2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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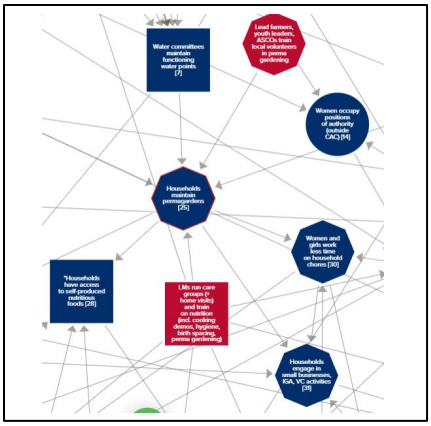

Case Title:

Measuring the Benefits of USAID's Integrated Programming in the DRC:

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Summary:

The benefits of integration are not easy to measure. Cross-sectoral integration is a pillar of the USAID/Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). As part of the CDCS Mid-Course Stocktaking, the Mission tasked its Mission Strategic Support Program (MSSP) to conduct the Integrated Programming Assessment (IPA) to understand to what extent the implementation of the strategy's integration pillar contributed to the progress of its Development Objectives (DOs).

To carry out the IPA, MSSP introduced Participatory Adaptive Modeling (PAM), a participatory process that leverages the experiential knowledge of implementing partner (IP) staff to create a comprehensive model of an activity's approach to creating change among its target populations. Collaborating with two complex multi-sector resilience activities, MSSP was able to build visual action-based Theories of Change (TOCs) and infuse these TOCs with information on the strength of contributions along results chains to build a Bayesian Decision Support System (DSS) for each activity. Through scenario analyses of the DSS, the assessment team was able to provide precise estimates of the added benefits of integration.

The findings and lessons learned were shared with the Mission during its MCST; and sparked critical discussions about the implementation of ongoing and future integrated programming, needed adaptations to the CDCS, and how to facilitate improved collaboration within the Mission and its partners. MSSP intends to continue to use and refine the tool to provide a structured process to systematically assess projected results achievement and adapt to context changes throughout the project cycle.

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?**

Cross-sectoral integration is a strategic pillar of the USAID/Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). The CDCS aims to improve the integration, layering, and sequencing of development and humanitarian efforts to address emergencies and their underlying causes. As part of the CDCS Mid-Course Stocktaking (MCST), the Mission tasked its Mission Strategic Support Program (MSSP) to conduct the Integrated Programming Assessment (IPA) to examine how changes in context and progress to date confirm or challenge whether integration has improved USAID's work within and across activities.

Capturing and measuring the benefits of integration can be challenging due to its complex and interconnected nature. To determine the value added by an integrated multisectoral approach, it is important to understand what would have happened if the activity had been implemented as a single-sector activity. Simply comparing a single-sector activity with a multi-sector activity, with its different objectives, target region and population, implementing partners and budgets, would not lead to conclusive results.

To evaluate complex, integrated activities, MSSP used Participatory Adaptive Modeling (PAM). PAM allowed MSSP to deconstruct multi-sectoral approaches, and compare the results that would have been achieved if only interventions from one sector had been implemented, with the actual results achieved through the multi-sectoral approach. By maintaining consistency in target regions, objectives, and implementing partners, the evaluation team was able to accurately determine the benefits of integration, and provide actionable recommendations to facilitate integration, inform the adaptation of the CDCS, and improve collaborative practices.

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

Theories of Change

Pause & Reflect

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

To conduct an in-depth case study of the selected multi sectoral activities, MSSP used Participatory Adaptive Modeling (PAM), a participatory process that leverages the experiential knowledge of implementing partner (IP) staff at all levels and across sector teams, to create a comprehensive model of an activity's approach to inciting change amongst its target populations. The models can be used to run different scenarios for planning, understand the benefits of integration, and inform adaptive management decisions. Two USAID/DRC Resilience and Food Security Activities (RFSAs) were selected for the case studies because of their complex, multi-sectoral activities and their focus on resilience.

Building an Action-Focused Theory of Change (TOC): The first task of the assessment was to translate the activity documentation into an interactive and visual action-focused TOC that included all interventions, outputs, outcomes, and impacts as individual elements. Each element of the TOC was formulated as an action taken by a stakeholder of the activity, omitting outputs and outcomes that do not represent observable behavior. These TOCs go beyond traditional logical frameworks and lengthy "if, then" statements to encompass a far greater number of interrelated cause-and-effect relationships. Implementing partners then validated TOCs in sector-specific workshops, where the assessment team led "walks" through change processes in participants' areas of expertise, to identify missing steps or links. Sector teams were then brought together to discuss how interventions produce joint effects at cross-sector nodes in the intervention logic.

