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USAID Advancing Nutrition Nigeria State Committee on Food and Nutrition Capacity Assessment Report

Bauchi
July 25-26, 2022

About USAID Advancing Nutrition

USAID Advancing Nutrition is the Agency's flagship multi-sectoral nutrition project, led by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), and a diverse group of experienced partners. Launched in September 2018, USAID Advancing Nutrition implements nutrition interventions across sectors and disciplines for USAID and its partners. The project's multi-sectoral approach draws together global nutrition experience to design, implement, and evaluate programs that address the root causes of malnutrition. Committed to using a systems approach, USAID Advancing Nutrition strives to sustain positive outcomes by building local capacity, supporting behavior change, and strengthening the enabling environment to save lives, improve health, build resilience, increase economic productivity, and advance development.

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Activity Information

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Acronyms

JSI	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
LGA	local government authority
LGCFN	local government committee on food and nutrition
MBEP	Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning
MDA	Ministries, Departments, and Agencies
MEL	monitoring, evaluation, and learning
OCAT	Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool
SCFN	State Committee on Food and Nutrition
ToR	Terms of Reference
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

State Committees for Food and Nutrition (SCFN) are key players in coordinating food and nutrition interventions across states in Nigeria. The USAID Advancing Nutrition Nigeria scoping exercise identified the need to assess SCFN's capacity to perform oversight functions in nutrition activities. This report presents results from the assessment in Bauchi State. There are accompanying reports for Kebbi and Sokoto States.

This assessment revealed that the SCFN needs substantial support to perform its functions effectively. Priorities for improvement include building a functional local government committee on food and nutrition (LGCFN) at the local government authority (LGA) level, improving monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems, and increasing budget release. Key actions to address these issues include engaging in advocacy efforts to increase government support, developing a resource mobilization plan to increase funding, reactivating the LGCFN, and developing MEL systems for SCFN.

Background

In Nigeria, State Committees for Food and Nutrition (SCFN) were established within the state Ministry of Budgeting and Economic Planning (MBEP) or its equivalent in each state to provide oversight of multi-sectoral activities that impact food and nutrition issues. The Committees support the state planning ministries, which serve as the state-level secretariat, for planning, budgeting, implementing, monitoring, and advocating for activities.

During the USAID Advancing Nutrition Nigeria scoping exercise, stakeholders cited the need to strengthen the capacity of the SCFNs both in their understanding of multi-sectoral nutrition and skills in planning, budgeting, and oversight. As a result, USAID Advancing Nutrition conducted a capacity assessment in its implementing states (Bauchi, Kebbi, and Sokoto) to inform capacity-strengthening processes. This initial capacity assessment will enable the project to track changes in SCFN capacities throughout the project's life.

Objectives

The main objective of the assessment was to identify areas where areas for improvement exist and to produce an action plan for addressing them. The assessment will help the SCFN prioritize where it should focus its improvement efforts, decide on responsibilities and timeframes, and know when to request possible technical assistance. Specific objectives include:

- Identify SCFN strengths and areas for improvement to stimulate discussion among the leaders and members, aiming to improve performance.
- Provides a quantifiable baseline score for various capacity areas.
- Monitor and quantify the effects of SCFN action plans alongside USAID Advancing Nutrition capacity building efforts on the SCFN (when repeated to show progress).

Methodology

For the current assessment, the Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT)¹ was revised by USAID Advancing Nutrition in June 2022 and is fit for SCFN assessment in three states in Nigeria. The OCAT served as the basis of the tool and incorporated elements from the Organizational Performance Index² and Government Performance Index³. It was adapted to collect insights from SCFN leadership and members and perform a quantitative and qualitative diagnosis of its planning, budgeting, and oversight competencies for implementing nutrition policies and programs at the state level. The tool provided a framework to collect individual insights about the organization's trajectory and helped stakeholders identify shared concerns and priority actions.

