Capacity Development Framework for EpiC

The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project provides strategic technical assistance and direct service delivery to achieve HIV epidemic control among key and priority populations and to promote self-reliant management of national HIV programs by improving HIV case finding, prevention, treatment programming, and viral load suppression. EpiC partners with more than 200 local and regional organizations across 40 countries, developing their capacity, as needed, to contribute effectively to their country's national HIV response. Capacity development is core to EpiC's overall approach to programming and is integral to achieving one of its objectives—supporting the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to direct 70 percent of U.S. government (USG) funding to local partners. As all of EpiC's programming strives to be locally led—that is, customized to the local context, guided by local priorities, and led by local institutions to the extent possible—capacity development is also central to realizing this aim. This document outlines EpiC's approach to capacity development, examples of EpiC's range of capacity development support, and considerations for measurement of outcomes.

EpiC is a five-year, global project funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with a period of performance from April 15, 2019, to April 14, 2024. EpiC is led by FHI 360 with core partners Right to Care, Palladium, Population Services International (PSI), and Gobee Group.

EpiC has four objectives:

Objective 1: Attain and maintain HIV epidemic control among at-risk adult men, women, and priority populations

Objective 2: Attain and maintain HIV epidemic control among key populations

Objective 3: Improve program management (including health information systems and human resources for health) and financial systems to ensure attainment and maintenance of epidemic control

Objective 4: Support the transition of prime funding and implementation to capable local partners to meet the PEPFAR goal of 70 percent of funding to local partners

EpiC's Vision and Approach to Capacity Development of Local Partners

In every country, a range of institutions is involved in addressing the HIV epidemic, including faith-based and community-based organizations (CBOs); local, regional, and national government structures; public and private health care facilities; research institutions; nongovernmental organizations; professional associations; and others. Each institution

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brings specialized expertise, ranging from policy development and advocacy to outreach to marginalized communities and clinical service delivery. Collectively, these players constitute the HIV "ecosystem" in a country. The capacity of each institution in the ecosystem to achieve its own mission affects its ability to fulfill its role in the HIV continuum of care.

The goal of EpiC's capacity development work is to ensure that local institutions that provide HIV prevention, care, and treatment services can implement technically sound programming at a consistently high level of performance.

If
local institutions addressing HIV have stronger capacities and operate within a **supportive ecosystem**.

Then
local institutions will demonstrate **improved technical performance** and more **effective resource management**.

Leading to
effective, locally led responses that accelerate progress toward **achieving and sustaining epidemic control**.

To realize this vision, EpiC focuses its assistance on a few essential "capacity domains," which together contribute to thriving institutions.

Capacity Domain	Includes
Technical capability to implement programming that is contextually appropriate, responsive to the needs of the community, aligned with donor priorities and expectations, and consistent with relevant standards of care	• HIV prevention, care, and treatment best practices • Programming adapted from one population or context to another • Pivots in service delivery to align with donor requirements • Achievement of PEPFAR targets • Quality improvement
Organizational capacity to effectively manage the institution's resources (human, financial, assets, etc.), the management structures supporting operations, and the overall governance of the institution	• Financial management for USG awards • Registration to comply with country requirements • Governance and board management • Human resources planning and policies • Procurement systems • Compliance with donor regulations • Program management

