

Red Light, Green Light: How a Scorecard Turned Data Into Progress in Nigeria



Introduction

In a crowded policy landscape marked by limited bandwidth and complex data and evidence, the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) Nutrition Scorecard stands out as a clear, actionable model for how to drive political will and policy change in Nigeria through simplified evidence. Originally developed by the NGF to track progress on state-level nutrition commitments, the tool has grown into a nationally adopted instrument influencing decisions across government. This **case study illustrates how intentional design, smart dissemination, and strong political relationships transformed a data tool into a lever for action.**

The Challenge

In 2021, Nigeria faced an alarming nutrition crisis: it found itself among countries with the poorest malnutrition rates, including having the second highest burden of stunted children globally^[1]. Nigeria's 36 state governors had made four clear commitments to tackle malnutrition:

1. Strengthen or establish functional coordination mechanisms for multi-sectoral action
2. Develop and implement integrated, context-specific strategic plans aligned with national or sectoral priorities
3. Increase financing
4. Expand maternity protections, including providing childcare in government offices

However, there was no mechanism to monitor progress. The missing piece? Accountability.



[1] UNICEF, Nutrition: <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/nutrition>

Design and Development

The NGF, building on its successful use of scorecards in health, proposed a new, streamlined accountability tool tailored specifically for nutrition. Its core principles were to be simple and clear, user-friendly and usable, and to showcase urgency.

- **Binary Traffic-Light Ratings:** Using only green and red traffic-light indicators, each state was assigned whether it met (green) or did not meet (red) a defined benchmark, with no yellow “in progress” buffer. This binary system created a sense of urgency, motivating action for progress, and avoided complacency.
- **Focus on Enablers, Not Just Outcomes:** Instead of focusing only on changes in malnutrition rates, which are harder to see, the scorecard also tracked more upstream drivers of change - governance, financing, and legal frameworks – including processes that policymakers could act on.
- **Action-Oriented Reporting:** Every scorecard included a summary with three concrete, state-specific actions governors could take to improve their nutrition commitments. In addition, directional arrows tracked progress over time, encouraging continued effort even when benchmarks hadn’t yet turned green

Indicator	SCFN quarterly meeting chaired by SCFN Chair	75% of quarterly funding for SCFN workplan released	MSPAN approved	Six months maternity leave with full pay	Functional creche(s) in State Secretariat
State A	Red circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓	Green circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓
State B	Green circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓	Green circle ↑↓	Green circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓
State C	Red circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓	Red circle ↑↓

The Engagement Strategy

What made the scorecard particularly effective wasn’t just its design, it was how it was delivered. The NGF leveraged its unique convening power. Nigeria’s 36 governors meet monthly under the NGF platform to discuss pressing national and subnational issues. By embedding the scorecard into these high-level meetings every quarter, and publicly displaying each state’s results, the NGF created a culture of positive peer pressure and healthy competition.

Governors could see how they fared against their peers, including neighboring states, and particularly those in similar geopolitical zones that are exposed to the same conditions.

This visibility created incentives for governors to engage in peer learning. Officials in states that were underperforming often reached out to their counterparts in high-performing states to understand how to replicate their success.

The Impact

After three successful rounds, the scorecard gained national traction. In 2022, the National Council on Nutrition adopted the NGF Nutrition Scorecard as the official National Nutrition Scorecard, expanding from 6 to 20 indicators to reflect broader multisectoral engagement - from education and agriculture to humanitarian response and social protection.

The scorecard's influence is tangible. Since its launch:

- All 36 states now have a functional State Committee on Food and Nutrition - up from just 5 states at the start
- Nutrition departments were established in 3 states and 7 federal MDAs, which unlocked statutory funding channels
- 8 states have passed laws guaranteeing six months of paid maternity leave - up from 3 states
- Nutrition-specific budget lines have been introduced in both state and federal budgets

Today, the national scorecard is jointly managed by the NGF Secretariat (for subnational data) and the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning (for federal-level data), ensuring both institutional sustainability and shared ownership.

The tool's visibility and perceived legitimacy are high. As the NGF team reports: "Every major stakeholder in Nigeria makes reference to the scorecard."

Key Success Factors



1. Institutionalized Relationships and Co-Creation

Long-standing partnerships and communities of practice ensured buy-in across administrations. By embedding the tool within existing national and subnational institutions, it became part of the system – and built in ownership from the start. It also helped that the decision-makers were a part of the design and co-creation, which made the scorecard more likely to be used.



2. Simplicity and Actionability

Indicators were measurable, relevant, and clearly attributable to policy action. The scorecard's design removed ambiguity, making results easy to interpret and act upon.



3. Positive Peer Pressure

Public comparison spurred healthy competition and peer-to-peer learning. The scorecard also helped identify both the problem and the next steps.



4. Strategic Dissemination

Face-to-face engagement with policymakers created accountability beyond paper. The NGF experience shows that whether through monthly meetings, dashboards, or other approaches, it is valuable to leverage platforms that policymakers already trust and use.

Conclusion

The **NGF Nutrition Scorecard** turned accountability challenges into a catalyst for change, demonstrating how simplified, strategic tools designed for policymakers – paired with smart engagement – can cut through government complexity and drive real results. The NGF experience shows that to make research policy-ready, it must be translated into formats that policymakers can digest and act on. Indicators must not only reflect problems but also point to solutions. **This case affirms that success depends as much on how evidence is shared as on what the evidence says**, highlighting the importance of co-creation, timing, and tailoring outputs to decision-makers' needs rather than researchers' preferences. For countries grappling with similar challenges, the Scorecard offers a replicable model of how evidence can not only inform but also push toward policy action.

Related Resources

This case study is part of a four-part series, developed by Africa LEEPS, exploring effective evidence outputs that have successfully communicated information to policymakers in different contexts and were tailored for policy impact. To view the other case studies in this series, please click on the links below:

1. [Evidence that Works: The Anatomy of a High Impact Policy Output](#)
2. [Delivering Evidence in 9 Days: How a Rapid Response Brief Shaped the Conversation Around Screen Time in Brazil](#)
3. [Red Light, Green Light: How a Scorecard Turned Data into Progress in Nigeria](#)
4. [How Peer Exchange and Co-creation Laid the Foundation for National Data Reform in Togo](#)

About the Africa LEEPS Partnership

Africa LEEPS aims to advance the use of evidence in policymaking to support progress towards the SDGs. The partnership brings together leading evidence organizations from across Africa to learn from each other, exchange knowledge and experiences, and jointly problem solve – to strengthen evidence-informed policymaking and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Technical capacity strengthening and policy engagement activities are led by three initiatives: the Centre of Excellence Evidence Policy Action established by the [African Center for Equitable Development \(ACED\)](#), the East African Regional Evidence Synthesis Initiative established by the [Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis \(ACRES\)](#) and Alliance for Evidence and Equity in Policy-making in Africa established by the [African Institute for Policy Development \(AFIDEP\)](#).

[Results for Development \(R4D\)](#) serves as the learning and engagement coordinator for LEEPS.

LEEPS is funded by the [International Development Research Centre \(IDRC\)](#), the [William and Flora Hewlett Foundation](#), and [Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH](#).