STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN GHANA

End of Project Report

Reporting period: October 2016 – October 2018
Submitted by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI)
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Under its international cooperation programme for civil society, the Embassy of France in Ghana has been providing support to CSOs through small grants allocation, within the framework of its erstwhile Funds for Social Development (FSD) scheme. The French Cooperation recognises the role and importance of civil society as a key player in the pursuit of democracy, good governance and development at national level. This has translated into meaningful financial assistance to CSOs over the years to support their operations and delivery.

Over the years CSOs in Ghana have had the opportunity to improve their effectiveness and emerged as important influencers on national development issues. Many have acquired array of operational skills such as proposal formulation and basic financial management and develop seemingly stable governance systems. Nonetheless, there remains the need to sustain their relevance, strengthen their capacity to assess and document their results to promote accountability and continue to engage policy makers in a more effective manner.

There are persistent gaps which reflect in the way CSOs report on donor funds’ spending. Also, there is a need to strengthen accountability and participatory development through more effective policy engagement and influence with government and the private sector on recurrent and emerging development issues.

In a bid to reinforce the effectiveness of CSOs in Ghana, the Embassy of France in Ghana approached WACSI to roll out a 3-Year CSO Capacity Development Programme dubbed “Strengthening Professional Skills of Civil Society Organisations in Ghana”. The three-year initiative was designed to boost the professional skills of CSOs in the country. Following an open Call for Application, 63 organisations responded, of which 15 were shortlisted.

The programme provided the selected organisations a series of capacity strengthening activities in three (3) phases. The first and second phases focused on training courses for the selected organisations. The third phase of the programme was about providing hands-on support through mentoring and coaching to the participating organisations.

Two (02) progress reports covering the first two phases have been submitted to the French Embassy in Ghana during the project period. This report captures the implementation of the third phase and achievements & recommendations of the three years capacity development project.

**Objectives of the Programme**

The Capacity Development programme, with support from the Embassy of France, will seek to achieve the following objectives:

- Improve the ability of civil society organisations to enhance their organisational effectiveness;
- Strengthen the capacity of target beneficiaries in results-based management and reporting;
- Enhance the knowledge and skills of target beneficiaries to achieve better results and assess the effectiveness of their interventions for lessons learnt and accountability; and
- Develop capacity of target beneficiaries to become more skilled civil society advocates and leverage their strengths to effectively engage policy-making processes.

**Activities Implemented during the Project Period**

The following activities were implemented during the programme period:

- Organisational Capacity Assessment of the 15 Selected Organisations;
- Phase I Training consisting of Governance & Leadership and Results-Based Monitoring & Evaluation;
- Phase II Training on Policy Influencing, Advocacy & Networking;
- Phase III Follow up Mentoring and Onsite Coaching; and
- Collection and Documentation of Success Stories.

The followings articulate highlights from these various phases with an emphasis on the last phase that took place before the closing of the project, i.e. Mentoring/Coaching and Change Stories Documentation.
PHASE 0: ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

To kick-off the 3-year long capacity strengthening support the Project Team undertook an assessment of the current state of the organisations to assess their existing strengths and areas for improvement and ascertain their needs in the relevant areas of support identified in agreement with the Embassy of France. The organisational capacity assessment was conducted through the administration of questionnaires covering seven (7) key areas, including: Governance, Management Practices, Human Resources, Financial Resources, Service Delivery, Advocacy and External Relations, and Sustainability. These areas were broken down into 30 sub-components covering a total of 137 questions. Below is an overview of the main findings from the organisation capacity assessment. It is apparent from the assessment that the level of strength and the challenges facing the organisations were multi-fold, even though there were a number of common points.

- **Governance:** The average score for Governance was 4.33 out of 5. The 15 organisations, though having existing boards, had varied levels of challenges in terms of the board’s ability to fully exercise their oversight mandates, including board members’ absenteeism; inadequate capacity to carry out their roles effectively; irregular board meetings; weak participation from relevant stakeholders in planning, decision-making and leadership; inadequate strategic planning, poor relationships between board and management and poor implementation of strategy guideline or frameworks among others.

- **Management Practices:** The average score for management Practices area was 3.93. The assessment revealed that most organisations have established structures with clearly defined lines of authority and responsibilities. Formal processes are documented through a procedures’ manual guide in more than half of the organisations. However, they are confronted with various challenges in terms of implementation. Others are yet to finalise the development of their procedures’ manual but do have general guidelines stipulated in their constitutions. Majority of the CSOs reported that their monitoring and evaluation practices are based on projects. Likewise, most organisations do not have global annual implementation plans but plans are contingent upon project schedules. Despite general dependency on external funds, some CSOs have been able to continually secure project funds to support operations of their organisations.

