

Institutional Strengthening and the Capacity of NGOs to Deliver More Efficient and Effective Services: The Case of USAID/FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project

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Abstract: *This is a research report of an investigation of the linkage between Institutional Strengthening and the capacity of NGOs to deliver more efficient and effective services. It is a case study of three Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) affiliated to USAID/FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project. It is an original research project for partial fulfillment of M.Sc. in Development Management at the Open University – United Kingdom. The study adapted qualitative research methods through semi-structured questionnaires that were jointly completed by staff members from the three NGOs; this was triangulated by Skype interviews with the heads of the NGOs. This information was supported by literature review from relevant publications that provided grounded theory in relating development management definitions and aspects within the FANIKISHA context, as well as grey literature from project documents from the NGOs. The study has established key linkage between the processes that have taken place in the three NGOs in terms of institutional strengthen and their capacity to deliver various health services effectively and efficiently to the local community. This is the main aim of the FANIKISHA project. For instance, there has been improved access of various HIV & AIDS services provided directly by the three NGOs as well as through established partnership with Ministry of Health and other stakeholders. However, the findings revealed that the three NGOs are at different levels as far as systems and processes that influence efficiency and effectiveness is concerned. The study recommends that the institutional strengthening initiatives should be scaled up and sustained in order to ensure that more NGOs acquire relevant capacity to improve their performance in delivering health services in a more efficient and effective way to the local community. The existing partnerships should also be strengthened for effective service delivery, evidence-based advocacy as well as inter-organizational learning, accountability and decision making for improved health outcomes.*

Keywords: Institutional strengthening, capacity, non-governmental organizations, services

1. Introduction

The FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project is a five-year cooperative agreement (2011-2016), funded by USAID/Kenya and implemented by Management Sciences for Health (MSH), Pact Inc., Danya International, and the Regional AIDS Training Network (RATN). MSH has been working to strengthen health systems in Kenya for nearly two decades. The FANIKISHA Project is building the capacity of national-level NGOs to ensure and sustain their contribution to improvements in the health and wellbeing of all Kenyans. FANIKISHA aims to: Strengthen leadership, management, and governance of NGOs, Increase access and use of quality data for evidence-based decision making and Improve quality of institutional strengthening for NGOs.

In an effort to support and enhance the services provided by NGOs, during the five years the FANIKISHA project aspires to identify and strengthen the institutional capacity of ten national level Kenyan NGOs and their affiliates. Consequently, FANIKISHA facilitated the organizational capacity assessment (OCA) for the three NGOs selected for this study; ABANTU for Development (ABANTU), Omega Foundation and Women Fighting AIDS in Kenya (WOFAK), among the other NGOs under consideration for long term partnership with FANIKISHA. As a result, the assessments revealed various areas of capacity gaps that have to be strengthened. At the moment, the three NGOs have been supported to develop various organization policies

and guidelines and the staff members have been undergone various capacity building trainings.

While the initial steps have mainly focused on institutional strengthening, FANIKISHA is working with the NGOs and their affiliates to strengthen their capacity so that NGOs can play a more strategic role in working with the Government of Kenya and other stakeholders to deliver effective health services at the community level. In order to assess the extent to which such efforts are contributing to better health outcomes, this study investigates the relationship between capacity and performance [1]. In doing so, the relationship between capacity building, capacity itself, and organizational effectiveness [2] has been considered.

Community systems strengthening initiatives have the aim of achieving improved outcomes for interventions to deal with major health challenges such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and many others [3]. An improvement in health outcomes can be greatly enhanced through mobilization of key affected populations and community networks and an emphasis on strengthening community based and community led systems for: prevention, treatment, care and support; advocacy; and development of an enabling and responsive environment.

In order to have real impact on health outcomes, however, community organizations and actors must have effective and sustainable systems in place to support their activities and services. This includes a strong focus on capacity building,

human and financial resources, with the aim of enabling community actors to play a full and effective role alongside the health, social welfare, legal and political systems.

