The Nigeria SACE Approach

The Nigeria SACE Approach

Implemented by Chemonics, USAID's five-year Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) Program in Nigeria differed from most civil society organization (CSO) capacity development and governance projects by taking a different approach to the traditional formula of enhancing capacity development and strengthen government accountability. Rather than using grants to support CSOs to implement a linear project strategy focused on management-centered capacity development approaches, SACE adopted a systems approach based on the principles of accountability ecosystems and collective impact to achieve improvements in accountability and governance. This brief provides an overview of the approach used by the SACE program and the strategies and tools used to operationalize it. It also describes the prospects for sustainability and lessons from project implementation.

The objective of the SACE program was to strengthen civil society's ability to influence the development and implementation of key democratic reforms at the national, state, and local levels. Within the project's four components (see box), SACE's implementation strategy was anchored in traditional internal organizational strengthening capacity building skills (referred to as Capacity 1.0) but emphasized the principles of Capacity 2.0, supported through a collective impact approach, described below.

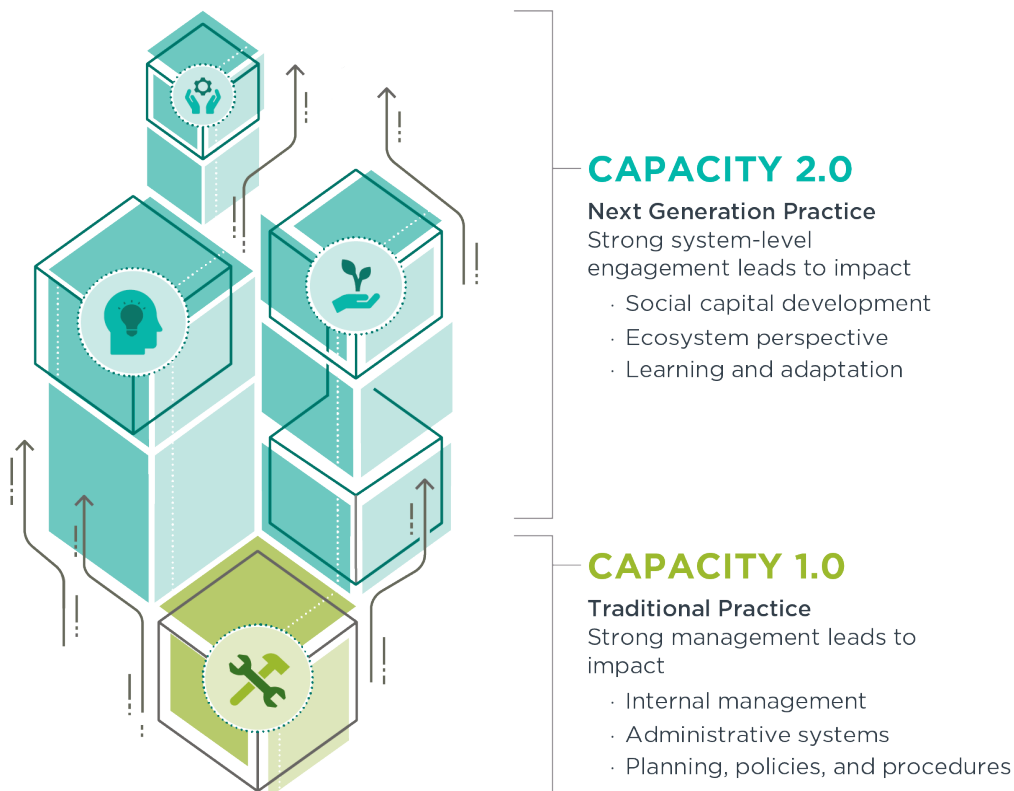| SACE's Project Components |
|---|
| • Component 1: Strengthen capacity of targeted CSO coalitions to advance democracy and good governance |
| • Component 2: Strengthened partnerships between CSO-led coalitions and Nigerian government institutions and stakeholders to advocate for and monitor select democratic reforms |
| • Component 3: Strengthened public awareness, discourse, and support for key democratic governance issues |
| • Component 4: Strengthened capacity of partner business membership organizations and CSOs in the Niger Delta to advocate for inclusive, equitable economic reforms |

