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MOTIVATING CHANGE: MOZAMBIKAN ORGANIZATIONS TRANSFORM THEMSELVES THROUGH THE PARTICIPATORY ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Looking Within as a First Step toward Change

From learning about the interdependence of basic organizational structures and systems to revitalizing their own dormant governance bodies, Mozambican civil society organizations (CSOs) commit to creating concrete and lasting changes when they participate in an institutional-strengthening process and apply tools that foster transparency and accountability. That process is the Participatory Organizational Assessment Process (POAP), introduced by the Capable Partners Program (CAP) in Mozambique.

CAP was designed to strengthen the institutional capacity of Mozambican CSOs to scale up service delivery of HIV/AIDS treatment, care, and prevention activities. From 2006 to 2016, CAP integrated intensive capacity development of its Partners with grants to provide the organizations with opportunities to put into practice what they had learned. CAP Mozambique was both a donor (as an intermediary grant-making organization for the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID] and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief [PEPFAR]) and a provider of training and technical assistance (TA). As the representative of a donor, CAP needed to ensure that grant recipients had sufficient capacity to manage project funds with appropriate accountability and implement programs effectively. As an institutional strengthening resource, CAP was committed to tackling broader organizational issues fundamental to achieving quality results in local communities and, more importantly, to helping Mozambican civil society develop and thrive.

The Participatory Organizational Assessment Process (POAP)

The POAP provides tools to help an organization conduct a self-assessment of its own systems, assets, and activities. During the assessment, staff and Board members assign numerical ratings to the organization's current status or performance in key organizational development (OD) domains.

The POAP data yield both an organizational profile and a baseline from which to track the evolution of the organization along a development continuum.

The POAP process brings together multiple steps—data collection, analysis, and decision making—in a coordinated activity.



STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS OF AUXILIO SEM FRONTEIRAS (ASF) CONTRIBUTE DURING THEIR POAP. (FHI 360)

In creating the POAP, CAP drew from the best of available organizational capacity assessment approaches and adapted a tool and a process to suit the country context.

Ingredients for Success

Information gathered during the CAP mid-term evaluation and insights gained from interviews with CSOs and CAP Mozambique staff for this document highlighted five factors that contributed to the success of the POAP in the first seven years of its utilization under CAP Mozambique.

1. Ownership through self-assessment

CAP initially debated which would be better for measuring and supporting institutional growth: an assessment process conducted by an external group, or one conducted internally by an organization itself. Both have advantages and disadvantages.

External assessments may introduce more objectivity into a scoring process; however, external evaluators may be less likely to uncover what is really going on in an organization (USAID 2000). When a donor-recipient relationship is added to the mix, an assessment can also feel to an organization like an externally imposed activity that extracts knowledge rather than facilitates local reflection or new learning (Hailey 2005).

In the end, organizational learning may be sacrificed for potentially increased accuracy in measurement.

In reality, all institutional-assessment processes are subjective, relying heavily on individual perception, judgment, and interpretation (USAID 2000). Although external assessments might have less bias, CAP deliberately chose to use a participatory self-assessment process in Mozambique to emphasize the opportunity for learning. This decision coincided with a growing appreciation in the field that without an element of participation, the process is likely to fail (Hailey 2005). Organizations that do not feel they own an assessment process (or have access to the results) have little incentive to do what it takes to grow.

Most grant recipients were surprised that CAP did not intend to evaluate their organizations during the POAP, but rather facilitated conversations to help them discover their own strengths and areas for improvement. Multiple perspectives within each organization were invited (all levels of staff up to the Board of Directors). The facilitator made clear his/her role was to ask probing questions, help people understand all of the areas and the meaning of the scores, and create a safe space for discussion. The participants worked together to agree on each score. As a result, the POAP for each CAP Partner belonged to that organization—it was not a “product” of CAP.

Five Key Factors

Key factors contributing to the success of the POAP in the first seven years of its use with Partners by CAP Mozambique included:

1. Ownership through self-assessment
2. Engagement of all levels of the organization
3. Training in organizational development
4. Strong facilitation
5. Commitment of resources to implement capacity-development plans

In order to maintain a balance between self-assessment for purposes of learning and for informed measurement of growth, certain elements were introduced to reduce potential bias in the POAP process. The ratings at each level of organizational growth were clearly described. Documents and complementary evidence were consulted to verify ratings as often as possible. In addition, in 2009 CAP Mozambique introduced a number of complementary external assessments primarily focusing on programmatic expertise (HIV/AIDS behavior change communication, care of orphans and vulnerable children, financial management, umbrella grant management, and quality of reporting). The results of these external assessments were shared with the organizations as additional evidence to consider when determining ratings in specific categories of their performance.

