Volume 1: Systems Approaches in Advocacy Strategies

Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) Program in Nigeria

December 2018

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Summary

This volume is the first in a series of papers about systems approaches in complex environments, which includes the use of the collective impact model to address large-scale social problems, and the application of participant-driven MEL techniques across 17 networks of civil society organizations. It is based on the experiences of Root Change and Chemonics, two development partners working on a USAID civic engagement project in Nigeria (2013-2018), as well as hundreds of Nigerian civil society organization partners. This is the first paper in the series and aims to present a brief introduction to systems approaches in advocacy settings, the SACE theory of change, and the scope of Root Change's work as technical lead on capacity building and measurement. The second volume addresses the innovative use of the advocacy strategy matrix, adapted from work by the Center for Evaluation Innovation, for collective impact and the Collective Impact Model, an approach that engages multiple players in working together to solve complex social problems. The final volume in the series highlights how the adaptation of participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning techniques (e.g., most significant change, outcome mapping, and outcome harvesting) evolved and ultimately empowered change agents.

Partners

Since 1975, [Chemonics](#) has worked in more than 150 countries to help clients, partners and beneficiaries take on the world's toughest challenges. Their global network of more than 5,000 specialists share an unwavering resolve to work better, driven by a conviction that the world must be better. Chemonics embraces project management as a discipline, not an afterthought, so their clients get maximum impact for minimum risk. They are one of the world's leading partners in international development, with a mission to promote meaningful change around the world to help people live healthier, more productive, and more independent lives.

[Root Change](#) is an internationally recognized NGO that works with civil society organizations in over 14 countries to develop and test practical methods for local systems development, systematic feedback, learning, and agile performance management to support locally driven development. Root Change designs products, technologies and interactive experiences that help people discover their own solutions and has helped over 200 local and international organizations test, pilot and launch local solutions. Root Change is the creator of Pando, an online tool with real-time mapping capability for promoting systems level change, and the pioneers behind Capacity 2.0, a growing international movement to rethink what constitutes effective development practice.

Context

In an effort to distill lessons learned and highlights from its work on a USAID-funded project in Nigeria, Root Change and Chemonics are publishing a three-part series on their experience with capacity building and measurement in democratic reform efforts. The [Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE)](#) project in Nigeria worked to build a stronger, more resilient, and more nimble civil society by strengthening the capacities of civil society actors to form common agendas, coordinate strategies, share outcome measurements, and share knowledge.

I.   Series Overview

This series of three papers focuses on systems approaches, collective impact methods and tools, and practical, right-fit measurement strategies. It demonstrates that adapting collective action models to different local and issue contexts can bring about community and individual empowerment to make a measurable difference to the success of advocacy initiatives. It argues that relational capacities within and among organizations are just as important as standard organizational capacities such as personnel management and budgeting practices. It also asserts that monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) in an adaptive framework requires methodological adaptation that rejects notions of methodological purity in favor of a commitment to credibility and actionability by program participants.

The core of the SACE project used a systems approach to relationship strengthening across and within advocacy organizations in Nigeria. Root Change and Chemonics engaged with *clusters* of organizations working on clearly defined thematic issue-areas, with a shared vision for change. These clusters were *anchored* by an organization that facilitated and managed collaboration and collective impact. This approach operated with the underlying premise no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change alone. The tools and coaching that emerged from this foundation were designed to strengthen relationships and build capacities in an effort to support cluster organizations' social change agendas.

Volume 1: *Understanding Systems Approaches in Advocacy Initiatives*

The first volume presents a brief introduction to systems approaches in advocacy settings, the SACE theory of change, and the scope of Root Change's work as technical lead on capacity building and measurement. It also situates the work of the SACE project within the larger spheres of complexity and accountability ecosystems, with an introduction to the work of Root Change on relational capacities of organizations.

Volume 2: *Using the Tools of Collective Impact and Advocacy Strategy*

The second volume addresses the innovative use of the advocacy strategy matrix for collective impact and to support the Collective Impact Model, an approach that engages multiple players in working together to solve complex social problems. It also presents the work of the SACE project through the six collective impact conditions (one added by the SACE project) with examples of cluster activities and outputs.

Volume 3: *[Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) in Complex Adaptive Environments](#)*

The final volume in the series highlights how the adaptation of participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning techniques (e.g., most significant change, outcome mapping, and outcome harvesting) evolved and ultimately empowered change agents, through innovative use of the advocacy strategy matrix.

II. Considering Systems Approaches to Advocacy

Large-scale social problems such as democracy-strengthening and governance, (or chronic poverty, cycles of violence, racial and ethnic mistrust, global trafficking, tensions over migration, environmental damage, etc.) are difficult if not impossible to address with one-dimensional interventions. These traditionally linear models set predictable outcomes, and often claim to be based on a series of actions that have "worked before" under certain conditions and are now being implemented "at scale."

Traditional models of change assume connections between inputs and impacts, with pre-determined outcomes and pre-tested solutions. These predetermined solutions work best under specific, and far from universal, conditions:[1]

- technical expertise is required.
- consequences of actions are predictable.
- material factors are known in advance.
- a central authority ensures that all necessary actions are taken by the appropriate parties.

However, complex social problems rarely respond to interventions as planned or hoped. They regularly fail to meet program
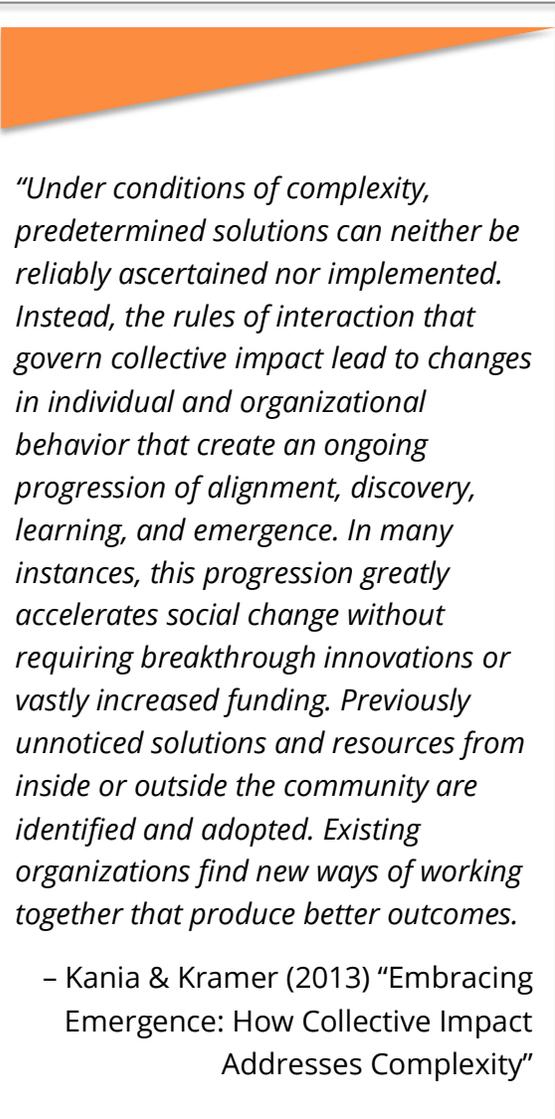
"Under conditions of complexity, predetermined solutions can neither be reliably ascertained nor implemented. Instead, the rules of interaction that govern collective impact lead to changes in individual and organizational behavior that create an ongoing progression of alignment, discovery, learning, and emergence. In many instances, this progression greatly accelerates social change without requiring breakthrough innovations or vastly increased funding. Previously unnoticed solutions and resources from inside or outside the community are identified and adopted. Existing organizations find new ways of working together that produce better outcomes.

