SOUTH SAHARAN
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION

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REFLECTIONS

IMPACT MEASUREMENT:
ACCOUNTABILITY AND AGENCY

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Impact Measurement: Accountability and Agency



At the recently concluded AVPA conference, I had the privilege of joining a panel convened by Triple I for Global Health, a G7-endorsed initiative mobilizing impact investment to address global health challenges in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Alongside donors and foundations, I brought the perspective of South Saharan Social Development Organisation (SSDO), a community-facing organisation. My contribution focused on what impact measurement means to organisations working directly with the communities that funding is intended to serve.

The African Venture Philanthropy Alliance (AVPA) brings together investors, foundations, development organisations and other stakeholders working to mobilise capital and drive social impact across Africa. The conference provided an opportunity to engage with conversations about new deals, capital raised, frameworks developed and plans for deployment. These are necessary conversations. But capital raised must eventually be deployed, and deployed capital must improve people's lives. Impact measurement is how we establish whether that promise has been kept.

This is also why South Saharan joined Triple I: to help ensure that community voices inform decisions about where funding goes and what it seeks to achieve. Investment decisions need to connect the priorities of funders with the aspirations of the communities they are intended to benefit. Community-facing organisations have a responsibility to bring those aspirations into the room and ensure they are not lost in the process of designing and financing interventions.

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From our perspective, impact measurement serves two closely connected purposes: **accountability** and **agency**.

Accountability

Funding carries a responsibility to deliver what was agreed and to demonstrate the results clearly. That requires clarity from the outset about what success means, how it will be measured and who is responsible for achieving it.

If we commit to a WASH intervention intended to reduce diarrhoeal disease in a population by 15%, our accountability extends beyond installing infrastructure or reporting the number of people reached. We must establish whether the intended reduction occurred, using the methods agreed at the beginning. If it did not, we must explain the gap, examine what contributed to it and use that evidence to improve our work.

This responsibility runs through the funding chain. Community-facing organisations are accountable for how they use the resources entrusted to them. Those allocating the resources must, in turn, account to the people or institutions that provided them. At every stage, there should be a clear connection between the funding, its intended purpose and the results achieved.

That accountability also extends to the communities themselves. They deserve to know what a project promised, what it delivered and what remains unresolved. Honest measurement builds trust. It gives funders a sound basis for further investment and communities a basis for holding organisations like ours to our commitments.



Agency

Communities must also have a meaningful say in defining success and deciding how it will be achieved.

Those of us working in development must acknowledge that projects are sometimes designed before the people they are intended to serve have had an opportunity to shape them. Consultation may happen, but often after the important decisions have already been made. By then, the space for community influence is limited.

This has consequences for sustainability. People are better placed to sustain an intervention when they have helped shape it and have a meaningful role in its future. Ownership requires more than participation in project activities; it requires influence over decisions.







Our experience providing WASH infrastructure in a humanitarian setting illustrates this. Through discussions with the community, we identified security measures that were needed to protect the infrastructure. Community members proposed practical measures, which we incorporated into implementation to support continued use beyond the grant period.

Without those conversations, we could have delivered the infrastructure and reported completion while overlooking a threat to its continued usefulness. The community's knowledge changed how we implemented the project and strengthened the prospects of lasting impact.

This is why accountability and agency belong together. Accountability asks whether we delivered what we promised. Agency asks who helped define that promise, whose priorities informed it and who has a say in what happens next.

As we mobilise more capital for impact, both questions must remain central. The success of impact investment cannot be measured simply by the amount of capital raised, the number of transactions completed or the interventions delivered. It must also be measured by whether commitments have been met, whether communities have had a meaningful role in shaping the outcomes, and whether those outcomes continue to improve lives after the funding ends.

Ultimately, impact is not just about what capital delivers. It is also about who gets to define what is worth delivering, who is answerable for the results, and whether the benefits endure.


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The answer is
US


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Katsina WASH project in brief
30,000+
5 hours


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