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Building Institutional Capacity to Use Social and Behaviour Change for Gender and Nutrition



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.



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Introduction

Malnutrition, encompassing both overnutrition and undernutrition, is now the leading cause of poor health worldwide, with low and middle-income countries experiencing the largest increases in diet-related poor health outcomes in recent years¹. Research shows that gender disparities play a large role in driving nutrition outcomes and that poor nutrition can further exacerbate gender inequalities,² making the two issues inextricably linked. This means that the most effective and efficient approaches to improving nutritional outcomes also work to address gender inequalities.

Social and behaviour change (SBC) is one such approach that has been shown to have powerful

impacts on improving nutrition and changing restrictive gender norms, when applied using gender transformative concepts and approaches.^{3,4} Initially designed to influence health outcomes, SBC has garnered increasing interest for application in various other sectors including agriculture, financial services, and climate change. However, comprehensive guidelines for applying SBC approaches to different sectors are still evolving, and there remains room for tailored strategies, tools, and guidance for implementation at the institutional level.

Through the Impacting Gender and Nutrition through Innovative Technical Exchange (IGNITE) project, Tanager has built an expertise in strengthening

¹ Popkin BM, Corvalan C, Grummer-Strawn LM. Dynamics of the double burden of malnutrition and the changing nutrition reality. *Lancet*. 2020; 395: 65-74

² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). *Undernourished and Overlooked: A Global Nutrition Crisis in Adolescent Girls and Women*. UNICEF Child Nutrition Report Series, 2022. UNICEF, New York, 2023.

³ Doyle K, Levitov RG, Barker G, et al. Gender-transformative Bandebereho couples' intervention to promote male engagement in reproductive and maternal health and violence prevention in Rwanda: findings from a randomized controlled trial. *PLoS One*. 2018; 13: E0192756

⁴ Freitas Lopez, Debora B., Sanyukta Mathur, Haley Brightman, Kathryn Berryman, and Kamden Hoffmann. 2020. "Gender integration in social and behavior change," Breakthrough RESEARCH Scoping Report. Washington, DC: Population Council.

institutional capacity to utilise SBC approaches to influence gender and nutrition within agriculture systems, with a unique focus on where they intersect. This case study focuses on the lessons learnt throughout the process of providing tailored technical assistance in SBC to agriculture institutions. These lessons, while not exhaustive, can serve as a starting point for both agriculture institutions and technical assistance providers looking to engage with SBC at the nexus of gender and nutrition to improve women's empowerment and the consumption of safe and nutritious foods.

Methodology

For this case study, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with four IGNITE technical experts and the Deputy Team Leader, all representing a range of experiences engaging in SBC work at the intersection of gender and nutrition. One follow-up discussion was conducted with an IGNITE gender expert where additional details were needed. Insights from this focus group were used to form the basis of the seven lessons presented below.

Lessons and Recommendations

1. Start with the basics to build ground-level understanding of the intersections between gender, nutrition, and behaviour change.

For institutions working in agriculture, it is not always clear from the get-go how gender and nutrition technical areas are interrelated or why considerations for each should be integrated into their policies, programming, or interventions. The same is true for social and behaviour change – it may not always be clear how it may fit into agriculture programming as a strategy for impacting gender and nutrition outcomes. In these cases, FGD participants highlighted the importance of hosting ground-level workshops, trainings, or sensitisations with key institutional actors prior to developing an SBC strategy, to go over the basics of gender and nutrition within food systems. These sessions help to build institutional buy-in and overall understanding of the importance of addressing gender and nutrition with agricultural programming, as well as the potential synergies that exist when integrated together.

In addition to ground-level gender and nutrition sensitisations, SBC-specific trainings should be conducted to create a shared understanding of what type of institutional commitment is necessary to roll out an SBC strategy from start to finish. These SBC trainings can happen after a formative assessment is conducted as part of the 'next steps' in utilising formative research findings. As one FGD participant explained, 'We found that it's important that an

institution is taken through the basics of ... an SBC approach ... so that they understand what it involves in terms of resource allocation, in terms of roles and location, in terms of any other partnerships, or if they need to build beyond what they're able to offer as a program or as an institution'. Establishing this understanding prior to co-creating an SBC strategy means that institutions are better aware of how potential activities may fit within the current scope of their work and where they may need to build additional partnerships to implement or resource SBC activities.

2. Take time to review institutional or programme goals, strategies, and activities to identify potential entry points to improve gender and nutrition outcomes using SBC approaches.

