2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

CLA mainstreams locally tailored solutions to improve natural resources management and prevent conflicts

Community members discuss Local Conventions to better manage natural resources and reduce causes of conflict. Credit: Nafissatou Allahoury, Winrock International, June 2022

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Summary:

In Niger, population growth, increasing demand for food and climate change put significant pressure on natural resources, requiring more and more land, water, and energy. This accelerates the degradation of natural resources and leads to conflicts over their use, especially between farmers and herders, further exacerbated by lacking or unenforced regulatory frameworks.

To find local solutions to these challenges, several organizations supported communes (equivalent of counties in the US) to develop local conventions (resource management guidelines) that empower communities to manage their natural resources and enhance social cohesion. But each organization was using its own model under the same label, creating confusion. The practices didn't align with national regulations on natural resources nor enabled communes to take ownership of their own development.

The USAID | TerresEauVie Activity under USAID Niger's Resilience Program, implemented by Winrock International and its partner TetraTech, collaborated with the host government and other development organizations (external collaboration, relationships, and networks) to co-develop and disseminate a national guide for local conventions through iterative back-and-forth movement between local experience and national regulation (Continuous Learning & Improvement, internal learning).

As a result of this inclusive learning process, the national guide was released and officially enforced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. Additionally, local conventions are now included in Communal Development Plans (central planning documents for communes in Niger). Local convention development is now clear, recognized by the Government, and easily scalable throughout the country: they formalize a community-driven natural resource management process by setting rules based on consensus through commune leadership.

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?

Niger, a land-locked West Africa country, is facing recurring phenomena associated with climate change: disruption of the start and end of the rainy season, poor distribution of rainfall in time and geography, decrease in water resources, recurrence of floods, etc. This increased pressure on natural resources is further amplified by the strong demographic growth (about 4% increase annually) and the intensification of seasonal migrations induced by the search for better living conditions and by conflict between herders and farmers. They find themselves competing to use natural resources. The main trigger of conflicts is the damage caused to cultivated fields when herders graze and water their livestock or move to other regions to find suitable grazing lands. Herders have seen their grazing areas, essential to feed their livestock, gradually disappear leaving fewer and fewer pathways to pasture and water points. Agricultural cultivation has encroached on these vital corridors, complicating how herders can safely feed and move their livestock. Dialogue between these groups is difficult, if not non-existent.

To find local solutions to both protect natural resources and support dialogue and social cohesion among communities, numerous development organizations were supporting communes (equivalent of counties in the US) to develop Local Conventions (LCs, resource management guidelines) as a sustainable way for communities to tackle the problem, make decisions on how to protect these critical natural resources, and effectively prevent conflict. However, there was a multiplicity of practice, not aligned with national regulations on natural resources. These solutions risked being unsustainable because they were scattered and not officially recognized by the Government. Moreover, the time and resources required to develop an LC (averaging 9 months of work with consultants, conducting studies, drafting documents) was preventing communes from leading these processes themselves.

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

CLA is incorporated into the design and requirements of the TerresEauVie Activity and is a key process that Winrock invests in throughout its projects in effort to reduce redundancies and scale successful practices. CLA elements were designed specifically for local conventions under TerresEauVie's work, including to assess LCs and develop recommendations on how to standardize them across communes. As TerresEauVie worked towards these goals, it became clear that these activities would benefit from additional layers of CLA to reduce the redundancies and inconsistencies noted among the varying approaches of different organizations in this space. Upon further observation of communes' work on LCs, TerresEauVie recognized an opportunity to adjust the LC process to better promote local ownership, tailoring LCs to local contexts, and local investment in implementation of LCs.

Given these observations based on activity implementation, observation, discussions with local stakeholders, and assessments of LCs, TerresEauVie leadership decided to intensify CLA efforts on this topic. By increasing and expanding collaboration with other organizations working on LCs as well as broadening collaboration with local stakeholders involved in the process, TerresEauVie used CLA to streamline the standardization process and improve local ownership which increases long-term sustainability of the interventions. This learning and collaboration effort was led by the Component Lead for this activity, who built on their robust networks within the local government and the Permanent Secretariat of the Rural Code (the key national institution for land tenure, natural resources management and rural conflict prevention in Niger).

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.

Through CLA, TerresEauVie brought actors together to reflect and produce a unified national reference guide, linking local experience to national regulation in rural land tenure and conflict reduction and operationalizing these regulations at regional and local levels. The approach evolved along the advice and procedures of the Nigerien government to ensure ownership and sustainability of the result. TerresEauVie was flexible, but always result-driven. The issue at stake was to enable communes to develop their own solutions and that these solutions are recognized by the government to ensure sustainable implementation. We never lost sight of this objective; this was our compass to efficiently support the CLA process.

It all started with TerresEauVie collaboration with a previous USAID project called REGIS-ER (Resilience and Economic Growth in the Sahel – Enhanced Resilience) that was ending. REGIS-ER supported the development of 8 local conventions in Niger and drafted a methodological guide to develop them. During its Refine and Implement period, TerresEauVie worked directly with REGIS-ER to understand the process and develop country specific activities and plans to continue REGIS-ER's efforts.

Afterwards REGIS-ER engaged TerresEauVie in the design of LCs in the Tillaberi region to gain experience and start improving the LC development strategy. TerresEauVie brought the Permanent Secretariat of the Rural Code on board as it is the key national institution for land tenure, natural resources management and rural conflict prevention in Niger to ensure national ownership and sustainability of this process.