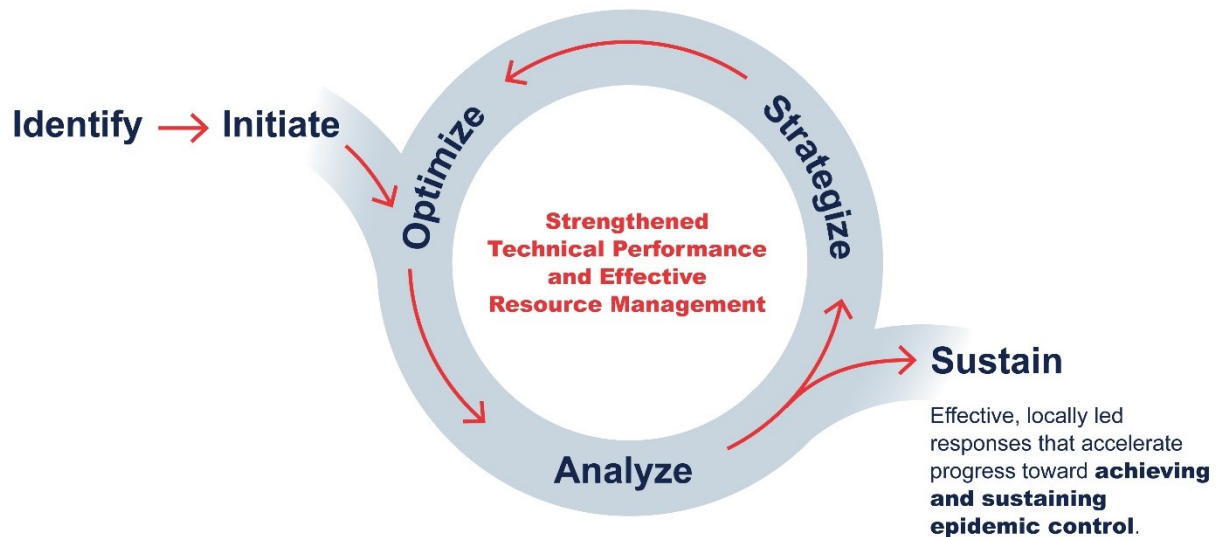|		
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning ability to analyze and interpret data about programming, use data to adapt and improve performance, and report to donors and stakeholders on the outcomes and impacts of programming		• Data collection, analysis, verification, and reporting • Data systems and alignment with other stakeholders and donors • Programmatic reporting • Data quality systems • Knowledge management • Communicating program outcomes effectively
Relational ability to work with other actors (stakeholders, health systems, funders, etc.) in both formal and informal ways toward common goals and to lead and serve as a resource within the community on areas of expertise		• Network and coalition building • Donor management • Stakeholder engagement • Advocacy and influence
Growth capacity to expand geographically and financially into new service areas and to diversify the institution's sources of funding and other resources		• Resource mobilization • Strategic planning • Diversification of funding • Sustainable financing • Change management

EpiC carefully identifies and engages with local, national, and regional institutions that are integral to the HIV response and have the potential capacity to implement a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project. EpiC supports partners throughout project implementation to enhance performance in the areas relevant to the EpiC scope of work as well as the institution's goals. Goals for performance improvement may be defined by the donor (such as strengthening systems for future direct funding from USAID), by the institution (such as expanding programming into a new technical area), or by other stakeholders (such as strengthening civil society organization [CSO] capabilities to engage in social contracting with a local government).

The blend of capacity development support provided depends on the context of the operating environment and the goals the institution is working to achieve. For example, a CBO striving to provide HIV outreach services to a rural community will have a different "ideal performance" and associated capacity needs than a research institution identifying the best way to initiate clients on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

EpiC's capacity development support strengthens practices and policies within institutions through mentoring, coaching, training, peer-to-peer learning, and other interventions. The EpiC team then monitors performance to confirm that outcomes have improved and to assist in maintenance of the desired change.

Adaptable Capacity Development Process

EpiC's capacity development programming follows the sequence of steps outlined below. The specific activities and timeframes from step to step may vary greatly depending on the needs, context, and scope of work.

Identify → Initiate   Optimize   Strategize

Strengthened Technical Performance and Effective Resource Management

Sustain

Effective, locally led responses that accelerate progress toward **achieving and sustaining epidemic control**.

Analyze

IDENTIFY

Most institutions that engage in the capacity development process are existing partners of the EpiC program, or USAID has requested EpiC's assistance. In some instances, partners need to be identified to implement the work in-country. When needed, EpiC uses a range of methods including solicitations, stakeholder conversations, donor recommendations, and landscape analyses to find the right partners for the program in-country.

Once the institutions are selected, partnering discussions start to document the terms of the relationship. Most of EpiC's work is completed through relationships with local institutions, so it is extremely important to establish partnerships, build trust, and formalize expectations through a consultative process in a subaward, memorandum of understanding (MOU), or other structure.

INITIATE

The initiate phase helps to set the tone and expectations for the capacity development process. This phase begins with an introductory period for the organization receiving capacity development support and the organization providing it, to understand the goals the institution seeks to accomplish, engage with relevant stakeholders, and start to understand capacity development expectations.

ANALYZE

Analysis of capacity development needs is done jointly with local institutions, through facilitated assessment tools, desk reviews, and other information-gathering processes. Institutions define their capacity development needs based on the information reviewed in the analysis process.

Sometimes, institutions have previously undergone assessment and may have a wealth of data and information already available on organizational performance. Additionally, for institutions with whom EpiC has an existing contractual relationship, EpiC's regular programmatic monitoring provides useful data about institutional performance. EpiC uses this existing knowledge to inform the analysis phase.

When existing information is not sufficient to design the capacity development support, EpiC will conduct an assessment. The "right" assessment tool will depend on the end goal for capacity development and other contextual factors. For example, a tool to assess an institution's capacity to complete a specific technical activity will differ from a tool that assesses an organization's readiness to receive direct USG funding.

