Hlanganisa Institute for Development In Southern Africa

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Strengthening community & civil society voice

ENABLING JUSTICE FOR COMMUNITIES

LESSONS FROM THE FREE STATE COMMUNITY

ADVICE OFFICE HUB MODEL

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACAOSA
Association of Community Advice Offices of South Africa

ADR
Alternative Dispute Resolution

CAO
Community Advice Office

CAOSA
Community Advice Offices of South Africa

CBO
Community Based Organisation

GBV
Gender Based Violence

HIDSA
Hlanganisa Institute for Development in Southern Africa

LGBTI
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and/or Intersex

MAGI
Multi-Agency Grant Initiative

Mott Foundation
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

MoU
Memorandum of Understanding

NADCAO
National Alliance for the Development of Community Advice Offices

NGO
Non-governmental Organisation

NGO Act
Non-governmental Organisation Act

PEPFAR
The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

RDP
Reconstruction and Development Programme

RFP
Request for Proposal

VEP
Victim Empowerment Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE FREE STATE HUB PROJECT was conceptualised with the aim of contributing to the development of COMMUNITY ADVICE OFFICES (CAOs) in the Free State province through grant-making, capacity building and onsite mentorship, as well as through facilitation of networking, brokering relationships and coalition building. Supported by the Hlanganisa Institute for Development in Southern Africa and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the project is based on a hub model which brings together CAOs to work collaboratively towards strengthening access to justice and community engagement on human rights issues among marginalised communities.

Having now completed the first year of project implementation, this report was commissioned to reflect on the model; its strengths, weaknesses and key learnings to date, to derive insight for potential replication or scaleup.

Community Advice Offices are a critical part of the South African justice landscape. With a reach covering over half the population of the country, CAOs serve as guardians of access to justice for some of the country's most marginalised communities. In operation since the apartheid era, they have worked to enable marginalised communities to better access and navigate the legal system, and have thus, bridged the gap for the politically and socially marginalised, particularly those who continue to bear the brunt of social injustices resulting from past inequity and inequality.

The Hub model is a mechanism designed to optimise efficacy of CAOs and unify their fragmented approach in the Free State. The model comprises five district Hub CAOs in Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Mangaung, Thabo Mofutsanyana and Xhareip, which mentor and support one mentee CAO in each municipality falling under their jurisdiction.

The model works through five key approaches incorporating capacity building; skills development; collaboration and peer-learning; strategic stakeholder engagement; and funding and financial resources. In the period under review, hub members were all actively engaged in activities to advance the strategy of the Hub model. Key successes have been scored across all pillars of the strategy, resulting in observable increased quality and impact of the services that participating CAOs provide in their communities. However, along with the observed strengths and successes of the Hub model also came some challenges; some which are typical of the non-profit sector as a whole, and some which are unique to the CAO subsector, as well as to Hub model specifically.

Chief among these is the lack of paralegal professional recognition and regulation within the formal legal system, and limited recognition of CAOs within the country's legal and policy frameworks. Strengthened advocacy by Hub member organisations and other stakeholders for integration of CAOs into law and policy is crucial for sustainability of CAOs, their inclusion in government planning and for their access to the fiscus. Enhanced communication, resource mobilisation and budgeting, and structured approaches, resources and tools for skills development and monitoring and evaluation will strengthen the Hub model, and its future applications, significantly.

INTRODUCTION

The Free State Hub Project was developed with support from the Hlanganisa Institute for Development in Southern Africa (HIDSA) and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (Mott Foundation), with the aim of contributing to the development of Community Advice Offices (CAOs) in the Free State province through grant-making, capacity building and onsite mentorship, as well as through facilitation of networking, brokering relationships and coalition building.

The Free State Hub has completed its first year of project implementation, which presents an opportune time to reflect on the model; its strengths, weaknesses and key learnings to date, to derive insight for potential replication or scaleup.

BACKGROUND

The Free State is a vast province with large tracts of farmland and mining operations. The population is largely rural and many live considerable distances away from key government services. In addition to limited access to services, the legacy of apartheid in farming and mining communities persists, as many disputes still arise from unfair labour practices on the farms and mines, necessitating the aggrieved to frequently seek redress services. The combination of scarce services and high demand for dispute resolution renders CAOs a critical resource for communities seeking access to justice.

COMMUNITY ADVICE OFFICES

Community Advice Offices are a critical part of the South African justice landscape. Historically, they provided the only means to access information and paralegal services for the oppressed black people under apartheid. Since the 1930s, they enabled marginalised communities to better access and navigate the legal system, and thus, bridged the gap by enabling politically and socially marginalised populations to access legal services[1].