- **Human Resources:** The average score was 3.06. Most of the organisations do not have a deliberate plan for staff capacity development. Staff capacity development training is often not a result of long-term strategic planning, but instead seeks to meet existing needs and leverages on unanticipated opportunities. In some organisations, the appraisal of staff is irregular and there is little room for career progression since the organisations lack the resources to pay additional staff. In other cases, staff are playing multiple roles with inadequate financial compensation.

- **Financial Management:** The scoring for this area was 3.77. Most organisations operate their financial management on project basis, i.e. requirements from donors. Most organisations do not have global annual budgets but project-specific budgets. Although some organisations have strengthened their financial and accounting systems, most do not conduct annual external audits. Internal controls seem quite weak. Organisations do not generally have the adequate financial strength to maintain permanent accountants or salaried finance officers; they rely on the service of voluntary staff or part-time accountants to keep their records and balance their books.

- **Service Delivery:** Organisations globally scored 4.03 under this category. Generally, organisations seem to have the requisite experience to carry out their duties, this varies based on their experience and expertise. They also seem to give attention to stakeholders, especially target groups’ needs of expectations in their programming. Regarding monitoring and evaluation, most organisations which tend to be applying some level of M&E activities do it based on projects; none had a holistic organisational M&E system in place.

- **Advocacy and External Relations:** Advocacy and External relations scored an average of 4.22. Most organisations do maintain a strong presence and engagement with government and other stakeholders, although some seem to be engaging more than others. They engaged in diverse kinds of networking and partnerships, there was an existing gap in terms of strategic engagement based on the organisations’ defined priorities. There was a significant gap in the ability to build partnership with the private sector, even though a few organisations had initiated some engagement in this area.

- **Sustainability:** This area scored an average of 3.94. Most organisations struggle in terms of financial sustainability. Although, most of them have more than one source of funding, there are often small grants that enable them carry out sporadic interventions and cater for their operations to some extent. Despite relatively consistent funding flow some benefit from, there are mostly restricted funds dedicated to specific project activities, with limited support to human and operational expenses. Organisations mostly operate on a day-to-day basis and mainly depend on donors’ support. Another challenge is the lack of adequate capacity to write proposals and win tenders. Organisations seek to engage stakeholders in the implementation of their programmes and promote a certain degree of community ownership. They periodically seek to review and align their organisational structures to their developmental needs. However, they often lack the adequate capacity, incentives and resources to accomplish their missions effectively.
PHASE I: TRAINING IN GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP AND RESULTS-BASED M&E

Activities implemented under this phase include the following:

- a 2-day training on Governance and Leadership (G&L) held from 27 - 28 February 2017 at WACSI training Centre;
- a 3-day training on Result-Based Monitoring and Evaluation (RBM&E) held from 1-3 March 2017 at WACSI training Centre;
- the formulation of Action Plans by selected organisations on both training modules; and
- follow-up on Action Plan implementation and Mentoring support by the Project Team.

- **Governance and Leadership:** The main aim of the training was to help participating organisations strengthen their governance structures, leadership and management abilities for enhanced performance and sustainability. Participants were taken through issues like governance, leadership, strategic planning, internal conflict management, human resource development, among others.

  The most prominent issue under this module was related to institutional building, which specifically focuses on strengthening or developing policies, procedures, board charters, financial controls, appraisal systems as well as engagement of Organisational Development Specialists to support with building critical aspects of the organisations. The critical mass of the organisations falls under this category; they showed a commitment to build on their internal governance and accountability systems to enhance their effectiveness. In addition, some organisations also embarked on developing their human resource capacity through reviewing their recruitment and training approaches, engaging external resource persons to assist with teambuilding and Staff productivity among others. Another recurring issue was related to the creation or review of organisational strategic plans. At least one third of the organisations committed to develop their strategic plan to enable them to better steer their organisation into a new direction of growth.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The main aim of the training was to strengthen the results-based management and ability of participating organisations to use monitoring and evaluation data for effective management, performance reporting, and accountability. Most organisations realised the need to share and transfer knowledge within the organisation as a critical step to achieve significant changes. This is associated with a certain level of restructuring in terms of the management functions and the team. Also, some organisations resolved to consider reviewing or beginning to develop an M&E system to help them document their M&E function functions and the tools and processes involved to achieve greater impact at organisational level, not only in relation to projects.

