2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Strengthening Local Capacity and Ownership Among CSO in Nigeria

Name:

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Organization:

Mercy Corps Nigeria:

Summary:

Mercy Corps(MC) and international donors increasingly recognize the importance of creating ownership among local CSOs to maximize long-term impact within target communities. Mercy Corps through one of its Activity is transitioning leadership role to a local organization through a staggered process to allow for grant management responsibilities, developing capacities where required. Contextual understanding and alignment are an essential requirement that is often met with the rigid engagement approach of INGOs, which often have a centralized decision-making structure and a culture of control, has been a significant hinderance to the empowerment of local actors and their decision-making processes. Limited time, resources, expertise at local level implementing localization in North Central Nigeria remains a challenge that hampers INGOs to establish long-term presence and build trust with communities. Anchored on a 5 step CATALYSE approach by MC. The following process was thoroughly followed; a pre-award assessment, joint organizational capacity assessment, joint capacity strengthening transition plan, implementation of capacity strengthening strategy, transition of activities from prime to local partner and assumption of prime role. PARTNER used multiple CLA approaches such as pause and reflections, adaptive management which fostered a culture of continued learning and improvement to enable effective local capacity in addressing peace and conflict in North Central Nigeria. constraints such as power dynamics and resistance of local partner staff to change was persistent, but with the openness, capacity building and creating an enabling environment, this has led to trust and social cohesion between the prime and the local organization

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is a regional peacebuilding organization that has been working in Plateau and Kaduna States since 2000. WANEP's work in these states focuses on three main areas conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and women in peacebuilding.
With funding from USAID, Mercy Corps is partnering with WANEP to implement the Peace Action for Rapid and Transformative Nigerian Early Response(PARTNER). To be able to implement together, there was need for WANEP to function as an organization and not as a network. To this end, there was need to ensure policies and systems are in place to guide program implementation. WANEP often face resource constraints, including limited funding, personnel, and infrastructure. Insufficient financial resources hinder their ability to undertake comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives, conduct conflict analysis, provide adequate training and capacity building, and engage in long-term programming. Additionally, the lack of skilled personnel and infrastructure limited their effectiveness and reach of their interventions.

WANEP usually leverage partnerships with national and international stakeholders to enhance their capacity and expand their reach. Collaborating with governmental agencies, international organizations such as Mercy Corps, provided WANEP with access to technical expertise, funding opportunities, and resources to strengthen their peacebuilding programs. Since this partnership, there has been knowledge exchange, learnings, that have contributed to the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts in Plateau and Kaduna States

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2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

Pause & Reflect

Continuous Learning & Improvement

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

We adopted the use of continuous learning and improvement, openness and relationship building to strengthen WANEP Capacity for activity implementation and setting them up for direct award from donor organizations.

During the design phase of the PARTNER Activity, a planning meeting organized by Mercy Corps discussed on the Conflict Rapid Need Assessment, Gender Assessment in which WANEP's capacity was mapped for enhancement on research methodologies. With technical and budgetary support, they were able to lead the assessment with little support from Mercy Corps. On the Rapid Conflict Need Assessment, WANEP was actively involved, their input and local knowledge sought to understand the specific challenges, dynamics, and priorities within the target communities. Through focus group discussions, key informant interviews we were able to generate insights critical to informing redesign of the Activity implementation.

With support from Plateau State Peace Building Agency and Kaduna State Peace Commission, WANEP led in providing insights into local customs, traditions, and cultural sensitivities, ensuring that the program activities were respectful and appropriate. Through their involvement, the program design and strategy were tailored to the specific socio-economic, political, and cultural realities of the target community in Plateau and Kaduna States.

During the implementation phase, Mercy corps hosted a work planning workshop where WANEP was actively involved in the joint work planning process. Through collaborative discussions held during the workshop, Mercy Corps pprogram team and WANEP collectively developed a detailed plan for implementing program activities. This included defining roles and responsibilities, setting timelines, and allocating resources. By involving WANEP in the planning process, their expertise and insights were incorporated, ensuring a more comprehensive and contextually relevant implementation plan.

