

# Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA)

## AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT CLA LOOKS LIKE IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING



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USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning holds an annual Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) [Case Competition](#) to showcase examples of effective collaboration, continuous learning and adaptive management in action. In reviewing the submissions, PPL and LEARN realized that the collection offers an opportunity to look across cases and synthesize patterns about CLA that would be applicable to wider USAID, implementing partner and donor audiences. This brief synthesizes findings from the [full report](#) and answers the following research questions:

- How did CLA practices and approaches found in the 2015 cases contribute to organizational change or development outcomes?
- What are the implications of learning for USAID staff, implementing partners and development practitioners?

### **How did CLA practices and approaches contribute to organizational change or development outcomes?**

An analysis of 32 (the top-scoring half) of the 2015 cases revealed five overarching patterns that demonstrate how CLA practices and approaches can contribute to development or organizational outcomes. The first four of these key findings are consistent with evidence from a [review of academic and gray literature](#).



**FINDING I: Collaboration leverages resources for collective benefit.**

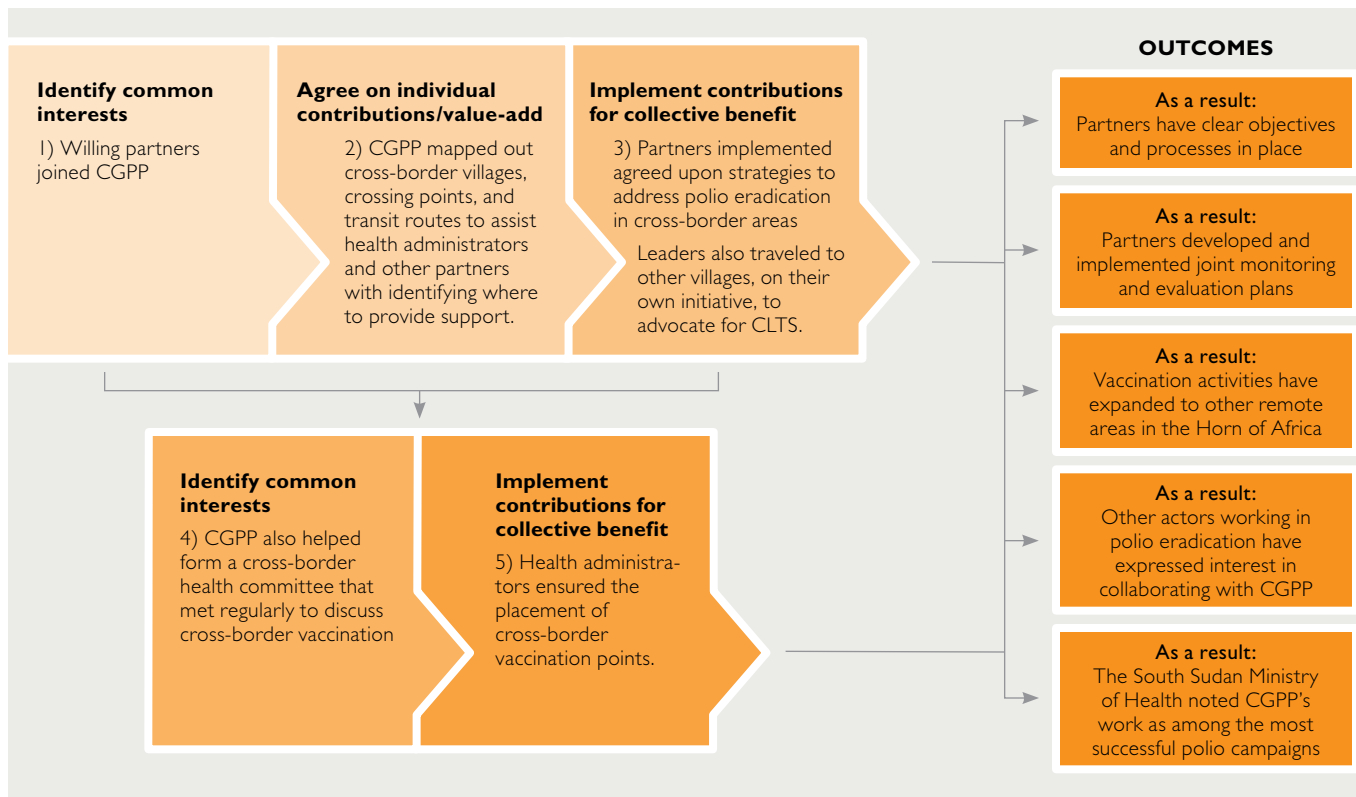
The cases that shaped this finding describe how collaborating helps development actors identify their respective comparative advantages around a common goal. Then, the stakeholders decide on next steps and divvy up responsibilities. Based on the final agreement each stakeholder provides funding, human resources and/or materials—among other potential contributions—toward the mutual desired outcome. This collaboration then leads to organizational and/or development outcomes that may not have occurred otherwise, as shown in the example below.

