2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Transforming security paradigms through responsiveness virtuous feedback loops.

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Participants of attending a capacity building workshop in Rio Sucio, Chocó (Colombia). Local communities and justice and security service providers identify priorities, and participant from rural areas travel to participate in multi-stakeholder dialogues. Credit: USIP/CSD

Summary:

The 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP guerrilla evidence the need to renew the justice and security paradigms operational over six decades of conflict. Building on best practices to support war-to-peace transitions, the U.S. Institute for peace adapted its community-based dialogue methodologies to the Colombian context developing a theory of change to improve relationships among local institutions and communities by measuring frequency and quality of service, performance, and fairness (lack of biases and institutional stereotypes) of justice and security service provision in remote, conflict-affected rural areas.

The Citizen Security activity is a learning activity that fills information gaps with evidence-based qualitative and quantitative data of justice and citizen security service provision in rural areas. Through a rigorous, intentional, and systematic MEL approach, the activity enhances informed decision-making of local communities and local justice and providers while feeding informed findings to national citizen security policy makers, the national government, and international stakeholders. The systematic usage of a structured and intentional MEL approach introduces USIP as a neutral actor that facilitates transformation through evidence-based feedback loops, enhancing ownership and buy-in of local communities and providers, but also, elevates informed findings for national policy-makers adaptive management. The MEL toolbox includes quarterly dashboards, risk assessments, monthly perception surveys of social leaders (subject matter experts), pre and post activities polls, and questionnaires to capture existing institutional biases. Lastly, the activity is frequently sharing findings with internal and external stakeholders and is slowly promoting a community of practice for knowledge management.

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?

After the 2016 Colombian Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP guerrillas, the country needed a citizen security paradigm addressing the consequences of six decades of ongoing conflict and a lack of state services in rural remote areas. In these territories, justice and security implementation are not approached in a systemic way, as there is poor coordination among institutions and towards the communities they serve. New evidence-based strategies are crucial to understand and tackle local realities, especially in rural areas. In late 2020, the Citizen Security Dialogues Activity was set-up as a learning activity that feeds citizen security and justice clients, providers, and policy decision-makers with informed findings to identify how safety, security and justice services are affected by biases and how to reverse those practices.

The theory of change (TOC) overall goal seeks to activate "responsiveness (virtuous) cycles" by improving the relationships between communities and security and justice providers generating trust and legitimacy in the short, medium, and long-term. The activity designed a condensed measuring framework through dashboards (https://bit.ly/3ySKjmq) to evaluate the TOC dynamically in real time. The M&E toolbox includes quarterly dashboards, risk assessments, monthly perception surveys of social leaders the subject matter experts, and pre and post activities polls by both communities and providers. The anonymous and untraceable findings are presented in an aggregated fashion through feedback loops, to local parties, national stakeholders, and policy makers to address prejudices, historical, cultural, and institutional legacies affecting the service provision. These findings have also fed the USAID/Colombia mission to adopt innovative methodologies, develop new indicators and improve the way data is gathered & analyzed in conflict affected territories. USIP permanently reviews its do-no-harm policy, risk assessment ratings and operational approach as each regional context is changing and territorial control disputes continue to happen.

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 Citizen Security Dialogues activity echoes USIP's academic nature building on international past experiences where multi-stakeholder dialogues have supported war to post-conflict transitions. In Colombia, CSD generates additional evidence around the Culture of Law practice in the Global South. Mindful of the increasing political polarization trend, it was crucial to develop a rigorous TOC, MEL, and overall approach to shield the findings from misinterpretation and misuse amidst the electoral processes in 2022 and 2023.
Sustainable adaptations and final recommendations could only emerge from communities' progressive interaction local authorities, which is only feasible structuring an intentional and overarching CLA approach. It is present throughout the activity, from its design considering the needs of national and local stakeholders, to strengthening strategic decision-making and adaptive management by feeding clients, providers, and policy makers. A CLA approach also helps timely reactions to address mistakes through pause and reflection loops with key stakeholders (i.e., evaluation polls and risk assessments; informed decisions dependent on findings, and context-specific interventions, adjusted by population, and conflict dynamics). The activity leveraged know-how from USIP but also worked with USAID/Colombia programs addressing citizen security and justice systems to support improved portfolio design and to take advantage of synergies of other donors approaches in the justice-security system. USIP regularly meets with national government representatives responsible for security policy who appreciate the effort of data collection and analysis in rural remote areas as it is difficult and expensive to operate within these geographies. Our final component includes nationwide round-tables to present informed evidence-based recommendations for communities and local and national authorities, international cooperation donors and other stakeholders. To date, the most surprising CLA outcome is that recommendations come from the responsiveness loops with local parties, as USIP briefs their own coded information together with the transformational power of the dialogues.