- **Action Plan Formulation:** After each of the above training session, an action plan template was shared with the participants of the selected CSOs for their completion. The action plan formed the basis of the follow-up and post-training support. 12 out of the 15 Organisations were able to develop their action plan, outlining key issues identified, intended action steps to mitigate those issues, timeline for implementation, resources, evidence of success and means of verification.

- **Follow-up Support and Mentoring:** The follow up post-training was done through face-to-face or virtual meetings with beneficiary organisations. Based on the response from the organisations, at least six (6) out of the twelve (12) organisations that submitted their action plans were engaged during the follow-up mentoring phase. The review of their action plans enabled the coordination team to ascertain their progress and provide support where needed. These engagements were useful to provide implementing partners some guidance in the process of leading changes based on the action steps documented in their action plans.

The first phase of the project was useful in engaging participating organisations to reflect on and take steps to strengthen their internal governance mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation initiatives. As a result of implementing the action plans, CSO partners recorded varied levels of changes and progress in their organisation. Few months down the road, many organisations began to take actions to share knowledge and skills acquired and work to support institutional building.
PHASE II: TRAINING IN POLICY ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT AND NETWORKING

The following activities were implemented during the period under review: a 5-day training on Policy Advocacy and Engagement and Networking and Alliance Building held from 11-15 September 2017; formulation of Action Plans by selected organisations on both training modules to document their intended action steps; and follow-up on action plan implementation and mentoring support.

- **Policy Advocacy and Engagement:** The topics covered under this module focused on the definition of key concepts and terms related to advocacy, understanding the policy-making cycle, identifying and mapping key policy stakeholders, developing an advocacy policy framework, and formulating and communicating advocacy messages among others.

- **Networking and Alliance building:** The topics covered under this module include understanding networks, alliances and coalitions; sustaining networks: resources and leadership; effective communication in networks; sources of conflicts and conflict management; and consensus building. This module sought to enable organisations to develop insight and strategies on coalition building and adopt relevant strategies to amplify their message and leverage strength to influence policy processes at different levels.

- **Action Plan Formulation:** A template in the form of a guiding questionnaire that helped organisations to identify and spell out relevant advocacy agenda(s) they intended they engage in post-training. The guideline laid out key aspects to consider to document organisations’ policy engagement plans, including: societal problem(s), identified, advocacy goal(s), advocacy message(s), strategies & tactics, tools, timeline, M&E, etc.

- **Follow-up Support and Mentoring:** The mentoring sessions provided an opportunity to follow-up on how the learning from the training was being implemented within the organisation. Participants provided feedback on institutional mainstreaming of concepts, lessons and initiatives from the training. During the mentoring sessions, each organisation was given the opportunity to present their prospective advocacy project. Organisations explained their selected advocacy issues, goal, objectives, message, strategy, stakeholders, evaluation mechanisms and their communication plan. During the engagements, they received support to reframe their advocacy messages and undertake effective stakeholder analysis. Some of the key elements discussed during the training were revisited to bring more clarity where needed, since only one member of the organisation had been present at the training. The mentoring team shared with the organisations certain approaches they could adopt for the effective implementation of their advocacy projects.

PHASE III: MENTORING AND ONSITE COACHING SUPPORT

The last phase of the capacity strengthening programme consisted of providing technical support to the participating organisations on the implementation of their action plans and hands-on support through onsite coaching exercise. This process enabled participating organisations to deepen their knowledge, sharpen their skills and institutionalise key learning actions gained during the training phase. During the onsite coaching, the project team visited seven (7) organisations. The support covered key learning points of the training modules delivered including Leadership & Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), and Policy Advocacy & Networking.

Through the visits the project team received feedback on the implementation progress by the participating organisations towards the institutionalisation of key learning points. The project team provided direct support in the various relevant aspects of the training programmes. The onsite mentoring and coaching sessions employed participatory methodologies, using the various organisation’s action plans as a guiding framework. The approach was modelled on a focus group discussion to enable an interactive engagement.

The substance from the hands-on onsite coaching support is highlighted below based on the respective modules delivered.

- **Leadership and governance:** Discussions touched base on the effectiveness of the board, board charter, frequency of board meeting, contribution of the board for the mobilisation of the organisations resources, availability of key policies, manuals, appraisal system, strategic plan, organogram, job description, staff meeting among other.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Support in this area focused on building institutional M&E system, performance indicators for project/programme, reporting, communicating impacts and the development of project-based Monitoring and Evaluation system among others.

