USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Philippines

Incorporating Local Voices

USAID/Philippines and Strategic Planning and Implementation of the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS)

The MECap* case study series shares the experience of how MECap Fellows collaborate with USAID staff to foster the four Program Cycle principles. This case study concerns the principle, Promote Sustainability through Local Ownership, and is intended to spark discussion about incorporating local voices in strategic planning and implementation. The experience shared is that of a Fellow placed in the Office of Local Sustainability in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment (E3/LS), who facilitated a retreat for USAID/Philippines, and does not represent the views of the Bureau or Mission.

Background

USAID/Philippines is a Wave 1 CDCS country. The Mission is also a Local Works country, which means that it is implementing discretionary funds under a Congressionally directed program to advance locally owned solutions to development challenges in the Philippines. Local Works requires that activities are designed and implemented together with new, underutilized local partners in order to strengthen local ownership and sustainability of USAID programs. To this end the Mission conducted a nationwide listening tour engaging hundreds of local people – citizens, community leaders, local officials, and private sector – to hear directly from them about their challenges and their priorities. The MECap Fellow helped the Mission incorporate these voices into deliberations on the new CDCS.

Snapshot

Background

Mission: Philippines

Offices: Entire Mission

Program Cycle Phase: CDCS development

Approach

What was the purpose? Incorporate local voices and perspectives in Mission strategic planning process.

Who are the local actors? Mission FSNs; local citizens ("end users" of programs); Government of the Philippines.

How was it done? Voices heard during listening tours were represented as the perspective of an "alter ego" during the strategic planning process.

Why is it important? To ensure that the perspectives and priorities solicited during a nationwide listening tour were genuinely considered and incorporated into Mission strategic and program planning.

Key Reflections

It can be challenging to convince technical staff that there may be equal or more value to following locally identified priorities rather than tackling the technical gaps that they know how to address.

Approach

Over several months, a cross-office team from the Mission traveled across the country to conduct conversations with potential "end users" of USAID's new programming. Much of the information taken from this experience was not surprising, but some new topics emerged.

These topics were presented at a Mission-wide CDCS retreat, facilitated by the MECap Fellow. This retreat included all Foreign Service National (FSN) staff, many of whom had never engaged in this type of strategic planning before. In order to bring the voices and perspectives of the end users into the room, the Fellow, together with the Mission Local Works team, created about 40 "alter egos" – composite profiles of respondents in the listening tour. These were made into handouts resembling bookmarks. Each participant in the workshop received an alter ego, and they were asked to represent that "person's" perspective throughout the workshop.

The results were mixed. It is difficult to see the world through other people's eyes, to see what they see, feel what they feel, and experience things as they do. The use of the alter egos was an attempt to simulate this experience, given the impossibility of bringing the actual individuals into the room. A few Mission staff members embraced the idea and reflected back on their alter ego throughout the workshop. The Fellow reminded the participants throughout the process to think of their alter ego,

which also helped re-center the experiences of local people throughout the workshop. In the final exercise, teams reviewed several versions of the Results Framework produced by working groups. In this review they were prompted to respond to questions about what their alter ego would say about the approach, and how it would affect them. This solicited several comments, for example: "This is nice, but will it get me a job?" The comments did not go so far as suggesting significant change to the Results Framework, but they did point out some possible weaknesses that could be addressed.

Reflections

What could have been done differently?

An After Action Review among facilitators noted that it would have been helpful to have spent more time orienting Mission leadership on the exercise, so they could model the alter ego approach. Some people were skeptical that it seemed like a gimmick, although most seemed to appreciate the novelty of the approach.

Did the approach change USAID's way of doing business?

Given the high-level negotiation of Mission strategies with Washington stakeholders, it was unclear to some participants how the local priorities could remain visible throughout the process. The alter egos were an attempt to keep those voices front and center. In the end, however, it was hard to say exactly how the alter egos made a difference to the CDCS as their impact on the process was indirect.

Overall it was somewhat difficult to get the "experts" to break out of their usual experience and technical lens and momentarily step into the shoes of the "end user". It can be challenging to convince technical staff that there may be equal or more value to following locally identified priorities rather than tackling the technical gaps that they know how to address.

Key Terms

Local actors: people, communities, networks, organizations, private entities, governments (*Final Round 4 Local Works Guidance*)
Locally led development: [When] local actors…are increasingly setting their own development agendas, coming up with solutions, and bringing the capacity, leadership, and resources to make those solutions a reality (*Final Round 4 Local Works Guidance*)

Key Tools

"Alter Egos": This tool was used during the workshop to help participants reflect on local perspectives.

Discussion

Figure 1 presents a framework for locally led development in the Program Cycle. USAID/Philippines was cognizant that internal local Mission staff do not typically have an opportunity to engage on the strategy. The Mission held an all-staff workshop to ensure everyone could participate in the design of the Results Framework.

To engage "end users" or potential beneficiaries of USAID programming, the Mission conducted a nationwide "Listening Tour" through its Local Works program prior to launching the new CDCS. The feedback on specific interventions was incorporated into programs.

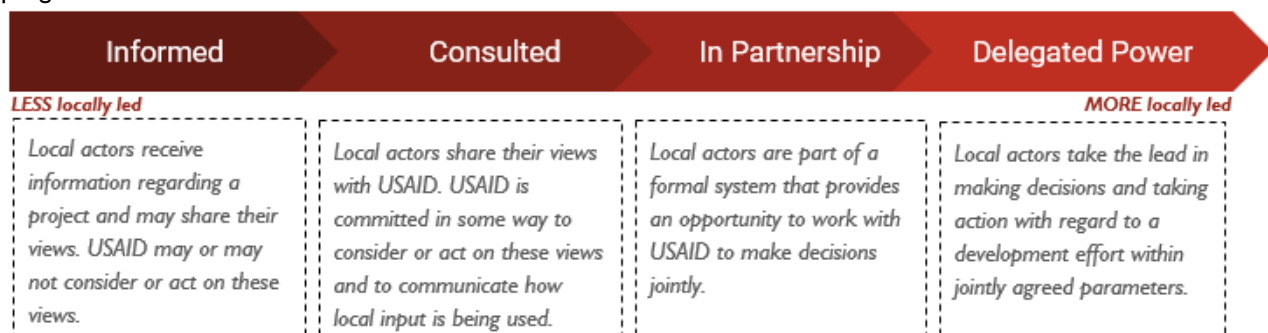| Informed	Consulted	In Partnership	Delegated Power
LESS locally led			MORE locally led
Local actors receive information regarding a project and may share their views. USAID may or may not consider or act on these views.	Local actors share their views with USAID. USAID is committed in some way to consider or act on these views and to communicate how local input is being used.	Local actors are part of a formal system that provides an opportunity to work with USAID to make decisions jointly.	Local actors take the lead in making decisions and taking action with regard to a development effort within jointly agreed parameters.

Figure 1: Framework for Locally Led Development in the Program Cycle (adapted from LEAF rubric for assessing local actor's involvement in setting priorities and implementation, https://www.powerofownership.org/resources/).