The Tool

The OCAT is a semi-quantitative assessment tool that comprehensively understands an organization's capacity across all the necessary functions (i.e., highlighting key strengths and areas for improvement). One of its advantages is that it serves as a learning tool and an assessment tool when applied as a self-assessment, giving respondents a concrete image of higher levels of capacity to strive for and a deeper understanding of each other's view of the organization's capacity.

¹ ICF/AmeriCorps. (2017). Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool. Washington, DC

² Pact 2018. Organizational Performance Index (OPI): A Pact Handbook, Washington DC.

³ Pact 2018. Government Performance Index (GPI): A Pact Handbook, Washington DC.

The tool is semi-quantitative because indicators are scored on a five-point Likert scale and, in some cases, allow for a qualitative response. By providing a specific description of capacity for each possible score on the scale for each indicator, the tool reduces the subjectivity associated with traditional tools, which ask respondents to rate indicators on a scale (i.e., from 1-5 with 1 and 5 generally defined as weak vs. strong). It increases reliability and decreases variability between participants. However, the descriptions are considered only a guide. Participants are to select the stage they feel best describes their organization's capacity for that indicator at the time, even if every word in the description needs to be more accurate of the organization.

USAID Advancing Nutrition's OCAT assesses six capacity areas as indicated below:

1. Institutional context
2. Structure and functions
3. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
4. Finance and Operations
5. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
6. State and LGA Offices

Under each capacity area, several indicators are listed in the form of questions. For each indicator, five stages of progress are defined as given below:

7. Low capacity/ No attainment
8. Minimal capacity/ Start of formal activity
9. Adequate capacity/ some progress shown
10. Good capacity/ good progress shown
11. Excellent capacity/ Complete attainment

The OCAT Process

The OCAT was filled out in a participatory setting with the relevant leaders and members of the SCFN. External facilitators hired and trained by USAID Advancing Nutrition guided the group in a discussion of each question and entered the response that the group agreed upon. In case of disagreement, lack of consensus, or non-applicability of the question, the facilitators note in the comments section.

Scores were compiled into an automated table that produces summary tables with a composite score for each capacity area. The facilitators analyzed the scores to identify capacity areas/indicators with significantly disparate scores and identify areas of relative strengths vs. need for capacity development.

The facilitators presented the self-assessment results highlighting the strongest and weakest capacity areas/indicators. They led a participatory process to select priority capacity areas to inform the capacity building plan. After the assessment, the participants were divided into groups and developed the capacity-building plan for each capacity area.

Results

The assessment revealed an overall performance score of two out of five. This suggests that the SCFN has minimal capacity with substantial support needs. Annex A provides more details. Further analysis of the main capacity areas within the OCAT shows that the committee's best performance was under the Structure and Functions capacity area, as it has established a presence in the state, with relevant documents, policies, and leadership, as well as some activities. The OCAT identified concerns with members' experience and ability to take on leadership positions, M&E reporting, and change management within the domain. The lowest performance area was State and LGA offices, with a composite score of 1, indicating low capacity. Lack of office space at the State and LGA levels and a dormant LGCFN structure at the LGA level were significant contributors to underperformance in this domain. Table 1 provides composite scores for each capacity area. Sub-area and individual questions are reviewed in greater detail below.

Table 1: Performance across OCAT capacity areas

Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool Summary			
S/N	Capacity Area	Composite Score	Percentage Score
1	Institutional Context	3	58
2	Structure and Functions	3	59
3	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	3	57
4	Finance and Operations	2	41
5	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning	2	39
6	State and LGA Offices	2	37
Overall Performance		2	48

Capacity Area 1: Institutional Context

Participant responses scored three out of five, suggesting adequate capacity and some progress demonstrated. Areas for improvement were noted for both capacity and commitment sub-area.

The Committee agreed that it has adequate capacity in terms of human resources, funding, and technical skill to implement activities without additional support. They noted that the State MBEP provides proper oversight to the SCFN and that legal and regulatory bodies provide supportive supervision. The Committee also has adequate capacity to mobilize resources. The SCFN reported that it has limited ability to train Committee members and will require support.

Responses indicated some political commitment to food and nutrition activities at the State level, but there needs to be clear plans, policies, or dedicated resources for this work. Respondents agreed that there is a high degree of dependency on external support for technical and financial needs.

