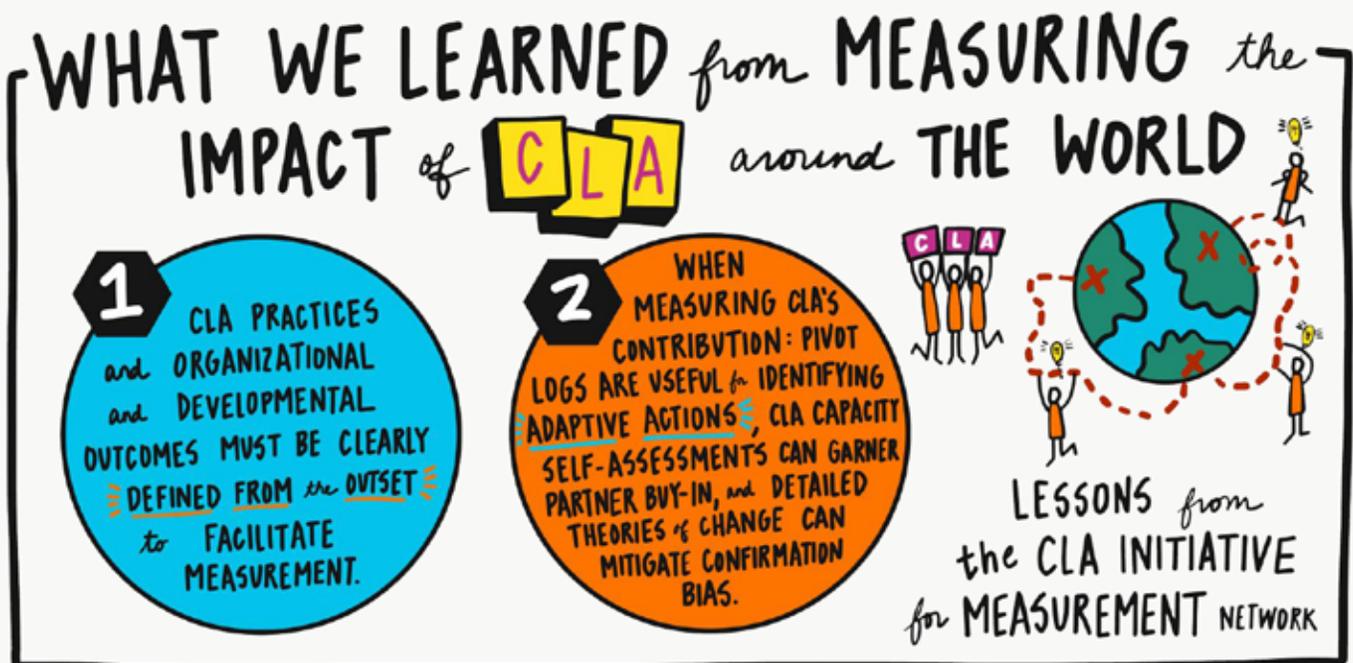




COLLABORATING, LEARNING AND ADAPTING IMPACT MEASUREMENT LEARNING NETWORK

Findings on How to Measure CLA



The Collaborating, Learning and Adapting Impact Measurement (CLAIM) learning network, funded by USAID, provided five grants to implementing organizations to support the development and sharing of innovative methods for measuring CLA's contribution to development. Over an 18-month period, CLAIM partners conducted five separate research efforts into seven implementing partner projects to address the question: 'How do we effectively measure the contribution (or lack thereof) of CLA to improved organizational effectiveness and development outcomes?'

Connecting these separate efforts, the learning network met monthly to share promising practices, address common challenges, and foster collective learning. This brief offers insights into their lessons learned regarding how to (and how not to!) measure CLA and its potential contributions to development outcomes.

Measuring CLA's contribution ...

Framing. Given the complexity of implementing partners' operating environments, the learning network focused on CLA's **plausible contribution** to organizational and development outcomes, rather than attribution. Each research partner developed specific questions aligned with the overarching research question and contributed to a general theory of change (ToC). They articulated different levels of measurement, ranging from activities to support application of CLA practices to (improved) application of CLA by targeted organizations to development outcomes.

Methods and Tools. The research efforts used a mix of innovative quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the link between CLA practices and development outcomes. These methods included: the USAID **Maturity Tool**, CLA Action Chains, Pathway/Decision Mapping, Pivot Logs, Participatory Quality Assessment (PQA), surveys (self-assessment, baseline, midline and endline), focus group discussions, participant observation, and key informant interviews.

... is difficult ...