EpiC has relied on tools such as:

- Organizational Capacity Assessment with Non-U.S. Pre-Award Survey (OCA with NUPAS)
- Integrated Technical and Organizational Capacity Assessment (ITOCA)
- FHI 360's pre-award assessment tool
- EpiC's readiness review
- FHI 360's technical quality assessment tools
- PEPFAR Strategic Information Capacity Assessment (PSICA)

In Nepal and Jamaica, the EpiC team developed and implemented a "readiness" tool based on NUPAS standards, and then, with the local partner, prioritized areas of capacity development to help partners move toward direct funding from the USG.

Generally, assessment tools provide standards against which to gauge how well an organization functions. When assessment tools do not exist or are inadequate for the situation, EpiC compares an organization's performance to global guidance documents, accepted best practices, or similar standards.

STRATEGIZE

Based on the outcomes of the analyze phase, EpiC works with the institution and, when necessary, other key stakeholders, to set goals for performance improvement. Goals clearly define the desired operations for a given area and focus on outcomes rather than outputs. For example, instead of a goal to "deliver training on procurement policies," an organization might aim for "90 percent of procurement packages reviewed in spot checks to be compliant with procurement policies."

EpiC prioritizes its technical assistance to focus on the issues most relevant to the local partner, the activity, and the context. When EpiC is unable to provide the technical assistance to achieve a goal, EpiC staff will identify external technical assistance for the institution. Goals, activities to achieve goals, resources required, and responsibilities are then documented in a capacity development plan (CDP). The CDP is used to both guide and monitor progress of the capacity development work. As goals are achieved or the context changes, EpiC updates the plan in coordination with the institution.

SELECT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT DELIVERY APPROACHES

Mentoring and coaching—A mentor/coach can introduce new approaches, build capacity in data quality and use, answer questions in real time, and facilitate learning by doing. Mentoring can be done in-person and virtually.

Peer-to-peer exchange—Knowledge exchange occurs through webinars, facilitated conversations between implementers to share lessons, site visits to demonstrate implementation practices, and twinning of institutions delivering similar services.

Trainings with follow-up—In-person or virtual learning events are used to share new ideas and concepts, followed by support to ensure ideas are integrated into programming.

OPTIMIZE

Once a CDP is ready, EpiC delivers technical assistance to help the institution reach its goal and optimize its performance. Technical assistance is tailored to local priorities and institutions' differentiated needs. Adaptive management is core to optimization; EpiC and the institution will review progress against CDPs, discuss the direction of performance, and course correct. Technical assistance is localized or regionalized, and often provided by EpiC in-country staff familiar with the context and local institution. When international technical assistance is sourced, local EpiC staff support adaptation to the country and institutional contexts.

To provide technical, organizational, learning, relational, or growth technical assistance, EpiC applies a range of approaches (see box for examples).

SUSTAIN

To sustain performance, EpiC works with local institutions to:

- Examine their funding base, consider how to diversify their funding streams, develop sustainability or resource mobilization plans, and assist in putting these plans into action
- Develop new business models, sustainable financing options, or systems for proposal writing to continue work
- Identify any new technical assistance needs to ensure continued growth and improvement
- Develop plans and systems to cascade learning to other institutions and staff

One way EpiC works toward sustained performance improvements is to help create the next level of capacity development providers in-country and regionally. For example, EpiC works with organizations to establish capacity development standards, create or enhance assessment tools and frameworks, and link institutions for mentoring opportunities or cascade training of trainers (TOTs). EpiC generates the demand for capacity development services through twinning and creating connections between local CSOs and regional or local capacity development providers.

Three Thailand-based EpiC partners are receiving support to provide technical assistance in the Philippines, Nepal, and Myanmar in interventions such as improved services for transgender people, demand generation for PrEP, and undetectable= untransmissable campaigns.

Sustainable Financing for Local Partners

Local partners contribute substantially to a country's ability to design, resource, and implement solutions to address its HIV epidemic, or be "self-reliant." When operating in a country that is far along a pathway to self-reliance with strong civil society actors playing a significant role in service delivery, EpiC aids local institutions to identify financing for their programming, outside of traditional, external donor funding. The EpiC project can work with national governments to explore sustainable financing for HIV programming and with local institutions to diversify funding and integrate interventions into national programming.

EpiC and its partners assess country readiness for social contracting (local governments providing grants to local organizations), help address barriers to initiating domestic funding of local organizations, and provide technical assistance to governments beginning or expanding social contracting of local institutions. EpiC also works with CSOs to understand and meet domestic funding requirements.

