

AFRICA LEAD'S FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP ROLE ON COMPLEX, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES

"If you fail to honor your people, they will fail to honor you; it is said of a good leader that when the work is done, the aim fulfilled, the people will say, "we did this ourselves."

Lao Tzu, 604-531 B. C., Founder of Taoism, Tao Te Ching

Introduction

Meaningful, sustained collaboration among donor development actors, particularly contractors, is uncommon. Project timeframes are short and implementing organizations are expected to deliver results fast. Most projects are compelled to be laser focused on their own narrow results and have little time to collaborate with other projects. Development actors, facing these challenges in an increasingly competitive landscape, are eager to take credit for themselves and uneager to collaborate with their brethren.

Development challenges, in their own right, do not conform to the competitive dynamics of the donor development field. Some of the problems we face in the field are complex and require complex solutions that go beyond the mandate and resources of single projects. These problems require the participation and collaboration among multiple partners. Picture these three scenarios:

1. *Partnership for Resilience and Economic Growth (PREG)*, a USAID Kenya program committing \$360 million in investment through 14 USAID partners and national and county government authorities. PREG focuses on nine of Kenya's northern drought prone counties crowded with donors, government, private sector and NGOs, all working toward the same goal of resilience, but each focused on a narrow area of specialization. These areas include livestock, rangeland, environment, water-sanitation-hygiene, education, agriculture and livelihoods. USAID and the Kenyan Government believe that efficient and effective programming depends on highly coordinated planning and implementation among the many organizational actors. USAID has even created a framework for such coordination, the sequencing, layering and integration (SLI) methodology. This is sound theory, but how can collaboration among so many diverse actors happen?
2. *Tanzania's Agriculture Sector Development Program Phase 2 (ASDP-2)* is the government's main vehicle to deliver inclusive, participatory economic growth over the next five years. Building on lessons from ASDP-1, the new Program calls for a more coordinated and integrated effort among key players, including the private sector, and especially Local Government Authorities (LGAs) to whom 75% of national Government resources will be allocated. After the ASDP-2 document was completed in early 2017, the Government was faced with the challenge of introducing and socializing the Program with dozens of

LGAs across the entire country. The problem was that the Tanzanian Government lacked the resources and had not previously been diligent in improving coordination structures between the national and local governments.

3. Kenya's current *Agriculture Sector Growth and Transformation Strategy (ASGTS)*, which predates the new constitution and devolution, is obsolete. There is no institutional framework, formal or otherwise, within which agriculture policies and programs can be executed in an inclusive and constructive manner. The Kenyan Government and other key actors have long been aware of these weaknesses, but it wasn't until the Inter-Governmental Forum held in November 2016 that the Kenyan Government committed to developing a new strategy, the *Agricultural Sector Growth and Transformation Strategy (ASGTS)* and, more importantly, to creating a more constructive and inclusive agriculture policy making system. Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MOALF) now had a notion of where to go, but it knew it needed a lot of support to get there.

Successful collaboration requires a facilitative leader. Facilitative leadership, if executed well, can increase effectiveness by harnessing the resources of many, can increase efficiency by avoiding duplication and conflict, and can be a powerful leveraging mechanism to achieve high level development goals. However, all too rare is a project whose principal objective is to facilitate the collaboration of organizations and projects in achieving shared goals. Africa Lead is one of these projects. This paper draws from the three scenarios portrayed above, and describes how Africa Lead facilitated the coordination and collaboration among diverse organizations to achieve a goal that none could achieve alone. The paper highlights the following key aspects of Africa Lead's facilitative leadership experience:

1. How did we assume the role of facilitator?
2. What were our key functions and behaviors?
3. What were the outcomes?

Africa Lead's Facilitative Leadership Experience: three recent examples

I. How did our role as facilitator come about?

Africa Lead had the good fortune of a broad mandate that allowed for flexibility in program design. Although leading the facilitation of complex development programs was not an explicit part of our scope of work, by 2016 it seemed a natural next step. The demand for such a service clearly existed and no other organization had stepped up to take on the role. Further, after several years providing support to other organizations and larger development processes, we had earned credibility as a comparatively neutral and trustworthy party.

