Oxford Policy Management

CAPABILITY STATEMENT

Supporting locally led development

What we do

Localization - shifting power within the aid system from international donors, implementers, and aid agencies to local actors and communities - is critical to the long-term achievement and sustainability of development outcomes. We believe true locally led development requires a "reimagining" of current technical assistance programs at the heart of development aid. Localization cannot be achieved through the transition of funding and management of development programs from international organizations to local entities alone. National governments need to steer policy decisions and local entities should lead all phases from design and delivery through to evaluation of donor-funded programs. Development must pivot from providing capacity substitution to true capacity strengthening that enables and facilitates local leadership.

We see our work as contributing to this holistic vision of locally led development in a variety of ways. First and foremost, we are a global organization. Our independent network of offices across Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Pacific,

represent investments in national and regional growth. Our international offices are staffed by long-term, national experts with strategic autonomy, and central to each one is a commitment to long-term partnership with governments and local institutions, beyond a project life-cycle. Our combination of global expertise and deep local roots allows us to develop a holistic understanding of local contexts, and build strong networks with local private sector organisations, academic institutions, and civil society groups. This, in turn, ensures the strengthening of long-term local capabilities to research, design, implement, and evaluate impactful policies and programs.

Below we highlight some of the key elements of our approach to localization.

Drivers of success and selected case studies

1. Focus on sustainability

The project-driven and correspondingly time-delimited nature of international development funding often leads to disjointed and unsustainable outcomes. Programs end, implementers pull out, and gains are lost. As an organization dedicated to maintaining a long-term presence in the countries in which we work, we explore innovative ways to work within project timelines to contribute to sustainability. These include models such as the international to national NGO transition of MUVA (see Box 1) in Mozambique, where we supported local actors to build successful and sustainable means to achieve development outcomes.

Box 1: Sustainable local development

1. The **MUVA program** *(FCDO; 2015-2022, £18M+)* supported the economic empowerment of adolescent girls and young women in urban centres across Mozambique. Recognizing persistent barriers that limit access to decent work, MUVA piloted and evaluated innovative projects to build the skills, self-confidence, and vision that young women need to work, and to create new job opportunities that match their aspirations and abilities. The success of MUVA's methodology and approaches, buffeted by the solid evidence base developed through the program's use of monitoring, evaluation, and learning, led to donor interest in continuing to finance the work it was doing as a social incubator. As a result, in 2020 the program transitioned to become a **national Mozambican NGO, also called MUVA**, to continue the work begun under the program. The MUVA NGO received seed funding from the FCDO, as well as from AFD and USAID, and continues to successfully pilot and implement novel approaches to women's economic empowerment.

2. In Nigeria, we led the **World Bank-funded Results-Based Financing Technical Assistance (RBFTA)** *(World Bank, 2014-2019)* project that helped to establish RBF schemes in three States in partnership with government. Unlike other RBF programs that remain dependent on external assistance, the project designed and created a comprehensive **Health Financing Fellowship program** for Nigerian RBF technical staff and managers to allow for sustained capacity for RBF implementation and scale up of RBF schemes in other states in Northern Nigeria.

2. Strengthening capacity through partnership

A key underlying tenet of our approach is joint capacity strengthening in the countries in which we work. This means that we actively seek to collaborate with local consultants, researchers, and practitioners, sharing lessons learned from across our global network while building a better understanding of the local and national context. We take a collaborative approach to developing skills in areas such as the generation, management, communication and use of research evidence to inform decision-making. We draw on a range of tested capacity strengthening approaches including: training, mentoring, peer learning, and partnership work (see Box 2).

Box 2: Strengthening local capacity

1. We established a mentoring program under the **UNAIDS Technical Support Mechanism (TSM)**, *(2018-2021, $43M)*, where international HIV experts were paired with national consultants to provide high-quality technical assistance to strengthen the HIV response in over 80 countries. Through this work, we have learned that successful mentorship experiences are characterized by clear intention, goal setting, and regular scheduled touchpoints and discussions between mentored pairs, and with program managers. As well as providing training for mentors and mentees, and templates to use for clear communication, we follow up with mentoring pairs to learn from their experiences and incorporate feedback in real time on how the program is designed. This mentorship model can be easily adapted to other contexts.

2. As part of the **Economic Development and Institutions Program (EDI)**, *(FCDO, 2015-2020, £13M+)*, we developed an 'Institutional Diagnostic' by iterating it across four countries: Tanzania, Benin, Bangladesh, and Mozambique. One tenet of the success of this approach is that it allied senior international researchers with local researchers and pushed deep and early engagement with decision-makers. Each EDI Randomized Control Trial (RCT) was linked to an intervention being implemented by a government partner. This was partly to improve the quality of evidence, but it also brought meaningful partnerships with local researchers and excellent engagement from the state implementers themselves.

3. Working politically for effective programming

We work politically to adapt to local contexts and ensure technical assistance programs align with government needs. By applying political economy analysis to development issues, we can better ensure effective policy design and implementation in ever-changing local contexts. We recognize that approaches need to be flexible, adaptive, and responsive to windows of opportunity for reform. Understanding power dynamics, institutional history, politics, socio-cultural status, and other issues in-country allows us to be an effective facilitator between donors and local entities and ensure lasting, sustainable change.

Box 3: Working politically for long-term impact

The **Strengthening Evidence use for Development Impact (SEDI) program** *(FCDO, 2019-2021, £17M)* worked to develop capacity and promote innovation in evidence-informed decision-making in three countries: Ghana, Pakistan, and Uganda. SEDI worked with national policymakers and other key local stakeholders to design, pilot, and implement interventions in a politically informed, demand driven and equity-responsive manner.

