2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Choose a Title that Describes the Who, What & Where of your Case

Name:

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Organization:

Bixal Solutions, Inc.

Summary:

In the context of the twin shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 La Soufriere volcano eruption in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, USAID/ESC faced the challenge of limited coordination and information sharing among stakeholders. This hindered effective resource allocation and progress towards sustainable development goals. To address this challenge, USAID/ESC, with Bixal Solutions Inc. as a prime contractor for its MELSA platform, implemented a Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach, aiming to promote joint learning opportunities with its key external partner and strengthen those relationships by fostering trust. By utilizing a combination of CLA subcomponents, including conducting joint events with one of USAID's key external stakeholders to identify risks and opportunities in the aftermath of COVID-19, and build trusting relationships and expanding joint networks. As a result of our CLA approach, USAID achieved joint learning between its staff and OECS, enhanced personal relationships that have made communication more efficient, and increased knowledge exchange and deep insights on mutual topics, leading to tangible improvements in development outcomes and organizational effectiveness.

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 case takes place in USAID/ESC in the context of the twin shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 La Soufriere volcano eruption in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In 2022, the ESC island states remain in dire need of a “breakthrough” based on economies offering rewarding work and creating well-paid 21st century jobs for a well-educated workforce or risk falling behind the rest of the world. In stark contrast, the pervasive, debilitating effects of low functional literacy, lack of opportunity, impoverished and dysfunctional families who add to social welfare costs and contribute to a next generation of disaffected, vulnerable youth--many of whom drift toward violent crime for reasons of social status and survival. The organizational challenge USAID/ESC faced was the lack of coordination and information sharing among stakeholders involved in the recovery and development efforts. This challenge resulted in inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and ineffective resource allocation. Recognizing these challenges, USAID/ESC identified the need for a CLA approach with its partners, and in particular, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) to address the organizational and development issues the organizations jointly were facing. The two organizations embarked on joint initiatives that were dynamic, supported by innovation, agility and co-created solutions that will sustainably enable fruition of the OECS region into a place where people thrive, the natural environment is resilient, and economies are reinvented but malleable enough to be recalibrated during times of crises. This case highlights three joint CLA events by USAID and OECS that were geared toward three strategic priorities of each organization:
- Reinventing the economy with a focus on business development and innovation;
- Building resilience with a focus on technological advancement in education; and

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

Please Select a Sub-Component

Please Select a Sub-Component

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

To address the challenges, USAID/ESC and Bixal followed a systematic and intentional CLA approach. We established two OECS Breakfasts, which sandwiched an OECS study tour to Washington and Chicago. The CEO Breakfast series created a space that brings together the region's innovators (from all sectors conceivable), international voices and partners for development to co-create, scale, and sustain solutions related to mutually agreed development challenges. The OECS study tour was for USAID and OECS staff to travel together spurring joint learning for the co-creation efforts. All three events were designed to build trust, open doors, facilitate knowledge sharing, foster dialogue, and generate actionable insights to improve the common development outcomes. They were all jointly planned between USAID and its contractor Bixal and OECS staff.

The first OEC Breakfast, on July 11, 2022, addressed the critical issue of accelerating economic featuring topics related to "reinventing the economy," including how member states can leverage and monetize the "orange economy" strengths. The forum included speakers such as U.S. based venture capitalists, intellectual property lawyers specializing in the Caribbean, entrepreneurs, trade specialists and marketing specialists. A strategic communications specialist sent speakers a list of questions meant to help them think through common threads and a professional moderator prepared with all panelists to get the most out of the sessions. Although the forum was promoted throughout the region and internationally as a CEO Breakfast targeting a mostly C-suite audience, the quantity, quality, and candor provided insight to 400 plus attending both on-site and virtually.

The USAID-OECS study tour, from July 30 – August 8, 2022, matched participants with sources in Washington and Chicago recognized as a "who's who" among practitioners for programmatic results in key areas of interest: youth diversion and justice systems; advanced personalized technology. During the study tour planning, the planning team held planning meetings with staff from each site visited to ensure they understood the objectives of the study tour, why they were chosen and what participants hoped to get out of the site visit. This led to targeted and insightful meetings and groups to bow out if they didn't believe they could meet expectations.

