

2024



SUCCESS STORY

From Technical Support to Agri-food MSMEs on Value Addition in Food Processing, New Food Products Formulation, and Reformulation of Existing Biofortified Food Products

A GAIN (SNIPS)- Commissioned Activity

Implemented by:
Ikore International Development Limited



Strengthen Nutrition in Priority States
For SMEs across Vitamin A Maize, A Cassava and Orange Fleshed potato Value Chains



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THE JOURNEY TO CHANGE



In Nigeria, small businesses in the food sector often struggle—not just with access to markets, but with the knowledge to transform their ideas into thriving enterprises. Many lack business registration, struggle to secure funding, and have limited understanding of product development, certification, and market expansion.

That was the reality for hundreds of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) processors within the vitamin A cassava, vitamin A maize, and orange-fleshed sweet potato (OFSP) value chain in Kaduna, Benue, Nasarawa and Oyo states, Nigeria.

The Strengthening Nutrition in Priority Staples (SNIPS) project, designed by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), set out to change that. Ikore was contracted to provide technical support for MSMEs/processors to improve value addition in food processing, formulation of new food products, and reformulation of existing nutrient-enriched products. To achieve this, Ikore strengthens agrifood MSMEs ecosystems (women and youth-led businesses), building their capacity to promote

By employing a comprehensive and hands-on approach, Ikore successfully addressed the immediate needs of MSMEs while laying the foundation for sustained growth and development within Nigeria's agrifood sector.

production and accessibility of value-added products from biofortified foods. Ikore walked the journey with these entrepreneurs—developing value-added recipes, providing hands-on mentorship, opening doors to funding, and creating direct business opportunities.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS: HOW WE DID IT

Ikore's approach was not just about teaching business skills, it was about transforming mindsets and providing hands-on support. Here is what made the difference:

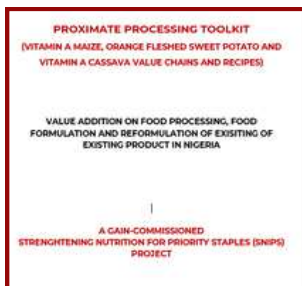
Needs Assessment

To ensure a tailored hands-on support, Ikore carried out a comprehensive needs assessment, engaging over 200 MSMEs to uncover the challenges holding them back. What we found was striking: **94.6%** of these enterprises were micro-businesses, operating with limited resources and grappling with critical gaps in areas like hygiene,

business formalization, limited access to finance and raw materials, record keeping, and product development. These findings painted a vivid picture of businesses brimming with potential yet hindered by barriers they couldn't overcome alone, hence informing our training modules.



Proximate Processing Toolkit / Business Management Guide



Understanding the challenges faced by MSMEs, Ikore developed the Proximate Processing Toolkit—a practical resource featuring over 40 bio-fortified recipes for Vitamin A cassava, Vitamin A maize, and orange-fleshed sweet potato (OFSP). This toolkit became a game changer, serving as a reference point for MSMEs to bandy around improving efficiency in proximate processing, improving product quality, ensuring food safety, and expanding their reach. This toolkit wasn't just about recipes; it included a Business Management/Entrepreneur Guide, equipping MSMEs with the skills to formalize their businesses, manage finances and cashflows, and access new markets.

Capacity Building

During the training phase, Ikore delivered impactful two-day workshops across four targeted states, reaching 129 MSMEs across value chains. These workshops aimed to empower participants by enhancing their skills in value addition, product formulation and reformulation, and food safety standards. The core of the training involved hands-on practical demonstrations, where participants learned how to create easy-to-make snacks, baby foods, and other nutrient-rich products from biofortified crops.



To enhance the experience, Ikore engaged her food scientists, nutritionists and business experts to develop innovative and practical recipes. A key outcome of this process was the development of the Proximate Processing Toolkit—a comprehensive resource that MSMEs can reference to improve product quality and processing efficiency. Beyond knowledge transfer, the workshops created a supportive, collaborative environment that encouraged participants to confidently apply their newfound skills, driving innovation and long-term growth.





Coaching and Mentoring

Our one-month coaching and mentoring approach combined one-on-one and group sessions, leveraging virtual platforms to enhance engagement. MSMEs (101) were grouped based on similar needs and provided with lectures, videos, audio recordings, and other reference materials to support continuous learning and business development. This transformative coaching and mentorship program provided personalized guidance in key areas such as business registration, product certification, packaging and branding, access to finance and capital raising, supply chain management, and digital marketing. This mentorship proved valuable, equipping MSMEs with the skills to develop comprehensive business plans, package their products in a compelling and high-quality manner, and confidently pitch their businesses to potential investors.



