

SBN case study – Nigeria sub-national engagement in Kano and Cross River states

Introduction

The SUN Business Network (SBN) is the private sector branch of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and aims to support businesses to grow the role they play in improving nutrition and to support SUN countries in developing national business engagement strategies.

The Partnering Initiative (TPI), working together with the SBN, has developed four case studies which explore SBN engagement of business towards improved nutrition, and how SBN works with government to catalyse private sector action. Across a range of countries and contexts, the case studies aim to explore this approach to tackling the Sustainable Development Goals, and to identify lessons learned – both good practice and challenges – to share within and outside the SUN network.

This case-study explores an initiative in Nigeria to help businesses support the government's aim of tackling malnutrition. In 2020 SBN Nigeria began a new sub-national engagement initiative in the form of a training programme open to SBN members and other small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The initial training consisted of a funding master class, held in four states, and a food safety and nutrition workshop held in two states. The case study focuses on Kano and Cross River state, where both of the trainings have taken place, to look at the initiative in more detail, and to understand how it seeks to align the public and private sectors, through building SME's specialist skills and knowledge.

Country context and national level activities

Nutrition in Nigeria

Food insecurity is an acute problem in Nigeria. With the largest population of any African country (around 200 million), and high fertility rates, 37% of children under five years are stunted, and one in eight children do not survive until their fifth birthday. Maternal death rates are also high, at one in 30 women. 37% of adolescent girls begin childbearing before age 19, leading to higher population growth and greater risk of mother and baby health problems. 11% of women are underweight, while 28% are overweight or obese – both indicative of poor diets. Poor infant and maternal nutrition, coupled with low rates of breast-feeding, contribute to stunting and diet-related health problems.¹

COVID-19 has pushed up food prices in 2020-21, exacerbating the lack of access to nutritious food throughout the country. However, the most serious threat is in the north-east of the country, where armed conflict caused by the militant Islamist group Boko Haram, has resulted in 2 million people being internally displaced and at risk of starvation.²

Government framework on nutrition

Nigeria has long recognised the role of nutrition as a development issue and is committed to addressing malnutrition. The National Multisectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition 2019-2023 builds on the

¹ Based on data from NPC and IFC International Demographic and Health Survey, 2019; USAID, 2021; UNICEF, 2021.

² UN <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103252>

2016 National Food and Nutrition Policy, and sectoral plans of action.³ The plan aims to reduce malnutrition and stunting, and increase the rates of exclusive breastfeeding.⁴

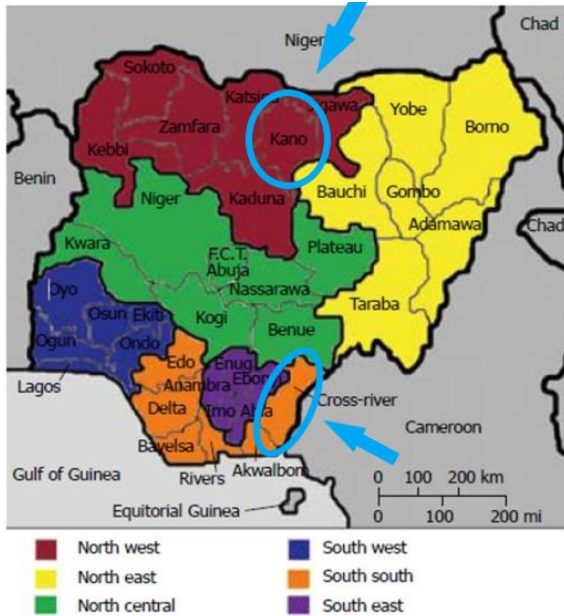
SBN Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria joined the SUN Movement in November 2011. A SUN Business Network Coordinator was in place by 2015 with the responsibility of working with the government on nutrition issues, and the network was formalised with the support of GAIN in the same year.⁵

Current SBN priorities include: access to finance for small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs); technical support to identify nutrition gaps in business structure and offer solutions; business-to-business linkages and product registration support in partnership with regulatory agencies; and nutrition education for business.⁶

Sub-national context in Cross River and Kano States

Through their location in very different geopolitical zones of the country, the two states in the case study each present their own social and nutritional contexts. Cross River state is located in the South south geopolitical zone while Kano state is in the North west geopolitical zone. Stakeholders interviewed offered their perspectives on the challenges in each state.



