burkina Faso. For instance, the NGO had no gender advisor at country level and the main gender specialist was based at its regional headquarters in Dakar, Senegal. It was also concerned about the 'numbers'—e.g. the percentage of women participating in its programming vs. men—rather than what Gaye calls the 'transformative aspects' of gender.

'We can try to get a percentage of women participating in agriculture activities, for example. But how is this participation helping them be a leader and change dynamics at the household level or have the possibility to travel or to make decisions? The transformative gender approach entails looking at the roots of

gender inequalities and the positive social norms that effectively promote and facilitate women's empowerment,' Gaye explains.

To address these gaps and build its capacity, PanAfricare took a two-pronged approach. First, it hired a part-time gender consultant, who could immediately add support to the organisation. At the same time, it was working to build its own in-house expertise: A staff member, Benjamin Sawadogo, had previously sought to expand his own education in the gender space. With recommendation from the organisation's Burkina Faso country director, Sawadogo was able to enroll in a gender and development certification course within six months of PanAfricare starting up as an IGNITE LSP.

Expanded skillsets from continued capacity building

IGNITE built upon these interim measures with continued capacity building to PanAfricare staff in conducting client audits and diagnostic assessments in both gender and nutrition, enacting social and behavioral change, budgeting for gender and nutrition-sensitive activities, gender and nutrition-sensitive monitoring and evaluation, and conducting gender and nutrition sensitizations and trainings.



¹ IGNITE provides a diagnostic assessment of every new client, to determine the client's institutional knowledge around gender and nutrition. The assessment, which consists of document review, interviews, field visits, and more, allows for a tailored training program that addresses the areas most relevant to the client's needs.

'Today we are on our third institutional diagnostic assessment for a microfinance institution,' says Sawadogo, illustrating PanAfricare's continued expansion of capabilities. 'This diagnostic assessment will help the institution to see where they are in terms of gender mainstreaming. It also helps us to provide them with recommendations in terms of [gender and nutrition] interventions, policies, plans and activities.' More recently, he adds, the nonprofit has conducted reviews of clients' training documents and manuals to assess gender and nutrition gaps and make appropriate technical suggestions for gender and nutrition mainstreaming.

Hubert Badiel, PanAfricare's country director for Burkina Faso, says the changes are noticeable across the organisation.

'At the beginning, as an institution, we didn't see the link between gender and nutrition. But now we feel more comfortable explaining this link. It's something we were not able to explain before because we didn't have enough knowledge,' Badiel explains.

At the individual level, PanAfricare staff point to increased responsibilities and skillsets since the start of the IGNITE relationship. For example, Sawadogo now has greater implementation responsibilities than he did when he initially began working on the IGNITE project. 'The director really gave me more responsibilities to represent PanAfricare in more activities and support technical assistance delivery to clients. There's more engagement at my level than even at the beginning of our launch with IGNITE,' he says.

PanAfricare has not only institutionalised its capacity to provide gender technical assistance but also nutrition. Mamouna Simpore previously held a dual role in PanAfricare as project coordinator and nutritionist, although 'the profile of the project coordinator was more of what I was implementing prior to IGNITE, she says. Since then, however, her role has changed within the team, and she began working under the IGNITE project as a nutrition expert.

Gender competence now a strong selling point

Such has been IGNITE's impact that PanAfricare has begun integrating the gender approach into its nutrition-focused projects—with positive results.

'The fact that we have integrated the gender approach has given us more success in the different activities at the community level,' Simpore reports. She cites a project where, after incorporating gender sensitization, husbands in the target population began to push for better nutrition alongside their wives. 'So now whenever we have proposals, we are automatically adding the gender approach,' she adds.

It's easy to see the positive impacts after the fact. But what motivated PanAfricare to become an IGNITE LSP in the first place? For Badiel, the move was strategic.

'PanAfricare for a long time has intervened in the nutrition sector of projects,' Badiel says. 'We were interested in this thematic area of gender and nutrition—keeping in mind that this will open more room [from a funding perspective] for us.'



Indeed, the organisation is now beginning to prospect for new opportunities based on its enhanced capabilities. The leadership recently met with representatives from the General Directorate of the Promotion of the Rural Economy from Burkina Faso's Ministry of Agriculture to explore possibilities for collaboration. PanAfricare is also gauging how it can offer its gender and nutrition mainstreaming services to other institutions with which it works.

'Whenever we meet an NGO partner, we introduce PanAfricare, introduce the IGNITE project, and tell them that PanAfricare has built on this expertise through our partnership with IGNITE,' Badiel says.

It's a strong selling point, according to Mohamed Ouédraogo, the organisation's monitoring and evaluation specialist. 'Whenever we talk with organisations about our partnership with IGNITE, they are thrilled. There is more enthusiasm for more collaboration,' he says.

Enthusiasm for IGNITE services is perhaps even stronger among those who have received them. According to gender specialist Sawadogo, institutions that have been trained by PanAfricare turn around and ask for gender sensitisation for the partners they work with. 'Some of them contact us to inform us, 'These other organisations may need the same assistance,'" he explains. In this way, IGNITE has achieved wider, cascading impact on gender integration efforts across the agriculture sector through the LSP model.

Management buy-in is necessary

PanAfricare leadership clearly saw the institutional benefit of pursuing expertise in the gender space. Such buy-in at the management level is necessary to ensure institutional success in gender and nutrition mainstreaming.

Sawadogo observes, 'It's not enough to sensitise the different agents. To be able to have some change, we need to train the decision-makers at the top level of an institution. If decision-makers are already sensitised on gender and nutrition, this can facilitate the integration of gender and nutrition in the budget and activities.'

