

Learning product

The role of capacity building in user-led approaches

Introduction

Ghana Somubi Dwumadie (Ghana Participation Programme) is a four-year disability programme in Ghana, with a specific focus on mental health. This programme is funded with UK Aid from the UK government. The programme is run by an Options-led consortium, which also consists of Basic Needs-Ghana, King's College London, Sightsavers and Tropical Health, and focuses on four key areas:

1. Promoting stronger policies and systems that respect the rights of people with disabilities, including people with mental health disabilities
2. Scaling up high quality and accessible mental health services
3. Reducing stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities, including mental health disabilities
4. Generating evidence to inform policy and practice on the effectiveness of disability and mental health programmes and interventions

The programme adopted a user-led approach focused on participation of people with disabilities, including people with mental health conditions. Learning has been a key facet of the Ghana Somubi Dwumadie, and the programme sought to foster three interconnected areas of learning:

- Capturing emergent learning to support improved programming and results. This is **addressed in a separate learning product** (see link)
- Providing training and capacity building to particular groups to enhance skills and capacities
- Generating new evidence for audiences about what's needed and what works in the disability inclusion sector in Ghana

This learning product focuses on the second of these areas and examines capacity building approaches of the programme which centered on organisational strengthening of grantees and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as well as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Community Volunteers to enhance their skills and capacities. The types of capacity building adopted by the programme for these groups and covered in this product include supportive face-to-face monitoring visits; learning and reflection meetings; training on monitoring and evaluation, financial and

grant management, safeguarding, gender awareness and strategic planning. Other trainings include leadership and negotiation skills and rights-based advocacy.

Throughout the programme period, three different grants were awarded to grantees as follows:

- The COVID-19 Psychosocial Resilience Grant, awarded 1,193,574 Cedis to seven grantees;
- Evidence and Effectiveness Grant, awarded 6,844,350 Cedis to nine grantees; and
- Legacy and Sustainability Grant, awarded 992,757 Cedis to five grantees

This product is based on the learning from the implementation of the programme's user-led approaches for grantees and self-help groups. It describes the role of capacity building in the implementation of user-led and participatory approaches. The learning product is intended to inform future works of stakeholders who may be implementing or have interest in adopting user-led approach for programme implementation. Key learning points in this product have been categorised in two main areas:

Sustaining capacity building activities

User-led approaches and capacity building

Overview of the programme's capacity building approaches

Organisational strengthening for grantees and CSOs

The programme, as part of measures ensuring an effective user-led and participatory approach, provided training and technical support to grantees and CSOs. These were predominantly geared towards building the capacities of grantees and CSOs as well as creating spaces for sharing and learning for improved results. This was to position them to work more effectively in the mental health and disability sector. The programme initiated and implemented 'handholding' supportive activities with the grantees, including the following:

- Regular supportive face-to-face monitoring visits to all grantees. The purpose of these visits was to provide guidance on effective implementation and reporting of grantees' projects.
- Week-long training session at the start of the grant, covering essential project management matters such as safeguarding, gender awareness, data protection, MEL, financial and grant management, COVID-19 protocols and branding and marking the project for all grantees.

- Annual face-to-face Learning and Reflection Meetings, which provided a valuable platform for grantees to assess their progress, share experiences and learn from each other. The presentations and discussions made during these events allowed grantees to gain insights into the achievements, challenges and lessons learned in their respective projects. The interactive nature of the meetings provided practical guidance on utilising lessons learned and enhancing project interventions.
- One-week technical support to Social Behavioural Communication (SBC) grantees to co-create SBC materials using positive words and phrases developed on mental health and disability.
- Specialist online training sessions for Evidence and Effectiveness grantees to enhance skills around SBC, such as developing a creative brief; introduction to Time to Change project; and the SBC Accessible Materials Design
- Learning exchange between two grantees, i.e. Hope for Future Generation (HFFG) and VOICE Ghana (now Africa Disability Institute)
- Legacy and sustainability grantees received additional dedicated training in Monitoring and evaluation; Strategic planning and management; and Making change happen. These grantees also had dedicated funds to develop and deliver their own capacity building priorities based on an organisational capacity assessment undertaken at the start of the grant.

