

Organizational Assessment & Program Evaluation of



Executive Summary

April 28, 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This organizational assessment and program evaluation report of PHASE Nepal has been prepared by an independent external assessment team.

On behalf of the assessment team, I would like to thank PHASE Nepal for providing us an opportunity to conduct this organizational assessment and program evaluation. Also, we offer our sincere thanks to all who provided their valuable input, suggestions and timely feedback during this task.

I would also like to also express our gratitude to the executive members, leadership staff, central level and field level staff and Dr. Gerda Pohl, Trustee (PHASE Worldwide). Similarly, respondents from the PHASE program districts who took part in the program evaluation. Input and suggestions from all the stakeholders were highly appreciated. The field level staff from the project districts deserve our special thanks for their availability, support and excellent coordination during the field visits. Finally, I would also like to especially thank my other two team members, Bibhuti Bista and Anamika Oli, who did the vast majority of the work. Their dedication and continuous efforts to complete this task was critical to this final report.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Knoble
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Team members

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Introduction

Practical Help Achieving Self-Empowerment – PHASE Nepal is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that was established in 2006. Its main objective is to reduce poverty and its effects by focusing on three key areas: health, education and income generation. The focus is in areas where there is minimal government presence. PHASE Nepal is currently working in 17 Village Development Committees (VDCs) in five districts. Being in its ninth year, the leadership identified a need to conduct an independent organizational and program assessment in order to better assist them in developing strategies to be more effective and efficient in meeting their mission and vision.

The overall objective of the organizational assessment and program evaluation was to identify the health of the organization and to make recommendations for improvement, assess the effectiveness of programs and projects and measure the stated goals vs. the outcomes at the community level.

Methodology

PHASE Nepal requested Stephen Knoble of the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) to function as the lead evaluator/team leader. The evaluation team included Mr. Bibhuti Bista as the Research Officer and Ms. Anamika Oli as the Research Assistant. The evaluation took place during the months of February and March 2014.

The assessment methodology utilized participatory, broad-based methods. Data collection tools included document review, interviews or focus group discussions with leadership, staff, the target community and other stakeholders. Data collection was conducted at the PHASE office in Kathmandu and the project areas in Sindhupalchowk and Gorkha districts. An attempt to visit the project sites in Humla had to be cut short due to travel difficulties, but some information was also collected during the trip. Both qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires were utilized. This was done as a cross-check of findings to support the validity of the tools. Analysis was focused on two areas: the organizational assessment and program evaluation.

Organizational Assessment

Mission, Vision and Values

The mission, vision and values of PHASE Nepal are embraced within the organization both by leadership and staff. Although the target community is not aware of the stated mission of PHASE Nepal, their perception of the organization and its activities support these stated goals. The current choice of projects and project areas are also consistent with the mission and vision of the organization.

One of PHASE Nepal's stated goals is for communities to have a sustainable livelihood. The term, "sustainable" can have different meanings. Yet, one definition is that a program over time should become less dependent on outside intervention and more dependent on local resources. Because PHASE works by design in some of the most remote and least economically developed areas of the country, the projects as currently implemented have little chance of success at being locally resourced and sustainable.

Recommendations include a board level review of the goal of "sustainability" in terms of stated project outcomes. It is acceptable to implement a project without the goal of sustainability based on mere humanitarian concerns of the target community; however, a change in the stated objectives needs to be made.

Governance and Leadership

The board is active and engaged in the activities of PHASE. They were well aware of the organization's mission, vision and values. There are regular formal meetings as well as informal meetings when the need arises.

The executive leadership is also strong. There seems to be good communication between the executive team and the board. Despite the executive director's being away temporarily due to study leave, the leadership function has been carried out without any difficulty by mid-level managers. There was a strategic plan drafted in 2011, however, it has not been officially adopted by the leadership of the organization. There is a work plan that is based on activities related to the annual budget.

A recommendation is that the board and leadership develop a comprehensive strategic plan. This is in contrast to the budget/work plan that currently exists. The strategic plan would guide PHASE in an organizational development process for the next five to ten years. It should address where PHASE wants to be in the future and mapping a way to get there. This document can help in this by addressing some of the key issues raised in this assessment.

Human Resources

One of the strongest aspects of PHASE Nepal is its human resources. From the top down, there is good staff morale and a feeling that they are working together as a family and a team. Due to the remote location of some of the project sites, it is a challenge to ensure

that good communication occurs. Yet, it seems that it is being done internally as an organization and no major problems were identified.

A challenge that PHASE faces is the retention of field staff. Some of this is natural due to the type of people hired and PHASE is seen as a strong link in building a successful career path. Between marriages and application to government service, most staff do not stay more than a couple of years. PHASE must continually be planning for supplying the necessary human resources to staff their field projects. Fortunately, PHASE is seen as a good employer and there have been adequate applications for the jobs that need to be filled.

A good tool utilized for this challenge has been the “floating” staff who are able to fill in whenever and wherever the need might be. This indicates good understanding and planning ahead by the management team. Although being done, a formal program for developing PHASE’s mid-level management staff should be undertaken as supervisory and management staff are much harder to find and retain.