Management buy-in with regard to budget is particularly important for monitoring and evaluation, as gender-sensitive practices may require more time and money, according to Ouédraogo. PanAfricare was already disaggregating its data by age and gender before becoming an IGNITE LSP. After capacity building from IGNITE, however, it now incorporates qualitative data from focus groups into its data collection protocols.

'The focus groups enable us to see thoroughly what the quantitative data would not be able to provide,' Ouédraogo explains. 'The difficulty is that data

collection sensitive to gender is more expensive than simple [quantitative] data. Because here you have to have focus groups, interactions, and data collection of the quantitative data.'

Long-term coaching and support to lead change

Management buy-in may well assist organisations in fully integrating gender and nutrition, when the benefits may not be immediately obvious. Citing PanAfricare's recent IGNITE work with microfinance institutions (MFIs), Simpore observes: 'Some of these institutions don't really link the good health of the client and their ability to be able to pay back a loan. These institutions need to include household nutrition of the different beneficiaries and improve that and allow women's empowerment within the household. Because once these women have their own activities, it can help them to diversify their food diets and help these clients to be healthy. When clients are healthy, they can pay back the loans. This is the link MFIs haven't [made].'

It should be noted that the business case for institutional integration of gender and nutrition may not entirely be in direct financial terms. For example, the business case could be aligned with other aspects of organisational goals, such as greater beneficiary impact or access to new markets.

Whatever an institution's business case, both Simpore and Ouédraogo agree that integrating gender and nutrition is a long-term commitment.

'You need long-term coaching and support for the integration,' Ouédraogo says. 'So, if you go and conduct one [sensitisation] session for one week or two weeks, it's true you raise awareness. But you can't mainstream gender [in this way]. If I can call it a journey: It's a long-term journey for supporting organisations and [achieving] effective integration of gender and nutrition.'

This applies not only to IGNITE clients but to the LSPs as well. PanAfricare staff, in fact, cited the desire for more capacity building in several areas. These included addressing gender-based violence; sector-specific gender and nutrition tools (or tools that could be more readily adapted to the needs of different sectors); gender-oriented policy and strategy development; and business planning.

In the meantime, PanAfricare remains committed to continuing the work it started with IGNITE.

'Many people will say [to us], 'You again, coming here to talk about equality,'" says country director Badiel. 'But after the training, people realise it's not about equality [per se]. Gender goes beyond that. This is a message of change. We are comfortable being leaders of this change.'

Lessons and Recommendations

Interviews with representatives from PanAfricare and Tanager's technical staff offer several lessons on supporting and building the capacity of LSPs, and how other institutions can replicate this type of model.

1. Learning by doing helps grow capacity.

IGNITE adopted a process that enabled PanAfricare staff to grow their confidence and skills in service provision over time. This then allowed PanAfricare to take on more responsibility and leadership in technical assistance activities.

After conducting the first IGNITE client training, Tanager's West Africa Gender Expert, Sokhna Gaye, made sure to turn the reins over to PanAfricare. She supervised how PanAfricare staff delivered IGNITE services and provided input as needed.

This process was followed for other activities. 'We needed to do a gender audit, but PanAfricare didn't have all the skills,' Gaye explains. '[IGNITE] organised a day to go through the gender audit process and had PanAfricare doing the process with us. Learning by doing is kind of the process we have used in Burkina to improve the LSP's capacity.'

Through the 'learning by doing' approach, IGNITE experts were able to gradually transfer skills and competency and turn over responsibility and ownership of service delivery to the LSP—while ensuring the quality of the service delivered was up to IGNITE standards.

As PanAfricare expanded its capacity, IGNITE invited them to participate in client meetings which made the transition for the LSP into co-managing clients easier. Similarly, IGNITE and PanAfricare jointly conducted client diagnostic assessments, until PanAfricare staff had gained sufficient confidence and expertise to lead on the assessments.

2. When transitioning an organisation into an LSP, it is necessary to identify a project coordinator on their staff to be in charge of clearly identified activities.

Even as PanAfricare's delivery of the IGNITE mechanism was improving, its management and operations had room to grow.

'Sometimes I'm managing the PanAfricare teams working with IGNITE, rather than their

institutional manager,' Gaye observes. 'I found myself delivering reports that should have been done by the LSP.'

To resolve these challenges, the LSP appointed the gender focal point to coordinate communications and all activities with IGNITE. This staff member had the responsibility to monitor whether deadlines had been met, activities outlined in the scope of work had been accomplished, and so on.

'From that point, I can say the management [was] very smooth,' Gaye reports.

PanAfricare's experience shows that these responsibilities have the added benefit of helping the LSP staff to grow professionally in their positions. Both Sawadogo and Simpore took on more responsibilities in their positions and, in a way, more status as subject area experts within their organisation. These observations are supported by a previous IGNITE study, which found that creating clear terms of reference for focal points is important to their success as subject experts within an institution.

3. Regular communication ensures IGNITE–LSP alignment.

Officially, PanAfricare and IGNITE agreed to hold meetings twice a month, but ended up meeting every week.

'We [were] holding meetings regularly, talking about the challenges and how they needed to be supported and what they needed to deliver correctly,' says Gaye. 'So, this proximity and this communications facilitation between IGNITE and the LSP [helped] us in Burkina reach a lot of our objectives and also facilitate our work with PanAfricare.'

Gaye also recommends involving the LSP in all phases of working with clients. 'The more we have proximity with LSPs, the better we are at [achieving] the best results,' she says. This includes involving LSPs in inception meetings with clients, in data collection and service delivery, in training facilitation, in developing training materials, and in results presentations as applicable.

