



Joint Reflections on Strengthening Local Capacity for Nutrition in Emergencies in Mali

Across Mali, local and national organisations are at the forefront of delivering life-saving nutrition services to communities affected by crises. Their work is often carried out in challenging conditions – from insecurity and logistical barriers to limited access to funding – yet they remain the backbone of the nutrition response. In 2023, five Malian NGOs – ONG Avenir, [GRADP](#), [Help for Sahel](#), [G-Force](#), and women-led [APROFEM](#) – embarked on a tailored capacity strengthening journey to boost their ability to lead and sustain high-quality nutrition in emergencies (NiE) interventions, in collaboration with the [Mali Nutrition Cluster](#) and the [Global Nutrition Cluster](#) (GNC).

FROM NEEDS TO ACTION

The initiative began when these organisations responded to a call for expressions of interest from the Mali Nutrition Cluster and the GNC to join a project designed to advance the localisation process in Mali and address their self-identified priorities in the areas of both organisational and NiE capacity strengthening. The project was intentionally designed to offer both types of capacity strengthening, given how critical the two aspects are for sustaining effective

nutrition responses and for securing a stronger voice for local and national actors in coordination and funding spaces. The GNC contracted an organisational capacity strengthening partner, [Centimani Solutions](#), which worked closely with the Mali Nutrition Cluster to guide each organisation through a detailed capacity assessment. This process helped the NGOs pinpoint their strengths and map out specific areas for improvement.



Participants at the training on infant and young child feeding in emergencies (IYCF-E) in Bamako. ©Global Nutrition Cluster/Saïdou Kaboré

BUILDING NIE SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

Between April and August 2024, in-country and remote support was provided by a regional GNC NiE Advisor, [Saïdou Kaboré](#), who worked side-by-side with the NGOs to put their plans into action. Saïdou’s regional expertise in nutrition programming for the Sahel, as well as his previous experience in Mali and local language skills, made him an ideal fit for the assignment. Seventy-seven staff members (57% women), from the five selected NGOs, as well as other partner national NGOs ([ADMSM](#), [ATDED](#), [ADIS](#), [AMSODE](#), [YAG-TU](#), [AAG](#), [ADIZOSS](#)) participated in three key technical

face-to-face trainings:

- Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (three days)
- Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (five days)
- Nutrition Information Systems (two days)

Notably, the Nutrition Information Systems training was a first-ever training in this area for 60% of participants.

The NGOs were directly involved in organising the trainings, with [GRADP](#) and [APROFEM](#) generously offering their conference rooms to host the trainings. Overall, there was a 90% average satisfaction rate among participants for the three training sessions.

In addition to classroom training, Saïdou visited NGO offices and co-created tailored action plans with technical recommendations for each of the five national NGOs,

PRACTICAL ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

In late 2024, the NGOs reconfirmed their critical gaps beyond technical NiE expertise, based on the initial capacity assessments. Between January and April 2025, the GNC, in collaboration with the Mali Nutrition Cluster, partnered with [RedR UK](#) to deliver 60 hours of online training in three areas: (i) monitoring and evaluation (5 sessions); (ii) proposal writing for resource mobilisation (6 sessions); and (iii) human resources management (4 sessions). The training materials were contextualised for Mali, translated into French, and delivered by French-speaking regional experts.

These trainings brought together 51 staff members (33% women) from ten organisations, including the five NGOs who participated in the earlier NiE capacity strengthening activities, as well as [ATDED](#), [ADIZOSS](#), [ONG YA-G-TU](#), [ONG ADMSM](#), and [AMAED](#). The training approach combined live sessions, self-paced exercises, and interactive tools like Zoom whiteboards and shared Google documents. Overall satisfaction was high, with 92% rating the courses as “good” or “excellent”. The training on proposal writing for resource mobilisation received the highest satisfaction score, with 4.38 out of 5.

“ [The M&E training is] an essential tool for the success of any project or programme. We are now equipped to carry out M&E activities within our various organisations.

M&E TRAINING PARTICIPANT, JANUARY 2025 ”

placing the NGOs’ priorities, realities, and ambitions at the heart of the process. He also offered on-the-job coaching and facilitated job shadowing at another NGO site, the ALIMA-supported severe acute malnutrition stabilisation centre in Bamako. This peer-to-peer learning approach proved highly valued, helping participants see practical examples of how other NGOs operate and adapt.



GNC NiE Advisor Saïdou Kaboré demonstrating the use of a height measuring board during the Community Management of Acute Malnutrition training for national NGOs in Bamako. ©Global Nutrition Cluster/Saïdou Kaboré

ENSURING INCLUSION AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Efforts were made to ensure all staff could participate fully in the capacity strengthening activities. For example, when some female colleagues were on maternity leave, hybrid participation was arranged so they could still benefit from the sessions. Discussions also explored how the

organisations integrate gender and gender-based violence mitigation into their work – especially medical and psychosocial/case management services – as well as advising on how to safely and appropriately provide referrals to GBV survivors.