– Kania & Kramer (2013) "Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity"

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[1] John Kania and Mark Kramer. 2013. "Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity." *Stanford Social Innovation Review.*

targets or produce unexpected outcomes far outside the scope of the program log-frame. These complex realities require approaches that recognize the non-linear nature of change, where social problems are nested within several, overlapping contexts, factors, worldviews, and relationships.

Systems approaches are characterized by the emphasis on connections among individuals and organizations. Relations among agents are continuously being established, refined, and practiced, and unregulated by any central authority. These complex systems cannot be reduced to their constituent parts, because it is *the way that agents work togethe*r that brings about change, not simply the activities in which they engage. This is a distinct departure from interventions that have historically focused on institution-building and program activities, and it leads to novel conclusions about how to facilitate empowerment and social change.

III. SACE Theory of Change

One of the most important ideas contributing to our understanding of social change is the notion that individuals and organizations are embedded in thick webs of social relations and interactions. For those working in advocacy, these webs stretch across communities, civil society, and government. Advocacy organizations build and use social capital to navigate a network of relationships within a community of peers and other demand-side stakeholders, as well as across to supply side actors. The benefits of organizational social capital flow from trust, reciprocity, information exchange, and the norms of cooperation that are embedded in these relationships.[2]

The SACE approach assumes systems change isn't determined by how well an organization works within its "four walls." Rather, organizations and social missions are embedded within, and change, entire systems. Instead of treating each organization's individual developmental ache and pain as a separate problem unrelated to fundamental systemic forces, SACE looks at organizations in relation to the larger ecosystem in which they work. Instead of choosing between supply or demand side interventions, leadership development or organizational effectiveness interventions, SACE targets whole ecosystems for change, which include clusters of partner organizations, policy-makers, CSOs, CBOs, external stakeholders, funders, and, of course, community actors whose lives are affected by an organization's activities. The resulting theory of change is a ripple effect, where changing conditions in one sphere brings about a gradually spreading series of consequences.

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[2] Shirley Sagawa and Deborah Jospin. 2009. *The Charismatic Organization: Eight Ways to Grow a Nonprofit that Builds Buzz, Delights Donors, and Energizes Employees.*

Figure 1: SACE Theory of Change and Project Results Framework
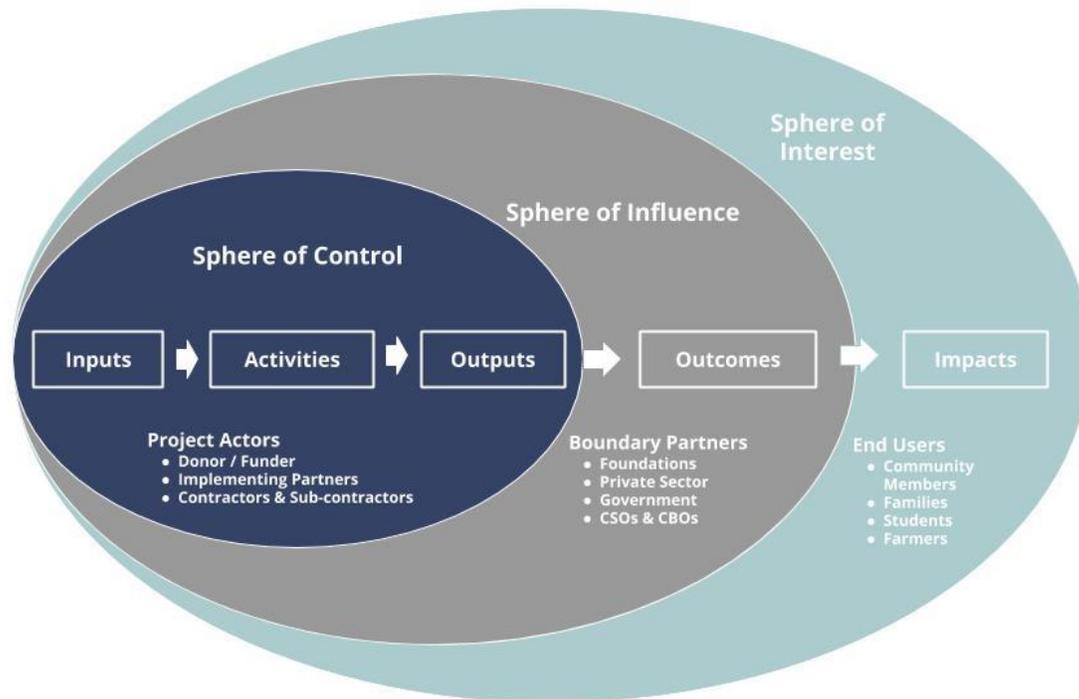
The **Sphere of Control** includes the inputs received and activities and outputs implemented by Anchors and Cluster Members. This area refers to the operational environment of the project and the direct activities and output that are within control of the cluster actor. Project outcomes, in contrast, exist in a separate domain referred to as the **Sphere of Influence**. This space represents the actions of boundary partners (or stakeholders), who are outside the direct reach of what project partners can control. Anchors and Cluster Members, however, can indirectly influence boundary partners to take an action in line with their advocacy goals through the spread of ideas, new knowledge, engagement or relationship building. The **Sphere of Interest** is the social, political, economic and environmental state in which cluster actors are ultimately seeking change. When a cluster's boundary partners are able to ultimately sustain significant changes, we consider "impacts" to have been achieved.

A.   Complexity and Emergence

Large-scale social problems are often classified as "complex" when they defy traditional approaches to social and political development programming. However, complexity is a specific field of study focusing on the behavior of systems, not just a term for the difficulty of solving sticky problems. Components of complex systems interact in multiple, unpredictable ways but follow simple, locally understood rules, resulting in a structure greater than the sum of its parts. Complex systems also regularly adapt to feedback from internal and external sources, including changing enabling environments. In socio-political settings, complexity also refers to the connections between components of a system, such as the relations between citizens and policymakers.