4. Helping institutions to identify linkages between seemingly disparate issues will assist them in making the business case for gender and nutrition integration.

At the beginning, institutions may not always see the linkages between gender, nutrition, and their business goals, and may require handholding to

make the relevant connections. This will help to ensure that they see both the value of gender and nutrition mainstreaming and disseminate that message to their networks.

As previously observed by Country Director Badiel, PanAfricare did not initially see the link between gender and nutrition. Similarly, according to Simpore, PanAfricare's nutrition focal point, microfinance institutions were not always able to see the connections between how better nutrition for its clientele could lead to more regular loan repayments.

Providing direct coaching and ensuring that the staff in the positions most likely to be at the crux of these issues receive appropriate training, can help institutions connect the dots between the issues and people's roles.

5. Catalysing changes within LSP institutions and their partner institutions can impact their overall ecosystem.

As its staff got involved in gender and nutrition issues, PanAfricare as an institution began to view its programming through these lenses. The result, as highlighted by Simpore, was that PanAfricare worked to integrate gender into its existing nutrition programs—and continues to incorporate gender into proposals.

This is a powerful example of IGNITE's broad impact, whereby the LSP model is integrated across a network of institutions, through various means: from the training institution to the client, from clients to their partners, and from the training institution to its existing projects or partners.

Thus, even as LSPs learn to conduct diagnostic assessments and provide other services to clients, it may be helpful to encourage them to also look within their own institutions and programming to determine how they can more fully 'walk the talk.' This can be achieved by having an LSP do a self-diagnostic assessment and determining the areas needing improvement.

6. Identifying and closing gaps in LSP competency can open doors for wider impact and new business opportunities.

Once PanAfricare built up its gender expertise, it began leveraging these new skills to go after new business.

The organisation was already implementing food security and nutrition programming in Burkina

Faso. According to the Country Director Badiel, adding the gender component — and being able to operate at the nexus of gender and nutrition — have given the institution additional status that opened doors for new business opportunities.

Other projects similar to IGNITE can lean into their tailored technical assistance to assist other LSPs make similar leaps by helping them build upon their unique skillsets.

7. Long-term management commitment maximizes integration potential.

As PanAfricare has made significant strides in its gender education and expertise, its staff have become increasingly aware of areas where they require capacity building. To support these needs, a long-term commitment is necessary at the institutional level.

As noted by all the PanAfricare staff who were interviewed for this case study, management buy-in ensures support within and across the institution as a corporate philosophy, and in budgets. But how long is that commitment for?

As Ouédraogo noted, it is a journey: 'You need long-term coaching and support for the integration.'

It is therefore necessary for technical assistance programmes such as IGNITE to assist LSPs and, by extension, clients, to map out what commitment to gender and nutrition integration looks like over an extended timeframe. Part of that mapping out should also include plans on how these initiatives will be funded, to ensure the goals can realistically be supported.

Conclusion

As illustrated in this case study, IGNITE's approach to providing technical assistance and building capacity yielded major gains for LSPs and clients. IGNITE's process enabled LSPs to grow their confidence and skills in integrating gender and nutrition, and even to cascade these competencies to their clients. Working with IGNITE helped PanAfricare to not only expand its staff's skillset, but also opened up new opportunities for business. The coaching and mentoring allowed the NGO staff to learn from IGNITE experts through a learning by doing model. The approach demonstrates how the impact of a funded project's technical assistance can continue long after it ends.



Leveraging IGNITE to Expand Technical Areas: Spotlight on Fair & Sustainable

IGNITE LSP

Fair and Sustainable Consulting Ethiopia (F&S)

Profile:

International consultancy and social enterprise, supporting clients in different thematic areas in agribusiness

Working with IGNITE since: 2021

Offices: Netherlands (HQ), Ethiopia and Kenya

Typical Clientele:

International NGOs and Private Sector clients, Government Actors and Local Organisations

Impetus to Become IGNITE LSP

F&S had specific reasons for wanting to become an IGNITE Local service provider (LSP) in Ethiopia. The social enterprise consultancy firm already had a background in gender, implementing gender mainstreaming and gender inclusion activities for clients.

‘We did not have as bold a profile in nutrition,’ says Hibiye Tesfaye, F&S’s interim general manager and gender expert, who served as the lead writer for the firm’s proposal to become an IGNITE LSP. ‘So we have the gender part. If we get the assignment, then we will have exposure on the nutrition part—that was the motivation [for the application].’

The calculation paid off.

‘The moment we started working with IGNITE, the more that we started to engage on projects that also have nutrition components,’ says Lensa Girma, agroecology, nutrition, and food systems consultant for F&S. ‘As a consulting firm, we mostly used to focus on market value chains and empowerment. But thanks to IGNITE, we get a chance to [apply] more of the nutrition tools [to our work].’

F&S served as an IGNITE LSP for 3 years. From the staff testimony, it is clear that the role provided several benefits—and not just in terms of growth in nutrition, a technical area new to them. The role introduced new dimensions to existing work with clients and opened up new business potential. It also enhanced the firm’s capacity in its mainstay area of gender.

‘Before we started engaging with IGNITE, we had some projects that we were really involved in [in food security], but we weren’t doing the big picture when it comes to nutrition,’ says Girma. ‘The more we know about the concepts and tools, the more we start to engage on nutrition assignments. So, it really changed us and given us a picture where we can also incorporate nutrition in the projects that we are working for.’

Incorporating Nutrition into Existing Projects

Following capacity building by IGNITE, F&S staff started to proactively incorporate elements of what they had learnt into client projects. For example, F&S has been involved in a pre-existing project before IGNITE, where it has been building the general capacity of a technical vocational college for the past five years. One of the project components involved establishing a daycare center where employees of the college could leave their children while they taught.

