2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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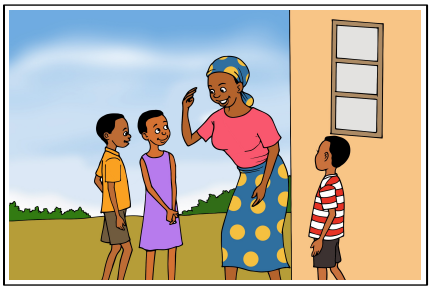

Case Title:

Funding and Support for Local Partners: Restructuring Grand

Name:

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Organization:

World Vision/All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development

Summary:

All Children Reading: Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD) leveraged the collaborative learning and adapting (CLA) approach to listen to awardees, understand barriers to accessing funding and successful implementation, and adapt to support their success. In 2020, ACR GCD initiated a CLA Strategy that enabled ACR awardees and Partners to collaborate and share knowledge and experiences more openly. It also supported them in adapting their designs or implementation approaches based on ongoing learning or changing circumstances. Over nearly 11 years, ACR GCD solicited 1200+ applications for approximately $24 million in funding. However, until 2023, less than half of these applications came from organizations in developing countries, and none were from local Disabled Persons Organizations (DPO), despite ACR GCD ' s explicit focus on children with disabilities.

This case study illustrates how ACR GCD used CLA to leverage its mechanism and put into practice USAID ' s commitment to localization and enacted it with awardees in Malawi and the Philippines.

Through trial and error, ACR GCD found solutions that increased the number of DPO applicants and their chances of receiving funding from ACR GCD

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?**

[Set the scene for your case and describe the organizational challenge(s) or opportunities that prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt.]

(Approximate word limit: 250-300)
This CLA case study spans 2020-2023, including the global COVID-19 pandemic and USAID ’ s historic and bold commitments to localization . All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD) had the opportunity to respond to these drivers of change in a positive way. The Pandemic induced school shutdowns affected more than 1.5 billion students worldwide, and the most vulnerable learners were often hit hardest . For children with disabilities in low resource contexts, most books are in print format, rather than digital, and not designed with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, rendering them inaccessible. These challenges required local solutions and responsive funding mechanisms that could accommodate the new and quickly evolving disparities resulting from the pandemic. This story demonstrates how ACR GCD team tackled these questions:
1) How can locally led teams create high quality, digital, remote accessible teaching and learning materials in low resource contexts, ensuring cultural relevancy and appropriateness, to drive demand and use?
2) Once created, how are these materials disseminated and used by teachers, parents and children in affected communities given the barriers?
3) How do we raise awareness and promote the use of sign language storybooks in schools for the deaf where access to accompanying devices and Internet connectivity is low or non-existent?
5) How can we provide flexible and demand-driven funding to local partners who are best placed to address emerging learning/teaching challenges?

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

Pause & Reflect

Adaptive Management

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

ACR GCD is one of USAIs Grand Challenges for Development designed to advance EdTech innovation and research to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts. The founding partners - USAID, World Vision and the Australian Government, led the overall direction of the Challenge, while World Vision, in Rounds 2 and 3, served as the Challenge Manager. This role included competition design, proposal review, awardee selection, and overall award and performance management. ACR GCD gleaned incredible lessons from the experiences of its 90+ awardees, particularly local awardees. CLA provided a structure to ensure ACR awardees and Partners had a regular opportunity to collaborate and share knowledge and experiences, then to adapt their designs or implementation approaches based on ongoing learning or changing circumstances.
The CLA Approach included the following steps:
1. Commitment: To ensure awardees bought into the CLA approach and felt supported to share challenges and make mid-implementation pivots, ACR GCD dedicated time to sensitizing awardees through multiple mechanisms- in competition documents, during start-up workshops and in regular program management meetings.
2. Awardee Pause & Reflect Sessions: Then, ACR GCD ' s MERL Partner, School to School International (STS), convened bi-annual CLA pause and reflect sessions with awardees, and without any ACR GCD staff to maintain confidentiality.
3. Adaptation: Following those sessions, STS met with ACR GCD and presented Pause & Reflect Session feedback with the expectation that the Challenge Management Team would take action prior to the next session by making changes.
The example below illustrates the process:
To create digital, born accessible storybooks ACR GCD funded the Begin with Books (BWB) Prize as the first step in addressing the many barriers to education that children with disabilities face. ACR GCD recognized that addressing these barriers required local organizations positioned to responsively and proactively collaborate and address complex dependencies. Four awardees were selected, each selected local disabled persons organizations (DPOs) as partners to create sign language storybooks as a part of their overall awards to produce accessible digital books. The CLA approach simultaneously built capacity and enriched the book chain at three points - 1) accessible title development in underserved languages children use and understand, 2) publishing and printing and 3) active use to ensure that accessible teaching and learning materials were available at various touch points.

