2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

CLA Culture and Outcomes in USAID Morocco's FORSATY Program

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Hamza KHAYYAT LAKHAL, 18, psychosocial beneficiary under CLA COVID-19 adapted activity. Photo credit: IOM

Summary:

While change can be achieved with Program resources during implementation – using significant resources not locally available, the central development challenge of the USAID/FORSATY program was sustainability beyond. This drove FORSATY to implement CLA as a core operating principle with partners.

The experience of FORSATY with CLA highlights the importance of enabling conditions and the interdependence of CLA philosophy with management culture. CLA was introduced two years into the Program by a change in Chief of Party. Enabling conditions of openness and sharing – of co-ownership, were not present under the first CoP, and were valued by the second.

The CLA approach worked from the inside outward, first establishing a culture of openness through a thorough reassessment of expected outcomes and approaches involving all staff. Internal knowledge management and decision-making processes were constructed on this basis. From there, external collaboration with implementing partners was overhauled to bring partners closer into the change management taking place. Adaptive management was a result but also an enabler of the culture and processes introduced.

The first resulting adaptations produced FORSATY's clearest demonstration of direct impact on radicalized individuals and of effective actions among the sub-group most at-risk. The most determinant difference attributable to the CLA approach was during the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, thousands of beneficiaries and CSO and program staff members went into confinement overnight. The CLA approach was instrumental in keeping most beneficiaries participating and progressing during the confinement period, through rapid adaptation to an exclusively online environment. Two subcomponents most reflected: Internal Collaboration; Adaptive 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?

The FORSATY program was designed in response to a dramatic increase in enrollment of Moroccan youth in VEOs and their departure to Syrian battlefields. The drivers of radicalization in target urban areas in the north are deep-rooted, highlight severe inequity in access to opportunities and a near complete lack of processes and methods that foster the development of the person as a full-fledged member of the community. This gaping deficit generates legions of disoriented and idle urban youths, against a backdrop of growing decent employment opportunities driven by strong foreign direct investment. FORSATY's original design is characterized by 1) a nine-month participatory approach with target beneficiaries to identify key drivers of extremism; 2) large-scale implementation through CSOs; 3) intensive technical and organizational support to implementing CSOs.

The goal of FORSATY is to achieve three changes in the environment: 1) policies and practices are inclusive of vulnerable groups; 2) CSOs are a key GoM partner in reaching vulnerable groups; 3) CSOs sustain the use of appropriate methods and practices developed with the Program. The changes translate directly into access (to opportunities), personal assets and local identity, reducing vulnerability to VEO messaging and recruitment and fostering stability.

While all three changes can be achieved with Program resources during implementation – using significant resources not locally available, the central challenge is sustainability beyond. The sustainability challenge drove FORSATY to implement CLA as a core operating principle with implementing partners.

All three CLA foundations – Collaborating, Learning, Adapting, were essential to the achievements of the Program. Collaborating closely at regular, short intervals, with CSOs – on iterative method development, on management, on M&E, was foundational to achieving changes in organizational culture and capacity that could be sustained. Collaborating also underpinned and defined learning over the longer term and was instrumental in adapting to a dramatically changing environment.

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

Some CLA-relevant approaches were built into the original design of FORSATY (2012-2014), namely a participatory assessment involving target groups – a nine-month investment on which the design of a three-year follow-on (2014-2017) was designed. The follow-on design centered on the delivery of tailored services to vulnerable populations based on results of the participatory assessment. It included a focus on monitoring, evaluation, and continuous learning, but not an explicit or global approach to CLA.

FORSATY's CLA approach grew organically, beginning in 2015, and has been evolving until today. The motivation for CLA was the achievement of sustained change through change in implementing partners, and also reflected basic management values. CLA enabling conditions were introduced not as extraneous investments but, rather, as a central tenet that is part of the management culture of FORSATY. Collaboration as a way of working and building capacity in partners, combined with a comprehensive tracking of performance and results by partners, guided the development of learning mechanisms.