In addition to social contracting, EpiC works with local institutions to consider profit generation activities, such as social enterprise opportunities or sale of goods and services. For example, in Cambodia, EpiC is working with a local clinic providing HIV services to key populations to examine options, including fees for high-demand services and partnership with corporations, to enhance revenue streams to the organization. In Thailand, EpiC has helped local partners to receive reimbursement from the national government for services provided to beneficiaries (see box).

Under the Linkages across the Continuum of HIV Services for Key Populations Affected by HIV (LINKAGES) project, FHI 360 in Thailand helped transition the financing of HIV services from international donors to reimbursement from Thailand's National Health Security Office (NHSO) by: (1) setting quality standards for HIV testing administered by lay providers, (2) helping CSOs demonstrate the ability to reach those standards, (3) advocating for policy change, and (4) working with CSOs to help them become accredited for reimbursement for testing services once the policy had changed. In fiscal year 2019 (FY19), seven CBOs—supported by FHI 360 to achieve quality standards— contributed 52 percent of all HIV testing and 28 percent of case finding among men who have sex with men and transgender people for the entire country.

Transition Awards to Select Local Partners

As EpiC has the ability to provide transition awards, the project aids local institutions in the process of receiving direct funding when requested by USAID. USAID missions often identify partners with strong technical performance who meet PEPFAR's rigorous reporting requirements while efficiently managing USAID funds. EpiC also recommends local institutions that demonstrate readiness for direct USAID funding. EpiC looks for the following characteristics when assessing "readiness":

- No pending disciplinary or legal actions from another funder or government agency
- Appropriate registration and approval to work in-country

- At least two years' experience implementing HIV programming in the area of their subaward
- Good standing with country government and USAID
- Track record of meeting reporting requirements (program and financial) under subaward
- Ability to collect, validate, analyze, and report on data consistent with PEPFAR rules
- Successful record of managing funds from multiple sources, with an annual subaward budget of at least US$150,000
- Regular achievement of 80 percent of PEPFAR targets

In Malawi, EpiC staff were tasked with providing support to Pakachere, a partner directly funded by USAID for the first time in FY20. EpiC staff discussed technical assistance needs with both Pakachere and USAID, drafted and delivered against a technical assistance memorandum of understanding (MOU) and a capacity development plan, and provided ad hoc support for questions related to implementation. Pakachere exceeded all targets in its first year as a directly funded partner and is continuing to receive technical assistance from EpiC in FY21.

If these basic criteria are met, and a mission is interested in this type of exercise, EpiC will conduct a more extensive review to determine an organization's readiness to receive direct funding. As of October 2021, EpiC has transitioned three local institutions to direct USAID funding and supported dozens of others to prepare for potential funding in the future.

EpiC also will work with local partners that have already transitioned to direct funding to (1) define goals (restarting the capacity development process, but with a focus on sustaining performance), (2) address special award conditions, (3) continue learning and sharing best practices related to HIV prevention, care, and treatment, and (4) move into new technical or geographic areas.

Types of Capacity Development Support EpiC Provides

EpiC applies the capacity development process in many circumstances, such as with subawardees striving to achieve grant targets, for institutions that have transitioned to direct USG funding and need help to sustain performance, and for organizations setting up systems to manage their own subawards. Annex 1 includes a list of illustrative scenarios in which EpiC may provide capacity development support. The support provided is dependent on the EpiC country scope of work and local institution needs to achieve that scope of work. Sometimes, an organization has a range of needs, and EpiC will blend its capacity development approach accordingly.

Measurement of Capacity Development

The goal of EpiC's capacity development work is to ensure all types of local institutions who provide services along the HIV continuum of care can implement technically sound programming with continued financing to sustain a consistently high level of performance.

EpiC examines a range of measures to identify the outcomes of capacity development interventions.

At a global level, EpiC reports on USAID's capacity development indicator CBLD-9:

Indicator Name	Source	Frequency
CBLD-9: Percentage of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance [IM-level]	Implementing partners that have been allocated USG funding to work with local organizations to strengthen their organizational capacity for increased performance	Annual

Globally, EpiC also collects information about:

- The number and types of partners with which EpiC has a capacity development relationship
- The areas of capacity development within which EpiC is providing technical assistance
- Progress toward achieving capacity development goals
- Capacity development support provided to institutions with CDPs
- Key performance improvements seen within the reporting period as a result of (or related to) capacity development support provided

Depending on the scope of work for capacity development, EpiC may create additional custom indicators to track progress such as modalities in which technical assistance is provided, additional funding received, or satisfaction with capacity development services provided.

