2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION
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Case Title:
Utilizing CAM to Collect Localized Data for Responsive Decision-Making

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Summary:
CEPPS partners in Iraq faced challenges operating in a rapidly changing political environment. Local partners implemented activities regarding the adaptation and adoption of key legislation. As political support for legislation consistently shifted, CEPPS/IRI relied on local partners to identify, capture, and report on programmatic information necessary to make appropriate adaptations. Local partners did not have the capacity to do so, prompting CEPPS/IRI to invest in promoting a culture of collaboration, learning, and adaptation with local partners.

CEPPS/IRI adapted its internal processes to create feedback loops between an inclusive group of stakeholders to better facilitate collaboration. As a result, local partners meaningfully participated in pause and reflect sessions, highlighting changes in the local context. This allowed CEPPS/IRI to adapt support given to local partners to ensure their campaigns were responsive to shifts in political support for key legislation. In response, legislation passed and included citizen-responsive recommendations developed by local partners. To increase local partners ’ capacity to collect and discuss data, CEPPS/IRI supported local partners to operationalize complexity-aware monitoring methods. As a result, local partners highlighted gaps in their programming, and collaborated with each other and with IRI staff to adapt activities to become more inclusive to women and youth.

Altogether, access to higher quality, localized data, and processes to facilitate informed and collaborative discussions, supported more effective and inclusive programming. In turn, as MEL processes become more accessible to local partners, increasing their capacity, local partners were able to collaborate independently of CEPPs/IRI, increasing program sustainability.

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?**

Since 2018, the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), represented by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), has supported citizens ' participation in Iraq ' s electoral processes. CEPPS/IRI provides direct support to civil society organizations and civic activists to implement regional advocacy campaigns. Since the initial launch of the program implementation, however, Iraqi politics has changed significantly. Public protests have occurred and support for key legislative actions among political stakeholders changes frequently. Given the direct tie of legislative actions to local partners ' advocacy goals, CEPPS/IRI adopted a stronger collaboration, learning, and adaptation approach. CEPPS/IRI aimed to better support local partners implement projects responsive to the changing tides of local politics and public sentiment. By adopting a more inclusive and participatory approach, CEPPS/IRI increased the capacity of local partners and better positioned IRI field staff and local partners to provide localized, high-quality information to inform programmatic adaptions responsive to such shifts.

To ensure that IPEA-funded programming is strategic, CEPPS/IRI initiated weekly updates between the field office and DC-based program team. Updates were critical in planning effective and efficient quarterly pause and reflect sessions, which were adapted to happen on a semi-quarterly basis, and to include local partners. Discussions highlighted changes in local contexts, emerging and persistent challenges and opportunities, and updates on programmatic outcomes to identify if and how programming should adapt. Furthermore, initial pause and reflect sessions highlighted a gap in partner capacity and current MEL systems to identify and report higher-level results. By adopting a participatory monitoring approach, further localizing data collection to include beneficiaries, CEPPS/IRI systematized project-level learning and adaptation to address changes in the political environment, as well as gaps in local partner capacity.

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

Internal Collaboration

M&E for Learning

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

CEPPS/IRI's initial CLA approach consisted of quarterly reflection sessions between IRI staff. IRI staff reflected on local partners ' activity reports to understand programmatic results, and identify any challenges affecting program implementation, including changes in the local political context. Local partners did not directly participate in sessions, and through initial reflection sessions, IRI staff found that local partners were not able to identify and report on different levels of programmatic results, including any unexpected results. As a result, IRI staff did not have enough information to effectively identify changes in the local context, nor identify strengths and weaknesses in the programmatic approach. To cover gaps in data and provide more nuanced information, IRI field staff supplemented activity reports with their own observations. However, IRI field staff found that too much time had passed between quarterly reflection sessions to rely on their observations and memory alone. Overall, the initial CLA approach did not adequately capture the information needed to allow for proactive programmatic adaptation.

As a result, CEPPS/IRI adapted its learning approach to increase the frequency of pause and reflect sessions, and to expand local partners ' role in sessions. To achieve this, CEPPS/IRI first initiated weekly meetings between the field office and DC-based program staff. IRI staff provided updates in local contexts, and any emerging or persistent challenges and opportunities, to better inform the agenda for pause and reflect sessions. To address gaps in local partners ' ability to provide quality data to inform discussions on adaptations, CEPPS/IRI developed targeted trainings for local partners designed to improve their MEL capacity to capture higher-level results. Pause and reflect sessions shifted to a semi-quarterly basis, and to include local partners. By creating a more inclusive CLA approach, CEPPS/IRI was able to collect more localized data to identify shifts in the local political context, and more nuanced information on how these shifts may affect local partners ' ability to implement their projects. In turn, IRI staff learned how to provide more targeted support to local partners to help them adapt their advocacy campaigns as shifts occurred.