Recognizing that successful civil society campaigns 'connect the dots' between multi-level government stakeholders and a diverse coalition of allies using complementary tools and tactics, SACE worked with CSOs to create and promote engagement with other like-minded organizations to enhance their ability to adapt interventions and respond appropriately in Nigeria's rapidly changing political environment. SACE supported 18 CSO cluster groups, including several business organizations, comprising a total of 157 individual CSOs with multi-year grants to lead complementary and collective advocacy efforts in policy areas including education, extractives, health, social inclusion for women, youth and persons with disabilities, and budget transparency. Over the life of the project, SACE worked across 137 areas of law, policymaking, and administrative procedures to achieve 62 discrete policy outcomes.

The Theories Behind the SACE Approach: Accountability Ecosystems and Collective Impact

SACE was guided by a theory of change and a consequent theory of practice that reflected a politically aware, systems-based approach. SACE's approach considered the growing body of evidence on what works in strengthening accountability and where traditional approaches were falling short. The standard accountability equation (transparency + participation = accountability) doesn't consider the different factors that affect the motivations and abilities of government and civil society actors to increase transparency or improve mechanisms of citizen participation. It also fails to consider that the window of participation for civil society organizations may not provide sufficient information or access within the system to affect blockages in accountability throughout the system, or how a country's political economy affects accountability.

Termed "accountability ecosystems," the approach emphasizes digging below the surface of the political system to understand the

SACE's Theory of Practice: Principles of Accountability Ecosystems
• Mapping and analysis of accountability ecosystems
• Vertical and horizontal integration strategies
• Strategic use of varied and complementary tactics
• Learning and adaptation
• Thinking and working politically
In doing this, it is important to build on existing assets and acknowledge the context, especially conflict drivers.

underlying incentives, relationships, and power dynamics that shape government responsiveness in a specific geography and political context. Using five underlying principles (see box), it assesses the range of actors, institutions, and organizations involved in promoting – or undermining – accountability and considers how they relate to each other and who is affected by their decisions.[1] Framed by these principles, SACE's theory of action and implementation strategy was based on moving beyond Capacity 1.0 practice to the next generation practice of Capacity 2.0, (see Exhibit 1) following the approach of "collective impact"– a model of collaboration that aligns the diverse efforts of several actors towards the same social change goals by building the capacity of CSO coalitions and networks to act as change agents in improving transparency, accountability, and good governance in a range of sectors. To do so, SACE created clusters of organizations, led by a backbone "anchor" organization, committed to working together towards a common policy objective. Together with the SACE project team, the cluster CSOs co-created policy objectives and developed a coordinated strategy with supportive activities to achieve the objectives of their grant. A robust learning and adaptation plan ensured they adapted these strategies, interventions, and tactics, and tracked progress using simple tools with common measurement and shared data. The approach created a sense of mutuality in relationship, creating a 'culture of we' among the cluster members to achieve policy objectives.

Exhibit 1. Capacity 1.0 and 2.0: Building Traditional and Next Generation Practice

CAPACITY 2.0

Next Generation Practice
Strong system-level engagement leads to impact
· Social capital development
· Ecosystem perspective
· Learning and adaptation

CAPACITY 1.0

Traditional Practice
Strong management leads to impact
· Internal management
· Administrative systems
· Planning, policies, and procedures

---

[1] For more on the accountability ecosystems approach, see Strengthening Accountability Ecosystems: A Discussion Paper, Halloran, Transparency and Accountability Initiative, 2015.

Putting Theory into Practice: The SACE Cluster Model

The SACE program began with a six-month inception period during which SACE program staff (from Chemonics and partner Root Change) and USAID staff organized large stakeholder dialogues to identify policy areas that would resonate within the current accountability climate in Nigeria. This is described in detail in the brief, SACE Co-creation and Inception Process. SACE program staff identified CSO partners through a collaborative but rigorous selection process, ensuring that there was representative geographic focus across Nigeria (as well as at national and sub-national levels), including previously excluded groups (notably youth, women, and persons with disabilities), and a diversity of appropriate advocacy issues related to governance, transparency, and accountability. SACE provided core funding to these partners to support their activity and organizational needs while also delivering training to the wider clusters of organizations to develop key advocacy competencies (defined by SACE as 2.0 competencies) and assist them in engaging in policy reform and public engagement.

