Assessing and Strengthening Strategic Information Capacity of Local Partners

Supporting USAID Missions to meet Journey to Self-Reliance goals

THE OPPORTUNITY

USAID Missions are working to increase the number and scope of USAID's direct partnerships with local organizations to reach the agency's Journey to Self-Reliance and PEPFAR's local partner transition goals. For many local organizations, receiving direct PEPFAR funding is an enormous opportunity: partners can increase qualified staff, expand much-needed services, and strengthen enduring organizational systems. This funding, however, comes with extensive requirements, not only in terms of financial management and contractual compliance, but also for strategic information and results reporting. Particularly for newly established primes, these requirements can present a steep learning curve.

> PEPFAR and USAID are working to advance the leadership of local partners in the HIV/AIDS response. As part of this effort, it is important that local partners have the requisite capabilities in strategic information (SI) management as they transition to independently leading PEPFAR-funded programs.

To help ensure that local partners succeed, USAID Missions need ways to assess and build local organizations' capacity to independently manage funding, including their ability to complete routine and required reporting. Some local organizations also need support to "skill-up" their workforce to respond to critical HIV and COVID-19 data needs. Standardized assessment tools, online trainings, and virtual mentorship approaches support efficient capacity strengthening and allow organizations and their clients to check in, in a supportive fashion, on organizational growth over time.

THE DATA.FI SOLUTION

Data.FI's approach to capacity strengthening begins with a strengths-based assessment of staff skills and organizational processes related to strategic information and reporting, followed by an action planning step to agree on priorities. Data.FI then supports capacity strengthening in critical areas and assesses local partner progress in an iterative way.

Assessment: Data.FI has developed, piloted, and validated an easy-to-administer, rapid, and virtual **PEPFAR Strategic Information Capacity Assessment (PSICA) tool.** The PSICA tool can be self-administered by local partners on a routine basis or completed jointly by local partners and USAID Missions. Routine assessments communicate readiness for transition and inform action plans to strengthen local partners' SI capacity prior to or during the transition to prime awardee status.

Action planning: Data.FI facilitates the development of action plans for capacity strengthening. These may include recommendations to undertake available trainings, specific skills-strengthening support, and routine assessments to monitor growth.

Capacity strengthening: Data.FI provides customized trainings and mentorship to local partners to meet capacity gaps. Data.FI has already developed a standardized training for local partners globally on data quality and site-level quality improvement, which was identified by local partners and USAID as a key area for growth (see text box on the online course). We have also developed and are carrying out country-specific training and mentorship programs in data review, visualization, and use.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

As of January 2021, Data.FI had virtually assessed eight local partners from six countries in Africa and the Caribbean using our PSICA tool. Local partners and USAID Missions have appreciated how systematic and straightforward the assessments are, and how the process supports a holistic view of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity.

USAID/PEPFAR HIV Treatment Cascade Quality Assurance Tools Online Course

This is an interactive online course on data quality assessment (DQA) methods and use of the USAID/PEPFAR Treatment Cascade Quality Assurance Suite of Tools. The training is offered over the course of six weeks as online asynchronous, self-paced learning, along with scheduled synchronous sessions that allow participants to meet with monitoring, evaluation, and learning experts and discuss key learning points from the course. It provides participants with guidance on the implementation and applications of DQAs to improve HIV reporting. The tools and resources in the training also facilitate efforts to improve and support client monitoring systems for program quality improvement.

In addition, more than 100 SI and M&E managers, M&E directors, and data clerks from 30 local partner organizations in three continents have participated in two 2-week sessions of Data.FI's virtual DQA tools online course. Participants noted that the training increased their skills to improve and support patient monitoring systems, which has led to enhanced data quality and data use for program quality improvement. Some are adopting the DQA tools into their organizational practices and have reported increased confidence in generating quality data and making data-based decisions.

PUTTING THE SOLUTION INTO ACTION

Data.FI works with Mission teams to understand the local partner landscape and their progress and goals related to the Journey to Self-Reliance. We then work with local partners prioritized by the Mission. We are also able to help identify promising local partners, should that be one of the Mission's objectives. To date, Data.FI has conducted all assessments, action planning dialogues, and trainings virtually—ensuring a highly efficient process.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Data.FI:

Emily Harris, Data.FI AOR
emharris@usaid.gov

Jenifer Chapman, Data.FI Project Director
jenifer.chapman@thepalladiumgroup.com

https://datafi.thepalladiumgroup.com/

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