Capacity development for locally-driven, locally-led development / Shifting the locus of change away from the project cycle and into the community

Proposal Status: Review Complete

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Current international development context: Capacity strengthening—especially that of civil society—is increasingly cited as critical to achieving deep rooted and sustainable development results. Those capacities include the ability to incorporate systems-based approaches.

"We recognize that local actors need to step into leading roles in development and they are not by and large in a position to do that right away, so we went to strengthen their hands, strengthen their ability to become leaders in the development of their own societies." –David Jacobstein, USAID

"Developing a systems mindset, identifying the right tool for the job, and paying attention to human dynamics can help leaders move from theory to action when facing complex social problems…. Our hope is that more social sector actors feel empowered to experiment with a broader range of systems tools and integrate them into their daily work." --Stanford Social Innovations Review[i]

Around the world, civil society is caught in a whirlwind of change. Entities ranging from national policy advocacy organizations to humble community groups are being buffeted by increasing restrictions and government oversight. They are pulled in different directions by donors who arrive with already finalized theories of change, predetermined goals, and workplans. Also, donors require proof of "compliance" and often onerous reporting. Competition for donor grants pits organizations against each other, which inhibits shared learning, coordination, or collaboration. At times, large—even unwieldy—grants, and pressure to implement pushes organizations off of their original charted course. Conversely, very small grants may come with an equally heavy compliance and reporting burden.

International development suffers from disruption driven by a continuous stream of short project timelines—starting, implementing, and ending every few years. This precludes medium and long-term visioning and goal setting for organizations, and in turn, their societies. The need for "guiding stars" (long term strategic visions) and "near stars" (5 to10 year goals) are well established among high-income country actors. Many LMIC civil society groups are lucky to get as many as five years within which to undergo any given project cycle, before starting over with new donors, new assessments, new terminology, and new short-term targets. Funding from various donors also often overlaps, so organizations are simultaneously juggling any number of beginnings, middles, and ends. Derek Brinkerhoff, Michael Sayre, and other capacity development experts have noted the damaging, even fatal effect of this environment on civil society organizations.

In today's world of international development, the "project" is often the center of gravity, creating an externally-imposed system that creates its own orbit of grantees, other in-country partners, international technical assistance, and donor focus areas. To succeed, grantees must accommodate to each specific project environment, where their own history, sociocultural and political context, ideas, and goals are easily fragmented, overlooked, and even eclipsed. However, as Brinkerhoff and many others point out, "local" agency and contextualization are critical to achieving sustainable development results.[ii]

*USAID's newly released five-year plan includes many references to capacity development and the need for localized control. E.g. "Performance Goal 4.1.2: By 2022, **increase engagement with local partners to strengthen their ability to implement their own development agenda."***

Vision of improved international development: Capitalize on global decentralization trends to push the locus of development efforts out of the 'international project' paradigm, and onto the 'home turf' of each community or place. This is necessary for locally appropriate, long-term solutions.

In Pact's case, that "home turf" or locus of development has always been *the community*. Communities are local enough to link to the nuanced, ever changing voices and realities of individuals and families, but in aggregate, they help set and enforce social norms and serve as playing field for cultural and political influence and change. They advocate to health and other systems for appropriate services. Communities can also recognize and include even the most marginalized people. As systems, they are the logical playing field for systems-based approaches like Collective Impact which are emerging as powerful tools to foster sustainable change.

In response to the well documented limitations of top-down, modernist and authoritarian approaches that have dominated development, practitioners and academics increasingly promote more community-based approaches. The World Bank uses the term 'community driven development' to describe projects that increase a community's control

Another positive trend to capitalize on: The discipline of capacity development for community-led development emerges, evolves: Capacity development emerges as a recognized discipline, enters phase two (Capacity Development 2.0)

USAID has been an important global contributor to the growing understanding of what the next generation of capacity development should look like in order to produce the next generation of development results. Known as "CD 2.0", this field builds on a strong Western history of organizational development, and adds a systems perspective linked with co-creation of locally led solutions. **In this proposal, Pact proposes to upgrade its Capacity Solutions Platform to incorporate CD2.0 features.**

What is Capacity Development?

Traditional Capacity Development

- **Assumption**: Strong management skills lead to better outcomes in projects and programs

- **Logic**: Improve impact through building excellence in standard internal areas such as human resource management, financial management, planning governance and service delivery

- **Process**: Emphasize the transfer of knowledge and skills via training and consulting

Capacity 2.0 Approach

- **Assumption**: Using a "Best Fit" approach to improving performance leads to better outcomes

- **Logic**: Improve impact through helping organizations to transform wider systems within the country, tailoring strengthen to their situation

- **Process**: Emphasize understanding how organizations interact, how to improve communications and collaboration within the systems, and how to adapt approaches

Source: USAID's Learning Lab CD2.0 website

This proposal: How to upgrade the Capacity Solutions Platform to enable civil society and community-led development efforts to use CD2.0 to produce development results.

