

BOTTLENECK ASSESSMENT

OBJECTIVES

- Understand what a bottleneck assessment (BNA) is, and its utility
- Understand how to do a BNA through a workshop

What is a Bottleneck Assessment (BNA)?

A Bottleneck Assessment allows key stakeholders to identify current challenges, also known as bottlenecks, and to begin to discuss prioritization and strategies to address them. When the ISS Operational Model is applied for the first time, the main objective of the initial BNA is to provide the foundation for developing a Bottleneck and Solution Inventory (BSI).

How to do a BNA?

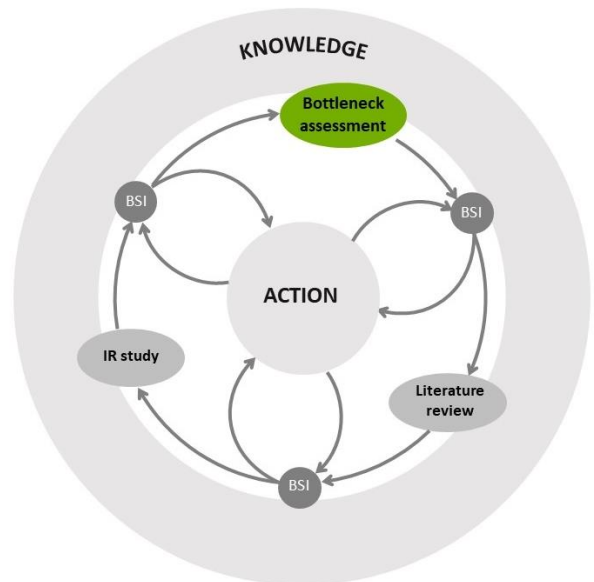
There is no standard approach to conducting a BNA; choose the type of approach that is most effective for identifying bottlenecks. Examples of approaches include highly structured surveys linked to administrative data at different levels of a delivery system^{4,5}, rapid assessments within a smaller number of units within the system⁶, key informant interviews and participatory workshops⁷. Workshops are particularly insightful because this type of approach:

- a) is systematic and participatory
- b) involves diverse stakeholders.

While it is not the unique approach, a participatory workshop is attractive because it helps every stakeholder to hear the perspective of others and better understand the system as a whole and how the different parts connect to each other. It also allows for reaching a consensus on bottlenecks in the system, and which ones to prioritize for action.

Objectives of a BNA workshop

- Identify bottlenecks affecting the implementation of the program of interest
- Generate possible solutions to address bottlenecks
- Identify bottlenecks that could already be addressed quickly
- Prioritize the remaining bottlenecks
- Provide the information needed to create a Bottleneck and Solution Inventory (BSI)



Recommended Steps to do a BNA workshop

Planning Logistics

1. Choose a date and time for the venue
2. Develop a diverse list of stakeholders and send invitation letters

Planning Content

The preparation for the BNA can take place through a participatory approach

1. Organize a planning meeting that defines the objectives of the event
2. Identify approaches, instruments, and facilitators
3. Consider different tools that could be used to carry out a systematic analysis of bottlenecks within a system or to prioritize the bottlenecks, for example:
 - a. Adapt the [Program Assessment Guide \(PAG\)](#)^{8,9} to facilitate the meeting and map out the systems
 - b. Create criteria for a ranking system exercise, to help prioritize bottlenecks during BNA (see Box 3)
4. Create a facilitator's guide and agenda for the event
5. Gather preliminary information about potential bottlenecks



Follow-Up

1. Prepare an evaluation form to gauge audience understanding
2. Create a report based on the BNA event
3. Organize meetings to complete the assessment process and validate, or elaborate, the bottlenecks identified
4. Disseminate the results.

Box 3. Prioritization of the bottlenecks

The **prioritization** of the bottlenecks can be done through an iterative process. To help prioritization, it is useful to think about the following aspects or criteria:

- the importance of addressing a bottleneck (e.g. 'stockout' is at the beginning of the results chain so it should have an impact on everything else, but perhaps 'stockout' is very rare);
- the existing windows of opportunity to begin addressing a bottleneck;
- the type of bottleneck and the actions required to address it (minor vs. major changes, etc.) and the feasibility of the solutions considered (funding, capacity, political will, etc.). For some of these bottlenecks, obvious and/or easily achievable solutions can be tried out more or less quickly. For others, a pilot study may be required to test a solution and this may require additional funding;
- the potential impact of possible solutions on the resolution of the bottleneck (direct vs. indirect), and the timing of the solutions (rapid vs. long-term);
- the expected sustainability of the potential solutions;
- the potential unintended consequences of the potential solutions.

Conclusion

The BNA allows for specific challenges and strategies to be identified, while including knowledge from a variety of stakeholders. Since BNAs are flexible in structure, they are widely applicable to different projects and can be implemented by various country teams.

Case study: BNA

In ISI, the country teams of Kenya and Uganda decided to carry out the BNA in the form of a two-day participatory workshop. Both country teams used the Program Assessment Guide (PAG) as the guiding approach. The implementing teams adapted the PAG to their needs and created a facilitator guide and an agenda for the workshop. In Uganda, 18 participants participated in the BNA workshop; in Kenya, it reached a total of 39 participants. In both countries, the facilitation of the workshop was shared among members of the core team: the project coordinators, researchers and some government representatives. In Uganda, a pairwise ranking of the bottlenecks and of potential solutions took place during the BNA workshop. This helped to prioritize three bottlenecks:

- i) inadequate provision of IFAS-related health education to the mothers
- ii) weak drug quantification process at health facility resulting in unnecessary stockouts
- iii) low male involvement.

In the same country, the results of the workshop were presented during the monthly Nutrition technical working group meeting from the Ministry of Health.