Because school lunches are not provided in Ethiopia, these parents were packing lunches for their young children. F&S’s new found knowledge in nutrition prompted the staff to look into the quality of those packed lunches. ‘When we saw what kind of meals

[parents] were bringing for their kids, [we realised] it’s not really what is essential for the children but what is convenient to put in the lunchbox,’ Tesfaye explains. To address this, F&S produced a manual and organised training for the parents and the school on the importance of nutritious food for young children. The training included how to safely pack a balanced meal in a lunchbox. Tesfaye adds that the training by IGNITE also prompted her to become more deliberate about what she packs in her own children’s lunches.

In another case, F&S was assessing the impact of women’s involvement in a coffee value chain. These assessments usually inquire how respondents use the income generated from the activity: ‘What do you do with the money? Do you buy clothes? Do you do this?’ says Tesfaye.

This time, Tesfaye and Girma proactively added a nutrition-oriented question, prompted by their training by IGNITE. They asked project participants whether their increased income had led them to change the types of meals they make. Tesfaye points out that while F&S was not there to measure nutrition for the project, the questions brought in new perspectives on gender: ‘I can boldly say that we process some of the information from nutrition perspectives [now, due to] our exposure working with Tanager. It has helped us to open our eyes to see the gender dynamics from a nutrition perspective.’

That perspective has allowed F&S to offer its newly built capacity to clients. As Girma says, ‘Before, [clients] ... focus more on the food security issue, [on] empowerment for job creation. But the more we tell them that we also have experts at home and that we can do a nutrition assessment, the more they



become interested in the agenda. They're like, 'OK, what if we also commit to these kinds of tools, this kind of assessment, rather than only looking at the food security part, since nutrition is a byproduct?'

Gender Transformative Changes

Serving as an IGNITE LSP appears to have added value to F&S on other fronts.

While gender was already a technical area in the firm, the experience with IGNITE expanded its gender knowledge base. F&S had previously largely worked with organisations to implement gender at the household level. However, working with IGNITE clients such as Digital Green and Sasakawa Africa Association built the capacity of the firm to tackle gender at the national and larger institutional level.

'[Working as an IGNITE LSP] has enhanced our understanding ... of gender from a higher level, in a way,' Tesfaye says. 'It has strengthened our mechanism,' Tesfaye adds, noting that she has revised F&S's gender training materials and methodology following IGNITE training.

The firm has also benefited from its relationship with Tanager, as well as with the other IGNITE LSPs.

'Counting on our experience working with Tanager [through IGNITE], we have applied for [proposals] that are at the regional level. We profile ourselves that we are a Tanager LSP, and Tanager is working in this country so in a way we have that exposure. We can also use the LSPs in Tanzania, Nigeria, and Burkina as our partners in a way. That has given us confidence that we have that bigger network, and we qualify to take the bigger assignment[s],' Tesfaye says.

Cascading Knowledge to Enhance Learning

Even staff not specifically involved in IGNITE projects have benefited from F&S's status as an IGNITE LSP. Emmy Mugasia is an associate consultant for F&S in Kenya who attended an IGNITE-led monitoring and evaluation (M&E) training in October 2022. The training focused on gender and nutrition indicators in agriculture programming.

Mugasia does not do any direct work with IGNITE but had been invited to the session as an F&S staff member. But the training has stuck.

'It was one training [session], but I've been able to use [what I learned] to share with other organisations,' she says.

After the workshop, Mugasia immediately put her new knowledge to use on a client evaluation for an international women's economic empowerment organisation. Later, she partnered with a gender expert colleague on a community engagement and gender analysis for an international conservation organisation.

'The project was gender-blind, so they wanted us to look at it and provide gender indicators,' Mugasia explains. She says she was able to actively contribute to the assignment, thanks to the IGNITE training.

In this way, Mugasia has been able to cascade knowledge and skills gained from IGNITE's training to other organisations.

'Without [IGNITE] equipping us, I don't think it would have been as smooth as it went. So, I'm really grateful,' Mugasia says, noting that she still refers to the notes she took from the session.

Challenges with LSP Model

'The Nature of Consultancy'

Mugasia's example illustrates IGNITE's impact. It is not always a smooth path from training to application, however, as a consulting firm, F&S operates with a slightly different structure than some of the other IGNITE LSPs. According to Clarice Kionge, institutional development manager for IGNITE, F&S's consultancy status may have been an advantage when the project was choosing LSPs.

'If you look at technical assistance and what Tanager is doing [through IGNITE], the thinking was, if we can get someone offering services—which is literally what F&S does—then this must be the right fit,' Kionge explains.

As a consultancy, F&S operates with a small full-time staff. Associate consultants, who are independent, or freelance are recruited onto projects on an as-needed, contract basis. In this way, F&S can maintain a roster of consultants in various technical areas in a budget-efficient way. As Tesfaye notes, if F&S does not have enough client work for full-time staff, 'they become a cost.'

But this also means that some technical areas, such as M&E, do not have full-time staff. Further, the F&S consultants who received IGNITE training did not automatically work on IGNITE projects. Nor is there any guarantee that the trained consultants would be available to work on those F&S assignments with gender and nutrition components.

There is also the matter of what clients deem to be important.

Simone Reinders, an associate consultant in M&E, research, and knowledge management for F&S Kenya, benefited from an IGNITE-led social and behaviour change training in April 2023. She uses her training to identify how social and behaviour change can add value for the clients and incorporates the approach into proposals. She has also suggested behaviour change as an extra element for measurement on M&E projects. Since the IGNITE training, however, she has not had many opportunities to work on projects focused on gender or nutrition, and few of her clients



have implemented her suggestions on social and behaviour change.

