

Strengthening the Capacity of Local Organizations for Nutrition Outcomes

Responses to questions posed during the webinar

Question 1 : How did you cope with the staff turnover which can be high among NGO and CSO staff?

Answer: Staff turnover remains one of the main concerns for both NGOs and CSOs. To counter this, the approach focused on improving the organizational capacities, and thus, institutional capacities, rules and procedures were strengthened - with the goal to retain more staff over the long run. Technical capacity strengthening sessions also included several staff members from each organization (never just one person), so that even if people leave, other trained staff remain available to continue the work. Lastly, it is worth noting that although staff turnover poses challenges at the organizational level, those staff carry the skills they've learned into their next role, which contributes to strengthening the local system.

Question 2: Did you experience any resistance to your capacity strengthening efforts? If so, how did you overcome this challenge?

Answer: Experiences varied across organizations, but where resistance to capacity strengthening was low, more time was given to clarifying expectations and creating alignment for the support. Setting clear expectations about the amount of funding that would be given (if any) and discussing organizational and individual priorities for capacity strengthening activities helped to overcome resistance to capacity strengthening efforts. Compensating for staff time spent in capacity strengthening activities is not easy, but overall, when learning opportunities are tailored to individual priorities, staff often recognized the value and adjusted schedules accordingly. Some programs discussed staff workload before launching the program, encouraging directors to earmark some staff time for joining capacity strengthening activities.

Question 3: Which strategies were used to ensure sustained operational capacities (in the face of high staff turnover) considering most of the support was provided by consultants?

Answer: With the CSO support provided in Kenya, consultants were used as needed to fill specific needs. For example in the Mission activity the 5 CSOs selected needed in-depth exposure to USAID rules and regulations for grants and awards. This necessitated STTA for that particular area without the need to employ a full time LOE. Additional support is for the CSOs to budget and plan for a 2-3 days training offered by several specialized agencies that train on USAID rules and regulation e.g InsideNGO among others. In the Kenya Market space there are many professionals that can fit into this role. Internship and attachment of nutrition professionals is another strategy for building specific skills and increasing individuals' exposure to other systems. With the NPI program, most of the capacity strengthening support was delivered by consultants based in or near where grantees were implementing their programs. We chose this approach to provide coaching that would be available locally after the

NPI program finished and to ensure that TA providers had a clear understanding of the context in which NGOs were working. Where needed, the consultants providing TA were offered support and guidance from USAID Advancing Nutrition staff (based either in our country program offices or in Washington DC).

Question 4: On the learning approach, can you share what types of tools were used to conduct organizational capacity assessments?

Answer: For the NPI program, we adapted USAID's organizational capacity assessment (OCA) tool. We pared down the full OCA to include only domains where TA support could be provided and added specific technical components, based on our partners' implementation plans. For example, we added technical components related to SBC, since nearly all NPI partners had some SBC programming. With the Kenya CSOs, we created a shortened version, which we called a rapid OCA (ROCA). The ROCA was used to assess short term outcomes and aimed to cover specific areas—governance; partnership and coordination; and monitoring, evaluation, and learning for nutrition, etc.

Question 5: Most support to local organizations focuses on development of technical skills, while organizations want and need operational/management support. How did you handle staffing and funding to meet these needs?

Answer: For local partners to continue making significant contributions, they need both organizational and technical support. The NPI program is structured to assess and provide TA support for both technical and organizational development. For example, for SOS Sahel, our support covered all areas of need as identified by the organization in the assessment of organizational capacities. Overall, we recommended that implementers of capacity strengthening programs increase their focus to include both organizational and technical components. Local organizations often need TA to strengthen systems and procedures for finance, procurement, fundraising/new business development, branding and visibility, audit/compliance etc. These organizational systems also have an impact on retention (see the response for question 2). Lastly, for programs that have funding to provide technical capacity strengthening, look for opportunities to create mentoring relationships between NGO staff and country program staff from international organizations. Mentoring, whether formal or informal, can have a lasting impact and make technical programming more effective.

Question 6: Understanding that this capacity building was very recent, has it translated into funding opportunities for NGO/CSO's own projects?

Answer: Yes, we can say that capacity building has opened doors to funding opportunities as capacity building has improved our project proposals and organizational competitiveness. This has already translated into new grants for some local organizations and increased attention from potential funders.