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Strengthening the African Society for Laboratory Medicine's Measurement Efforts

Using Upfront Thinking to align ASLM's strategy and measurement



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SUMMARY

The African Society for Laboratory Medicine is a pan-African organization committed to achieving a healthier Africa by increasing access to quality laboratory services for all. Since 2011, ASLM has worked with country, regional, and global stakeholders to strengthen laboratory and diagnostic services and networks, and to ensure that country needs and priorities are reflected in the global laboratory and diagnostic agenda.

Following the launch of a new strategic plan, ASLM wanted to strengthen its measurement efforts. Databoom used <u>Upfront Thinking</u> to connect the organization's measurement to its strategy. We developed a theory of change, a logic model, and capacity building tools to create SMART indicators for logframes. Together, these components form the foundation for a strong measurement framework.

SERVICES

- Theory of Change Development
- Logic Model Development
- Measurement Capacity Building

That's where

We came in

DEVELOP A THEORY OF CHANGE

Pathways to desired impact

A Theory of Change (ToC) shows how an organization expects to achieve its desired change or impact, the possible pathways leading to change, and why these pathways lead to change. It will guide decisions about program design and set up hypotheses to test over time.

ASLM needed a robust, feasible, and compelling measurement framework aligned with its new strategic plan. We focused on the four main approaches (building blocks) featured in the new strategy. During a series of workshops with staff from across the organization, we identified how each approach contributes to the organization's vision and mission, the desired change associated with each approach, and enablers to success. These efforts resulted in a ToC that clearly shows what the organization wants to change, the values it embodies, and how it will achieve this change. We worked with a design agency to develop an infographic that showcased key elements in a visually appealing and shareable format.

"The theory of change is a very useful tool. We need to reflect and pivot so that we can ensure that we make these insights and next steps a reality."

> – Joshua Mwangi, ASLM Chief Operating Officer

CREATE A LOGIC MODEL

Measures to achieve the theory of change

A logic model presents a linear sequence of "if/then" steps that flow from inputs to activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact. It explains why a program is a good solution for the problem at hand. It's the second step in a measurement framework.

ASLM's logic model needed to capture measurement for the ToC and for each program implemented. Our solution? We prepared a 'universal' logic model template based on the ToC that depicted each level of measurement for a desired building block. Shown below, for example, are the short-term outputs associated with each intermediate outcome for one building block, "Ensure populations' access to quality diagnostics."

The 'universal' logic model included short-term outputs for each intermediate outcome under each building block. Together, these formed a comprehensive picture of how ASLM would measure progress toward its goals over time.

To stress test the logic model, we mapped an existing logframe from one of ASLM's largest projects to the model. This exercise revealed areas of congruence and some gaps. Working closely with the program team, we refined the logic model to be more responsive to the current project and refined some project indicators to better align with the 'universal' logic model. Retrofitting an existing program into the logic model was time-consuming, but ASLM can use the worked example as a reference to finalize logic models for other projects.

EXAMPLE* - Improve the efficiency of laboratory systems and networks

MEASUREMENT CAPACITY BUILDING

Resources to develop SMART indicators

Indicators are measurable information used to assess if an organization is implementing programs as intended and achieving the desired outcomes. They help decision-makers understand changes, identify trends, and prompt questions about the mechanisms of change. All indicators are not created equal. Strong indicators are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound (SMART). Organizations that use SMART indicators for monitoring, evaluation, and learning can make data-driven decisions and optimize the impact of their projects and programs.

ASLM wanted to build their organizational capacity to develop SMART indicators. We designed a training module grounded in the latest research literature that introduced core terms, concepts, and different types of indicators, each illustrated with examples from ASLM's own work. The module also included guided practice activities and a SMART indicator checklist to help evaluate and strengthen existing indicators. We held a "train the trainer" session for ASLM's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Unit and provided the module as a PDF and as a PowerPoint presentation with voiceover recording.

PRACTICE 1 - Why isn't this indicator SMART?

By the <u>first quarter of project year 1</u>, a TB focused LabCoP work stream is established, which includes <u>quarterly</u> TB ECHO sessions jointly organized with the Stop TB partnership GLI, to support <u>uptake of</u> <u>practical guidance and tools</u> for building and sustaining high-quality TB diagnostic (public and private) laboratory networks.

The Timeframe is ambiguous:

Because this indicator contains two outcomes, one output, and one activity, it also contains multiple timeframes "by the first quarter of project year 1" and "quarterly." There's no timeframe for the uptake of tools.

Here is an example of a guided practice activity. On the left is a sample indicator. The underlined text indicates where a sample indicator does not meet the "SMART" criteria. On the right is an explanation that describes how the indicator should be improved.

Impact

With a thoughtfully designed ToC, logic model, and capacity building tools to create SMART indicators, ASLM has the foundation for a strong measurement program. The collaboration strengthened ASLM's capacity to measure and evaluate its progress toward its strategic goals. Organizing the ToC and logic model around four building blocks helped ASLM staff understand how their work fit within the organization's overall mission and vision. Additional work is needed, however, to help staff transition from a "project mindset" - where they identify measures from project to project - to a "program mindset" - where they align measures to track progress against programs I and goals.

"The ToC has been very helpful," Dr. Talkmore Martua, ASLM's Acting Director of Programs. ALSM has presented the ToC to internal and external stakeholders. "We included in a brochure and other collateral, and plan to use it during a conference and meetings with donors." ASML has also promoted sections of the ToC on their social media channels. "The various deliverables produced will play a profound role in shaping the future of ASLM and in guiding conversations on our internal structures and processes. We couldn't be more appreciative."

> –Michael Maina Waweru, ASLM Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Manager and Data Analyst

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