

BANTWANA INITIATIVE TECHNICAL BRIEF



CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS IN UGANDA

BACKGROUND

Since 2015, the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. (WEI/Bantwana) has led the implementation of the USAID/Uganda Better Outcomes for Children and Youth in Eastern and Northern Uganda (BETTER OUTCOMES). Aimed to build resilience and reduce risk of violence and HIV for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and families, the program included a capacity development component focused on strengthening the technical and organizational capacity of seven local sub-partners to deliver evidence-based models of integrated social protection and HIV support to OVC and their families across 22 districts.

Capacity development efforts helped local partners meet OVC service delivery standards, including tracking and monitoring household resilience and progress toward graduation from vulnerability. This required strengthening partnerships and coordination with government, police, and other community health and social protection stakeholders to function within an integrated referral network and case management system. WEI/Bantwana's approach was responsive to new PEPFAR/USAID OVC programming standards and HIV-centered technical shifts, which required local partners to rapidly adapt to new programming and data collection and reporting requirements emerging throughout the programming cycle.

WEI/BANTWANA CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

At the outset, WEI/Bantwana conducted a pre-award risk assessment, followed later by a facilitated self-assessment exercise using a simplified version of the USAID organizational capacity assessment (OCA) tool to assess sub-partner capacity along six domains: governance, financial management, project management, monitoring and evaluation, human resources management, and administration. Additional technical assessments included USAID's Site Improvement through Monitoring System (SIMS) assessments and Data Quality Assessments (DQAs). WEI/Bantwana also conducted a tailored procurement assessment to address specific issues within partner organizations.

WEI/BANTWANA TENETS FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

HOLISTIC:

Maintain organizational approach

RESPECTFUL:

Recognize organization's autonomy

RESPONSIVE:

Needs-based; meet partners where they are

FOCUS ON QUALITY:

Promote best practice and best fit

INNOVATIVE:

Do things differently; do different things

THE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Based on findings from the assessments, WEI/Bantwana and CSO partners jointly developed **individualized action plans**, which prioritized strengthening sub-partners' technical abilities to implement the program while also strengthening the organizations holistically in the areas of governance, finance, and human resources.

Technical support was responsive to partners' needs and took into consideration the divergent levels of capacity within each organization, using group trainings to meet common needs and individualized trainings for specific issues. Monthly meetings between WEI/Bantwana and CSO leadership provided another platform for addressing emerging issues in a timely fashion.

WEI/Bantwana adopted an **integrated capacity development approach** across key domains. WEI/Bantwana's senior technical, grants, finance, and M&E teams provided targeted support through individual and joint technical monitoring visits to enhance cross-learning and coordination. Quarterly performance reviews, work planning, and data quality audits supplemented site visits. District and sub-county coordination and networking meetings, case conferences, and joint training and support supervision visits with CSOs, local government, and community structures offered additional mentoring opportunities, while also strengthening important CSO and government partnerships.

Joint Technical Monitoring (JTM) visits were conducted on a bi-annual basis and reports were shared across teams to ensure coordination and consistency. WEI/Bantwana and CSO partners developed Quality Improvement (QI) teams to address gaps identified from SIMS assessments and DQAs, which were integrated into CSO action plans. Technical support during on-site visits prioritized key issues, such

as beneficiary files and household improvement plan reviews, beneficiary feedback interviews, and meetings with local government, CSO, and other key school, health, police, and community stakeholders to address bottlenecks to referral completion. M&E supports helped CSOs adopt new data collection tools and reporting requirements emerging from the program.

The **grants and finance teams** prioritized supports to strengthen compliance with USAID standards, reduce fraud risk, and provide assistance to CSOs in managing their grants. This included refining and executing stronger fraud prevention policies and procedures, and adopting simple, user friendly budget and financial management templates. Targeted training and coaching improved partners' capacity, quality, and timeliness of budgeting, monthly reconciliations, and cost-share documentation. WEI/Bantwana also guided CSOs on the recruitment of qualified finance and grants staff members and, in some cases, temporarily installed WEI/Bantwana finance staff directly in CSO offices or relocated finance staff from Kampala to a regional office to strengthen oversight as capacity was developed.

WEI/Bantwana conducted consultations and trainings with CSOs' boards of directors and CSO leadership on specific compliance, human resources, and decision-making processes related to implementation of the grant.

