Linking Everyday APEA and Adaptive Management in the Zimbabwe Civil Society Strengthening Project:
A TWP/Adaptive Management Case study

Background

Pact uses Applied Political Economy Analysis (APEA) to support project teams to make strategic decisions by a structured and iterative means of probing the shifting social, political, and economic factors that influence project outcomes. In Zimbabwe, Pact integrated APEA into our $26.7 million USAID Civil Society Strengthening Program (CSSP), a five-year initiative (2012-2017) focused on improving the ability of civil society actors and community-based organizations to influence progress toward a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance system. The project aimed to:

- Empower citizens, particularly women and youth, to lead social change in target areas
- Increase evidence-based advocacy by CSOs and citizens
- Parliamentary Committees exercise independence
- Increase social cohesion within politically polarized communities

The project faced the challenge of achieving planned results in the fluid and rapidly changing operating environment of authoritarian-ruled Zimbabwe. Throughout the life of the project, CSSP successfully used ongoing APEA data to adapt program objectives and strategies to a rapidly changing context, to understand progress made toward project outcomes, to assess opportunities and threats in the local context that were likely to affect project implementation, and to determine project's progress toward desired results. The TWP system was comprised of regional political economy research studies, iterative civil society reflection and networking meetings, regular field monitoring visits, and weekly environmental scans and program meetings. Maintaining this comprehensive environmental scan system was crucial to the success of a project working in a difficult and ever-shifting environment.

Incorporation of TWP and adaptive management

At the beginning of the project, CSSP initially intended to focus on mobilizing citizens for enhanced participation in elections through expanded civic and voter education, assisting citizens to protect themselves against electoral violence and intimidation and to press for constitutional reforms. However, the environmental scan data that our partners were continuously gathering from the ground showed that the shifts in the political landscape, especially in community and government power structures after the 2013 elections, reshaped the operating environment and created new factors that directly affected civil society and program implementation strategies. The wider public's needs and priorities also changed after the 2013 elections, especially as the economy continued to deteriorate and the government struggled to provide essential services like water, electricity, sewage management, and housing. This real-time data prompted CSSP to revisit its intended results and implementation strategies to reflect/adapt to the contextual changes. While the project's goal, to protect and promote democratic space, remained the same, the project IRs/outcomes and activities were redesigned to ensure relevance in the post-2013 external environment. The project's focus shifted to mobilizing citizens to make their voices heard and building citizen capacity to lead social change through citizen-based actions and sustained dialogue with all stakeholders.

CSSP commissioned 10 regional APEA studies to identify citizens' development priorities and concerns in Zimbabwe's administrative provinces and political, economic, and social structural shifts that could promote or inhibit project implementation in each province. Pact directly linked CSSP's grant-making program to APEA, and the project used the evidence gathered to inform the design of the 2015–2016 request for applications (RFA) for partners and potential grantees.

CSSP also intentionally engaged CSO partners in the data collection process. Pact maintained active partnerships with 20-30 CSOs and civic activists who are highly embedded in local districts and communities, and partners covered a wide geography across all 10 provinces. Partners engaged in several modes of sharing context-related data, and CSSP convened partners every 6 months for discussions related to the changing political context. Finally, the project carried out deep analytical "dives" (including APEA) and consultations with expert panels.

Results

CSSP used the results to recalibrate the programming strategy by shifting CSSP's focus to include supporting CBOs engaged on socioeconomic issues instead, including government service delivery in health, education and basic infrastructure. This included funding proposals with theories of change tested against APEA lessons and found to be realistic, and fitting the socio-economic and political context. USAID noted that "*the Contractor was able to adjust the program to continue alignment with shifting USAID objectives and strategic direction due to the context, using a combination of periodic strategy reflection sessions and targeted sub-national political economy analysis.*"

The information gathered through this TWP scanning system was used to monitor project implementation challenges in near real-time and determine whether adjustments were necessary. TWP processes contributed to Pact's ability implement this complex project in a highly fluid environment, and data gathered through regular environmental scans was critical to identifying possible threats to project success. For instance, CSSP was able to quickly pick out an imminent threat to one of its grants that was focused on social mobilization of street vendors, where one of the two implementing partners increasingly sought to use the project to advance a partisan political agenda. Having assessed the threat, CSSP made necessary project implementation adjustments, including modifying the grant's activity focus and terminating the relationship with the problematic partner. Additionally, data gathered was critical to understanding the cultural and political factors inhibiting women and youth participation in CSSP that was therefore preventing the project from meeting targets for women and youth participation.

