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

Kebbi

July 20-21, 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.

Disclaimer

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Recommended Citation

USAID Advancing Nutrition. 2022. *USAID Advancing Nutrition Nigeria SCFN Capacity Assessment -Kebbi Report*. Arlington, VA: USAID Advancing Nutrition.

USAID Advancing Nutrition

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

2733 Crystal Drive

4th Floor

Arlington, VA 22202

Phone: 703-528-7474

Email: info@advancingnutrition.org

Web: advancingnutrition.org

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Activity Information

Activity Title	USAID Advancing Nutrition
Contract/Agreement Number	7200AA18C00070
Name of Prime Implementing Partner	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
Names of Sub-awardees	Implemented by Helen Keller International in Nigeria
Geographic Coverage	Bauchi, Kebbi, and Sokoto States and National level
Activity Start Date	October 1, 2021
Activity End Date	October 31, 2023
Total Estimated Life-of-Activity Cost (\$)	\$9,500,000.00

Acronyms

JSI	JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
LGA	local government authority
LGCFN	Local Government Committee on Food and Nutrition
MBEP	Ministry of Budgeting 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
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 capacity to perform oversight functions in nutrition activities. This report presents results from the assessment in Kebbi State. There are accompanying reports for Bauchi and Sokoto States.

Findings from this assessment revealed that the SCFN needs substantial support to effectively perform its functions. Priorities for improvement include building functional committees at the Local Government Area 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 Local Government Committee for Food and Nutrition, 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 (USAID Advancing Nutrition) Nigeria scoping exercise, stakeholders cited the need to strengthen SCFN capacity both in terms of their understanding of multi-sectoral nutrition and their skills in planning, budgeting, and oversight. As a result, USAID Advancing Nutrition conducted capacity assessments in each of its implementing states (Bauchi, Kebbi, and Sokoto) to inform capacity-strengthening priorities. This initial capacity assessment will serve as a baseline to track changes in SCFN capacities throughout the life of the project.

Objectives

The main objective of the assessment was to identify areas of 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's strengths and areas of improvement and 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 (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., highlights the 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 various levels of capacity and the opportunity to

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.

discuss their perspectives of each capacity area openly, allowing for a deeper understanding of other's views of the organization's capacity.

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 1-10 with 1 and 10 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 local government authority (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:

1. Low capacity/ No attainment
2. Minimal capacity/ Start of formal activity
3. Adequate capacity/ some progress shown
4. Good capacity/ good progress shown
5. 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 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 facilitator included notes in the comments section.

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

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 an action 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, MEL reporting, and change management within the capacity area. 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 structure at the LGA level were significant contributors to underperformance in this capacity area. 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	4	71
3	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	3	52
4	Finance and Operations	2	40
5	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	2	42
6	State and LGA Offices	1	15
Overall Performance		2.5	46

Capacity Area 1: Institutional Context

Participant responses produced an average score of three out of five (58%), indicating adequate capacity but room for improvement.

The Kebbi SCFN has a well-articulated and documented vision for nutrition reforms. The Committee also has a costed work plan ready to be endorsed by the government for nutritional activities. When signed, it will help generate funds and other forms of support from private actors and entities such as banks and other implementing partners.

There is a formal and regular process by which leaders share information, the Committee uses WhatsApp and email and has official letterhead for formal information sharing. The Committee reported that it has a systematic process for engaging and soliciting stakeholders' feedback during quarterly review meetings and that deedback is actively discussed to find solutions to challenges.

Committee activities are often coordinated and it participates in recognized national networks. Evidence of coordinated activities have been documented in pictures and nutrition performance scorecards were shared by the Nigeria Governors Forum to Kebbi State in 2021.

The Committee has prepared a costed work plan and

The Committee reported having inadequate capacity in terms of human resources, funding, the ability to independently develop and implement policies, and technical expertise to implement activities independently. They noted that there is limited oversight from the state MBEP and that supportive supervision by legal and regulatory bodies only takes place on an ad-hoc basis. In addition, the Committee has limited capacity to train members. Training is only offered sporadically and is not based on a formal assessment of committee needs.