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Cross River State

In terms of nutritious food security, Cross River State places a strong focus on agro-industrialisation. However, businesses in the state face several challenges. Food storage and preservation costs are seen as major issues for businesses, as cold storage facilities are not available. The lifespan of harvested food is

³ USAID May 2021: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/tagged_Nigeria-Nutrition-Profile.pdf

⁴ Scaling up Nutrition, *National Council on Nutrition approves a five-year nutrition action plan for Nigeria* [website], <https://scalingupnutrition.org/news/national-council-on-nutrition-approves-a-five-year-nutrition-action-plan-for-nigeria>, (accessed 17/09/2021)

⁵ Scaling up Nutrition [website], <https://sunbusinessnetwork.org/our-members/nigeria>, (accessed 1/09/2021)

⁶ Ibid.

reduced, with high levels of waste. This is compounded by infrastructure challenges, such as the poor road networks between farmers and off-takers or markets, again resulting in post-harvest loss.

There is a significant knowledge gap that needs to be bridged through education and awareness-raising amongst micro-entrepreneurs around nutrition, food safety, packaging, and preservation. To date, capacity building is felt to have been marginalised, as Cross River state is not a big commercial hub. While other states like Lagos have significant private sector presence with social enterprise supporting business, businesses in the South south region are more cut off from this kind of information and support.

Spotlight: government initiatives on nutrition in Cross River State

- Local government has been providing continuous advocacy and sensitisation to pregnant women on exclusive breastfeeding and complementing feeding after 6 months (this has taken place in primary health care centres across the state).
- Nutrition-related interventions include deworming of children ages 2-5 months; vitamin A supplementation for children 6-9 months; and growth monitoring of children 0-5 years of age.
- School-based nutrition and agriculture strategies such as home-grown school feeding programmes are currently implemented in primary schools across the state.

Constraints

The government of in Cross River State is committed to these initiatives but is constrained by funds, hence requires more support and collaborations with donors or partners such as the work SBN and GAIN are doing to promote food and nutrition in the state.

In addition, there are contextual challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted progress of government initiatives. #EndSARS protests resulted in destruction of various facilities, including a database of local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Spotlight: business engagement activities by government in Cross River State

- Local government focus on agricultural business in relation to nutrition includes supporting production of bio-fortified crops, particularly bio-fortified rice and vitamin A cassava. A factory has been set up to produce vitamins and a mill has been set up to process rice. The government has been distributing bio-fortified seedlings to farmers for planting. Another element of support to farmers is provision of animal feed to poultry farmers who supply birds to the state-owned poultry factory for processing.
- The state government has hosted breakfast meetings with entrepreneurs and youths, focusing on opportunities in agro-business. This aims to bridge the knowledge gap and identify business opportunities that exist, linking businesses up with funding agencies, and encouraging farmers and entrepreneurs to collaborate, to create a better network, and strengthen the economy.
- Another recent innovation was the creation of a fabrication academy, which manufactures basic equipment that is suitable for local agro-business, at a lower cost than importing.
- Government has given partners and donors a free hand to operate in the state and put in place institutional frameworks for food and nutrition activities such as the state committee on Food and Nutrition, and the Food and Nutrition unit in the Ministry of Agriculture. The state Government also aligns with Federal Government Policy on Food and Nutrition.

Kano state

Agriculture is one of the main sustainable business areas, especially in the North. The main challenge mentioned in relation to SMEs working on nutrition is the difficulty in obtaining loans or grants to start, register or improve their business.

There is a need to enable women to move into agricultural production and business as agricultural work is often restricted to men. In Kano, as in other areas of the mainly Muslim north, there are traditionally social and religious restrictions on women's professional activities. In many cases women are limited to

domestic-based enterprises – gardening, production of groceries, and livestock production at home, including eggs and poultry.

SBN sub-national engagement: SME capacity building programme

The two initial trainings delivered as part of the sub-national programme have focused on basic nutrition and food safety, and on funding through a Funding Masterclass.

Approach

- Leveraging GAIN programmes where possible, SBN is established in states where GAIN is operating, such as Kano and Cross River.
- Through engagement with the Chamber of Commerce, SBN has mobilised the private sector at state level.
- Rather than providing piecemeal trainings spread across the country, SBN's aim has been to engage more intensively over time, through successive phases of capacity building, with a smaller set of states, to ensure that they are building a robust set of skills and really enhancing capacity.

