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

Sokoto

July 14-15, 2022

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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 Advancing Nutrition 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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Recommended Citation

USAID Advancing Nutrition. 2022. *USAID Advancing Nutrition Nigeria SCFN Capacity Assessment-Sokoto 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

Contents

- Activity Information..... iv
- Acronyms..... v
- Executive Summary..... vi
- Background..... 1
- Objectives 1
- Methodology 1
 - The Tool 1
 - The OCAT Process 2
- Results..... 3
 - Capacity Area 1: Institutional Context..... 3
 - Capacity Area 2: Structure and Functions 4
 - Capacity Area 3: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion 4
 - Capacity Area 4: Finance and Operations..... 4
 - Capacity Area 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning..... 5
 - Capacity Area 6: State and Local Government Authority (LGA) Offices 5
- Recommended Actions 6
 - Institutional Context..... 6
 - Structure and Functions..... 6
 - Gender Equality and Social Inclusion..... 6
 - Finance and Operations 6
 - Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning 6
 - State and LGA Offices..... 7
- Conclusion..... 8
- Annex A: Completed OCAT for Sokoto SCFN..... 9
- Annex B: Action Plan for Sokoto SCFN..... 10

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 Sokoto State. There are accompanying reports for Bauchi and Kebbi States.

Findings from this assessment revealed that the SCFN has minimal capacity to effectively perform its functions and requires substantial support to improve overall performance. Priorities include building the capacity of the Local Government Committee on Food and Nutrition (LGCFN) at the local government authority (LGA), increasing funding, and improving monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems. Key actions to address these issues include engaging in advocacy efforts to increase government support, developing a resource mobilization plan for improving 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 (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 priorities for improvement and produce an action plan for addressing them. The assessment will help the SCFN prioritize its efforts, identify responsibilities and timeframes, and know when to consider technical assistance. Specific objectives include:

- Identifying SCFN strengths and areas for improvement and stimulating discussion among the leaders and members.
- Provides a quantifiable baseline score for various capacity areas.
- Monitoring and quantifying the impacts 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 identifies an organization's capacity across all necessary functions. Completed by a group rather than individuals, it provides respondents with insights into their collective understanding of current organizational capacity and informs recommendations for improvement. OCAT indicators are scored on a five-point Likert scale and in some cases, allow for

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.

qualitative responses. The tool aims to increase consistency and decrease variability if respondents vary year after year, by providing indicator-specific capacity definitions for each possible score.

The 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 (MEL)
6. State and local government authority (LGA) Offices

The OCAT includes several indicators within each capacity area, and respondents are asked to choose one of the following stages of progress for each:

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 completed by SCFN leaders and members in a participatory setting. External facilitators hired and trained by USAID Advancing Nutrition guided the group in a discussion of each question and recorded the agreed-to response or lack of consensus.

Facilitators entered scores in an automated tool that produced summary tables with a composite score for each capacity area. They then analyzed the scores to flag disparate scores, highlight strengths, and identify capacity development needs.

Facilitators led a participatory process to select priority areas to inform the capacity building plan. 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. The Committee's best performance was in the Structure and Functions capacity area, as it has established a presence in the state, with relevant documents, policies, leadership, and some activities. The OCAT identified concerns with members' ability and prior experience 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 Area

Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool summary			
S/N	Capacity Area	Composite Score	Percentage
1	Institutional Context	2	34
2	Structure and Functions	3	64
3	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	2	47
4	Finance and Operations	2	36
5	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	2	41
6	State and LGA Offices	1	20
Overall Performance		2	40

Capacity Area I: Institutional Context

The Institutional Context score was score was two out of five, indicating minimal capacity and progress. Participant responses revealed opportunities for improvement in both capacity and commitment. Human resources, funding, and technical know-how to implement activities are limited, there is limited oversight from the state MBEP, and supportive supervision by legal and regulatory bodies only takes place on an ad-hoc basis. In addition, participants reported that the committee has no ability to build members' capacity and that no capacity building training has been conducted in the last five years. Despite this, participants reported being willing and ready for such training to enhance their skills and efficiency. Increasing the capacity to develop and domesticate policies independently was also identified as a priority.