- **Policy Advocacy and Networking:** the project team looked at progress made on advocacy initiatives, advocacy strategies/tactics, evaluation mechanisms, networking, identifying and mapping key policy stakeholders. During the onsite coaching, the project team discussed with participating organisations the progress made toward the implementation of their advocacy initiatives and provided support to overcome challenges encountered.
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the onsite coaching the project team recorded noteworthy achievements and improvements by participating organisations in their various focus areas. With respect to the leadership and governance aspect, most of the organisations took key steps in rearranging their boards to make responsive and effective appointment of new board members and development of board charter to guide the work of the board.

For example, during the organisational assessment prior to the trainings, the project team identified that Global Women Development Promoters (GLOWDEP) was not having a functioning board. The interim executive director was also the board chair. A situation that was affecting the oversight function of the board over the management. With the skills and knowledge on good governance practices gained from the training, GLOWDEP management dissolved its old board, set up a new board based on the expertise needed for the growth of the organisation. The interim Executive Director was fully appointed as Executive Director and gave up the board chair position.

Likewise, Anchito Foundation for Education and Self Help (AFES) realised from the training that its board was not featuring key characteristics of a functional board. Board meetings were not regular as they were supposed to be. Subsequent to the training, the organisation took actions to reorganise its board. They undertook a process of appointing new board members to guide the organisation and provide strategic advice towards the advancement of the organisation’s mission.

The Project Team also noticed some progress in terms of management practices with the policies and manual developed by many participating organisations. For example, the project enabled Moremi Initiative to review the constitution and organogram and develop key policy documents and manuals, including, board charter, HR Manual, financial management manual, procedures manual, fundraising strategy and a communication and advocacy strategy meant to support their work and operational effectiveness.

Anchito Foundation for Education and Self Help (AFES) developed contract document for staff and is now contributing social security support for staff. This has helped to deepen the sense of belonging within the organisation.

Inspired by the learning from the capacity strengthening the Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC) engaged in a process of developing a new strategic plan (2019–2023) after some lapses since the expiry of the previous strategy. GACC revamped its organisational structure through the reshuffling of head of units with clearly defined job descriptions and work plans. The organisation holds more regular staff meetings and programme team meetings as well.

Similar achievements were recorded at Socio-serve Ghana (SSG) and Great Thinkers Social Club (GTSC). Both organisations have taken important steps aimed to strengthen their governance structure including the development of new strategic plan and the setting up of performance appraisal systems. The appraisal system led to greater satisfaction of staff who now felt that their hard work is better acknowledged. GTSC also developed job description for each staff, filled key vacant positions and planning to hire a dedicated M&E person.

SocioServe–Ghana’s strategic plan expired years ago. With support of this programme, the organisation hired a consultant to develop a new strategic plan, which with assistance from the WACSI team has been reviewed and is pending board approval.

Regarding efforts pertaining to monitoring and evaluation, it was observed that there is a general trend of continued focus on project-based M&E as opposed to organisational level M&E, with exception of GLOWDEP. This is mainly due to lack of dedicated M&E personnel and resources. Nonetheless, the skills they have acquired helped them to improve the quality of their interventions’ assessment as well as the quality of their reports. For example, Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC) was able to formulate a proposal submission with a well-articulated project proposal and a comprehensive M&E plan, which enabled them to secure funding from the United States Embassy in Ghana.

Global Women Development Promoters (GLOWDEP) was able to scale up its project-focused M&E into a more comprehensive fully-fledged organisational M&E system. The newly developed M&E system has proved to be useful in supporting the organisation through its operations. These steps have significantly helped the organisation in monitoring progress of its interventions and ensure that activities are aligned with long term goals. “The steps of improving our systems has enhanced our credibility within donor community and we were able to secure funding for new projects”, stated GLOWDEP Executive Director - Victoria Norgbey.

Furthermore, the capacity strengthening programme helped participating organisations to strengthen their advocacy interventions. Their advocacy initiatives are now guided by a clearly articulated advocacy strategy developed based on the skills gained form the programme and support of the WACSI project team. The advocacy plan outlines the societal problems they have identified, advocacy objectives, relevant stakeholders including allies, opponents, target audience, partners, constituency, strategies & tactics as well as communication and engagement tools among others.