‘I think that’s the nature of consultancy. I don’t have a lot of say in how an organisation works or what they choose to do,’ Reinders explains. ‘We both know that in the NGO world, there are a lot of people who do not go much beyond what their funders want and need. In some cases, you will mention [social and behavior change], and there will be interest. But whether it actually happens remains a question.’

Tesfaye echoes this sentiment. Citing M&E, for example, she acknowledges: ‘We are aware that there is a better way of doing M&E when it comes to gender and nutrition, ... how to feed data, how to do analysis. But sometimes the challenge is to apply it to other assignments. It also depends on the interest of those clients.’

Limitations on LSP Operations

Another, perhaps unexpected, challenge for F&S, was its relatively modest engagement with IGNITE clients. F&S worked alongside Tanager’s IGNITE staff to provide capacity building and training for Digital Green and supported a gender and nutrition research assignment for Sasakawa Africa Association.

‘I feel like the investment [from IGNITE] is way bigger than what we have delivered. We want to have more engagement with the clients and more clients,’ Tesfaye says. ‘There were times where I requested

[of the IGNITE team], ‘Can we also do mapping? Partnerships? Can we pitch on behalf of you and attract more clients?’ Because I know how well-designed the training materials are, how the expert label—the Tanager label—[will be effective]. I felt that we can really do bigger.’

Kionge notes the demand for IGNITE services in Ethiopia was lower than what some of the other LSPs in other countries experienced.

‘It did not have anything to do with Fair & Sustainable, and it had nothing to do with our technical assistance service,’ Kionge says. ‘It has just been, I think, the kind of priorities that the clients have had in Ethiopia.’

She adds: ‘Our clients in Ethiopia were donor-dependent. Their priorities are this deadline, and the timeline [of implementation]. All that [affected] how they [took] the IGNITE work.’

What held F&S back from going out and trying to pitch for more clients independently?

The way Tesfaye tells it, the IGNITE arrangement limited what F&S felt it could do on its own. She explains, ‘We are a local service provider hired by Tanager. So in a way, we have an expectation to be told [what to do]. That’s also how our working framework is: We have counted activities, then we just follow that.’

Opportunities for More

Tesfaye sees opportunities to continue to expand IGNITE's footprint in Ethiopia, however..

'With the training materials, the training methodologies, the process I see from the Tanager team, we could profile products, training products for organisations that are engaged in agriculture and nutrition,' she suggests. 'So, we can deliver training with resource materials, certify, coach them, follow them, and see the different levels of engagement,' she adds.

Another starting point may be rooted in the Gender and Nutrition Learning Network, which IGNITE launched in Ethiopia in August 2023. The F&S staff who worked directly with IGNITE staff to organise the activity agree that it was a valuable event that received considerable interest from the attendees. But F&S staff appear to harbor some uncertainty on the next steps.

Having observed a real desire by the participants' for more networking, Reinders suggests a follow-up forum, with built-in networking time and practical tools that make it easy for organisations to engage in partnerships. 'Implementers wanted donors, and donors wanted implementers,' she says of the first forum. She suggests that IGNITE's well-developed framework and tools can offer a useful starting point for stakeholders, with F&S implementing them more broadly.

Tesfaye sees a similar opportunity. 'We see our role on networking [to be] bringing similar like-minded organisations to coming to one way of doing things that we could produce different guidelines. We could identify an area of influence at the policy level,' she says, noting the potential for a network to draw attention to significant issues.

'I want to see more engagement, for Tanager to get engaged with different organisations, to become more visible at the country level,' Tesfaye declares. 'In Ethiopia, we are 85 to 90% dependent on agriculture. Nutrition is also our priority, yet we struggle to address it. I see it's the fertile ground to promote the issue at a bigger level.'

The opportunities are there—but so, too, is the need for more technical assistance such as IGNITE, contends Tesfaye. When asked about areas where F&S might need more capacity building or technical assistance, she answers: 'We feel that we want to get more engaged and want to be more involved on a bigger scale. And whenever you put us at the bigger scale, we need the support, coaching, and the M&E.'

Lessons and Recommendations

1. Continuous capacity building for LSPs strengthens technical assistance delivery on gender and nutrition integration; however, clients decide on the support desired.

F&S staff reported having greatly improved on how they offer technical assistance to clients. The nutrition portfolio, which initially was low, has grown, and F&S has continued to strengthen its gender portfolio. However, F&S faces a major challenge during the delivery of technical assistance because most of its clients are development organisations funded by donors implementing programmes with pre-determined design and deliverables. Based on the gender analysis and nutrition diagnostic report, F&S and Tanager can advise the client on how to mainstream gender and integrate nutrition into their work, but it is up to the client to express interest or decide on the assistance needed.

2. LSPs may need to market their services differently to overcome client resistance.

In some instances, clients may have a defined package of services that they use LSPs for, limiting the opportunity to receive new technical assistance. To counter this, LSPs may have to approach their client engagements differently, such as through more client education about the value of various services or using different marketing tactics. Not all LSPs may know how to effectively sell their services and they may require additional support to address this challenge.

3. There is significant value-add for organisations that become LSPs. However, success requires institutional support and buy-in.

Becoming an IGNITE LSP offered these F&S several advantages. The role enhanced the organisation's reputation, expanded technical capacity, opened new funding opportunities, and provided access to a new roster of clients. Success, however, is not guaranteed. Becoming an effective LSP requires institutional support and a long-term outlook on the strategic value of investments, as continuous resourcing of technical experts is needed. As previously noted, organisations also need to have an interest in diversifying into new services and a client base that supports

this interest. Organisations may also fare better when they have existing institutional capacities and systems upon which to build.

