EVALUATION OF THE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION'S DATA AND INNOVATION GRANTS PORTFOLIO IN TANZANIA

Learning Brief

ADVANCING DATA FOR DEVELOPMENT

BY DIANA HARPER AND DEO MWINGIZI

As the international development community has increasingly come to understand the role of complexity in sustainable social change, programs focused on systems have accelerated in recent years. Of particular interest are innovation initiatives, which seek to identify, pilot, and scale different approaches to solve "wicked" problems that haven't responded to previous strategies.

As such intervention approaches grow, the next challenge is how to evaluate their effects and learn and adapt accordingly. Historical approaches to evaluation in development have assumed a tightly-controlled implementation environment and a linear theory of change—neither of which are up to the task of the complexity of the real world and of innovation initiatives.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) engaged the SPACES consortium to conduct an endline evaluation of their Data Collaboratives for Local Impact (DCLI) program in Tanzania.

As part of this effort, LINC conducted primary research with a variety of local stakeholders in Tanzania. This work was completed by a team of two researchers (one American and one Tanzanian).

This brief describes the key findings from the primary research.

ABOUT SPACES

This evaluation was conducted by the Strategic Program for Analyzing Complexity and Evaluating Systems (SPACES) consortium, an initiative of the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Global Development Lab.

SPACES aims to provide a variety of integrated systems tools and methodologies to support the design, monitoring, and evaluation of development programs.

Additional details can be found in the full report.

BACKGROUND

The $21.8 million Data Collaboratives for Local Impact (DCLI) program is the result of a partnership between the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

DCLI includes a series of innovative activities to promote data use for decision-making in support of better policies and programs in areas of HIV/AIDS and health, gender equality and economic empowerment. It is implemented by MCC and funded by PEPFAR.

In Tanzania, one of two countries of investment, the DCLI program consisted of three interrelated projects:

- Tanzania Data Lab (dLab), a center of data-related activity including physical space and computing resources, training and skills-building on the analysis and use of data, planning and hosting of data-focused events.
- Data for Local Impact Innovation Challenge (DLIIC), a set of grant challenges for promoting data use across a variety of themes.
- Data Zetu, an activity to improve the capacity of subnational (district and ward) institutions to provide and make use of actionable data.

Using a systems perspective, we examined the results of the program to understand the actual and unanticipated effects of the program, as well as the pathways through which change occurred. This analysis sought to explore why certain interventions and innovations were sustained and how the project activities affected and were affected by the data ecosystem and contextual factors. Our findings also include lessons learned for future programming.

METHODOLOGY

For this activity, we adapted an outcome harvesting methodology. In this process, we collected evidence of what has changed (outcomes) in order to identify meaningful differences in the local ontext, and then worked backward to identify whether and how the project contributed to those changes. This helped to explore why certain innovations were sustained, as well as how the project activities affected and were affected by outside factors.

We used a series of outcome statements and a thematic interview guide to collect data from program implementers, partners, beneficiaries, and other key stakeholders. In total, we conducted 45 key informant interviews (KIIs) from September to November 2019. As directed by the activity's scope, the majority of the interviews were conducted virtually by phone, Skype, and WhatsApp.

Alongside these interviews, we also conducted a secondary document and data review of project reports and communications materials, academic and grey literature, and news and media sources. Data was analyzed through a simple coding worksheet according to the outcomes of interest and the main evaluation questions. To consolidate the findings, we held a series of team discussions and stakeholder validation sessions.

OUTCOME HARVESTING

"Outcome Harvesting works well when outcomes, rather than activities, are the critical focus. In addition, it is suitable for evaluating complex programming contexts."

Robert Wilson-Grau and Heather Britt H. "Outcome Harvesting." Ford Foundation. (2013)

FINDINGS

DCLI sought to positively affect the data ecosystem in Tanzania through a set of integrated projects. The program presents a set of ambitious long-term goals: to increase the frequency and effectiveness of data use for decision-making in policies and programs related to in HIV/AIDS and health, gender equity, and economic growth; and to improve the alignment between needs and budgets. In addition, the program targeted changes in decision-making processes among diverse audiences, including national and local governments, donors, NGOs, and individual citizens.

DCLI included many different interventions and innovations, many of which have been detailed through the program's reports and use stories. Through the interviews, specific themes as the components were perceived as the most far-reaching and positively-viewed efforts, as detailed in the following sections.

ADOPTING A COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING PROCESS

One of the most positively perceived aspects of the DCLI program were the community-driven dialogues (Listening Campaigns) and related community engagement activities conducted under Data Zetu. Listening Campaigns engaged citizens and local leaders to identify and prioritize the problems in their communities at the ward level. Through thoughtfully-facilitated sessions, Data Zetu created an open and safe space for discussion, without significant limitations or predetermined plans.

Priorities identified through these campaigns directed the remainder of DCLI's activities in those districts.

The campaigns were well received by both community members and leaders. The opportunity to jointly define needs and shape policy priorities was reported to increase civic engagement.

Citizens are well-versed in the problems of their communities, but may have an attitude of apathy or lack of trust and confidence in existing processes to solve these problems. The campaigned offered an opportunity to address this dynamic. Carefully facilitated sessions allowed for a discussion of issues without blame, which was one reason local leaders remained engaged in the process.

COMBINING HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING WITH MENTORING, PRACTICE, AND SUPPORT

DCLI's training was highly valued, particularly when it was complemented by mentoring, support, and opportunities to apply the learning in practice and real-world settings. DCLI capacity building efforts targeted skills directly related to working with data, such as data analysis and storytelling, as well as topics related or effective data use and promotion, such as leadership and entrepreneurship. Several data competitions were held in conjunction with trainings, which offered participants mentoring and practice with their new skills.

