

The MEASURE Evaluation–Tanzania Small Grants Program

Building Capacity and Informing HIV/AIDS Programs

Background

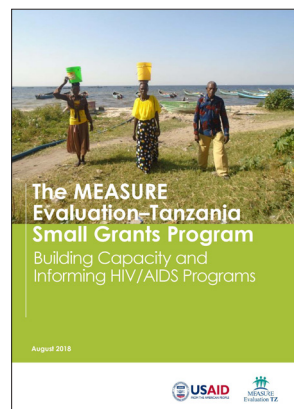
Small grants are one mechanism to promote research capacity and provide financial support for health research conducted in low-income countries. When host country teams research issues, develop strategies, and implement solutions, those actions promote sustainability, a goal championed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

MEASURE Evaluation–Tanzania (MEval-TZ), funded by USAID, administered small grants to local universities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Tanzania to contribute to Result 3 of the project: an increased evidence base for community health and social service programs through conducting research and building research capacity. The objectives of the small grants program were to:

1. Address research gaps in HIV/AIDS services and interventions



Above: Idda Swai, PI, and Dino Woiso, chairperson of Seeds of Hope.



2. Provide opportunities for data to be disseminated to and used by local stakeholders for informed decision making
3. Build research capacity among local agencies

Intervention

The project conducted two rounds of small grants. The research focus for the first round was to address gaps in community health and social service programs for HIV/AIDS. The second round focused on addressing gaps in the evidence base for linkages and retention in HIV/AIDS care and treatment programs.

Small Grants by the Numbers

	Round I	Round II
Number of applications received	62	82
Number of proposals awarded	5	5
Average award amount (direct costs only)	USD \$9,207	USD \$12,940
Number of subgrant awards to local universities	2	1
Number of funded subgrants with a female principal investigator (PI)	3	2

The selected subgrantees were invited to a two-day small grants workshop, organized by MEval-TZ, to orient them to the project and the small grants program, build their research capacity, and create an opportunity for research teams to network. Each subteam was monitored throughout their 12-month research project and received tailored, hands-on technical assistance.

At the beginning of the research projects, subgrantees completed a baseline self-assessment of their research capacity—organized by pre-award status, research study implementation status, and capacity for subgrant management and execution. Based on the teams' assessment of their research strengths and weaknesses, they developed two to four objectives stating what they realistically hoped to learn or improve upon during the research opportunity. Each objective required an action plan and identification of person(s) responsible.



A data collector for Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre.

Results

All 10 of the subgrantees successfully completed their proposed research projects. The final manuscripts are posted on the MEASURE Evaluation website (<https://www.measureevaluation.org/our-work/capacity-building/small-grants-program>). The research findings were widely disseminated through a meeting with regional and council health management teams, a feedback workshop with local government representatives and NGOs, and oral presentations at international conferences.

Upon the final research capacity self-assessment, the research teams had achieved most or all the objectives in their action plans. They reported feeling supported and empowered to conduct additional health research. Many of them shared how this opportunity and the direct technical assistance received had strengthened their abilities and afforded them valuable research experience.

This research project that we conducted through the small grant was a great opportunity to build capacity of our team, especially on how to define problems, set objectives and priorities, identify solutions to problems as well as proper planning of resources. For example [one of the researchers] has been appointed to lead two national projects as PI...With the skills he gained through this research, he feels very confident with designing implementation plans of the said projects.

—Anna Mbise, PI, Jerusha (T) Ltd.

A key aspect of the research projects was engaging stakeholders before, during, and after the research was conducted. Subgrantee applicants were required to submit a dissemination plan in their proposals and stakeholder engagement was a core theme during the workshop. Subgrantees acknowledged improvements in this area.

The research opportunity contributed to strengthening the capacity of the organization [in] engaging with the wider community of stakeholders through dissemination of findings and recommendations.

—Pantaleon Shoki, PI, Governance Links Tanzania

MEval-TZ started a Tanzania monitoring and evaluation (M&E) community of practice, which includes all subgrantees and shortlisted subgrantees. These members have access to useful M&E resources and relevant research related to Tanzania.

The networking and capacity building begun during the small grants program has lived beyond the project's involvement. One subgrantee, Sokoine University of Agriculture's (SUA) Gender Centre, organized a graduate seminar on integrating gender in research, conducted by MEval-TZ in 2017. At SUA's request, MEval-TZ returned in 2018 to conduct a training of trainers and a graduate seminar on integrating gender into the M&E of health programs for the university's new post-graduate Project Management and Evaluation program.

Conclusion

MEval-TZ's small grants program was an effective strategy for increasing the evidence base in community health and social service programs that address HIV/AIDS, for improving research capacity in Tanzania, and for providing data use opportunities.

Our recommendation is to promote a small grants program as a viable approach to filling research gaps in local HIV/AIDS programs and providing hands-on research experience for those working in areas where promotion of evidence-based practices is a priority.