Although respondents reported that the SCFN has limited capacity to mobilize resources throughout the national system, they believe the group could increase its capacity to do so with greater support. Notably, the SCFN has already contacted different actors such as the Zakat committee, USAID Advancing Nutrition, USAID Integrated Health Program, and others to explore additional funding to implement nutrition interventions.

Respondents indicated that the state lacks a strong political commitment to nutrition. While there are budget allocations, funds have yet to be released for Committee activities or other stakeholder engagements due to a lack of SCFN follow-up for its release. Furthermore, while all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) have nutrition codes within their budgets, only one SCFN member from the MBEP reported being aware of the regulations. The Committee also reported that the LGA lacks autonomy, which means there is an inadequate transfer of institutional authority, responsibility, and

resources. All SCFN members reported that there is a high degree of dependency on external support for technical and financial needs.

Respondents reported that SCFN's strengths include a commitment to learning about the value of networking, coordinating, and partnering in nutrition intervention programs. There is also some planning to increase the sustainability of the current program, as the Committee is already developing a resource mobilization plan to identify resources needed for the program and potential donors.

Capacity Area 2: Structure and Functions

The Structure and Functions score was three out of five, indicating adequate capacity and progress. The Committee is guided by a written Terms of Reference, has full legal status, has policies in place, and a clearly outlined committee structure. The Committee also has an organogram with clearly defined roles and reporting lines and an appointed head with a documented official designation. The Committee has clear reporting lines which they consider appropriate and holds a quarterly meeting during which the minutes and action points are documented and circulated among Committee members.

The Committee identified several areas for improvement. Priorities include developing an orientation package for members and developing processes to respond to changes in leadership, members, budgets, government policies, and donor funding levels and priorities. Creating term limits was explicitly discussed. In addition, the Committee needs to develop a greater capacity to identify and adapt to changes in the internal and external environment as well as to develop new leaders.

Capacity Area 3: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

Results from the capacity assessment produced an overall average score of two out of five, which indicates that the SCFN has minimal capacity and many areas for improvement.

While responses to stakeholder consultations show that the SCFN has adequate capacity to work with its target group, the Committee needs to adequately engage and involve its target population in participatory planning and decision-making. The Committee reported some capacity to engage with key stakeholders, including clear channels of communication to raise issues and provide feedback but also reported that the frequency of this engagement depends on the availability of funds.

The Committee does not have written policies, procedures, or systems to address culture and gender issues. Three members reported that they had heard about the National Policy on Food and Nutrition in Nigeria but had never seen it and knew it had not been used in the State. Participants also revealed that the Committee is not diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, and culture and that women and different ethnic groups from their target communities, such as the Fulani, are underrepresented in the SCFN. Responses also indicated that SCFN members have insufficient exposure to tools for addressing gender and cultural issues.

Capacity Area 4: Finance and Operations

The Finance and Operations assessment produced an average score of two out of five, which indicates that the SCFN has minimal capacity and many areas for improvement.

While the Committee has an annual budget plan process and has developed a budget template aligned with their strategic and operational plan, program and finance members from relevant MDAs did not participate in the budget preparation at the central level. In addition, no Committee members have been trained to use budgeting templates. Respondents reported that while the Committee has an approved plan, it has not received any funds from the State government since 2016.

While the State has operating policies and procedures to guide Committee work, it is still in draft form and not operational. Finally, the Committee reported that it needs the necessary systems and training for effective financial management.

Capacity Area 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

The capacity assessment explored MEL staffing, competencies, and members' individual and collective capacities. The MEL assessment produced an average score of two out of five, indicating minimal capacity.