Africa Lead saw this opportunity and during the fiscal year 2017 work planning process designed a set of strategic activities within which the Project would take a facilitative leadership role. We had to be careful not to overdesign these activities, since the true role of a facilitator is to support others in mapping out activities and in making critical decisions. Initially, our main role was to bring these actors together and then let the process take its course.

In Tanzania, the Government's initiative to launch a new ASDP offered the perfect stage onto which many actors could be invited to participate in inclusive policy dialogue. Africa Lead had offered to support the Government's Ministry of Agriculture to socialize the Plan with Local Government Authorities, but no single

project had the financial resources or knowhow to do it alone. With support from USAID, we identified and convened three other USAID Projects – and later a private development organization - whose objectives were broadly aligned. During the first meeting among the four projects and thereafter, we made a point to allow each project to suggest its unique capacity and the contributions to such collaboration. These partners gradually appreciated Africa Lead’s intentions to be an honest broker of collaboration and believed that our main objective was the successful launch of the ASDP-2. This quickly established Africa Lead as de facto facilitator.

In Kenya, Africa Lead’s facilitative leadership role in Kenya’s ASGTS development came about in an even more subtle and organic way than the Tanzania case. But it didn’t happen by chance. On the contrary, it developed according to Africa Lead’s plan. Since the Africa Lead program in Kenya started in 2015, we were aware of the lack of a constructive policy process involving national Government, County Government, non-state actors and the donors. Sub-groups and back channels had formed, resulting in confusion, conflict and cross purposes.

From the outset Africa Lead’s strategy in Kenya was focused on developing relationships with and being supportive of all parties, and on creating opportunities for open dialogue and learning among the stakeholders. Activities included the execution of an Institutional Architecture Assessment, participation in the Agriculture Policy Analysis Group, organizing and facilitating several CAADP related policy events, and inviting key individuals representing stakeholders to trainings. Having earned the confidence and trust of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MOALF) leaders and other actors as a competent facilitator and an unbiased partner, the Cabinet Secretary requested Africa Lead to facilitate a newly formed task force responsible for the development of the ASGTS. The task force was comprised of Government, non-government and donor representatives.

Africa Lead’s facilitative leadership role on PREG, in contrast to the other cases, occurred quickly and formally. PREG was conceptualized and then launched in 2013. An organization was hired to help organize PREG, but was ineffective. Here was the main challenge: while the 14 partner projects and 7 USAID offices all had financial resources, clear plans, mandates, and contract-bound obligations, PREG itself had none of these. In search of a solution, in 2016 USAID/Kenya invited Africa Lead to lead the collaboration, learning and adaptation process (CLA) for PREG. Africa Lead developed a workplan and received a budget allocation from USAID later in 2016.

2. What were our key functions and behaviors in our facilitation role?

Facilitative leadership requires balancing assertiveness with supportiveness; the right term for this might be “assertively supportive.” A facilitative leader can be strong and assertive provided he or she always remembers to put the goals of the group first. A facilitative leader needs to drive the agenda, but not his or her own agenda. The functions and behaviors described below all follow from this basic tenant.

Identify and work towards a common purpose

A facilitative leader’s effectiveness is established very early on and is rooted in the preference to “ask, not tell.” Many organizations commit the error of promoting a partnership by trying to sell, or worse still, they

try to mandate, their idea to others. This approach of humble inquiry proved particularly important in Tanzania, in which each organization was driven by very different objectives, targets and incentives. One organization had been advising the Ministry on key policy issues. Another organization worked exclusively with LGAs to strengthen their financial and administrative systems. A third organization had invested heavily in developing the new ADSP-2 and wanted to make sure its investment paid off. Still another project was focused on supporting private sector businesses in specific regions and saw an opportunity to interface with LGAs on business policy. Throughout this collaboration, one of Africa Lead's functions was to support the design of a socialization event agenda that incorporated specific priorities of each partner, building on their skill sets, at the same time ensuring all were working on a common purpose.