The below tabular illustration highlights main advocacy agendas initiated by the respective organisations.
Table 1: Overview of Organisations’ Advocacy Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANISATIONS</th>
<th>ADVOCACY GOALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moremi Initiative</td>
<td>To reduce by 20% Early/Forced child marriage practice in the Sagnarigu and Nanhuma districts assemblies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Resources Centre</td>
<td>To facilitate and support actions aimed at promoting, protecting and developing the rights of children in Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Aid Ghana</td>
<td>To reduce the rate of dental caries (kaka) cases among the inhabitants of Adentan Municipal Assembly by 25% by 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Women Development Promoters</td>
<td>To reduce the pregnancy rate of young girls by at least 10% in the Central Tongu District by June 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchito Foundation for Education and SelfHelp</td>
<td>To initiate a local policy/bye-law to reclaim degraded land along the shoreline of the black Volta lake within the corridor of the upper Manya-Krobo District by December 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana Federation of Labour</td>
<td>To give a voice to workers in marginalized, unregulated sectors of the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Thinkers Social Club</td>
<td>A reduction by a third of the number of households who do not have household litter bins and regular waste collection services in three urban poor communities. (James Town, Korle-gonno and Chorkor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Volunteer for Environment Ghana</td>
<td>To introduce the use of refuse dump to community members and regular (at least twice a month) clean up exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Serve – Ghana</td>
<td>To reduce the prevalence rate of child marriage in Ghana by the year 2020.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Local Governance and Advocacy</td>
<td>To ensure that the Local Governance Act 2016, (Act 936) is amended to cater for the election of MMDCEs by the third quarter of 2018</td>
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**CHALLENGES**

Various challenges came up throughout the project implementation period that required adjustments to keep things on tracks. The challenges included:

- **Delay in submission of action plans:** Most of the organisations were unable to submit their actions plans during the time allocated for each phase due to limited staff strength and multiple roles and responsibilities. The deadlines had to be revised to cater for late submissions. This affected the planned period for follow-up support and also the collection of success stories to ensure that significant changes that have taken place since the inception of the programme are duly captured.

- **Conflicting Scheduling for the mentoring and onsite coaching:** Some organisations had to cancel their mentoring sessions on several occasions due to their unavailability and conflicting schedules, which had a bearing on the planning and implementation of the technical assistance phase. A situation that was more revealing during the onsite coaching exercise. Only seven out the fourteen participating organisations were visited for the onsite coaching. All attempts (including proposing virtual coaching) made by the team to visit the other seven organisations were futile. Most of them were working on and occupied with field projects that take them from their base of operations.

- **Staff attrition that affected transfer of knowledge:** Staff members from three of the participating organisations that participated in the training are no longer with the organisations and knowledge gained from the programme were not fully transferred or operationalised within the organisations.

- **Financial Challenges:** Another key challenge articulated by most participating organisations related to inadequate funding. Funding challenge was reported to be a major hindrance and limitation to the execution of activities that were documented in organisations’ action plans, including for instance, action steps related to hiring of consultants to help in developing strategic plan, M&E plan, key policy documents and conducting regular audits among other.
RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION STEPS

At the end of the project, the following key recommendations are formulated in a bid to further strengthen similar interventions in the future and explore possible options to maximize the benefits of these programmes. These recommendations include issues with respect to:

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- **Commitment and endorsement from the leadership of the organisations:** Initiate a pre-project induction meeting in addition to the transmission of the terms of condition for participation and individual visits to organisations for assessment. This will be useful to involve the organisations leadership and ensure they are consistently engaged and committed to the process to ensure more.

- **Conditions for Participation:** In subsequent projects, WACSI should ensure that organisations are not only committed to observe the terms of participation in the programme but remain aware of the risks associated with not complying to the conditions and its effects on the project objectives.

- **Number of personnel participating in the training:** At least two individuals from each organisation should be invited to participate in the training. This would help to mitigate potential attrition and help to ensure key knowledge and skills gained from the programme are fully transferred to the organisation.

- **Shared Learning:** Similar programmes in the future could incorporate an aspect on shared learning among participating organisations to create an avenue for peer-learning and experience sharing. Such platforms could offer an opportunity for organisations lagging behind to emulate the strategies of their peers to improve their practices and strengthen their capacity.

**Embassy of France in Ghana**

- **Seed Funding:** It became apparent that the participating organisations required financial and material resources to support the implementation of their action plans. Some support in the form of seed funding could be substantial beneficial to empower organisations to be more effective and facilitate their implementation of key action steps post-training. This would constitute an incentive in a way and assist organisations to champion leading practices and changes both internally and with regards to their advocacy strategy (based on key priorities identified).

- **Other areas of capacity building:** It came out from the assessment that a major challenge the selected organisations were facing included ability to mobilise resources to carry out their interventions. As major improvements have been recorded at governance level through this project. The Embassy of France among other partners could consider the possibility of offering this kind of training to support the organisations develop the required skills in resource mobilisation, proposal writing and partnership building to be able to mobilise adequate resources towards the achievement of their missions and stand out as key champions in the development sector.