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[1] RAITH Foundation. Long-term sustainability of advice offices. 2017

Post-independence, CAOs have continued to play an essential role in marginalised communities that continue to bear the brunt of social injustices resulting from past inequity and inequality. It is estimated that there are 350 CAOs in South Africa [2]. These serve over 50% of the country's total population, with figures much higher in geographically isolated and socially marginalised communities[3]. Key roles of CAOs include assisting people with legal and other forms of advice, referring beneficiaries to relevant support organisations and taking up legal cases. CAOs work with paralegals to advance Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) by facilitating negotiation and mediation in cases pertaining to domestic violence, labour, housing and farmworker rights, victim empowerment, and general socio-economic and human rights issues[2]. Additionally, they enable parties to own the process by advocating for dispute settlement , and mobilising and empowering communities through awareness raising and building capacity on pertinent matters. As such, CAOs continue to strengthen South Africa's democracy through enhanced access to justice.

Despite these critical functions, CAOs are faced with multiple challenges, including: scarcity of resources for human rights-related work, limited capacity for strategic planning and a lack of- or weak operational and governance mechanisms and guidelines. There is currently no government legislation that acknowledges the work of CAOs and this continues to deter their ability to get funding from the fiscus. They have weak sector representation, with politics of legitimacy affecting the effectiveness of two sector representational bodies - The Association of Community Advice Offices of South Africa (ACAOSA) and the National Alliance for the Development of Community Advice Offices (NADCAO). Even though in recent months the two have merged to form the Community Advice Offices of South Africa (CAOSA), critical challenges remain in advancing the status of CAOs and optimising their functions. Their work thus remains uncoordinated and fragmented.

THE FREE STATE HUB MODEL

The Hub model was conceptualised by the Free State ACAOSA in partnership with HIDSA (formerly Hivos South Africa) in 2012, seeking to strengthen CAOs' impact through structured mentorship, resource mobilisation and technical support. It is a mechanism designed to optimise efficacy of CAOs and unify their fragmented approach in the Free State, so as to strengthen access to justice and community engagement on human rights issues.

The model ensures CAO representation in the five districts: Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Mangaung, Thabo Mofutsanyana and Xhareip, and in seventeen municipalities within these districts (See Figure 1)

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[2] World Bank. "To whom do people take their issues?": The contribution of Community based paralegals to access to justice in South Africa. 2013

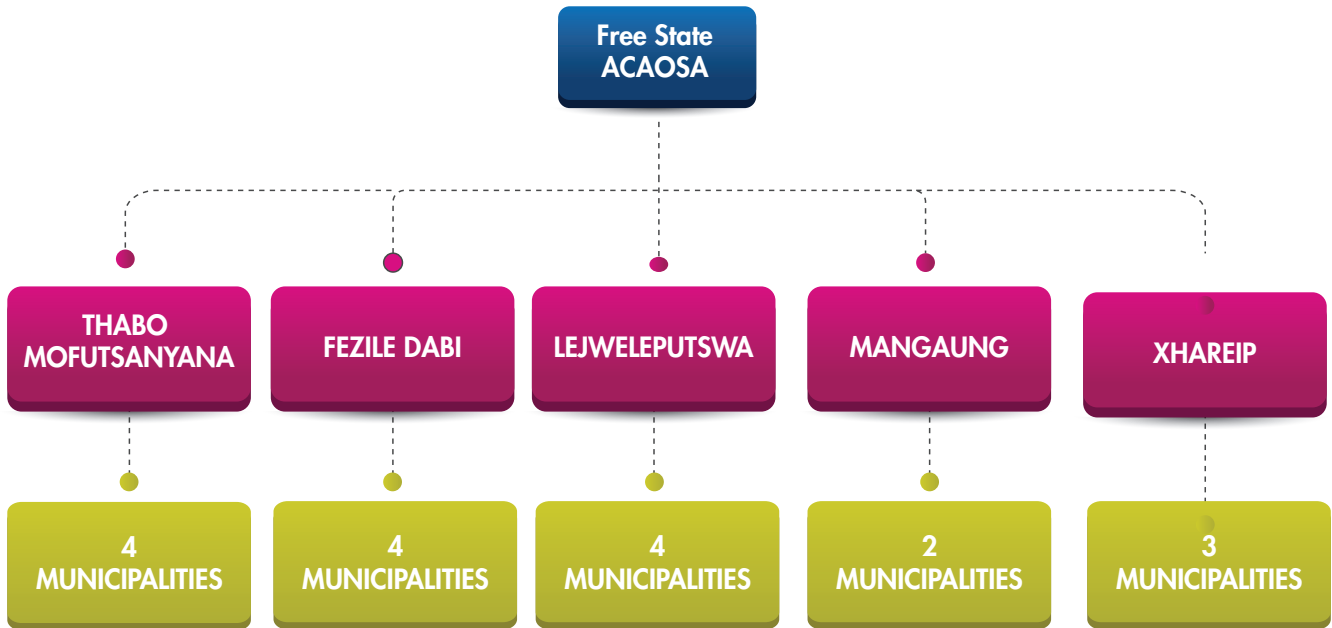[3] STATSSA. Poverty on the rise in South Africa. 2017

Figure 1 Hub Model Structure: Districts and Municipalities

The Hub is funded through the Multi-Agency Grant Initiative (MAGI), a multi-donor funding mechanism managed by HIDSA. The MAGI programme aims to strengthen community based organisations (CBOs) to better serve the needs of communities through a multi-pronged approach encompassing catalytic funding, capacity building and networking.