Our role in supporting the ASGTS in Kenya was different because, technically, the Kenyan Government alone had the authority to develop the new strategy. The other stakeholders were not equal partners. They wanted to be heard and involved in the process. Africa Lead tried to balance the Ministry's desire to be in charge with its admission of having inadequate technical and financial resources by gradually and incrementally introducing other interested organizations to participate and to contribute. Eventually this grew to a group including county governments, line sector ministries, academic and research institutions, NGOs, the private sector and donor organizations. This was accomplished over time through a series of Africa Lead facilitated retreats beginning with broad issues such as theory of change, eventually culminating in the creation of Technical Working Groups responsible for developing sub-sector roadmaps and investment plans.

As stated in the previous section, USAID vested some authority in Africa Lead to facilitate PREG through a contracting arrangement. Ironically – but in keeping with human and organizational nature - this seemed to have caused angst among partners about additional workload as well as some general resistance to our new role. We had to prove ourselves a worthy facilitator. The size and complexity of PREG has required an especially extensive process to identify common purposes. Initially, we insisted with USAID on carrying out a scoping exercise to better understand what the partners do and what they expected of PREG. We then designed a two-day learning event, our first major joint exercise, to develop a structured approach to collaboration. The result was a common agenda including mutually reinforcing activities and measuring systems, as well as shared communications. The event was a good first step, but partners remained skeptical. During the ensuing months, we followed up on and reinforced the learning event agenda that the partners themselves had identified. Over time, partner leaders and field staff began to see the value in the agenda and began to actively support PREG initiatives.

Ensure all partners contribute to and have ownership of the activity

Once all the partners have agreed on a common purpose and a commitment to collaborate, the facilitative leader sets out to ensure all partners are fully engaged and take ownership. In all three cases, Africa Lead supported a working group or task force comprised of all the partners. Within each group, Africa Lead then facilitated action planning and implementation. Our goal was to ensure that each partner contribute according its specialized skills and resources. For PREG, Africa Lead facilitated the learning agenda on the behalf of USAID. We drafted and circulated the agenda and meeting minutes of each monthly meeting, collected and circulated power point presentations and reports in a user friendly constant contact format, and coordinated and facilitated learning events and site visits in ASAL counties. This facilitative role involved

identifying key partners and coordinating their contributions—one partner providing logistics support is key to Turkana County events, another providing leadership to successful monthly meetings in Wajir County, and the Government’s National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) sharing valuable drought updates that all partners could use to plan and make timely programmatic adjustments along the way.

In Tanzania, one of the project partners had direct relationships with high level Government officials and involved them in a timely manner for key decisions. Another partner, based on its strong ties with Local Governments, could ensure socialization event sessions gave local officials ample opportunity to provide initial feedback and ideas on how to implement the ASDS-2. The Tanzanian Government itself provided the venues for the events in all five regions and managed protocol. Further, each partner’s budget was limited in amount and how and where funds could be used. Individually, each partner was hamstrung, but together we were able to finance the entire series of socialization events.

The Kenya ASGTS process has not been without setbacks and conflicts, but this was to be expected for a national level platform that had been nonexistent or dysfunctional for years. Africa Lead has largely maintained a facilitative role by providing logistical support, event facilitation, communications channels and support for writing, peer review, editing and printing of documents. However, Africa Lead had also planned to provide technical support in authoring the main pieces of the ASGTS. We had unwittingly put ourselves in a position of both broad facilitator and narrow contributor. Tension arose after several other donor organizations volunteered technical resources for essentially the same exercise. Africa Lead gave way to the other organizations, tensions were defused, and Africa Lead returned exclusively to its role as facilitative leader.

Over a period of several months, organizations that had been invited into the process offered many valuable contributions. A pair of major donors has provided technical support for situational analyses and evidence. The Council of Governors, the main body that represents Kenya’s counties, seconded experts who provided important contextual information on the constitution and political economy. Still other actors have made financial contributions for events and technical assistance.