Several major adaptations, from learning but also from changes in the environment, were implemented successfully because of the collaborative approach on which FORSATY's CLA is based. These adaptations translated into or otherwise positively impacted major achievements. Moreover, the practice of collaborating with and, most importantly, between partners, has evolved into five Communities of Practice that are now embarking on continuous learning independent of the Program, improving prospects for sustainability.

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.

Internal Collaboration: The FORSATY CLA story begins in FY2015 with the institution of regular internal reflective workshops involving all Program staff monthly, quarterly, and annually. The first series, in 2015, led to a redefinition of the theory of change, adjustments to the results framework, some staff scopes of work, complete overhaul of one component and hiring of four new staff; three other major changes (2017, 2020, 2021) were made based on reflective workshops and changes in the environment. Reflective workshops continued throughout. In 2019 staff was reorganized into thematic groups assembling all levels and components to design activities and determine outcomes and other considerations relevant to the Complexity Aware ME&L (CAMEL) method. This reorganization was carried out to generate a more transversal learning environment and to motivate and engage staff in the new objectives of the second phase of FORSATY (2019-2024).

The first series of internal workshops, in 2015, established shared ownership and an enabling culture of trust and open sharing of ideas from all. From there, purpose and values were shared in open discussions with CSO partners, with clarity of expected changes and sustainability outcomes. Gant and CSO coordination mechanisms were overhauled in 2015, introducing participatory monthly reviews in a joint staff meeting framework led by the CSO, enabling a collaborative culture and information sharing to develop between departments in the CSO. This combined with weekly mentoring and regular CSO exchange and learning sessions per component (Education, Vocational, Community) facilitated by FORSATY staff and generating iterative method and tool development based on CSO experiences from service delivery with beneficiaries.

A relationship of information exchange and trust was established between CSO management/staff and FORSATY staff, meaning the CSO was receptive to continuous change and improvement: technical, managerial, and organizational. CSO M&E and information management capacity was strengthened and regular collaboration frameworks (including monthly information exchange) with the Program's M&E component established. Quarterly meetings with all CSO and FORSATY supervisory staff present fostered exchange on progress and challenges and introduced sharing and learning between CSOs.

Adaptive Management: The CLA approach was modified in support of the sustainability strategy. In 2018 an autonomy policy was adopted, putting responsibility for the respect of methods and adaptations squarely with the CSOs as a condition of continued FORSATY support. Mentoring and training were replaced by quarterly, then semi-annual, then annual technical FORSATY audits of the CSOs, evaluating their capacity to autonomously implement the methods developed and maintain strong performance based on quantitative data produced monthly. The CLA approach was further modified to institute Communities of Practice (CoP) between CSO partners in four thematic areas plus M&E and Management, in 2019 (implementation delayed to January 2022 due to COVID-19). Each CoP is now a collaborative learning and method development framework owned by the seven current CSO partners.

In April 2020 FORSATY's CLA framework was put to the test when XX vulnerable beneficiaries and XX CSO and program staff members went into confinement overnight. CLA was rapidly redesigned in response, instituting multiple joint CSO-FORSATY working groups. Weekly learning was instituted to continually improve online service delivery to existing beneficiaries. A program-wide assessment of situations and needs was carried out by CSOs with FORSATY assistance. CSO M&E officers worked with FORSATY staff to adapt tracking and monitoring tools to beneficiary participation and progress under confinement. Continuous learning and improvement and a good deal of innovation were achieved in the 18 months that followed, entirely online. Weekly needs assessments by CSOs enabled FORSATY to adapt services and direct resources, raising psychosocial support in response to rapidly growing needs due to pandemic conditions in target neighborhoods.

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 introduction of CLA approaches, in 2015, accompanied a change in CoP. Between October 2012 and October 2014, the Program did not have the culture and processes necessary to develop and sustain a CLA approach, and staff motivation was quite low. The new CoP initiated an in-depth reexamination of the entire Program involving all staff members in a series of participatory workshops. The result was a revised scope of work and series of approaches co-owned by the staff, now evolving into a team.

