REPORT OF THE NAIVASHA CONVENING 2024

19-21 June 2024

Naivasha, Kenya

Overview of the Convening

- From 19th – 21st June, [Busara Africa](#) convened 51 participants from 7 countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Tanzania.

- The participants were from organisations that Co-Impact is funding to design or implement systems changes initiatives.

- The objectives of the convening were:

  1. To finalize the purpose, objectives, norms and ways of working of a Community of Practice (CoP) on system changes.

  2. To get to know each other and build trust.

  3. To begin peer learning on specific topics.

- This report highlights key outcomes of some of the sessions of the Convening.

Purpose and Objectives of the CoP

Participants discussed and came to agreement on the following as the Purpose and objectives of the CoP.

Purpose:

To strengthen the **capacity** of partners to design and implement **systems change** initiatives through **peer** and **shared learning** and **collaboration**.

Objectives:

1. **Learning**: To enable collective learning and knowledge sharing on systems change.
2. **Collaborate**: To provide support and promote collaboration and networking.
3. **Improved practice**: To contribute to strengthened strategies and approaches to systems change.
4. **Knowledge generation**: To generate knowledge on systems change to share within the community and beyond.

Values of the CoP

Participants discussed and came to agreement on the following as the values of the CoP.

Collaboration

- We believe in sharing information and resources and supporting each other around our systems change work.

Respect

- We treat all members with respect, valuing the contributions and perspectives of all members.

Trust

- We believe in creating an environment that enables members to know each other and forge trusting relationships by establishing norms around expected behaviour, confidentiality and transparency

Engagement

- We actively participate in the CoP by interacting regularly, facilitating discussions on challenges, exchanging insights, and collectively learning from our diverse experiences.

Inclusion

- We value our differences in identify and perspectives and will create a community where everyone feels valued, welcomed, respected, and heard.

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Developing learning questions

The activities of CoP will be designed around the learning needs of its members. Accordingly, the purpose of this session was to elicit from the participants the issues they wanted to learn more about in the four learning areas, notably:

1. **Design Phase**: Issues relating to the Co-impact Design phase.
2. **Navigating the System**: Strategies, approaches and challenges with systems changes
3. **Collaborating with Others:** Issues relating to collaborating and working with others on systems change
4. **Organisational Strengthening**: Issues related to creating the necessary organisational capacity to implement systems change.

The slides that follow include the questions in each of these areas

Learning Area 1: Design Phase

What we want to learn

- Understanding flow of the guiding questions.
- How do you balance the design phase process while running orgs' mandate/programs?
- How do you keep sane during the design phase?
- How do you turn the idea formulated to the paper?
- Learning from Cohort 1 and 2 people.
- The time commitment required for this phase.
- How do we move from top down to co-design (and take up ownership from onset)?
- Is availability a must? How much of the effort do you redirect without undermining the quality of design phase?
- How do your partners identify their strengths within a 'new' system change approach?
- How can the process be simplified please?
- The unspoken effect in adaptation or rejection of idea.
- How to best to synthesize and prioritize the main questions.

What we want to learn

Learning Area 2: Navigating the System

- How to prioritize use of domestic resources.
- How to navigate the shrinking civil society spaces within the system.
- How to make first contact.
- How to get the full eco-system to understand that systems change is important.
- How do we become a systems champion alliance with organizations - not the government - like Tax Justice.
- How do we effectively influence government to change the structure of government budget?
- How to have a real talk with government officials in partnership.
- How do you get the system actors to own the change agenda?
- How do we balance our internal priorities and the system's priorities?
- How do we make system change tangible and behavioral changes more available?
- How to get government on board and get them to think system change.
- How do you sustain change across leadership?
- Documenting success.
- How can we use data to help us understand systems change impact?
- How do we ensure political transitions sustain systems change?
- How do you measure systems change?
- How best can we engage the Government of Kenya?
- Learning from supply side on how it works.
- How do we balance organization collaboration with system actors?