Responses indicated no strong political commitment to nutrition at the State level. Food and nutrition has not been part of the political agenda but the State is currently developing policies, plans, and resources dedicated to food and nutrition. Committee members confirmed that all Ministries, Department, and Agencies (MDAs) have nutrition codes within their budgets and most Committee members are aware of these codes.

The Committee noted that the LGA has no autonomy and therefore there is an inadequate transfer of authority, responsibility, and resources within the institutional system. In addition, the SCFN has no funds of its own and so is not capable of distributing revenue to LGAs as only N200,000 is given monthly for the nutritional activities of SCFN, but it is considered grossly inadequate. The State promptly releases the 10% allocation meant for LGAs, but the State does not know how much is allocated/released for nutrition activities at the LGA level.

While the Committee is committed to involving local non-state actors in the nutrition sector, the Local Government Committee for Food and Nutrition (LGCFN) has just recently been inaugurated but has not formally launched activities in some LGAs, so authority has not been transferred in all cases. Committee members shared that there is a high degree of dependency on external support for technical and financial needs.

Capacity Area 2: Structure and Functions

Results indicated an average score of four out of five (71%), indicating good progress, particularly in terms of having policies establishing the Committee and holding regular periodic meetings.

For the Terms of Reference / Vision and Mission sub-area, the SCFN is guided by a written Terms of Reference. The SCFN has legal status, and most but not all steps necessary to obtain legal status are being taken. The Committee has policies in place, a clearly outlined committee structure, an appointed head with an official designation that is well documented, an organogram with clearly defined roles and reporting lines that is well disseminated to members, and clear reporting lines that members consider appropriate. The Committee holds a quarterly meeting during which the minutes and action points are documented and circulated among the committee members.

While the SCFN has processes or structures that respond to changes in leadership and members, not does not have strategies to respond to budgets, government policies, and donor funding levels and priorities, and limited capacity to identify and adapt to changes in the internal and external environment. The Committee reported that it has limited capacity to develop new leaders and that members need both an orientation package and leadership training. Finally, the Committee reported that there is no time limit for the Committee chair.

Capacity Area 3: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

Results from the capacity assessment produced an average score of three out of five (52%), which indicates adequate capacity.

The Committee reported that it has strong diversity in terms of its gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural composition and some capacity to engage with key stakeholders. The Committee, has held some meetings and has clear channels of communication that stakeholders use for raising issues and feedback.

There are several opportunities to strengthen this work. Not all stakeholders have been involved in Committee work and there is still a low level of target group engagement in participatory planning and decision-making .

While the Committee reported that it has recently finalized its nutrition program policy that includes procedures and systems to address gender issues but not cultural issues. Committee members said they have inadequate tools, training, and expertise to address gender and no tools or systems to address cultural issues. As such, gender and cultural issues are not integrated into project planning, implementation, and Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL).

Capacity Area 4: Finance and Operations

Respondents self-scored two out of five (40%) in Finance and Operations, indicating minimal capacity.

The Committee has an annual budget plan process, has developed a budget template aligned with its strategies and operation plan, and has involved program and financial members from relevant MDAs in the budget development process in a participatory manner. In addition, the State has operating policies and procedures guiding the finance and operations activities

Areas for improvement include ensuring the release of funds as approved to allow the Committee can implement all planned activities, conducting a financial audit of the Committee, providing training on financial management including budgeting templates for Committee members, and providing additional training for Committee members on operating policies and procedures.

Capacity Area 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

The MEL assessment produced a score of two out of five (42%), indicating minimal capacity.

The SCFN has achieved some progress. Accomplishments include sharing the Committee's approaches and results at external events like national meetings and the Governor's forum meetings and having a process to share good practices, successes, and challenges. It also has demonstrated some progress in promptly preparing periodic and general reports with some need to respond to donor clarification requests.

Finally, the Committee reported recently conducting advocacy visits to the State Governor's Office through the Office of the Commissioner for Budget and Economic Planning, which led to securing budget allocations for MEL activities.