This enabled the Program to overhaul its processes and relationship with implementing partners, through which nearly all activities were implemented. Before 2015, relations with partners were tense, exchange was limited. By 2016, an observer would have witnessed broad sharing of information, collective internal decision making and a myriad of monthly meetings in CSO offices involving program staff members.

The second major CLA-related change began in 2019 and was completed in 2021 (delayed because of the pandemic). This change was prompted by implementation fatigue, after a successful but rollicking six years of implementation. The first phase (2012-2019) was structured along service delivery in education, vocational, and community components. While keeping supervision channels intact, the Program reshuffled staff members across components by instituting Thematic Working Groups. Thematic Working Groups were tasked with defining program elements, developing approaches, and identifying outcomes. While the staff initially resisted, the experience of working across hierarchical and component lines using CAMEL methodology bought needed stimuli, reinvigorating staff members and assembling the conditions for innovation and learning, and for cross-component collaboration under phase 2 (2019-2024). A visitor before the Working Groups reorganization would not have found the same engagement and enthusiasm in discussions with staff, nor the same engagement to contribute beyond one's individual scope of work or component to achieve transversal objectives.

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?

The first adaptations, in 2015, mostly the overhaul of a component and hiring of four additional staff, generated very significant CVE-relevant results. Activities of the revamped component produced the clearest demonstration of direct impact on radicalized individuals and of effective actions among the sub-group most at-risk. These activities simply did not exist in the component pre-CLA. The revamped component also became a prime example of collaborative learning and adapting: the approach and methods evolved significantly through CLA methods involving implementing partners and community-based organizations (CBOs).

The most determinant difference attributable to the CLA approach was during the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, beneficiaries and CSO and program staff members went into confinement overnight. A program-wide assessment of situations and needs was carried out by CSOs with FORSATY assistance, and weekly consultations were established to keep the program abreast of the evolving situation. This rapid collaborative assessment enabled the program and its partners to quickly adapt and respond, implementing measures in psychosocial assistance, provision of phone credit to keep beneficiaries online, and provision of basic equipment to ensure staff without laptops provided adequate sessions online.

Weekly learning was instituted to deliver online service delivery to existing beneficiaries. Continuous learning and improvement, and a good deal of innovation, was produced in the 18 months that followed, entirely online. Continuous improvement generated collective artistic productions, career days, contests, and several thousand sessions and short video productions by educators, coaches, trainers, and monitors. This enabled connected beneficiaries to maintain interest. The program kept most beneficiaries participating and progressing during the confinement period. Without the CLA culture and mechanisms that existed pre-pandemic, it simply would not have been possible to retain beneficiaries on that scale and for an extended period; most would likely have dropped out entirely.

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?

Open discussion on goal, ultimate outcomes, approach and activities brough an examination of current activities and practices and this revealed existing conflicts and sensitivities between some team members, which had to be managed. Also, some staff members needed to come accept some level of instability and change, as some sub-activities or practices were questioned or modified. However, all program orientations were open to discussion, which facilitated individual acceptance and made the Program globally more attuned to changes and responses from the environment. Each technical component retained cohesion and competed with others to show good results. A more global, open culture of openness to self-examination and change, came much later, through Thematic Working Groups. The CLA approach required significant investment in time, invested in multiple, regular staff workshops to share information, validate new directions, and share programming developments. This, along with the new coordination mechanism with partners, increased workloads significantly, but was offset by a willingness to invest more because of a sense of shared ownership.
Sustainability is mostly riding on the capacity of local CSOs to mature into learning organizations capable of maintaining and adapting a series of methods and practices. A culture of monitoring, evaluating, and maintaining a more professional practice to retain high performance, requires significantly more work than that required by the local and national environments. While CSO technical staff and management were mostly welcoming of the significant extra effort and encouraged by the changes observed in the beneficiaries, the impetus was essentially coming from Program and running against limitations related to management capacity, pressures from growing demand for services (pressing staff to cut corners on method), changes in personnel, and instability/weakness/lack of vison and buy-in from CSO boards. This is where the obstacles were found and remain to this day.