2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Addressing systemic gender barriers in Karamoja sub-region of Uganda through learning and adapting the use of Male

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Organization: Catholic Relief Services

A male change agent and his spouse work together on a vegetable nursery bed in Abim, Uganda. Credit: CR/Uganda

Summary:

Nuyok is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance funded Activity in Karamoja, Uganda led by Catholic Relief Services in a consortium with six implementing partners. The activity was designed with the goal of improving food and nutrition security in Karamoja, a sub-region with persistent and high levels of malnutrition and food insecurity and influenced by household gender dynamics. Men and women have distinct roles and responsibilities dictated by cultural norms. Men have more power and control over valuable resources and make major decisions at household and community levels. Nuyok devised an approach to support reduction in gender barriers at the community level to influence individual and household changes in perceptions and practice. Initially, Nuyok used the Catholic Relief Services ' Faithful Household Approach but realized it would not fit the Karamoja context due to the prevalence of polygamy.

Using evidence from evaluations of previous Karamoja Development Food Assistance Programs and internal collaboration with Nuyok partners led to the decision to adopt and adapt Male Change Agents approach - an innovative and context specific intervention. The adaptation included spouses in the approach. Evidence from a gender study by Nuyok showed that the approach was effective in improving unequal power distribution, intra-household relationships, and joint household decision making, resulting in reduced Gender Based Violence and increased household food production. Nuyok is working towards sustaining the approach through collaborating with local government and scaling it to other organizations.

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?

Karamoja sub-region is a patriarchal society where polygamy is prevalent and culturally acceptable. Men have power and control over valuable assets, make major household decisions and control their wives ' incomes (Nuyok ' s Gender Analysis 2018). Nuyok seeks to improve food and nutrition security for vulnerable populations by strengthening governance and gender equity, improving livelihoods, resilience and Maternal Child Health and Nutrition. To promote equity and support reduction in harmful traditional practices, Nuyok implemented Male change Agent (MCA) approach as a cross-cutting, transformational gender strategy. Previous gender models in the sub-region have focused on the transfer of power from men to women. These have not gained traction in a highly patriarchal society, with men perceiving this as an attack on their roles and responsibilities. Catholic Relief Services ' (CRS) Faithful Household Approach also focused on monogamous marriages overlooking polygamy in the community. These approaches were also individual, and household based, disregarding that Karamoja is a close-knit society where social capital is highly valued. This did not contribute much to gender equity as it faced resistance from different angles as an attack of the local Karamojong culture. It became clear that to overcome all these challenges, Nuyok needed to collaborate with local partners to adapt these approaches to the operating environment. Nuyok collaborated with its implementing partners (Caritas), local government leadership and community members and used evidence from evaluation reports of previous programs in the sub-region to adapt the MCA approach to drive improvements in joint decision making.

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 Karamoja sub-region is shaped by a complex range of environmental, conflict, security, and gender dynamics, which are all linked to different governance, social, cultural, and development issues. Due to the complex nature of the sub-region, Nuyok activity introduced the CLA approach to evaluate its intervention strategies and adapt them to the specific context of implementation. Nuyok adopted the CLA approach to build on what had been done already in Karamoja sub-region by government and other organizations to improve food and nutrition security. This is possible through collaboration with local stakeholders who have experience in the sub-region and understand the local Karamojong norms and customs. Acknowledging that there have been previous projects implemented in Karamoja, Nuyok did not seek to start implementation from the ground, but to use and build on learning from the previous experiences. This way, Nuyok would avoid repeating the same mistakes previously made in implementation, whilst building on the strengths of strategies implemented by past projects. Nuyok continuously collaborated with its local stakeholders, mainly the Caritas partners, from inception, creating an environment conducive for intentional learning and adaptation to improve the implementation and sustainability of the MCA approach. Most of Nuyok ' s partners are locally based Ugandan organizations that have years of field experience in Karamoja. The majority of Nuyok staff are also from the Karamoja, crucial for collaboration with the local communities. Collaborations with Nuyok partners increased cross-learnings and knowledge sharing.

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.

The Nuyok activity adapted to context-specific evidence-based innovative approaches to address gender dynamics in Karamoja and promote gender sensitive practices with focus on improving unequal power relations, intra-household relationships and joint household decision making. Nuyok initially implemented the CRS ' s Faithful House Approach (FHA) which focused on married couples to drive positive changes on gender. This approach had limitations as it did not consider polygamy and the low levels of literacy among women. The FHA had a curriculum that had to be delivered by a couple, which was difficult with one or both members illiterate. Nuyok reflected and used previous experience and results of evaluations of the Development Food Security Activities (DFSAs); Resiliency through Wealth, Agriculture, and Nutrition (RWANU) and Growth, Health, and Governance (GHG) previously implemented in Karamoja. A reflection workshop was organized by Nuyok, where CRS, and the different Caritas and other partners met to discuss the findings of these evaluations. During this meeting, the partners shared ideas and suggestions that led to the decision to implement the MCA approach. Evidence from the evaluations showed that using MCAs as drivers of change was a promising approach for bridging gender inequality gaps at household and community levels. The team agreed to adopt the MCA approach and adjusted it to fit and deliver better outcomes. For example, instead of having only one MCA per village, Nuyok opted to have three and then included the spouses in implementation too. The curriculum was also adapted and approved by Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development as part of wider collaboration between Nuyok and the government of Uganda. The approach employs male role models known as MCAs who act as drivers of change in promoting gender-sensitive practices with a focus on shared workload, decision-making, and non-violence; challenge gender inequities within communities and bring about positive behavior change in health and nutrition practices among others. A research study was conducted to provide evidence on the effectiveness of the MCA approach in improving power relations, intra-household relationships and joint decision making at household and community levels.

