



The Local Capacity Strengthening Policy was adopted in 2022 to guide USAID in making strategic and intentional decisions about why and how to invest in the capacity of local actors based on a shared understanding of the principles for effective local capacity strengthening.



### Development Outcomes

The Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) project designers understood that to aid Nigerian civil society’s ability to influence and implement democratic reforms, it had to work with and within the local systems. Its objectives included strengthening partnerships between civil society organization (CSO) networks and government institutions, identifying key stakeholders, and supporting partner business membership organizations and CSOs to more effectively advocate for democratic reforms.



Photo: USAID/Nigeria SACE

**Key to Success:** Implementation of SACE included strengthening partnerships between CSO networks and government institutions; identifying key stakeholders to advocate for and monitor specific democratic reforms aimed at building transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of government institutions; increasing public awareness, discourse, and support for key democratic governance issues; and supporting partner business membership organizations and CSOs to more effectively advocate for inclusive economic reforms and equitable economic growth.

### Local Capacity Strengthening Principles Exemplified in the Case Study



**Start with the local system**

SACE developed an approach in which national and local CSOs along with business member organizations received multi-year grants and led collective advocacy efforts. Those organizations then developed thematic clusters based on specific objectives and offered mentorship, training, and sub-grants.



**Align capacity strengthening with local priorities**

During SACE’s extensive stakeholder dialogue process, implementers reached out to advocates from marginalized populations in Nigeria such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The inclusion of voices from traditionally underrepresented groups helped SACE create diverse coalitions around common areas of interest in order to scale up collective action efforts.



**Plan for and measure performance improvement in collaboration with local partners**

SACE developed and adapted its performance tools to the local context and made these tools available for continued refinement by local actors.



**Be mindful of and mitigate the unintended consequences of our capacity strengthening**

SACE’s designers depended on political economy analysis and stakeholder consultations because they knew success required tailored and conflict-sensitive approaches that were responsive to the incentives and power dynamics among different Nigerian actors in the local system.



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## Case Study: The Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement Project Embodied the Spirit and Principles of USAID's New Local Capacity Strengthening Policy



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### **SACE collaborated with and empowered local civil society organizations (CSOs) to lead change.**

USAID awarded Chemonics International a five-year contract in 2013 to implement the Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) project with the objective to support Nigerian civil society's ability to influence key democratic reforms. The primary goals were to strengthen the institutional, organizational, and technical capacities of civil society organizations to advance democracy and good governance initiatives.

Implementation included strengthening partnerships between CSO networks and government institutions; identifying key stakeholders to advocate for and monitor specific democratic reforms aimed at building transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of government institutions; increasing public awareness, discourse, and support for key democratic governance issues; supporting partner business membership organizations and CSOs to effectively advocate for inclusive economic reforms and equitable economic growth.

To meet these ambitious goals, program designers approached the project with a commitment to a collaborative process, which included:

- Conducting an extensive contextual analysis of the Nigerian governance landscape, key stakeholder interviews, focus-group discussions, and large-scale stakeholder dialogue sessions with more than 400 national-level and Niger Delta participants.
- Creating "Clusters" consisting of diverse sets of local actors, gathering them, and guiding sessions to develop common agendas for solving problems.
- Designating "Anchor" CSOs that coordinated the collective efforts on their Cluster's advocacy issue and provided mentorship and sub-grants to Cluster members.
- Co-creating measurement plans to assess progress toward locally-identified goals and developing technology for local actors to use to collect their own data.

SACE's approach has contributed significantly to the enhanced advocacy capacity of Nigerian partner CSOs, enabling them to work together to influence government policy development. Among the many benefits, this has strengthened public discourse and support for democratic governance reforms in Nigeria.

The SACE approach specifically demonstrates how to implement and reap success from Principles 1, 3, 4 and 6 in USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy.