Develop and maintain open lines of communication

The most important and valuable function of the facilitative leader is to develop and maintain open, frequent channels of communication among partners. In this context, communication isn’t just a vehicle or platform, such as email. Communication is a total and constant commitment of the facilitative leader. An effective program of communication is at the core of all successful collaborations, and consists of this unexhaustive list of actions:

- ✓ Building rapport and spirit among partners,
- ✓ Synchronizing tasks,
- ✓ Avoiding duplication,
- ✓ Seeking constant consensus
- ✓ Soliciting feedback, gaps, and opportunities
- ✓ Identifying and addressing problems.

With PREG, Africa Lead developed platforms to strengthen communication at multiple levels. We facilitated communication among national level representatives by sharing and monitoring action items. Communication at the county level – where most projects were executed – involved strengthening the capacity of county leaders to manage meetings and conduct joint work planning, and by arming them with simple communications vehicles. We addressed what was possibly the most problematic of all communications channels – the one between country level decision makers and county level implementers – by adding county leads to the monthly mailing lists of reports, power points, and meeting minutes from the national PREG meetings. This simple act of democratizing communication allowed county teams to become aware of discussions, decisions, and updates at the national level. We also began adding county PREG meeting minutes to these country-wide emails, so that for the first time, national partners knew what specifics of county meetings and action items surfacing from them.

Africa Lead's solutions to strengthening communications on the Tanzania and Kenya ASDP activities was less complicated, but equally important in keeping the partnership together. In both cases Africa Lead volunteered to draft and share the minutes and follow-up actions for the meetings. We encouraged feedback and corrections to these documents. In Kenya, Africa Lead provided assistance in developing and disseminating communications updates through the MOALF to respect that institution's lead position. In the process, however, we encouraged the Ministry to work extra hard in engaging emerging non-state actors and county governments, two important groups that had previously felt excluded from national agriculture policy processes.

Keep the collaboration focused and intact at almost any cost

Forming and maintaining a team of distinct partners to work on a one-time activity - each with its own priorities, skill sets, systems and personalities – are extremely difficult. The integrity of the partnership can splinter, break down, even collapse, at any time. The facilitative leader, having put the partnership above everything else, must remain vigilant and prepared to solve problems when they arise.

Each of three cases experienced problems that threatened the success of the collaboration. One of the project partners in Tanzania opted out because it wasn't satisfied with the level of Government commitment and it didn't think the benefits justified the costs. Africa Lead quickly brought the remaining partners together to honestly weigh the impact of the other partner's decision. The result was a redoubling of commitment and identification of a new partner that could fortify the overall collaboration.

When Africa Lead presented the strategy for the Joint Work Planning among PREG partners at the county level at a PREG national meeting in October 2016, many partners resisted, arguing that they had already submitted their project work plans to USAID and that their plans could not be modified. Partners would repeat this argument time and again over the next eight months. While Africa Lead listened attentively, we stressed that the joint work planning workshops were designed to discuss strategies for collaboration and learning, not necessarily for modifying existing work plans. This non-threatening approach appealed to partners, who over time have increasingly participated in collaborative activity planning and implementation at the county and local levels. In fact, the county sessions enjoyed so much success, that USAID insisted on a national joint work planning session in Nairobi that took place in July of this year.

In Kenya, the ASGTS collaboration was threatened as several donors tussled for a lead technical assistance role. Initially, Africa Lead was one of the culprits, but we quickly took a backseat while redoubling our facilitation support to the Ministry and other key local actors. The Ministry eventually stepped up to settle the conflict. Africa Lead was widely recognized for its impartial brokering role and the collaborate ASGTS exercise was put back on track, having been strengthened in the process.

3. What were the outcomes?

As the three cases are recent and only one has been fully executed, we don't know fully what the eventual outcomes will be. However, judging by current measures and feedback to date, all three collaborations are adding value both to individual organizations and projects, as well as to their shared goals.