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SHEILA BIRUNGI, AIC,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

While CSO achievements varied, all partners improved capacity across prioritized domains. These included:

STRENGTHENED CAPACITY TO COORDINATE AND DELIVER HOLISTIC OVC SERVICES AND TO MEET OVC QUALITY STANDARDS:

Training, coaching, and mentoring of CSOs with their community structures in evidence-based OVC service delivery models, approaches, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) improved OVC program quality. Joint coaching and mentoring support for para-social workers (PSWs) strengthened their capacity to integrate HIV risk assessment and viral load monitoring into the case management process. Strengthened M&E capacity and routine updates of household improvement plans improved monitoring and tracking of household progress towards graduation.

INCREASED CAPACITY TO FUNCTION AS PART OF AN INTEGRATED REFERRAL NETWORK AND COMMUNITY CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

OVC coordination and networking meetings, case conferences, and 'Case Conference Plus' meetings were used to address referral bottlenecks and strengthen coordination between CSOs and government protection and health partners. Costed operational and strategic plans outlining delivery points and services shared between CSOs and government partners further strengthened coordination and access to critical services.

STRENGTHENED CAPACITY IN OVC SERVICE TARGETING, MONITORING, AND REPORTING IN THE NATIONAL OVCMIS:

Integrating M&E into the capacity development approach helped to shift mindsets around data collection, quality, analysis, and reporting in the national OVCMIS. Additionally, WEI/Bantwana used JTM visits and USAID's M&E technical visits to build CSO capacity to use findings from household vulnerability assessment tools to develop targeted household improvement plans, improve service targeting; and improve data quality, timeliness, and reporting in OVCMIS.

IMPROVED PLANNING, COORDINATION, AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE:

Introducing weekly milestones for tracking and reporting improved CSO planning, coordination, reporting, and overall project performance. WEI/Bantwana helped CSOs sequence case conferences, sub-county dialogues, and OVC coordination meetings so that child protection issues emerging from each platform could be addressed during community dialogues for support and action.

REDUCED FRAUD RISK AND STRENGTHENED FINANCIAL SYSTEMS:

On-site and remote training coaching, and technical guidance improved compliance, accountability, and transparency of CSOs. CSOs transitioned from a cash-based system to an electronic-based transaction system to reduce fraud risk; strengthened operations manuals and ensured fraud reporting processes and requirements were in place. Support also improved the accuracy and timeliness of vouchers and financial and cost-share reports using payment processing checklists. Improved workflow and review processes reduced accountability liquidation from five months to two months, and support to close audit gaps strengthened internal controls.

LESSONS LEARNED

Integrated capacity development approaches across program, finance, M&E, and operations led to improved operations, workflow, and quality programming.

Several CSOs reported that cross-training and learning through joint program reviews, work planning, and on-site and remote coaching visits strengthened integrated approaches to managing the program and improved broader organizational approaches.

Integrating program implementation with capacity development required a high level of commitment by both WEI/Bantwana and partner CSOs.

Staff struggled to manage their work while also assuming the responsibilities that came with implementing action plans. To address this, WEI/Bantwana allocated time during work planning and technical review sessions to review progress and reduce time demands caused by separate capacity development progress analyses.

Continuous shifts in USAID technical guidance required constant learning and adaptation

to help local partners and community structures address changes in technical emphasis, and data collection and reporting requirements required significant time and resources for ongoing training, coaching, and mentoring. To address this, WEI/Bantwana used remote coaching and work planning, program reviews, and coordination platforms to help CSOs and community structures build new programming and data collection and reporting skills.

Joint training, coaching, and mentoring with CSOs and government structures strengthened important partnerships and created space for advocacy. For example, in the eastern region, joint training on emerging technical guidance, M&E, and planning and coordination fostered discussions on OVC priorities, which led to direct government action to eliminate clinic-community referral bottlenecks and prioritize OVC for government livelihoods supports.

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MOVING FORWARD

WEI/Bantwana will continue to strengthen key gaps for CSO partners over the remaining programming period, using lessons learned from the capacity development process. As USAID embarks on localization efforts to develop in-country capacity to deliver integrated OVC service delivery with direct US Government support, WEI/Bantwana will refine its development approach to more explicitly support organizational structures and policies, drawing on WEI/Bantwana's recent experience in Zimbabwe developing the capacity of three national OVC partners to graduate to direct funding from USAID. www.bantwana.org | bantwana@worlded.org | 617.482.9485