In many parts of the world, of course, communities are affected by various kinds of diseases and by many other challenges to health. Communities of every kind need to be able to access services easily to address all their differing needs. Currently, there is increasing understanding of the need for integrated programming and delivery not just of health services but combinations of health, social, education, legal and economic support. Community based organizations and networks have a vital role to play in the development of such integrated and community-driven approaches [3]. In appreciating this fact, FANIKISHA is working with ten Kenyan NGOs and their affiliates over five years to strengthen their skills so as to play a more strategic role in working with the Government of Kenya and other stakeholders to deliver effective health services at the community level.

Since the selected NGOs are mainly donor funded, the rush to meet donor deadlines implies that they don't have the opportunity to reflect on the work they are doing and hence this study will provide opportunity for the NGOs to assess their performance on how the current systems and processes relate to their capacity to deliver health outcomes at community level with a view of programme improvement, adjustment and organizational learning and accountability.

In this regard, the aim of the study was to investigate the linkage between institutional strengthening and the capacity of NGOs to deliver more efficient and effective services. This is done through a case study of three NGOs affiliated to the FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project. The three NGOs are among ten NGOs supported by the FANIKISHA project that implement various health interventions at local and national level through partnership with the Kenya's Ministry of Health.

2. The Nature of the Problem

Capacity building has become central to the development of health systems in low-income countries. Experience suggests that achieving better health outcomes requires increased investment of financial resources and adequate local capacity to use those resources effectively. Local capacity is also believed to play a critical role in the sustainability of health outcomes and in reducing reliance on external assistance over the long term. International donors and nongovernmental agencies, as well as ministries of health are, therefore, increasingly relying on capacity building to enhance overall performance in the health sector. Despite increased attention to capacity building, there is still limited understanding of the role capacity plays in ensuring adequate performance in health systems. There are unanswered questions regarding the elements of capacity that are critical to performance and the level of capacity necessary for adequate performance.

Recognizing the need to improve understanding of the relationship between capacity building and development outcomes, in late 1998 the Center for Population Health and

Nutrition at USAID (CPHN) began to examine the role of capacity building in the population and health sector. Discussions emphasized the challenges of assessing capacity and monitoring and evaluating USAID capacity building efforts. While methods for assessing change in service coverage, access and quality are well advanced and widely accepted, many practitioners have found it considerably more difficult to capture the interim state or process – known as “capacity” – that reflects local ability to achieve and sustain coverage, access, and quality over time.

The change in NGOs' role, from pure service delivery to capacity development, requires that NGOs acquire different sets of capacities. Over the course of the past decade, NGO support organizations are increasingly gaining ground and possess important knowledge about how to build and develop capacities successfully. These NGOs primarily aim at assisting NGOs and sometimes government or other relevant actors in whatever sector they are working in, through focusing on individual capacities. They also provide support at the organizational level by addressing relevant issues in management, monitoring and evaluation. An example is the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), which collaborates among others with the UNDP and the World Bank. Its primary objective is to strengthen human and institutional capacity in the public sector and to foster an inclusive and participatory approach to capacity building and management development [4]. One of its core competencies concerns the professionalization of the voices of civil society (www.acbf-pact.org). Tool kits for developing the capacities of NGOs are being used increasingly by donor agencies for assessing NGOs' mission, organizational structure, leadership, management practices and activities [5]. UNESCO and the World Bank have joined the CCNGO/EFA in its call for building civil society in education in Africa, identifying four areas of capacity building: education content, pedagogy, programming and management, and policy dialogue and information exchange [6]. These organizations and their initiatives constitute promising strategies to strengthen partnerships, develop NGO capacities and in turn, strengthen NGOs' impact on government capacities in the health and other sectors such as education.