Furthermore, Mercy Corps and WANEP shared vision regarding Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning jointly conducted "pause and reflection" sessions on a quarterly basis. These sessions provided a platform for open and reflective discussions on program achievements, challenges, and lessons learned. WANEP after receiving mentoring and coaching currently lead in the organization and facilitation of these sessions, and other consortium partners shared their insights, perspectives, and experiences. The collaborative nature of these sessions allows for a collective understanding of progress and the identification of necessary adjustments or improvements.

Mercy Corps and WANEP MEL team collaboratively developed a common learning agenda. This agenda outlines the shared learning objectives, questions, and priorities to be addressed throughout the MEL process. WANEP's MEL colleagues actively contribute to shaping the learning agenda, ensuring that it reflects their specific needs and interests. By aligning the learning agenda, the program team and local partners focus their efforts on generating knowledge and insights that are relevant and actionable.

The use of mentorship and accompaniment were crucial in activity implementation and the transition process. Mercy Corps continues to provide ongoing mentorship and support to WANEP, helping them to build their capacity and develop the skills necessary to implement peacebuilding programs successfully and at the same time building trust between Mercy Corps and themselves.

Also, experiential learning has helped WANEP staff to develop their skills and knowledge through hands-on experience.

4. **RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.**

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

B. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Through CLA, Mercy Corps have fostered a collaborative approach within the team and WANEP. Mercy Corps recognized the importance of working together, sharing information, and leveraging collective knowledge and expertise. Through regular meetings, joint planning, and open communication channels, we have established stronger partnerships and improved collaboration throughout the transition process. Also, Mercy Corps have promoted a culture of continuous learning within our team and among WANEP Staff Mercy Corps collaborated with another USAID funded Activity within Mercy Corps and seconded WANEP staff for intention to facilitate learnings on program related activities and organizations systems and approach of operations. Prior to this placement, Mercy Corp evaluated WANEP staff capacity to gauge their knowledge as it relates to department of placement after which same assessment was conducted on them again and this shows knowledge gain from the analysis and report. Through this process, WANEP has adopted innovative practices, adapted successful strategies, and challenge existing norms, fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth.
Also from the community perspective, based on already established trust with WANEP, the Activity is now seeing a positive shift in terms of community level of engagement and ability to support program activities, indicating a growing sense of ownership. There is increased participation in program activities. The community participants are taking ownership by actively participating and engaging in dialogue sessions, sharing their perspectives. The community participants are also exhibiting a growing sense of pride and empowerment in their involvement with the activities. They recognize their ability to make positive changes in their own community and are motivated to actively contribute to its development. Over 50 women already engage and playing substantive role in their communities holding different meetings that empower women.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

Mercy Corps and WANEP uphold transparency and accountability as core values within their organizational cultures. It promotes openness, honesty, and ethical behaviours in all its activities. During the organizational capacity assessment, WANEP staff scored low on a scale of 0–4, which implies a low level of skills and expertise on activity implementation in peacebuilding. As such, Mercy Corps and WANEP developed a joint capacity strengthening and development plan after which Mercy Corps provided trainings, technical assistance, and mentorship to WANEP Staff which strengthened their skills, knowledge, and organizational capacity to effectively implement activities and assume program responsibilities. By strengthening their capacities, they are now able to take ownership of activities and sustain them beyond the life span of the program and also have the capacity and systems in place to directly get funds from donors.
Also ensuring equal partnership leads to strong collaboration and trust with local organizations and building relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and shared vision that will allow for s smoother handover of program activities. There were instances where power dynamics and resistance to change within the program team and WANEP this has slowed part of the transition process. Relinquishing control and decision-making authority from the program team to WANEP staff may face resistance, particularly if there are concerns about losing influence, resources, etc. Overcoming these power dynamics requires open dialogue, building trust, and fostering a shared understanding of the benefits of local ownership. An example was when the Chief of Party (COP) of the Activity I currently support went for home leave and handed over to the Deputy Chief of Party to oversee all the activity implementation, this created some sense of ownership and trust around transition.