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Small Businesses Right-Sized To Achieve Big Social Change

Role of Data, Digital Solutions to Drive Global Transformations and Save Lives

We hear the hype. Entrepreneurial success and innovation today require businesses to master the science of big data and technology. But how can social enterprises, especially small social enterprises, realize data's potential to leverage social change amid the everyday technical and organizational challenges they often face?

Small social enterprises can lack the skills, awareness, and investment capital to turn technology and data opportunities into social advantages. Technology for the sake of technology – even data-based technology – can be a waste of precious resources if not used strategically. Unfortunately, too often small enterprises lack the right-sized examples and roles models they need to help sort through the jargon, hyperbole, and sometimes unwieldy tools and systems, and find their way to workable solutions that achieve results.

At Panagora, a woman-owned small business that works to solve global health and other development problems, we've found that overcoming these challenges

can be surprisingly simple. For example, by leveraging free online tools like Google applications, we can build accessible data repositories and sharing platforms that help people use data to make evidence-based decisions and innovate. This allows us to do things like improve health outcomes in some of the world's most hard-to-reach places.

Instead of being daunted by perceived limitations, we've learned to harness our strength as a small business and do what we do best – bring different perspectives, voices, and resources together – for exciting and innovative results. We've learned that when it comes to creating social value and leveraging change for the world's most vulnerable people, it is the intersection of government, private, and social/local sectors that holds the most promise.

4 Pillars to Data-Driven Results

Data- and technology-based solutions are key components in Panagora's development activities. As a small

business, primarily supporting the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), we have more than 100 full time staff on the ground working in over 15 countries to leverage data and technology to deliver development results and continuously improve our own systems and processes.

Nowhere is this more critical than in our support of the USAID Global Health Supply Chain-Procurement and Supply Management (GHSC-PSM) activity, which delivers life-saving health commodities around the world. Among other support services for this activity, Panagora harnesses the power of data so key stakeholders and decision makers can increase efficiencies and cost savings for contraceptives and other reproductive health supplies, thereby reaching even more people with critical health care.

At Panagora, our pillars for navigating when and how to apply data and technology to our development activities are captured in the way we provide support to USAID's Contraceptive Procurement Planning and Monitoring

(PPMR) database and report. The PPMR activity, initially launched in 2007 and integrated into GHSC-PSM in 2016 (where Panagora is a subcontractor), is an example of how increases in data visibility and the understanding of how that data relate to contextual realities can foster transformative social change, especially when end-users – in this case government officials and clinic procurement staff – are involved in its design, analysis, and communications. In this way, data and technology also have the power to alter the perceptions and understanding of marginalized and vulnerable populations.

1 Involve users in the design and continuous adaptation of data and digital solutions

Whether it's designing data delivery and analysis, data surveys and instruments or other data and technology platforms, involving end users at the outset is crucial. Not only do users and other stakeholders directly know the problems you're trying to solve, they also know how and why people will use – or not use – your product or service.

Since its inception, **the PPMR data tool, which is designed to improve a consistent supply of reproductive health commodities where they are needed most, has improved contraceptive access for more than 1 billion people worldwide.** The data tool, which provides monthly reports on contraceptive commodity stock status and expected demand to ministries of health and other entities that purchase health supplies, has achieved this success because of its high-touch, direct interactions with the people who work within the ministries, pharmacies, and other supply chain entities. Over time, these interactions have led to continued data collection and reporting improvements and refinements as well as increased use of the tool itself – 38 countries now regularly report data – as well as reduced reporting times and improvements in data accuracy.

2 Move beyond data collection and analysis to application and meaning

Data alone is meaningless. It's the purpose behind the numbers and how that information will be used that drives transformative change, especially in social endeavors. In addition to creating greater visibility into the adequacy of countries' contraceptive supplies, PPMR was designed to increase collaboration and communication between countries and donors to avoid stockouts and related

health crises. By integrating appropriate communication products, discussion points, and data reviews among key stakeholders, countries have been able to work together, with the resulting critically important social benefit that people's access to contraceptives when they need them is substantially increased. This puts people – women and men – in charge of their sexual and reproductive health.

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Michelle DeClerck, CMP, President
2018 Enterprising Women of the Year Recipient

by Betsy Bassan

3 Communicate data results and findings to users for local action

Similar to involving users in the initial design of a data or technology endeavor, it's important to also ensure that they receive any data results and findings so they can validate them and, as needed, take action. In the PPMR example, the monthly reports are communicated to the end users, the women and men who order and otherwise ensure adequate contraceptive supplies. Because the PPMR data cut across multiple perspectives – local supplies, regional supplies, national supplies – these users have access to the information they need for their specific responsibilities as well as broader contextual realities. As a result, participating countries are better targeting resources and reducing waste from overstocks and expiries. Within countries, reproductive

health advocates also have been able to advocate for increased government funding of contraceptive commodities.

4 Communicate data results and findings to key decision makers for global action

More than 65 global and national programs now use PPMR data and analyses to help ensure citizen access to contraceptives. PPMR is putting into the hands of people who are making key decisions – especially about funding or strategic targets like health outcomes – the data they need to catalyze transformative change. PPMR has enabled this change at country levels, where national leaders gain insights on the health needs of target populations and are able to redirect funds and policy accordingly.

Globally, PPMR is also helping donors like USAID, the Global Fund,

and UNFPA to better coordinate their efforts to strengthen both the global contraceptive supply chain as well as the capacity of national, regional, and local health systems to manage and strategically leverage their supply chains.

At Panagora, we prize harnessing data and technology in pragmatic ways that better people's lives and make our world a better place for good – doing good and making it stick. ☺



BETSY BASSAN leads her company, Panagora Group, and is a member of the Enterprising Women Advisory Board. She is a 2020 recipient of the Enterprising Women

of the Year Award. Learn more at www.panagoragroup.net.



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