These technical supports generally contributed to knowledge enhancement and skills development of grantees which enabled them to further their project objectives, which created positive impacts in their communities. Confirming how these capacity-building sessions has made significant progress in the institutional and technical capacities of grantees during the programme evaluation, some of them stated,

‘Our strategic plan which could cost GBU huge sums of money through hiring of consultant service was reviewed by GBU staff and the Board president as a result of training received through the project. It also helped to build our internal capacity’ Ghana Blind Union (GBU) Staff

‘The various training programmes gave me insight into effective report writing and presentation as well as how to use participatory and engaging approaches. One of the presentation styles I now adopt is ‘experience sharing’. This method allows participants to share their experience with each other and critically examine each other’s situations. Applying this style of presentation have indeed helped me in my work. For example, I am now able to engage more and get positive feedback on lessons learned from participants. To me the grantees learning, capacity building, and other activities related to the programme have contributed significantly to my growth and development as staff of GNAD.’ Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD) Staff

The Mental Health Alliance which is a body of independent NGOs and CSOs operating in the mental health service delivery and advocacy space in Ghana, has also received funding and capacity-building support from Ghana Somubi Dwumadie. **The Alliance has received support** (see link) for their annual review and planning meetings. These meetings, among others, have enhanced the skills of member organisations in community entry, outcome reporting, writing significant change stories, and maximising social media use, among others.

Organisational strengthening for Self-Help Groups and Community Volunteers

The programme recognised the importance of effective leadership to the operations and growth of SHGs and hence, enhanced SHG leader's knowledge in advocacy and self-representation in local governance. The programme successfully trained leaders from 32 SHGs on rights-based advocacy and supporting advocacy engagements with duty holders on the rights and needs of people with mental health conditions in their respective districts. The **Rights Based Advocacy Toolkit for Self-Help Groups** was developed in this regard. Other training on leadership and negotiation skills, records keeping, group development and conflict management were also provided by the programme to SHGs.

Support visits were another approach by the programme to build the capacity of SHGs. During these visits, SHGs, were among others, technically supported to create and implement actionable plans and coached on how to hold **interface meetings with Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies MMDAs**.

Community volunteers, on their part were trained on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) to provide continued support to persons with mental health conditions. The volunteers underwent comprehensive training on basic level of competencies in detecting and reporting of mental health conditions. This training equipped them for home visits to provide MHPSS for persons with mental health conditions and their primary caregivers.

Lessons and good practices in capacity building

Sustaining capacity building activities

Learning Point: It is important to ensure that support and technical assistance needs are identified and driven by the priorities of those taking part.

The programme approach emphasised the importance of tailoring support and technical assistance to the specific needs and priorities of those taking part. The programme for instance supported OPDs like the grantees to conduct their own Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA), using a participatory and engaging approach which encouraged participants to take ownership of the process. Based on these capacity assessments, some central training needs were identified and appropriate training was provided centrally by Ghana Somubi Dwumadie. Grantees benefited from a range of training and development sessions on: Monitoring and evaluation; Strategic planning; Making change happen; Grants management; Financial management; Risk assessment and management; Data protection; Gender mainstreaming; Safeguarding; and Branding, marketing and communication. This

participant-driven approach ensured that capacity-building support provided was relevant and effective.

‘The OCA was greatly useful for the effective implementation of our project activities since it gave us the opportunity to identify our Weaknesses, Strengths, Opportunities and Threats, out of which relevant trainings were provided by Ghana Somubi Dwumadie’ Women with Disability Development and Advocacy Organisation (WODAO), a programme grantee

Learning Point: Providing technical assistance only, without any funding to execute the plan, does not seem attractive to young organisations and those with less stable funding, who usually require financial capacity for sustainability and growth, and whose activities are dependent on donor funds.

