2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:
Nourishing the Future: Transformative Power of Agri-nutrition

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Organization:
Nuru International Kenya

Summary:
Nuru International Kenya received a USAID Fixed Amount Award for the Sustainable Local Leadership Project (SLL), Local Works Project on 16th December 2021. The project implementation commenced in January 2022 in Homa Bay and Migori Counties. These counties have had a history of high levels of poverty above the national average, chronic food insecurity and inadequate access to quality health care. The project addresses two broad objectives: Expansion of successful rural poverty reduction and a resilience-building model; and Providing critical support through private sector investment, business enterprise offerings, and technical capacity building. The project activities focussed on engaging the farmers and stakeholders through; extension education, stakeholder engagement, enterprise development and value addition and cooperative management capacity building.

The SLL team observed a knowledge gap in agri-nutrition among farmers, affecting their food security and access to nutritious food. Addressing the issue was crucial for enhancing the well-being and nutrition of cooperative farmers and their families. The limited participation of youth members in the project highlighted potential challenges in inclusivity and empowerment that are essential for promoting gender equality, expanding livelihood opportunities and fostering long-term development collaboration and continuity of the target farmer cooperatives.

The integration of agri-nutrition best practices engaged internal and external stakeholders, including cooperative leaders, county health representatives and agricultural experts. Training sessions fostered a culture of learning and knowledge sharing among farmers. The CLA approach greatly enhanced the project's development outcomes, benefiting over 500 farmers who gained a deeper understanding of agri-nutrition practices and embraced good nutrition.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

The Sustainable Local Leadership Project (SLL) implemented in 24 farmer cooperatives drawn from two targeted Counties of Homabay and Migori was designed to address two broad objectives: expansion of successful rural poverty reduction and a resilience-building model and providing critical support through private sector investment, business enterprise offerings, and technical capacity building. These objectives were to be achieved through the implementation of cooperative management capacity-building training, enterprise development and value-addition activities, extension education for improved livelihoods and stakeholder engagement.

During the monitoring field supervision of the Sustainable Local Leadership Project (SLL) activities, it was noted that the cooperative farmers were not effectively utilizing their farms to establish kitchen gardens to provide adequate, fresh and diversified nutritious food. This observation indicated a significant knowledge gap in agri-nutrition among the farmers, which raised concerns about their food security status and their access to diverse and nutritious food within their households. Therefore, addressing this issue became crucial to enhancing the overall well-being and nutrition of cooperative farmers and their families.

Additionally, through learning and collaboration, the team discovered that kitchen gardens present an attractive and immense potential to interest and engage the youth. This is due to their lower capital requirements and shorter maturity period, resulting in a faster return on investment. Before the agri-nutrition intervention, most of the cooperative activities recorded low numbers of youth participating and this was as a result of them failing to find income-generating activities that provide immediate financial returns. The limited participation of cooperative youth members in the project highlighted potential challenges regarding their inclusivity and empowerment. Their active and meaningful participation is critical for promoting gender equality, expanding livelihood opportunities, and fostering long-term development and continuity of the farmer cooperatives.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

External Collaboration

Continuous Learning & Improvement

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

During the implementation of the SLL project, the team focused on rural poverty reduction through extension education for improved livelihoods and technical capacity building through the leadership training, stakeholder engagement and enterprise development and value addition program. Other activities that were not within this scope, such as agri-nutrition, were not the focal point of intervention The SLL team held structured meetings that formalized the local external collaborations with key stakeholders including cooperative leaders and farmers, county health representatives, and agricultural experts, the team was able to identify the limiting factors to the sustainable application of best practices of agri-nutrition in Migori and Homa Bay Counties.

The team embedded the agri-nutrition training to the technical training and during extension education services to cooperative farmers. The engagement yielded results that increased access to nutritious vegetables and increased incomes from the surplus vegetable supply at the household.

The team organized training sessions and workshops where a platform for sharing and learning was created for the cooperative farmers, especially youth, to share their traditional knowledge and experiences related to kitchen gardening, fostering a culture of learning and knowledge exchange. The organization also established kitchen garden demo plots at the Nuru Regional Training College where farmers learn the practical skills needed to apply improved agri-nutrition. Additionally, lead farmers across the cooperatives were identified and each was guided on how to establish a kitchen garden. These served as learning points for other cooperative farmers.

