

This Case Story was submitted to the 2016 CLA Case Competition. The competition was open to individuals and organizations affiliated with USAID and gave participants an opportunity to promote their work and contribute to good practice that advances our understanding of collaborating, learning, and adapting in action.

Collaborative Learning and Adapting for Better Social Dialogue on Gender in Jordan

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

In analyzing gender equality and female empowerment in Jordan, the dichotomies are stark: multi-degreed, well-traveled women live side-by-side with women limited to their homes as a result of societal and familial pressures; the Constitution mandates equality for all citizens, while other laws restrict women's employment options; and despite statistics showing more women than men completing basic and tertiary education, fewer than 15 percent of women participate in the workforce, due to factors such as uncondusive workplaces, poor transportation options, and pressure to prioritize home and family.

It is in this context that the USAID Takamol program, a three-year program implemented by IREX, seeks to move the needle toward more equitable gender policies, practices, and attitudes. This crosscutting pilot program is achieving its goal in Jordan through three main components: policy and advocacy, services for women and girls, and social dialogue. It is the latter that this case study examines. Through the program's social dialogue component, it aims to expand social dialogue to build grassroots momentum on gender equality, particularly among youth, in key target stakeholder communities of Amman, Ajloun, Karak, Zarqa, Jerash, Tafileh, Russeifah, and the Jordan Valley. As this story shows, USAID and IREX have adapted their approach to gender dialogue and the structure of the social dialogue component as a result of collaborative learning.



Slam poetry participant Sally Bani Hani performing her poem "Dear Mom." USAID Takamol.

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

The social dialogue component was intended to create and increase conversations on gender issues and priorities in order to expand awareness and ideally change social norms and behaviors. Initially, USAID and IREX planned to facilitate this dialogue through local partners such as Jordanian civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), universities, and youth groups. With an eye toward sustainability and local ownership, USAID Takamol did not want to force the subject of these conversations, but to simply facilitate them. The expectation was that if the conversations were allowed to develop organically, they would spark community mobilization to take ownership of advocacy and awareness efforts around gender priorities. But one-off activities, disconnected from one another and from the USAID Takamol program and combined with limited resources and incentives for local actors, resulted in little impact.

In its first iteration of the social dialogue component, USAID Takamol held community seminars, public meetings, and debates. One example was TakamolChat, which used Skype to bring together youth from different communities and universities across the country to discuss a set topic, facilitated by a local gender expert. TakamolChat offered Jordanian youth an opportunity to identify key gender issues in their communities, but it included no mechanism for supporting participants to address those issues. The program offered no incentives or resources for youth to create their own initiatives. Because the TakamolChats were disconnected, as were most of the other initial social dialogue activities, USAID Takamol's main challenge was in how to sustain engagement. Participants did not have the resources to continue to organize initiatives, and local groups lacked either the capacity or the resources to help.

While youth were an important target group for the program, analysis of quantitative data collected during the first nine months of social dialogue activities revealed that youth represented a small percentage of community members who participated in social dialogue activities, suggesting the need for a new approach. Focus groups with youth participants and adaptation sessions with program staff and strategic partners led USAID Takamol to shift toward health, well-being, and sports initiatives to engage youth in conversations on gender. USAID Takamol conducted market research to examine existing sports and gender programs available in Jordan and determined that sports and wellness could be an appropriate avenue for reaching Jordanian youth on gender issues.

As a result of this learning, USAID Takamol piloted health and sports initiatives that included segments of gender training. But this second iteration was only implemented for four months, because the same problems persisted: the level of engagement remained modest, the nature of the activities did not allow for focused capacity building, events didn't integrate well with other USAID Takamol activities, and follow-on activities were stunted by existing programs' lack of interest in collaborating with USAID Takamol as their focus did not include gender per se.



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Describe the CLA approach or activity, explaining how the activity integrated collaborating, learning, adapting culture, processes, and/or resources as applicable.

Convinced that the social dialogue component could change social norms and spark community-led initiatives, USAID Takamol repeatedly undertook a two-step process of reflection and adaptation. First, it regularly and collaboratively reflected on what was and was not working and why. Staff held meetings with local government and CSOs to discuss what communities needed. From these meetings, it became clear that a key problem in engagement was that the program did not provide resources and incentives to help motivate and actualize community ideas. Further, the initial social dialogue design was composed of disconnected activities, inhibiting sustained engagement. IREX and USAID reflected together on the social dialogue activities and results and discussed the challenges that the program was facing, as did the USAID Takamol staff internally.