MEASURABLE IMPACTS

At the close of the project, the five NGOs took part in the final evaluation. Four other NGOs that joined the NiE or organisational capacity strengthening trainings also provided feedback. When asked to rate the usefulness of the capacity-strengthening activities for improving organisational capacity, 91% of participants highlighted gains in their internal systems and overall ability to manage

programmes effectively.

In terms of technical nutrition capacity, 92% of organisations reported stronger skills to design and implement high-quality, context-adapted nutrition interventions in emergencies. The initiative supported them in areas ranging from technical NiE practices to programme planning and coordination.

The organisations also reported that their access to funding improved: on average, the number of active grants per organisation increased from 1.88 in 2023 to 2.25 in 2025. It is not clear if this increase is directly linked to the support provided by the project, but 70% of the NGOs reported feeling that this project contributed to their ability to obtain new funding.

Within the Mali Nutrition Cluster, the evaluation results point to a modest but positive strengthening of local actors' involvement. This has included greater participation in cluster-led processes and increased confidence on the part of local and national actors to influence cluster strategy and make their voices heard.

REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING

From the perspective of the NGOs, trust and collaboration were at the heart of the project's success. Having an open and respectful relationship made it easier for the NGOs to clearly express their capacity-strengthening needs and priorities. Early sensitisation encouraged focal points to complete the organisational capacity assessment honestly, seeing it as a tool for growth rather than a "due diligence" exercise. The capacity assessment tool itself was then seen as a valuable roadmap for organisational growth.

Appropriate framing, and jointly agreeing on contextual adaptations to the definition of a "local and national actor", helped ensure fairness and relevance at different stages — from the establishment of the selection committee to the final NGO selection. However, in hindsight, project participants felt that earlier involvement of the Malian Ministry of Health in the process would have been beneficial, to ensure appropriate national NGO engagement and to support the selection process. The Malian Ministry of Health was brought in at a later stage, during the preparation of the trainings.

The NGOs valued practical, progressive skill-building with a balance between theory and hands-on sessions. Locating training activities in the NGOs own offices and sites improved relevance and put participants at ease, whilst simple tools like WhatsApp groups kept communication flowing. Co-designing activities altogether ensured that capacity strengthening was building on existing resources and meant that the NGOs could put forward their preferred approaches, e.g. a strong preference for face-to-face or blended learning formats to foster deeper interaction.

Going forward, project participants highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for networking among

national NGOs and establishing regular spaces for peer exchange, even at the initial capacity assessment stage. They also highlighted the need to continue capacity-strengthening beyond the initial trainings and establish a strategic, longer-term capacity strengthening vision for national nutrition actors in Mali, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Mali Nutrition Cluster. Finally, participants called for more attention to community accountability and multisectoral integration, linking nutrition with food security, WASH, and health services.

In addition to these reflections, the NGOs also noted some specific challenges that affected participation and learning outcomes. Insecurity and transport disruptions prevented some staff from attending, while high staff turnover within organisations risked the loss of newly acquired skills and slowed the roll-out of action plans. Training durations were often too short – particularly for complex topics like Nutrition Information Systems – leaving limited time for group work, practical exchanges, and experience-sharing. Online components were also hindered by the mixed experience levels among participants, and frequent connectivity issues, which reduced interactivity and made it harder to tailor sessions to everyone's needs.

“ This type of initiative is essential to reduce asymmetries between national NGOs and international actors. ”

MALI NGO PARTICIPANT, MAY 2025

LOOKING AHEAD

For the five participating Malian NGOs, the initiative has reinforced their ability to plan, deliver, and advocate for a stronger nutrition response. The experience also underscored the need for ongoing investment in local and national actors – not just in technical nutrition skills, but in the organisational foundations that sustain their work.

In 2026, the Mali Nutrition Cluster will focus on consolidating the gains made in 2025 by increasing national actor leadership and decision-making roles. This includes: (i) specialised training in M&E, advocacy, emergency preparedness, and cash/voucher assistance; (ii) stronger engagement through Technical Working Groups and the Cluster Strategic Advisory Group; and (iii) appointing

national NGO leaders with clear coordination roles at national and regional level.

National partners will also receive orientation on GBV, gender, and PSEA, with priority given to partnerships in high-need districts. Support through the Mali Humanitarian Fund will continue, enabling more local and national partners to access and manage grants. Collaboration between national and international NGOs has improved and 10 of 33 national and local organisations received humanitarian funding in 2024–2025 to deliver nutrition interventions in hard-to-reach areas, reaching over 400,000 people.



Do you represent a local or national actor doing great work in your community, but could use technical support in nutrition and beyond? Please [contact the GNC](#) to explore the different types of capacity strengthening services on offer.