Upon Rural Code's request, TerresEauVie temporarily shifted staff dedicated to NRM and land tenure on bridging these learnings at the national level to develop a national guide building on initial reflection of REGIS-ER, TerresEauVie and Rural Code. With Rural Code, TerresEauVie engaged in an intense process to share experiences with all development organizations supporting LCs and get their buy-in in developing national guidelines for LCs including of REGIS-ER's initial draft. The process included numerous informal exchanges and also 3 workshops to enrich to guide and 1 workshop to validate it, until the national guide official release by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in March 2021.

The CLA process continued in an iterative learning cycle. TerresEauVie supported Rural Code to test the new annexes of the guide to develop 4 LCs in Mazamni (Zinder region). Based on this testing, the project went back to Rural Code to revise the annexes so the communes can easily use them. After this revision, the very final guide was ready for dissemination, promotion, and implementation across the country.

Based on one of the findings, which was that LCs needed to be fully enforced by national regulations, TerresEauVie seized an opportunity: another USAID project called SHIGA (Sahel Human Voice in Governance Activity) was revising the national guide for the development of Communal Development Plans (CDPs) which are the main tools for communal planning in Niger. TerresEauVie thus collaborated with SHIGA, allowing both projects to join efforts and improve efficiency and sustainability with TerresEauVie bringing LC expertise to facilitate the inclusion of LCs in CDPs.

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?

This successful CLA process had five major organizational impacts:

- It created a shared pride within the project and a recognition of our technical skills and results outside at national and international level. We are keen on sharing this experience through various meetings organized by USAID, OECD, etc. and trainings (for example, training USAID Implementing Partners on this LC approach) to further improve consistency, efficiency, and sustainability.
- This strengthened the relationship with Rural Code structures at all levels, thus easing our work on the field.
- It helped to embed a strong sense of collaboration habit between our regional teams and our central team in Niamey. Our regional team had the opportunity to provide feedback on best practices and this was considered in learning and adapting the guide. Not only did CLA result in improved local ownership by communes, but it also increased staff ownership of the work and results.
- Impactful CLA in this component motivated other project components to invest resources in the CLA process. For instance, our component on risk and disaster management began drafting the national methodology to develop communal contingency plans, which historically have existed only at national and regional levels. TerresEauVie has used a similar collaborative process in developing 25 communal contingency Plans in Niger and they recognized the opportunity to further streamline and scale this successful approach.
- This success also helped to intensify leaning in our organizational culture, through annual “Pause and Reflect” sessions and regular “After action reviews” on major activities, where we examine our practice and explore how to improve them and link local experience to learning and adapting within national policy.

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 this CLA approach enabled us to achieve development outcomes more efficiently because the approach is standardized and officially endorsed by the Government, while reducing the development process from 9 to 4 months and putting communities at the heart of the process under local authorities’ supervision.

In a 14 months period, after the guide was released, we supported 18 LCs' development (12 are already signed, covering 27,000+ hectares of natural resources) in collaboration with two other USAID-funded Resilience Food Security Activities called Wadata and Girma. TerresEauVie also participated in the effort of disseminating the guide and trained these projects on how to implement. Each project is supporting several stages of the LC development (sequencing) in line with the mandate and level of intervention (communes for TerresEauVie and grassroots for the other ones) and in close collaboration with local authorities. This is a progress because it took five years to USAID REGIS-ER to develop 8 LCs in Niger.

These local conventions work because the community itself diagnoses and maps out the problems encountered. Based on this birds’-eye view, they define rules to reduce encroachment on land use as well as resource misuse. For example, in Mazamni (Zinder region), based on its local convention, the resource management committee of the Kouyikam grazing area was able to delineate 15 km of livestock corridors providing cattle access to watering points without trampling over crops. This also halved conflicts between farmers and herders in a single year, thus maintaining an ongoing and open dialogue.

Moreover, we didn’t stop the CLA process when the guide was released: we collaborated with USAID-funded SHIGA project to make sure local conventions are included in CDPs. We expect that this will ensure sustainability of the solutions developed under the local convention shape beyond the life of our project.

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?

Advice 1: CLA requires relationships development, networking ability, diplomacy, and self-criticism to be able review actions and build on best practices to develop one standardized guide. Having worked on the field in partnership with the Rural Code to build capacities of local land tenure institutions and having a Component Lead well known in the sector and mastering the know-how and organizational features of all partners engaged on this CLA experience were enabling factors to secure stakeholder buy-in and pave the way to the CLA approach, with the forethought to put the Rural Code in the driver's seat, not our project.

Advice 2: CLA requires time and patience. CLA processes don't always produce quick results, especially when gathering information on both development and government organizations. Between the first discussion and the final version of the guide and dissemination, it took 9 months. During several months, we had to shift staff and resources from our project to bring the CLA process to fruition; this also impacted our indicators as there were delays in being able to count the results. Ultimately, CLA improved our efficiency in NRM.

Advice 3: CLA requires money. We invested resources including staff time and workshops logistics. We needed to adhere to government requirements to come to the results (4 large workshops in addition to regular exchanges and informal meetings). This created many debates inside the organizations. We leveraged resources from other participating organizations and and in-kind participation from the communes (provide rooms for meetings, etc.) and communities (popularization of management rules through radio and community discussion frameworks), which also promoted buy-in. With the former practices, for 1 local convention full process, it costed about 9 million CFA in 9 months for the CL development and now it is about 3 million CFA in 4 months.