2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

Case Title:

Colombian cacao organizations work and learn together to strengthen the industry.

Name: Tatiana Villate

Organization: Fintrac

Cacao organizations making decisions through collaboration, scenario planning, and adaptive management. Credit: Fintrac

Summary:

The 811 Colombian Law created agricultural value chain organizations and federations. This same law established the necessity of Competitivity Agreements for all value chains through the dialogue and contribution of all parties involved in each industry. Because of USAID's Producers to Markets Alliance Program (PMA) cacao assistance record and its good relations with all parties involved, The National Cacao Council (CNC) –the government's advisory body on cacao and chocolate- requested the program´s facilitation of an open dialogue and conciliation space to update this agreement.

Having worked with all of the organizations and institutions that make up the cacao and chocolate industry, PMA understood the diverse range of missions and visions each one represented and their sometimes conflicting views on different matters. This was the major challenge the program faced. To circumvent this constraint, and produce a document that could encapsulate all of the experience and knowledge each institution and organization had, PMA resorted to the CLA approach.

The program engaged a neutral and experienced facilitator to create trust among participants and proceeded to a structured dialogue to share ideas and technical-based evidence, reflect on them, and understand each other's needs. Through adaptive management, participants built networks and relationships and compromised to get to common ground and a common vision for the industry. Finally, they produced a document that rested on five pillars to guide all parties toward a sustainable cacao and chocolate value chain.

Which two subcomponents of the Collaborating, Learning & Adapting (CLA) Framework are most reflected in your case? Please reference them in your submission.

- Internal Collaboration
- External Collaboration
- Technical Evidence Base
- Theories of Change
- Scenario Planning
- M&E for Learning
- Pause & Reflect
- Adaptive Management
- Openness
- Relationships & Networks
- Continuous Learning & Improvement
- Knowledge Management
- Institutional Memory
- Decision-Making
- Mission Resources
- CLA in Implementing Mechanisms

1. WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?

The 2003 811 Colombian law created the agricultural value chain organizations and the foundations to establish a Competitivity Agreement for each value chain as a participation and dialogue mechanism to involve different stakeholders within the value chain. As the government's advisory body, the National Cacao Council (CNC) reached out to USAID's Producers to Markets Alliance program (PMA) to help facilitate dialogue spaces where those institutions could converge and update the Cacao and Chocolate Competitivity Agreement. Since 2017, PMA strengthened cacao and chocolate production and its market systems through partnerships with producers, processors, exporters, and private and public entities.

Different organizations and institutions –private and public- integrate the cacao and chocoalte value chain; each one with different interests and missions which can be difficult to reconcile to create an agreement for all of them. Establishing common goals and especially a common guideline for everyone to follow was certainly challenging, and required each stakeholder within the industry to be open to collaborating, and working jointly towards a common goal: to bolster the Cacao and Chocolate industry.

PMA understood the need for a methodology that could bring all the stakeholders together, collaborate to shape the future of the industry while respecting their input, and learn from each other to engage in adaptive management and promote collective decision-making. For this to work, PMA needed a neutral service provider that was foreign to the cacao and chocolate industry, and therefore had no stakes in the decision-making process. In May 2021, PMA hired We Push to lead dialogue sessions.

2. WHY: Why did you decide to use a CLA approach? Why was CLA considered helpful for addressing your organizational or development challenge(s)?

The CLA approach identifies each participant's needs, their ideas to build on common ground through open dialogue, learning from each other, compromising, and reaching conclusions based on evidence for an effective adaptive management and decision-making process.

In this particular case, PMA identified each participant, its specific interest, mission, and the way it was intertwined with other stakeholders within the cacao and chocolate value chain. Because participants had such diverse and sometimes conflicting interests, PMA needed a methodology that could create a safe and constructive environment for dialogue yet lead to decision-making to update the Competitivity Agreement. As a facilitator of this space, PMA wanted to ensure other organizations (government bodies, private companies, producers, and organizations) would exhibit adaptive management and leadership, and that through dialogue they would build stronger relationships that would strengthen the cacao and chocolate industry, integrating the different parties.

Furthermore, government bodies and institutions, keen on producing a robust and actionable agreement, tasked PMA to use a practical and proven methodology, through an unbiased facilitator, to ascertain neutrality and build trust among participants. Establishing trust was key to addressing certain topics that could be considered controversial by many of them.

3. How: Tell us the story of how you used a collaborating, learning and/or adapting approach to address the organizational or development challenge described in Question 2.

As was previously mentioned, PMA recognized the need for a neutral and foreign facilitator to be leading the dialogue and decision-making sessions. A service provider that could be trusted by all parties involved but that also had ample experience in leading such dialogue processes. Through an open-call process, We Push was selected as the service provider.

Once We Push was selected, PMA and the contractor designed the methodology to be followed throughout the sessions as it would need to be an inclusive and safe space for dialogue yet productive and decision-making oriented. Therefore, trust among the parties involved, adaptive leadership, and design thinking were key to co-create an agreement for all. Due to Covid restrictions, and accessibility limitations, the program developed virtual meetings and tools that could engage with the audience and simulate a sense of physical proximity.