One of the weaknesses cited to affective service delivery by NGOs is weak institutional capacity that also poses a challenge to the decision makers. For instance, among 70 NGOs surveyed, only 20% had elected leaders, 15% had annual plans to guide implementation, 53% had financial procedures in place, 22% used finances efficiently, and 68% had a constitution [7]. The NGOs lacked systems of tracking their performance and resource utilization, a situation that made it difficult to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of community interventions. Without adequate organizational capacity, the NGOs could not efficiently use any technical skills they possessed. These co-ordination and harmonization gaps had also been recognized as key challenges during implementation of the World Bank-supported Kenya HIV/AIDS Disaster Response Project that was part of the Multi-Country AIDS Programme [8].

While efforts to address these gaps have been intensified by a number of implementing and development partners, there

is a challenge of attributing such efforts to improved service delivery. A common critique of, and a significant obstacle to, capacity development strategies is that they do not lead to the proper development and absorption of capacity development. Capacity development does not consistently translate into effective learning and as a result, fails to promote sustainable change, which is the *raison d'être* of the capacity development approach. Virtually all the major instruments devised by donors over the past 20 years to strengthen state capacity have turned out to be ineffective, and creative responses to these failures have been few [9]. This means that proper mechanisms have to be put in place to ensure that capacity building efforts are measured so as to relate their effectiveness on service delivery.

Within the FANIKISHA project design, institutional strengthening for capacity development is through support to the NGOs to develop key policy documents and guidelines that inform the strategic and programmatic direction of the NGOs and their affiliates, and training of staff on relevant institutional strengthening component. While these have been done, the aim is to ensure that the capacity of the NGOs and the staff themselves should have a positive impact of their performance and hence provide services efficiently and effectively. Additionally, the project implementation is pegged on delivering planned activities leaving little time for reflection. This is a common characteristic of most donor funded projects where focus is on inputs and activities while not focusing on the results of such activities. The challenges faced by various NGOs are not any different from the capacity gaps identified in the ten NGOs affiliated to FANIKISHA during organizational capacity assessment conducted in 2012. Particularly, the three NGOs selected for the study are not different either and as a result they have gone through institutional strengthening even though they are at different level of capacity. This study therefore aims to address the institutional strengthening problems reported by broader NGOs sector with specific focus on the ones affiliated to FANIKISHA project looking at three of the ten NGOs.

3. Research Methodology and Design

The processes that guided this study were informed by evolution of ideas right from project title and background which formed the basis of formulating research questions below:

- i. In what ways may institutional strengthening activities carried out under the FANIKISHA project be associated with improved capacity and efficiency in carrying out various responsibilities by the NGOs aimed at delivering health services at community level?
- ii. In what ways do the NGOs demonstrate an enhanced capacity for strategic engagement with the Government of Kenya and other stakeholders in delivering healthcare services and what kinds of factors influence this type of participation?
- iii. How might the quality and effectiveness of the NGOs and Ministry of Health through local health facilities be enhanced to support more effective health outcomes at the community level?

It is worth noting that the above questions evolved as the understanding of the topic grew both as development management concern as well as the context of FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project affiliated NGOs. These questions attempted to assess the extent to which the three NGOs have contributed to the aim of FANIKISHA project while also provide opportunity for internal reflection by the NGOs together with their affiliates and stakeholders especially the Ministry of Health. While relationship between capacity and performance has been documented in a number of literatures on institutional strengthening processes within NGOs, this has not been done for FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project. The aim of the project was therefore to investigate the linkage between institutional strengthening processes of three NGOs that are supported by the FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project and their capacity to deliver more efficient and effective services as envisaged by the project. This study looks at the linkage between capacity and performance as well as the 4Es including efficiency and effectiveness.

