Through a collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), PYXERA Global designed and implemented the Impact Champions program. As the legacy of IMPACT2030, an initiative launched in 2015 to unite companies and harness the skills and creativity of their employees to advance the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals, this virtual initiative enables corporate employees to align their passion and purpose with strategic opportunities to make social impact from their home or office.

Over the course of 12 weeks, corporate participants collaborated with other professionals across a broad range of industries. Together, in virtual teams, they applied their business, technology, and operational skills to support selected partner organizations in emerging markets focused on providing accessible and affordable energy, capacity building, and enhancing operational performance. By introducing new perspectives and improved and updated business practices, cross-corporate Impact Champions teams had the opportunity to have a transformative impact on USAID’s social sector partners that are providing critical services to both businesses and families.

Program Highlights

From April – July 2021, 13 employees from five different private sector companies - Boston Scientific, Linklaters, PIMCO, SAP, and Tata Consulting Services - worked in teams of four-five to support three partner organizations collaborating with USAID under the Power Africa program: Hello Solar, Pawame, and Simusolar.

All three organizations work to bring affordable solar energy to business and households across Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, but each Impact Champions project had a unique focus. Teams’ work ranged from developing a customer vetting process to building an IT architecture plan for improved internal operations. At the end of 12 weeks, each team presented their final deliverables to the partner organizations and shared their work to a broader audience of USAID stakeholders, partner organization employees, and colleagues.

“Through the Impact Champions program, I learned about the power of a diverse team (one that’s tightly aligned with the client) coming together to effect change, as well as the importance of truly listening to and understanding your client’s needs.”

– CAITLIN METCALF
Senior U.S. Associate, Linklaters
Simusolar Team Member
Partner Organization
Overall Experience

As part of USAID’s Power Africa program, the three partner organizations, Hello Solar, Pawame, and Simusolar, all work to provide affordable solar energy to households and businesses through a Pay-As-You-Go model. Each organization has experienced success in reaching its target audiences throughout Kenya, Tanzania, and/or Ethiopia, but the organizations have also experienced challenges over the past year for which they needed support.

In collaboration with their Impact Champions teams, the organizations were able to build their internal capacity in a variety of areas, namely training & knowledge transfer, stakeholder engagement, and leadership & governance. This increase in the organizations’ capacity to fulfill their missions will be critical, as all three organizations predict reaching more clients in the next year, for a total of 16,000 new clients provided services.

Additionally, the partner organizations agreed that working with a multi-company cohort improved the program’s outcome, as it allowed them to analyze the projects from different perspectives.

Number of new clients partner organizations anticipate reaching in the next year

16,000

How confident are you in your ability to meet your customers’ needs?

How confident are you in your ability to meet your customers’ needs?

Before Impact Champions  After Impact Champions

[The Impact Champions team] were from different backgrounds [compared to Simusolar staff]. I feel that if all the IC team was from one company, that company’s way of doing things could have become the focus of the project. With a diverse team, they were able to instead focus on what we need. [The team’s work] redefined our IT architecture to be streamlined and customer-focused while being a multi-cloud structure. Bringing in that consistency will have a big impact on how well our staff understand our customer’s journey with us, complementing our service design process.”

— VAIBHAV VAIDYA, CTO, Simusolar
Hello Solar is a company that is working to successfully implement PAYGO solar energy distribution in Ethiopia by building a distribution network supported by agents and a customer management and payment system adapted to the Ethiopian context.

In the PAYGO solar energy sector, a low defaulting rate is decisive in maintaining a sustainable business, so Hello Solar needed to be able to make sure customers are able to pay for their systems in a timely manner. Based on the tailored deliverables the Impact Champions team produced, the organization believes it can reach 3,500 new customers next year while mitigating risk. As Abyie, the Credit Portfolio Manager stated, “The program enables us to get answers to credit scoring, which was our big issue previously... and now we can enhance our responsiveness to customers.”

**Organizational Mission**
Hello Solar’s mission is to build a strong and customer-centered PAYGO solar energy distribution network throughout Ethiopia.

**Impact Champions Project Objective**
The objective of the Impact Champions project was to create a prospect customer vetting process that would be both independent from HelloSolar’s partners and specific to the Ethiopian landscape.

How feasible will it be to implement the recommendations provided by the Impact Champions team in the next year?

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**Top 3 organizational capacities improved due to the Impact Champions program**

1. Stakeholder Management
2. External Relations
3. Training, Development & Knowledge Transfer

**DELIVERABLES**

1. **Excel-based customer vetting & scoring method**
   A personalized vetting process Hello Solar can use to assess potential customers.

2. **Customer vetting guidelines**
   A document that details the methodology behind the customer vetting process and how it was created.

3. **Customer vetting handbook**
   A document that details how the customer vetting process can be updated and expanded in the future.

**TEAM MEMBERS**

- Amanda Griggs, Team Lead, Linklaters
- Mark DaRocha, Boston Scientific
- Jean Andre Le, PIMCO
- Javeriah Farrukh, SAP
- Aditya Karma, TCS
Pawame

Pawame is a Kenyan solar home system distribution and financing company whose objective is to provide energy access as a gateway to financial empowerment for off-grid communities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Prior to the Impact Champions project, Pawame was using informal operational processes to conduct business, and this led to inconsistencies and customer complaints. The team and Pawame leadership struggled to come to an agreement on why the processes were not as effective, but eventually found that recommendations needed to be made not only around BPM, but also trainings and feedback loops. Despite these difficulties, Sydney Ogada, a Training and Resource Management Associate, believes Pawame will be able to reach 12,000 new customers in the next year.