In each focus country, we began by undertaking a political economy analysis of evidence use. Understanding political economy dynamics within policymaking and programming is crucial for identifying what shapes the potential for catalyzing change. This approach also meant recognizing the limits of international organizations: we adopted a consortium model where national organizations spearheaded activities and engaged with government partners, with support from ourselves and other international partners.

4. Enabling collaborative global networks

We recognize that the most significant outcome of a program is often not just the deliverables and policies it generates, but the communities of practitioners, researchers, and research users which it establishes. We prioritize activities to catalyse global collaboration and lesson sharing within the communities of practice and between researchers and potential research users (see Box 4).

Box 4: Global collaboration

The **Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) program** *(FCDO, 2015-2023, £37M)* relied on attracting and retaining some of the world's leading researchers and enabling them to form a vibrant research community. The RISE Directorate took a 'loose but firm' approach: there was a very clear focus on the end goal of driving improvements in children's learning and clear adherence to core contractual obligations such as safeguarding and financial oversight. On research design and research uptake activities, however, the Directorate provided a supportive, collegiate approach, conscious that a community of critical friends was more likely to incentivize the quality and impact the programme aimed to achieve than an excess of managerial process. As a result, RISE has created a vibrant research community involving hundreds of researchers; a global conference which is frequently hailed as the best academic conference on education; and an active community of practice including hundreds of practitioners who work on a day-to-day basis to improve educational outputs within many different country contexts.

5. Connecting funders with local partners

While many funders and aid agencies are eager to drive locally led development through new connections with local and national partners, they are often not set up to do so. Without deep roots, networks, and established partnerships in focus countries, it can often be challenging to identify, contract, manage, and support new partners. As part of our mission to facilitate sustainable development within our country footprints, we aim to serve as a bridge for funders and local and national partners (see Box 5).

Box 5: Making connections

The **Implementation Research and Innovation Support (IRIS)** *(Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2022-2024, $5M)* **program** is an innovative facility supporting the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to generate and share actionable evidence through technical assistance and research on effective, efficient, and scalable supply and demand interventions in family planning. IRIS aims to achieve this by facilitating world-class technical assistance and research to the Foundation from a wide range of primarily women, women-led, and local experts and organizations in a set of focal countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ouagadougou Partnership, India, Pakistan). We act as a consultant to provide up-front research and implementation design support; a facilitator to connect the Foundation with local capacity to conduct the research; and a manager to work with the researchers to complete their scope of work, monitor and evaluate key metrics around localization, and communicate and disseminate the relevant learning emerging from the research.

Strengthening governments

6. Government support and strengthening

Sustaining development outcomes requires effective partnerships with country governments. We have a long history of making this work successfully at both the national and sub-national levels (see Box 6). We know that reforms work best when there is a clear authority and acceptance from within government for the need to change and improve service delivery for citizens. Our experience shows that greater sustainability and impact can be achieved by working through existing government systems rather than creating parallel ones that risk inefficiencies through duplication at best, and, at worst, the undermining of ownership through the imposition of new structures and processes which fail to account for local contexts.

Box 6: Strengthening governments through effective partnerships

1. **Building Resilience in Ethiopia (BRE)** *(2019–2024, £26M)* is a program co-funded by FCDO and USAID which aims to strengthen the Government of Ethiopia's capacity to prepare for, and respond to, disasters. BRE works across four complementary areas: disaster risk management, shock-responsive safety nets, public health emergency management, and disaster risk financing. Amidst a wave of complex climatic and humanitarian emergencies, BRE's innovative demand-led approach has made significant progress in strengthening nationally owned and led institutions for a more effective and timely response to disasters. Successes include (1) integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk management into the country's Ten-Year Development Plan; (2) developing and testing a new approach to climate-smart local development planning across four regions; (3) embedding over 30 Regional Technical Advisors supporting decentralized disaster risk reduction and social protection; and (4) supporting 156 highly vulnerable woredas across ten regions to design health emergency preparedness and response plans.

2. Through the **Sub-National Governance Program (SNG)** *(2019-2023, £30M)*, we work in partnership with two provincial Pakistani governments (Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) as well as local governments within each Province to strengthen public financial management and planning systems and improve delivery of devolved services. The program pilots reforms, focusing on the involvement of citizens and local officials in the needs assessment, solution design and sourcing of feedback to help evaluate services. To date, we've worked with policymakers to identify £2 billion worth of under-utilized funds – revenue which can now be used to improve health and education service delivery in some of the poorest parts of the country.

A snapshot of some of our experts...

Dwi Rahardiani
OPM Indonesia, Country Manager
Expert managing and implementing large-scale national projects and programs in the fields of climate, resilience and sustainability.

Charles Sokile
OPM Tanzania, Country Director
Expert in governance and institutions, public service delivery and research, and overseeing evidence and research policy development in Eastern Africa. Former Governance Adviser at DFID.

Prabal Vikram Singh
OPM Bangladesh, OPM India, Country Director
Expert in the design and project management of large-scale surveys and fieldwork activities, health policy program design and organisational development.

Suresh Tiwari
OPM Nepal, Country Director
Expert in public health and public financial management. Extensive experience of capacity building within government institutions and NGOs.

Olufemi Adegoke
OPM Nigeria, Country Director
Expert in designing, implementing and managing large-scale development programs to inform evidence-based decision making and policy development.

Abdur Rauf Khan
OPM Pakistan, Country Director
Expert in governance and institutions with over 28 years' experience working in development in the public and private sectors.

Caroline Thuo
OPM Kenya, Program and Operations Manager
Expert in program management and advisory across the east Africa region. Specialist expertise in stakeholder engagement; value for money analysis; risk management; budget development and monitoring; and client relationship and grant management.

About us

Oxford Policy Management enables low- and middle-income governments to bring about sustainable positive change using analytical and practical policy expertise.

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