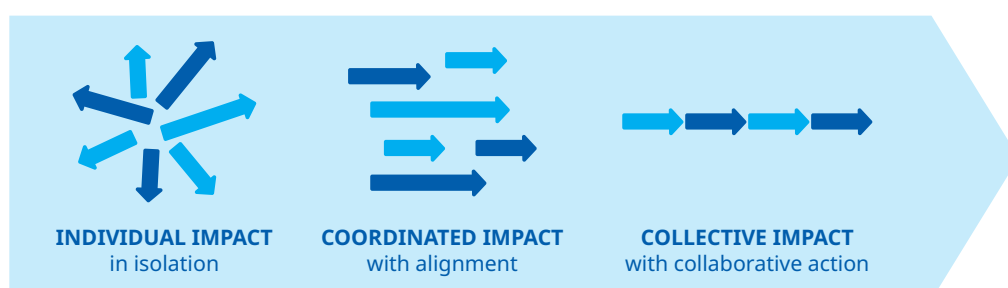# Collective Impact and Care Reform in Ukraine

Collective Impact and Care Reform in Ukraine

Care is a complex sector comprised of many actors and guided by complementary mandates, often overseen by more than one government ministry or department. When strengthening and reforming the care system, it is essential to adopt a collaborative approach that brings different actors with a stake in the outcome, including government, civil society, and communities, together to develop a shared vision, strategy, and coordinated action plan.

Collective Impact (CI) provides a useful framework that helps guide what can often be a complex process involving social issues. **CI is a network of community members, organizations, and institutions that advance equity by learning together, aligning and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems-level change.**[1] A CI approach is intentional and highly structured and engages important multisectoral actors in coordinated efforts toward a common vision; it helps actors to move from isolated impact (symptomatic of duplication and sense of competition) or isolated partnerships (common topic worked on by the "usual suspects" with surface-level coordination but often lack of real alignment and shared measurements) to collective impact (where cross-sectoral actors, including non-traditional ones, work toward the same goal and measure the same indicators).

CI provides a platform for participants who may not typically collaborate with one another to share experience and learn: *"Getting the right actors involved, across sectors, that do not traditionally work together, will generate meaningful dialogue with different perspectives… Using common goals to create coordination across sectors results in a sense of mutual responsibility and accountability."*[2]

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT
in isolation

COORDINATED IMPACT
with alignment

COLLECTIVE IMPACT
with collaborative action

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1   Standford Social Innovation Review (2022). *Centering Equity in Collective Impact,* retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/centering_equity_in_collective_impact#

2   Kania, J., Hanleybrown, F., & Splansky Juster, J. (2014). Essential Mindset Shifts for Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review. 12(4): 2-5.* https://ssir.org/articles/entry/essential_mindset_shifts_for_collective_impact

Key roles within Collective Impact

> **Backbone Organization.** The central coordinating entity in CI that provides the leadership, infrastructure, and resources necessary to align the efforts of participating stakeholders. The backbone supports the development of a shared vision, strategy, and direction for the collective, establishes shared measurement systems, provides logistical support, and fosters a culture of openness and trust among partners by modeling the kind of behavior it wants to see in others. By working closely with partners to build relationships and cultivate shared ownership of the effort, the backbone organization helps to ensure that efforts are sustainable over the long term and that impact is felt far beyond the individual efforts of any one partner. A strong backbone organization is essential to the success of CI.

> **Steering Committee.** The governance structure that provides strategic guidance and oversight to a collective. It typically consists of representatives from various partner organizations or individuals involved, often those considered "champions" in the effort. The Steering Committee is responsible for making key decisions related to the initiative's strategy, direction, and progress. The Steering Committee ensures that the Collective Impact effort stays on track and that partners are working collaboratively towards the shared goals via mutually reinforcing activities. It is helpful to ensure that the Steering Committee has sufficient political clout/ credibility to make decisions.

> **Thematic Working Groups (TWG).** A sub-group within a collective that focuses on a specific area related to the overall effort. It typically consists of individuals with expertise and experience in a particular area and is responsible for developing and implementing strategies to achieve the collective's goals related to that theme. Thematic Working Groups provide a platform for in-depth discussion and collaboration on specific issues. A key advantage of TWGs is their ability to produce key deliverables more quickly than the larger collective (as they are leaner, enabling streamlined decision-making).
For example, in Moldova TWGs of 15–30 members were established (membership tended to increase over time), with clear (written, co-created) scopes of work for social services workforce development, case management, strengthening foster care, and financing. Each group was led/facilitated by a member, who was compensated for their time.
The role of the facilitator(s) of each Thematic Working Group is an important one and requires diplomacy, patience, and an ability to create an environment where everyone feels there is space to speak, to share, and to learn.

Pre-Conditions

Across contexts, several pre-conditions have been found to contribute to the success of CI. Where there is already traction in these areas, it is listed below.

1. **Influential champions:** Ukraine has a vibrant community of NGOs, as well as senior political leadership (i.e., the President's Office, the First Lady) who are supportive of care reform.

2. **Adequate financial resources:** Ukraine is currently experiencing an influx of humanitarian funding which could be leveraged to kickstart CI for care reform.