In response to the changing context of international development, Pact's **Capacity Solutions Platform (CSP)** was borne of—and continues to evolve in response to—the need to move in-country partners away from the push and pull of the external project motif, and to take control of capacity development processes and data. As a product, it supports locally-generated and locally-controlled solutions, action, and change. It moves away from extractive, expert-driven approaches, and enables organizations to generate, capture, track, analyze their own capacity

assessments, action plans, and verifiable performance data. All of this can be based on their own organizational timelines, inclusive of but not limited to any given project timeline.

This proposal would enable the CSP to incorporate new systems-level capacity and performance tracking features, in order to use CD2.0 to contribute to large-scale social change.

The *Capacity Solutions Platform* today

In 2013, Pact launched the CSP, including offline, paper, and mobile options. The purpose is track and measures the results of capacity development efforts of civil society, community groups, government entities and even networks. The CSP systematizes capacity development efforts and associated data, producing reliable, transparent, and actionable outputs. As their capacity allows, it offers in-country partners direct access to and control over all aspects of capacity development.

Borne of Pact's integrated and collaborative approach to development, the CSP currently features six well-established capacity development methodologies and tools to choose from, depending on context. Among these is Pact's Organizational Performance Index (OPI), which has become an open-source industry standard: the OPI is recommended by USAID's Local Solutions team as the preferred tool for measuring outcome-level organizational capacity changes.

Proof of the CSP's conceptual soundness, user friendliness, versatility, and practical value lies in its widespread global utilization to date. **Over the past eight years, it has shown its worth by supporting improved capacity of over 2,500 organizations in more than 30 countries; the numbers continue to grow.** Many partner organizations directly control all aspects of data collection, entry, tracking, and analysis.

Organizational capacity development needs *currently* met by CSP	Notes
Customized assessment process: Guidance through process of reflection and planning for capacity development	Both organizational (e.g. finance, leadership) and technical capacities (related to the development issue) can be addressed, as needed.
Capacity and Performance Data: Capture, track, analyze, visualize capacity and performance data, including changes over time.	As with all aspects of CSP, management of and access to data may be controlled by partner organization at every step.
Contiguous capacity development progress-: All data and associated activity, plans, progress are available to share with any donor or partner in the future.	Valuable organizational documentation doesn't disappear when any given project ends. Enables multiple donors or partners to pick up where last left off, see gaps to be filled (as allowed by partner)—all without repeating onerous capacity assessments, planning etc.
Documentation: Track accomplishment of capacity development activities	Notes who, where, when, what—helps all parties see what has been done already, and what is pending
Verified performance improvement: Document objective progress as demonstrated by included evidence and validated by third party	Fosters accountability and transparency. Provides proof to donors, board, community of progress.

Risk management: Demonstrate compliance, capacities to donors	Donors or prospective business partners can "see" what they need to, to assure compliance is possible.
Lower reporting burden: Generate donor reports instantly.	With a push of a button...lowers reporting burden, instantly produces colorful data visualizations.
(Potential for ex-post sustainability/creative financial incentives: Track sustainability of gains achieved, and continued growth.)	(This could be shown by entering data after a project ends, to see what has been sustained or even adapted. We haven't leveraged this opportunity yet, but are looking for opportunities. Financial incentives to do this relatively low-cost ex post evaluation could be a cost efficient donor investment.)

Currently, the CSP focuses primarily on the *capacity development of individual organizations*. Users and advocates increasingly ask for expansion of the CSP to foster peer collaboration and to increase access to local and regional capacity support and, most importantly, to support planning and implementing community systems-level efforts, including "community health systems," which encompass formal and informal actors, as well as those in other sectors or roles that impact health of a population. In this project, Pact envisions a systems-level expansion of the CSP based on the *Collective Impact* approach, a thriving "open source" methodology with a solid evidence base and many supporting resources, which will also support the move away from too many INGO-driven, proprietary, or branded approaches.

Ultimately, we envision increased uptake of health (and other) organizations using the CSP across multiple donors and revenue streams, with the platform serving as a unifying thread that generates momentum, agency, ownership, and maturation of both individual organizations and the systems within which they have impact.