The collaboration in Tanzania resulted in the successful completion of two-day ASDP-2 workshops in five regions. The Government's plan was socialized to over 1000 local government leaders and, more importantly, the LGA leaders reported they had been given a voice in the future of the country's agriculture development. The Government, whose initial commitment to the series of socialization events had been questioned, now reported a genuine appreciation for and commitment to joint implementation of the ASDS between national and local Government levels. Meanwhile, the private sector, represented by three national umbrella groups, has requested Africa Lead to facilitate the socialization of the ASDS-2 to their members.

Africa Lead's facilitative leadership role on PREG is less than a year old, but is already showing results. County and national partners are exchanging information for the first time. Learning across counties is also richer and more elaborate. Some of the county partners have started joint activities in target villages as a result of the joint work planning. In the county of Marsabit, for example, two implementing partners had in their annual work plans activities for training of trainers in community health nutrition, but neither had the resources to cover the entire county. Before the joint work planning, neither partner was aware of the other's designs. After the workshop, the two partners conducted a joint training of trainers to increase the number of trainers from 280 to 600. This collaboration allowed the partners to cover the entire county. Africa Lead's point of contact in USAID applauded Africa Lead's work for having taken collaboration and learning to another level, having raised PREG's profile in USAID and having increased the demand for PREG learning products.

In Kenya, trust and transparency among ASGTS developed slowly but surely. Unique contributions from a growing number of actors have strengthened the exercise' quality and inclusivity. Common understanding and agreement has been established on the roles of each of the partners. Increasingly, a give and take attitude among them has been emerging. County governments and the Council of Governors are fully on board and share in leading the exercise together with the Ministry. The group of donors, chaired by USAID, has settled into a positive, constructive role in supporting and tracking the process.

In sum, all three collaborations have resulted in progress that no single organization could have achieved alone. Trust has been built among organizations and forged a platform for possible future collaboration. In the case of the ASDS programs in Kenya and Tanzania, this trust could lead to something much more: sustained, constructive collaboration among diverse stakeholders in pursuing the countries' agriculture

development goals. For the USAID development project partners, these collaborations have shown that working together pays off more than working in isolation. Each partner can take credit for targets it achieved. And just as importantly, USAID has taken note of the partnership and the selfless role each project played.

Summary of Key Lessons Learned

On the benefits of facilitative leadership

1. Facilitative leadership, in contrast to autocratic or domineering leadership, has clear benefits for project design, planning and implementation, and outcomes, especially on projects requiring coordination and collaboration among diverse partners. Facilitative leadership of activities involving diverse partners:

- Leverages resources from multiple partners and channels them to a singular, common goal
- Builds consensus, familiarity and trust among partners
- Helps to avoid duplication, inefficiency and conflict
- Achieves objectives that no single partner could achieve alone

On being an effective facilitative leader

2. Facilitative leadership requires specialized skills and repeated practice. It is unlikely Africa Lead would have been able to play a facilitative leadership role early in the project (although we did not attempt to do so). It required months and in some cases years to “practice” facilitation on small, discrete activities and to become recognized as a credible player in the agriculture policy environments within which we worked.

3. Facilitative leadership requires a certain personality profile and attitude. To be an effective facilitative leader, Africa Lead had to put its agenda aside, be humble and focus first and foremost on playing a facilitation role. We had to be constantly self-aware of how we interacted with others, avoiding self-righteous attitudes. We often reminded ourselves to behave in a non-threatening, even vulnerable way. Doing this helps build trust in the facilitative leader and among all partners.

4. If the Project had been burdened with narrow, time-bound implementation targets, Africa Lead would not likely have been able to play this role. Self-interest would have stood in the way.

On Strategic Design and Approaches to Solving Complex Development Problems

5. Facilitative Leadership is particularly vital and effective in solving complex development problems in complex environments with multiple organizations, perspectives and interests. Overcoming differences, building trust and settling conflicts requires the patience and razor focus of a dedicated facilitator. To solve these problems and to accomplish goals that require collaboration, donors and other leading organizations should seriously consider designing the facilitative leadership function into their activities.

6. Most USAID missions encourage collaboration through quarterly partners meetings and other methods, but the level of successful collaboration as witnessed in the cases of the Tanzania ASDP-2 and PREG rarely occur. These two examples could serve as case studies for other USAID missions.

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