Each organization underwent the POAP process several times. Participation was therefore a discovery process over time, as well as a learning experience during each specific assessment occasion. Progress typically took place over several POAP periods. As a staff member of one CAP Partner—Associação de Fomento de Desenvolvimento Comunitario (ADC)—said:

For us the POAP was new, so we thought that we should show all of our strengths. But then we learned that, no, the purpose was to look at the reality and accept our problems so that we can correct them.

Many CAP Partners began implementing the POAP within their networks or with their own sub-partners. Organizations also requested that CAP facilitate follow-up POAPs with them even after their grant relationships with CAP ended. This showed that organizations appreciated the inherent value of the process, even when the donor did not require it.

2. Engagement of all levels of the organization

Typically in Mozambique, an organization's governing bodies—Board of Directors, Fiscal Council—play a tangential role in the life of the organization, called upon when there is a problem to solve but otherwise not engaged. The POAP revealed potential consequences. For example, CAP shared stories of multiple cases in which a lack of effective, timely oversight allowed relatively small problems to go unaddressed and become serious issues resulting in loss of funding and/or credibility. As a result, the members of governing bodies welcomed TA interventions on internal controls, the role of the Fiscal Council, governance, and leadership tools and resources designed to improve the odds their organizations would be successful over the long term.¹ As one staff member from CAP Partner Liga dos Direitos de Criança (LDC) put it:

The inclusion of the Board of Directors helped the growth of LDC because before it was only the staff that participated in meetings with donors. We are happy when the Board now asks staff to be accountable.

“It was better than a SWOT exercise done [to us] externally in the past. In the POAP, we felt that the facilitators were there shoulder-by-shoulder with us, so we understood that it was ECoSIDA making the analysis....”

“There are many issues that are ours to take care of. It wasn't CAP that did the evaluation [POAP]. It was us that did the evaluation.”

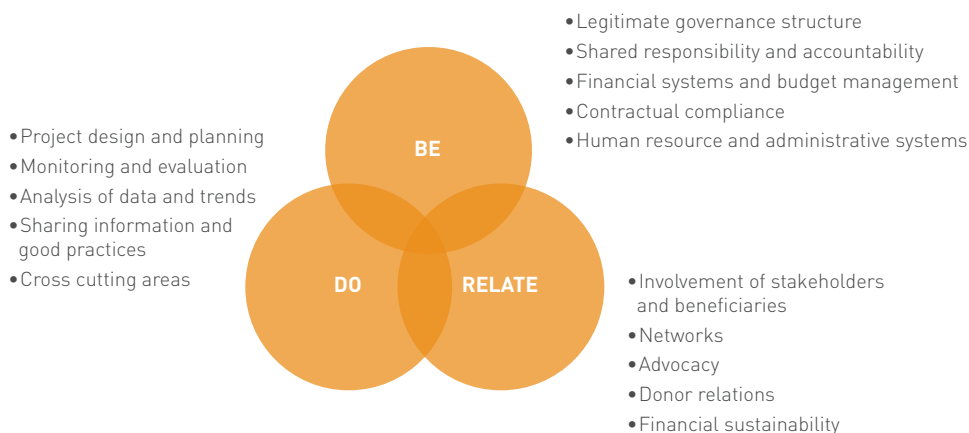
—ECoSIDA staff members

“The POAP helps me as a person. I can accept my errors and the opinions of others about my mistakes. It helps you become more humble. First it cleans your mind, and opens your conscience to be open to hear about your mistakes in order to improve.”

—ADC staff member

¹ See also the CAP technical brief, “Mozambican CSOs Rise to the Challenge: Good Governance in Practice.”