Each cluster consisted of a cluster anchor and cluster members (see box). The cluster anchor acted as the hub and the primary, but not the only, mobilizer of the other cluster members. Usually the cluster consisted of CSOs (sometimes operating in the same general locality) with previous experience collaborating on projects as well as new CSOs. The recruitment of cluster members was based on their common interests and ability to work together. Unlike most other, traditional CSO capacity projects, the cluster members did not join a pre-conceived project in which the lead CSO designed the program, invited other CSOs to be its sub-grantees, applied for and received a grant, and then acted as head of the project responsible for implementation and results. Instead, significant effort was invested in co-creating the agenda for change at the beginning and the anchor was more of a 'first among equals.'

Anchor CSOs that worked in the focus policy areas were selected through a request for application (RFA) process. Part of the selection process required prospective anchor CSOs to use the STARNET online platform, which measures and visualizes the connections between actors in a system to facilitate new collaborations, identify gaps in an ecosystem, and strengthen collective impact initiatives. Through STARNET, anchor CSOs were able to map their institutional relationships and visualize their positions and organizational strengths relative to other organizations working in the same advocacy ecosystem. The project and anchor CSOs used the analysis to select cluster members with complementary skills and expertise best suited to contribute to the common goal. These clusters worked collectively to advance advocacy efforts in policy areas including education, extractives, health, social inclusion for women, youth and persons with disabilities, and budget transparency.

Working collaboratively, each cluster collectively designed or "co-created" its program, decided on roles and responsibilities for implementation, applied for the SACE grant, and took responsibility for changes and results. Because the cluster members had usually worked together before, they usually knew one another's strengths, weaknesses, records of performance, and interrelationships with other members of the cluster, other CSOs, and

Fostering Collective Impact

Clusters could be comprised of:

- partner civil society organizations (the anchor)
- other CSOs
- policymakers
- donors
- private-sector partners
- media
- researchers
- social influencers
- community mobilizers
- legal representatives

Anchors were organizations selected to receive core funding from SACE based on their capacity and potential to provide sectorial leadership.

"Without a doubt, SACE has recorded tremendous successes across the country, revolutionarily improving capacity of key actors and organizations and instigating many positive reforms at the national and sub-national levels. However, the key achievement of the project is in the co-creation of a novel system of working to achieve results through partnerships, cooperation, networks, and solidarity. The SACE Cluster Model provides an innovative blueprint which leverages strengths and mitigates weaknesses. In place of competition it presents partnership; in place of suspicion, it presents collective results and collective heroism."

— Ken Henshaw, Social Development Integrated Centre (SACE anchor organization)

government officials. In cases where cluster members did not have this prior knowledge, SACE used the STAR Assessment to enable cluster members to identify their strengths and weaknesses, develop joint and individual action plans to address these, and support project interventions. The STAR Assessment was a detailed survey of members to determine their current capacities in relation to key change drivers, including strategies and tactics, stakeholder mapping/engagement, M&E, member development, alliance building, experimentation and adaptation, and public awareness. Armed with their network map, cluster members were able to assign initial roles and responsibilities.

Moreover, the clusters worked together across their respective substantive interests and programs. With a few exceptions, the cluster members did not receive any remuneration from the grant. Instead, the cluster anchor received remuneration and supported basic transport and other costs associated with cluster members' advocacy activities. Finally, the co-creation within clusters was driven by collaboration, rather than competition between members, and, for the large CSOs, between local and national staff of the same CSO (see box). As one cluster anchor member put it: "The model forces organizations to look for 'win-win' strategies not just for your own organization but for your colleagues and cluster members. In the model, the anchor organization learns to move away from the center stage." At least notionally, clusters also included policymakers, donors, media representatives, and "influencers" beyond its core members.