What we want to learn

Learning Area 3: Collaborating with others

- How do you identify the right partners and keep them engaged and maintain trust?
- Aligning with partners with different views/mandates.
- How do we create synergies across organizations with common goals but diverse mandates?
- How do we keep motivated to keep a complex collaboration motivated and aligned?
- How do we move from rhetoric to reality when it comes to collaboration?
- How do we get funders to have a consistent commitment to collaborate to make systemic change and not just look at deliverables?
- How can power and resources be distributed equitably amongst partners in the collaboration?
- How to manage conflict and misalignment in collaboration.
- How do we map primary stakeholders to system change?
- How do we deconstruct top-down thinking and attachments to institutional program agendas?
- How do we harmonize our objectives as organizations?
- Challenges the organizations face when collaboration seems to be failing.
- How can we use unique competencies to promote collaboration and create harmony?
- How do we navigate the legal framework of different countries/states?
- Where do we get power, how to be the convenor?
- How do we get buy-in to system change?
- Willingness/Openness to collaborate and work with you on systems change.

What we want to learn

Learning Area 4: Organisational Strenthening

- Attracting and retaining skilled talent for system change
- How do we support the leadership to effectively lead systems change?
- How to build on what is working in organizational capacity?
- How to build system change to that effect. How do we strengthen capacity?
- Strategy and tactics on how to raise resources for systems change
- How to align our day-to-day operations (programming) to scale for systems change?
- MEL for system change and telling the story.
- Peer learning based on the existing organizational strengths
- How to navigate the challenge of the additional donors who do not buy into systems change approach?
- How do you effectively do organizational change management to align with systems change?
- How to get staff internalized and buy into systems change and how do we get them to change?
- How do we build the right organisation structure for a system change organisation?
- How do we get the entire organization to buy into systems change?
- Access to resources
- How do we structure, manage, and lead a highly dispersed and matrixed organization for cost-effective delivery?
- Can the CoP integrate organizational development to support a new growth culture?

Catalysing Systems Change to Achieve Impact at Scale: Case Study from Ilifa Labantwana and SmartStart

Panel discussion with Zaheera Mohammed, CEO of Ilifa Labantwana and Grace Matlhape, CEO of SmartStart Social Enterprise

Key Takeaways

- We need a mindset change to do systems change. One needs to position themselves as thinking partners with government; not experts coming to impose on them.
- To have a strong coalition:
  - ✓ demonstrate respect for everyone;
  - ✓ work to ensure alignment of mission,
  - ✓ manage egos.
  - ✓ Build high levels of trust
  - ✓ Separate the issues from the people,
  - ✓ leaders keeping their focus on the big picture
- To work effectively with government:
  - ✓ Appreciate the constraints that government has and give them the benefit of the doubt.
  - ✓ Don't go in with solutions, first seek to listen and together with government identify the solutions.
- Systems change takes a long time; keep the vision in focus so you don't get lost along the way.
- Systems change is a journey of humility, et go of the need to show attribution of your work.

Catalysing Systems Change to Achieve Impact at Scale

Unlocking Systems Change:
Practical Strategies for Collaborating with Government

Interview with Sara Ruto, Program Office, Echidna Giving

Key Takeaways

- When working with government there is need for conscious planning and executing.

- It is critical to understand the power dynamics within government and partners when doing systems change.

- Build on existing or past initiatives with government with humility and recognise that others may have done same work before you.

- Leverage the power you as CSOs when working with government.

- Acknowledge that not everything can be sustained. Sometimes those things may be cyclical.

- Partnerships and networks must be intentionally developed.

- Partners must develop and secure themselves at different levels of systems change to help manage transitions.

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Learning circles

Learning circles are the spaces for peer learning in the CoP. In Naivasha, there were two rounds of concurrent Learning circles each around the four learning areas. The highlights of these sessions are covered in the next couple of slides. The detailed notes will be captured and uploaded in the CoP Website.

Round 1 Learning Circles

Learning Area 1: Design Phase
Topic: Leading transformation from thinking to paper

Discussion Questions:

- What are the strategies you have used to get your ideas from your head to paper?

- Who have you brought in to help you think outside of the box or to think more strategically about the system?

- What could Co-impact have done differently to get these ideas on paper?

Highlights:

- Set a working group with diverse group of people from the Board, staff and anyone who will be needed to support the writing process.

- Seek the guidance of a coach to help.