WINNING ORGANIZATIONS – THREE PILLARS



3. Training in organizational development

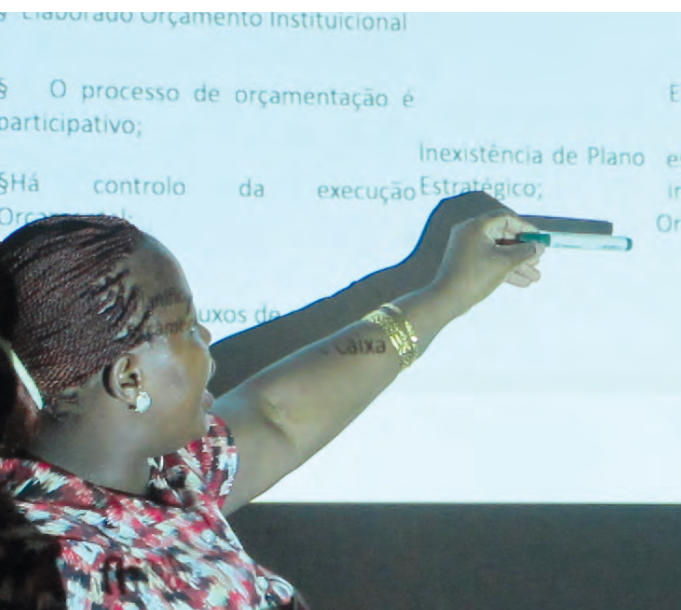
Because Mozambican civil society is still relatively young, discussing aspects of organizational performance—and, even more so, evaluating and scoring them—was

uncharted territory. To tackle this, CAP integrated training on basic elements of OD in the first and second applications of the POAP. This helped organizations develop a frame of reference for assessing themselves and enabled them to score each area more realistically.

CAP developed a methodology that oriented organizations to OD elements and facilitated conversations about where these fit along a scale of clearly identified criteria related to four stages of organizational growth. It was evident early on, however, that this was not sufficient to enable the Partners to participate meaningfully. Among other things, organizations were struggling to understand how the components fit together. CAP therefore adapted the widely recognized “be-do-relate” model (see figure above) to further orient participants. This model groups key elements together by function and highlights the linkages among components within a circle (or function), as well as across circles. In the words of a staff member of Associação de Empresários contra o HIV-SIDA Malária e Tuberculose (ECoSIDA):

The be-do-relate model helped us to be open to discuss more things.

It helped stimulate conversation. When we talked about administrative issues, we saw how these are related to other areas.



CAP STAFF EXPLAINS RESULTS OF FINANCIAL HEALTH CHECK TO POAP PARTICIPANTS. (FHI 360)

4. Strong facilitation

Helping an organization take stock of sensitive topics such as staff competence, salary policies, and conflicts of interest—in front of its Board and a donor—is challenging. In Mozambique, employees of an organization rarely contradict the opinions of colleagues or Board Members who may be in the same room. A facilitator must recognize and understand the needs, motivations, and agendas (whether hidden or not) of those involved, negotiate a genuine consensus about what the assessment process is for, and ensure that each individual in the room is willing to accept responsibility for his or her role in bringing the organization to its current stage as well as in moving forward. That is why CAP nurtured highly skilled facilitators who, over time, built the trust necessary to help organizations conduct authentic self-evaluations. Using Appreciative Inquiry² as an approach during the POAP, the facilitators were able to engage the organizations in a new way—exploring the positive rather than focusing on the negative (White 1996).

A staff member of CAP Partner the National Nurses Association of Mozambique (ANEMO) commented on his transformative POAP experience: “The facilitator raised questions to make us think about reality. Not about what I would like to be the reality, but in fact the reality [of the status of our organization].” According to another member of ANEMO, “The methodology was great. It made the people reflect and created an opening and conditions for people to tell the truth, without being afraid.”

Experience showed that poor facilitation of the POAP could derail the process. Early in the project, CAP Mozambique contracted external consultants to be facilitators, but this did not always go well. In some cases, the organizations felt they were being asked to evaluate CAP, rather than themselves. In other cases, the consultants were not able to create a safe environment for sharing—which is the starting point of the POAP process. CAP subsequently focused on training a few key individuals to facilitate all POAPs, providing both the organizations and CAP with consistent application of the tool and the process across all Partners over time.

CAP facilitators set the mood—by asking those who had already participated in the process to share their experiences and by using ice breakers and other tactics to create an open atmosphere. Without a doubt, humor proved to be one of the best tools for helping people open up.