Through the funding and capacity development support to the Free State Hub, the programme aims to achieve the following outcomes:

1   The five advice offices in the programme become more sustainable through the funding, accessing funding from other sources, building strong networks and working as a cluster in the Free State

2   Increased capacity to support clients seeking assistance with human rights-related matters among CAOs.

3   An increase in the number of people participating in local processes to address service delivery challenges, thereby contributing to deepening democracy.

4   Marginalised groups in communities become better able to raise their grievances and express how they feel through collaboration with local stakeholders, and appropriate solutions and responses are jointly devised.

5   An increase in the number of women in leadership positions in the advice offices and strengthened leadership skills across the advice offices supported.

Figure 2 Map of District (Hub) Offices

NB: The Hub office in Xhariep is no longer function due to operational funding challenges

HUB STRATEGY

Five strategies were agreed for the Free State Hub Project. These are outlined below:

1 **CAPACITY BUILDING OF CAOS**: To enhance CAO governance, compliance structures and ability to receive and manage funds through provision of mentoring, monitoring and technical assistance.

2 **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**: To increase CAO performance through paralegal training in casework-related skills and knowledge. A secondary objective in this regard is to provide alternative administrative and human resource training for staff members.

3 **COLLABORATION AND PEER-LEARNING**: To increase collaboration of Hub members through common advocacy and campaigns.

4 **STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**: To expand CAO stakeholder profiles and increase participation in government programming through networking with provincial government and state-related stakeholders.

5 **FUNDING AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES**: To attract donor interest to CAO work in the province, diversification of donor profiles and availability of sustainable fundraising opportunities.

In 2018, HIDSA initiated a process of documenting the Hub model and reflecting on its major successes and weaknesses. HIDSA contracted the services of an independent consultant who collected data from the Hub mentor organisations, a sample of mentee organisations and a selection of relevant stakeholders. The findings are presented below organised along the five Hub project strategies.

HUB PROGRESS

In the period under review, all the mentor CAOs were actively engaged in activities to advance the strategy of the Hub model. Respondents largely reported that the model was beneficial to member offices. This was particularly so in respect to their gaining access to training opportunities, broadening their stakeholder profiles and through the benefits derived from the shared-learning platform; all of which enhance the quality of services rendered to the community. Some challenges remain. Chief among these, are a lack of resources, lack of a standardised monitoring framework and internal tensions on membership. There has been some controversy surrounding the recruitment of mentee offices. A decision to incorporate Gender Based Violence (GBV) initiatives in the work of mentees led to the inclusion of Victim Empowerment Programmes (VEP) in the Hub. This has been met with different views from Hub mentoring offices; some feel that VEP organisations can be a mentee, with access to justice programming integrated in the work of all mentees, while others advocate for the inclusion of only traditional CAOs. If left unresolved, the impasse threatens the overall sustainability of the project in all agreed locations as it limits the ability to recruit mentee offices into the Hub network.
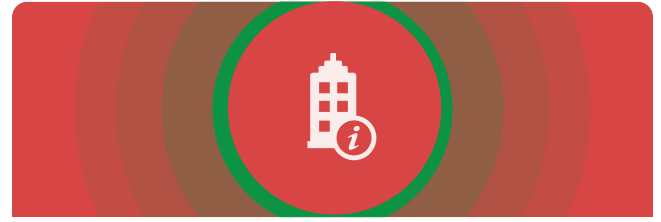
CAPACITY BUILDING OF CAOs

The capacity building component of the Hub is designed to strengthen institutional resilience and improve the quality of services rendered by the CAOs to the community. Member organisations are trained in various modules, which include governance and compliance, management, legal statutes and stakeholder engagement. The capacity building happens at two levels; capacity building offered to mentor offices by HIDSA, and capacity building of mentee offices by the mentor offices.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF CAOS

HIDSA provides training to the mentor offices through workshops and on-site technical support. In the period under review, three HIDSA-led workshops were held focusing on resource mobilisation, LGBTI programming, and monitoring and evaluation. Hub members reported that they found these workshops extremely beneficial and called for them to be held more frequently to enhance continued support.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF MENTEE OFFICES
BY THE MENTOR OFFICES

Mentor offices cascade the training received and offer additional forms of support to their respective mentees within the Hub network. The mentee workshops are aimed at enhancing CAO governance and compliance, thus making them better able to receive, manage and account for funds. Components of this process are outlined in Figure 3.

