CLA and the Journey to Self-Reliance in Streamlined CDCS Planning and Development

USAID’s Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) principles and approaches help staff and partners to work more effectively with local actors, country partners, and others to generate and share learning that can be used to inform strategic choices and programming decisions in a Mission’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). As USAID’s approach to operationalizing adaptive management in the Program Cycle, CLA helps us plan and manage USAID programs in ways that help foster self-reliance. The various ways CLA supports self-reliance in strategy development and implementation are discussed below, along with specific resources. Some of the resources linked from this document may be updated in the future to incorporate the Journey to Self-Reliance explicitly. For now, this tool serves as an interface to help users understand how the CLA tools and approaches linked here can be used to design and implement strategies and programming that support self-reliance.

This tool discusses four areas in which CLA approaches can be used in CDCS development:

- Stakeholder engagement for contextual awareness
- Stocktaking and other methods for identifying and applying lessons from implementation
- Building adaptability into CDCSs and the projects and activities that flow from them
- Developing and implementing learning agendas to fill gaps in knowledge

In addition to describing how each of these approaches can inform both CDCS planning and deliverables, this tool also ends with a discussion of the MEL section of the CDCS and the CLA plan in the PMP.

A. Collaborating with Stakeholders/ Learning about the Country Context

Both the Policy Framework and the Private Sector Engagement Policy emphasize the importance of collaborating to support local communities to define their development challenges and implement the solutions they choose.

CDCS Planning: CLA approaches and principles help Mission staff collaborate effectively with local stakeholders and the private sector to support learning from and among local actors. These practices also support Mission understanding of the local context and a country’s capacity for and commitment to self-reliance. Engaging with local stakeholders to pool knowledge and evidence about the local context and identify development challenges and opportunities will inform strategic choices to achieve better development results.

CDCS Deliverables: The resources below can support you as you develop:

- the CDCS Phase 1 Concept Presentation template (specifically, the “country context” and “partner government priorities” sections)
- the Phase 2 Results Framework (RF) Summary Paper and Matrix Template and DVC template (specifically, the “high-level summary country context”, “strategic partners”, “critical assumptions”, and “risk factors” sections)
- and the Final CDCS outline (in particular, the country context, strategic approach, and results framework narrative).
Resources:

- **Engaging Stakeholders** Includes tips on how to effectively engage with stakeholders and links to the following related resources:
  - Collaboration Mapping & Network Mapping
  - Designing Participatory Meetings and Brownbags
  - Communities of Practice Guidance
  - Facilitation Tips for Stakeholder Consultations
  - Co-creation Discussion Note
  - Peer Assists Guidance


B. Stocktaking and Learning from Strategy Implementation

Missions will want to capture what was learned from implementing their previous CDCS, and current and past projects and activities, to inform their new CDCS.

**CDCS Planning:** Prior to beginning Phase 1 of a new CDCS, portfolio reviews, CDCS Mid-Course Stocktaking and other learning events serve as “pause and reflect” moments for the Mission to assess what has been learned and inform the new strategy with these lessons. Missions may leverage these learning events to further enhance strategic collaboration and stakeholder engagement, to strengthen knowledge transfer among staff and partners, and to address organizational practices and culture to better enable adaptive management that, in turn, helps USAID to better empower country partners at all levels to resource their own development efficiently, accountably, and transparently.

**CDCS Deliverables:** The resources below can support you as you develop:

- the CDCS Phase 1 Concept Presentation template (specifically, the “preliminary strategic approach”, “what’s different about the new strategy”, and “lessons learned” sections)
- the Phase 2 Results Framework (RF) Summary Paper and Matrix Template and DVC template (specifically, the “high-level summary country context”, “strategic partners”, “critical assumptions”, and “risk factors” sections)
- and the final CDCS outline (in particular, the executive summary when discussing strategic choices, country context, and strategic approach, and the results framework narrative).

Resources:

- **How-to Note: Strategy-Level Portfolio Review**
- **How-To Note: CDCS Mid-Course Stocktaking**
- **Mid-course Stocktaking Module and Related Resources** (in the Module, see sections on “planning” and “conducting a stocktaking”) The module is a rich source of resources such as templates and sample questions that can guide a Mission’s early thought process. This page also includes resources on:
  - Stocktaking worksheet (a planning document that guides a Mission through decisions, ultimately ending with a draft agenda) and rubric (to assess the strengths of the plan to date);
  - **Webinar**: Adaptive management at the strategy level: portfolio reviews and mid-course stocktaking
  - **Webinar**: CDCS mid-course stocktaking: what we’ve learned so far and how to get started; and
C. Building Adaptability into Strategic and Management Approaches

As Missions consider how they can most effectively support a country on its Journey to Self-reliance, they will want to develop and implement a CDCS that is adaptable to the uncertainties and changes in the country context and partner relationships.