In addition to integrating local partners into feedback loops and increasing their capacity to meaningfully participate, CEPPS/IRI adapted its monitoring system to become more participatory. CEPPS/IRI designed a custom training for local partners on how to identify and report on outcome level results and co-created a secure MS-form as online platform for directly submitting results by partners as a systematic approach for collecting expected and unexpected results. Data quality improved, as an additional layer of data validation occurred through systematic follow-up procedures designed to assess program results. Altogether, by adapting the CLA approach, higher quality, localized data was generated to assess results for learning purposes, and as the online platform for results approach embeds practices for discussing the meaning and significance of data into the monitoring processes, local partners and IRI staff were able to improve their capacity to learn and adapt.

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

By integrating local partners into quarterly reflection sessions, CEPPS/IRI and local partners were able to have informed, collaborative discussions regarding changes in the local political context. This allowed CEPPS/IRI to proactively adapt the support given to local partners to adjust their advocacy campaigns. For example, CEPPS/IRI supported local CSO partners implement advocacy campaigns regarding proposed legislative amendments. Local partners developed recommendations to improve proposed legislation to become more responsive to citizen needs. Despite meeting with several parties receptive to changes, one coalition gained traction and proposed their own internal version of the law that rolled back several of the suggestions local partners advocated for improving. Because of informed discussions between IRI field staff and local partners, and due to weekly updates with IRI DC staff, everyone was able to monitor changes in political sentiment from key actors and work together to adapt programming accordingly. DC staff made administrative adaptations, while field staff worked with local partners to adapt their advocacy campaigns to instead collaborate with like-minded civic organizations to release a joint statement against these amendments. Local partners successfully advocated for half of their original recommendations to be integrated into the adopted law.

By adopting a participatory data collection method, CEPPS/IRI was able to collect localized data throughout project monitoring, allowing for small project adaptations to happen in real-time. This approach was particularly effective at helping local partners and IRI staff identify gaps in demographic groups participating in programming and adapt activities to reach program beneficiaries more strategically and inclusively. For example, during local partners ’ awareness sessions to highlight their advocacy work, local partners shared that they were not able to reach their target for women ’s participation. Local partners and IRI staff collaborated to discuss how they would adapt their approach and decided to hire women facilitators and tap into networks of women via female education centers. When gaps were identified in the age groups of participants, local partners similarly shifted their approach and worked with universities to reach target youth populations.

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?**

IRI/CEPPS utilized quarterly pause & reflect sessions with IRI staff and local partner representatives for almost five years of the project lifespan. Throughout that time, CEPPS/IRI identified two main conditions that enabled the team to achieve programmatic results, and navigate any challenges through CLA. The first condition is using participatory processes. Participatory monitoring and participatory reflection sessions allowed CEPPS/IRI to access localized, and higher-quality data generated by local partners. This information was crucial in informing weekly updates between IRI staff, and quarterly pause and reflect sessions between local partners and IRI staff, allowing for more effective and relevant program adaptation. Because of this adaptation, programming was more effective and more inclusive. By holding weekly update meetings between IRI field staff and DC-based program teams, CEPPS/IRI was able to strategically discuss the design and implementation of pause and reflect sessions with local partners to make them as effective and targeted to their needs as possible.

The second condition is having an organizational learning culture. Instilling a learning culture between IRI and local partners allowed local partners to actively engage with IRI staff and take on a more direct role in adapting their programs. This allowed CEPPS/IRI to hear honest reflections about challenges and programmatic weaknesses to inform adaptions, and local partners to increase their capacity to operate more independently from IRI over time, including with other local partners. Initially, local partners were busy and did not see the value of pause and reflect sessions, nor did they understand which actions would be taken if they shared details about their work, creating a sense of hesitation. CEPSS/IRI learned to build trust over time by sending agendas in advance with details on what will be discussed, relevant materials that would be referenced, and types of action items that were and could be generated with the information they shared. Agendas were informed by weekly updates between IRI staff.