During these reflective conversations, USAID Takamol was struck by the success of its online initiative, “Faces of Takamol,” a user-driven discussion platform, hosted on Facebook, that celebrates and reflects the diversity of Jordanians. The page tells true stories of Jordanians that challenge and question stereotypes, offering a space for people to discuss the stories, reflect on the content of each story, and contribute their ideas on the topic. Faces of Takamol is unique, in that the same people could continue to engage with the initiative, something USAID Takamol wanted. But the team learned two other important points of distinction and success: Faces of Takamol was easily adapted to reflect the program’s larger themes and integrate into other activities, and partners of USAID Takamol could also use the platform for greater reach and collaboration. The initiative had a few key criteria that USAID Takamol learned, all of which seemed to respond to the problems the component faced: it allowed for sustained engagement, its stories reflected local issues, it was flexible enough to support other program activities, and there was a possibility for Faces of Takamol to become locally owned.

After this collaborative reflection, USAID Takamol held adaption sessions — meetings with community members, among USAID Takamol staff, and between USAID and IREX — to discuss the best way to adapt the component activities based on the lessons learned from collaborative reflection. These sessions led USAID Takamol to pilot new initiatives that met criteria for sustained engagement, flexibility, being locally grounded, and the possibility of leading to further activity and local ownership:

- Through *Souk Takamol*, local CBOs present proposals for community gender initiatives in a “marketplace,” where community members vote on which initiative should receive funding, thus creating incentive and leading to further activity.
- A mural project has brought together international and Jordanian artists with 187 youth volunteers to design and paint murals that reflect and challenge community gender norms, while also providing a space for future activities.
- *El Ma7ki Ma3 Takamol* is a slam poetry initiative that adds a modern twist to the rich poetry heritage of Jordan and the Arab World.



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El Ma7ki Ma3 Takamol exemplifies USAID Takamol's adapted approach to social dialogue. It is grounded in a local tradition, poetry, but provides a creative avenue through which to discuss gender issues. Selected applicants receive intensive training on gender and slam poetry performance — repeated engagement. Participants present their poems publicly in an open competition, gaining recognition that creates incentive. The public competition promotes a broader dialogue among audience members, extending the activity's reach. And like the other new social dialogue initiatives, as USAID Takamol organizes activities under specific themes, such as economic and political participation, it can redirect *El Ma7ki Ma3 Takamol* under these themes.

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

In adapting its approach to the social dialogue component, USAID Takamol considered what it had learned from previous efforts. An earlier challenge had been outreach, which had resulted in social dialogue activities where participant numbers ranged from 10 to 100. For its adapted approach, the program team led outreach offline as well as on social media. Online outreach succeeded, thanks to the large audience for Faces of Takamol, and because social dialogue activities are now integrated with other program initiatives, USAID Takamol was able to promote and recruit through its other program components and partners, such as at universities. Having more creative initiatives also helped generate interest, because USAID Takamol stood out; a workshop framed as being about poetry is more appealing than another workshop about gender. The location of activities has also been key: USAID Takamol chose easily accessible locations so youth could participate despite transportation challenges.

Another earlier challenge was community buy-in. Communities did not celebrate earlier social dialogue activities because they did not originate in the community and there was no obvious result to celebrate. Now, community members support and celebrate the adapted approach and activities because they come *from* the community and because the incentives result in products *for* the community. The slam poetry results in original poems and performances that the public enjoys. Community members participated in focus groups to help design the murals, and then helped paint them. These large murals are in prominent places in cities, offering thought-provoking pieces of art. *Souk Takamol* gives community members an opportunity to voice their opinions and leads to CBOs getting to implement projects that serve the community.

Final success factors in adapting the social dialogue approach are resources and USAID support. IREX would not have been able to adapt its approach had USAID not been supportive and collaborative in that effort. The adaptation also meant a redirection of resources, for which USAID support was also crucial. To conduct more complex, sustained efforts, IREX needed more staff. For *El Ma7ki Ma3 Takamol* alone the program provided one full-time specialist plus technical support from an external slam poet trainer. For *Souk Takamol*, the program needed more grants support to oversee dozens of small grants. Perhaps equally important in this process was the flexibility of the mechanism: USAID Takamol is funded through a cooperative agreement, which gives USAID room to be supportive and shift resources during implementation.