CRS also conducted a midterm evaluation (MTE) of Nuyok, led by external consultants in 2020. The results recommended that Nuyok should focus on the MCA approach, increase the number of MCAs per village and allocate more resources to the approach. This was synonymous with community-based facilitators suggestions during monitoring visits and implementing partner staff during monthly and quarterly reflection meetings to increase numbers as the demand for MCAs by the communities grew. The community facilitators are a crucial arm for Nuyok implementation as they are based in the communities where Nuyok is implemented and are closer to the communities. Nuyok also places much importance in monitoring visits to mentor facilitators and learn more on how implementation is going. More MCAs were later selected and trained together with their spouses after these consultations. Couples that had previously been selected to work under the FHA, were also incorporated into the MCA approach and trained as well. These MCAs and their partners reached more peers with positive gender norm messages. In a bid to improve the MCA approach as well as document learning for future projects, Nuyok conducted a study on the MCA approach. The study assessed the effectiveness of the approach and how it could be improved. Results showed that the approach was highly appreciated by the community members who mentioned that their household gender dynamics have improved, with reduced GBV and increased role and responsibility sharing and better productivity.

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?

CRS uses the CLA approach to collaborate, learn, and adapt Nuyok interventions and approaches based on evidence. Continuous collaboration has built trust and rapport amongst the team members. There is continuous consultations between the community-based facilitators, the field supervisors, implementing staff and CRS. This has been one of the major contributors to success of the MCA model. The teams know they can communicate openly and make suggestions that will be considered, in a bid to improve implementation. Nuyok staff capacity has been built through monthly and quarterly learning and reflections events, focused on best practices and lessons learned. Joint monitoring visits have been crucial in bringing the government arm to learn and understand the MCA approach. Collaboration with the government is important to the sustainability of the activity. Nuyok learned that collaboration with the government must be done at the beginning and continue throughout implementation. This gives the government staff time to understand the activity and how to take over at the end. Nuyok staff have also learned the importance of evidence-based decision making, for CLA, hence the adoption and adaptation of the MCA approach was based on previous evaluations, mid-term evaluation and internal studies as well as field consultations. The CLA approach has fostered a learning culture beyond the MCA approach, where Nuyok lessons are being continuously being documented and shared to allow cross-learning between development partners and government stakeholders.

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?

Use of technical evidence, internal collaboration and adaptation has improved quality of implementation of the MCA intervention where spouses are involved. This has promoted equitable relationships and positive changes in gender roles at household level. Technical evidence from a recent research study conducted by Nuyok in 2021, found that the MCA approach was effective in improving power distribution, intra-household relationships, and joint household decision making. Results further showed that improvements in intrahousehold relationships have resulted in to reduced GBV and increased production of food at household level. Men now take on roles traditionally assigned to women such as cooking, fetching water and caring for children. This has reduced the time and workload burden on women. The MCAs testified that they use their power positively to influence behavior change among peers, neighbors, and other community members. Through learning, MCAs were integrated into the different Nuyok sectors to benefit from these, i.e., savings groups, farmer groups and business groups, but also influence behavior change amongst group members. Routine and joint monitoring field visits and observations, show that the MCAs have become champions of change where they have influenced their peers to construct pit latrines in their villages, put up kitchen gardens and be involved in Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) activities to improve food and nutrition security in their community. Men now actively participate in ante and post-natal care with their partners. Nuyok is currently working towards sustaining the MCA approach and is also encouraging other stakeholders in the region to adapt the approach to promote equitable relationships and positive changes in gender roles at household level.

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?

The following enabling factors have influenced MCA results:
a) Supportive leadership fostered a learning culture within Nuyok and led to improvements in quality and outcome. Nuyok has a very supportive management team which is spearheaded by the Chief of Party who puts collaborative learning and adapting at the forefront of all activities
b) Strong monitoring, evaluation, accountability, learning, and research systems able to produce data to be used as technical evidence to inform decision making.
c) Staff capacity and willingness to easily adapt to changes because of their ability to comprehend and understand implications of each finding and putting it to use.
d) Availability of funds to conduct quarterly reflection meetings to discuss monitoring reports, findings, and other documentations. There are also resources to conduct field monitoring visits.
e) Open discussions with both internal and external partners have enabled the team to embrace the activity failures, challenges, and successes and collectively work together to develop and implement action plans

Nuyok's advice to others includes the following:
a) Implementing partners have limited time to pause and reflect because they are too busy with implementation aiming to achieve targets and results, particularly if targets are set too high. Planning is key at the start and learning and reflection events should be incorporated into the detailed implementation plans
b) No learning lead at partner level, this leaves behind the learning component. There is need to identify a learning lead at implementing partner level who will spearhead all processes of collaborative learning and adapting.
c) Not all stakeholders are involved during pause and reflect moments. There is a need to utilize avenues that bring together all stakeholders like monthly or quarterly meetings to share lessons learnt and develop action plans for the lessons learnt.