3. **Sense of urgency:** Ukraine must reform its care system as part of its EU accession process; the President's Office has made a public commitment to reform the system.

4. **Readiness assessment:** A readiness assessment is a tool used to evaluate the pre-conditions for successful Collective Impact. The assessment identifies strengths and weaknesses and provides recommendations for building the necessary conditions to succeed. Ukraine could benefit from a readiness assessment to map out clear next steps in establishing a strong foundation which CI efforts can be built upon.

Core Conditions

The CI approach operates on six core conditions:

Common agenda: All participating stakeholders must agree on a shared vision of the desired outcome of the process (i.e., what a reformed care system should look like) and co-develop a strategy for how to achieve it. This is one of the most important first steps. Committing the time and energy to the process of agreeing upon the common agenda is a foundational piece of the process. The unique strengths of each actor engaged in the CI process should be identified, as well as potential key risks to the Collective's success. The common agenda should focus on both short-term and long-term goals and must be adaptable to the evolving context.

Shared measurement system: A set of common indicators must be established to measure the progress and impact of the collective actions. This ensures that stakeholders can track progress, learn from one another, and adjust strategies as needed. Data can also play a key role in building trust among members in the collective. These may include, for example, which children "count" as being in institutional care (e.g., they stay overnight, in any place where paid staff supervise them, for at least xx days per week), number of reunifications/placements of children into families, number of child-family separation prevention cases, etc.

Mutually reinforcing activities: Participating organizations should identify their unique strengths and resources to contribute to the reform efforts. For example, NGOs might focus on capacity building and training, while government agencies may prioritize policy and service standards development and implementation. Each stakeholder should undertake actions that leverage their unique strengths and complement those of the other stakeholders, thus creating synergy and maximizing the overall impact.

Continuous communication: It has been said that "Collective Impact moves at the speed of trust." Open and transparent communication among stakeholders is crucial for building trust, aligning efforts, and facilitating the sharing of knowledge and resources. CI requires continuous communication that is safe, respectful, inclusive of all voices, and open across participants and externally to relevant actors. True Collective Impact also requires individuals and organizations to step away from their comfort zone or their role of always being in front to make room for others. External communication is also beneficial to promote the work of the collective, for example, in Moldova, the collective had a Communications Team which developed a monthly newsletter highlighting both the collective impact and the contributions of individual members (making sure not to focus on any single member more than another and to highlight non-traditional members).
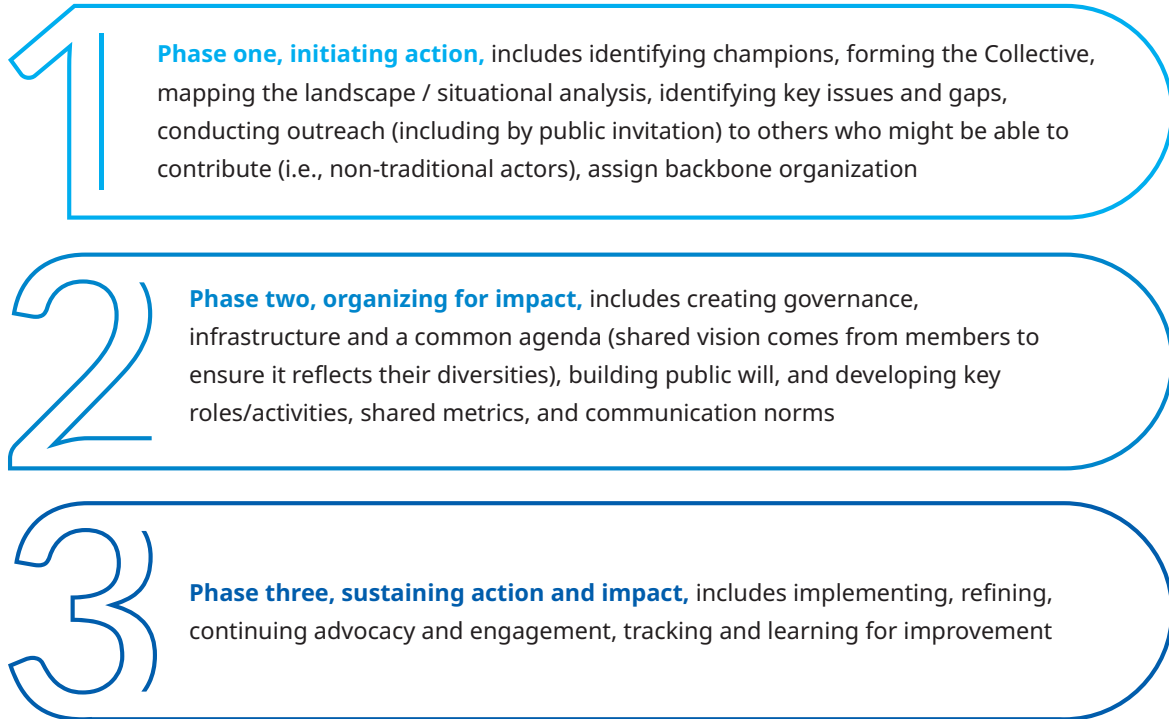
A recognized backbone organization: A dedicated organization is needed to coordinate, support, facilitate communication, ensure alignment and accountability among stakeholders, and monitor progress toward the Collective's shared vision. The best backbones focus on building trust among members. For example, in Moldova, the backbone organization, Changing the Way We Care,[3] focused on bringing members together regularly in-person, in a facilitated, neutral, and accessible meeting space and giving time for both work and socializing (additional break times, etc.).
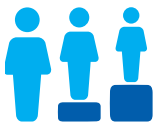
Centering/prioritizing equity: Collectives must address power imbalances that affect relationships among participants and create an internal culture where contributions from all members are valued equally. People with lived experience, especially care leavers, children with disabilities, and alternative caregivers should also be engaged, and their voices should be at the center of CI care reform efforts.