**CDCS Planning:** Throughout CDCS planning, development, and implementation, CLA approaches, such as scenario planning and adaptive management, can inform a CDCS’s implementation to help ensure the CDCS and its projects and activities -- as well as USAID partner relationships -- can be adapted based on new learning to better foster countries’ self-reliance.

**CDCS Deliverables:** The resources below can support you as you develop:
- the CDCS Phase 1 Concept Presentation template (in particular, “what’s different about the new strategy” section)
- the Phase 2 Results Framework (RF) Summary Paper and Matrix Template and DVC template (specifically, the sections that include rationale for DOs and IRs, strategic partners, critical assumptions, risk factors, and scenarios, if applicable)
- and the Final CDCS outline (in particular, the “strategic approach” section, which includes brief description of scenarios, the annex on scenarios, and the “management resources” section, which includes a brief discussion of management considerations.)

**Resources:**
- [Adaptive Management Discussion Note](#) See “Strategic Planning and Implementation” section.
  - Includes:
    - Examples of other donors and development organizations’ adaptive management initiatives
- [Adaptive Management Discussion Note Resources](#) (ProgramNet)
  - Includes:
    - Examples of CLA case competition winners
    - Mission examples and perspectives on scenario planning and learning and adapting
- [Adaptive Management Resources](#) (Learning Lab)
- [Scenario Planning Resources](#) (ProgramNet)
  - Includes:
    - Futures analysis in strategic planning and implementation
    - Several Mission examples of various inputs to scenario planning
- [Context Driven Adaptation Resources](#) (ProgramNet)
  - Includes:
    - Adaptive management resources
    - Political economy analysis resources
    - [Context Driven Adaptation Resources](#) (Learning Lab)

D. Identifying Knowledge Gaps and Developing a Learning Agenda

As a Mission deliberates how best to foster self-reliance, it will grapple with assumptions, theories of change, as well as incomplete evidence bases, which will reveal gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed.
**CDCS Planning**: The resources below can help you to identify knowledge gaps, plan to fill them, and ensure that CDCS implementation can adapt as more is learned.

**CDCS Deliverables**: The resources below will be useful:
- in developing the preliminary learning agenda that is a required section in the Phase 2 Results Framework (RF) Matrices that accompany the RF Overview Paper
- and in informing the MEL section in the Final CDCS outline and the subsequent Performance Management Plan (PMP)

**Resources**:
- [Resources on Learning Agendas](#) Includes:
  - Establishing a learning agenda and learning agenda template
  - Landscape analysis of learning agendas
  - Sectoral examples of learning agendas
- [Tips for Creating a Learning Agenda](#)
- [Learning Questions Checklist](#)

**E. Planning for CLA in CDCS Implementation**

The CLA plan in a Mission’s PMP focuses on collaborating, learning, and adapting throughout implementation of the strategy, and incorporates plans for:

- addressing gaps in the evidence underlying the strategy (for instance, by generating evidence about the effectiveness of local capacity building efforts)
- identifying which local actors and stakeholders are most critical to achieve CDCS objectives, and developing and implementing plans to engage them
- facilitating conversations among those critical stakeholders to identify shared interests, co-create programming, and develop stronger relationships
- generating and using evidence from -- and in collaboration with -- stakeholders and in some cases working with partners to build their capacity in generating, sharing, and using evidence
- planning and implementing pause, reflect and adapt processes to continuously improve programming in order to better foster self-reliance
- and other activities that support alignment across the Mission’s CDCS and its projects and activities, as well as overall implementation of the direction envisioned in the CDCS.

**CDCS Planning**: Throughout CDCS development, Missions can consider what to include in their CLA plan. At the beginning of implementing a new CDCS, Missions will further develop their CLA plans as part of their Mission’s PMP.

**CDCS Deliverables**: The resources below can support you as you develop:
- the preliminary learning agenda to be included in the Phase 2 RF summary paper and matrices
- and the MEL section of the CDCS and the Mission’s PMP.

**Resources**:
- [Drafting a CLA Plan](#)
- [CLA Plan Template](#)