



The Data Dilemma: Making Measurement Matter

Perspective from a Gender-Focused Poverty Intervention Program

--The BOMA Project and Vera Solutions



Sarah Lanyasunya, BOMA Project Field Officer, collecting data from a BOMA Savings Group in Samburu Country, northern Kenya. Photo: Jane Sklonsky

Accountability for nonprofits means many things: financial transparency and disclosure, to show that they are good stewards of the funding they rely on to execute their programs. Accountability to their partners who are helping them scale or innovate in their space. Accountability to their employees to provide safe, professional work environments. And, most importantly, accountability to the populations that they serve—are they delivering on their mission?

Data is essential to achieving these measures of accountability, but collecting not only accurate data but *meaningful* data is an ongoing challenge. It is easy to understand the urge to collect as much data as possible, but without a clear focus on what is essential to program execution it is easy to get off track. Organizations need to ask the right questions, then use that information to guide execution and delivery of their programs.



To uphold this standard of due diligence, nonprofits are increasingly relying on CRM (customer relationship management) software such as Salesforce, to manage beneficiaries, visualize and report on performance, and measure impact across a portfolio of project and grants. Having a robust data collection and management platform helps nonprofits be clear in their goals, progress and outcomes, and prove their value propositions.

Connecting a nonprofit organization's mission with outcome data and solid metrics is the key to success as well as validating funders' support. But numbers alone don't tell the whole story—understanding the data's context helps an organization more fully understand the landscape in which they are operating. Sharing data and demonstrating the ability to find the meaning in data to achieve the best outcomes is what gives funders and partners confidence in a nonprofit's ability to deliver.

Nonprofits need to ask themselves how the data they gather is going to support their program and iterate to achieve success.

- Are we achieving what we set out to do? How do we know?
- Did we establish baselines and what metrics are being using to gauge “success?”
- Are we getting a complete picture of our participants' lives? What equilibriums are we trying to change?

Particularly for organizations that operate in areas with little infrastructure, collecting and evaluating data to inform program decisions presents its own set of challenges. Having a robust technology platform can make the rapid collection and uploading of data possible, so program decisions can happen in real time, allowing orgs to pivot and respond to the needs of the communities they serve.

At [the BOMA Project](#), our mission is to help women in the drylands of Africa overcome extreme poverty. But our program also takes into account and addresses the multiple, interlinking causes and consequences of extreme poverty, such as lack of access to education for girls and women. The remote regions where we work can make submitting data difficult. In partnership with [Vera Solutions](#) and with a grant from [Salesforce.org](#), we developed a proprietary cloud-based data platform called Performance Insights, which allows our field teams to enter and upload data quickly for real-time evaluation and response. The latest iteration includes Project Scorecards which show at a glance how our participants are doing across multiple benchmarks. It also helps us to see the bigger picture and learn what information we might *not* be getting that can help us better understand our progress and inefficiencies.

We recently launched a Girl Child Campaign in the communities where we work to promote the importance of sending children, particularly girls, to school. Our Project Scorecards allow us to see trends in data that show where we are not meeting benchmarks.



Projected Graduation Rates

Cohort	Start	End	As of	Data Completeness	Food Security	Business Value	Savings	Income Sources	Girl Enrollment
<u>Cohort 1</u>	Apr 1, 2016	Apr 30, 2018	Mar-2018	90%	97%	96%	84%	93%	74%
			Feb-2018	100%	100%	88%	88%	75%	
<u>Cohort 2</u>	Nov 1, 2016	Nov 30, 2018	Mar-2018	99%	100%	92%	81%	75%	68%
			Feb-2018	94%	100%	95%	74%	67%	
This cohort includes participants in both Turkana and Wajir.									
<u>Cohort 3</u>	May 1, 2017	May 30, 2019	Mar-2018	99%	100%	90%	90%	49%	15%
			Feb-2018	97%	100%	93%	51%	16%	
Participants are in Turkana only.									
<u>Cohort 4</u>	Jul 1, 2017	Mar 31, 2019	Mar-2018	99%	100%	93%		40%	100%
			Feb-2018	100%	100%	88%	40%	100%	

Refocusing the data collection—what questions are we not answering, what factors are we not figuring into our matrix?—allows us to get a better understanding of the obstacles and adjust our programming to achieve our goals. What is happening in the communities where we’re seeing low percentages of enrollment? Digging deeper into the data collection process, we discovered that in one community, when participants had been asked if their children were in school, they took the question to mean “Are your children in school *at this moment?*” The data gave us a snapshot that looked alarming, and led us to ask deeper questions to further refine our data collection approach. Instantly seeing flags go up in the data pipeline allowed us to adjust and act quickly.

Building the tools and resources to collect and evaluate vital data is essential to delivering a high-quality program. But to be fully accountable, to beneficiaries and stakeholders alike, organizations have to dive deep into what the metrics really mean, and translate that knowledge into action.

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[The BOMA Project](#) is a U.S. and Kenyan nongovernmental organization implementing a gender-focused poverty graduation program in the drylands of East Africa. To date, BOMA has helped 105,624 women and children overcome extreme poverty.

[Vera Solutions](#) is a social enterprise and Certified B Corporation® providing cloud and mobile solutions that help social sector organizations better track their impact, streamline their operations, and create feedback loops that put data in the hands of those who need it. Vera has worked with 240+ impact-driven organizations, including the BOMA Project, to help them navigate this journey toward more efficient and effective impact measurement on Salesforce.