Respondents reported having no costed monitoring and evaluation plan and lacking professional qualifications and competencies both individually and collectively to implement MEL activities. The SCFN Committee Secretary indicated, "we presently do not have resources for MEL activities which are needed in our committee, and we solely depend on external support and interventions in this area. Presently, we do not collect evaluation data. We need training in this area because I have assessed all members' capacities. No one has professional qualifications or competency in the MEL function. Still, some available people and volunteers can be trained among us, and their capacities and knowledge can be improved regarding MEL functions."

Group discussions revealed that members have good capacity and display good progress in promptly preparing periodic and general reports. They have consistently been meeting donor expectations without the need for clarifications. Additionally, they mentioned recently visiting the State's Commissioner for Health seeking support to address malnutrition and malaria as urgent public health issues, indicating that the Committee has appropriate mechanisms to communicate between Committee and State. These communications should continue to be strengthened.

The Committee identified several priorities for improvement. These included:

- Sharing the Committee's approaches and results at external events and developing relationships with formal learning networks.
- Partnering with other agencies who can provide operations and implementation support.
- Conducting program evaluations. Current constraints include funding, equipment, tools, and personnel.
- Developing an external communication strategy. The assessment highlighted minimal capacity to analyze good practices, successes, and areas for improvement. While the Committee currently communicates through a WhatsApp group, they agreed that communications through this platform could be improved.
- Developing a database and formal system to share knowledge and results about programs, operations, and research.

Capacity Area 6: State and Local Government Authority (LGA) Offices

This capacity area had an average score of one out of five, the lowest of all capacity areas. Lack of dedicated office space and adequate equipment hinders day-to-day operations. For sub-State functions, the LGCFN has been dormant since 2016, and there has yet to be an attempt to revive the committee due to a lack of funding. There is no budget for LGCFN activities at the LGA level. Without financial support, there is no capacity to meet their mandate and no formal mechanism for the LGAs to report their activities.

While the Committee confirmed that it received a grant for its establishment and commencement of operations following its revival in 2019, it did not develop a functioning grants management system or realistic costing for required items because members did not feel the need to complete costing work.

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

- Conduct targeted outreach and advocacy to the Executive Governor of Sokoto 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 orientation to increase knowledge and understanding of Committee roles and responsibilities in coordinating nutrition activities at the State level.
- Conduct periodic leadership training to enhance members' leadership skills.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

- Seek funding from different MDAs to facilitate and increase the frequency of meetings and stakeholder engagement.
- Expand efforts to involve all target populations, especially traditional leaders, religious leaders, and school-based management committees, in Committee activities.
- Follow up with the SCFN Chair and Secretary about developing written policies, systems, and tools to address culture and gender issues to ensure policies are implemented. Committee members have the tools and guidance needed to improve their knowledge and capacity.
- Develop and implement training on cultural and gender issues and increase diversity in their membership's gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural composition.

Finance and Operations

- Engage in regular financial planning and include fundraising activities in the advocacy agenda to improve the Committee's ability to implement nutrition activities.
- Conduct financial management training for SCFN members.
- Conduct an annual financial review to harmonize budgets from different MDAs within the SCFN.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

- Develop a costed MEL plan for the SCFN, including a system to track indicators and measure results.
- Conduct MEL training for 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.
- 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 near the MBEP and implementing partners to enhance the Committee's efficiency and effectiveness.
- Reactivate and fund/budget for LGCFN operations.

Conclusion

Findings from the SCFN capacity assessment for Sokoto State revealed that the SCFN has limited capacity to perform its functions effectively 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. Key actions to address these issues include engaging in advocacy efforts to increase government support, creating a resource mobilization plan, reactivating the LGCFN, and developing MEL systems for SCFN.

Annex A: Completed OCAT for Sokoto SCFN

Please see the link:



USAID Advancing
Nutrition OCAT for SC

Annex B: Action Plan for Sokoto SCFN

Please see the link:





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Implemented by:
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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November 2022