Linking Learning with Adaptive Management

SACE used regular dialogue and review, known as cluster reviews, as a key process for learning and adaptation throughout the project. The program conducted cluster reviews with individual clusters periodically to reflect on what was working well, where strategy adjustments might be needed, and determine next steps. Because of the initial co-creation of the clusters and their collective adaptation to changing conditions, they developed a higher than usual level of trust and were better able to iterate and adapt as modifications were needed. SACE used a variety of tools throughout the cluster reviews to facilitate this process (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. SACE Cluster Review Tools and Processes

SACE Tools/ Processes	Description	Purpose
STARNET	Assesses, maps, and provides a visual representation of the capacities, organizational strengths of the cluster members, and other CSOs in the same advocacy ecosystem as well as their institutional relationships and networks.	To decide which CSOs to invite or recruit into the cluster, determine strengths and weaknesses, and help assign roles and responsibilities.
Strategy Matrix and Outcome Harvester	Detailed mapping of prospective and completed advocacy activities and results against proposed/intended policy outcomes. The tool was divided into three levels of advocacy activity: awareness, commitment, and action. It was directed towards four target audiences: cluster members, the public, key influencers, and decision-makers.	The matrix is used to design activities and to regularly track and monitor outcomes and impact at the micro and macro level. It served as the foundation for all cluster discussion of what is working well, what is not, and consideration of alternative tactics, strategies, and approaches to achieve program and policy results.
Policy tracker	Excel spreadsheet to measure specific steps proposed to advance a cluster's policy objective.	Assessing how far along a cluster was in achieving its policy objectives. The cluster anchor was responsible for maintaining the policy anchor and reporting updates to their cluster members and the SACE team.

SACE program staff frequently reviewed spreadsheets with detailed "to do" items and their outcomes informally and at formal cluster and inter-cluster meetings. The Strategy Matrix and Outcome Harvester and policy tracker identified particular meetings and activities held by the cluster members together with their results or outcomes. The reviews might result in adaptations such as changes in direction, approach, interventions, interlocutors, or roles and responsibilities among the cluster members. Similarly, to guide revisions or confirm the current trajectory, each cluster regularly analyzed micro and macro changes in its political environment through a constant, iterative, and localized analysis of the political context including the connections between power structures, motivations, and incentives. SACE clusters also used political economy (or windows of opportunity) analysis, further described in the adaptive management brief, to assess signs that a different approach might have worked better or that new windows of opportunity had arisen, such as if a new government official replaced one with whom the cluster had a good working relationship or the government promulgated new laws or regulations.

Given the ongoing assessments and adjustments, the SACE approach necessitated flexibility by all parties: by the cluster members and cluster anchors with one another; by the cluster with the prime contractor (Chemonics) or grantee; and by all of them, led by the prime contractor or grantee, with the donor (USAID). This enabled the project to overcome the rigidities inherent in a traditional USAID contract, embedding ongoing adaptation. Over the project cycle, the activity monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan was formally amended four times to account for these and other changes. It is this combination of tools and processes that facilitated learning, iteration, and adaptation throughout the project. This is described in more detail in the SACE brief, Sailboats Not Trains: Adaptive Management in Nigeria SACE.

Building a Flexible Toolbox

"The SACE tools are very effective, not just on our project with SACE, but we embedded these tools into our organization framework for networking and tracking our outcomes in other donor-funded projects. In fact, it's part of the training we give to new program staff when they are employed."
— **Chidi Ugwu, Health Reform Foundation of Nigeria (anchor), speaking for the Quality Maternal, Newborn, and Child Healthcare Cluster**

"Through the SACE project, we have learned how to use the policy tracker to monitor our project's progress. We will continue to use this tracker going forward as it helps us to keep tabs on other development issues we are advocating for."
— **Isaac Botti, Social Action, Open Budget Cluster**