Complex adaptive systems are strengthened by variety within the system. In these contexts ambiguity and paradox commonly co-exist and allow for new possibilities to co-evolve with their environment. Examples include democracies, which are complex adaptive systems that derive their strength from tolerating and encouraging a variety of political perspectives. [3]

The ways in which the agents in a system connect and relate to one another is critical to the survival of the system. These connections form the basis for patterns to evolve, feedback to be disseminated, and adaptation to take place. In fact, when considering the whole of a complex system the relationships among agents are just as important to outcomes as the agents themselves. Complex adaptive systems don't strive for perfect, standardized models; rather they adopt the dynamics they need to thrive without wasting energy.[4]

Features of a complex system:
- It involves a number of elements, arranged in structure(s) which can exist on many scales (local, national, global, etc).
- These elements interact locally: every element is connected to every element in the system, even indirectly.
- Structures go through a process of change not describable by a single rule or reducible to a single level of explanation.
- Features emerge that cannot be predicted from the current description of the structure(s).

– Kaisler & Madey (2008) "Complex Adaptive Systems: Emergence and Self-Organization"

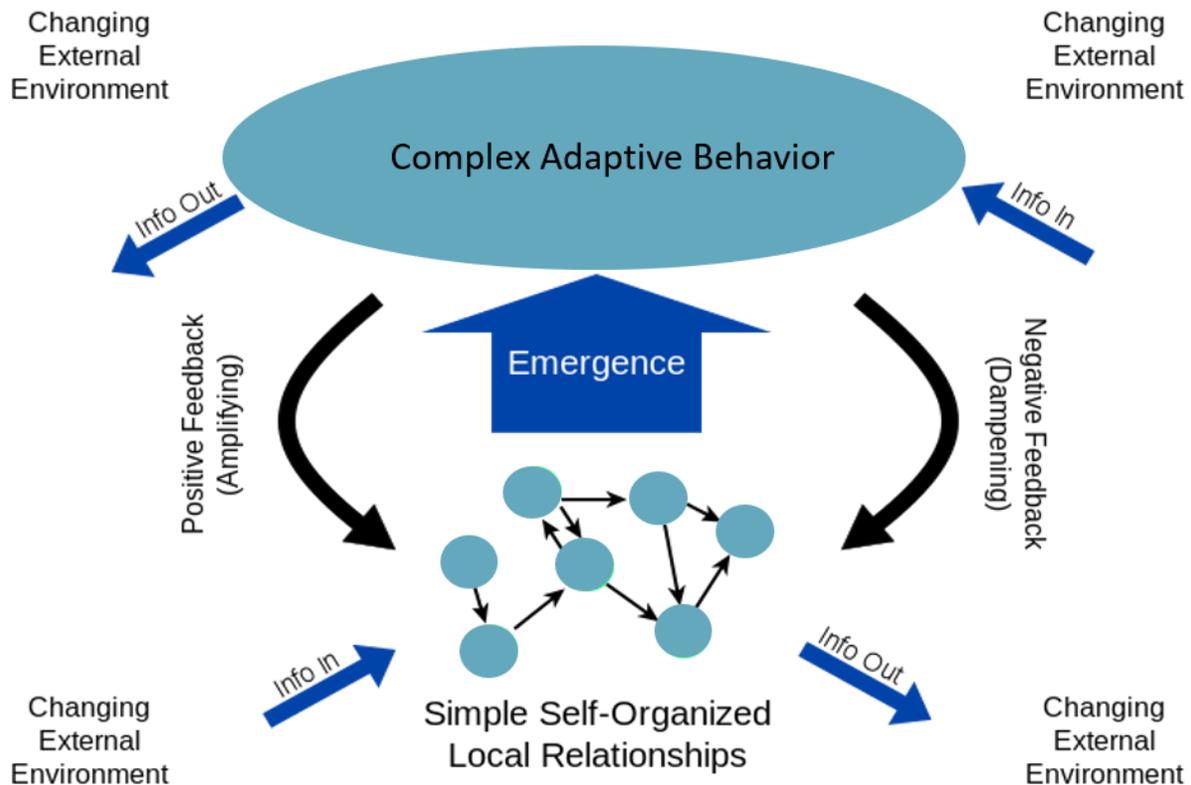[3] As described by Kaisler and Madey (2008). See their work for more detailed information on complex adaptive systems: https://www3.nd.edu/~gmadey/Activities/CAS-Briefing.pdf

[4] Stephen H. Kaisler and Gregory Madey. 2008. "Complex Adaptive Systems: Emergence and Self-Organization"; Seth Bullock. 2006. *Introduction to Complexity Science.*

In a complex adaptive system such as an advocacy setting, behavior emerges that is not easily predicted from the **component parts** of the system (e.g., institutions, and actors such as governments, local CSOs, donors, private firms, media, etc.) or various **inputs** (e.g, donor financing and technical support). As information flows through a system the different components react differently. If relationships and exchange among agents are robust enough, those reactions trigger action in the form of self-organized advocacy strategies. Information then flows back into the environment, allowing both positive and negative feedback mechanisms to contribute to the system's ongoing response.

Emergence refers to the rise of adaptive behavior that is unplanned and uncontrolled; that has come out of the interactions of agents within a system. Patterns *emerge* from the relations among agents, across systems, and are irreducible to system components. Social networks emerge online through the use of social media in ways that are unexpected and often unmanageable, such as during the 2011 Arab Spring, when protesters used online platforms to connect and communicate during information blackouts. In cities, neighborhoods of like-minded people sharing interests and concerns establish themselves organically, from the bottom up. Thus, New York gained Chinatown and Little Italy, the Garment District and the Flower District, enclaves that appeared regardless of such top-down forces as planning commissions and zoning laws.

Figure 2: Diagram of a complex adaptive system[5]

Changing External Environment

Changing External Environment

Complex Adaptive Behavior

Info Out

Info In

Positive Feedback (Amplifying)

Emergence

Negative Feedback (Dampening)

Info In

Info Out

Simple Self-Organized Local Relationships

Changing External Environment

Changing External Environment

In working with complexity, fixed structures are replaced with the process of continuous social reconstruction. Patterns and behavior emerge rather than sit in the background, and organizational emergence is driven not simply by organizational change. Creating effective rules for interaction is the main mechanism for addressing complex problems in collective impact models. These rules increase the likelihood of emergent solutions among actors with a shared agenda leading to the intended goal.[6]

> *"Emergence occurs when interactions among the diverse entities of a system disrupt, causing the system to differentiate and ultimately coalesce into something novel."*
>
> – Peggy Holman (2010) *Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity*

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[5] A way of modelling a Complex Adaptive System. A system with high adaptive capacity exerts complex adaptive behavior in a changing environment. CC BY-SA 3.0
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Complex_adaptive_system.svg#/media/File:Complex_adaptive_system.svg