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.

Amidst Peace Agreement negotiations (2012-2016) Colombians, academia and international stakeholders discussed strategies to address long-standing needs of remote rural territories previously controlled by FARC-EP. The guerrilla army regulated social, environmental, commercial relationships and individuals' behavior, overseeing governance and security issues. Some challenges included: How were these communities to trust state officials traditionally introduced as enemies? How can the state guarantee that service providers are not biased when serving communities that cohabited with illegal groups over half a century? And, how to enhance trust-building relationships in areas where armed actors continue to fight for territorial control?

The Activity aims to improve relationships among communities and security and justice providers grounded on technical evidence-based information shocks promoting adaptive management on both sides. USIP builds on global best practices and methodologies previously used to ease war-to-peace transitions. USIP frequently consults with national authorities and international stakeholders to identify gaps and synergies given the constant security fluctuations. The TOC hypothesis is measured through changes in monthly and quarterly community and institutional perception surveys that assess performance, quality of service and fairness (lack of biases) towards different population groups. The information is disaggregated by ethnicity, age range, gender and whether they live in rural or urban areas. The findings are contrasted with other information sources to determine the authenticity of the information as respondents often self-censure themselves in conflict affected areas. Changes are also captured through pre and post polls of participants joining different component activities i.e., workshops and dialogues. Only half of the targeted municipalities were selected for dialogues but qualitative and quantitative data collection and adaptations are implemented and evaluated in the entire region so we can measure if there is an aggregated impact beyond individual components.

The resulting analyses are anonymous and shared in safe spaces with both local communities and security and justice providers for them to reflect on possible biases and bright spots, acknowledge changes and discuss how to foster attitude and behavior change to improve the provider-institution relationship. One of the tools created to facilitate the overall or independent variables is the CSD dashboards https://bit.ly/3ySKjmq .

The activity builds momentum through reflection pauses of evidence-based findings, and multi-stakeholder dialogues where all positions and interests are presented aiming for an improved relationship. The topics, and safe-space design of the interventions are context-driven as the geography, and nature of local conflicts is intentionally varied. Parallelly, USIP implements a citizen security adaptation component supporting local authorities to improve their service provision and fostering the responsiveness (virtuous) cycles. Regional and national authorities are periodically invited to join the process by following the evolution of the different components and enabling conditions for local changes while capturing lessons learned that can be adapted to other municipalities (i.e., Police Lab for new service model in rural areas). Finally, all variables and changes are systematically captured to formulate evidence-based citizen security recommendations for rural areas to the Colombian National Department responsible for public policy and other stakeholders including MoD, MoJ, Colombian Congress, international cooperation, among others.

We also learned from technical and management mistakes and revalidated original operating assumptions as the activity had a slow start and the context dramatically changed since the concept note was written. The implementation requires flexibility and constant adaptation due to the severe armed strikes in early 2021, the Congressional and Presidential elections in 2022 and the persistent COVID pandemic contagion waves. USIP frequently meets with USAID and interested partners to share lessons learned to the citizen security portfolio. These exchanges are generating a community of practice—a network for information exchange that USIP will use to present lessons learned and recommendations.

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?