4. Knowledge transfer¹, direct capacity building, and networking strengthen LSP capacity, positioning them to cascade IGNITE learnings and service offerings to others.

Despite LSPs being experts in their field and clients having varying needs, F&S staff reported having learnt a significant amount themselves when co-delivering technical assistance services to clients. This was cascaded to its projects that have a focus on women's empowerment, gender, and nutrition.

On knowledge brokerage, IGNITE facilitated knowledge sharing among LSPs through various platforms, including a research summit, LSPs summit, and some training tailored specifically for LSPs to enable them to share their best practices, learn from each other, connect, and explore potential areas of collaboration. F&S noted that these engagements, including the opportunity to work and learn alongside other IGNITE LSPs, were beneficial for the continued development of its technical capacity. Overall, these efforts contributed to increased learning and networking and have the potential to increase demand for IGNITE services from clients.

5. Creating and strengthening local networks offers a gateway to advance gender and nutrition integration.

Tanager and F&S launched the gender & nutrition learning network for different stakeholders in the agri-food sector to share their best practices, models, and tools on gender mainstreaming and nutrition-sensitive agricultural approaches. The network, which brings together IGNITE local partners, development partners, researchers, policymakers, and the private sector, also allows participants to collaborate amongst themselves to avoid duplication of efforts, leading to greater impact.

The network elicited excitement amongst stakeholders. However, there is still much support needed to strengthen it, define its structure of operations, and follow up with members to keep up the momentum. F&S and Tanager can take advantage of such forums to share more about their work as well as learn from clients, interact with potential new clients, and explore opportunities for engagement with other key stakeholders in the agri-food sector.

The LSPs from IGNITE implementation countries have also formed their own network to share successes, challenges, and existing opportunities for offering technical assistance to clients. This enhances learning and opportunities for future collaboration.

6. Scale training to other programmatic staff to enhance efficiency and service delivery.

IGNITE targeted gender, nutrition, and M&E experts in its training. However, F&S staff interviewed suggested that such training should be extended to other staff—especially those in finance—for better delivery of services. For instance, training on gender-responsive budgeting requires experts with a financial background, and someone knowledgeable in gender. Given potential staff capacity issues that arise from a consultancy framework, extending training to other programmatic staff would be beneficial to the entire team.

Conclusion

F&S is expected to deliver technical assistance on gender and nutrition integration to clients even beyond the IGNITE project. From interviews with staff, it seems that knowledge transfer has been achieved from their engagement with IGNITE, as well as a technical transfer of tools. Although they have gained additional technical expertise in gender and nutrition, F&S staff still require continuous technical support, especially on M&E, as well as guidance in steering the gender and nutrition learning network. It is therefore important that LSPs continue to receive ongoing coaching and support for continuous quality improvements as they grow into their roles.

¹ A process by which knowledge, ideas and experience move from the source of knowledge to the recipient of that knowledge.



Threading the Needle: Spotlight on IGNITE’s Technical Experts

For the technical experts serving on the Impacting Gender & Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange in Agriculture (IGNITE) project, providing technical assistance (TA) is not simply a matter of knowing the subject matter.

‘Working with clients and being able to deliver technical assistance requires some amount of soft skills,’ observes Catherine Macharia-Mutie, deputy team leader for IGNITE. ‘Beyond you needing to be a technical expert—you have your nutrition skills, your gender skills—there’s much more [that is required] for you to be able to deliver to your clients.’

This was one of the many topics discussed by IGNITE technical experts during a virtual learning workshop held on August 22, 2023. Nearly a dozen IGNITE team members from Tanager shared best practices, insights, and challenges during the 90-minute session. The session brought together gender and nutrition experts, researchers, monitoring and evaluation specialists, and team leads. They joined the meeting from multiple countries and spoke about their experiences working with clients from both anglophone and francophone countries in Africa. The following are some of the issues that emerged from the discussion.

1. Client availability can significantly impact the timing of technical assistance delivery.

IGNITE worked with clients to determine the specific activities and materials to be provided, before technical assistance could be delivered. Because client leadership tends to be eager for technical assistance at this point, they would be actively involved in planning the scope of work.

While clients would express enthusiasm about the technical assistance to be delivered, it did not mean they would be available to receive the support on the agreed-upon timelines. IGNITE staff frequently experienced delays from the client side when they tried to deliver the technical assistance activities.

‘Since we are working with agriculture institutions that most of the time are working in seasons, we find that, yes, the material [we’ve agreed upon and developed] has been delivered, but there’s no one to receive it because most of the guys are out in the field,’ said IGNITE Gender Expert

Winnie Osulah.

IGNITE staff employed a number of strategies to try to mitigate this issue. One was to try to synchronize work plans with client institutions—but this had its own challenges, as IGNITE's operational calendars often differed from those of their clients.

Additionally, before finalising scopes of work, technical experts would often go back to the client to confirm that the originally agreed-upon timelines would still work. Osulah offered a hypothetical: 'For example, when we're [planning on] doing staff training, are the targeted staff [actually] available during a given period of time?'

IGNITE's staff in Burkina Faso would share with clients a calendar of the intended activities for an upcoming month prior to starting the actual activity. 'So what we have [planned] in September, we already have shared [ahead of time] with clients to confirm the dates and their availability,' explained Sokhna Gaye, an IGNITE gender expert based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

The staff would then follow up with additional reminders. During monthly meetings with the client liaison persons, the technical experts would provide advance notice of plans one to three months ahead. Gaye said that she would also follow up on any emails with a phone call to ensure clients had understood what she covered in the email.