[6] John Kania and Mark Kramer. 2013. "Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity." *Stanford Social Innovation Review.*
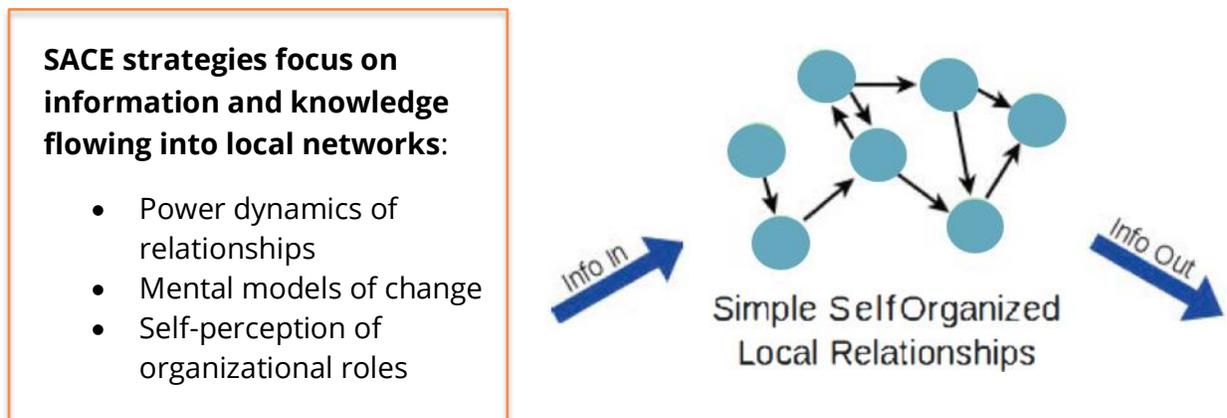
B.   Capacity 2.0: Relational Capacities in Organizations

Effective voice and accountability programs succeed best where they take account of context; where they blend demand and supply side approaches, galvanize action around issues with a common understanding of the problem and find a joint approach to solving it; and where credible, legitimate local actors drive the process. They seek better-fit, rather than best practice solutions and prioritize iterative learning and adaptive design.

Alongside this learning, we know that better internal management practices by organizations leading voice and accountability programs create only incremental, not breakthrough, social change. Past efforts to elevate the influence and impact of Nigeria's civil society targeted strengthening internal management capacity of individual organizations and coalitions. They also included small grants to organizations to promote greater openness, accountability and transparency at the federal government level. Root Change describes this managerial approach to capacity development as *Capacity 1.0*. Capacity 1.0 is a highly idealized, normative theory that well managed organizations with strong administrative systems are able to respond consistently and adequately to the everyday challenges they face. In reality, very few organizations are able to achieve and sustain this level of efficiency and accountability.

While internal systems and management practices contribute to an organization's "capacity" to function as a modern civil society organization, they do not, in and of themselves, represent capacity. How well an organization represents the communities it serves, prioritizes making connections, leverages resources to learn and share knowledge within its network, and adapts to its ever-changing environment are under-appreciated "higher order" capacities that contribute more to an organization's ability to achieve impact in its work.

Figure 3: SACE entry into complex systems

SACE strategies focus on information and knowledge flowing into local networks:

- Power dynamics of relationships
- Mental models of change
- Self-perception of organizational roles

Simple SelfOrganized Local Relationships

Info In

Info Out

Chemonics and Root Change recognized the importance of changing organizational processes and relations, e.g., "the way of doing things," as the core of their approach to working with groups of advocacy organizations. The new relationships, opportunities, and possibilities created in clusters often contribute to outcomes, but not necessarily outcomes that are anticipated by the funder or program. Changes in relational practice, i.e. how people and organizations relate to each other, can lead to new "rules of the game" that enhance change mechanisms and the institutions that they are trying to influence. SACE targeted these relationships through cluster coaching, which included adaptation of the advocacy strategy matrix, micro-surveys on constituent feedback, and an online platform to map and monitor relationships within clusters.[7]

C.   Accountability Ecosystems

Over the first two years of the program, SACE adapted strategies and interventions to fit the complex Nigerian social and political "ecosystem". This local ecosystem is comprised of hundreds of relationships, responsibilities, policies, and projects. New research and practice have reinforced just how complex and interrelated these factors are, how they shape project outcomes, and how linear accountability approaches fail to address the power dynamics that undergird accountability. Open government and social accountability cannot be reduced to the simple maxim: "transparency + participation = accountability".

Instead SACE developed a holistic and politically-informed model based on what are known as "accountability ecosystems". This model is grounded in an appreciation for the power dynamics involved in accountability relationships, both among government institutions and between government and citizens. It also recognizes that civil society can create conditions that embolden oversight institutions. By raising expectations of state performance, bringing abuses of power to light, and holding government responsible for its own promises, civil society can target and weaken opponents of accountability.[8] Civil society demands for state accountability matter most when they empower the state's own checks and balances toward the same purpose.

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[7] For more information on SACE innovations to the collective impact model, and use of data to inform relationships, see Volume 2.

[8] Jonathan Fox. 2000. Civil Society and Political Accountability: Propositions for Discussion. Paper presented at "Institutions, Accountability and Democratic Governance in Latin America." University of Notre Dame.

An accountability ecosystem approach acknowledges there are pro- and anti-accountability forces, both inside and outside the state, and that they are in continuous contest around the goals of accountability. In order to improve government accountability, civil society efforts must tap into a wide range of actors, including strategic segments of the general public, key influencers and decision makers themselves. They also need to expand their repertoire of tactics to raise knowledge and awareness about key concerns, generate commitments, and mobilize direct action.

Political Economy Analysis and Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation in SACE

Political economy analysis
- Clusters consider the range of actors and factors influencing their issue, revisiting the landscape in every cluster meeting

Problem-driven iterative analysis
- Clusters learn from each other's strategies and work collectively to learn and iterate

In the last few years, and in the face of repeated failures in transparency and accountability interventions, increasingly precise thinking about accountability ecosystems has emerged.[9] Considering that the common understanding of social accountability practice is (still) limited to citizen monitoring and feedback loops, there are concerted calls for approaches that incorporate power analysis into their strategies as a central focus, with an acknowledgment of the systemic nature of "intractable" social problems related to transparency, accountability, and civic engagement.

The SACE program approach reflects the fundamental elements of an accountability ecosystems approach:

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[9] Brendan Halloran. 2015. *Strengthening Accountability Ecosystems: A Discussion Paper*. Transparency and Accountability Initiative.

Figure 4: Operationalizing accountability ecosystems thinking (Halloran 2015) in the SACE project

Accountability ecosystems approach:

1. Analysis and mapping of accountability systems, including formal and informal actors, institutions, mechanisms and processes, and their underlying power dynamics
2. Strategies that emphasize integrated approaches, both vertically across scales and horizontally across accountability mechanisms and processes
3. Strategic use of varied and complementary tactics, such as litigation, media coverage, citizen monitoring, freedom of information requests, etc.
4. Embedding learning and adaptation in organization approaches
5. Politically-informed practice, that focuses on addressing and shifting power relations that underpin accountability.

