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



**A Case Study by IGNITE**  
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**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.



## 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, outsized 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.



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## 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.

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