- Have more time at the writing workshop like up to 2 days.

- Have a co-creation process when writing and prioritising the problem.

- Talk to as many actors as possible in the system.

The Balancing Act: Ensuring Accountability within close Government Collaborations

Discussion Questions:

- What are different ways we as civil society have held government to account?

- What are the potential challenges in continuing to hold government to account in this way when we start to collaborate with government? What are risks?

- What are some of the strategies we have used to get around this?

Highlights:

Strategies used for engaging governments:

1. Use data as a tool to hold government accountable
2. Sign MOUs with governments
3. Organise protests and use the right of assembly.

Challenges in holding government accountable:

1. Getting caught in the cross-fire of politics
2. Calling government out while working with them
3. Being labeled as being a supporter of one government and not the other.

Strategies to get around this:

1. Build a relationship of trust with government
2. Do not create the impression that you know better than the government officials.
3. Identify the appropriate path ways to meaningfully influence the government

Learning Area 3: Collaborating with Others
Navigating dynamics of competition and power within CSO coalitions

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Discussion Questions:

- What is your reality and experience?

- What strategies have you used to diminish the negative impact of competition and power?

- What strategies have you used to build trusting relationships even when you are not totally aligned on values or politics?

Highlights:

Challenges:

1. Turf war among CSOs

2. Lack of trust

3. Conflicting prioritises and needs.

Strategies to diminish impact:

1. Create clear guidelines on how you will operate together.

2. Have effective leadership of the coalition.

3. Create systems to sustain the coalition not individuals

4. Have a vision bigger than one organisation.

Learning Area 4: Organisational Strengthening
Creating an Organisational LME Fit for Systems Change Work

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Discussion Questions

- What needs to change in the way we do LME as we embark on systems change?

- How can we assess the impact of interventions and attribute outcomes to specific actions given that systems are dynamic and multifaceted, with numerous interdependencies and feedback loops?

- Many of our LME frameworks are designed for short finite periods, how can we capture and evaluate progress given that systems change often unfolds over extended periods of time?

Highlights

1. Demystify MEL so all staff can understand and appreciate it.

2. Consistently build on your capacity on MEL

3. Design milestones so that is it is possible to measure progress.

4. Build trust with key stakeholders from the start to instill confidence in the data produced by MEL.

5. Build MEL with government to enable them build confidence in the MEL system.

Round 2 Learning Circles

Learning Area 1: Design Phase
Rethinking the Design Phase: Practical tips for Cultivating Space for Reflective Thought and Deep Deliberation

Discussion Questions:

- How would describe your experience during the design phase? Are you finding time for reflective thought and deep deliberation?

- What would you need to do differently to feel you have the space and time to reflect deeply?

- What would Co-impact need to do differently?

Highlights:

Experience on the design process:

1. Initially went about this as a usual proposal writing process.

2. Humbling process

3. Dedicating more time to the process more. No time to reflect

What would you need to do differently:

1. Bringing in more experienced people to share knowledge and experience.

2. Understanding the role of the organisation in facilitating the change.

3. Ensure to seek help when you see the need.

What could Co-Impact do differently?

1. Better explanation on how to respond to the questions.

2. The tension between what is for co-impact and what is for the organisation.

Learning Area 2: Navigating the System
Shifting Vested Interests in the System: What works and What doesn't work - Experience sharing from Harambee.

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Discussion Questions:

- Sharmi shared the Harambee systems change journey, the challenges, how they overcame them, what they have discovered works and what doesn't work and the lessons they have learned.

- Questions and discussions from the group, determining what lessons they can take away for their own initiatives.

Highlights:

- Building relationships with government takes time and can be exhausting

- Be seen as a useful resource and not a competition.

- Have diversity in your partnerships e.g. work with different political parties so you do not look like a friend of one.

- Elevate your conversations beyond the current government.

- Be sure to have a sustainability plan with government beyond NGO programming.

- Use data as a tool for your engagement with government.