**Finding I in Action: Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Supports Cross-border Vaccinations in the Horn of Africa**

A 2013 polio outbreak in the Horn of Africa led the CORE Group Polio Project (CGPP) to focus on cross-border transmission and work to tackle the spread of polio in the region’s most unstable areas.

To address this complex crisis, CGPP employed the Secretariat Model, which convenes civil society, in-country and such international actors as UNICEF and the World Health Organization, to coordinate efforts to stop the spread of poliovirus in cross-border areas. The diagram below describes how this collaboration, based on the respective value-add of each stakeholder, produced positive outcomes, including expanding vaccination activities to other remote areas in the Horn of Africa.

**FIGURE I:** Collaboration leverages resources for collective benefit in the CORE Group Polio Activity



Other cases that support Finding I demonstrate how strategic collaboration supported the dairy sector in Bangladesh, access to water in Lebanon, integration of humanitarian and development funding in Somalia, and savings groups in Uganda.



**FINDING 2:** Local engagement leads to local ownership and, ultimately, improved development outcomes.

Several of the cases highlight how engaging with local stakeholders contributes to their increased ownership, which in turn can lead to better development outcomes. The example below shows that when implementing partners invite local stakeholders to actively participate in activity implementation, they become agents of their own change process and are motivated to achieve desired development outcomes.

**Finding 2 in Action:** Local Engagement Helps Curtail the Spread of Ebola in Liberia

When Ebola struck Liberia and eventually spiraled into an epidemic, Global Communities realized it needed to help curtail the epidemic via improved burial practices. However, communities were skeptical of Global Communities and even attacked staff members and their vehicles. Residents wanted to know: “Why do you only come when someone has died? Why do you not come to help when someone is sick?”

As a result, Global Communities had to quickly shift tactics and meaningfully engage community members, particularly traditional leaders, to support safe burial. Because of this intentional relationship building, traditional leaders were willing to educate their community members about Ebola transmission and accompany burial staff for safe and peaceful burials. This resulted in a an increased number of safe burials and a reduction in the rates of Ebola transmission.

**FIGURE 2:** Local engagement leads to local ownership and, ultimately, improved development outcomes for Liberian communities



Other cases that support Finding 2 demonstrate how local engagement improved sanitation in Zambia, savings groups in Uganda, and livelihoods in global programming.



**FINDING 3:** Intentional knowledge management generates standard good practices for broader application:

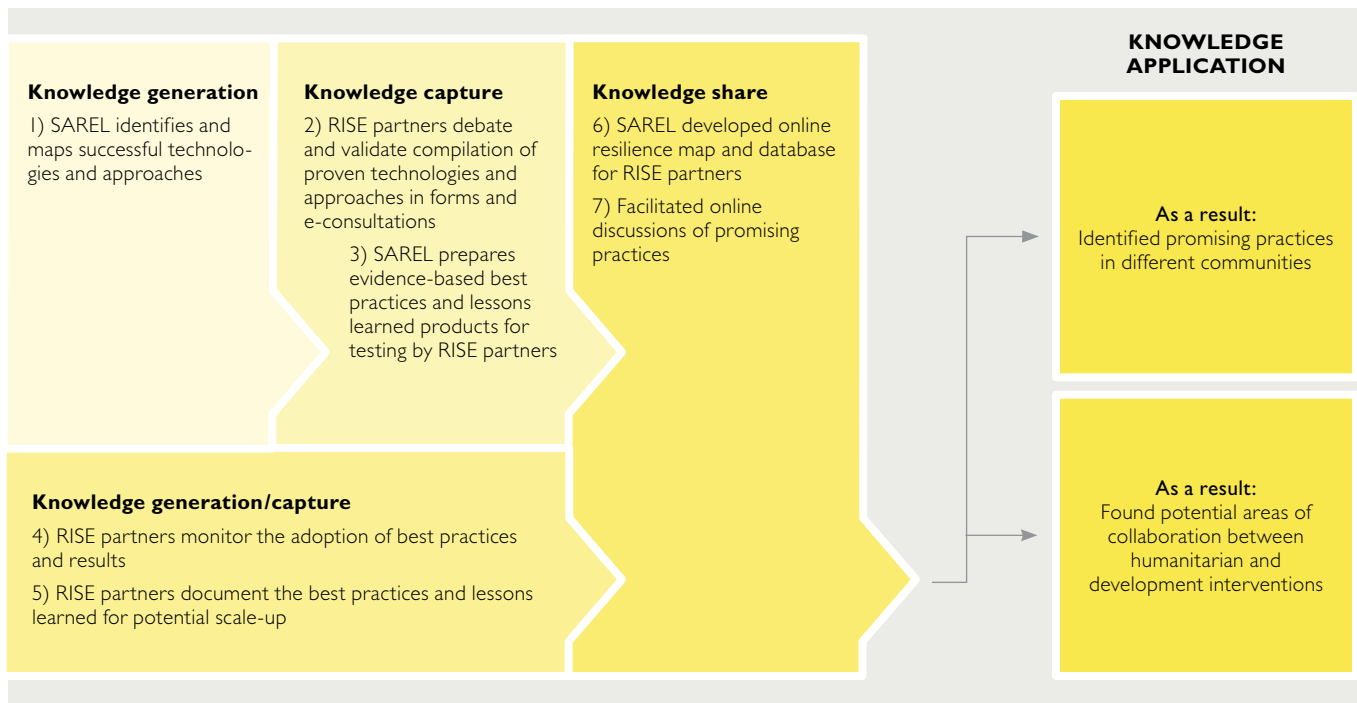
The cases comprising this finding underline how capturing knowledge and sharing best practices derived from that knowledge can contribute to improvements at the organizational level. Moreover, knowledge dissemination can also lead to scale-up of good practices.