Sustaining Action Beyond SACE

During its four years, SACE worked with and provided grants to 18 clusters of CSOs, including eight national CSOs, seven in the Niger Delta, and three business organizations in the Niger Delta. Because of the organic composition of the clusters, their co-creation and co-management, and the absence of dependence on sub-grants for the participation of cluster members, the clusters believe they will continue beyond the end of the SACE program in November 2018. They intend to cooperate virtually, for example, through Skype and WhatsApp, after SACE grant funding has ended. However, the semi-annual cluster reviews by each cluster and the annual learning summits for all of the clusters will almost certainly end without additional funding. The clusters will also no longer benefit from the oversight and assistance of SACE's own core Abuja staff who were in constant touch with the clusters and who often attended and provided advice into the regular cluster review meetings (where plans were made, outcomes harvested, policy progress tracked, and future work areas decided). Given these limitations, the next two years will tell how sustainable the clusters will be either in their original composition and purpose or in modified ones, and how successful the clusters will be in achieving results. If they are more enduring than the often-unsustainable activities and continuity of traditional capacity development programs and relationships, SACE will have blazed a new trail and, from everyone's perspective, a better approach. Given initial outcomes and ongoing CSO collaboration, as described below, SACE's unique approach to building cross-sectoral engagement and deepening CSO commitment appears to promote greater sustainability than traditional, disparate, activity-based CSO projects.

Promising Signs of Sustainability

Achievement of meaningful policy outcomes. SACE partners recorded an impressive 62 policy outcomes across a wide range of policy areas, including education; extractives; health; peace; budget transparency; and social inclusion for women, youth, and people with disabilities. The achievement of meaningful policy objectives has increased the public's support for advocacy work, and CSOs have reaped the benefits of using the SACE approach to practice a new way of thinking and working. Many of the project's policy outcomes are already engrained into the fabric of government responses. For example, as a result of the policy work on Open Budget, the Akwa Ibom government has now produced budgets online and available to the public two years in a row and a Youth Development Fund Bill. Another cluster helped secure one percent of the Consolidated Revenue Funds for a Basic Healthcare Provision Package in the 2018 federal budget. With help from the Accountability in Education cluster, Nigerian states leveraged millions of naira in counterpart support from the federal government. Following sustained advocacy efforts from the Open Budget in Health and Education Cluster, Imo State released the call circular for the 2018 budget, and responded by completing previously abandoned capital projects, which improved basic service delivery.

Adoption of SACE model and tools. Former partners have adopted the cluster model as their own and have moved forward with the collective impact methodology. For example, there are now new clusters focused on open government partnership in the Niger Delta, extractives, and education that exist without SACE support. In Kogi state, a new youth cluster using the SACE model has emerged, all without SACE support. This newer cluster, which includes some CSOs that previously worked with SACE, was able to usher the passage of the Youth Development Fund Bill in Kogi state in October 2018. A new cluster, led by the Youth Alive Foundation, successfully garnered a £2m DFID grant: independent, direct funding critical to CSO sustainability and self-reliance. CSOs have seen the benefits of collective action and are willing to use their own resources to continue the positive collaboration. Additional results are highlighted in the [SACE final report](#).

Furthermore, SACE-developed tools have gained currency with other projects and organizations. For example, the Strategy Matrix and Outcome Harvester is being used by non-partners as an effective tool to plan and validate activity outcomes. SACE's approaches to network mapping and analysis, introduced through STARNET, are in demand by a wide range of actors, and the transformational cluster review approach and Mindset 2.0 knowledge-sharing events have permeated the practice of other actors. With the project's capacity-building efforts reaching more than 9,000 individuals, this is anticipated to continue.

Increased CSO capacity to receive donor funding. Six of the project's anchor partners are now assessed as ready to receive direct USAID funding as a result of the project's 1.0 interventions. In addition, in the final year of the project alone, eight partners leveraged donor funding worth more than $3 million. SACE also supported four fledgling CSOs in the Niger Delta to access an extra year of institutional support from the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta to prepare them to receive additional donor funding.