Learning Area 3: Collaborating with Others
Fostering Sustainable Relationships

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Discussion Questions:

- What are the different types of CSO collaborations?
- What are best practices in forming and ending?
- What are good practices in collaborating with Government

Highlights

·***Types of CSO collaborations***: Coalition, Consortium, Network/Alliance: Members and Partnerships

·***Best practices for CSO collaborations***:
- ✓ <u>Before forming</u>: · Clarify purpose and expectations · Map and align with appropriate CSOs · Understand your organization's strengths and weaknesses · Ensure strategic alignment with regular work · Decide on leadership and secretariat structure
- ✓ <u>During collaboration</u>: · Maintain regular communication · Stay focused on the purpose · Monitor progress · Have conflict resolution mechanisms · Promote transparency and co-creation
- ✓ <u>Ending the collaboration</u>: · Conduct a final review meeting · Host close-out and dissemination events · Develop a technical report on achievements, learnings, and challenges

·***Best practices for collaborating with the government***:
- ✓ Approach with humility, empathy, and straightforwardness
- ✓ Maintain a clear identity and mission separate from government politics

Learning Area 4: Organisational Strengthening
Building Comprehensive Skills and Competencies Across the Organization for Effective Systems Change.

Discussion Questions

- What range skills do we need within our organisations for effective systems change work?

- What are some of the challenges you face in ensuring your team has these skills?

- What strategies have you used to address these challenges?

Highlights

- Effective internal communication mechanisms to ensure all staff are well inducted in the systems change process.

- Sometimes there are challenges; having resistance in the organization.

- Have negotiation skills to sustain the relationships.

- Have orientation and onboarding for new staff and include the relationships and partnerships you have so they know.

- Recruit competent staff and incentive mechanisms,

Mastering the Art of Building Winning Coalitions – What you need to know

Interview with Rakesh Rajani, President Just Systems

Key Takeaways

- Reflecting on the Gen Z's protests happening in Kenya, Rakesh stated: It is sometimes necessary to shake the system before you change it. Systems don't work for the poor but when you shake it remember to have an alternative. *"Governing is not the same as protesting."*
- We should see the human side of government officials when dealing with them and be empathetic towards them; avoid "othering" government. *Relational accountability* is key.
- Kindness and humility matters when doing systems change work; pay attention to your "fundmentalisms" they will weaken you.
- Learn how organizing works, it is not the same as mobilizing.
- To form quality coalitions, look for people your are not used to working with; avoid echo chambers and learn to work across difference to achieve a common purpose.
- Avoid the blame game and pointing out what has gone wrong; focus on making proposals of solutions to the challenges.
- Take into account the role of politics and how it affects the systems change work; one cannot escape the politics.

Next Quarter: Learning Circles

	Learning Area	Learning Circles

1.	Design Phase	• Monthly Office Hours –
		  ✓ July
		  ✓ August
		  ✓ September

2.	Navigating the System	• **July**: Sustaining System Change Amid Political Transitions: Strategies and Insights" **(Proposed lead- Caroline)** • **September**: "Adapting Systems Change Language and Approaches for Diverse Stakeholders: Best Practices and Strategies? **(Proposed lead-Yinka)**
3.	Collaborating with Others	• **August**: "Aligning on System Change: Navigating Diverse Values and Interests Among Partners"-**(Proposed lead- ARMS)**
4.	Organisational Strengthening	• **July**: Building the Right Organizational Structure and Culture for Systems Change: Strategies for Success **(Proposed lead-?)** • **September**: Attracting New Funders for Systems Change: Securing the Right Type of Funding **(Proposed lead- Nicola)**
5.	Organisational Leaders	• **July -** Virtual convening **– (Lead John Mugo)**

Next Quarter: Other Activities

- **Website completion and member registration:**
  - ✓Early July.

- **Knowledge production**
  - ✓Videos
  - ✓Articles
  - ✓Tools

In Conclusion

- The Busara Africa team is proud to note that the convening achieved its stated objectives, namely:
  1. The purpose, objectives and norms were revised and established
  2. Participants got the opportunity to interact with each other and created new relationships while old ones were re-energised
  3. Participants learned from one another while also sharing their own experiences for community learning.
- Feedback from the evaluation survey was also very positive with 90% rating the convening overall as "Excellent."
- We thank Co-impact for their support and all the partners for their active engagement.
- We couldn't have done it without you.
- **The Busara team is excited to join you all on this learning journey**