With your initial challenge/opportunity in mind, what have been the most significant outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?

One of the most significant outcomes of the adapted social dialogue component has been sustained, meaningful engagement with stakeholders, particularly youth. Slam poetry participants continue to perform together and have expressed interest in forming a poetry association. Their [videos](#) have been viewed 6 million times online. That type of result is exactly what USAID Takamol had hoped for: community members coming together through a program activity, but then independently developing their ideas into their own project.

This approach does involve a tradeoff, but it is one that IREX and USAID feel is worthwhile. Previous social dialogue activities more people, but with little impact. For example, 157 youth participated in TakamolChats, but with no follow-on activity or further engagement. While more than 100 people applied for the first two rounds of *El Ma7ki Ma3 Takamol*, only 21 people were selected for participation, but their engagement has been far more involved and meaningful, based on the depth and repetition of this engagement. Whereas youth would only attend a single TakamolChat, participants from the slam poetry continue to meet every two weeks, meet informally among themselves, and have created Facebook pages to promote themselves as poets as a result of their participation in USAID Takamol. Furthermore, more than 700 people have attended performances led by these participants, expanding the reach. Similarly, although only 40 CBOs participated in the first *Souk Takamol*, more than 1,500 community members attended, and funding to the winning CBOs means that their initiatives will have more impact the community.

If your project or activity is in the development phase or just recently underway (less than 1 year into implementation), how do you intend to track results and impact? What outcomes do you anticipate?

Although USAID Takamol is already seeing results from its adapted social dialogue model, only recently has it begun to grow the piloted initiatives. Tracking the results quantitatively has been relatively simple: tracking participant numbers and disaggregating data such as age, sex, and location. This information is collected manually, through sign-in sheets, but USAID Takamol anticipates collecting this information through an audience response system at larger events. The same system will allow USAID Takamol to measure changes in beliefs and attitudes throughout an activity by asking opinion questions and tracking the results. This should allow program staff to get a better sense of any opinion shifts, which USAID Takamol was not previously measuring because engagement was too limited to expect real attitude change. With the sustained engagement from the new initiatives, the program will begin measuring attitudinal shifts.

To measure real impact, the program intends to use targeted qualitative collection methods. USAID Takamol's senior monitoring and evaluation specialist will follow up with slam poetry participants to discuss whether and how the program has affected them, their attitudes, their knowledge, or their skills. The specialist will conduct similar interviews with CBOs from *Souk Takamol* after they have implemented their community initiatives, and interview the beneficiaries of these initiatives to determine how successful these CBOs have been.



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USAID Takamol will continue its two-step process of reflection and adaptation. USAID and IREX will collaboratively reflect on the qualitative and quantitative data in bimonthly meetings, and USAID Takamol staff will meet with stakeholders to ensure the that component is still moving in the right direction. If progress stalls or something seems off, USAID Takamol will hold new adaptation sessions.

What were the most important lessons learned?

The first lesson learned is an important one in development. As much as we may know about a target group, it is difficult to predict needs, interests, and reactions when addressing sensitive issues such as gender; in those instances, testing is crucial. Collaborating, learning, and adapting is an effective framework for such testing.

Related to this first lesson is the need to find creative ways to engage with stakeholder communities. Particularly in a country such as Jordan, where development funding and programming is plentiful, traditional approaches can be white noise. Unique initiatives that build on local or traditional activities stand out and generate more interest.

Lastly, initiatives and activities need to be flexible enough to integrate well into the larger program's objectives and activities in order to mutually reinforce each other. The adapted social dialogue approach seems to be working more effectively because the new initiatives feed into USAID Takamol's other work. As the program enters its third year, it is focused on the themes of women's economic and political participation. The adapted approach allows social dialogue activities to fit under these themes and support activities under the other components: *Souk Takamol* can solicit from CBOs community initiative ideas that focus on women's economic and political participation, *El Ma7ki Ma3 Takamol* poems can integrate these themes, and activities from other components can take place at the mural sites.

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