Conducting a stock-taking exercise of existing institutional or programme goals, strategies, and activities at the outset of an institutional engagement can make it easier to:

- (1) Determine potential entry points to promote the adoption of both gender and nutrition behaviours,
- (2) Identify where behaviour change approaches might be most useful in reaching existing gender and nutrition goals and indicators
- (3) Pinpoint where SBC approaches may be able to build on current program activities.

In some cases, this exercise could be included in a larger audit process, such as the one conducted through the IGNITE diagnostic tool to assess institutional capacity in gender and nutrition, to see where SBC approaches might fit into the overall organisational strategy for gender and nutrition. In other cases, this process may take a much narrower view of the goals, strategies, and activities of specific programs or interventions, depending on the level the engagement taking place.

When working with institutions at the programmatic level, FGD participants described how, in the agricultural sector, many institutions may already be implementing programmes that have goals or objectives for improving nutrition, but may not have goals for increasing women's empowerment, or vice versa. In these cases, a collaborative review of existing project goals, strategies, and frameworks may illuminate previously unexplored entry points for either gender and/or nutrition. As one expert explained: '... It goes back to the programme goals... what do you want to achieve in your programme? So, once you have that defined, then that defines what is being integrated into what. And in our case, as IGNITE, we have both gender and nutrition. So,

when you're working with clients, you get to really listen in, you get to hear their strategy, what they would like to do. Then if they want some pieces in nutrition, then we integrate gender. If they want things that are more gender related, we look for opportunities to integrate nutrition'.

Alternatively, FGD participants described how programmes may have already included gender and nutrition goals but may not have a clear strategy for how to catalyse and sustain the behaviour change amongst project beneficiaries needed to achieve them. In these cases, a stock-taking of existing project frameworks, strategies and activity plans can help to identify where an SBC approach may build onto existing activities to achieve gender and nutrition targets. For example, one participant described how some institutions are already utilising SBC approaches by nature of their work, which creates the opportunity to use those existing skills and channels to also deliver on gender and nutrition. 'Some facilitators in the field use SBC approaches in their agricultural domain to sensitise the farmers to adopt and to implement best practices in agriculture', explained an expert. 'I think in this field we can include SBC for gender and nutrition, as it is the same actors, facilitators, that will implement these tools with the beneficiaries, who are farmers'.

3. Where possible, prioritise behaviours that influence both gender and nutrition outcomes to maximise impact.

Programmes are time-bound and resource-limited, so it is important to narrow down behaviours of interest to those that can have the largest impact on desired outcomes and be sustained over time. This means that it can be advantageous, where possible, to focus an SBC strategy on changing behaviours that influence both gender and nutritional outcomes. When working with institutions that are newer to integrating both areas, technical assistance providers can assist them in identifying where gender and nutrition may overlap in their activities and which behaviours might have the highest impact on outcomes. This process is accomplished during initial SBC conceptualisation workshops.

Some examples of behaviours that incorporate both gender and nutrition components include: shifting commonly held beliefs limiting the consumption of certain nutrient-dense foods for women and children, developing financial products designed to increase women's access to and participation in certain agriculture value chains, or engaging men to take on more caretaking and food preparation activities at the household level.

Amo Farm Sieberer Hatchery Limited in Nigeria

worked closely with IGNITE to develop an SBC campaign designed to increase household consumption of chicken and eggs amongst women and children and increase women's participation in poultry production through improved household decision-making. Each of these behaviours were selected based on their ability to reinforce both gender and nutritional outcomes. By increasing women's inclusion in poultry production, it is expected that more chicken and eggs will be produced and available to be consumed at home or to sell at a market to buy more nutritious foods. Similarly, increasing the consumption of nutrient-dense chicken and eggs should improve nutrition outcomes for women and children while also driving demand for poultry products and expanding the market for women to sell their products.

4. Utilise formative assessments to understand context-specific barriers and facilitators to gender and nutrition behaviours in target populations.

FGD participants emphasised the importance of conducting formative assessments to fill current institutional knowledge gaps in gender and nutrition prior to SBC strategy development. Formative assessments can help identify which factors — whether individual, social and/or structural — serve as the main barriers or strongest enablers of the priority behaviours of interest. They also help to ensure that an SBC strategy is evidence-based and not built around assumptions of why certain behaviours are occurring, an important requirement that participants were quick to emphasise.