Clusters visualized and planned within the diversity of changes and efforts taking place around their issue. Cluster members strived to understand the power dynamics of the environment that they were operating in, and how they communicated their advocacy message to difference audiences. Review sessions provided a space for cluster members to visualize those different tactics as complementary pieces of the same strategy.

Clusters used a Constituent Voice feedback methodology to check in on trust, accountability, and relationships within their clusters. Donor-led coaching sessions focusing on enhancing relational capacities eventually evolved into cluster-led review sessions that focused on outcomes and strategies as external conditions changed.

This new line of thinking argues that diverse pathways are needed to address the diversity of political forces embedded within a system. An accountability ecosystem perspective integrates a variety of seemingly heterogenous approaches to influencing accountability into a systemic approach taking into account power dynamics and relationships. The system is complex and adaptive, and composed of actors, processes, contextual factors, and the relationships between these elements, all of which constitute and influence accountability of system actors, including government, both positively and negatively.

IV. SACE Nigeria: Focus on Capacity Building and Measurement

In the Nigerian landscape organized civil society is a critical element of citizen participation, and a source of pressure on parties and leaders for better governance, improved performance, and attention to citizen's rights, entitlements, and public needs. Over the past 15 years, the civil society sector has demonstrated it has the potential to serve as an agent of change, leading action around key public policy issues including economic and political reform, social sector reform, anti-corruption, anti-trafficking, and women's empowerment.

The USAID Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) program helped civil society organizations and citizens become more involved in democratic reform processes. Encouraging citizens to participate in governance and advocate for themselves, the program equipped them to better influence institutions that serve public interests. SACE was dedicated to boosting the participation of marginalized populations — such as women, youth, and the disabled — and emphasizing the importance of their leadership and innovation. SACE project goals were to:

- Aid civil society organizations as they create initiatives that promote democracy and good governance
- Strengthen partnerships between civil society organizations and the Nigerian government to promote its transparency, accountability, and responsiveness
- Increase public awareness, discourse, and support for key democratic issues, particularly issues related to accountability and good governance
- Build partnerships between business membership organizations and civil society organizations in the Niger Delta to initiate inclusive economic reforms that lead to equitable growth
- Work with targeted Nigerian organizations to improve their ability to receive USAID funding

Although Nigerian civil society was freed of the constraints it faced under decades of military rule, many of the same roadblocks to strengthened democracy in Nigeria still remain. Entrenched political elites exclude the voices of most citizens, particularly women, the poor, and key marginalized groups from meaningful political participation. The scale and

prevalence of conflict, triggered by communal, ethnic, religious or resource issues, poses a major threat to stability in Nigeria. Bottom-up pressure from citizens and service-users remains weak. Government institutions, for their part, have tended to shy away from establishing sustainable partnerships with citizens, and in many cases lack capacity to carry out their own mandates.

A.   Engagement within Networks: Clusters and Anchors

As an alternative to the fractured landscape of civil society organization, the organizational clusters introduced by SACE provided an entry point to work on a clearly defined thematic issue-area, with a shared vision for change, and 'anchored' by a legitimate organization that facilitated and managed collaboration and collective impact. This approach operationalized the accepted reality that no single organization could create large-scale, lasting social change alone. Drawing on Collective Impact literature, the SACE model also hypothesized successful clusters are grounded by an 'anchor' organization serving as a catalyst, convener, and broker to enable cluster members to add value to the issue effectively. In order for the approach to succeed, the following conditions were considered necessary:

Table 1: Characteristic of cluster organizations and anchor organizations

Issue Cluster Members	**Cluster Anchors (Backbones)**
Cluster members demonstrate a commitment to regular learning and improvement around an issue-based technical competency in their chosen thematic area...	*Cluster Anchors (Backbone Organizations)* fully embrace a system's perspective and a multi-sectoral engagement agenda...
Active public awareness building around core public policy and advocacy issues...	Reach out to large groups of diverse actors with complementary skills and competencies...
Regular knowledge sharing and constituent voice feedback mechanisms to ensure ongoing legitimacy of Cluster Anchors...	Demonstrate willingness to co-create resource hubs within its Cluster and to broker new relationships on behalf of cluster member organizations...
...and provide other Cluster actors with critical subject matter expertise on public awareness building, capacity development, legislative processes and advocacy.	...and commit to continuous improvement of 2.0 capacities.

Cluster members were intended to represent the diversity of stakeholders impacted by a particular issue, including civil society organizations, business, media, unions, and community groups. Through intentional and regular interactions, clusters allow members to recognize the unique combination of skills, services, and influence each organization brings to the group. Clusters collaborate around problem-solving using the tools introduced by Chemonics and Root Change, which were adapted to the needs and context of the clusters.[10] Anchors with credibility, connections, and sector expertise served as the backbones loosely maintaining the cluster structure. Their responsibilities included convening the cluster, building and maintaining trust with cluster members, facilitating continuous communication, and coordinating individual roles and responsibilities when appropriate. Anchors were expected to "lead from behind," which required facilitation rather than supervision, allowing for cluster behavior and strategies to evolve naturally.

B.   A Collective Impact Approach

Collective impact refers to the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem at scale. The collective impact approach engages multiple players in working together to solve complex social problems:

- ➢ Funders and implementers understand social problems – and their solutions – arise from the interaction of many organizations within a larger system;
- ➢ Organizations actively coordinate their actions and share lessons learned;
- ➢ Progress depends on working toward the same goals and measuring the same things;
- ➢ Large-scale change depends on increasing cross-sector alignment and learning among many organizations;
- ➢ Corporate and public sectors are essential partners. [11]

Figure 5: Five collective impact conditions[12]

Common Agenda — Shared Measurement — Mutually Reinforcing Activities — Continuous Communication — Backbone Support

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[10] This included use of the advocacy strategy matrix and participatory MEL methods discussed in Volumes 2 and 3.