WORKSHOPS

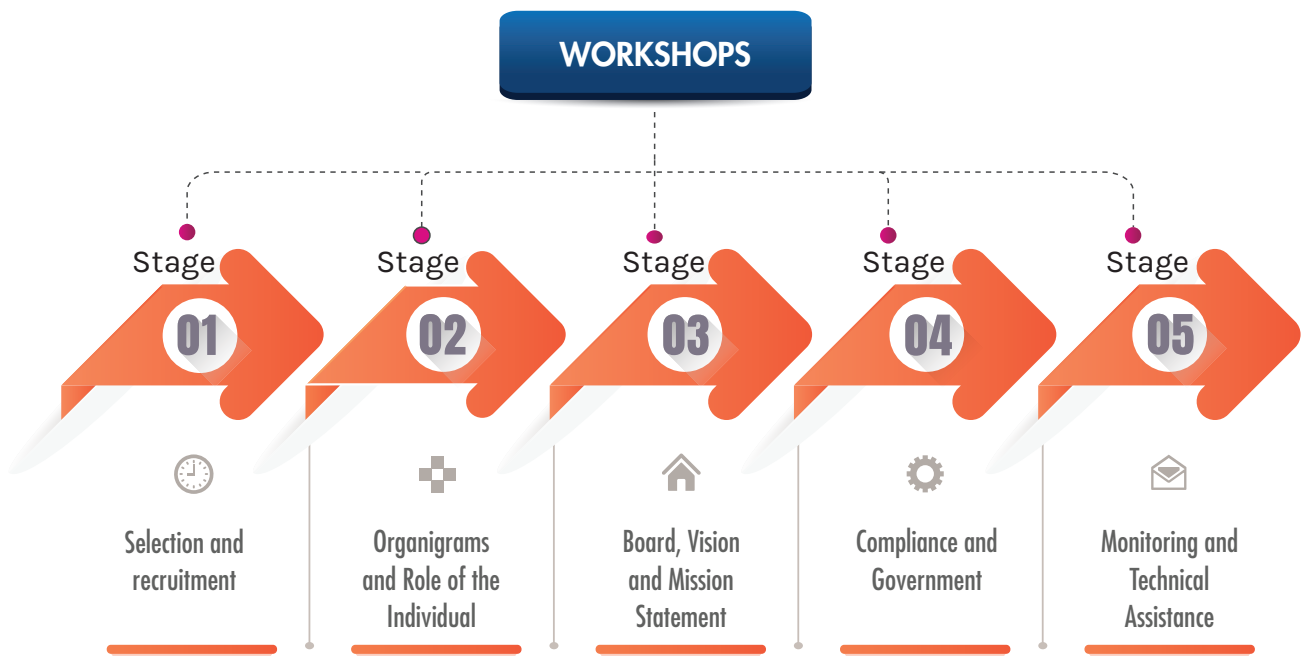| Stage 01	Stage 02	Stage 03	Stage 04	Stage 05
Selection and recruitment	Organigrams and Role of the Individual	Board, Vision and Mission Statement	Compliance and Government	Monitoring and Technical Assistance

FIGURE 3 CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS COMPONENTS

The mentor offices are responsible for selecting an existing organisation in each municipality to represent the Hub and provide services in their respective community. Of the existing social development organisations in the municipality, the most established and capable is recruited. Three key staff (office manager, finance officer and paralegal) are selected from each mentee organisation to attend the Role of the Individual workshop. This workshop is aimed at clarifying division of labour within the mentee organisation. Mission and vision statements are formulated and agreed, and a follow-up workshop on Compliance and Governance is conducted.

Although most mentee CAOs were established prior to the inception of the Hub model, working-relationships between mentor and mentee organisations often predate this project. This has worked in favour of the capacity building component, as the process of supporting mentee offices to establish organograms, boards, and mission and vison statements for their offices has taken little time and effort. As a result, mentors have invested more time in supporting the integration of access to justice programmes into the work of mentees. The Hub formed a relationship with the North-West University, who facilitate the Compliance and Governance workshop for mentees. The objective of this workshop is to strengthen mentee compliance with relevant sector regulations and enhance strategic stakeholder engagement among mentees as a way to improve their operations. Most mentee offices attended the North-West University-facilitated workshops, while a few attended similar workshops facilitated by other affiliated entities such as the CAOSA. Participating mentee offices found the workshop informative and indicated that it had assisted them in ensuring compliance to the NPO Act and in the formation and maintenance of functional governance structures.