Industry Learning Visit

Industry learning is a core component of our mentorship and exposure sessions, providing agrifood MSMEs with firsthand experience in large-scale processing facilities. All 30 MSMEs participated in these visits, which Ikore facilitated at companies such as CSS Integrated Farms in Nasarawa, Krunch Foods in Kaduna, and Cato Foods in Osun State. These visits went beyond traditional learning—they were transformative, offering participants direct exposure to industry-leading practices in food safety, production standards, and operational scaling. By observing these best practices, MSMEs gained practical insights to apply in their own operations, fostering innovation and enhancing their ability to scale and compete in the market.



Market Linkage

Recognizing that many MSMEs (24 out of the 129 trained) struggled with limited market access for both raw materials and processed products, Ikore conducted a mapping assessment to identify key market players and broker initial discussions. These efforts culminated in a physical one-day market linkage event, where participants had the opportunity to pitch their products and negotiate business terms. The event was attended by over 100 participants, sparking new collaborations and opening doors to expanded market opportunities. These connections propelled MSMEs' growth and boosted their sustainability in the competitive agrifood sector.



RESULT

Output

- 129 MSMEs received comprehensive capacity-building support in value addition and new product formulation. Of these, 112 MSMEs adopted the practices and made meaningful business changes.
- 25 businesses successfully formalized their operations.
- 40 newly formulated products were introduced to the market.
- Improved access to inputs for vitamin A cassava (UMUCASS 52, 53, and 54) production and secondary processing materials were facilitated.
- Eight MSMEs secured financing totaling ₦32 million.
- One MSME received in-kind capital expenditure support for her processing facility.
- A standout MSME secured over half a million naira in sales after winning a product pitching competition, thanks to high-quality packaging and presentation.

Notable Changes

Several MSMEs (112) among the 129 Agrifood MSMEs offered tailored technical support;

- Adopted improved food safety and hygiene practices, leading to higher-quality products and better customer satisfaction.
- Increased product diversity, with MSMEs launching new snack foods (like Kokoro, Dakwa etc.) and baby food products from biofortified crops.
- Enhanced business management practices, including formal record-keeping and financial tracking, to improve business transparency and sustainability.
- Expansion into new markets through strategic market linkages, boosting visibility and sales opportunities for processed products.
- Strengthened supply chain connections, leading to a more consistent and reliable input supply for biofortified products.

KEY SUCCESS FACTOR

Deployed relevant expertise that made our training work

A diverse team of specialists was engaged to provide high-impact training and support. This included experts in food science, nutrition, quality control, curriculum development, value chain development, and monitoring and evaluation. These combined efforts ensured MSMEs received practical, high-quality support tailored to their needs.



A tailored Technical Support Approach all the way

Our approach was insight-driven and needs-based. The curriculum was designed based on the needs assessment findings and adapted to the realities of MSMEs. Local languages and adult learning materials were used to enhance knowledge retention and adoption. Additionally, technical support extended beyond training to include follow-on coaching and mentoring, helping MSMEs develop business plans, apply for grants, and secure financing.



Market Linkage a core success driver

Ensuring access to markets and inputs was critical for MSME success. We facilitated connections with reliable suppliers and buyers, enabling MSMEs to source raw materials and sell their products more effectively. This approach was instrumental in driving business growth and sustainability.



Collaborative Partnership with GAIN

GAIN's collaborative efforts facilitated connections with complementary projects, providing capacity support for the team, and offering troubleshooting assistance. This partnership strengthened project implementation and amplified the impact.

Leveraging Partnerships with Key Industry Players

Collaborations with organizations such as HarvestPlus and IITA enabled access to biofortified cassava stems and improved planting materials for MSMEs. Industry players like Cato Foods, CSS Integrated Farms, and Krunch Foods played vital roles in the industry learning visits, providing MSMEs with firsthand exposure to best practices in food safety, production, and scaling.

GUVEREN BENEDICTA UKANGE: FROM HIDDEN STRUGGLES TO A THRIVING BUSINESSWOMAN



"Before Ikore, I had dreams—but I did not know how to bring them to life. Now, everything has changed."



Nguveren always had a passion for creating food products, but her business remained small and unstructured. She struggled to secure buyers and could not scale beyond her immediate neighbourhood.

Then she joined the SNIPS project.

During mentorship sessions, she learned how to improve her branding, structure her finances, and formalize her business. But the biggest breakthrough came when Nguveren was guided on how to apply for funding. With Ikore's support, she applied for a ₦4 million grant—and won.

Now, Nguveren:

- Has a registered business, giving her access to larger markets.
- Has direct supply linkages with farmers, meaning she never runs out of raw materials.
- Can confidently pitch to investors—and is planning for an even bigger expansion.