[11] Community Tool Box, Chapter 2, Section 5 Collective Impact, Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas https://ctb.ku.edu/en

[12] ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute. 2018. When Collective Impact Has an Impact: A cross-site study of 25 collective impact initiatives.
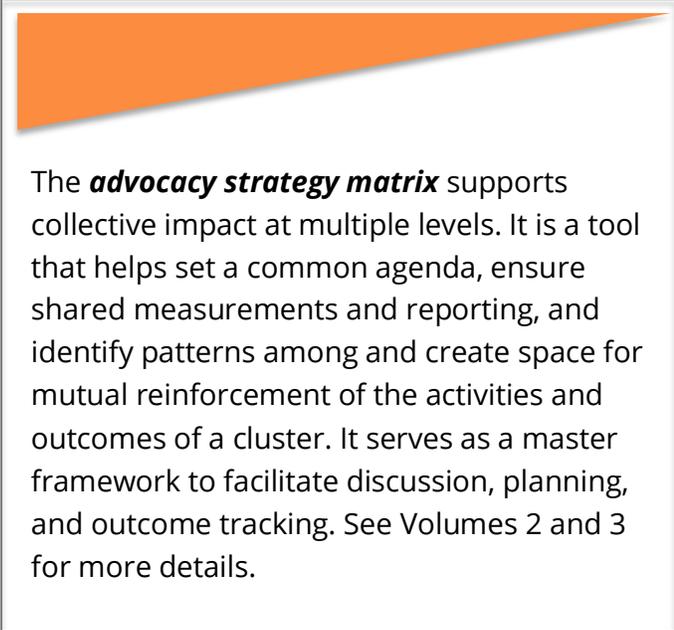
Successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together change the accepted way of working and lead to powerful results:[13]

Common Agenda. Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Organizations may have slightly different definitions of the problem and the ultimate goals, and these differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives. However, these differences can splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field. Collective impact requires that these differences be discussed and made transparent. While agreement on all issues is not necessary, all participants must agree on the overarching goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole.

Shared Measurement Systems. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Shared measurement using tools like the *advocacy strategy* matrix emphasize common learning in the initiative over strict evaluative agreements. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on the community level and across all participating organizations ensures three important organizational outcomes:[14]

The ***advocacy strategy matrix*** supports collective impact at multiple levels. It is a tool that helps set a common agenda, ensure shared measurements and reporting, and identify patterns among and create space for mutual reinforcement of the activities and outcomes of a cluster. It serves as a master framework to facilitate discussion, planning, and outcome tracking. See Volumes 2 and 3 for more details.

- all efforts remain aligned,
- participants have a means of holding each other accountable,
- participants learn from each other's successes and failures.

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[13] Kania, J. and Kramer, M. 2011. Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. For more information on innovations to the collective impact model, including the introduction of the advocacy strategy matrix, see Volume 2.

[14] For more information on the SACE approach to measurement and data see Volume 3.

"The process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to developing shared measurement systems and effective communication strategies. Collective impact initiatives may hold monthly or even biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations' CEO-level leaders. Skipping meetings or sending lower-level delegates is not acceptable. Meetings often benefit from support by external facilitators and following a structured agenda."

- Kania & Kramer (2011) "Collective Impact"

Mutually Reinforcing Activities. Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others. The power of collective action comes from the coordination of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder's efforts must contribute to an overarching plan if a cluster's combined efforts are to succeed. The multiple causes of social problems, and the distinct components of their solutions, ensure diverse organizations can focus on their area of expertise as part of a larger, multi-actor strategy.

Continuous Communication. Developing trust among organizations, private firms, media, and government entities is a monumental challenge. Participants need several years of regular exchange to build up the experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Backbone Support Organizations. Sustaining the relationships and exchange that defines collective impact requires a dedicated organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. The expectation that collaboration can

Addition of sixth condition in SACE: *Acknowledgment and Trust*

Facilitating and convening safe spaces for partners to genuinely express themselves and their feelings about their clusters and work was indispensable. These spaces created an environment where imagination and collaboration were possible, breaking down many of the disincentives and habits that keep organizations apart. See Volume 2 for more details.

occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons for failure. The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly.[15]

C.   Understanding Change in Relational Practice

Root Change and Chemonics fostered relationships between anchor organizations and cluster members through regular and intensive reflection, often supported by organizational capacity assessments and micro-surveys. Ultimately, these reflections led to a profound realization that power dynamics within the clusters were preventing effective relationship-building and needed to be addressed. Changes in relational practice, i.e., how people and organizations relate to each, can lead to new "rules of the game" to enhance change mechanisms and the institutions they are trying to influence. In this case, once power dynamics were brought to the light, communication flowed much more freely, leading to increased knowledge creation and exchange. As in all complex systems neither the challenges nor the outcomes could have been predicted, but the collection of data through rigorous survey and assessment methods, combined with a real commitment to act on data in the best interest of the project, lead to breakthroughs that strengthened the relationships within the clusters. To support cluster coordination the SACE program relied on three primary complementary datasets:

1.   STAR Index of Organizational (Relational) Changes

Root Change developed a comprehensive evaluative approach for SACE suitable to its complex programming context. The framework, called the STAR Index, involved identification of sentinel capacity indicators, systematic collection of stories of "most significant change", network analysis, effect size measurement of SACE project interventions, and Outcome Harvesting to give clusters the most comprehensive view possible of their cluster and ecosystem. In this way, the evaluation process is designed to simultaneously assess *and* improve the capacity of advocacy CSOs participating in the project. When local development actors take the lead in their own project review and engage confidently with international development actors, we expect to see progress towards more enduring, constituent-centered results. Participating organizations also develop skills to think critically about what constitutes strong evidence while they contribute to a shared SACE learning agenda.

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[15] Often backbone organizations received funding to perform these coordination tasks.

Table 2: Definitions of STAR capacity change types

Change Types	Definition
1. Adaptive Voice and Accountability Strategy and Tactics	A change in how an organization works with others to ensure all stakeholders have a shared vision, a common understanding of the advocacy issue, and a joint approach for adapting strategy and tactics to achieve priority advocacy goals.
2. Stakeholder Engagement	A change in how an organization engages with a diverse set of current and new partners through regular and open communication, trust building, recognizing member achievements, and motivating others to develop clear and complementary roles and responsibilities.
3. Monitoring and Evaluation	A change in how an organization works with others to build agreement on how success will be measured and reported, and how common indicators of success are used for both learning and improvement.
4. Member and Partner Development	A change in how an organization ensures members/partners are developing the necessary skills to lead and/or effectively participate in joint activities by finding appropriate training opportunities and connecting them with capacity development coaches and technical consultants.
5. Knowledge Exchange	A change in how an organization develops mechanisms for identifying, capturing, cataloging, validating and disseminating knowledge and expertise from partners and other outside actors to support its work.
6. Alliance Building	A change in how an organization brokers or strengthens ties between many different types of actors, both current and new, in order to expand voice and initiatives.
7. Innovation & Experimentation	A change in how an organization seeks out new ways of accomplishing voice and accountability initiatives and how they rally Cluster Members to test and share the results of these new approaches.
8. Public Awareness	A change in how an organization seeks out new ways to improve public awareness, discourse and citizen support for key democratic governance issues (such as transparency, accountability, and good governance).

Through a survey distributed annually to anchors and cluster members, SACE calculated participating organizations' net capacity change in eight key 2.0 Capacity change types. To capture capacity change, the STAR Index asked SACE partners to report their improvement in each type using the same rubrics from the program baseline assessment to the final annual report in 2018. This allowed the project to track organizational capacity improvement over time and provided a consistent reference for SACE and its partners to concretize the range of behaviors required for cluster success.

