2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Agricultural empowerment to marginalized widows in Anbar

Widows first harvesting in provided polytunnels.
Photo Credit: MEL Coordinator Mustafa Salam

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Summary:

The case study talks about one of the activities in Iraq, West of Anbar. It talks about two subcomponents of CLA (internal collaboration, external collaboration and decision making) used to adapt approach of CLA. The case study talks about the challanges the team went through desiging and implimentating activity post-ISIS war where many women became widow after losing their husbands during the war. Those women used to depend on their husbands who supported them on their daily life. Other challanges team experinsed were lack of resourace in designated area, distance of the location, difficulities in aquiring data, access issues, and limited partners with technical experities. The team adopted CLA to overcome the obesticals to ensure the outcome of the activity along with the programm's goal. CLA approaches became a must tool among the team.

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?

Iraq is one of the countries that faced a very dramatic situation that caused the country to be at the edge of destabilization. One of the critical provinces, Anbar, is considered is the largest province in Iraq which makes up 31.5% of the country's landmass. The west of Anbar is dominated by a large desert with less population while the dense population is located in the east which privileges the east with cultural, and social-political power over western cities and districts. This has led the west to suffer from weak governmental services as well as public infrastructures such as hospitals, higher educational institutes, roads & bridges, and other necessary infrastructure. ISIS war has added further burden on Anbar and even worse on West of Anbar. West Anbar has historically relied on its border with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia to sustain a level of economic and commercial activities in the west. Agriculture has also long been another important part of the economy. The border crossings did not only provide the district authorities with some revenues to sustain and improve essential services but were an important revenue for small businesses and residents working at the border facilities. However, after the war the west has been struggling with basic services and livelihood opportunities. ISIS kidnapped and killed hundreds of men from the west, many of whom were breadwinners for their families. The tragedy left many farming families with no source of income and the inability to resume their agricultural activities. Women, many of whom are now widows, are struggling to rebuild their lives with no source of income. Furthermore, they are often alienated and marginalized, given the socially conservative nature of the area, and typically among the last segments of society to receive government support. This reality is certainly true in the west, where female heads of households have not received equitable support to resume their farming activities and deliver for their families and are left with no source of income. Therefore, USAID has been focused to support these women with livelihood opportunities by providing them with equipment and training to do agriculture activities.

Working in such a complicated environment where you have limited resources in the designated area, limited specialized organization, limited support from the local government, and access difficulties intensified the team to think out of the box and to bring CLA approaches to the table to achieve the goal of the program and to deliver the needed services to the beneficiaries at its best shape. After the approaches have been successful, they have helped the team to build up more follow-on projects to support women in the designated area. After the first success, the approaches have been used in different provinces and cities and become a habit and culture among the Iraq team

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 main reason for using a CLA approach is because of the fast-paced nature of our program and the team ’ s incentive to learn and adapt. In addition to that, Iraq has a very fragile and fluid context; therefore, the team has opted to activate a CLA approach as a culture in the program cycle. The CLA approaches were helpful and useful to direct the program resources and team ’ s vision and to steer the partner ’ s expertise in the field in a way that could advance their scope and achievability. Furthermore, the goal was to extend CLA impacts beyond our program and had installed the fundamental subcomponents of the CLA Framework among the partners.

The CLA approaches were not only advocated by the senior program management but also by USAID personnel supporting the program, and this shows how much USAID thrives to learn and adapt. Back in the time, the CLA was built into the activity ’ s design. The success of CLA approaches in the design of the activity has led to considering the methodology in different activities and program-level. The reason for using it in other activities and program-level is because the approach gave the team to expand and promote internal and external collaboration, better design TOC to meet the goal of the activity and program, build solid relationships and networks with different stakeholders, and to build nature of decision-making by considering not only good decision but also considering the ideal decision through translating different factors and aspects.