We are interested in creating something that has a life beyond the assistance immediate assistance we are providing. –Zachary Pusch, USAID

Maturity Level Assessment

According to the Global Good Maturity Model, the CSP is well established and rates as "high" within many aspects of global utility, community support, and software maturity. Certain aspects of it can be customized by each group in order to reflect their unique realities, progress, and localized solutions. The globally standard metrics of the OPI are popular as well. The CSP is governed by an Advisory Board according to its charter. It is regularly improved based on feedback gathered through user surveys. Easy-to-use functionality, highly accessible documentation, and continual user support have enabled groups from all around the world to directly access and use the tool.

Where internet access or even computer availability is scarce, data may be captured and transferred using a simple spreadsheet or a paper-based system. The back end operational costs are low and the number of users infinitely scalable, enabling low or no-cost access, perhaps subsidized by international users. This grant would ideally enable the CSP to increase its maturity through improvements in lower maturity areas, refinements across the board, and the new systems-level features.

An row-by-row commentary of the CSP according to the model is available here .

Digital Square Proposed upgrade: Incorporating CD2.0 into the CSP
Project Description

The Capacity Solutions Platform has been designed to foster data capture, analysis and storage that is accessible to and controlled by local partners, as appropriate to the setting and capacities. This new set of features would build on that design, supporting locally driven capacities and data management related to systems-level approaches.

Through this initiative, we propose to increase the utility and the impact of the CSP by **adding a new module that addresses the capacity and performance of systems, and allows for aggregation of data by region or country (while protecting the privacy of individual organizations on the platform).** CSP already includes basic network mapping functionality, but this doesn't encompass state-of-the-art elements of CD2.0, i.e. a whole systems approach to fostering social change through strategic leveraging.

	CSP today	Proposed improved CSP
Captures capacity development data of "local systems"	Not possible	Participating organizations will be able to visualize and analyze their "local system," track systems-level activities, systems capacities, and performance changes. As relevant, this systems level data may be informative to others into the same 'local system.'
Captures capacity development data of individual organizations	Each participating organization can access only their own data.	Each participating organization will also be able to compare their data to others in their 'local system,' subnational area, country, region, or globally. (deidentified)

As the CSP functionality expands beyond organizations to link to systems-level efforts, so will its value as a one-stop shop for planning, tracking, and adapting capacity development efforts within an organization, community, district, country, or a region.

Currently each new donor or partner canaccess the CSP (with permission), understanding the history, current state and ongoing efforts of these maturing organizations, individually, or as groups. Increasing the uptake of this platform would support the shift away from the project mentality, and enable more complex and comprehensive analysis, and -strategic long-term visioning, planning, and action, and decrease the burdens resulting from fragmentation. Adding the new systems-level features to the CSP will exponentially increase its potential to foster meaningful and sustainable change by increasing networking, coordination and collaboration within any given 'local system.'

Ultimately, Pact envisions many more thousands of users—organizations worldwide—using CSP over many years, in partnership with any given donor at any given time, to plan, track, access quality capacity development support, monitor, and report on progress. The CSP will capture this data not only from the point of view of each individual organization, but also from the system perspective, and even enable country-wide point of view. In a time of backsliding regimes and closing civic space, the CSP will serve as a platform to craft strategic alliances, cross-organizational learning, collaboration, and resilience around mutually reinforcing activities, using shared metrics.

Planting the seeds: Potential growth beyond the scope of this effort

In the long term, Pact sees other demand-driven needs that the CSP could meet. Development experts worldwide recognize the dearth of professional development opportunities available to international development staff, civil society, and many others. This impacts the quality of efforts, wastes human potential and represents a troubling global inequity. The CSP can link the individual level professional development dynamically with the other levels (organization, system). All professional development content would be based on state-of-the-art, evidence-based approaches to global health and development for non-clinical staff, members of civil society, advocates, and anyone else playing a role in a "local system" that produces health or other development outcomes.

Consortium

Pact always works in partnership. We will use a systems-based, user-focused process as the basis for partnership to move this forward. Pact will facilitate and guide, while collaborating closely with partners, such as donor representatives, global and in-country health experts, global advocates for community-led development, technology experts, and most importantly, community level representatives from around the world,

including civil society, governments, and the private sector.

At a global level, we have contacted several groups who about potential technical support or advisory guidance. These groups will help ensure we are choosing strategic ways forward include framing, decisions and processes. These will ensure the new features are:

- Practically connected to a theory of change that ensures these features can foster concrete health (and other) development outcomes,
- Driven by savvy technology design (to produce immediate the upgrades as well as leaving the "door open" for future upgrades)
- Based on user-centered design, i.e. informed by civil society and other stakeholders in LMIC.