Capacity Area 2: Structure and Functions

For Structure and Functions, the assessment scored three out of five, indicating that the committee has adequate capacity and is making some progress. The Committee is guided by a written Terms of Reference (ToR), has an appointed head with an official designation that is well documented and has clear reporting lines to the Commissioner for Budget and Economic Planning. The Committee also has a basic organogram with definitions of committee responsibilities and/or key lines of responsibility, communication among members, and an adequate scope to support its mandate. The Committee holds

a quarterly meeting during which the minutes and action points are documented and circulated among Committee members.

The Committee has no legally recognized status or plans to obtain policy/law. There are several opportunities to improve the Committee's structure and functions. These include regular review of the ToR, ensuring quarterly meetings are held consistently, and enacting term limits for the Committee chair. Other opportunities include developing an orientation package for new members, providing all members with leadership training, and establishing a plan for new leader development. Finally, the SCFN has no processes or structures to respond to changes in budgets, government policies, donor funding levels, and the Committee's priorities, which will be essential to develop.

Capacity Area 3: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

The capacity assessment scored three out of five, which indicates that the SCFN has adequate capacity to work with its key stakeholders and target group and is making progress but still has opportunities for improvement.

The Committee has bi-annual meetings with its stakeholders and clear communication channels for stakeholders to raise issues and provide feedback. The Committee also has written policies, procedures, and systems in place to address gender issues, and the Committee has good gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity.

Opportunities exist to develop a specific policy on culture and to be more consistent in addressing culture and gender issues in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Other opportunities include further engaging target groups in participatory planning and decision-making, increasing Committee diversity to include groups from Kirfi and Dambam LGAs, and providing Committee members with training to address culture and gender issues.

Capacity Area 4: Finance and Operations

Participant responses scored two out of five, indicating minimal capacity and limited activities.

The Committee has an annual budget plan process and has developed a budget template aligned with its strategies and operation plan. The budget development process involves program and financial members from relevant Ministries, Department, and Agencies (MDAs) in a participatory manner. Committee members have been trained on using the budget template.

Responses revealed that funds allocated to the Committee were not released as approved, resulting in substantial funding gaps. As a result, the Committee needs more funds to implement all planned activities and to participate in workshops and meetings.

Concerning operating policies and procedures, the Committee is only partially compliant with operating policies and procedures guiding the activities of the food and nutrition committee and requires additional orientation. The committee cannot develop and implement its work plan independently of the MBEP.

The Committee needs a system in place for financial management, and no Committee member has engaged in financial management training: the Committee requires the ability to implement performance-based funding.

Capacity Area 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

The assessment explored MEL staffing and members' individual and collective capacities in monitoring, evaluation, learning, reporting, and communication. Results produced a score of two out of five, indicating minimal capacity.

While the SCFN has a documented and costed MEL plan with a list of key output and outcome indicators and some individual members are qualified to effectively and efficiently implement MEL activities, the Committee has not designated anyone to lead MEL activities and has not engaged in any MEL work. One member indicated that *“our monitoring and evaluation system is weak and desperately needs strengthening. Also, we are deficient in reporting because our partners only write reports for us. We want to stand alone as a committee and not be 100% dependent on external support.”*

Committee discussions revealed that members had made progress in analyzing their programs and services and making changes as needed through a transparent process. Similarly, they reported adequate capacity and some improvement in analyzing program and service successes and challenges and sharing the Committee’s approaches and results at external events like National Food and Nutrition Committee meetings. Committee members felt comfortable raising challenging issues during discussions with the State government. They indicated that while there are mechanisms and forums for good communication between the two entities, they could still be improved.

Discussions indicated limited capacity and progress in several areas.