**Finding 3 in Action: Knowledge Management Supports Effective Resilience Programming**

Sahel Resilience Learning (SAREL) provides monitoring, evaluation, collaboration and learning support to USAID’s Resilience in the Sahel-Enhanced (RISE) initiative. SAREL addresses some of the major challenges faced by RISE partners, notably a lack of a shared collaboration and learning platform.

In response, SAREL 1) identified and mapped proven technologies and approaches implemented by partners that have helped make vulnerable families more resilient, 2) hosted knowledge-sharing events to validate best practices and identify opportunities for collaboration and 3) produced briefs on best practices and uploaded them to a shared online platform.

**FIGURE 3:** Intentional knowledge management generates standard good practice for broader use.



Other cases that support Finding 3 demonstrate how intentional knowledge management supported improvements to safe male circumcision in Uganda, health worker management, and preventing mother to child transmission of HIV.



**FINDING 4:** Feedback loops increase the likelihood that evidence will inform decision-making:

The cases illustrating this finding describe how specific tools and processes for creating feedback loops provide continuous learning to inform decision-making. In generating feedback, teams and organizations analyze learning, make decisions based on that learning and then follow through on decisions reached.

**Finding 4 in Action: Real-Time Feedback Supports Adaptive Management in Uganda**

To improve literacy rates and reduce HIV transmission among primary and secondary school students, the Ugandan government designed an integrated education and health strategy. USAID/Uganda supports this approach through the School Health and Reading Program (SHRP), implemented through the Research Triangle Institute (RTI). The mission awarded a Performance and Impact Evaluation mechanism (P&IE) to Panagora Group with the goal of providing monitoring, evaluation, and CLA advisory services to RTI.

Panagora Group developed a multi-stage approach to continuous learning by providing RTI with real-time performance information needed to inform adaptive management decisions and actions that could, in turn, lead to improved results. The figure below shows how feedback was used, in one example, to improve training.

**FIGURE 4:** Feedback loops increase the likelihood that evidence will inform decision-making.



Seven additional cases support Finding 4 and include examples of how real-time data led to greater responsiveness in the aftermath of the [2015 Nepal earthquake](#), a midterm evaluation resulted in changes to [an activity's theory of change and overall approach](#), and routine data collection in Haiti informed where best to [allocate resources](#).