Monitoring of the mentee offices is done quarterly at district level meetings and outcomes of the monitoring are used to report progress, for discussions on achievements and challenges, and to develop a strategy for further support. The Hub meets bi-annually as a whole, and, in addition to monitoring, the opportunity is also used to provide further tailored capacity building support. Inconsistencies have been noted in the implementation of monitoring initiatives in the five districts, largely due to the lack of a monitoring framework and harmonised indicators. Current monitoring metrics include the number of community activities, caseload volume and the ratio of successful casework. Through shared reporting and discussions that ensue, mentor and mentee offices collectively propose solutions and schedule follow up visits for on-site assistance. Unfortunately, the number of visits has been limited by lack of funding. To cope, the Hub has had to meet the costs of these initiatives while mentor offices have attempted to limit the impact of this challenge by conducting telephonic monitoring and reporting.

Technical assistance to mentee offices is delivered on a needs basis. In most cases, this support has enhanced the offices' ability to support their communities through a robust referral system, peer learning and information sharing in support of case management. Where mentee offices lack paralegal staff, their mentor CAO processes cases on their behalf and facilitates the recruitment of paralegals. Additionally, there has been some resource sharing with regards to office equipment such as fax machines and printers when the mentee office in need is near their mentor office.

Hub capacity building initiatives vary between districts and offices. These inconsistencies stem from differing office needs and limited budgets for Hub-related activities. Despite this, mentor-mentee relationships were reported to be generally positive and mentees indicated that, despite the financial constraints, their mentors continue to provide invaluable support within the limitations. In addition, mentee offices proposed that a counselling component be incorporated so as to enhance the support that staff receive to help them cope with the psycho-social strain posed by their work.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

To further enhance the capacity of mentee offices, the Hub offers skills development for paralegals with training coordinated by CAOSA. The Dullah Omar School, affiliated to CAOSA, trains paralegals on public accountability and community engagement, social cohesion and community development, organisational sustainability, advocacy and sustainable democracy, and on legislation relevant CAO activities. The training is aimed at safeguarding the development and institutionalisation of the community advice office sector. The accredited and examinable courses are offered in one-week block sessions. Despite the Hub meeting transport and accommodation costs for attendance at these trainings, many mentee offices have not sent their staff for training. Those that have, have done so only sporadically. The training application process requires participants to apply through, or be invited, by their mentor office. It was reported, however, that there were many instances where invitations did not reach the mentee offices or arrived after the application deadline. The trainings are currently being attended by both the mentor and mentee office staff. However, there was a view expressed by mentees that priority should be given to them because of their much lower capacity levels.

To date, 30 paralegals have undergone training. An additional cohort of 15 paralegals will commence coursework in October 2018. The office managers and paralegals who have been trained noted how the training had increased the aptitude of paralegals to engage with and assist the community on relevant case-related issues. The courses offer valuable knowledge and guidance on application of learnt skills by examining real-life case studies on contemporary community issues and advocacy. Participants also reported having gained confidence and the ability to apply more proactive problem-solving approaches. In some cases, this has resulted in increased community confidence in the offices, with some clients moving out of their municipal jurisdictions to present their cases to these seemingly more competent offices. While this implies training successes, it also emphasises the unbalanced distribution of skills amongst CAOs.

Overall, respondents reported that the trainings have been extremely useful, with some calling for increased frequency and local follow-up training to ensure increased coverage and locally tailored learning. An unintended consequence of the skills development is high staff turn-over as trained staff were better able to move to take up opportunities elsewhere

COLLABORATION AND PEER LEARNING

Effective collaboration amongst the Free State Hub members is integral to the success of the model. The Hub ensures collaboration through common advocacy, select campaigns and knowledge sharing between all participating offices. The provincial and district Hub meetings are a valuable platform, not only for monitoring activities as discussed above, but also for fostering stronger collaboration. The mentor and mentee offices share lessons learnt from the field, co-create solutions for identified challenges, and collectively reassess their strategies. Offices also support each other in case management, with relevant partner referrals and to come up with strategies for operational efficiency. Some districts exhibited higher levels of collaboration than others. Ideally, mentees would meet with their mentors monthly, entire districts congregate quarterly, and provinces meet bi-annually (See Figure 4).

PROVINCIAL HOUSING CAMPAIGN

The provincial housing campaign was a great testament to the success of the Hub's collaboration efforts. This campaign was a unified and coordinated approach to advocacy around housing issues in the province. All members contributed to the list of issues tackled through the campaign, and formed working committees to address specific issues. The campaign resulted in increased awareness amongst communities and enhanced community participation. Additionally, the campaign helped CAOs to better understand the severity of the issues in question and existing gaps in the governance of housing-related issues. This significantly empowered both the CAOs and the community to remedy service delivery challenges such as RDP housing allocation. Because of these successes the CAOs gained leverage to compel their respective municipal governments to engage communities and report violations to the Human Rights Commission. While there were a few challenges; for instance, it is reported that some working committees expected financial incentives, overall, the campaign was an overwhelming success with many invaluable and positive outcomes.