Choosing methodologies that can provide quality insights into both gender and nutrition is also important when designing formative assessments. This likely means drawing from a variety of disciplines and approaches to uncover the current context and drivers of the outcomes a strategy is working to change. According to the FGD participants, findings of such a formative assessment process directly impact whether the SBC strategy will involve more gender-focused activities, nutrition-focused activities, or both. **Box 2** provides an example of how IGNITE undertook one formative assessment process using a barrier analysis and qualitative interviews to inform the design of SBC activities promoting integrated gender and nutrition behaviours related to poultry production in Zimbabwe.

Finally, conducting validation workshops at the end of a formative assessment process is an important step in ensuring that the findings are understood by institutions, contextualised for technical assistance providers, and incorporated into subsequent SBC strategies and activities. Through these workshops, technical assistance providers can validate assessment findings based

on participant perspectives and experiences, which can then be incorporated in formative assessment reports to further contextualise results and inform recommendations. At the same time, participants are given the opportunity to ask questions and reflect on how findings may affect the implementation and outcomes of their interventions and services, in addition to shaping the SBC strategy.

Box 2. Using a barrier analysis assessment to design a gender and nutrition SBC strategy in Zimbabwe

In 2022, IGNITE staff conducted a barrier analysis and qualitative interviews for Hamara Foods to better understand the drivers and barriers amongst their clients to household consumption of eggs as well as women's inclusion and decision-making in poultry production.

Findings from the barrier analysis identified (1) disagreements over profit-sharing from the business and (2) remembering to have conversations with their husbands as key barriers to joint decision-making for women. Results also showed restricted access to eggs as a major barrier to increasing egg consumption. However, women rearing their own birds and increasing their knowledge of how eggs contribute to better nutrition and income for the family were found to make it easier for women to feed eggs to their family.

Following a validation workshop of the formative assessment findings, IGNITE assisted in co-creating an SBC strategy that focused on implementing messages and activities that could impact both gender and nutritional behaviors, including:

- Encouraging healthy communication to improve joint-decision making.
- Developing SBC messages that promote the economic and nutritional benefits of consuming eggs.
- Ensuring chickens are accessible to community members, especially women.
- Increasing husband/partner support for their wives to rear poultry.

5. Engage MEL teams early in the SBC development process.

IGNITE was not a direct implementing mechanism, so much of the monitoring of the SBC strategy implementation and evaluation fell to organizational MEL teams to execute. For this reason, FGD participants recommended engaging MEL teams early in the SBC design process so that they are aware of the overall goals, involved in the development of relevant gender and nutrition indicators — with support from technical assistance providers — and able to inform how these indicators may fit into their existing M&E frameworks and activities. MEL teams should also work with technical programme

teams to provide regular reports and updates on the implementation of the SBC strategy to inform any strategy changes that may be needed.

6. Co-create SBC tools that integrate gender and nutrition.

Throughout SBC activity design, implementation, and monitoring, there are an array of tools that can aid institutions to do the work effectively and iterate in the future without direct support from IGNITE. These tools are diverse according to the unique needs of the institution; for example, survey tools used to conduct formative assessments, tools used to deliver SBC messaging, and data collection tools used to monitor the implementation of an SBC strategy. By applying a co-creative approach to each stage of development, providers of technical assistance are able to bring their expertise in designing SBC tools, while institutions are able to apply their situational knowledge to customise them based on their understanding of the local context and their institution's overarching gender and nutrition goals. This co-creation process also ensures that the tools created are user-friendly for the field officers delivering gender or nutrition messaging and for the MEL teams who will be monitoring and evaluating the SBC strategy at the community-level.

7. Plan ahead for funding and resource availability.

An institution cannot start implementing an action plan for an SBC strategy until it is appropriately resourced. While an SBC strategy is generally considered a cost-effective intervention method,⁵ preparation of budget and resource availability in the planning process can support in the overall construction of the strategy for gender or nutrition. When an institution has a firm understanding of available resources, they can better support the development of a realistic action plan for the SBC strategy. One FGD participant recommended a list of initial questions to ask regarding the availability of resources before starting the action-planning process:

- Who is going to lead the process?
- How much level of effort will be needed per person?
- What resources are already available to undertake the SBC strategy?