Lessons from the SACE Experience

Identifying and mobilizing the cluster members takes time and analysis. The initial mobilization of clusters involved more than just recruiting organizations as sub-grantees to lead organizations. It required analyzing the potential cluster member's composition, strengths and weaknesses, compatibility with the other cluster members, what it could contribute to the project, whether the proposed cluster had those skills, what help it would need to gain them, and what cost the cluster would incur in providing the skills and undertaking the mentoring. This approach required a longer-than-usual startup to identify strong cluster leaders and compatible cluster members and flexibility to adjust as their respective programs developed.

Collective impact, as operationalized through SACE's cluster model, requires cluster ownership and mutuality. SACE staff sought to support "bottom-up" cluster design and management. Once the cluster was assembled, it owned the design and implementation of its program. It was up to the cluster as a collectivity, not just the cluster leader together with the donor, to design and implement the proposed program and to assign roles and responsibilities to cluster members depending on their strengths and performance. This created mutual accountability for operations and results within the cluster group.

Policy reform requires ongoing learning and adapting through political analysis and thinking and working politically. It was incumbent on the cluster to continually monitor its activities, the (perhaps changing) political economy in which they took place, and their successes or shortcomings, and adapt its strategies and tactics accordingly. For example, upon learning that the governor of the Akwa Ibom state was opposed to their bill establishing a fund for youth skills, employment, and empowerment initiatives, the Youth Advocacy Cluster revised its advocacy efforts to address the governor's concerns and build community and legislative support. The cluster's radio programming, grassroots mobilization, legislative lobbying and public campaign to counter the governor's opposition resulted in inter-state alliance building and significant legislative momentum culminating in the passage of the Youth Development Fund Bill. Unlike a traditional program in which a trajectory is proposed and followed without substantial adjustment, the reviews and reevaluations were constant both in terms of the cluster itself and the political "ecosystem" in which the strategies and tactics took place.

Learning and adapting requires encouraging staff (and leadership) and facilitative support and systems. Tolerance for finding the right mentoring and monitoring staff with the ability and commitment to nurture the clusters, teach the use of tools like the Strategy Matrix and Outcome Harvester and policy tracker, and other adaptive management techniques, is critical to the success of this approach. The primary grant recipient as well as the clusters themselves were responsible for constant monitoring and mentoring using the SACE tools. The goal was for cluster self-reliance. The primary contractor/grantee is responsible for teaching those skills in regular hands-on cluster meetings, annual learning summits, internet messaging, and the like.

The project and partners should adopt a "failing forward" mindset. SACE promoted rigorous, objective review and analysis without ego investment. Unless the constant tracking, monitoring, and evaluation, coupled with appropriate changes in tactics, roles and responsibilities, were undertaken as objectively as possible, both missteps and opportunities might be missed with sub-optimal results. Clusters and their members had to be open to dispassionate review and analysis. Self-evaluation and criticism were optimal, but cluster members had to be open to evaluation and suggestion by the other members of the cluster and by the program staff.

Both 1.0 and 2.0 capacities are important. SACE emphasized not only the development of traditional 1.0 capacities (e.g., operating independently, applying for, managing, and implementing grants and finances) but also 2.0 capabilities, such as building appliances and experimentation. While we found that 1.0 capacity is not sufficient for organizations to be effective, the foundation is critical and needed to do 2.0 capacity well.

Donors need to be flexible too. The constraints on donors often lead them to prefer a clear plan with set objectives and indicators. Bureaucratic procedures and incentives often deter flexibility and impose risks on those who approve changes. Yet flexibility is incumbent precisely to allow learning from missteps, taking advantage of opportunities, and adapting to alterations in the political economy. Flexibility by the donor needs to be accompanied by continuous consultations and explanations as well as by the responsibility to account for performance successes and shortcomings.

It takes time to tell. It would be well worth the time, energy, and funding to track the future of the SACE CSOs, their attempt to employ the SACE approach, and the strengths and weaknesses of the SACE approach relative to the more traditional one over time. The use of collective impact and an accountability ecosystems approach illustrated by SACE may have a variety of advantages over the traditional 1.0 approach, including the persistence of the clusters after SACE ends, the experiences of designing and implementing a project as a group, and the forging of relationships between CSOs working in very different sectors. But the final measure of an advocacy program depends on its impact in the substantive areas that the clusters mobilized themselves to address.