Figure 4 Frequency of Hub Meetings

Effective peer learning and collaboration benefits mentee offices immensely. However, levels of success of knowledge sharing and learning initiatives at the district level vary. Some CAOs were excluded or chose to exclude themselves from meetings, which are key platforms for learning, due to political tensions between Hub members. Unresolved conflict poses a threat to the model and diverts time and focus from more relevant pressing matters. That said, respondents reported that a platform exists for them to discuss and resolve challenges, and share pertinent learnings, thus enabling them to address community needs more effectively.

Communication between Hub members happens via multiple channels. Offices communicate regularly telephonically and through email, SMS and WhatsApp messaging. In-person communication is frequent between mentor and mentee office staff when offices are close to each other. However, limited equipment, internet connectivity and funds to pay for airtime and transport, hinder the efficacy of these communication approaches.

The Hub is in the process of developing a case management application to further optimise case work efforts of the Free State Hub. This application has immense potential to strengthen collaboration and support on cases by providing a confidential intranet system for secure storage and sharing of client files, and for facilitating joint work on specific cases. While still in the pilot phase, eventual roll-out of this platform will bring significant improvements not only for the Free State CAOs, but nationally, as it will contribute to better documentation of the sector as a whole. Enhanced documentation can provide evidence to motivate for increased support and contribute to efforts towards the integration of paralegals into the formal legal system.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

All offices within the Hub network worked to increase their stakeholder profile and ensure greater inclusion in government programming through networking with state and state-related stakeholders. Engagement was maintained through attendance of conferences and workshops, and communication with key individuals in government departments. This was with the aim to form and maintain strong rapport with individuals and institutions that enhance the quality of services rendered to communities.

CAOs signed MoUs with relevant entities such as government departments, NGOs, human rights and social development institutions, local businesses, schools and churches. This demonstrates the visible expansion of the Hub stakeholder pool. In some instances, the mentor offices acted a catalyst for formation of new relationships, and in others, individual mentee offices leveraged their own partnerships for the development of new strategic alliances. This network supports the work of CAOs through inclusion in their programming, acting as referral partners and inviting offices to participate in awareness raising activities. Some partners have also donated equipment, subsidised costs of hosting events, and provided resource mobilisation support, including through direct funding.

Hub members with stronger government relationships noted that participation in government meetings, workshops and activities, and making presentations to relevant departments had been extremely valuable in engaging government as a key stakeholder. There are, however, inconsistencies in the level of stakeholder engagement amongst individual offices and in different districts. Many respondents cited how difficult it was to get government stakeholders to attend meetings called by CAOs. For instance, municipality staff would opt to include issues brought up by CAOs in their own meetings than attend meetings called by CAOs. Even then, the issues often did not receive adequate attention in the municipal meetings.

Furthermore, the exclusion of CAOs from the formal legal system results in the lack of a defined entry point into government programming. While the Legal Services Sector Charter and Legal Practice Bill aim to integrate paralegals, without such legal and policy provisioning it has proven difficult to work with local government, particularly when community-expressed needs point to government service delivery failures. Additionally, political parties reportedly exploit community confidence in CAOs and routinely claim support of CAOs in their election campaigns. This poses a threat to community confidence in CAOs, either where the concerned party has previously failed to meet the needs of the community, or if it subsequently fails communities having won elections in part by making such claims.

FUNDING AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The exclusion of CAOs from the formal legal system has led to under-recognition of paralegal efforts and, consequently, an overwhelmingly underfunded sector. In response, the Hub aims to expand donor profiles and fundraising opportunities for member offices. CAOSA is currently planning a province-wide resource mobilisation campaign in support of the Hub's efforts in this regard.

A few mentee offices have received resource mobilisation support from their mentor office and more established offices within the Hub. Where this support is offered, mentors and partner offices proactively seek and share open bid opportunities, and provide technical support to enable mentees to make strong submissions to requests for proposals (RFP). As a result, two Hub offices have secured long-term funding from donors such as PEPFAR and Soul City, and some CAOs have seen their operating budgets rise to R2 Millions. Some offices have come up with innovative strategies for sustainable income generation, including running cyber cafes, food gardens, raffles, sports day events, and soliciting donations from local businesses to supplement current Hub funding.