As the issues studied related to the perception and feeling of the beneficiaries and informants on the health outcomes of the project in the communities where there have been interventions, the author mainly adapted qualitative rather than quantitative research method. Considering the nature of FANIKISHA project, being mainly donor funded with a rush to implement activities and submit reports in order to meet donor deadlines, very little attention is given for reflection on the efficiency and effectiveness of institutional strengthening processes and hence there are no studies in this area by the NGOs affiliated to FANIKISHA project. This meant that people are the main informants for the study. The literature provided a springboard to identify what to explore, as well as a backdrop to understand the qualitative data gathered, allowing a more analytical approach on the relationship between capacity and performance of the NGOs.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

After initial discussion with contact persons from the three NGOs, it became clear that the project would be of relevance to them and hence they gave consent to participate in the study. For authenticity, the student letter of introduction from the Open University was shared with them while outlining the aim and objectives of the study.

3.1.1 Primary Data Using Qualitative Methods

While it would be ideal to conduct individual interviews with relevant respondents, time and distance was a key constraint. As such, a two-tier process was adapted to gather qualitative data that could provide accurate information in order to realize the objective of the study. In the first stage, semi structured questionnaire was developed in line with research questions. This was pretested with two individuals from two of the FANIKISHA affiliated NGOs that were not part of the study. The purpose of pre-testing was to ensure reliability and validity of the methodology and data generated using the questionnaires. After pre-testing the questionnaire was sent to the contact persons of the three NGOs to conduct joint self assessment together with relevant staff involved in project implementation at various levels and representing existing departments. The contact persons in

this case were Institutional Strengthening Advisors who facilitated the process after guidance from the researcher. In order to get significant representation, the respondents were drawn from various departments and those who participated must have been involved in the implementation of the FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project. The process took 10 days to take care of any clarification between the researcher and the respondents and final submission of consolidated feedback, thereafter the Institutional Strengthening Advisors compiled the responses and sent via E-mail to the researcher.

The second stage of the process was a triangulation through Skype interviews with the executive directors of the three NGOs. This was a brief session but touching on the key areas addressed by the questionnaire, it was done after receiving feedback on the joint responses on the questionnaires completed by the other staff members from the three NGOs. This was meant to provide additional information and clarification on some areas that were not clear from the joint feedback from staff. The information from Skype interviews were useful in backing up the joint responses from the staff as well as clarification on some of the areas outlined by the staff.

This form of case study conducted over limited period of time was done through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) by joint self-assessment of the three NGOs with triangulation by the heads of the three NGOs as the top leadership. The purpose of involving the heads of the three NGOs was also to ensure accuracy and authenticity of the information as well as promote ownership of the findings. Consolidated questionnaires provided relevant information for content analysis to assess the linkage between capacity and performance of the three NGOs in terms of efficient and affective delivery of health outcomes. A total of 32 respondents from the three NGOs participated in the exercise as outlined in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Distribution of respondents in the study

Organization	Number of respondents	
	FGD	Skype Interviews
ABANTU for Development	8	1
Omega Foundation	11	1
WOFAK	10	1
Total	29	3
	32	

3.1.2 Literature Review

The second aspect of research was based on reviewing existing literature on the different issues related to subject of investigation. Literature originated from various journals, reports and books including course materials, as well as grey literature from project documents shared by the three NGOs. Review of project documents and literature search was meant to inform the quality improvement approaches and applications to the FANIKISHA supported initiatives. The literature influenced the research at two levels. The first was to guide the research questions and the development of the questionnaire in terms of the content. The second was that it guided and contributed to the analysis of the data gathered. The literature was used to complement, judge and evaluate the qualitative data gathered. A three-way 'conversation'

took place between the research questions, the qualitative data gathered and the theories in development management. The complexity and specificity of the three NGOs made some interpretation and adaptation of the theories necessary which nonetheless provide very significant insight. The theories also explain part of the data gathered. The literature was at the same time put to the test as for their applicability to the situation of the three NGOs as well as other FANIKISHA project affiliated NGOs.