**Organizational Mission**

Pawame’s mission is to provide affordable, modern energy access as a foundation for financial empowerment and a gateway to limitless opportunity.

**Impact Champions Project Objective**

The objective of the Impact Champions project was to standardize and improve Pawame’s operating processes by designing and developing a Business Process Management/Quality Management System with an internal audit framework.

**How feasible will it be to implement the recommendations provided by the Impact Champions team in the next year?**

![Feasibility Chart]

**Top 3 organizational capacities improved due to the Impact Champions program**

1. Training, Development & Knowledge Transfer
2. Leadership & Governance

**DELIVERABLES**

1. **Staff training recommendations**
   Recommendations on how to best train Pawame staff on current business process management systems to decrease internal pain points.

2. **BPM recommendations**
   Recommendations based on a review of Pawame’s current business process management systems and how to improve them for Pawame’s current context.

3. **Feedback collection recommendations**
   Recommendations on how to collect feedback from all levels of staff to continually improve BPM systems/address pain points.

**TEAM MEMBERS**

- Tulsi May, Team Lead, PIMCO
- Josh Feit, Linklaters
- Prasanthi Thatavarthy, SAP
- Rubina Aganjee, TCS
Simusolar

Simusolar is a company that launched in Tanzania in 2014 with a mission to increase the income of rural households through productive-use equipment and services.

Earlier in 2021, Simusolar realized its current IT architecture plan, with its many off-the-shelf software services was no longer serving staff in an efficient and cost-effective way. The Impact Champions team not only worked with the Simusolar team to develop a useable plan that is easily implementable, but also provided “extra” deliverables around how to best bolster IT security and implement change management best practices once the plan is rolled out. Due to the program, Simusolar feels they will reach 500 new customers in the next year. “We got world class validation to our approach,” said Vaibhav Vaidya, CTO. “[We also got] expert consultation on the right way to move forward for future projects.”

Organizational Mission

Simusolar’s mission is to increase the income of rural households through productive-use equipment and services.

Impact Champions Project Objective

The objective of the Impact Champions project was to develop an IT architecture plan and specific software recommendations that build off Simusolar’s existing multi-cloud platform with a preference to no-code solutions.

How feasible will it be to implement the recommendations provided by the Impact Champions team in the next year?

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Top 3 organizational capacities improved due to the Impact Champions program

1. Leadership & Governance
2. Information & Communications Technology
3. Training, Development & Knowledge Transfer/ Stakeholder Management

TEAM MEMBERS

- Harish Parmar, Team Lead, TCS
- Caitlin Metcalf, Linklaters
- Brian Lau, PIMCO
- Stefan Boller, SAP

DELIVERABLES

1. IT architecture plan review
   - Review of Simusolar’s current IT architecture plan to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

2. IT architecture plan execution roadmap
   - Document on how to streamline the IT architecture plan and make it more customer-focused.

3. Security and change management recommendations
   - “Nice-to-have” recommendations provided by the team on security and change management decisions that will come up in the future.
Out of the 13 employees who participated in the program, 12 responded to the Feedback Survey. All who responded to the survey found the Impact Champions program to be a positive experience that allowed participants to test their business skills in a new environment and all enjoyed working in a cross-corporate team as the structure allowed for them to gain new perspectives and ways of working.

Although the employees would recommend the program to colleagues and friends, some participants mentioned a few challenges, namely coordinating across time zones, establishing the best technology to use to communicate, and the overall time commitment it takes to participate. That being said, most participants agreed they were able to make a significant contribution to their partner organizations and they have an increased confidence in their ability to make a difference in their communities.

**Overall Participant Impact**

How much did you learn about social/social enterprise sector work through your participant in Impact Champions?

- A great deal: 8%
- A little: 8%
- A moderate amount: 42%
- A lot: 42%

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with your contribution/support given to the partner organization.

- Extremely Satisfied: 42%
- Somewhat Satisfied: 42%
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 16%

Please rate the following statements: *The Impact Champions program...*

- Resulted in me coming up with new ideas and/or improvements for my work at my company.
- Prompted me to search for other ways to get engaged in my local community.
- Increased my confidence in my ability to make a difference.
- Helped me learn valuable things about myself personally.

[Being part of a diverse team meant] bringing innovative thoughts and cultural challenges out in the open and learning and adapting. It really helped create a positive impact and led to an innovative solution being offered to the partner organization.”

— HARISH PARMAR
Client Partner, TCS, Simusolar Team Lead

**NET PROMOTER SCORE**

Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a standardized metric used to assess overall satisfaction with and perceptions of a program based on participants’ self-assessed likelihood of recommending the program to others. Scores range from -100 to 100, with scores above 0 considered positive.
Mark DaRocha, the only Boston Scientific employee in the cohort, was satisfied with his Impact Champions experience overall. In the post-program Feedback Survey, he mentioned the time commitment was more than he was expecting, but it was the result of having to learn about his team members and establish a relationship with the partner organization. Despite the time commitment, DaRocha felt he was able to increase his proficiency in adaptability, business acumen, and innovative thinking given his team had to create a customer vetting process in an unfamiliar Ethiopian market. The program also increased his confidence in his ability to make a difference in the lives of others. Overall, DaRocha enjoyed learning about another culture and meeting the challenges of a business across the world.

I would recommend [the program] to my colleagues but would preface it with a reservation about the amount of work it can potentially be. At the start of the project, it wasn’t too bad but in the third phase, it can be pretty extensive... Other than the workload, the experience was positive.”

— MARK DAROCHA
Human Resources Administrator IV, Helio Solar Team Member

### Top skills proficiency increase after the Impact Champions program

1. Adaptability
2. Business Acumen
3. Innovative Thinking