The STAR Index also took an innovative approach in evaluating the effectiveness of SACE interventions each year using an effect size calculation. For each of the capacity types, the

STAR Index asked partners to indicate which SACE interventions from the past year, chosen from a pre-populated list, were most effective in improving their capacity in that area. Using an effect size calculation to compare the relative effects of all SACE interventions, we were able to identify which SACE activities made *above average contributions* as reported by the partners themselves. This information was then used in the annual review and used to inform the next year's interventions. In this way the STAR Index was both an annual M&E survey as well as a learning tool that guided SACE's programmatic priorities.

2. Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

The techniques of most significant change, outcome mapping, and outcome harvesting aim to put change agents in central roles in projects, but they are not always expected to drive the process. In the SACE project, change agents (clusters) were prioritized as the heart of the MEL process, and once they received coaching in how to apply the MEL techniques, they institutionalized the processes in their own work without externally-imposed structures or standards. Clusters used advocacy strategy matrices as a planning and monitoring tool in cluster reviews, and clusters regularly pivoted and refined strategies based on the outcomes reported in that process. The annual learning summits also served as opportunities to discuss their progress with peers and program officers in a low-stakes environment that facilitated relationship-building and capacity-building, while also generating evidence for mid-course project corrections and summative evaluation.

These MEL processes demonstrate the outcome mapping-inspired perspective we applied throughout the SACE program. Outcome mapping (OM) is an iterative, evidence-based evaluative approach originally developed by the IDRC in 2001. A 2009 background note on OM by ODI's Harry Jones and Simon Hearn articulated the approach's four underlying principles, which closely reflect our own guiding evaluative principles:

*"**Non-linearity and contribution, not attribution and control**: In outcome mapping, processes of change are owned collectively. They are not the result of a causal chain beginning with 'inputs' and controlled by donors, but a complex web of interactions between different actors, forces and trends. To produce sustainable changes, organizations contribute to these processes of social change, rather than seeking to control specific outcomes and to claim attribution, with an understanding that acknowledgement may come later with evidence.*

***Actor-centered development and behavior change**: As people and organizations begin to drive the change process, they define the problem to be tackled, the project aims, and indicators of success in terms of changes in the behavior of the public, influencers and decision makers. Influencing change requires engaging with these actors, forming or modifying relationships, and discovering their motivations.*

Continuous learning and flexibility*: An accountability ecosystem approach emphasizes that the most effective planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) activities are cyclical, iterative and reflexive. Learning is to be fed back into adaptations to the project as it proceeds.*

Participation and accountability*: By involving stakeholders in the M&E process and emphasizing reflection on relationships and responsibilities, the accountability ecosystem approach incorporates varied perspectives and fosters 360-degree accountability, something that is often missing from frameworks oriented towards upward accountability."*[16]

Based on these principles the SACE project's MEL strategies evolved throughout the five years to both assess and improve the capacity of cluster members participating in the project. When local development actors take the lead in their own project review and engage confidently with international development actors, they make progress toward more enduring, constituent-centered results. Participating organizations also develop skills to think critically about what constitutes strong evidence and worthwhile strategy while they contribute to a shared SACE learning agenda. Changes in relational practice, i.e., how people and organizations relate to each, can lead to new "rules of the game" that enhance change mechanisms and the institutions that they are trying to influence.

Figure 6: Advocacy strategy framework, adapted by SACE into the advocacy strategy matrix[17]

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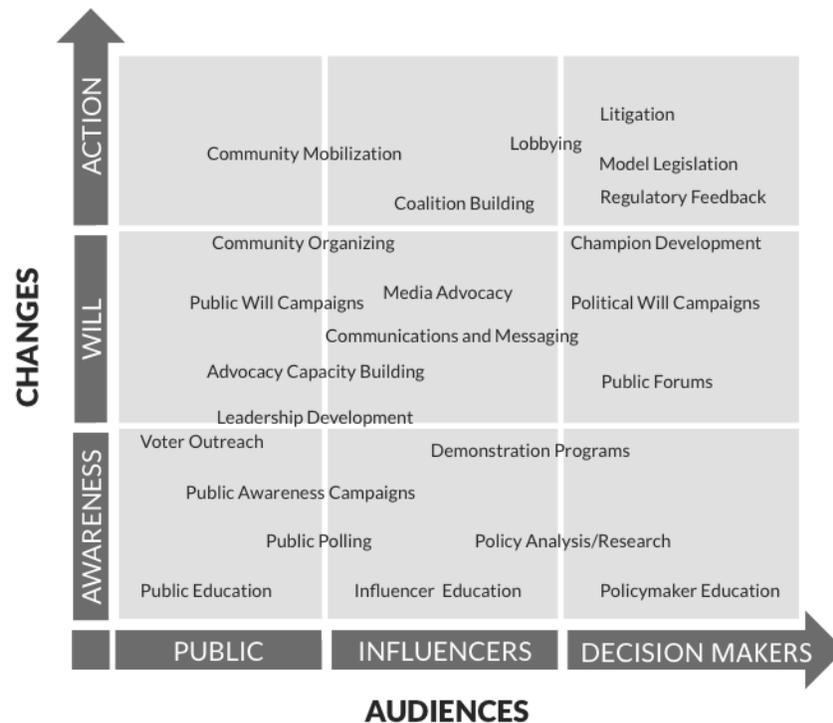
[16] Jones, H. & Hearn, S. (October 2009). Outcome Mapping: a realistic alternative for planning, monitoring and evaluation. Overseas Development Institute.

[17] Coffman, J. & Beer, T. (March 2015). The Advocacy Strategy Framework: A tool for articulating an advocacy theory of change: Center for Evaluation Innovation. See Volumes 2 and 3 for discussion of the advocacy strategy matrix and how it was used.

SACE clusters also adapted participatory MEL techniques to their specific needs – as tools to think about their combined contributions and share the diverse and disparate changes cluster members experienced. Outcome mapping and outcome harvesting allowed clusters to develop an understanding of how changes occurred in their work, how they could best communicate and negotiate the meaning of different outcomes, and how they could integrate their findings into future advocacy strategies. SACE systematized clusters' outcome harvesting-inspired thinking with the introduction of the advocacy strategy matrix to help organize the range of outcomes and activities clusters were reporting. The matrix thus served dual roles as both planning framework and outcome tracker. Stories reported on tactics and achievements were added to the advocacy strategy matrix throughout the life of collaborative initiatives. This allowed backbone organizations and cluster members to monitor on a regular basis how their initiative was progressing toward their advocacy and public awareness goals and how cluster activities overlapped and interacted for an accumulation of change.

