



Helping NGOs do more with their money

ENCISS, Christian Aid & Mango: strengthening civil society in Sierra Leone



A case study of Mango support
throughout phase III

208

organisations supported

€11m

programme size

Working alongside Christian Aid and funded by DFID and the EU, Mango's role was to build the financial capacity of over 200 NGOs and local councils over 3 years. Programme size: €11m.



Outcomes

- Grantees improved their planning and efficiency in using the money provided to achieve the intended outcomes by using activity-based budgeting.
- Careful review of proposals and budgets, due diligence and robust financial monitoring reduced the risk of fraud and misuse of funds and enabled timely closure of all grants.
- The capacity of grantees to manage their finances and become more financially sustainable was increased significantly.
- Mango's role in risk management and quality assurance of the overall ENCISS programme supported strategic allocation of the available resources to maximise value for money.

Key drivers of impact

- World-class training on financial management enabled a step-change in the capacity of a large proportion of civil society organisations in Sierra Leone. This drove strong value for money in their delivery of grant-funded activity and reduced risk. Mango's training also built greater financial sustainability and adaptability, which was critical with the onset of the Ebola crisis.
- Mango acted as a critical friend through regular visits and remote advice on risk management and quality assurance of the most critical value for money decisions, e.g. grantee selection. This led to proactive risk management and quality improvement, which contributed to the faster achievement of overall intended outcomes for ENCISS III.

About ENCISS III

ENCISS was an independent programme that operated in 3 phases, from 2004 until 2015. It sought to strengthen the relationship between society and state in Sierra Leone. It is widely recognised that the programme had a significant long-term impact, not only by stabilising the relationship between government and civil society for the 2012 elections and beyond, but also by strengthening the capacity of NGOs and civil society groups to respond effectively to the Ebola outbreak.

ENCISS aimed to equip socially excluded groups from Sierra Leone's poorest communities (especially women, young people and people living with disabilities) with the tools to become active participants in the decisions affecting their lives by:

- Making grants to organisations and bodies for developing pro-poor and transparent policies, programmes and institutions at national and district level
- Building the skills and capacity of grantees in budget monitoring, advocacy and communications
- Sharing lessons and experiences of transformational change among grantees and with a broad range of stakeholders in Sierra Leone.

When Christian Aid took on phase III of ENCISS in 2010, DFID agreed a strategic shift towards a more facilitative, national programme to promote more effective engagement by stakeholders. In addition to a grant-making function to civil society organisations, an 'enhancing impact' strand focused on encouraging direct engagement and dialogue with government and district authorities. The intended outcome of phase III

was to improve the quality of the lives of poor women, men, children and youth by enhancing their engagement with government so that resources would be distributed equitably.

The challenge & Mango's role

Mango's role was to work with ENCISS staff and partners to develop their financial management capacity so as to promote transparency and accountability and drive value for money. Mango also provided support in risk management and quality assurance, including reducing the risk of grant funding being misused or not fully accounted for.

During phase III, funding was distributed through 243 grants ranging from GBP 5k to GBP 160k. The decision by Christian Aid and DFID to distribute funding amongst a larger number of local organisations than in phases I and II presented the following challenges:

- A significant increase in the scale of grant-making, combined with an aim to reach organisations working with the most vulnerable groups and communities who had limited capacity, and who had often not received grant funding previously.
- Short timeframes, with a requirement to ensure grants were disbursed and that grantees could carry out activities that would support marginalised people to have a greater impact on the election process (including contributing to peace and stability throughout)

Mango strategic goal areas

1

Getting the basics right: essential skills

2

Managing strategy, risk and value for money

3

Working with donors

4

Working with partners

5

Building finance capacity

6

Financial management standards

Kenema

Kailahun

• Regional and local partners needed to scale up their financial management capacity so that they could manage funds well from proposal to implementation stage, and become financially sustainable beyond the life of the project

- Christian Aid needed to demonstrate value for money to donors. They therefore needed to make strategic resource allocation decisions and distribute grants accordingly to achieve the outcomes within the logical framework and demonstrate effectiveness. They also needed good financial management practices in grant making and on the part of their grantees to increase efficiency. Finally, rigorous review of proposal budgets and ongoing financial monitoring would be needed to ensure economy and reduce the risk of fraud or misuse of funds.

Approach

Mango and Christian Aid worked together to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy that would support ENCISS to select, train and support grantees to execute programme activities effectively and become financially sustainable. Mango also provided consultancy advice to Christian Aid to ensure effective risk management within ENCISS, including adapting the programme to respond to key shifts in the internal and external environment. Mango's combination of training and consultancy support included:

- Developing and supporting ENCISS staff to maintain a detailed

assessment of the financial management capacity and associated risks for each grantee, which was communicated and managed through a simple 'traffic light' report

- Delivery of financial management training for 227 participants from ENCISS and its grantees in activity-based budgeting, grant management and planning for financial sustainability
- Quality assurance of the financial assessment of grantee proposals and overall grantee selection process, including reviewing how resources were being allocated to achieve the intended outcomes within the logical framework. This was documented in reports to the independent grants committee.
- Providing advice to Christian Aid on the design and operation of appropriate risk management processes both within the ENCISS programme in Sierra Leone and at senior management level within Christian Aid in London, so that timely actions were taken to address emerging risks and adapt the programme delivery as internal and external circumstances changed.

Lessons learned

- Local follow-up support is key to sustaining positive change.
- Activity-based budgeting is effective in driving VfM and preventing fraud.
- Including training for financial sustainability increases long-term impact and enables more adaptability of civil society to deal with crises, like Ebola.
- Proactive risk management drives faster achievement of higher quality outcomes.

Key innovation: activity-based budgeting

- Drives VfM
- Links programme and financial monitoring
- Reduces risk of fraud

“ You've surely supported us to build a legacy in Sierra Leone to the extent that when I engaged a cross-section of our grantees in the East a few weeks ago they openly had this to say to me: 'ENCISS has supported us to become much more accountable in the use of donor funds, especially in ensuring project closures, in a way which is unprecedented. This is besides the financial management capabilities ENCISS has built in us that is now helping us to secure bigger donor funds.' This could not have been possible without your support and that of your organisation Mango. I remain personally appreciative of your support to ENCISS, particularly in helping us identify the possible grey areas of our grants work (financial monitoring), which we're now aggressively pursuing to mitigate further risks. On behalf of the ENCISS team, I wish to thank you, Tim and Mango, for your timely and useful support. ”

Alpha Sankoh, ENCISS Director



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/// It gave us as grants managers and the donors great confidence that Mango supported the grant partners of ENCISS at every stage. This included bespoke financial training both for budgeting proposals and also for financial reporting. The final training around budgeting for proposals was particularly popular with the grant partners as they were able to take it and use it when fund raising after ENCISS. The approach adopted of accompanying grant partners throughout in a supportive manner while focusing on robust financial management added a huge amount of value to the programme. From our perspective as contract holders it greatly helped us manage risk. Mango were part of the team, not just a sub contractor. ///

Mark Vyner, Africa Divisional Manager – Service Contracts, Christian Aid

/// During the recent Ebola period the test of CSOs' organisational and technical capabilities came into the limelight. They were able to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that they are highly trained with the relevant competencies and skills to re-organise themselves and take up the challenge to adapt to change from their normal programme activities and responding to a national health crisis. They demonstrated increased skills, knowledge, organisational capacity, financial management and capacity to cope with change. Due to the Mango training and support, implementing partners' financial management capacity has increased and they can develop project proposals, financial plans, lead project implementation, have gained access to other sources of funding and feel more confident to apply for funding. ///

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