



Learning Brief | Beyond Delivery

Building Institutional and Technical Capacity Through Partnership: Lessons from a Biqu Wetat Implementing Partner's Collaboration with UNICEF

Overview

The Biqu Wetat Programme, implemented by UNICEF in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, supports youth in the Afar, Amhara, and Tigray Regions strengthen their livelihoods, by integrating social and behavioral change activities, psychosocial support, skills training, and links to education and employment opportunities.

As part of UNICEF's programming approach within the Biqu Wetat Programme, a core implementation strategy is to partner with local civil society organizations that are deeply embedded within the communities they serve, ensuring effective grassroots delivery, fostering community ownership, and strengthening local institutions for long-term sustainability.

This learning brief demonstrates how delivery-focused partnerships, when accompanied by intentional technical and institutional support, can generate sustainable capacity gains that extend beyond the life of a single programme. It highlights the experience of Action for Integrated Sustainable Development Association (AISDA), a local implementing partner in the Afar Region, which strengthened its organizational systems, technical competencies, and programme management capacity while working with UNICEF to implement the Biqu Wetat Programme.

Managing complexity through continuous support

For more than 20 years, AISDA has extensive experience implementing humanitarian and development programmes across Health and Nutrition, Agriculture, WASH, Education, and emergency response. While AISDA had a strong track record of sectoral programming, implementing the Biqu Wetat Programme introduced the organization to a new way of designing, coordinating, and delivering integrated youth focused interventions.

The partnership required AISDA to move beyond parallel sectoral delivery and adopt coordinated planning, sequencing of interventions, and joint monitoring across sectors. This shift strengthened the organization's ability to conceptualize and manage complex, integrated programmes targeting multiple dimensions of youth vulnerability.

“Previously, we implemented WASH, nutrition, agriculture, and other programmes independently. Through Biqu Wetat, we learned how to integrate these sectors into one livelihood enhancement programme. It was a transformative experience as it led to greater results.”

Lulseged Mekonnen, Director of AISDA

The multisectoral design of the Biqu Wetat Programme, combined with its scale and its focus on conflict affected youth facing social and cultural barriers, created new operational and technical demands for AISDA. Addressing these demands required strengthened systems, enhanced coordination, and strong technical guidance.

By combining livelihood support with social and behavioural change (SBC) interventions, psychosocial support, mentoring, and continuous follow-up, the programme helped create pathways for youth to build both skills and confidence.



"The diversified support I received through the programme helped me start a poultry business, enabling me to earn an income for the first time and support myself and my family. The continuous advice and follow-up motivated me to persevere, even when some of my friends discouraged me from pursuing the business. Today, they see the progress I have made and are interested in following the same path."

Abduselam, 26, Biqu Wetat Programme Participant

AISDA noted that UNICEF's continuous technical support and follow-up were instrumental in managing programme implementation complexities. This included developing programme guidelines and SOPs, providing sector-specific coaching and mentorship, conducting regular monitoring visits, facilitating peer learning among partners, strengthening MEL systems and tools, and enhancing financial management through training and hands-on support.

Institutional Growth Beyond the Programme

In addition to technical learning, the partnership contributed to broader institutional strengthening.



Enabling institutional growth through new funding and partnerships

The partnership open doors for additional funding opportunities from UNICEF and other partners.



Growing organizational capacity through expansion of staff members

20 new staff and **80** young volunteers recruited, contributing to their expertise to strengthen overall organizational capacity beyond programme delivery.



Strengthening institutional capacity through dedicated funding

7 % additional budget allocated to capacity strengthening, supporting staff development across different organizational levels.

Key Learnings

Partnerships can be a powerful vehicle for institutional and technical capacity strengthening when learning is embedded in delivery: The Biqu Wetat experience shows that capacity development is most effective when embedded in programme implementation. Through continuous engagement, joint problem-solving, and learning by doing, AISDA strengthened its systems, staff skills, and confidence while delivering programme results.

Intentional investment in partner capacity accelerates both programme quality and sustainability: The dedicated budget line for partner capacity strengthening enabled AISDA to enhance its systems and staffing beyond immediate programme needs, supporting long term institutional growth and readiness for future partnerships and programming.

Trust based partnerships enable adaptive implementation and locally grounded solutions: AISDA's local presence and trusted relationships enabled rapid sharing of field realities, improving programme responsiveness and highlighting the value of local partners as co-creators.

Capacity gains extend beyond one programme when partnerships are designed with a long term perspective: The skills, systems, and credibility gained through the Biqu Wetat partnership enabled AISDA to secure new funding, expand partnerships, and deliver more complex programmes, demonstrating the long term value of intentional localization investments.