Already, we have confirmed interest from several potential collaborative partners in helping us create a user-friendly, practically useful, and well-functioning upgraded product, with details to be determined through collaborative dialogue upon award. These include the Human Resources Research Council, Techchange , Dimagi and Clear Impact .

Use Cases, User Stories

Over the past four years, the CSP has been used by thousands of civil society and community-based groups (and even government entities) to assess their own capacities, plan for and track progress, measure resulting performance improvement, and generate donor reports.

As systems-based approaches to change, e.g. Collective Impact , are increasingly used, the lack of systems-based features of the CSP is a gap that is increasingly apparent. If they were available, a network of civil society (and other types of organizations) would use them to plan for and track systems-based efforts, including development and refinement of a shared vision, common agenda, shared measurement, and design and implementation of mutually reinforcing activities.

Collective Impact use cases abound in North American and other high-income countries. For example, the San Francisco Getting to Zero HIV program has been extremely successful—and it is based on the Collective Impact methodology. The application of Collective Impact produced dramatic results   in New York's juvenile justice system. Collective Impact and other systems-based approaches are increasingly taken up as routes to generating sustainable change, with at least two US-centric platforms to designed to meet these needs: Clear Impact and MPowr.

More and more, systems-based approaches are being used   in low- and medium-income countries, but not at the pace warranted, considering the proven value. This effort can help accelerate that lagging uptake by offering state-of-the-art approach based on an attractive global good technology--one that fosters sustainable local capacity to drive, achieve, and maintain measurable development results.

Evidence of demand for a) systems-based approaches, and b) local control of data and development

a)   "Funders are increasingly interested in applying the principles of collective impact—a structured, cross-sector approach to solving complex social problems—to collaborations across national borders." –Stanford Social Innovation Review, August, 2017.

b)   "Profound issues of local ownership and consent underlie ICT4D's practice of data collection and management….At a minimum, local data ownership and consent are paramount to breaking this cycle. As a starting point, technology activists in the 'West' could work to create sustainable models that respect users' data and provide them ownership." [iv]

At all levels of international development, stories circulate of increasing calls for less extractive methods of project data collection—that is, scenarios in which data is gathered, taken away, and either never returned, or if so, returned in the form of a solution crafted by unknown experts. Often, when a project ends, raw data and relevant reports and analysis disappear, no longer accessible to the local partners or new implementing partners.

On a practical level, one popular product filling a high-income country need for the same product is called Clear Impact . Systems-based approaches to large-scale social change are better established here so there is a great deal to learn. Although so customized to the unique setting of the U.S. that it would not work in international development contexts, nonetheless, the Clear Impact product and business serves as a useful model. Pact and staff from Clear Impact have already been in touch to explore shared learning opportunities. These might be formalized through a formal business arrangement (small subcontract) or remain informal, depending on best fit, should this proposal be funded.

Budget and budget notes accompany this proposal

Workplan

Upon award, Pact staff would begin the process of gathering input from stakeholders, and hold a user-centered design event to be based in a LMIC, in partnership with a local research firm, potentially HRSC of South Africa. The event would gather input from users representing a range of profiles. Small subgrants would be granted to several users worldwide to support attendance, design, and testing of the new features. These activities would simultaneously serve as capacity development opportunities in technology and development co-creation, testing, and adaptation, as well as how to use systems-based approaches to generating social change. These subawardees could serve as champions of the methodology and customizable platform within their contexts.

Our retained design firm, Epic Software, would build out the new features under the guidance of Pact program officer Dmytro Mykhalenyko. Once design, tested, refined and ready to launch, Pact and partners would roll out the enhanced CSP worldwide, offering low-cost or free access to LMIC partners, at cost access to high-income country partners, and incorporating it into new programs.

This process would take nine to twelve months.

In addition to the increased partner capacities, the deliverable will be a new module of the Capacity Solutions Platform that guides and monitors locally-driven systems-based approaches to generating sustainable change, including improved health of communities.

ENDNOTES

[i] Misra, Susan and Jamaica Maxwell. "Three Keys to Unlocking Systems-Level Change" Stanford Social Innovation Review. April 29, 2016.
[ii] DW Brinkerhoff The state and international development management: Shifting tides, changing boundaries, and future directions, Public Administration Review, 2008
[iii] Victoria A. Beard, Aniruddha Dasgupta. "Community Driven Development, Collective Action and Elite Capture in Indonesia." Development and Change, Development and Change 38(2): 229–249 (2007)
[iv] Anonymous Author. "Data Colonialism: Critiquing Consent and Control in 'Tech for Social Change'"Model View Culture: A magazine about technology, culture and diversity.Issue 43, November 14, 2016.

Supporting Documents: Pact budget narrative