Conversations took place in a neutral environment and had a common goal: to integrate all of the parties within the cacao and chocolate value chain, listen and learn from their experience, and update the Competitivity Agreement based on this knowledge. Through trend analysis and reports, as well as group workshops facilitated by an expert mediator, everyone came to an understanding of common challenges and opportunities in the industry.
Basic tools to communicate and move through the conversation and the different steps proposed like the mural (where everyone could participate and write ideas publicly), the design of question flow charts (to guide conversations), and experience-oriented activities (to learn from someone else's perspective) uncovered key concepts that needed to be addressed.

Co-creation methodology was based on conversations around actionable possibilities and the prospective future of the industry; judgments and personal opinions that did not contribute to the agreement process were not welcome. During each session participants would capture concerns, ideas, and interests on a virtual board – the mural- for everyone to envision key elements to discuss. Through the mural, everyone involved could write their ideas and questions, thus creating an interactive and inclusive environment where everyone could share and be heard. It also helped to visually organize each session's key elements and to move forward with the discussion, leaving a trace map of the process to go back to certain ideas or concerns if needed.

One hundred and sixty-four people took part in the 10 dialogue sessions, all of them either producers, associations, chocolate processors (of all sizes), or exporters. Public entities were also part of the dialogue: the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, and the Territorial Renewal Agency (ART). The National Cacao Federation, the National Cacao Council, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), USAID, and other international development organizations took part in the process as well.

All of the participants had different perspectives and ideas to implement to improve cacao and chocolate productivity and its national and international market insertion. Through the mural, all could contribute and share. Afterward, the participants discussed the ideas, and a debate ensued. With further analysis, they would go back to the mural, organize, prioritize and refocus to reach conclusions on each subject. Partakers agreed on the need for traceability systems, better promotion of cacao of origin, and its sustainability that could highlight peace process-building. By the end of the exercise, the mural contained five key guidelines for the industry.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT: How has collaborating, learning and adapting affected your team and/or organization? If it's too early to tell, what effects do you expect to see in the future?

It is worth considering that all of the institutions and entities that participated in the process endorsed, valued, and appropriated the methodology into their practices, as it was highlighted by their constant participation, their positive response to exercises, and their preparedness for each meeting. Their willingness to be open and discuss difficult topics to come to an agreement proved the success of CLA's methodology. Moreover, it changed the focus of the discussion and of the final Agreement toward a market-oriented document.

Due to the success of the meetings, the National Cacao Council (CNC) requested PMA to keep on leading such processes as the ten-year development plan, the road map that will guide future activities to strengthen the cacao and chocolate value chain.

With this positive outcome, PMA learned to implement CLA through different tools (virtual and physical) that can be used in various contexts, especially when working with partners and allies that have conflicting missions and visions, which can be a very common development challenge for this program. It can also be implemented in everyday tasks to ascertain solutions to any problem.

5. DEVELOPMENT IMPACT: How has using a CLA approach contributed to your development outcomes? What evidence can you provide? If it's too early to tell, what effects do you expect to see in the future?

As previously mentioned, the CLA approach allowed us to bring all parties involved to the discussion table by promising a safe and open space to come to an agreement. Part of PMA goals in facilitating this process was to integrate the different parties involved in the cacao and chocolate value chain as the program found a lack of linkage that affected productivity and market access. In facilitating this process, and especially through the CLA approach, PMA connected all of the parties, and furthermore, they all came to an agreement on the future of the value chain.

Through CLA, partakers defined a common vision for the industry: "To improve the livelihood of all of the parties within the value chain, with a special focus on the small producer. To position Colombia as a chocolate and cacao producing country that promotes traceability, sustainability, and peace by supporting producers and focusing all activities toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals."

PMA's intervention in the cacao and chocolate industry aimed at strengthening production to reach market standards. Through this process, all of the parties reached the same conclusion on their own, defining the five market-focused pillars of the Agreement:

1. Promoting the Colombian Origin cacao and chocolate
2. Developing sustainable productivity: to increase production while preserving the environment.
3. Developing a rural extension to have an impact on production, and improve production processes and practices.
4. Improving cacao and chocolate quality to offer a more competitive product.
5. Promoting research and technology development to innovate, and improve production.

All of these established pillars are incidentally part of PMA's development goals. Through the establishment of the Agreement, PMA will promote the sustainability of the program.

6. ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?

To ensure the success of the project, the program or the participants needed to meet certain conditions. From the start, the proposal sought to link the heads of organizations and institutions rather than individual producers or companies, so as to engage decision-makers within the industry. This not only enabled the program to hold productive meetings with fewer participants but to reach all parties. In addition, as We Push and PMA held virtual meetings, all participants required a steady and good internet connection, to join meetings and to access virtual tools like the mural. Working with participants located in areas with good connectivity, increased their chances to contribute.

As was mentioned, PMA decided to hire an external consultant, We Push, to guarantee the neutrality of the conversation. We Push was an industry outsider, and an experienced coaching company that help build trust among participants.