Workshops

- **Basic Nutrition and Food Safety training:** The training assessed the knowledge of the participants, then provided an adapted 1-day in-depth training on basic nutrition, followed by a day of training on food safety and regulations, focusing on the link with nutrition, including occupational safety, hygiene, food hazards, wastes and regulations and the opportunities in the recently launched African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA)
- **Funding Masterclass:** The key objective of the training programme, as stated in the workshop report, was to equip SME business owners with the knowledge and skills they need to improve their chances of accessing finance from a range of complementary sources, including the ability to think critically about funding problems, assess the risk profile of their business and address financiers' concerns, and identify and exploit potential funding opportunities. It was targeted at business owners and entrepreneurs seeking new capital for their business.
- **Virtual Packaging Workshop:** a 1-day virtual workshop held on Zoom, focusing on food processing and packaging techniques, in relation to preservation and food safety.

Timeline

- 3rd and 4th March 2020: 2-day KANO Basic Nutrition and Food Safety training
- 28th December 2020: 1-day Virtual Packaging Workshop
- 7th and 8th May 2021: 2-day Cross River Basic Nutrition and Food Safety training
- April and May 2021: Funding Masterclass – this took place in Cross River, in Kano, and in Lagos state and Plateau state

Government involvement in engaging private sector

In Kano, the Ministry of Finance and Commerce and the Central Bank of Nigeria were involved alongside SBN. In Cross River, SBN engaged with the Commissioner and the state Ministry of Commerce and collaborated with the two ministries involved in nutrition in Cross River State - the Ministry of Agriculture and of Health. SBN also engaged with the Chambers of Commerce and the National Association of Small-Scale Industrialists.

The state government has spearheaded many of the activities. SBN has worked with them to advocate and create awareness of nutrition priorities, and the role of business and need to support business.

Government has also supported in the mobilisation of businesses for the training.

Other stakeholders

The Basic Food Training and Nutrition workshop in Kano was conducted in collaboration with the Kano Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (KACCIMA), GAIN, UNICEF and WFP. The training in Cross River was in partnership with the Calabar Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture

(CALCCIMA), the Nigerian Association of Small-Scale Industrialists (NASSI), GAIN and WFP. The executive Chairman of the Cross River State Primary Healthcare Development Agency (CRSPHCDA) and the Scaling Up Nutrition Focal Person in Nigeria Dr Binyerem Ukaire were present at the training, which was facilitated by Glytabs Consulting Limited.

For the Funding Masterclasses offered in four states, SBN partnered with Smallstarter Africa, who developed and delivered the training programme.

The virtual packaging workshop was offered in collaboration with KACCIMA, GAIN, WFP, UNICEF, the Institute of Packaging – Nigeria, the African Packaging Organization, and the EatSafe Country Program, Nigeria.

Participants

The Basic Nutrition and Food Safety training was attended by 60 participants from various educational and professional backgrounds. The training report notes that they were experienced, many in farming rather than production or processing activities, which provided an opportunity to challenge participants about value addition activities along the food value chain”.

The Funding Masterclasses in Kano and Cross River were attended by cohorts of 25-30 participants. Most of them had a registered business with a market-ready product, in the growth or maturity stages, a track record of sales and customers, and required additional capital to grow, scale or expand the business.

Other SBN sub-national engagement activities and linkages with GAIN projects

Leveraging

GAIN has a range of other projects focusing on nutrition in the country, outside of its work with SBN - for example, the commercialisation of bio fortified crops (vitamin A cassava). When selecting the states in which to carry out the capacity building activities, SBN ensured that states which were not selected benefited from other projects. In states where capacity building activities were not implemented , businesses or the government were still made aware of other nutrition related activities like bio-fortification, through SBN, GAIN, or partners.

Likewise, SBN worked closely with GAIN on other initiatives with common goals. A good example is the COVID- support project which had a grant component to help SMEs survive the shocks associated with lockdown measures.(See below.)

Business through the lens of gender

SBN designed a meeting / workshop entitled Business Through a Gender Lens, as an initial step towards providing focused support specifically for women in business. In preparation for the event, SBN carried out two state-level rapid assessments, in Plateau state and in Cross River state, to understand the challenges that women in business face.

The event was then convened in Lagos, with stakeholders from different states, sharing findings and coming together for a way forward to better support women. Chambers of commerce, key government officials and women’s groups were invited, with a focus on how women can be supported to move into different trades and become active in the agricultural and food production sector, a necessary strategy for poverty reduction and boosting the economy.

The assessments highlighted the need to support and engage more meaningfully with women in business, and revealed a number of issues that SBN hopes to address in the next phase of the sub-national engagement projects. For example, women face significant barriers to setting up agricultural or food production/retail businesses. In some communities, women are not allowed to own land, or in some cases stores. They require a male proxy, who stands in for them, and is paid based on whatever agreement they have.