Despite these notable successes, the majority of mentee offices have not been successful in fundraising for access to justice work. Funding constrains have resulted in a range of limitations which disrupt operations and impede overall impact of members' work on access to justice. While alternative sources of funding have been secured for some offices, they are insufficient to ensure the sustainability of all members. Offices identified challenges in finding funding relevant to their specific activities and geographic areas. In addition, available funding is often short-term or incongruent with CAO planning and implementation cycles, resulting in curtailed projects. At the same time, funded awareness campaigns and outreach activities result in increased demand for services which cannot always be adequately met.

Funding for overhead costs is a matter of survival for CAOs. Some member offices have secured funding for their overhead costs through self-initiated partnerships with the Social Development Fund. Additionally, where the Hub supports expansion of programme areas, member offices are, at times, able to meet administrative financial needs through alternative programme funding. In some cases, mentee offices are sub-contracted by the Hub to implement funded programmes and act as sub-recipients.

Overall, however, the paucity of funding for overhead expenses has dealt a major blow to the Hub and the project. Lack of funding to meet overhead costs has frequently resulted in the closure of some offices. Some mentee offices have had to discontinue operations altogether due to failure to pay rent, which has disrupted progress on the programme. As a result of resource constraints, there are presently 18 out of the original 22 offices still in operation after one district Hub office and three mentee offices closed down. The Hub continues to replace offices that have had to drop out due to similar constraints and offers them targeted mentoring to help them survive. Table 1 shows the number of mentee offices currently operating against the required number.

Table 1 Mentee CAOs Currently Operating

DISTRICTS	Mentor CAO	Required Number of Mentee Offices	Actual Number of Mentee Offices
Thabo Mofutsanyana	Qholaqhwe	4	5
Fezile Dabi	Maokeng	4	1
Lejweleputswa	Henneman	4	5
Xhariep	Tshireletso	3	2
Mangaung	Mangaung	2	2

Because of the funding challenges, a large number staff have been forced to forego their stipends. When such staff are presented with better opportunities, they tend to leave, thus exacerbating existing capacity gaps. The problem of dwindling staff numbers, compounded with delayed funding and budget cuts, drastically disrupts day-to-day operations and leads to frequent ad hoc office closures.

Funding acquisition is further constrained by a general lack of proposal writing skills among offices. The lack of equipment and internet access also limits members' ability to search and apply for available funds. While some offices have received training on proposal writing and resource mobilisation from the Hub, others have sourced services externally from entities such as the CAOSA. Nevertheless, skill gaps persist. In addition, newly established offices lack the required financial audits and service records which are often a prerequisite for funding.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

The review shows that the Free State Hub Project has brought significant improvements to the operations of CAOs and contributed immensely to ensuring access to justice for the targeted communities in the Free State province. Along with the observed strengths of the Hub model also comes some challenges; some of which are typical of the non-profit sector as a whole, and some which are unique to the CAO subsector, as well as to Hub model specifically. Future implementation of the Hub model would, for instance, benefit from a set of clearly defined and agreed selection criteria for membership.

Several key strengths and successes of the model have been outlined in the review above and do not bear repeating. Below, therefore, are some of the key lessons that can be drawn from project implementation in the period under review, which would be invaluable as insight for improvement in the model design and towards ensuring greater operational efficiency in any potential reviews, replication or scaleup of the model.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Key successes have been scored under this component, with hub members appreciative of support availed and exhibiting greater capacity to deliver for communities. Specific lessons emerging from the review include:

1. While the needs of **HUB MEMBERS** are not uniform, there is need to standardise core capacity building approaches used so that support provided to mentee offices enables all of them to rise to uniform levels of capability.

2. **CAPACITY BUILDING** support by HIDSA has proven critical for the Hub. More demand-based thematic and issue-based training by HIDSA is needed in order to consolidate capacity strengths and equip the Hub to manage emergent strategic and operational issues.

3   It would be **BENEFICIAL** to develop and hold all offices accountable for using standardised training material, needs assessment indicators and agreed timeframes for mentoring and monitoring of mentee offices.

4   **A ROBUST PROJECT** monitoring framework with clear indicators should be developed and applied consistently across all five districts.

5   **MONITORING** should be resourced to enable mentor offices to conduct on-site monitoring visits and maintain consistency in monitoring.

6   **COUNSELLING SERVICES** should be made available to CAO staff as part of an employee wellness package to safeguard staff health and assist staff in managing the psycho-social strain associated with their work.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Work under this component has gone a long way towards safeguarding the development and institutionalisation of the community advice office sector, with interventions having resulted in enhanced confidence of CAO staff and that of the community in member offices. The following lessons emerged from the review:

1   THE APPLICATION PROCESS, admission criteria and communication on skills development opportunities for paralegals should be streamlined to ensure information reaches mentee offices in good time, with clear application guidelines.

2   A QUOTA should be reserved for mentee office participants in skills development courses to ensure training benefits the areas where the skills deficits are greatest. Admission criteria should also ensure equal representation across districts among trainees.