"The day I got the grant approval, I felt like my dreams were no longer just ideas—I was finally building something real."



REAL STORIES

IKORE

HULERA SULEIMAN: A SECOND CHANCE AT SUCCESS



"I once tried to secure funding and failed. But after Ikore's training, I finally got it right." Hulera's first attempt at applying for a GAIN micro-grant ended in disappointment. She lacked the proper business documentation knowledge, and her proposal was not strong enough.

But SNIPS gave her a second chance. Ikore's mentorship helped her refine her business model, improve her product branding, and master the application process. When the grant opportunity came again in 2024, she applied—this time with the right knowledge. She won a ₦4 million grant.

With the funding, Hulera is now:

- Expanding production capacity, meeting the growing demand for her products.
- Developing new bio-fortified food products, diversifying her offerings.
- Targeting premium markets, thanks to improved branding and certification.



"I now have the confidence and financial backing to take my business to new heights."..... S. Hulera



REAL STORIES

IKORE

VIVIANE M. TAVERSHIMA:

FROM LOCAL PRODUCER TO MARKET LEADER



"Ikore did not just give me knowledge; they gave me the confidence to compete and win."



Viviane had a food business, but it lacked visibility. Her products were not well-branded, and she struggled to attract customers beyond her small network.

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During Ikore's training, she learned how to package and position her products for the market. But the real turning point came when she participated in the Ikore Product Pitching Competition. She won—and made over half a million naira in sales that day. That win was not just about money; it gave her credibility, market exposure, and the push she needed to scale.

Now Viviane is:

- Expanding her distribution network, reaching supermarkets and major food outlets.
- Introducing new product varieties based on consumer demand.
- Positioning her brand for long-term success.

"I never imagined my business could grow this fast. Ikore gave me the tools to dream bigger—and the skills to make it happen."



A TRANSFORMATION THAT LASTS

For us at Ikore, the SNIPS project was not just about training—it was about transforming lives. Entrepreneurs who once struggled now have thriving businesses, improved access to funding, and brighter futures. By sustaining these interventions, Ikore aims to continue driving economic growth and improving food security in Nigeria and beyond. Specifically, Ikore will continue to refine and provide affordable technical support to agrifood MSMEs through the following initiatives:

- **Continuous Business Support:** Launching a Knowledge Management Platform to help MSMEs access ongoing training, certification guidance, and best practices to enhance business formalization and operational efficiency.
- **Expanding Market Linkages:** Facilitating connections between MSMEs and large-scale buyers, distributors, and input suppliers to improve sales and sourcing opportunities.
- **Leveraging Digital Tools:** Utilizing e-learning platforms and online marketplaces to broaden market access, improve visibility, and enhance MSMEs' digital capabilities.
- **Scaling to New Regions:** Expanding Agrifood ecosystem to reach even more MSMEs across Nigeria, ensuring equitable access to technical support and business growth opportunities.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our sincere gratitude to GAIN and the entire SNIPS team for their steadfast support throughout this project. We are especially grateful to Mr. Godwin E Ehiabhi, Senior Project Manager, Supply Chains for Commercialisation, GAIN Nigeria, whose expert guidance was vital to the project's success. Additionally, we thank GAIN's State Desk Officers for their commitment to ensuring smooth implementation across all activities. Our appreciation extends to our partners—HarvestPlus and IITA—for their invaluable contribution in supplying improved varieties of biofortified raw inputs for our MSMEs, and to Cato Foods, Krunch Foods, and CSS Groups for facilitating industry visits and providing critical support.

Special recognition is due to Ovo Ugbebor, Ikore's Managing Partner, for her exceptional leadership, oversight, and meticulous review of the Proximate Processing Toolkit, which ensured its relevance and accessibility to adult learners. The project's success was significantly enhanced by the dedicated leadership of Michael Adegboyi, the Project Manager, whose strategic direction and commitment were crucial. Favour Jauro provided invaluable assistance through skillful coordination, ensuring smooth and efficient implementation of all project activities. We also acknowledge the expert contributions and collegiality of Dr. Chinwe Elochukwu (Food Nutritionist), Mr. Ismail Adeleye (Food Quality and Safety Expert), Dr. Hosea Yakubu (MERL Lead), as well as the technical, communications, finance, and logistics teams.

Finally, we commend the MSMEs who enthusiastically embraced the program, diligently applied new knowledge, and transformed their businesses. Their dedication has established a solid foundation for sustainable growth and innovation within the agri-food sector.



At Ikore.....

OUR MISSION

Enhancing Nutrition through
sustainable food practices, education
and community empowerment for
vulnerable population

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