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3   A consortium of Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International.

Process

Broadly, the Collective Impact process can be divided into three phases:

1 **Phase one, initiating action,** includes identifying champions, forming the Collective, mapping the landscape / situational analysis, identifying key issues and gaps, conducting outreach (including by public invitation) to others who might be able to contribute (i.e., non-traditional actors), assign backbone organization

2 **Phase two, organizing for impact,** includes creating governance, infrastructure and a common agenda (shared vision comes from members to ensure it reflects their diversities), building public will, and developing key roles/activities, shared metrics, and communication norms

3 **Phase three, sustaining action and impact,** includes implementing, refining, continuing advocacy and engagement, tracking and learning for improvement

Challenges to Consider

There are several challenges inherent to the CI approach that can jeopardize its chance of success:

> **Maintaining long-term commitment:** CI requires a long-term commitment, which can be challenging to maintain. As stakeholders change over time, it can be difficult to sustain the momentum and engagement necessary to succeed.

> **Aligning different organizational cultures:** Collaboration among organizations with different missions, cultures, and operational styles can be difficult. Aligning everyone's goals, strategies, and tactics can take time and require strong leadership and communication skills. Backbone organizations and TWG facilitators must be committed, effective communicators, and have the time available to invest.

> **Balancing power dynamics:** CI requires equitable participation and decision-making among stakeholders, but power dynamics can often jeopardize this. Organizations with more resources or influence can dominate the conversation, while smaller or less-resourced organizations may feel marginalized.

> **Managing data and evaluation:** Collecting and analyzing data is essential for measuring progress and identifying areas for improvement in CI initiatives. However, managing data across multiple organizations with different systems and standards can be challenging. Additionally, determining the impact of the initiative and attributing change to specific actions can be complex.

> **Securing sustained funding:** CI initiatives require resources to sustain efforts over time. Funding can be a challenge, as many organizations may have different funding streams or priorities, and funding sources may be limited or inconsistent.

> **Funding mechanism:** Backbone Organizations and Steering Committees must decide whether funding is allocated directly within the Collective or via external funding mechanisms; each approach has its pros and cons. In Moldova, the Collective identified priority activities needed to achieve their shared vision, then the Backbone Organization publicly advertised funding and encouraged members to apply. By contrast, in Cambodia, the Backbone Organization disseminated funding directly to members based on their pre-identified organizational strengths (this meant non-traditional members often received funding that they previously may not have, positioning them well for subsequent funding from donors which may not have previously considered their work).

> **Positioning the collective at the "right" level:** Collectives may be positioned at national or sub-national levels, depending on the nature of the social problem being addressed, which dictates the nature of the activities undertaken by the collective. For example, there may be advantages in Ukraine to positioning Collectives at oblast-level, where there is decentralized authority that is not being implemented; however, there is also a need for policy reform which would require a national-level Collective. Consider different models, including the national Collective being comprised of oblast-level Collective members to centralize and share across the country. The role of Government may vary in different collectives/TWGs and should be defined early.

Conclusion

CI can be a powerful approach to addressing complex social issues, but it requires dedicated leadership, strong communication, and a sustained commitment to collaboration and data-driven evaluation. While CI is a long-term commitment, it creates new norms and expectations for intentional collaboration and shared accountability. By bringing together diverse stakeholders and fostering collaboration, it is possible to create lasting, systemic change that improves the lives of children and families in Ukraine.

Resources

1. The Aspen Institute, *Collective Impact: What Is It and Why Is Everyone (Still) Talking About It?* [video]*, https://www.classcentral.com/course/youtube-collective-impact-what-is-it-and-why-is-everyone-still-talking-about-it-161894

2. Stanford Social Innovation Review (2022). *Centering Equity in Collective Impact,* retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/centering_equity_in_collective_impact# [4]

3. Changing the Way We Care (2023). *A case study on using collective impact approach in strengthening social services workforce* [video], https://vimeo.com/819861261?share=copy

4. Collective Impact Forum (2016). *Collective Impact Principles of Practice: Putting Collective Impact into Action,* retrieved from https://collectiveimpactforum.org/blog/collective-impact-principles-of-practice-putting-collective-impact-into-action/

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4   Also available in video summary, not yet viewed: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AK_LNpaQA8

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Wherever he lives.

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A future.

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