Recommendations include a more robust program of identifying staff with management potential and developing them to take on more responsibility in the future. Lower level staff should recognize this as a career ladder within PHASE and it may improve retention. This principle applies all the way up to taking steps now to develop a future executive director when the time comes for leadership transition.

Management Functions and Process

Overall, the management functions and processes of PHASE are strong. As the majority of the staff and projects are in very remote areas, the management team has done an exceptional job at ensuring an effective and functional system. The practice of regular communication, team meetings both at the Kathmandu office and at field program sites is good. Good communication is a foundational component of a well-functioning organization.

An area of identified weakness is in the monitoring and evaluation of programs. Although it does seem to be done, there is not a real system in place that allows leadership to put all the pieces together in order to make some informed decisions regarding actions to improve effectiveness.

Another area of challenge is in the communication with local government officials. This issue is perceived by the local officials who believe they were not consulted enough in terms of project implementation. Whether this is truly a weakness or is due to other local politics and agendas cannot be determined. Better communication may improve the goal of GoN’s increased involvement in the future and improved prospects of sustainability.

Associated with weak communication with the government, PHASE has not made it a priority to promote what it does both within Nepal and in the international development community. PHASE is doing important work which should be showcased. Benefits would be recognition, but also more influence within the government when it comes to influencing policy on rural health care issues.

Recommendations include developing a more robust M&E system of reporting. This should include a standard matrix of indicators for evaluation as well as a feedback system that would allow any follow-up visits to access previous evaluations so as to provide continuity of intervention.

PHASE should also develop a plan to promote what it does both here and internationally. The newsletter is a good start. Publishing research regarding the experience with project implantation would also be recommended.

Financial Strength

PHASE has been judicious in the use of their funds and has shown themselves to be wise stewards of the resources entrusted to them by the donors. Most of their resources are actually used at the project level; they have kept the percentage of administrative costs to a minimum and exceed the industry standard in this area.

The infrastructure and supporting technology has up to this point been adequate to meet their needs. This may not be the case in the future, and some planning for an upgrading of the central office may be in order.

The reporting and accounting system is solid and reflects integrity in their financial management. The board has adequate oversight of their financial position. Up till now, they have utilized a paper-based system. This results in multiple bank accounts and somewhat convoluted reporting formats. Recently electronic accounting software was purchased. This should allow for more efficient accounting and a simplified reporting format.

There are no recommendations regarding the financial management.

Program Evaluation

Relevance of the programs

PHASE Nepal's team believes and supports Government of Nepal's (GoN's) goal in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set by United Nations (UN) in health and education. Programs of PHASE Nepal are significance in supporting the activities that the GoN is implementing in ensuring safe health and education to deprived children with full participation of the community. No change is possible without full participation of the targeted beneficiaries. PHASE Nepal has conceptualized programs that support the activities of the GoN. The programs were also relevant in accordance to the MDG and Three-Year Interim plan of the GoN

There are no recommendations regarding the relevance of the program

Service Delivery

PHASE is involved in three interventions: health, education and livelihood. Of these three, curative health care is by far the most developed and recognized part of their activities.

They have been very successful in providing health care in remote areas. This has been reflected by a dramatic increase in utilization rates. Education has also been successful, although it has not seen the same amount of emphasis. Where it has been delivered, it has been well accepted and appreciated. Livelihood has been a neglected aspect within the programs of PHASE. It was implemented in Sindulpalchowk, but due to lack of government partnership, it has been essentially discontinued. Another gap-area identified was the lack of an exit-strategy for various projects.

Recommendations include a reassessment by leadership in conjunction with locally identified needs of livelihood programs in various project areas. Development of a system of indicators to work for that would identify when and if a project could be discontinued. Doing this in conjunction with an M&E system would make the most sense.

Community Outcomes

The communities overwhelmingly are appreciative and supportive of the activities of PHASE. Whether it is in curative health, adult education or community improvement, PHASE is seen as an organization that is there to help and improve these communities.

In terms of measurable health outcomes, some communities reported a decrease in infant and maternal mortality after PHASE began work. There are also measurable changes in the number of toilets and drinking water facilities in targeted areas.

One stated objective of PHASE is that communities would begin to appreciate the government's work in their community. The high quality work of PHASE, however, has resulted in the community actually being less happy with the government as they see it as not engaged with the community. How PHASE could redirect this perception in the community is a challenge.

Recommendation includes development of a system of indicators to identify when and if a project should be discontinued. Doing this in conjunction with the M&E system would make the most sense.

Conclusions

PHASE Nepal is a first-class organization that is making a significant impact in rural Nepal that is disproportional to its small size. The competence of its leadership, the quality of its staff and its dedication to its mission, vision and values is the reason that it has been so successful. It is appreciated by the target communities it works in and has also achieved some measurable outcomes in terms of health and significant contribution in alternative education and adult literacy.

Addressing the areas, which this assessment and evaluation identified as those that could be improved, will only make this organization stronger and more effective.