Expert Elicitation of Effects: Once the TOCs were validated, a series of Pause & Reflect workshops were organized with field staff to understand the degree to which interventions produce the desired effects, and what role cross-sectoral integration plays in results achievement. To provide numerical estimates for contributions along result chains, IP staff were asked to imagine a sample of their target population and estimate how many communities or individuals would experience the desired result in different scenarios. For example, to understand how Care Groups contributed to exclusive breastfeeding, staff were asked: "Out of ten mothers, how many practice exclusive breastfeeding when participating in Care Groups? How many do so without participating in Care Groups?"

Modeling a Decision Support System: Once all elements of the TOC had numerical effect estimates, the causal elements were chained together to create a comprehensive change model, referred to here as a Bayesian Decision Support System (DSS). While the TOC showed where activities sought cross-sectoral integration, the DSS showed how much cross-sectoral integration contributed to the effectiveness of the activities. The interactive DSS allows users to either activate or deactivate individual elements to observe the ripple effects of interventions throughout the system.

Scenario Analyses: Equipped with an interactive DSS, the team was able to run different scenarios to calculate accurate estimates of the value added by integration. Full implementation of the entire multi-sectoral approach was compared to scenarios in which only single-sector interventions (e.g., livelihoods, health, or governance) were implemented. By conducting such comparative scenario analyses, the evaluation team could meaningfully and systematically compare single-sector programming with integrated programming and determine where integration had the greatest benefit.

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

The initial findings of the IPA's case studies were presented to the Mission during the MCST. They sparked meaningful discussions about the implementation of ongoing and future integrated programming, needed adaptations to the CDCS, and how to facilitate improved collaboration with the Mission and its partners.

Lessons Learned: Integration has tangible benefits that can not only be described and measured, but scaled up and replicated in different scenarios. The assessment found that in concert with other sectors, interventions gain wide-reaching effects. For example, livelihood interventions added an average of 10% to results under governance and health. Also, it found that different sector interventions within an activity are able to compensate for each other in challenging environments. Scenarios showed that the lower the average output achievement, the higher the added benefit of cross-sectoral integration. Achieving integration by designing and implementing multi-sectoral activities appears to be less challenging than achieving integration through the collaboration of activities. Lessons learned also include how to better manage complex multi-sectoral activities, such as using local committees to coordinate interventions and improving planning capacity to support communities and households in prioritizing actions.

Taking Stock: During the MCST, Mission staff engaged in discussions and proposed a number of actionable next steps. These include mapping development and humanitarian activities to identify potential areas of synergy, and leveraging the work of RFSAs in other provinces. Participants also explored strategies to foster a culture of collaboration across offices. These include promoting regular communication among activity managers, sharing knowledge, involving stakeholders in planning processes, aligning project cycles, conducting joint field trips, and developing joint programmatic documents and initiatives. Other recommendations to improve collaboration among IPs included adding specific collaboration language in award and procurement documents, sharing provincial contact lists, and establishing a sharing process or platform to maximize the impact of collective efforts.

A New Tool in the Toolbox: The IPA was an opportunity for the MSSP to pilot the PAM tool in the DRC, and the team plans to continue to use and improve it in future CLA initiatives. In addition to assessing complex integrated activities, the tool can be used to assess activity designs in a participatory manner and support implementation at the community level. The tool provides a structured process for offices and activities to systematically pause and reflect, review TOCs, synthesize existing knowledge, and efficiently run different context and progress scenarios that will enable decision-makers to make informed adaptive management decisions and improve programming effectiveness.

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?**

A New Approach: The introduction of the new PAM approach required a significant effort of awareness raising and continuous adaptation. It was critical to gain the support of champions in the program office, activity managers, and IP leadership to be able to implement the approach and ensure the active engagement of workshop participants and interviewees. Tools were designed to bridge new concepts with familiar ones (e.g., using the TOC to build an informed DSS) and were consistently tested to ensure logic and clarity. The assessment team conducted dry runs with other MSSP staff and conducted workshops and interview after-actions to review and adjust processes as needed.

Hybrid Data Collection: Data was collected through online workshops and interviews with IPs throughout the DRC. This approach was cost-effective, minimized the use of IP staff time, and provided flexibility in terms of scheduling and location. While convenient, reliable internet connectivity was a challenge in remote areas, and staff were sometimes required to troubleshoot or relocate to areas with stronger connections to ensure active participation.

Tight Timelines: If time had permitted, the assessment team would have supplemented the staff elicitation estimates with performance monitoring data to produce an even more robust DSS with empirical evidence from the activity's monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan. While the PAM process can be used throughout the project cycle, there is added value in starting the process early in implementation so that the tool can be used consistently to inform adaptive management. Both activities that were chosen as case studies were in their final year of implementation. Staff were able to provide valuable retrospective insights into integration within the activity, and recommendations will be used to inform the design and operationalization of future projects.