During their annual review and planning meetings, the Mental Health Alliance, identified their own capacity gaps, as a result of which the programme provided training in specific areas such as community entry, outcome reporting, developing most significant change stories and maximising social media.

Learnings from the programme have revealed that tailoring capacity-building support to the specific needs of participants not only enhances the impact of the interventions but also empowers participants to take an active role in their own development, leading to a more meaningful and lasting outcomes. Although capacity building is essential in project implementation, it must be noted that funding for the execution of project interventions is as important as capacity building. Ghana Somubi Dwumadie provided both technical and financial support, in the form of grants to grantees for the execution of their plans.

These grants, together with the technical support provided by the programme contributed to the successful execution of plans by the grantees. The grantees were more committed to the programme due to the financial support provided.

When programme funds came to end, enthusiasm and commitment to the programme of some of the organisations reduced, even though they continued to receive technical assistance from the programme. The Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD) and Mental Health Society of Ghana (MEHSOG), for instance, received dedicated technical assistance to enhance their capacities. Although this strategy worked well in strengthening GFD as an organisation, the programme sometimes struggled to get engagement from GFD due to a lack of financial support to GFD for running and staff costs, particularly when GFD had competing priorities. Initially, the programme provided a grant to GFD, but this had to be stopped due to budget cuts. On the part of MEHSOG, when the COVID-19 project funded by the programme came to an end, their enthusiasm diminished and, consequently, activities for which MEHSOG had funding were prioritised over programme activities in the technical assistance plan.

The Ghana Somubi Dwumadie approach underscores the importance of providing both technical and financial support to young organisations and those with less stable funding. By integrating these two elements, the approach ensures that

organisations are not only equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge but also have financial resources to implement their plans effectively.

Learning Point: Post-training support and follow-up is necessary for success in capacity building programmes

Capacity building programmes aim to enhance the skills, knowledge and abilities of individuals and organisations. However, effectiveness of these programmes is significantly increased through post-training and follow-up activities. The Ghana Somubi Dwumadie approach provides a clear example of how post-training and follow-up are crucial for the success of capacity building initiatives.

Following the grants award to grantees, the programme undertook series of capacity-building activities to prepare grantees to adequately plan, implement, monitor and report on progress of their planned activities. Aside these initial capacity building activities, the programme adopted a continuous support and mentorship approach that was aimed at ensuring that implementation was according to planned activities and grants objectives. The programme's follow-up and supportive approach combined reviews of documents and reports, with in-person supportive monitoring visits which reviewed compliance and also discussed lessons and best practices. These follow-up supports also helped to solve technical problems emanating from issues such as community mobilisation, stakeholder engagement advocacy opportunities, transactions treatments, progress reporting, monitoring and evaluation and handling of suspected safeguarding abuses.

'The capacity building and the quarterly monitoring visits supported to improve the functionality of the M&E unit especially documentation which generally has been scaled beyond the project to the organisational levels and applied by all staff. The monitoring visits were also learning space for the project management team, including the programmes and finance team to learn on some standard and best practice especially around the finance.' Staff of Songtaba

SHGs continued to receive capacity development throughout the programme. Continuous training on conflict management, advocacy, safeguarding, among others were provided to SHGs. The groups also enjoyed support visits, which supported them to complete applications for inclusion in the disability database in their MMDAs; assisted members to apply for support from the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF); and collected data on the wellbeing of members.

The ultimate goal of capacity building programmes is to create sustainable change. Post-training and follow-ups ensure that impacts of trainings are long-lasting and that the trainees continuous to develop and improve over time. Ghana Somubi Dwumadie highlighted the critical importance of post-training and follow-up activities by incorporating continuous engagements, rigorous monitoring and evaluation, on-going support as key components of the programme's capacity building approaches.