Another area an institution may consider when allocating resources to an SBC strategy is the potential return on investment (ROI), especially for private sector companies. One FGD participant

⁵ Rosen, James E.; Bellows, Nicole; Bollinger Lori.; DeCormier Plosky, Willyanne, Weinberger, Michelle. 2019. The Business Case for Investing in Social and Behavior Change for Family Planning. Breakthrough RESEARCH. Washington DC: Population Council. 2019; 13-21.

recommended that before an institution starts the SBC strategy process, they determine the anticipated results and what will come from the SBC intervention. Some questions to ask when considering ROI for gender and nutrition investment opportunities include the following:

- What level of buy-in for gender and nutrition integration already exists?
- What is the level of understanding of the ROI amongst key decision makers?
- Is there a business case for gender and nutrition integration?

8. Consider building partnerships to leverage institutional capacities to implement an SBC strategy.

In instances where an institution is unable to resource its own SBC strategy, it may leverage partnerships to tap funds, resources, and technical expertise with other institutions who have built a strong capacity in SBC work or who have similar goals in gender and nutrition. It may also be advantageous to consider co-designing an SBC strategy with other partner institutions to leverage on the different capacities of institutions to best support the action plan development and benefit the larger collaborative initiative. As a result, co-designing partnerships may further scale the potential impact of the SBC strategy capacities within communities and households. **Box 3** provides an example of how institutions can use partnerships for impact.

Box 3: Leveraging on partnerships to raise resources

IGNITE's experience working with Tanzania Inclusive Processor-Producer Partnerships in Dairy Project (TI3P) is a good example of capitalizing on partnerships to co-design and resource an SBC strategy. TI3P is a partnership between the Tanzania Agriculture Development Bank (TADB), Heifer International, and Land O'Lakes Venture37. Following the completion of a gender and nutrition assessment conducted by IGNITE, TI3P identified the need to implement an SBC strategy with the goal of 'improving the nutritional status of target communities through the dairy value chain, while promoting gender inclusivity via the increased consumption of milk and milk products and increased ability of women to participate in decision-making in dairy farming'. Each of the three partner institutions contributed to the SBC strategy development and agreed to take on different implementation activities based on their expertise and capacity. TADB, for example, plans to leverage their access to capital and expertise in finance to contribute to matching grants for small-scale dairy producers and finance the SBC strategy, while Venture37, on the other hand, will take on the coordination of a school milk feeding program and running radio campaigns, and Heifer International, a facilitator of farmer connections to markets, the responsibility of linking milk producers to processors to ensure safe dairy products are available on the market.

Conclusion

The integration of SBC capacity building, programming, and strategy development into IGNITE's service offerings over the life of the program is a shining example of how it has been able to adapt to the needs of institutions and capitalise on opportunities to further gender and nutrition impact. While these engagements have demonstrated the utility of SBC approaches in a variety of contexts, there is still work needed to ensure that SBC methodologies are integrated more systematically, where applicable, within agriculture institutions and that their impact is better measured and documented. This can be addressed by:

- **Generating more demand:** It is not always obvious to agricultural institutions how SBC approaches can help create better outcomes in their work. Institutions often need to see returns on their investments in gender and nutrition work before they commit to building their capacity and investing their resources to implement an SBC strategy. However, it is clear from the increasing number of IGNITE engagements over time in SBC work that once institutions understand the potential impact of these approaches, the demand for them grows.
- **Strengthening the ecosystem for technical assistance providers:** As the awareness and demand for SBC capacity building grows, there will likely be a need to increase the supply of technical assistance providers in the overall ecosystem who are able to provide this service. IGNITE's approach to this need was through the training of local service providers (LSPs), who in addition to building their own capacity, will eventually be able to deliver SBC services beyond IGNITE.
- **Documenting impact:** A major challenge of IGNITE's model of service delivery was the lack of incentive for institutions to measure or report back on the impact of their gender and nutrition activities. This means that the scale of their impact was not always well understood, especially past the institutional level. In the case of SBC activities, this made it difficult to determine how reliably SBC approaches were being implemented, how well SBC capacity building was being cascaded or retained within institutions, or what effects their SBC activities were having at the household level. While IGNITE documented the impacts of its SBC work, the approach thus far has been piecemeal and not able to reflect any impact down to the level of the household. Going forward, data sharing agreements between technical assistance providers and partner institutions/clients could help to better measure the effectiveness of SBC capacity building and determine which approaches and activities are delivering on their intended impacts. In addition to building evidence around the application of SBC at the intersection of gender and nutrition, this sharing of data could help to further refine IGNITE's strategy and approach.

This case study was written by **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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