- The SCFN needs to prepare regular reports; donors write reports and share them with the Committee. Reports are only completed and shared with the State when requested.
- A formal system has yet to be established to implement MEL activities due to the lack of resources, especially funding. As a result, the Committee entirely depends on external support from their implementing partners.
- The Committee is not a member of any formal learning networks. While it has some understanding of the technical competencies of some agencies, it relies on outside support to make contact for assistance.
- The SCFN has never conducted or commissioned any operations or implementation research.
- While the Committee can review evaluation data quality and reports, there are no existing systems for documenting, storing or disseminating program knowledge.
- The Committee needs an effective plan for internal or external communication.

Capacity Area 6: State and LGA Offices

Findings indicate that this capacity area scored two out of five, indicating minimal capacity.

The SCFN does not have designated office space but works in a shared space with insufficient workspace for individual employees and no space for collaborative work.

The LGCFN only exists in four out of 20 LGAs within the State. However, the existing committee lacks designated office space, infrastructure, and equipment for day-to-day operations, requiring needs from the government and donor partners.

The LGCFN has yet to be functional, and there is no funding for LGCFN from the government or implementing partners and no formal mechanism for LGAs to report their activities. In addition, LGA members still needed to undergo training in the last 12 months, leaving them unable to meet their mandate.

The SCFN confirmed that the LGA committee still needed to receive funding since its establishment in 2012; however, it gets a monthly impress that is inadequate for the day-to-day operations and thus does not meet the committee's needs. The Committee needs a functioning grants management system.

Recommended Actions

Following the capacity assessment and analysis, SCFN members engaged in a participatory process to select priority capacity development areas to inform the Action Plan (see Annex B).

Action Plan recommendations include:

Institutional Context

- Develop a training manual and conduct periodic training to increase SCFN member capacity.

Structure and Functions

- Develop an orientation package and facilitate Committee member orientation to increase knowledge and understanding of Committee roles and responsibilities in coordinating nutrition activities at the State level.
- Register Bauchi SCFN with all the steps necessary to obtain legal status
- Conduct periodic leadership training to enhance members' leadership skills.
- Redesign financial and budgetary processes and structures to respond better to budget changes, government policies, donor funding levels, and priorities for transparency.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

- Engage in outreach and /or sensitization for community and religious leaders and involve target populations in participatory planning and decision-making.
- Engage relevant stakeholders in quarterly meetings.
- Review the State policy on gender and culture to respond to food and nutrition issues.
- Provide SCFN members with training and tools on culture and gender issues.
- Revise the MEL plan to include culture and gender indicators.

Finance and Operations

- Develop a financial management system.
- Conduct financial management training for SCFN members, including operating policies and procedures.
- Conduct an annual financial review to harmonize budgets from different MDAs within the SCFN.
- Engage in regular financial planning and include fundraising activities in the advocacy agenda to improve the Committee's ability to implement nutrition activities.
- Mobilize private sector resources.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

- Develop a system to track indicators and measure results.
- Train SCFN members to implement MEL activities effectively.

- Hold a monthly nutrition data review meeting to share and disseminate data and exchange ideas about good practices, successes, and areas for improvement.
- Action plans must be shared during these meetings, and follow-up plans must identify responsible parties and realistic timelines.
- Build upon existing communications platforms with a more defined plan, using valid data to shape communications strategies.
- Develop an advocacy agenda to solicit funds for more efficient and effective Committee functioning, especially the MEL unit.
- Seek support to develop a program database for intervention programs and to share program knowledge.
- Include culture and gender indicators within the MEL plan.

State and LGA Offices

- Find and furnish sufficient office space for the SCFN by the MBEP and implementing partners to enhance the Committee's efficiency and effectiveness.
- Create and revitalize the LGCFN, with funding for day-to-day operations, and find and furnish designated office space for the LGCFN.

Conclusion

Findings from the capacity assessment revealed that the SCFN has minimal capacity to perform its functions effectively and requires substantial support to improve overall performance. Priorities for improvement include building more robust and functional committees at the LGA level, securing additional funding, and developing stronger MEL systems. Key actions to address these issues include engaging in advocacy efforts to increase government support, reactivating the LGCFN, and developing MEL systems for SCFN.

Annex A: Completed OCAT for Bauchi SCFN



Annex B: Action Plan for Bauchi SCFN





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