² “Appreciative Inquiry focuses us on the positive aspects of our lives and leverages them to correct the negative. It’s the opposite of ‘problem-solving’” (White 1996).



HACI BOARD PRESIDENT EXPLAINING WHY ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATIONS ARE USEFUL. (MAURO VOMBE | FHI 360)

“The dynamics created by the facilitators help the participants talk about things they were never able to discuss before in the organization. The facilitators bring the spice to the room—stir up the debate—and then leave to let the participants talk amongst themselves before wrapping up key points when the facilitator returns.”
—CAP OD technical officer

CAP Mozambique & Partners: 2014 Results

As a result of the POAP, subsequent training, and/or technical assistance, CAP partners attained the following:

- 9 organizations had Board-approved Human Resources policies and procedures (P&P) manuals.
- 7 organizations had “ready-to-approve” HR P&P manuals.
- 8 organizations had Board-approved Finance and Administration P&P manuals.
- 7 organizations had “ready-to-approve” Finance and Administration P&P manuals.
- 9 organizations had conducted General Assemblies.
- 11 organizations had revised and approved their organizations’ mission, vision, and/or value statements.
- 6 organizations had revised their Statutes and Internal Regulations.
- 6 organizations had conducted staff performance evaluations.
- 3 organizations had completed their registration as legal entities in Mozambique.
- 3 organizations had created Strategic Plans.
- 4 organizations had Board-approved salary policies.
- 9 organizations had Board-approved Codes of Ethics and Sexual Harassment Policies.
- 5 organizations had improved financial systems, resulting in grant awards.

5. Commitment of resources to implement capacity-development plans

Many OD tools incorporate action plans as part of the overall process. Frequently such plans are shelved almost as soon as they are written due to lack of commitment, time, resources, or a combination of these. Yet, it is the application of what has been learned—and the implementation of plans—that leads to meaningful change and progress.

CAP Partners quickly learned that the capacity development plan resulting from a POAP was an exciting path for real institutional growth. Resources for institutional strengthening are typically quite scarce, but USAID demonstrated a commitment to Mozambican organizations by channeling such funds through CAP to its Partners. CAP tackled priorities in collaboration with each organization, providing training and follow-up TA over the period of time necessary to achieve positive results. In some cases, this took a few months. In other cases, CAP supported organizations for a few years to reach their goals.

Organizations said they appreciated CAP’s systematic approach to prioritizing tasks, assigning responsibilities, and following up. As one ADC staff member put it:

It is important to have priorities to know where you need to attack first. And it is important to identify who is responsible for doing each thing. Otherwise, when the moment arrives it is hard to peg down who should have completed the task. Now [with the Capacity Building Plan] we have already identified who should do each thing, and it is much clearer how the work will get done.

Conclusion

CAP Partners witnessed real and lasting changes in their organizations according to their own and CAP project measures. Progress reflected each organization’s articulated priorities.

According to the externally conducted CAP mid-term evaluation, many Partners described the POAP as one of the most valuable aspects of their relationship with CAP (Blid et al. 2013). Many started to replicate at least some form of the POAP in their own organizations and/or with their sub-partners. One faith-based organization said, “The majority of our churches (14 of 17 churches) have adopted the POAP tool.”

In addition to providing organizations with an assessment process they could call their own, the POAP provided them with the skills to reflect and act. According to the project mid-term evaluation, “The POAP has forced [Mozambican] organizations to look critically at each component of their organizations that affect service provision and develop the critical analysis skills that they will need post-CAP to continue their growth and development.”

The POAP was new in Mozambique when CAP introduced it, and the project faced some skepticism and resistance to its use. Yet, the way the process was designed, implemented, and adjusted to improve it along the way made this one of the most transformational elements of the CAP Mozambique program. As one CAP Partner said,

In the beginning [of the process] we realized that we had a problem with criticism. We discussed this between ourselves and came to the conclusion that we need to be critical and honest about these issues. The facilitators told us that they were mediating the conversation and that it was a safe space. This made us feel more comfortable in sharing the information.

In a culture that tends to avoid conflict, candor is powerful.

Document written in 2014 and updated in 2016.



ASF STAFF AND BOARD PRIORITIZE FOLLOW UP ACTION STEPS. (FHI 360)

» NOTES

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