2. Staff transitions — on both ends — creates difficulties.

The experts observed that staff transition at IGNITE or the client institution can create challenges. Client staffing changes can mean not only starting anew on the relationship building, but also on knowledge building. IGNITE Nutrition Expert Josias Compaore cited a Burkinabé client whose nutrition focal point had recently moved to another organisation. 'The new [focal point] that the client chose [did not have] any knowledge in the nutrition field. So, we have to begin with some training and [help] him to improve his work in the nutrition aspect,' he said.

Mary Thamari, an IGNITE gender expert based in Nairobi, Kenya, cited a client's reported experience in having to work with different IGNITE gender experts at different times during the relationship.

In this case, Thamari explained, the client's gender focal point had been well briefed on the IGNITE transition. Meetings also took place between IGNITE's outgoing and incoming gender

experts, to ensure a smooth handover. However, these changes had not been well communicated with the rest of the client's team. 'That can demotivate, or make a client feel that their needs have not fully been met,' she said, adding: 'To some extent, the clients might feel that there are some needs ... that have fallen through the cracks.'

3. Client knowledge levels impacted what IGNITE could do for — and with — the client.

While clients were often eager to learn about gender and nutrition issues—wherever their starting point—technical experts reported that working with focal points who are not gender or nutrition experts can add an additional challenge to delivering technical assistance.

'That limits the ability to pass on the information or to utilise the capacity you as the gender expert are providing to the teams who really need this information and this technical support,' explained Thamari.

Thamari and Olive Muthamia, an IGNITE nutrition expert, recounted a situation where they proposed certain services to a client in East Africa, only to have the client reject them. 'At the moment, [...] what we saw is that they did not understand the importance of that service to their overall business,' Muthamia observed.

The two technical experts had to quickly adjust tactics and 'step back,' Thamari said. 'We stepped back not as giving up but as a way of setting that culture with the client that we really want to listen, not to impose what we think, even if we know or we think that [the proposed service] is useful for them. I think our stepping back at this moment is really to observe. We still have regular conversations, so that along the way we can again try to link whatever other needs they bring to this service.'

Muthamia agreed, 'Giving more time and engaging with the client over multiple times to [have them] understand the importance of that service is the best way to go about it.'

Is it at all possible to prevent such a situation from occurring in the first place?

'If an organisation is in a position to bring in an expert who is trained in that particular area, on gender and nutrition, or gender or nutrition, then that would be the ideal,' said Charles Karari, IGNITE's monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) manager. 'But if that is not possible, then the organisation just volunteers one person who they feel could be their focal person. And it is up

to our team of experts to work with that person, bring them to speed in understanding what is needed in the integration of gender and nutrition.'

As such, IGNITE experts agreed that continued engagement and ongoing mentoring was key to providing the most value to clients. The IGNITE team in Burkina Faso, for example, used the monthly client meetings to introduce new topics in gender and nutrition. During their client engagements, IGNITE's East Africa team worked to find teachable moments that would connect to previously discussed topics.

4. Client assessments or diagnostics help build evidence — and create demand — for technical assistance support.

At the other end of the knowledge spectrum from brand-new focal points are the MEL teams found at client institutions. According to Karari, IGNITE clients, especially from the non-governmental sector had very well-developed monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. 'They even have officers who are trained in monitoring, evaluation, and learning, or experts who are very well trained in data collection, analysis, and all that,' he said.

While these staff are well-versed in their area of expertise, however, Karari said they did not often think about gender and nutrition. 'In Burkina Faso, the microfinance institutions [we were working with] have been collecting all these huge data elements,' he explained. 'But they only analyse like five or six elements because they have never considered the importance of the other gender indicators—even though they collect them.'

Karari added, 'Once they buy in to integrating gender and nutrition, then they'll go into other areas, including monitoring evaluation and learning, and maybe even research.'

To cultivate that buy-in, IGNITE technical experts agreed that using client diagnostics or assessments was key. 'I think for technical assistance, we should first be able to know where the organisation is—by diagnostics or then the next step, a formative assessment, so that all the assistance we're giving is based on some evidence,' Thamari said.

Macharia-Mutie agreed: 'Creating evidence for TA support is critical.'

Gaye emphasised that conducting an assessment was particularly helpful, 'because institutions often think they're doing gender, whether they actually are or not.'

'Using any assessment approach — diagnostic, audit, discussion in beginning for client uptake and identifying gaps — helps to let them see the gaps they have,' she added.

Assessments also formed the basis of a tailored scope of work, allowing clients to commit to, and help determine, how the IGNITE technical assistance would unfold.

Demand creation may flow naturally after an assessment. 'For clients we have done a diagnostic process [for], I would say that would be the first point where demand creation for services is created,' explained Karari. 'Because you can tell from each of the domains in the diagnostic process, based on

what they score, ... there is a plan to track changes across all those domains and subdomains. [And] if you need to do a training or develop a gender strategy, then how will you measure that gender strategy is useful to your organisation? That creates demand for other services, including monitoring and evaluation and accountability processes.'

5. IGNITE clients with donor-provided funding for gender and nutrition mainstreaming had different expectations from independently acquired clients.

In providing gender and nutrition-sensitive MEL training, Karari would ask IGNITE clients a key question: 'I'll go in and [conduct] a training that talks about the logical frameworks, their monitoring and evaluation plans, and whether they integrate indicators, gender or nutrition indicators. If not, [I would ask], how much are they willing to include [them] in the existing and future M&E plans?'

Of course, future plans — and whether gender and nutrition mainstreaming is incorporated into them — can depend on funding availability. Interestingly, IGNITE staff said that simply having the funding for these services did not guarantee a clear path forward.