Respondents reported that the Committee has no costed monitoring and evaluation plan and lacks professional qualifications and expertise to effectively implement MEL activities. The SCFN Committee Secretary reported that *"our Monitoring and Evaluation unit is new and comparable to an infant. A few weeks ago, we just assigned about six members of the SCFN to constitute the team. Presently, there is no attainment and low capacity in this unit and we do need support. Those selected have the potential to be competent people if training can be provided to improve their capacities in this area."*

Members identified low capacity and no progress in several areas. These include:

- Implementation of MEL activities which is particularly hindered by the lack of resources.
- Networking and creating linkages with formal learning networks. That being said, individual MDAs like the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources are already partners with learning institutions like Michigan State University as a formal learning network focusing on agriculture, business, and climate change, among others.
- Obtaining support for operations and program implementation.
- Securing funds, equipment, tools, and personnel for program evaluation activities.

- Improving its external communication strategies.
- Designing a database and formal system to share program knowledge and programs, operations, and research results.

Capacity Area 6: State and LGA Offices

This capacity area had a score of one out of five (15%), indicating low capacity.

The lack of dedicated office space and adequate equipment hinders day-to-day operations. The LGCFN only exists in some LGAs within the state and existing LGCFNs also suffer from a lack of office space for day-to-day operations, requiring support from the government and donor partners.

For sub-State functions, the LGCFN has been dormant. There is no budget for Committee activities at the LGA level and without financial support, there is no capacity to meet their mandate and no formal mechanism for the LGAs to report their activities.

The Committee confirmed that it had not received a startup grant when it was reinstated in 2019; however, the monthly impress of N200,000 was reinstated for operations. The Committee does not have a functioning grants management system and no costing exercise has been undertaken for required office needs.

Recommended Actions

After the assessment and analysis, Kebbi SCFN members engaged in a participatory process to identify priority capacity development areas to inform the Action Plan for capacity strengthening (see Annex B for the Action Plan).

Action Plan recommendations include:

Institutional Context

- Conduct targeted outreach and advocacy to the Executive Governor of Kebbi State and other non-state actors to improve the State's funding allocation and release for nutrition.
- Develop a training manual and conduct periodic training to increase SCFN member capacity.

Structure and Functions

- Develop an orientation package and facilitate Committee member to increase knowledge and understanding of Committee roles and responsibilities in coordinating nutrition activities at the State level.
- Register the SCFN for full legal status.
- Conduct periodic leadership training to enhance members' leadership skills.
- Redesign financial and budgetary processes and structures to better respond to budget changes, government policies, donor funding levels, and priorities for transparency.
- Develop change management guidelines to enable the SCFN to identify and adapt to changes in the internal and external environment.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

- Engage representatives of target populations in participatory planning and decision-making.
- Include all relevant stakeholders in, and increase the frequency of, stakeholder engagement forums.
- Engage implementing partners to provide training for Committee members.
- Revise the MEL plan to include gender and culture indicators.

Finance and Operations

- Conduct an audit annually or bi-annually.
- Conduct periodic financial management training for Committee members.
- Conduct an annual financial review to harmonize different MDA budgets within the SCFN.
- Maintain regular financial planning projections to include fundraising activities.
- Provide Committee members with additional training focusing on operating policies and procedures.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

- Develop a costed MEL Plan for the SCFN including a system to track indicators, measure results, and include gender and culture considerations.
- Conduct MEL training for the SCFN to improve members' ability 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.
- Seek support to develop a program database for intervention programs and to share program knowledge.

State and LGA Offices

- Find and furnish sufficient office space for the SCFN to enhance the Committee's efficiency and effectiveness.
- Fund the LGCFN for the day-to-day operations.
- Create, revitalize, and fund the LGA committee for day-to-day operations.
- Find and furnish office operations for the LGA.

Conclusion

Findings from the SCFN capacity assessment for Kebbi State revealed that the SCFN has minimal capacity to effectively perform its functions and requires substantial support to improve overall performance. Priorities for improvement include building stronger and more functional committees at the LGA level, securing additional funding, and developing stronger MEL systems. Some key actions identified to address these areas of improvement include advocacy to the government and developing a resource mobilization plan for improving funding, reactivation of the LGCFN, and development of MEL systems.

Annex A: Completed OCAT for Kebbi SCFN



Annex B: Action Plan for Kebbi SCFN





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Implemented by:
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