Building Capacity for Award Readiness:

MSH's Organizational Synthesis of Capacity Assessments for Award Readiness (OSCAR)

CONTEXT

Strengthening a country's capacity to lead its own development is a cornerstone of the United States Government's foreign assistance efforts. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is a catalytic actor that supports countries on their journey to self-reliance, from being "recipients of assistance, to partners, and to donors."

To enable local engagement and elevate local leadership, USAID's approach to new partnerships centers on providing direct awards to new and underutilized organizations working to plan, resource, and manage local development through strengthened capacity. As a prerequisite to receiving direct funding assistance, USAID must assess an organization's management and systems readiness for the responsible stewardship of funds.

Management Sciences for Health (MSH) has created a new tool that synthesizes USAID's Non-US Organizations Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS) and Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tools while additionally evaluating critical sustainability factors. The Organizational Synthesis of Capacity Assessments for Award Readiness—OSCAR—tool is a comprehensive instrument designed to provide a general overview of organizational capacity and a specific read of an organization's ability to receive and absorb direct donor funding. Applied using an evidence-based, participatory process, OSCAR allows local partners to use the findings to identify areas in which they require additional support to build their capabilities.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR AWARD READINESS

OSCAR: The Organizational Synthesis of Capacity Assessments for Award Readiness (OSCAR) tool integrates both NUPAS and OCA in a user-friendly, Excel-based format, providing a specific read of an organization's ability to receive and absorb direct donor funding. It uniquely addresses sustainability capacities and builds upon a highly participatory process, allowing local partners and decision-makers to identify areas that require support.

+ SUSTAINABILITY: An additional feature the OSCAR assessment measures, unlike the NUPAS and OCA assessments, are critical sustainability factors of an organization.

NUPAS: The Non-US Organizations Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS), completed by an external audit team, determines if an organization has sufficient financial and managerial capacity to manage USAID funds.

OCA: The Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA), a self-assessment of the organization's capacity, identifies areas and actions needed to strengthen the organization's capacity before receiving funds.

The user-friendly, Excel-based tool gathers data on an organization's capacity along a broad range of performance parameters, which are organized by domains and corresponding sub-domains. The domains include:

Governance and Legal Structure

Financial Management and Internal Controls

Administration and Procurement Systems

Human Resources Systems

Program Management (OCA only)

Project Performance Management

Organizational Management and Sustainability

Sub-domains contain a series of descriptors corresponding to a qualifying stage, ranging from 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest level of qualification. The domains and sub-domains in the tool can be adapted to the organization's context; not all domains are applicable. The tool's features include automatic data visualization of OCA and NUPAS assessment results, in both aggregated and disaggregated formats, which are displayed in a series of graphs that can facilitate decision-making. Additionally, OSCAR automatically calculates three distinct factors—organizational, financial, and programmatic—that contribute to an organization's sustainability.

APPROACH
The initial application of OSCAR requires the presence of an external facilitator. This facilitator leads the various stakeholders of an organization in assessing their own institution against the standards that have been accepted as critical to overall effectiveness. Thereafter, assessments can be done by the organization on its own.

OSCAR is applied using a triangulated approach, combining a review of background documents (desk review), interviews, onsite organizational systems' review, and focus group discussions. This approach provides scores for the various capacity areas through consensus of the participants with input from the facilitator, the findings from the desk review, and onsite system review. The external facilitator works with counterparts to compile a report on all the elements of the assessment, and subsequent action plan outlining scheduled activities to advance specific sub-domains.

IMPLEMENTING OSCAR IN HAITI
The USAID-funded Health Leadership Project (HLP), a five-year project (2019-2024) managed by MSH, expands on the approach central to USAID's mission to support Haiti on its journey to self-reliance. HLP works with the Haitian Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) to ensure equitable and quality health services for all Haitians. The project partners with the MSPP and two local organizations: Group Croissance (GC), a Haitian firm specializing in health finance and budget transparency, and Centre de Formation et d'Encadrement Technique (CFET), an organization specializing in human resource management.

In 2018, MSH piloted OSCAR through HLP, engaging GC and CFET in the assessment process. The local organizations report a user-friendly experience, resulting in increased understanding of their current stage along the process.

" This tool will help us address ambiguities we had with the OCA scoring; the graphs help us immediately see our stage of development. And the tool is well organized."

With HLP and MSH's support, regular OSCAR workshops are being conducted with GC and CFET. Using the OSCAR tool, results from both NUPAS and OCA can be seen side-by-side, allowing the organizations to see what gaps were found in the assessment—including gaps in sustainability—and assist them in developing an action plan to address them. For the first two years of the project, MSH will collaborate with both organizations utilizing their OSCAR results to increase their financial and managerial capacities. By project years three and five, through regular workshops and coaching from MSH, GC and CFET will be eligible to be assessed again and become direct recipients of USAID funds.