## **Principle 1: Start with the local system**

The extensive analysis and engagements with hundreds of local stakeholders gave program designers critical information about the Nigerian system's context, capacities, functions, and dynamic complexity. This allowed designers to build a program that not only engendered buy-in and ownership from the very start, but also one that took into account existing obstacles. These included the strained relationships between government officials and CSOs, organizational challenges CSOs faced, and the lack of government transparency in budgeting and resource allocations.

## **Principle 3: Plan for and measure performance improvement in collaboration with local partners**

SACE developed and adapted its performance tools to the local context—the policy tracker, the advocacy strategy matrix, the outcome harvesting tool, the cluster check-in process, and network mapping and analysis—and made these tools available for continued refinement by local actors. This encouraged CSOs to leverage a real-time, online platform for partners to map institutional relationships, and visualize their positions relative to other ecosystem actors. At the same time, SACE empowered the Cluster members to provide regular feedback to Anchor organizations and share success stories and peer-to-peer knowledge.

## **Principle 4: Align capacity strengthening with local priorities**

A major thrust of the program was to work through the Cluster/Anchor Model, which allowed for more engagement from local actors to prioritize the program goals. Clusters included members of national CSOs, local CSOs, and business member organizations. SACE supported these groups with grants, training and coaching, and technical resources so that they could lead their own advocacy efforts.

## **Principle 6: Be mindful of and mitigate the unintended consequences of our capacity strengthening**

SACE's success in achieving and sustaining capacity strengthening outcomes and local systems change required tailored approaches that were sensitive to the power dynamics among different Nigerian actors. Reflections from political economy analysis and stakeholder consultation informed actions—such as helping to balance power asymmetries in local capacity strengthening programming, primarily among Nigerian government officials and CSOs—helped build partnerships based on trust and mutuality. In addition, by reaching out to advocates from marginalized populations—such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities—during SACE's extensive stakeholder dialogue, SACE listened to the voices of traditionally underrepresented groups and strengthened diverse coalitions around common areas of interest in order to scale up collective action efforts.





Photo: USAID/Nigeria SACE

## Results

Overall, SACE's approach has contributed significantly to the enhanced advocacy capacity of Nigerian partner CSOs, enabling them to work together to influence government policy development. This has strengthened public discourse and support for democratic governance reforms in Nigeria.

The Anchor/Cluster Model, in particular, was instrumental in building CSO capacity and coalition strength. This approach led to CSOs' developing more effective advocacy skills and tactics. It also fostered sustainable relationships between cluster members.

Another major success was that SACE helped to strengthen coalitions of diverse actors around common areas of interest by engaging with marginalized populations and working with CSOs to represent their interests.

Examples include:

- The Disability Rights Advocacy Center and the Access to Health for Women with Disabilities Cluster made progress toward disability mainstreaming by providing technical support and sustained advocacy pressure for the approval of Nigeria's National Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities.
- The Center for Social Justice (CENSOJ) and the Public Finance Management in Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Cluster helped secure (in collaboration with the Health Reform Foundation of Nigeria, or HERFON) one percent of the Consolidated Revenue Funds for a Basic Healthcare Provision Package in the 2018 federal budget.
- Selected regional initiatives addressed the basic educational needs of children (in Bauchi and Lagos), pressing maternal and child health challenges (Kaduna), and educational opportunities and access to accommodations for the disabled (in the Federal Capital Territory and Ibadan).
- Because of advocacy around transparency, the Delta State budget was made available online for the first time in 2016, and the Imo State government 2018 budget was published in several newspapers.

## Conclusion

SACE's approach has contributed significantly to the enhanced advocacy capacity of Nigerian partner CSOs. This has strengthened public discourse and support for democratic governance reforms in Nigeria and paved the way for skilled and committed coalitions that will continue this work going forward.

## References

- [Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement \(SACE\): Mid-Term Performance Evaluation \(2017\)](#)
- [Strengthening Advocacy And Civic Engagement Activity \(SACE\): Sustainability Evaluation Report \(2019\)](#)
- [Nigeria Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement Report \(2019\)](#)
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- [USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Development Policy \(2022\)](#)



Photo: USAID/Nigeria SACE