![COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT CASE COMPETITION]

Collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) have long been a part of USAID's work. USAID staff and implementing partners have always sought ways to better understand the development process and USAID's contribution to it, to collaborate in order to speed and deepen results, to share the successes and lessons of USAID's initiatives, and to institute improvements to programs and operations. Through this case competition, USAID and its LEARN mechanism seek to capture and share the stories of those efforts. To learn more about the CLA Case Competition, visit the USAID Learning Lab at usaidlearninglab.org/cla-case-competition.

Reaching the Most Vulnerable: Working in Partnership with Haiti's Government

Emily Janoch, CARE

What is the general context in which the story takes place?

In October 2013, CARE, the World Food Program, Action Contre la Faim, World Vision, and the Haitian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MAST) launched the Kore Lavi program, with generous support from USAID. The program's goal is to support a government-led social safety net to improve access to food and nutrition for the most vulnerable households in Haiti.

Most Haitians are jaded when it comes to international aid in their country. To them, the typical scenario goes like this: an issue is identified, a foreign NGO comes, it works on the problem in a completely isolated way for two to five years, funding ends, and everyone moves on and leaves very little to show for the time and money spent.

In addition to the challenges of sustainability, according to the World Bank, half of all aid in Haiti misses the most vulnerable because it goes to people who do not need it. As Kore Lavi was conceived, issues such as this one were kept in mind. The key question driving our theory of change was, *How do you reinforce social protection in a country like Haiti while ensuring that all the advancement is not lost after the four years of implementation?* One answer is to work in very close partnership with the government to ensure that vulnerability targeting is consistent, transparent, objective, and something the government can own and maintain in the future.

What was the main challenge/opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity?

In general, NGOs operate outside the space of the Haitian government. They make no effort to include government bodies in important decisions or build the government's ability to plan or implement projects autonomously without outside assistance. With their different human and financial resources, NGO projects often involve complicated and highly detailed processes that would never be possible for the Haitian government to implement on its own, or in a consistent way across the entire country. So, after three to five years of implementation, project results fade away when NGOs leave and there is no one left to take up day-to-day operations. However, by working closely with the government to build a transparent targeting system that reaches the most vulnerable, one that everyone can agree on and that is built into existing government systems and processes, Kore Lavi has been able to create a system that is anchored in permanent structures and can continue beyond the project end date.

An important part of this approach is to treat the government as an equal partner in designing and building systems, such as choosing the vulnerability criteria and how to handle decisions when conditions on the ground change. While this takes time and effort — adding additional partners always increases the transaction costs of coming to decisions — it ultimately leads to much better results. The challenge for Kore Lavi has been to build its relationships and effectiveness in collaboration with the government, to get to a place where government stakeholders are true partners and feel a sense of ownership for the project. This involves creating time and space for equal collaboration, considering the realities of government systems, budgets, and staff issues, and continuously balancing the different challenges and perspectives of all of the different partners — including the government, donors, implementing partners, and communities.

Describe the CLA approach or activity employed.

Kore Lavi directly supports the government in the field of social protection. Working with MAST, the program aims to strengthen social protection through direct coordination in building a safety net that fights chronic food insecurity and promotes the purchase and consumption of local agricultural products.

While the program's most visible aspects are monthly electronic and food voucher distributions to 17,700 vulnerable families and malnutrition prevention interventions reaching more than 170,000 pregnant and lactating women and children under 2, Kore Lavi's real strength is the part that nobody sees. The program team has been working in partnership with MAST to develop innovative techniques and bring together key organizations involved in social protection to harmonize activities and methodologies. A database, based on an algorithm adapted to the Haitian realities, is being used to create an equitable targeting mechanism to identify vulnerable populations. Imagine a resource that lets the government know exactly who the most vulnerable families are and where they are located. During emergencies this knowledge can save countless lives.

The institutionalization of Kore Lavi aims to strengthen government capacity at various levels as well as that of Haitian civil society. This will ensure local management and coordination for the implementation of social safety nets and the capacity to address vulnerability and gender inequality. Key government institutions, partners, and women's groups use their ability to make decision to strengthen food security, planning, and management of social safety net programs or risk and disaster management. The part of Kore Lavi that focuses on learning and collaboration with the government has thee major parts:

- *Strengthening government capacity to implement social safety nets*:
    - Government ownership of the program
    - Formalizing partnerships with government stakeholders
    - Engaging actors at different levels in program design and implementation from the start
    - Gradual transfer and reinforcement of skills to use the systems and tools in Kore Lavi
    - Being able to account for local needs and realities in implementation

- *Build capacities at different levels:*
    - Training of middle management
    - Facilitating all program components through continual involvement and commitment of local leaders and community structures to facilitate the vulnerability-targeting process, update the database for evidence-based decision-making, select of vendors, and follow up with beneficiaries
    - While training community structures on social safety net and nutrition behavior change implementation, ensuring active participation of women and men at all levels
    - Conducting social audits and implementing complaints response mechanisms at the local level

- *Building gender equality:*
    - Built-in active participation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in decisions related to development and implementation of Kore Lavi's targeting methodology
    - Standing with the Ministry of Women's Affairs as it recommends better gender integration in the implementation of social safety net programs
    - Creating spaces at department and municipal levels for the Ministry of Women's Affairs to be involved in designing and implementing program activities

Since Kore Lavi has committed to working hand in hand with the Haitian government, MAST offices have been the official workplace from the beginning, and all targeting data is centralized in a state-of-the-art server installed by the program, with key personnel being trained on its use. The program also has monthly meetings with national government officials to identify and resolve any issues that have arisen and take key decisions for future program directions.

Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources or enabling factors)?

It is critical for project staff to work closely with the members of the local government and develop tools and processes that these officials are able to use, with incentives to use them on an ongoing basis. This includes ensuring that staff members have ample time to work with the government, and that the government has resources to support this time. Government staff are busy and overburdened, so it is not feasible to expect them to prioritize something they might perceive as "outside project activities" without demonstrating how useful these activities may be and how it supports their time investment.

Leadership from USAID in setting the goal of transition to local ownership, and strong support from MAST officials, and Kore Lavi project leadership have been necessary to allow for the kind of collaboration and free exchange of ideas that are critical to the success of Kore Lavi. Getting the different program stakeholders working together around the same goal requires flexibility and commitment from everyone involved.

Frequent contact between national-level staff from all of the different actors helps set the tone for joint action and ownership. One current source of tension is making sure decisions at the national level filter down to regional and local actors. This means not only that project and government staff have to interact at the local level, but that national staff have to reinforce direction to the regional and local actors. In the diagram below, this requires strengthening the red arrows.
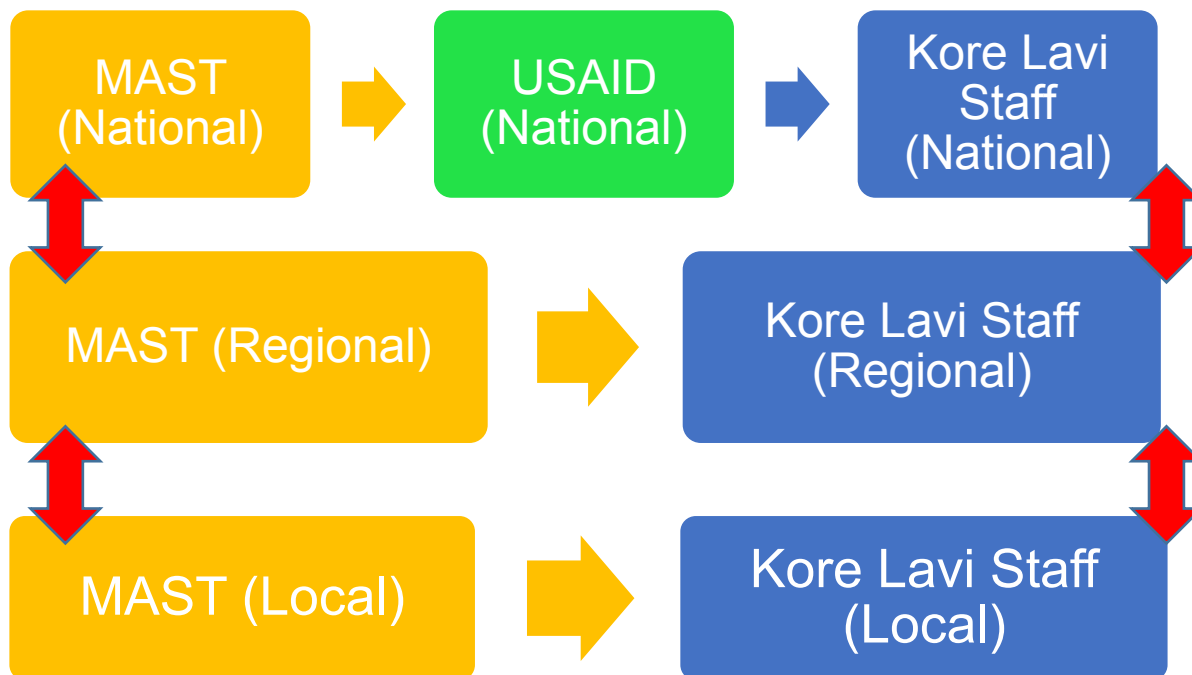
What have been the outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?

Kore Lavi also works with the Haitian National Coordination of Food Security institution. This institution is independently in charge of the vulnerability surveys (under the supervision of Kore Lavi) using the Haiti Deprivation and Vulnerability Index, developed with program support, and is being institutionalized by the government. The data are then analyzed and entered in the system. As of July 2015, approximately 102,227 vulnerable households had been entered in the MAST database.

Working together, Kore Lavi, MAST, and USAID have been able to provide food vouchers to more than 300,135 people for food security assistance.

This process has not been without challenges. The constant shifts in government have slowed full integration of the program within the ministry, but as Odney Pierre Ricot, the ministry's director of programming and research points out, "The Ministry of Social Affairs' personnel is committed to the institutionalization of the Kore Lavi program and will continue to work closely with consortium to insure that MAST is ready and able to keep moving forward after 2017."