Annex 1: Scenarios where EpiC may provide capacity development support

Situation a country team may need to address	What EpiC does to help
Local institution has minimal capacity to implement a subaward	EpiC's capacity development in this area is integrated into FHI 360's subaward process and is provided to all subrecipients of the EpiC project. A preaward assessment to determine areas of risk before receipt of award Special award conditions included in subagreements and monitored routinely Regular meetings with the institution to review programmatic, financial, and technical performance and address any challenges to achieving subaward goals
Local institution faces an organizational systems challenge affecting performance	EpiC delivers structured organizational development support to partners. This includes: • Organizational capacity assessment to identify areas of need • Joint preparation of a CDP to articulate capacity development activities and end goals • Delivery of technical assistance through trainings, mentoring, sharing of resources, review of materials, twinning, etc. • Monitoring of progress against capacity development goals outlined in plan
Local institution struggles to manage second tier subawards, or is looking to set up systems to issue and manage subawards	EpiC works with partners to structure their systems to issue compliant subawards and document a process and manual. This includes: • Mentoring when partners are managing second-tier subawardees • Review of existing systems (if any) related to issuing, executing, monitoring, and managing subawards • Training on compliance elements of subaward process • Review or assistance in the development of a subaward management manual and associated templates
Local institution is not consistently meeting targets, or struggles with implementation of technical interventions	EpiC strengthens partner capacity to implement technical strategies with fidelity. This includes: • Formal and informal assessment of technical implementation • Reviews of SOPs, tools, and technical resources guiding implementation • Updating and aligning the organization's technical SOPs to global best practices • Training and mentoring local partner staff to introduce new approaches

Local institution is challenged in meeting PEPFAR reporting requirements	EpiC strengthens data collection, compilation, verification, analysis, audit, and reporting systems and processes. This includes: • A review of strategic information (SI) systems • Routine mentoring and assistance through SI-focused check-ins; SI refresher trainings on data collection, analysis, and use; and one-on-one support as needed • Dedicated coaching on DHIS2 and DHIS2 trackers • Review of changes to PEPFAR Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting guidance yearly with attention to understanding indicator definitions and implementing changes to data collection tools and reporting systems
Local institutions are exploring financial sustainability	EpiC enhances resource mobilization or diversification in funding for local CSOs. This may occur as a natural continuation of subaward or organizational development support processes, or a mission may request EpiC assist local CSOs in this area. This includes: • Assessing the resource landscape and CSO strengths within that context • A needs identification process to pinpoint technical assistance requirements • Assistance to develop cape statements, trainings on proposal development, or aid in responding to existing proposals • In select instances, when funded and requested by the mission, EpiC will provide technical assistance to look at opportunities to diversify the funding streams for local organizations such as through social enterprise, fee for services, or other income generation models.
USAID has asked EpiC to transition a local partner to direct USAID funding	To transition partners to direct USAID funding, activities include (when time and resources allow): • Conduct a partner assessment of organizational capacity to manage and implement funding in a manner compliant with PEPFAR regulations • Co-create the CDP, focused on areas of need for managing direct USG funding (NUPAS areas) • Provide targeted support to address areas of need • Prepare an overview document for USAID outlining assistance provided, continued needs, and feedback on partner performance to date.

USAID has requested EpiC provide technical assistance to a local institution directly funded by USAID for continued strong performance	EpiC provides technical assistance to local institutions directly funded by USAID to ensure that partners continue to perform at optimal levels. In these instances, EpiC will: • Discuss and prioritize technical assistance needs with the partner and the USAID mission • Prepare and sign a technical assistance MOU and CDP plan with the institution based on identified needs • Deliver technical assistance according to the CDP • Include partners in already planned trainings and activities in-country • Provide ad hoc support for questions related to implementation
Local institutions are striving to become technical assistance providers in-country and regionally	EpiC can help develop the next level of capacity development providers in-country and regionally. EpiC works with organizations to develop standards related to capacity development, to create or enhance assessment tools and frameworks, and to connect institutions to develop mentoring relationships or cascade training of trainers. In these instances, EpiC will: • Arrange conversations and learning visits to facilitate the twinning process between organizations • Review assessment tools and processes and provide feedback and best practices to strengthen the overall approach
Local governments and institutions are facing challenges to put in place social contracting	EpiC assists local institutions to meet social contracting requirements and advises governments to develop social contracting guidelines and processes. Technical assistance includes: • Pilots to demonstrate that local organizations are able to adhere to government standards set for HIV testing, care, or treatment service delivery or qualifications set to be an accredited health care provider • Advocacy to the government to fund local organizations or task shift for greater coverage of HIV services • Capacity development support to local organizations to meet accreditation or registration standards in country • Technical assistance to governments to identify barriers to funding local organizations and solutions to overcome challenges