Capacity building participants reported increases in their skills for seeking, analyzing, and presenting data, as well as improvements in their confidence to engage with data.

## PARTNERING WITH LOCAL ACTORS TO INCREASE DATA DEMAND AND USE

A highly valued approach was how the DCLI program partnered directly with local stakeholders to identify their data needs and support solutions. This was cited as a strength throughout the DCLI program, including through specific innovation grants in DLIIC, community engagement and partnering with local organizations in Data Zetu, and institutional capacity development partnerships from dLab.

In particular, interviewees cited **service delivery** and **local resource allocation** as major areas for improved data use for decision-making as a result of DCLI. For example:

- A Community Development Officer described how ward-level data on HIV prevalence helped to target a moonlight testing program in bars, leading to increased case identification and treatment initiation.
- A District AIDS Control Coordinator described how their analysis for the first time of patients lost to follow up led to the development of facility-specific solutions.
- A District Medical Officer discussed how an analysis of low usage rates of the Community Health Fund relative to local income levels brought community members and leaders together to increase insurance enrollment.
- After gaining skills in the use of the Open Data Kit (ODK) for mobile data collection, the National Bureau for Statistics reports that they are considering the use of ODK as part of the next round of the census. This is expected to increase the quality and accuracy of the effort.
- A street leader mobilized other street leaders to collect a range of relevant local demographic and education data. As a result, they were able to obtain agreement and financing for the construction of new schools.

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KEY STATISTICS

- DCLI trained more than **2,000** people and **11** data scientists' data fellows.

- More than **2,800** organizations were involved in DCLI.

- Participants: **49%** women; more than **60%** youth.

- **5** innovation challenges:
    - 1,245 grant applications received.
    - 46 grants awarded worth more than $1.46 million.

- Communities generated **2.4 million** data points.

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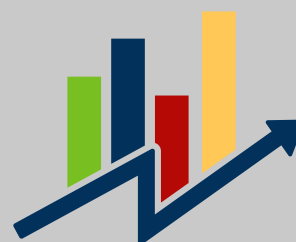
Many more specific examples have been documented in the program materials and use stories. Because our research uncovered many similar examples of improvements in data use for decision making, we consider that that the implementation approach successfully supported local stakeholders to better use data in their varied local contexts.

LESSONS LEARNED

Based on the available evidence, we believe that beyond the program implementation DCLI has begun to spur a wider set of changes in the data ecosystem. This reflects the overall success of the innovation program and the applicability of its lessons learned to the wider data and development community. We recommend that donors, governments, and civil society partners reflect on the lessons learned from the DCLI program and seek to incorporate the more successful pathways to change in their work, as appropriate.

WHEN LOCAL ACTORS LEAD CHANGE, PROGRAMS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE

1 While most development programs champion the importance of local engagement, it is much rarer to see truly flexible programs designed around locally-identified priorities. Precisely because DCLI activities were contextually appropriate and locally generated, the activities were not only well received, but also in many cases left a lasting effect.

FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE PROGRAMS LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR INNOVATION

2 As a result of an open-minded, flexible and adaptable approach to programming, promising interventions and approaches were identified as opportunities for further investment and scale up. These included community-driven dialogues to align needs, priorities, and activities; grantmaking coupled with technical assistance and mentoring for strengthening social innovation networks; and cost-effective and inclusive methods of community-based data collection, such as mapping.

INCREASING DATA USE FOR DECISION MAKING REQUIRES MORE THAN TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

3 Many efforts related to data use have focused on skills, tools, and technology. While these factors are important, it is also necessary to consider the wider development system in which data exists. This includes understanding the diverse actors in the data ecosystem, their motivations and incentives, and how they are connected (or not). It also includes understanding the factors that facilitate and reinforce data use, as well as those that create barriers.

4 STRENGTHENING DATA ECOSYSTEMS REQUIRES A LONG-TERM, SYSTEMS CHANGE MINDSET

Systems change efforts are favored for their ability to achieve long-term, sustainable results. Yet fostering systems change is slow, and despite good intentions, the pressure to deliver short-term results remains. Ecosystem investments require continued effort over time, and often do not proceed in a planned or linear fashion. These dynamics stand in opposition to traditional service delivery programming and activities such as large-scale training and outreach. We expect that continued attention to investing in data ecosystems—as well as learning from these efforts—will be important for advancing long-term outcomes in HIV, health, economic growth, and beyond.

ADVANCING A CULTURE OF DATA USE

Many interviewees believed that DCLI has contributed to a larger culture change related to data in Tanzania. DCLI is credited with being one of the voices championing data use and contributing to a positive change in the perception of data, in particular for its role in improving service delivery.

Across the DCLI program, many interviewees perceived that there has been an improvement in how they and/or their stakeholders think about data, and could cite examples of how they have used it to advance their goals in health, HIV, and other areas. Beyond these individual examples, interviewees discussed the changing perception of data in the wider context and environment. Interviewees felt that an important factor in this change was not to champion data for its own innate value, but to connect data to issues of interest in health, HIV, and gender issues.

The dLab emerged as an independent NGO and increased its visibility among local actors, including through the launch of an annual data-themed conference (Data Tamasha). On the whole, interviewees considered that the use of data analytics was more familiar, in demand, and acceptable now than in previous years, though certainly many factors, initiatives, technologies, and events beyond DCLI have contributed to this change.

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