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IGNITE's Impact: Spotlight on PanAfricare



A Case Study by IGNITE
July 2024

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.



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

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 Simpire, 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 Simpire, 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.

This case study was written by Mayu Mishina, Senior Director of Strategic Communications; and Mary Kate Cartmill, Associate Manager II, Nutrition and Food Systems, Tanager

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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