Key decision points were informed by data collected through follow-up training and feedback from the cooperative members. Regular communication and engagement with cooperative members ensured that their perspectives and insights were considered in decision-making processes. The SLL team listened to their experiences, challenges, and suggestions, and used this information to modify the interventions accordingly.

Over time, Nuru International Kenya adapted its nutrition-sensitive approach using a CLA process by gathering formal stakeholder feedback and the observed shift in needs among cooperative farmers, youth, and women members in the project. For instance, initial training sessions focused on technical aspects but later expanded to address broader challenges such as marketing and income generation.

Moreover, the SLL Team leveraged learning from formal monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) recurrent monitoring surveys and evaluations to expand training programs to include topics specifically tailored to address the needs and interests of the youth and women members. This included training on leadership and governance. By incorporating their perspectives and addressing their unique challenges, the SLL team enhanced their active participation and promoted their empowerment within the project.

Through continuous learning and feedback mechanisms, the SLL team tailored the interventions to better meet their needs and promote their active participation and empowerment within the Sustainable Local Leadership Project. This was possible through extensive use of CLA methods including learning from best practices, collaborating with stakeholders, farmers, and community members, and adapting programs to better fit the observed needs.

4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

A. DEVELOPM ENT RESULTS

The implementation of a CLA approach has yielded significant development outcomes for the SLL project. Prior to receiving agri-nutrition training, the farmers had insufficient knowledge in the field. However, through the effort of the SLL team, over 500 farmers were successfully reached and provided with a comprehensive and innovative training approach. This training greatly improved farmers' understanding on agri nutritional practices and the importance of diversified nutritious food. One notable achievement of the CLA approach is the improvement in farmers' ability to establish and tend their kitchen gardens. The acquired knowledge and skills led to the implementation of effective agricultural techniques, resulting in increased diverse and nutritious food.

The collaboration with the Department of Health at the county level proved crucial in facilitating SLL activity training initiatives. This partnership provided access to valuable training materials and enabled the SLL team to address region-specific challenges. The county's support in emphasizing key issues on agri-nutrition further strengthened the success of the intervention. Additionally, SLL team collaboration with the county government extended beyond training. The team were invited to participate in the development of the Migori County Nutrition Action Plan for 2023 to 2028, demonstrating their recognition of Nuru International Kenya's active involvement in agri-nutrition activities. This involvement ensured continued learning by the team from other organizations implementing agri-nutrition activities.

In conclusion, the CLA approach has resulted in significant positive outcomes. Farmers have improved their agri-nutrition practices, gained knowledge about suitable foods, and shown increased interest in utilizing local resources. The collaboration with the Department of Health and the county government has been instrumental in providing necessary resources, fostering relationships, and enhancing the long-term impact of our efforts in the field of agri-nutrition.

5. **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 key factor that enabled the SLL team to respond swiftly to the challenge was the unwavering support we received from our organization Nuru International Kenya, the Nuru Collective, USAID and the County Governments of Migori and Homa Bay, specifically the Department of Health. The targeted guidance and inspiring leadership from them into the activity as result of feedback from team members was crucial. Nuru International Kenya played a pivotal role in facilitating a smooth and successful adaptation by offering the necessary financial and human resources support. The donor, recognizing the well-justified rationale presented by the Activity, acknowledged and embraced the restructuring without requiring formal approval. The ability to adapt to the changing context with utmost flexibility was instrumental in achieving the desired outcomes.

The establishment of a culture of transparency among team members significantly contributed to the exchange of information. The team fostered an environment where honest feedback regarding both successful and unsuccessful aspects of program implementation was encouraged. This open feedback played a crucial role in identifying the underlying causes of failure and generating effective solutions. Furthermore, the dedicated leadership of the Activity and their unwavering commitment to continuous learning and improvement greatly influenced the success of the overall initiative.

The prolonged absence of rainfall posed a significant challenge to the implementation of kitchen gardens at the farmers' households. However, despite this obstacle, the team persevered by developing the gardens and simultaneously providing guidance on mulching techniques and appropriate watering schedules. The implementation of this Collaborative Learning and Adapting (CLA) approach has yielded significant benefits for both the team and the overall Activity.