The network members faced several challenges in their efforts to measure CLA and its contribution to organizational effectiveness and development outcomes, including:

- **Defining CLA.** CLA encompasses a broad array of interrelated practices which, for clear measurement purposes, need to be specifically defined. Without clear definition of what these practices are, how they are related to each other, and which practices have been 'selected' to be measured, the process of comparing measurement and understanding the extent to which CLA has been applied can become muddled.
- **Influence of organizational context on methods.** The state of the implementing partner (including their approach to adaptation, resources available, and organizational incentives) affected whether CLA practices could be applied, as well as the utility of certain research methods.
- **Confirmation bias.** The learning network members are all champions of CLA approaches and therefore needed to consider ways to mitigate bias towards finding evidence of CLA's positive impact on outcomes.
- **Aggregating findings across the network's research.** Though some members' methods were comparable, most of the approaches and contexts differed enough to make aggregating across them a challenge.
- **Recall bias.** Some research methods required staff to remember how decisions to adapt had been made and what specific lessons had motivated these decisions, introducing potential errors depending on accuracy or completeness of participants' memory.
- **Team willingness to share.** Given that most of the research partners' methods relied on questions answered by the implementing partners' team members (whether through key informant interviews, surveys, focus groups, or another method), findings were heavily reliant on the willingness of those team members to honestly share their perspectives and experiences. If a team has a culture of closed communication or team members do not feel confident in sharing their perspectives, this is potentially both a research finding (because open communication is part of CLA practice) and a factor biasing research findings. The bias introduced may also change over time: e.g., if a baseline is conducted on a new program without open communication norms, but then team is more willing to share during the endline.
- **Absence of a counterfactual.** Several of the research approaches constructed 'hypothetical' counterfactuals to gauge what might have happened had the project not invested in a specific CLA activity or made a specific decision. Though practical for research purposes, this approach introduced a level of error as improvements in outcomes due to CLA were compared to potentially inaccurate reference points.
- **Ease of measurement linked to definition of outcomes.** Research partners' definitions of 'outcomes' ranged from assessing changes in partner organizations to capturing changes among the population served, which had significant impact on the ease and timeframe of capturing outcomes.

... but it is possible!

Despite these challenges, each partner produced important and useful contributions to the evidence base for CLA. In particular, the methods tested improved the collective understanding of CLA enabling conditions, how to measure CLA, and which methods and tools work well, including:

- **A general theory of change and a detailed theory of change are both needed for each agenda.** Having both general and detailed theories of change helps to identify what expected changes a measurement method should seek to capture across stages of the project. It also helps in aggregating findings across research studies, and in reducing the impact of confirmation bias.
- **CLA practices must be defined at the outset to facilitate measurement.** In addition to defining CLA practices, the research partners clarified how these practices were related to one another and which specific practices would be measured through each learning agenda. This was achieved by using the established conceptual framework (**CLA Framework and Maturity Tool**) or through developing tailored frameworks to shape research tools (ex ante) and identify (ex post) when specific CLA practices had improved. The research partners also identified the importance of differentiating between reactive and proactive changes (which they also discussed in terms of 'adaptive' vs. 'reactive' management), and 'excessive' and 'strategic' CLA, e.g., for one partner collaboration during the grant development process used resources inefficiently, delayed implementation and caused staff frustration while team reflection activities during implementation of a grant mechanisms were viewed as positive and effective.
- **Self assessments were effective tools for generating partner buy-in which substantially improved the quality of research findings.** Members who used self-assessment tools to identify "CLA pain points" and, in turn, areas for CLA measurement found that these tools were helpful to build buy-in from their partners, which in turn improved research findings.
- **Quantitative analysis was helpful in analyzing cases with large numbers of observations.** Learning network members mostly used qualitative tools, but found quantitative tools were most appropriate when applied to cases whose large numbers of observations made it possible to establish statistical significance.
- **Pivot logs helped to capture key decision points, to an extent.** This tool allowed a granular understanding of the causes and results of key internal changes (e.g., relevant to internal operations and donor relationships) and external decisions (e.g., relevant to relationships with partners and other local stakeholders). and provided insight into CLA's contribution to development results. Confirmation bias within this method was mitigated by bringing together multiple perspectives within each program team and using program monitoring data to validate program outcomes that were identified by the projects.

AND it can be done better.

Based on the research agendas' successes and failures, the learning network partners identified a few lessons for future efforts to measure CLA and its impact on development outcomes:

- **Improving scope and reliability of findings from pivot logs.** While pivot logs were found to be successful in capturing development outcomes, they were also subject to biases, both from the researchers' interpretations and reliance on project staff for identification of cases. In addition, the focus of the pivot log on a key change means that it is inherently unable to capture points where the appropriate outcome of application of a CLA practice (such as "pause and reflect") was actually to make no change at all. Finally, some learning network members were hesitant to ask about negative outcomes or raise this possibility when facilitating exercises with teams, increasing the potential bias of results.
- **Flexibility of research designs.** Due to environmental factors and complexity of the research agenda, network members recommend employing a flexible research design, including: (1) partnering with multiple organizations to reduce the risk of failure; and (2) using multiple research tools to increase flexibility if one or more of the tools cannot be applied in the given context.
- **Where to focus research efforts.** This process should be replicated with different types of programs, especially those with more strictly defined outcomes, in different sectoral areas, and/or without deliberately adaptive approaches. Such research may find outcomes measurement easier, while potentially identifying a smaller but more coherent set of adaptive actions.