Financial and technical support to SMEs (and COVID 19 recovery) – linking with GAIN

As part of the COVID 19 support, SBN also did a survey to understand the challenges businesses were faced with, and provided webinars to inform them of mitigation strategies etc.

As a result of this survey, GAIN funded a financial support programme for SMEs, which included COVID-19 recovery grants. Although the funding was not SBN, GAIN and SBN, as “the business platform of GAIN”, worked closely together on the programme. SBN circulated the information and guidelines, the call for applications and submission requirements, communicated with businesses and managed the local practicalities of the grant process, including reviewing the applications, following up with the businesses and implementation of the grant. This also ensured that SBN member businesses were aware of the funding and some were able to benefit from grants.

Key successes, and success factors

The sub-national engagement initiative is still in its early stages. It has yet to be rolled out at on a larger scale. While it is not possible yet to speak of outcomes or impact, both states highlighted several successes.

The initial classes were felt to be successful. They were very well attended, with over 100 businesses participating, and furthermore, a good proportion of these were women entrepreneurs, which is seen as a very positive step. In Kano, this was facilitated by the fact that the Chamber of Commerce has women’s trade groups.

In Cross River, SBN shared information about the training using their social media handles, and businesses from other states responded asking for similar trainings to be organised for them.

Limitations of approach to date

As only a few trainings have taken place at this point, and the project is still quite new, limitations currently relate to scope and depth of the programme. However as new funding is secured to scale up the training in existing states, and reach new states across the country, this should change.

One weakness mentioned in the stakeholder interviews was the fact that so far, the trainings have only been offered in English, and without consultation with community groups or elders. Consequently, it was felt that the training is not relevant or accessible to micro enterprises at community level, or in more remote rural areas where language would be a barrier.

Planned activities and future initiatives

Future ambitions / hopes from partners

Partners expressed specific hopes and aspirations for future collaboration:

- Further trainings could be provided on the following: nutrition labels and labelling; food formulations and new food products using locally available foods (value addition across food value chains to improve nutrient content and further increase market value); food safety and hygiene; how to reduce post-harvest loss.
- **Cross River:** government partners expressed a desire to collaborate further with the SUN network, to ensure local people have maximum access to nutritious food, especially the vitamin A cassava stems, and hoped for support from the SUN network to help them to build up a strong database of local entrepreneurship data.
- **Kano:** one stakeholder suggested a project targeting women entrepreneurs with grants and support. The programme would consist of three levels: sensitisation, technical support and skills-sharing, and supplying resources. This would be aimed at young women entrepreneurs, who, in addition to issues around gender roles and work, face numerous challenges, from applying for bank loans to

marketing, equipment, sourcing of raw materials. The programme could be publicised on WhatsApp and on social media.

Local government plans going forward

- State governments plan to align with national frameworks and sustainability through the National Policy on Food and Nutrition, which have targets and goals and sustainable plans for succeeding governments to achieve.
- There are plans to budget for more capacity building in the next year and the hope that further partnership and collaboration could increase training coverage, using a step-down approach across the 3 senatorial districts. This would be supported through radio programmes on nutrition and food safety.
- Business meetings will be held outside of the State Capital, in rural communities, in other senatorial districts, targeting more farmers and those who are involved in the agricultural value chain.

SBN plans for scale and sustainability

- Broadly SBN plans to engage more at the sub-national level where a real impact can be made, though future plans are dependent on further funding.
- SBN will conduct a post-training evaluation to see whether the trainings provided so far have had an impact. This will explore the impact of the food safety training, looking at any shifts in government regulations and business compliance, and of the Funding Masterclass, exploring whether businesses have been able to refine their business proposals, have been successful in applications, etc. The evaluation will help identify priorities for future engagements.
- SBN will continue its current strategy of engagement in selected states, to progressively build capacity and ensure businesses gain a sustainable set of skills.
- Depending on funding, SBN will aim to implement a new programme specifically supporting women entrepreneurs, building on the work done through the state level surveys and the meeting in Lagos on business through a gender lens.