In the October 2020 Pause & Reflect session, the BWB awardees and local DPO partners stated, " we need support in developing sign language books ". Developing sign language videos was a steep learning curve for some, both because of the challenges one would expect (translation, language standardization, layout across platforms), but also deeper issues – e.g., children arriving at school with no language, regional sign language variations.
In response to this, ACR GCD facilitated the peer-led Sign Language Storybook Cohort (SLSC) for the awardees and their local DPO partners focused on improved sign language video production and how to improve visibility and engagement by deaf-led local organizations, donors and with the Ministry of Education.
In the December 2021 Pause & Reflect session BWB awardees commented, " We organized a workshop with AMASOURDS (the Malian Association for the Hearing Impaired) and 2 local Deaf school community representatives to foster local partnerships, initiate collaborative learning processes and prepare AMASOURDS to carry on the work in the future. "

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

B. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Grand Challenges are non-traditional and therefore more flexible funding mechanisms. Beyond driving innovation, they can also trial approaches to put agendas into practice, namely USAID ' s ambitious localization agenda. ACR GCD made over 92 awards valued at $24 Million since its inception in 2011. Although ACR GCD refined its approach to each competition, barriers still prevented the organizations which ACR GCD hoped to fund from submitting proposals and receiving funding, namely Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and local disability service providers.

Barrier - Limited local & DPO proposal submissions for funding. - Though local innovators were encouraged to apply for funding, most competitors were US-based. Barriers such as advertising, complex, written English-only submission requirements and limited familiarity with multilateral procurement regulations often deterred local innovators and implementers from applying or successfully competing for grant funding. Michele Sumilas, Assistant Administrator at USAID, also underscored these barriers and outlined steps needed to shift toward locally led development, such as translating requests for proposals into local languages, which has never been done to date at USAID .

Change #1 - Allow proposals in local languages including sign language.
In 2022, the ACR GCD designed a follow-on competition called Sign Language Books in Action. The competition focused on the actual distribution, promotion, and use of the 1000+ accessible digital books created under the BWB Prize. Eligibility requirements were limited to local DPOs who had partnered with innovators under Begin with Books to create sign language video storybooks as they were best positioned to engage with local stakeholders, Ministries of Education, teachers, parents, caregivers, and students. ACR GCD adapted competition requirements to create a flexible and inclusive design to solicit submissions from local deaf-led organizations/DPOs. For the ACR GCD partners: USAID, World Vision, and the Australian Government, the design broke ground as the first of its kind to allow for sign language (with English captioned) proposal submissions since English is typically a third or fourth language for sign language users. Of seven submissions, one local DPO submitted a combined package of written English narrative along with supporting videos in English captioned Malawian Sign Language.
Change #2 - Introduce flexible submission requirements and engagement with local organization prior to submission. ACR GCD solicited feedback from BWB awardees to determine a path forward to improve competition submissions overall. Recommendations included - translating the competition details into other languages and allowing Q&A submissions in other languages, including sign language video, which would have reduced competition barriers for DPOs. Further reflection revealed the need for capacity building from previous awardees, extended lead times and offering a competition webinar, with interpretation support, to improve both the number of submissions as well as the confidence level of local competitors.

Change #3 - Targeted advertising via local social media and local listserv
ACR GCD held After Action Reviews after each competition to determine if the competition goals were met. For the BWB Prize competition, ACR GCD advertised via the ACR GCD website, Facebook, Twitter. This yielded 34 applications, 9 from target countries and 0 from local DPOs. As such, ACR focused on

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?**

Conditions enabling local organizations, especially local DPOs, to participate in competitions included knowing the local context, ensuring funding requirements were translated and tailored to the audience, providing webinars to explain competition requirements, and encouraging support from more experienced organizations. Furthermore, ACR GCD had more flexibility in its requirements than traditional mechanisms with more stringent procurement regulations.
Beyond securing an award, enablers include dedicated staff to support awardees through targeted capacity building in milestone development and completion. After the Sign Language Books in Action prize winners were notified of their awards, the Project Manager (PM) worked closely to guide the local DPOs through the milestone development process and modify scopes of work and timelines to support improved outcomes. The PM also worked closely with the World Vision Finance Department to establish guidance on how to best forecast and front load milestones to avoid budget shortfalls and activity stoppage for small, local DPOs with limited reserves. This resulted in improved efficiency under a compressed timeline to avoid multiple contractual modifications or activity completion delays.

To further support the creation of more inclusive and collaborative networks for the local organizations to sustain their work, the PM shared the books created under BWB to local World Vision offices and made the necessary introductions between local DPOs and World Vision Education Specialists to increase opportunities for use outside of schools, such as in World Vision Reading Camps, communities and homes. ACR GCD alsoincreased visibility and advocated for DPOs to become active participants in local adovcacy networks with Ministries of Education to effectively address the complex barriers to Inclusive Education in the sustainable future..