## FINDING 5: CLA begets CLA and sometimes leads to scale-up:

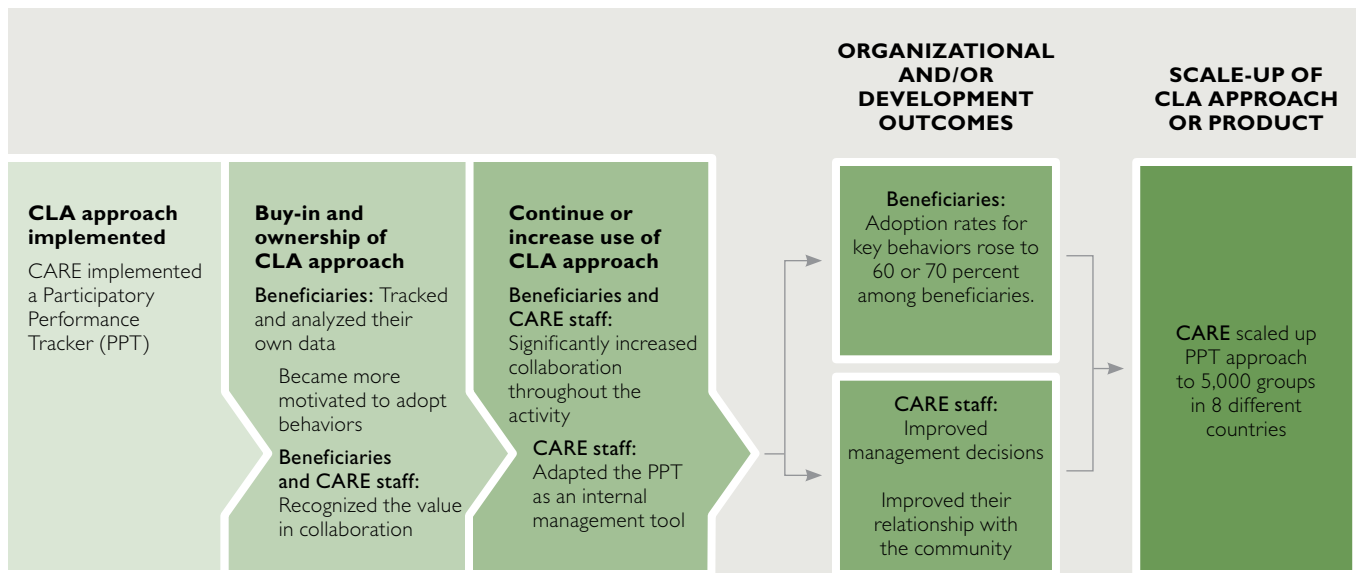
Some cases highlight how personally experiencing a CLA approach can lead to increased CLA uptake among staff within an organization and thereby lead to potentially improved organizational and/or development outcomes. Other cases show that there is a “demonstration effect” when development stakeholders learn about the benefits of a successful CLA approach implemented by another actor, and they then adapt this approach and scale it up in their own context.

### Finding 5 in Action: Effective M&E for Learning Practices Scaled Globally

To increase farmers’ access to food and improve nutrition, CARE worked to change the behaviors of rural farmers in Bangladesh through its Strengthening the Dairy Value Chain activity. However, behavior change is notoriously difficult to measure, particularly when an activity involves tens of thousands of program participants.

As a result, CARE created a Participatory Performance Tracker (PPT) to track and discuss behavior change data relevant to the activity’s objectives. It also resolved some of CARE’s operational challenges: relying on the PPT required community groups to hold regular meetings to review their behaviors. These data could then be aggregated and shared with program staff, who would analyze the data and suggest course corrections. Assessing their own progress also ended up motivating community groups to take more agency in adopting behaviors promoted by CARE. It also led to CARE expanding the use of the PPT to an additional 8 country offices working with 5,000 community groups. In both cases, effective M&E for learning had a ripple effect on communities using the tool and CARE’s offices.

FIGURE 5: Effective M&E for Learning Practices Scaled Globally



Nine additional cases support finding 5 and include examples of how implementing partners applied CLA approaches that [USAID/Uganda](#) and [USAID/Malawi](#) promoted and scale-up of an effective [monitoring approach for gender programming](#).

## What are the implications of learning for USAID staff, implementing partners and development practitioners?

- **Investing in CLA bears results. But are we willing to invest?** The cases clearly illustrate how investing in CLA practices and approaches provides a range of valuable contributions to organizational change and development outcomes. This suggests that USAID staff and implementing partners should continue and, in many cases, expand investments in CLA integration.
- **Work with local actors to facilitate, rather than create, development.** The cases showcase how CLA promotes local engagement and ownership and ultimately affects the success of development programming. These findings indicate the value of integrating CLA as part of a facilitative approach with local actors to enhance the sustainability of development results.
- **Create opportunities for others to experience and learn about effective collaborating, learning and adapting at the individual, team and organizational levels.** Cases in Finding #5 above suggest that “experiencing is believing”—meaning those who experience CLA are more likely to integrate CLA into how they operate. By effectively modeling CLA, organizations may more credibly share their benefits with other development actors and inspire them to integrate CLA into their own work.



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This analysis is part of a larger effort known as the Evidence Base for Collaborating, Learning and Adapting ([EB4CLA](#)) to understand whether and how strategic collaboration, continuous learning and adaptive management make a difference to organizational effectiveness and development results. For comments and questions, please reach out to [learning@usaid.gov](mailto:learning@usaid.gov) or [info@usaidlearninglab.org](mailto:info@usaidlearninglab.org).