Lessons and recommendations

Stakeholders shared their reflections and recommendations on the initiative and its future direction to achieve most impact. They suggested that:

- There is a need to refocus capacity building work also on micro-enterprises, as they represent a significant proportion of local business. In some states communities do most of their buying from those small businesses. It would be beneficial to engage with the micro-sized businesses rather than just small and medium, to really create the change that SBN wants to implement. This work would require a slightly different approach, including for example translation of materials or hiring interpreters.
- To ensure that capacity building reaches a high proportion of women entrepreneurs in the future, SBN and the Chamber of Commerce could engage other stakeholders who can assist, for instance organisations that deal with public health, and the government ministry dedicated to women's affairs, as well as companies and NGOs doing work targeting women.
- SBN and government could collaborate to organise a meeting with key stakeholders in the states, including nutrition actors and entrepreneurs, to conduct a needs assessment across the senatorial districts of the states. This would further reveal areas of weakness where collaboration, partnership or support are needed.
- If working at the grassroots level with small community enterprises, there is a need to involve community leaders, who can also assist with engagement. Similarly, for local skills-building at grassroots level, programmes need to be provided in the local dialect (or at the very least with interpreters).

- Sustainable impact will require consistent engagement, funding, the effective showcasing of successes, and ongoing advocacy with the government to ensure that it is entrenched in their policies and regulations and guidelines.

Recommendations for SBN from Smallstarter Africa

Smallstarter Africa, who developed and facilitated the Funding Masterclasses, produced a combined report on the four trainings. This included recommendations around how SBN can better support SMEs on issues relating to funding, based on their interactions with the cohorts and on feedback from participants.

- ***“Information alerts for new funding opportunities:*** *Many business owners do not have sufficient access to new funding opportunities such as Requests for Fund Application (RFAs), new government funding initiatives, or other financing options targeted at SMEs. The SUN Business Network could provide an information service that issues alerts for new funding opportunities. These alerts could be shared with partner organizations like the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, NASSI, etc.*
- ***Capacity building for related business skills:*** *Our analysis of the audience shows that there are often other root problems business owners need to fix in order to successfully deploy and reap the benefits of fresh capital infusion in the business. These problems often involve sales, human capital, operations optimization, or supply chain management, among others. The SBN should develop new training programs targeted at these root problems based on a survey of its members.*
- ***Professional service support:*** *Many business owners cannot afford or do not have access to good quality professional business support such as certified accountants, legal advisers, tax advisers, business strategy consultants, etc. The SBN could develop a “Shared Support Service” that retains quality professional services for use of its members.*
- ***Sharing success stories and lessons learned:*** *Due to high rejection and decline rates in funding applications, it is very important to provide constant psychological support for members of the SUN Business Network so they don’t give up and stop trying to raise the funds for their businesses. Sharing the stories, experience and lessons learned by members who have successfully raised funding would provide the encouragement and psychological boost other members need to stay determined and persistent.*
- ***Continuing education:*** *Fundraising is an evolving skill that needs to be honed from time to time. As the funding landscape changes, and new trends and funding sources emerge, it is important to constantly upgrade and update the knowledge and skills of members of the SUN Business Network so they stay relevant and effective. This can be achieved by organizing refresher courses and providing advanced fundraising courses that build on the competencies of previous training programs.”*

Methodology & acknowledgements

This case study is based on four stakeholder interviews, with the Kano State Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture in Cross River state, members of the Nigeria country team and Africa team at GAIN, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Cross River State.

With support from the country SBN coordinator, a wider range of stakeholders from across sectors in both states had initially been contacted. These were not available for interview or had technical issues.

As such the case study does not claim to present a comprehensive or fully representative account, but rather an overview of the initiative, with initial perspectives from government, industry and SBN.

Many thanks to the SBN global team and Nigeria country team for their continued support throughout the research, and to the interviewed respondents for their time and insights.

About the SUN Business Network

The SUN Business Network (SBN) is the world's leading private sector focused nutrition initiative: a neutral platform to foster partnerships and collaborations. It aims to engage and mobilize business at a global and national level to act and invest responsibly and to innovate in responsible and sustainable actions in emerging markets to improve the consumption of safe food and to make good nutrition more aspirational, accessible, affordable and available for all people.

Globally, the stewardship of the SUN Movement is enabled by the United Nations Secretary General nominations of a SUN Movement Coordinator, Lead Group, Executive Group and Secretariat. The SUN Business Network is co-convened by GAIN and WFP.

About The Partnering Initiative

The Partnering Initiative is a leading independent not-for-profit dedicated to unleashing the power of partnership for sustainable development. TPI was founded in 2003 around a passionate belief that only through collaboration among business, government, NGOs and the UN can we tackle the greatest environmental, development and business sustainability challenges, and make the systemic shifts necessary to eliminate poverty.

For 18 years, TPI has worked extensively with all sectors of society to drive effective collaboration. Throughout that time it has been internationally recognised as a pioneer in the theory and practice of cross-sectoral partnering, and in promoting the role of business as a partner in development.