As grounded theory, course texts have been very useful in providing insights that are relevant to this study especially in the relationship between capacity and performance [1] as well as going further to interrogate the extent to which improved performance can be attributed to effective and efficient service delivery of health services. The reflections have also been useful in informing FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project affiliated NGOs on the need to think beyond the activities and focus on results in order to be sure that the project is on track in realizing its goal of ensuring and sustaining their contribution to improvements in the health and well-being of all Kenyans.

3.2 Data Analysis

For data analysis, the researcher based the process along relevant themes captured in the questionnaires through interpretive pragmatic approach focused on qualitative research paradigm. This approach enabled the author to integrate findings and understandings from the selected NGOs, hence giving voice to the FANIKISHA project affiliates to tell their own story. The in-depth interviews via Skype with heads of the three NGOs as well as focus group discussions through joint staff self-assessment was supplemented by document analysis from the project and general literature on the topics addressed. The analysis and conclusion derived from the data generated from the NGOs and the document review was the base for this project report.

4. Findings

4.1 Institutional Management Capacity of the NGOs

Through the FANIKISHA support, the three NGOs have been able to develop a number of policy documents and manuals namely; i) Strategic Plans, ii) Governance Manuals, iii) Institutional Strengthening Policies, iv) Finance and Administration Manual, v) Human Resources Policy and Procedures Manual, vi) Grants and Sub-grants Management Manual, vii) Communication Strategy, viii) Advocacy Strategy, ix) Project Management Manual, x) Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, and xi) Resource Mobilization Strategy.

These have enabled Omega Foundation (OF) to enhance capacity of NOWA Moyie (one of the main affiliates) as well as the 6 other Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to carry out implementation roles while ABANTU continued to implement various projects with funding from FANIKISHA and the other partners; AMREF - Maanisha Programme and National AIDS Control Council's (NACC's) TOWA funds. ABANTU's ability to adequately report to its partners without FANIKISHA's direct support is a

demonstration of its growing capacity to take on bigger funding opportunities. The study also revealed that Women Fighting AIDS in Kenya (WOFAK) reviewed its M&E systems, revising the data collection tools, and installed a server that hosts the database, website and acts as both data storage and intranet support. All these have enhanced the capacity of WOFAK to process quality data for decision making. It is hoped that such efforts should be sustained for effective delivery of relevant services.

4.2 Effectiveness of the Project

The study has established the extent to which the organizations have effectively improved target groups' access to various HIV and AIDS services and messages in the project areas through related activities implemented between 2011 and 2013 which included HIV testing, counseling and continuous psychosocial support. For instance, Figure 1 below is about a couple testing for HIV during HTC outreach by Omega Foundation.



Figure 1: A couple tests for HIV during HTC outreach

Due to increased uptake of HIV counseling and testing services as a result of robust mobilization campaigns by CBOs and self-help groups working with them, those who test negative have a clear message of preventing new infection while those who test positive access relevant treatment and care services as most PLHIV have been able to receive pre-ART services as at the time of the study. The study has revealed that strengthened referral system has led to access of relevant treatment in good time and there has been increased access to home and community based care by PLHIV through the support of community health workers, though the number of PLHIV per CHW is fairly high and this may hinder quality of services provided by the CHWs.

4.3 Project efficiency

According to the respondents' views, FANIKISHA's partnership approach to work with local NGOs with strong community presence has facilitated effective utilization of resources to meet the needs of target populations. FANIKISHA contract with the three NGOs is based on the understanding that not less than seventy per cent of the resources will support the programmes on the ground. This has been carried into the Memorandums of Understanding with local partners. The three NGOs are charged with responsibilities to manage and monitor implementation of programme components that are implemented through additional local partners working on the ground. To ensure a

clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities of the other partners, Omega Foundation for instance has MOUs with NOWA Moyie and Port Florence Community Hospital. The flow of funds from FANIKISHA has been consistent and is normally within the month or two depending on when the annual report was submitted, assessed and accepted. This process takes between four to six weeks for FANIKISHA to assess and provide feedback before an annual report is finalized and accepted. Therefore, this means that if the reports are handed in on time, then there is likelihood of receiving funding within the stipulated timeframe. Even though there might have been a delay in the release of funding for the following year, this is mitigated by the release of 25% of the following years' disbursement in the current year.