3   LOCAL LEVEL FOLLOW-UP TRAINING of paralegals should be encouraged to ensure increased coverage and locally tailored learning, particularly for staff who are unable to gain admission or who may be unavailable for the centrally held training sessions.

COLLABORATION AND PEER LEARNING

Collaboration is a key aspect of the model. Leveraging on the design of the model which places collaboration centrally will be critical to the success of similar initiatives. Additional lessons and observations from the review include:

1. THIRD PARTY MEDIATION to engage in conflict resolution is crucial to solve fundamental issues and enable the Hub to focus on pertinent programming issues. A conflict resolution mechanism should be made readily available to ensure business continuity and quick resolution when conflict arises between Hub members.

2. COMMUNICATION is key for fostering and strengthening collaboration and learning among Hub members and should be resourced adequately to ensure robust equipment (inclusive of hardware and software), availability of secure channels for information sharing, and adequate in-person engagements among Hub members. The development of an internal information sharing platform would optimise collaboration and peer-learning.

3. Where practicable, RESOURCE-SHARING should be incentivised, as a way of encouraging good resource stewardship, collaboration and relationship strengthening among Hub member offices.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

While hub members have gone a long way strengthening their strategic stakeholder engagement, experiences are still mixed.

1. TO ENHANCE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, strengthen entry points for CAOs in local level governance and create the most supportive and secure operational environment, there is need to redouble efforts to advocate for the necessary sector legal and policy reforms to regulate CAO activities, and the institutions that govern them.

FUNDING AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The collaborative nature of the Hub model has the potential to foster a very supportive environment and beneficial arrangements for resource mobilisation support and presents an appealing asset for inclusion in future proposals. Funding and resource mobilisation has proven to be a key challenge for Hub members. While some member offices have come up with innovative strategies to ensure sustainable funding of their operations, persistent funding challenges can be minimised through continued and bespoke capacity building on resource mobilisation, innovative fundraising and on development of sustainable fundraising strategies. Other key lessons learnt regarding funding and financial resource management include:

1. **FUNDING FOR OVERHEAD EXPENSES** is crucial for sustainable running of CAOs, to reduce office closures and staff turnover rates, and to provide for basic office equipment required to adequately engage in case work. Fundraising should include such costs as a core component of proposals and funds secured for programming.

2. **RESOURCE MOBILISATION** among CAOs needs to be more strategic, ensuring that there is ample investment in efforts to secure a balanced basket of funds comprising long term, shorter term and bridging funds as may be needed - with funds secured to cover both activity and overhead costs.

3. **CONTINGENCY FUNDING** should be made available for CAOs to support them in the event of delays in the release of secured funds and to avoid termination of projects prior to their completion.

4. **LONGER TERM FUNDING** alternative fundraising and income generation schemes enhance the sustainability of CAOs. While CAOs should continue to innovate in their resource mobilisation strategies, donors should avail more long-term funding for CAO work to enable CAOs to implement long-term strategic interventions.

5. **FEEDBACK ON RESOURCE MOBILISATION EFFORTS**, particularly from submitted proposals is key to ensuring learning and incremental improvement in resource mobilisation. A tracking process should be put in place to enable member offices to receive feedback from unsuccessful applications so that they can learn from the experience.

CONCLUSION

The review has outlined key findings and lessons learned from the Free State Hub Model with a view to gleaning key insights for improvements in future implementation, replication or scaling up of the model. For the most part, the Hub operates in a collaborative manner and has scored appreciable successes in the areas of capacity building, skills development and knowledge sharing, resource mobilisation and joint strategic planning. Despite these achievements, some challenges remain. Chief among these is the lack of paralegal professional recognition and regulation within the formal legal system and limited recognition of CAOs within the country's legal and policy frameworks. The Legal Services Sector Charter and Legal Practice Bill aim to further integrate paralegals which would enhance regulation of the sector and provide crucial resource mobilisation, fundraising and income generating opportunities. Strengthened advocacy by CAOSA and other stakeholders on this integration is crucial for sustainability of CAOs, their inclusion in government planning and for access to the fiscus.

Enhanced communication, resource mobilisation, improved budgeting, and structured approaches, resources and tools for skills development and monitoring and evaluation will strengthen the Hub model, and its future iterations, significantly.

The current project has scored significant successes in enabling access to justice for targeted communities in the Free State province, yet its potential to model for other access to justice initiatives and to bring justice to more communities remains massive, not only for the rest of the Free State, but for the sector nationally. The lessons outlined above will be crucial in that regard.

Hlanganisa Institute for Development Southern Africa is an innovative intermediary grant maker aimed at strengthening social accountability, promoting human rights in pursuit of social justice in Southern Africa

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