3.   Online Platform for Social Network Data Collection

In addition to tracking cluster capacity and strategy, the SACE program also introduced an innovative tool to measure and visualize the relationships and knowledge exchange within and among clusters. Root Change's online mapping platform, initially introduced as STARNET Nigeria and relaunched as Pando in 2018, makes it easy to visualize, learn from, and engage with the systems and actors that clusters work the with and influence. SACE partners used the platform from the beginning of the program to identify diverse cluster members, assess the quality of relationships, and monitor the development of relationships that improve communication, roles, and alignment of efforts. The platform provided transparent data on network relationships and grew organically and consistently from 2014 to 2018 through an invitation process. Clusters used Pando to support more informed conversations about power dynamics and the flow of resources and information within and beyond their clusters.

This network map supported clusters in learning about their internal and external cluster network behavior and highlighted pathways to strategically partner to advance their collective advocacy goals. In 2018, after five years of SACE, the network map included roughly 1,300 organizations and 2800 relationships. The networking behavior of the 17 advocacy clusters was tracked over time by the clusters themselves and by the SACE program. Clusters and many Nigerian organizations outside of the SACE program have continued to use the network map to form meaningful partnerships, set common agendas, coordinate strategies, and hold the government accountable.

Figure 7: Tracking changes in networks over time in Pando
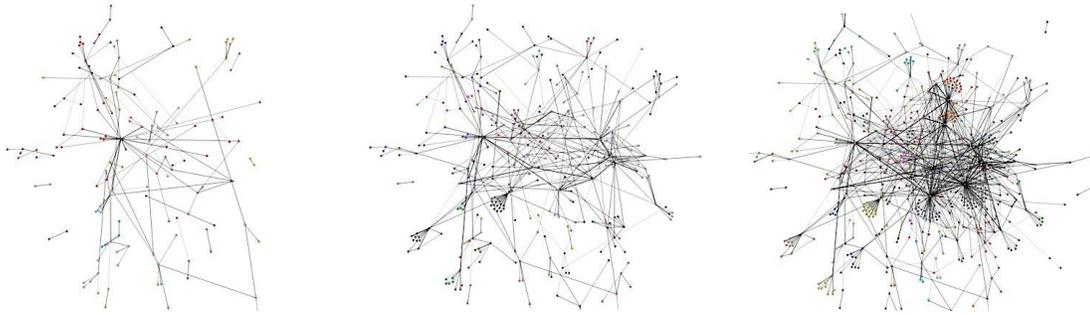
In 2018 Root Change upgraded the social network analysis technology used in SACE and launched Pando, a web-based platform that combines analysis and feedback surveys to help users visualize, learn from, and engage with the systems of relationships that support their work. Pando is integrated with Keystone Accountability's Feedback Commons, an online tool that gives map administrators the ability to collect and analyze feedback about levels of trust and relationship quality among map participants. The combined power of network maps and feedback surveys helps create a holistic understanding of the system of organizations that impact a social issue, facilitate dialogue, and track change over time as actors work together to strengthen the system.

Using the data of 1300 organizations and 2800 relationships, Root Change reported quarterly changes to clusters' networking growth and health. To capture two key networking behaviors we calculated N1, which indicated the number of cluster actors with increased network links, and N2 to track the number of cluster actors with increase clique counts. The N1 measure indicated overall relationship growth and the extent to which different clusters were prioritizing active networking as a strategic investment. At the same time, the N2 clique count metric reflected actors participating in multiple "conversations" within clusters. This clique count highlighted the density of relationships in a cluster and helped the SACE project understand the sub-cluster relationships and groups whose work constitutes part of the overall cluster strategy.

V.   Final Thoughts

The systems approach introduced in this paper, and discussed in depth in Volumes 2 and 3, is highly transferable to contexts where actors are attempting to influence through advocacy.

Crucially, SACE's participatory MEL[18] did not focus solely on summative evaluation. Rather the program's mixed methods approach provided a rich source of data for real-time analysis and interpretation for learning and adaptation. A policy tracker introduced in the middle of

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[18] See Volume 3 for discussion of the innovative approach to MEL used in the SACE project.

the project provided a glimpse of the policy change capability of the SACE systems approach: 63 policy outcomes were reported by clusters. Examples include:

- Inclusive education policy on verge of ascent in FCT (Abuja);
- Akwa Ibom State Youth Development Fund (AKYDF) Bill passed;
- Primary Healthcare Under One Roof (PHCUOR) passed in Kaduna and Katsina states

A summative after-program analysis also revealed a number of promising cluster and systems changes, including:

- Cross-cluster collaboration had increased near the end of the project. An example is the Quality of Health Services cluster working with Open Budgeting of Health Services cluster;
- Clusters adopted SACE tools and procedures across their non-SACE work, e.g., the CISLAC cluster began to use the advocacy strategy matrix in all their work;
- There was increased formation of relationships/partnerships with new and diverse actors that clusters reported they would not have otherwise thought to work with;
- There was increased involvement of non-traditional actors in legislation drafting and legislative advocacy. This included women, farmers, youth, and persons with disabilities;
- And clusters took on new leadership and influential roles in the policy community, e.g., female leaders on the Ministry of Agriculture board, CSOs on project monitoring committees for Niger Delta Institutions.

The SACE cluster model showed the potential of locally owned collaboration supported by diverse and regular data inputs and opportunities to build new relationships. A change in these starting conditions, in how organizations view themselves, their work, and the institutions they seek to influence, set in motion myriad ripple effects. From how organizations see alignment in their seemingly independent activities, to how actors visualized the potential of relationships and connections for the first time, to the ability of advocacy efforts to adapt and respond to changing conditions, the effects of the SACE cluster model have been varied and far reaching. When local advocacy leaders take on stewardship of their collective actions, they often develop in ways external implementers and funders could not have predicted or imagined. The success of diverse organizational clusters, supported by the same fundamental principles and accessible MEL tools, raises intriguing questions and important lessons for what success looks like in civil society strengthening and how, and by whom, that success is achieved.[19]

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[19] See the forthcoming SACE research report.

VI. Glossary of Terms

AKYDF	Akwa Ibom Youth Development Fund
ALS	Annual learning summit
ASM	Advocacy strategy matrix
CBO	Community-based organization
CI	Collective Impact
CENSOJ	Centre for Social Justice
CISLAC	Civil Society and Legislative Action Centre
CSO	Civil society organization
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
HERFON	Health Reform Foundation
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
JONAPWD	Joint Association for People with Disabilities
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
MSC	Most significant change
NDI	Niger Delta Institutions
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OH	Outcome harvesting
OM	Outcome mapping
PDIA	Problem-driven iterative adaptation
PEA	Political economy analysis
PHCUOR	Primary Healthcare Under One Roof
SACE	Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement Program
SSIR	Stanford Social Innovation Review
STAR	System for Transformation and Results
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WARDC	Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre