2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Scenario Planning in Sudan: CLA for Impact in a Conflict Environment

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Summary:

The 2019 popular uprising that ended a thirty year-long military dictatorship in Sudan marked a political opening for Sudan. To support the country's transition to democracy, the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS)—comprised of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI)—has worked to implement the USAID-funded Improving Electoral and Political Processes for Change in Sudan (IEPP) Activity. CEPPS confronted multiple challenges in implementing the IEPP Activity, such as rapid shifts in the operating context, including protests, coup d'états, and internal armed conflict, as well as tensions and lack of trust among key stakeholders. To navigate these challenges, CEPPS applied the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) framework in its democracy, human rights and governance (DRG) work which enabled CEPPS to support Sudan's transitioning democracy, while adapting to rapidly changing circumstances in a way that centered local actors in the process.

To do so, CEPPS utilized a test-and-respond approach, combining short-term planning, scenario development and reflection sessions with local partners, stakeholders, and participants to develop possible alternative interventions based on potential action-forcing events. This CLA approach prioritizes collaborative planning and activity design with local partners, who generate ideas and provide feedback on CEPPS activities and approaches. This enabled locally led adaptation of the IEPP activity and helped sustain the momentum in building the foundations of a peaceful, stable, inclusive democratic society in Sudan.

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?**

In 2019, protests and a coup d'état deposed Sudan's then-President Omar al-Bashir, a former military officer who had been in power since 1989. A relative political openness and a series of political and peace agreements that ensued provided an opportunity for CEPPS to support Sudan's transition to democracy through eventual elections. From the start of the IEPP Activity, CEPPS prioritized a collaborative approach, working together with local partners to balance diverse local interests, navigate underlying tensions between civil and political actors, and to manage uncertainties around the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In response to these uncertainties and since it was increasingly unclear whether and how the elections may unfold, CEPPS adopted scenario planning to create a realistic and flexible suite of possible interventions.

The October 2021 military coup halted the IEPP Activity. However, many Sudanese stakeholders wanted to get the country back on track to a democratic transition. To do so in the context of the increasingly unpredictable and deteriorating security environment, CEPPS switched from annual planning cycle to short-term activity implementation plans (STIPs) co-developed with local partners that would be submitted to USAID every 3-6 months. These STIPs enabled CEPPS to propose and gain rapid approval for feasible interventions based on scenario planning. War broke out on April 15, 2023, necessitating an evacuation of CEPPS staff. However, these same CLA practices enabled the IEPP Activity to continue operating. Relying on a locally driven process to identify and prioritize risks and interventions in this complex context helped CEPPS balance the immediate needs of Sudanese stakeholders with feasibility and safety, while still supporting Sudan's peaceful democratic aspirations.

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

External Collaboration

Scenario Planning

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

Collaboration with local stakeholders and joint scenario planning were embedded in the IEPP Activity from the start. All three CEPPS partners jointly developed intervention approaches based on different scenarios, including scenarios anticipating different lengths of the transitional period before elections in Sudan could occur; the spread and risks of the COVID-19 pandemic; and various levels of tension between political parties, civil society, and transitional governing bodies. To further enable fast adaptation in response to the 2021 coup, CEPPS shifted the IEPP Activity planning to STIPs. Continuous collaboration between the three CEPPS partners and with local stakeholders—through reflection sessions, meetings, informal discussions and weekly calls between staff in Khartoum and in Washington, DC—led to context-informed, flexible and needs-based approaches to activities that are incorporated into each STIP. For example, when a group of lawyers participated in one of CEPPS/IFES' Technical Roadmap for Elections workshops, CEPPS/IFES and the group identified an opportunity for CEPPS to support for the lawyers' efforts to develop a roadmap to free and fair elections in Sudan. Because of the flexibility embedded in the STIP process, CEPPS was able to rapidly integrate technical support to the legal group into an upcoming set of activities. This enabled CEPPS to support local stakeholders in putting together a strong elections roadmap which integrated international best practices on electoral law.

Alongside STIPs, CEPPS used context monitoring and frequent reflections with partners to adapt further. In particular, CEPPS tested various approaches to foster positive engagement during Consensus Building and Negotiation workshops with political party and civil society members. Tension between different groups, such as grassroots resistance committees and more established, mainstream parties and civil society organizations, necessitated rapid changes to workshop content and format to build a more collaborative atmosphere. CEPPS found that a facilitated discussion format helped participants find common ground and gradually build trust with each other. Without adjusting the format to establish a base level of agreement between these groups the workshops would have failed, undermining progress toward Sudan's inclusive, peaceful political transition.

Once a STIP period concludes, or if there is another action-forcing event, CEPPS begins a new scenario planning exercise. To inform scenario planning, CEPPS holds regular coordination meetings with local and international stakeholders and participants to gain diverse perspectives on current and upcoming developments. Based on this data, CEPPS develops a scenario matrix that describes and ranks most to least likely scenarios, the operating environment anticipated under each scenario, and potential interventions. Partners then discuss and validate the scenarios and interventions, as well as identify opportunities for coordination. These CLA practices have contributed to strong relationships among implementing partners, local stakeholders, and activity participants. Together they can quickly identify new risks and priorities in a dynamic context, and channel their collective resources to develop locally driven sets of short-term interventions. Importantly, even though STIPs are context-responsive, they seek to build on each other to achieve the IEPP Activity's objectives to improve the inclusiveness and credibility of Sudan's transition process despite the rapidly evolving political and conflict dynamics.

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

DRG assistance often focuses on a long-term investment in people and institutions. Therefore, meaningful short-term progress can therefore be difficult to assess. In this case, the IEPP Activity's ability to enable local stakeholders to continue to operate while navigating changing circumstances is the most achievable and measurable outcome of CEPPS CLA approach. In Sudan, the CLA practices undertaken by CEPPS and partners were and remain necessary to keep up the momentum among pro-democracy actors despite significant uncertainty about the future. The establishment of collaborative relationships among local partners and stakeholders through the CLA activities is a key result. In addition, CEPPS CLA approach has enabled CEPPS to contribute to broader results through their distinct and complementary efforts:

• After the coup, a CEPPS/IRI-created women's multi-party platform almost fell apart due to entrenched differences between stakeholder groups. CEPPS/IRI and participants co-identified three trainings—communication, conflict resolution, negotiation and dialogue—that would bring the group back together. As a result of CEPPS/IRI's trainings, the groups signed a commitment document to work together. While communication between groups did not change overnight, they were able to use what they learned to address mutual problems. This was critical to sustain momentum among pro-transition actors and generate new ideas for joint activities.
• In October 2021, CEPPS/IFES launched a discussion series for pro-democracy groups to share technical expertise and international best practices on organizing transitional elections, forming transitional election management bodies, and drafting election laws. The series culminated in March 2023 with a training that included Sudanese lawyers and pro-democracy actors. This group requested guidance to draft their own plans for a roadmap to elections after the series, and independently drafted a technical roadmap to elections with CEPPS/IFES support. The group did not end up publishing their roadmap because a broader political agreement never took place in late March 2023. Nonetheless, this process deepened relationships among these stakeholders and was an enabling factor in the continued ability of CEPPS/IFES and partners to conceptualize activities under different scenarios.
• CEPPS/NDI worked with a women-led legal group to conduct analyses of different transitional charters, an idea originally proposed to CEPPS/NDI by this group. After the coup, the group and CEPPS/NDI co-convened a multi-stakeholder forum that included resistance committees of grassroots youth, as well as civil society representatives, political parties and other key stakeholders, to review a draft analysis comparing 14 different charters. At first there was hostility and suspicion between the groups, given their contentious history and differing views of the transition; however, fostering dialogue about the charters between these groups helped them to identify their shared interests and possible ways forward to collaborate.

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 internal culture of strong relationships and networks was a key enabling condition in CEPPS' ability to adapt. CEPPS partners (IFES, IRI, and NDI) have strong internal and external relationships and networks that have been built on mutual trust. Partners consistently and transparently communicate with USAID, each other, and Sudanese local partners and networks to exchange up-to-date information. Additionally, these relationships are leveraged to remain aware of developments across the internal and external operating systems that may affect the activity. For example, CEPPS/NDI leverages its internal resources such as other regional or country teams and subject matter experts who are consulted during short-term implementation planning. One challenge or inhibitor to implementing CLA in practice was navigating administrative processes inherent in any large program with many partners and stakeholders. Standard timelines for workplanning and approval processes can stymie efforts to pivot programming quickly as required; by the time a new activity or approach is communicated and approved, despite every effort by all parties—funders and partners—needs may have changed. CEPPS Sudan offers the following advice to others in similar contexts:

• Don't panic, and don't despair. Get comfortable with discomfort.

• In a transitional environment with insecurity, communication and flexibility are key at all levels. Even though the program is constantly adapting, it is essential to build in times to reflect and check in with partners and local staff no matter how difficult it might be; this allows for creativity and adaptation.

• Prioritize local presence when feasible. Putting resources and time into doing a comprehensive mapping of stakeholders would have been extremely useful to target efforts at program startup. While CEPPS found an important group of pro-democratic voices to support, this process could have been more systematic.