The CLA approach reinforces the academic and think-tank like structure of the U.S. Institute for Peace as the activity implementation builds evidence-based informed recommendations that mitigate and prevent violent conflict. There continues to exist, though, an information gap of citizen security-related experiences for Global South. Through this activity, USIP headquarters is gathering and analyzing evidence that complements crosscutting analyses of justice and security existing projects and better inform findings and recommendations to U.S. policy and stakeholders. Additionally, a learning approach has been a win-win strategy to address some of the peacebuilding challenges in Colombia. Local empowerment and ownership are achieved because USIP is perceived as a neutral facilitator that documents and inform on changes of the client-provider relationship.

This set-up fosters self-assessment and the inclusion of actors that are not usually invited i.e., ethnic community leaders. Also, in an increasingly politically radicalized environment preceding Congressional and Presidential elections, evidence-based findings and recommendations are to some extent shielded from misuse and misinterpretation and are more likely to be accepted to feed the next 5-year citizen security policy national strategy. The team has also acknowledged the benefits of a strong and consistent learning approach as the evaluation tools are used to guide next steps or adjustments and not seen as an additional or external burden. Finally, this activity is frequently providing design and technical recommendations to the USAID/Colombia Mission as feedback to the Mission's journey to self-reliance in conflict affected rural territories.

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?

Using a CLA approach contributed to three specific outcomes: (i) Evidence-based understanding of the needs of local communities in municipalities heavily affected by the armed conflict; (ii) Adaptive management as the information gathered in local areas is used to nurture the national public policy on security and justice; (iii) Improved decision-making of security and justice providers as a result of attitudes and behaviors change when addressing systemic stereotypes and biases i.e., male youth, indigenous women, etc.

Evidence-based understanding of local needs: USIP uses monthly surveys and eleven quarterly questionnaires (over 220 questions) to assess changes within different actors: social leaders, local authorities, and the national stakeholders. With this information, USIP measures perceptions of justice and security and then synthesizes data to provide feedback loops for the dialogue and adaptations in each municipality.

Adaptive management fostering national public policy on security and justice: the activity further feeds Colombian national public policy through information gathering in remote rural areas. The analyses supported the construction of innovative indicators based on assertive communication and the capacities of the justice and security institutions to include the needs of communities in their service provision. The MEL systems are expanding to national institutions as the information collected in rural areas feeds new service-oriented models i.e., National police is following mental health, institutional stereotyped biases and behavior change in remote municipalities.

Improved internal and external partners decision-making: Local and national authorities benefit from the learning approach to understand the biases in the provision of services and from this reflection, pause to analyze the feedback. Therefore, CSD uses the data analysis gathered from local police commanders to provide evidence-based recommendations for a new national police service-oriented model.

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 further develop a CLA approach the activity faced different challenges. First, time-constraints and reduced financial resources as the program was cut one year short and one third of the budget was cut-off. Technical and financial adjustments were needed to increase MEL resources to improve evaluation tool design, data gathering protocols, systematized qualitative and quantitative data analyses, external evaluation, and data analysis scenarios.

The ambitious goal of processing 54 evaluation variables within a small operating team soon proved challenging, as the human-based reporting was not always fast enough to provide feedback to the communities and institutions simultaneously. It is challenging to maintain social leaders engaged throughout the duration of the program, so the questionnaires include a constant basic set of questions, while other variables are captured on a quarterly basis. The Language on questionnaires used to generate the communities' feedback loops needed adjustments as local literacy rates are low, some Indigenous communities are not Spanish fluent and digital connectivity is poor in rural areas (given limited mobile and internet coverage).

Additionally, information gathering is physically perilous, as it is considered problematic by armed groups to reference geo-located security and justice services and actors. The activity had to reinforce training to local agents facing all these challenges and questionnaires were crafted mindfully of do no harm protocols that avoid exposing respondents. A data security protocol was deployed, and all tools used were fully transparent to all stakeholders and external actors. The information flow improved as the MEL has been further integrated into the activity performance. With the overall learning approach, we were able to generate trust that was, in turn, needed to gather the data.