'Most of our demand usually feels like it is IGNITE driven because you're the one to identify the gaps. And then we take the client through a process to understand why, you know, what it takes for them to address those gaps,' said Osulah. She suggested that funding sources can play an unexpected role in client commitment or expectations.

For instance, IGNITE staff had observed that clients referred to the project by a donor would enter the relationship with expectations of

guaranteed services. With such clients, 'we get into trouble when it comes to budgeting for the activities we need to give them. We experience a lot of scope creep in the sense that ... they tell us, 'But [the donor] says that you're supposed to be giving us this technical support,' said Osulah.

She added, 'But what does this technical support really mean? As far as I'm concerned, it is my time as a technical expert that has already been paid for by the donor, but [clients] expect that, you know, when you are sending people for training, we meet the logistical costs. They imagine we have the budget, but ... the only budget we have is for our technical time.'

On the other hand, clients who approached IGNITE of their own accord often had a good sense of what IGNITE could offer and what they themselves had to bring to the table.

6. Encouraging clients to be proactive and promoting accountability can help ensure smoother delivery of technical assistance.

Despite the challenges with client expectations, IGNITE staff agreed on the value of having a mix of both referred and independently acquired clients. While clients who came to IGNITE of their own accord often understood their roles in the relationship, Team Lead Maureen Munjua pointed out that they sometimes did not know what services they needed. 'So I see it being a mix of us guiding what they need and then also shaping with them what they [want],' she said.

'It's a mix I would not want to let go, because it also provides a lot of learning,' agreed Osulah.

The experts agreed that clarity with clients, however, was necessary. Encouraging clients to be proactive — and holding them accountable — would also ensure a smoother process for delivering technical assistance.

'I think for me, what I want to say is that probably after the referral, there needs to be a way we engage so that it's not like it is us prompting the client but rather ... see how best we make [the process] more client driven,' said Clarice Kionge, IGNITE's institutional development manager.

Similarly, Thamari said, 'I wish there could be a progression of technical assistance that we



propose to say, 'This is what IGNITE offers, because this is the best practice of the tried and tested assistance you need for you to get gender-mainstreamed or nutrition-sensitive in your organisation.' Such a progression could, she suggested, offer client accountability and prevent issues of clients outrightly rejecting offered services and leaving both parties at an impasse on the next steps.

'So if we offer an approach for social behaviour change communication or another approach for whatever it is, we can have now, like, kind of recipes: 'You can go this pathway or this pathway.' But the beginning point is already defined,' Thamari said, because of the prior diagnostic or assessment that establishes a baseline of what is needed (See #5).

7. Ultimately, delivering technical assistance is a matter of threading the needle: Technical experts must possess seemingly opposing traits to successfully serve clients.

While subject matter expertise is critical in delivering technical assistance, the IGNITE technical team's experience shows that an expert's toolbox must be deep and varied to succeed. It would be helpful, for example, if the expert possesses the following:

A delicate balance of management skills and savvy in partnership engagement. In order to keep growing institutions' competencies in gender and nutrition, technical experts must both manage an institution's focal points as well as, in a way, its leadership. A scope of work must be agreed upon, work plans must be explained and reviewed. 'Everything to some extent requires client management [to ensure buy-in],' observed Kionge. But, she added, 'You also need to be able to see them as a [part of your] team. So you're a manager—but at the same time you are developing partnerships. For me, that means you need to understand how to nurture partnerships and sustain that partnership, even as you manage that client.'

An analytical mind, with a flair for creativity. An IGNITE technical expert needed to be able to assess and analyse where an institution was in terms of its gender and nutrition mainstreaming and how the institution could be guided to the next step. 'We have to be solution-driven, and there is a need for a technical expert to see in

an analytical way how we can improve what institutions are doing,' said Gaye, the gender expert in Burkina Faso. IGNITE developed a variety of gender and nutrition assessment tools, sensitization trainings, and modules to assist with this.

But, as Gaye pointed out, customisation was necessary to adapt to each client's differences. Experts also needed to consider how they could ensure client buy-in and engagement. 'We need this innovative way of thinking in addition to the analytical way of thinking,' she said.

Sales and persuasion skills — tempered by an ability to be patient. Team Lead Munjua pointed out that the start of an IGNITE–client relationship often like a marketing pitch: 'We are selling a service, and you have to almost pitch why that service is beneficial for that institution. So you don't go into that conversation from a purely technical perspective,' she said. In that sense, persuasion skills were handy to have.

But technical experts cannot be pushy. 'You need to be able to convince the client that what you're offering is good, but also be able to be patient when things don't work out,' said Macharia-Mutie.

Macharia-Mutie concluded: 'I think for me IGNITE has been more testing the expert [than anything else]. So you have all the expertise, but somebody doesn't think they need it or somebody doesn't think they have the time for what we want to offer. So how do you still float . . . in that circumstance so when [the client] comes tomorrow, you will still be able to be happy to deliver what they want?'

Conclusion

The IGNITE project model heavily depended on the technical experts to deliver tailored technical assistance to its clients. As this case study demonstrates, such an approach requires a careful cultivation of relationships, and a lot of patience on both sides. IGNITE's experts had to dig deep into their soft skills and innovative activity management, to create demand for the project's services, keep the client committed to the process and ultimately deliver on agreed activities in a timely manner. For any technical assistance project, forging a collaborative relationship with the recipient agency is just as important as having the required technical expertise on board. This case study has also demonstrated some useful approaches that technical assistance projects can employ for a fruitful relationship with their clients.

IGNITE Clients: 2018 - 2024





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