Highlights of the process

CSSP implementing partners provided weekly environmental scans documenting their observations on context changes and monthly program updates as part of regular performance monitoring, which summarized project activities conducted and the local situational factors affecting project implementation; this data is collected through the APEA process. This localized APEA data not only helps implementing partners to better understand shifts in their operating contexts and enable them to make strategic operational decisions, but also assists implementing partners to appreciate the various factors influencing project implementation in different parts of the country. The CSSP research unit analyzed and packaged the data into analytical briefs, shared internally to project and partner staff, called the *Pact Brief* and *Pact Alert*. The *Pact Brief* suggests practical solutions to programing challenges that aim to stimulate broader discussion around key programming issues. *Pact Alert* is designed to raise awareness about key and unexpected socio-economic and political developments that evolve and are considered highly significant to civil society programming. CSSP circulates the two publications among Pact civil society partners and international development partners.

> "On the other hand, **Goromonzi Rural Development Council (RDC) is operating isolation from the people, especially women, whom they represent.** There is communication breakdown between the people and the Council, which makes it difficult for women to participate in the open budget process and in general in other socio-economic development projects.
>
> -   Partner weekly update

During weekly program meetings each program officer identified opportunities or threats that could affect or support grantee results. After the meetings, the program team discussed these threats and opportunities and activity managers (program officers) provide technical guidance to sub-grantees on how to leverage opportunities or address threats. Simultaneously, grantees submitted regular progress reports to Pact, such as activity implementation reports and quarterly implementation reports, which contain an assessment of the environmental situation in their respective geographical program areas and the impact of that situation on their work.

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Challenges

Process: It was difficult to set up a comprehensive, but manageable system to capture ongoing data. Partners—the main sources of data—needed to provide regular information without a cumbersome reporting requirement overwelming their already full plates. In some ways this was a matter of working with partners to formalize the process of context analysis, which many partners were already actively doing as part of their work. It was important for CSSP to promote ownership of the data by project partners, and having CSSP staff dedicated to ongoing context analysis was critical for ensuring the viability of the process.

Context: Data collection took place in a dynamic, even volatile operating environment, with significant contextual differences across geographies. Working with parters on data collection was a necessity due to severe constraints for external actors in collecting data and information, as well as limitations in media reporting.

Lessons learned

CSSP's data sources and end-users were comprised of CSO and CBO partners, Pact, and beneficiary communities. CSO partners are primary sources of real-time project data, which is shared via partners' periodic progress reports, with sections outlining challenges, opportunities faced, and mitigation taken during implementation. But, by virtue of being closer to the communities, CBOs are the best-placed gatherers of primary data on the situation on the ground. CSOs and CBOs are also end-users of both unprocessed and processed data collected by Pact from various partners. To support these endeavors, CSSP strengthened its partners' capacity through basic action research training and used them to gather local real-time data from the project target communities.

Overall, Pact's work under CSSP suggests that there is a need for more deliberate analysis at the sector and issue level given the lack of uniformity of opportunities and constraints across the economic, social, and political system. Integrating APEA as part of the system of continuous monitoring, along with a commitment to collaborative learning allowed the project to remain nimble to the evolving situation on
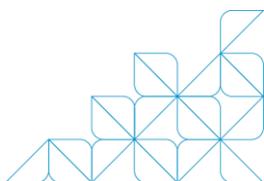
the ground. Local partners, Pact and USAID were regularly updating each other to inform decisions about the direction of CSSP. In addition to serving a key role within CSSP, Pact's APEA findings were used by the mission to enhance its analysis, management and integration of its overall democracy and governance portfolio, as well as to assess the developments, needs, challenges and opportunities of Zimbabwe's civil society sector writ large. USAID noted that Pact's "products have been of good quality, relevant and responsive."

Perhaps most importantly, lessons learned from CSSP implementation fed directly into the design of the follow on project, which Pact recently began implementing. A foundation of the project's strategy is a Scenario Change Management Plan, which will enable leadership to adaptively manage the program and effectively anticipate and mitigate risks. The CSSP experience also demonstrated the importance of scenario monitoring and planning as a shared exercise conducted by USAID, Pact, partners, and other stakeholders.