4.4 Partnerships and partner capacity building

The partnership agreement between FANIKISHA and the three NGOs stipulates roles and responsibilities of the two parties including management of the grant, disbursements to support programmes, and capacity strengthening of the NGOs and local partners involved in implementing programmes in their respective areas. The agreement provides a flexible framework that allows the partners to ensure delivery of services and is constructed specifically to make sure that there is a common understanding on what resources are available, the work plans and budgets to be submitted for release of funds and compliance with the reporting instructions and guidelines. At a lower level, the three NGOs have an agreement with their affiliates to define the nature of their partnership which entails financial and technical support in the areas of organizational, programme and financial performance.

5. Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

5.1 Overall conclusion

The study reveals that the three NGOs are on track in meeting the objectives of the FANIKISHA project and in meeting the needs of its target groups, albeit at different levels of performance. It is the view of the author that it is important to build on this success through additional resourcing to enable the NGOs to expand to new areas using their successful operational models given their current programming strengths and organizational capacity.

5.2 Implications of the Study

The study mainly employed qualitative research methods in order to capture the perception of the selected NGOs and based on the findings, there is positive correlation between institutional strengthening of the three NGOs affiliated to FANIKISHA project and service delivery. However, it is worth noting that the rush to beat donor reporting deadlines do not provide adequate time for the NGOs to conduct self reflection on the extent to which their interventions influence efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. The study reveals that FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project is on track in building the capacity of national-level NGOs to

ensure and sustain their contribution to improvements in the health and well-being of Kenyans. This implies that even if local communities are not directly in touch with FANIKISHA team, the services that they receive are efficient and effective through capacity building initiatives that have been supported by the project.

The implication of capacity building initiatives is a strong sustainability plan if the NGOs promote lessons learned with other NGOs as well as local organizations working with community. This multiplier effect will lead to improved capacity of other NGOs beyond the reach of FANIKISHA. The partnership between the NGOs and Ministry of Health also implies that the community will continue to receive services from the government even beyond the funding period and hence such efforts should be strengthened for the benefits of the community. This calls for further research on the extent to which this will hold true after the end of the project.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the NGOs experience of transitioning from direct implementers to facilitators, this success is attributed to the NGOs supporting projects implemented at the community level through CBOs. It is therefore recommended that the existing capacity should be strengthened and sustained in order to improve performance of the NGOs in delivering health services effectively and efficiently in order to benefit the community.

It is recommended that Omega Foundation strengthens capacity of CHWs with refresher training to keep them up to standard with new methods of supporting home based care and increase the number of CHWs in each community for effective psychosocial support to groups of PLHIV. In addition, OF should work very closely with the government community units in each locality where the organization works and strive to complement the work that is already being done by the CHWs recruited and trained by the government.

Based on WOFAK's experience on building communities' capacity on IGAs, it should review the IGAs that it has supported with a view to identify the most effective IGA interventions that will make significant contribution to the lives of its targeted population. Consideration should also be given to investments in infrastructure such as water that is vital for successful agricultural initiatives, capital equipment for manufacturing projects that could be supported with expertise in marketing and quality assurance to acceptable standards as set up by Kenya Bureau of Standards.

ABANTU has been successful in advocating in issues of rights of women at the local level, it is recommended that ABANTU uses this experience to work with likeminded organizations to advocate on specific issues of interest to the targeted communities with the aim to influence government policy on service delivery to increase access of vulnerable communities. The scaling up will use evidence that is generated at the local level and thus strengthen the advocacy case.

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