Within days of the tour, several of the contacts made during the visit agreed to be panelists at the second CEO Breakfast, including keynoter, the CEO of Chicago-based, non-profit "1871," recognized as the world's leading business incubator. Participants also saw innovative approaches to curb gun violence "matchmaker" services that helped to solve crime and unemployment. USAID/ESC-OECS also met with U.S. congressional leaders, USAID Washington-based staff, universities, and companies and NGOs in Washington and Chicago.

At the second OECS breakfast on September 14, 2022, in Grenada, focused on strategic priorities of Building Resilience and Advancing Equity and Inclusion in the areas of social development through innovation with a special emphasis on youth. For example, according to a panel discussant, transformative justice—with its emphasis on rehabilitation—while arguably key to solving for the crime problem among the 18-to-25 age group—first needs to be sold to a largely skeptical public which remains keen on retribution. In short, popular support leads to political will, and only then to changes to the justice system. The session raised questions: Does the region need a campaign to support a shift in popular opinion away from retribution and toward rehabilitation? If so, where might such a campaign fit in the sequence of next actions related to transformative justice? The questions illustrate the value of engagement as a resource for rethinking issues, resetting priorities, and ongoing, collaborative decision-making. At the same time, engagement also continues to validate the need to solve vexing problems already being tracked.

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

Please Choose A Question

Using the CLA approach significantly contributed to our development outcomes. Key takeaways of the breakfasts were that the regional economy needs: a more integrated approach to development, an investment “ecosystem” supporting entrepreneurs, and governments to invest not less than one percent of their annual budget as research and development to support innovation. Another is that for change to happen around rehabilitation for youth, a culture shift is needed. These takeaways suggest key action points for USAID and its partners. In addition, these events had tangible results. For example, an MOU signed by OECS and one private sector participant that will introduce 200 entrepreneurs to a Silicon Valley Innovation Hub. Longer term, that participant will establish what it calls it’s a start-up hub for would-be entrepreneurs in the Caribbean. Another participant will operate a “pitch competition” for another ten entrepreneurs who have tech innovations to offer in the travel and tourism space. For further analysis, the CEO Breakfast series alone has produced an archive of more than 10 hours of panel discussion and individual interviews as a resource, adding detail and rigor one “sticky metric” at a time to USAID/ESC and its partners’ decision-making.

Through the study tour, OECS leadership intends to pursue further discussions with one participant to assess regional needs. USAID/ESC-OECS have entered discussions with business school partners visited with the idea of establishing an international partnership with OECS-based community colleges with the main areas of focus to be included: applied data science and analytics, innovation, and entrepreneurship. At the same time, the visit to another participant not only identified a resource for regional entrepreneurs but has inspired the OECS leadership to consider options of its own relative to the importance of strengthening entrepreneurship and the business development ecosystem if it is to “reinvent the economy.” These are examples of the catalyzing effects of finely tuned and well-timed events between USAID and its partners with appropriate processes in place to spur insight.

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?**

Enabling conditions played a crucial role in our CLA approach and its success. Adequate resources, including time, funding, and staff, were essential for implementing and sustaining the CLA activities. We allocated dedicated staff members to oversee logistics and content. Critically for the OECS breakfasts, we had a strategic communications specialist developing questions for and engaging with speakers in advance. We had a professional moderator who was able to pull out insights in real-time. We had a full professional staff on the backend and a highly engaging online platform. We had a production company who obtained professional video for the documentation of knowledge. Organizational culture also played a significant role in enabling the CLA approach. There was seamless collaboration between USAID staff and leadership, Bixal staff and OECS staff. It was a one-team approach. We addressed any hurt feelings promptly and Bixal took a customer service approach to USAID and OECS, while maintaining clear lines of authority and approval with USAID.

However, we also encountered challenges and obstacles along the way. Limited funding initially posed constraints on the scale and scope of our CLA activities. We had to seek additional resources and advocate for the importance of these events. Other partners were added to offset some costs. Overcoming resistance to change and promoting a shift towards a more collaborative and adaptive approach required dedicated efforts in communication, a tremendous amount of scenario planning and pre-planning with participants such as speakers of the breakfasts and sites visit during the study tour.