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 complexity of agro-social activities in remote and post-conflict recovered areas / has forced the team to think out of the box M&E (instead of monitoring, evaluation and learning, the team has started considering the adaptation as a tool to add another layer for the success of the activity and program) and looked for a higher object beyond learning. The first step that came from the team is to look at statistical numbers of widows and their challenges post-ISIS war which was done through collaboration with external stakeholders (including government, local and international organizations). The team did not have agricultural expertise, and the designated area lacked a specialized organization or entity to provide technical support. Therefore, this has been translated to extensive meetings, reporting, and higher-level decision-making to come up with an alternative solution which was to find a group of youths who recently graduated from the agriculture college. The team conducted extensive research with the local staff to understand other challenges, and one of the challenges identified was having female agriculture engineers within the youth groups due to the conservative culture of the area working with female farmers. The team provided the youth group with resources to use their knowledge in the field required from the team to consider budget modification after having extensive meetings and reports along with the support from the management team. Afterward, the program team along with the youth team conducted a joint assessment to identify the capacity and the gaps of the female farmers since most of them did not have the experience in agriculture field. The designated area was suffering from water scarcity which was challenging for the team to decide on since it required government interference. after exxtensive meeting with different stakeholders, the matter was solved. Through the team's research, the team found one of the challenges that women could struggle with marketing since they do not have access to the market and could not transfer their products to the market. Therefore, the team has coordinated with the local market and introduced the produced products by the women to the market. The shop owners in the market have started to come to the farm and buy the products from the women which gave the women an easier marketing process. To keep the sustainability of the activity, the youth group used their knowledge to support the women with theoretical and practical training in using polytunnels. Furthermore, the group provided period monitoring which gave the female farmers sustainable production and has positively impacted the outcome, and exposed the team to CLA in its best form. This new experimental approach participated in this area operation in the program has been replicated in other areas through wide-spreading this best practice among the wider team. The youth group has been very successful after taking CLA approaches because of that, the group has been officially registered after been as a group of fresh graduates with no hope to have job opportunities. The group has become an expert in supporting agricultural activities and implemented different projects. This means the approaches did not only support our team but also went further to build the capacity of our partners. The team has realized that CLA being duplicated in other areas or different timeframes will need a different set of steps procedures and resources as this is linked to certain variables (time, budget, partners, outcome).

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?

Since then, the team has been always looking into CLA as a best practice that enabled the team to think out of the box when challenges emerge. This helped the team to be prepared and take steps forward, and the team became more creative and innovative, and the problem-solution originated in a fragile and fluid context country like Iraq. Including CLA became an essential step in the design of recent activities to ensure the adaptation of the team in terms of context, budget, theory of change, and partners. CLA helped the team to design an adaptive strategic framework and expected result which increases the level of flexibility in the program.
The program development unit started to unbox their sequencing and layering in the way thinking of designing the activities since the first time CLA has been visibly practiced which encouraged the team to design and implement more entry-level natured activities. This has encouraged USAID as a donor to take risks as counted thanks to the recent practice in completed activities. For instance, after the first trial of CLA in agro-social nature activity in a remote area and achieving the outcome, the team immediately designed a follow-on activity to expand the success. This success was not only adopted by the program but also expanded beyond that to be practiced and adapted by our partners.

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 the CLA has positively impacted the sustainability of the outcome of the projects of complicated agricultural that require skills, external factors (e.g., environment), and markets.
Before adopting CLA as an essential practice in the project cycle, the team lacked immediate action taken and decision making which disabled the team ’ s creativity, innovation and problem-solving oriented. For example, the team was experiencing different challenges during the implementation of the activities which was burdening the management team, and the partners who were looking for guidance and solution from the program team. While, after adopting CLA in the recent projects, the team has shown a higher level of confidence, trust and adaptability that on day-to-day level impacted the way projects are being designed, implemented and evaluated. In a fluid and rapidly changing unstable political and environmental context like Iraq.
Scope change and another flexible decision making that were taken in the past used to need more consultation and time to reach a meaningful action, and usually, these relatively lately made decisions were deemed to be not the best after a short while from taking them. While after being exposed to CLA the team started to make relevant, rapid decisions urgent decisions in a very quickly manner. That significantly impacted the project, quality of implementation, and the reachability of the outcome to more and more people.

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?

speaking of a country like Iraq where weekly updates are as dense as monthly updates in other countries in which means serious obstacles are common phenomena. The main challenges experienced by the program team and the partner are a lack of technical expertise, access issues, significant impact of global warming. Most of the partners emerged post-ISIS war with limited available resources which disabled them to meet the needs of their communities and the project. Therefore, the team allocated budget, time, and other resources to enable them and make them more capable to meet the goal of the project. The team struggled to work in the remote area where the team experienced access issues because the designated area was too far and controlled by different security forces. The area has been neglected for long period by the government, and no clear plans or response was initiated by the government.

On the other side, there are some enablers that helped the team to practice new approaches like internal collaboration, fast paced nature of management, and flexible budgetary modification.