User-led approaches and capacity building

Learning Point: The adoption of the user-led approach combined with capacity building of grassroots participants (users) helps not only to secure the buy-in of stakeholders, but also create legitimacy for the advocacy action and anchor sustainability.

Evidence from the programme has shown that when the user is at the forefront of demanding their rights, they more easily convince stakeholders to act. Key actors and implementers of the programme have been persons with disabilities and mental health conditions whose capacities have been built to drive their own course. The programme built the capacity of users to take the lead in their own advocacy priorities. Grantees, for instance, had their capacities built through ranges of training, coaching, technical and financial support provided by the programme. These enhanced organisational capacities of grantees, which empowered grassroots participation. As a result of this, they have engaged community, district and national-level stakeholders on matters that affect their lives. Affirming this, some grantees stated:

‘Building the capacity of members and creating the platforms and resourcing them to lead advocacy at the grassroots using their own stories and experiences turn in quick results and change’. GBU Staff

‘We used some of the advocacy skills to intensify pressure on government to reconstitute the Board of the Mental Health Authority under the banner of the Mental Health Alliance and it paid off eventually when the need Board was re-constituted and inaugurated on 29th June 2022.’ MEHSOG members

‘It is an undeniable fact that, within the one-year period of implementing the Capacity for Change project, WODAO has gone through so many transformational activities which has placed the organisation on a higher height than before. WODAO has now received the needed technical capacity to fully operate as a full-fledged user-led disability women’s rights organisation not only in Volta and Oti but Ghana as a whole.’ WODAO Staff

The Mental Health Alliance has also had the opportunity to receive capacity building training such as the development of most significant change stories and the use of social media for dissemination, during their annual review and planning meetings. Confirming this some Alliance members stated:

‘In this meeting I have learnt how to develop most significant change stories. I have realised that conducting most significant change stories and using social media to disseminate these stories and works are our best-selling points as advocates.’ Participant, Mental Health Alliance review and planning meeting

‘I have identified the need for continuous strengthening and effective collaboration with other Alliances and stakeholders to successfully deliver mental health services and share best practices on social media platforms.’ Participant, Mental Health Alliance review and planning meeting

On the part of SHGs, equipping them with right skills for self-representation during interface meetings has been beneficial. This has resulted in SHGs having more effective organisational capacity and being better able to engage with key duty bearers and policymakers. Technical assistance provided by the programme to SHGs gave them greater confidence when engaging with duty bearers through interface meetings with key officials of MMDAs. These meetings provided the avenue for deliberations of enhancing the inclusion of members of SHGs into the programmes of MMDAs. An SHG leader confirming this stated:

‘We had training on leadership and advocacy. This has therefore empowered us to able to negotiate very well. When you attend meetings and show good leadership qualities in your contribution, next time they will invite you.’ SHG Leader, Upper East region

As a result of these engagements, MMDAs have provided greater support to members of SHGs through resources from the DACF.

MMDAs awareness of mental conditions as a disability is now enhanced, leading to people with mental health conditions being prioritised for inclusion in social intervention programmes.

‘As a political head, I will approve applications of people with mental health conditions that the Fund Management Committee recommend to me without hesitation. We are here to serve the people and we must serve the vulnerable, including people with mental health conditions.’ District Chief Executive, North East Region

With the adoption of user-led approach and capacity building, users and grassroots participants took ownership of the programme and advocated for their own course. This adopted approach ensured that key actions affecting persons with disability were led by persons with disabilities themselves. With this, community leaders and duty bearers saw the genuine issues facing persons with disabilities and were more willing to lend support and address the issues. Moreover, the sense of ownership associated with this approach is a key factor for sustainability.

In conclusion

The programme’s capacity building approaches underscores the importance of participants-driven support, comprehensive support beyond technical assistance and follow-up support in the adoption of user-led approaches that aim at promoting the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. By integrating these good practices, programmes can enhance their effectiveness, foster stakeholder engagement, and ensure sustainable outcomes.

