2018 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Partnerships to Put Communities at the Center of Resilience Programming in South Sudan

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Summary:

South Sudan is facing a dire humanitarian crisis. The December 2017 Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring bulletin noted that "… South Sudanese households are facing the worst food security situation since the Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System began in 2010." Year-to-year comparisons reveal alarming increases in vulnerability and food insecurity, despite the fact that donors spent nearly two billion dollars in 2017 to prevent a famine; the numbers of those vulnerable to famine in 2018 are projected to grow.

At the same time as the South Sudan crisis has worsened, the concept of resilience has taken on increasing importance both within USAID and the international donor community. USAID's recent guidance on resilience states: "Resilience is a compelling concept for development assistance and humanitarian actors because it highlights the positive capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and recover from shocks and stressors to prevent households and communities from suffering long-term adverse consequences. Moreover, applying a resilience lens to program strategy and design has the potential to reduce humanitarian need and protect development gains for populations experiencing recurrent crises, as well as foster sustainable escapes from poverty."

In response USAID/South Sudan has been laying the foundation for the creation of Partnerships for Resilience and Recovery. The Mission's Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project (MESP), managed by MSI, is supporting the initiative in terms of facilitating the partnerships and creating a CLA platform to provide evidence for joint learning and decision-making among donors and partners regarding what works, what doesn't, and rapid interventions when necessary. Anticipated results include reduced vulnerability as measured by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), and increased resilience as measured by the Resilience Analysis Unit (RAU).

1. Which subcomponents of the Collaborating, Learning and Adapting Framework are reflected *most* in your case (select up to 5 subcomponents)?

- [x] Internal Collaboration
- [x] External Collaboration
- [x] Technical Evidence Base
- [ ] Theories of Change
- [ ] Scenario Planning
- [ ] M&E for Learning
- [ ] Pause & Reflect
- [x] Adaptive Management
- [ ] Openness
- [x] Relationships & Networks
- [ ] Continuous Learning & Improvement
- [ ] Knowledge Management
- [ ] Institutional Memory
- [ ] Decision-Making
- [ ] Mission Resources
- [ ] CLA in Implementing Mechanisms

2. What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?

Famine and violence have worsened the South Sudan humanitarian crisis. The December 2017 Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring bulletin reported that "… South Sudanese households are facing the worst food security situation since the Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System began in 2010." Year-to-year (as well as season-by-season) comparisons reveal consistent and significant increases in vulnerability and food insecurity, despite the fact that nearly two billion dollars were spent in 2017 to prevent famine; tragically, the numbers of people at risk of famine in 2018 are projected to grow.

In response, USAID South Sudan is leading a resilience initiative among donors and partners to save more lives more efficiently through collaboration. In the South Sudan context resilience has taken on increasing importance, both within USAID and throughout the international donor community. USAID's recent guidance on resilience states: "Resilience is a compelling concept for development assistance and humanitarian actors because it highlights the positive capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and recover from shocks and stressors to prevent households and communities from suffering long-term adverse consequences. Moreover, applying a resilience lens to program strategy and design has the potential to reduce humanitarian need and protect development gains for populations experiencing recurrent crises, as well as foster sustainable escapes from poverty."

The potential for resilience and donor collaboration in the context of civil war to multiply results led donors in South Sudan to formulate a strategy to focus on strategic hubs of stability. The idea behind identifying geographic targets was that even with a broken policy framework and conflict, it is still possible to work with communities to improve their conditions and save lives in a manner that empowers citizens and lays foundations for peace and recovery. It is further believed that the selected areas can produce more food for less money than feeding people through food aid.

3. Why did you decide to use a CLA approach? Why was CLA considered helpful for addressing your organizational or development challenge(s)?

For the reasons above USAID South Sudan has been laying the foundation for the creation of the Partnerships for Resilience and Recovery. The Mission's Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project (MESP) through MSI was adapted to support the creation of the the partnerships among international donors and local stakeholders and across USAID South Sudan sectors and implementing partners with communities as the center of gravity and initiatives. Moreover, MESP is tasked with creating a CLA platform to provide evidence for collaborative learning to inform multi-party decision-making and action based on what works and what doesn't, and identify immediate opportunities for donors to intervene to be more effective.

USAID quickly recognized that the worsening humanitarian crisis requires that donors work differently by strategically integrating their resources to meet community-identified needs and priorities and ensure closer links between humanitarian aid and long-term resilience. The fact that so many lives are at stake has prompted candor and a receptive openness among donors and stakeholders to this new approach.

Centered on collaboration, learning and adapting, these geographic-based partnerships in 5 to 8 locations in South Sudan represent a dynamic agreement among donors, implementing partners (IPs) and community institutions to integrate interventions more strategically through local, state, and non-state institutions to better serve the needs of the target communities. MESP has been adapted to serve planning, collaboration, and data collection needs of these partnerships by establishing a CLA platform to collect and analyze data, share information, present evidence, inform the partners, shorten the learning cycle, and empower real-time adaptive management.

4. Tell us the story of how you used a collaborating, learning and/or adapting approach to address the organizational or development challenge described in Question 2.

The first stage focused on developing a collaborative vision of the partnerships and what they could achieve through engaging donors, partners, and community leaders. Early on, the UN established a Resilience and Recovery Framework followed by a donor meeting to identify key lessons learned, which produced a 5 point action plan to move forward. By consensus Yambio emerged as the first pilot geographic region and a guiding framework was developed to set the stage to define contributions by and roles of interested stakeholders. The donors then issued a joint communique representing the commitment of the international humanitarian and development community to participate in the partnerships, and invite and encourage others to join. The next stage, currently underway, is focused on operationalizing and expanding this approach for other pilot geographic locations and participants.

Throughout the initiative USAID South Sudan has played a critical role in fostering, facilitating, and expanding collaboration by partnering with the UN to broker commitments and use emerging evidence around resilience programming to build a better way of working together based on the experience of all. USAID/South Sudan's approach is adaptive and flexible. At times the Mission has played a dynamic leadership role to encourage others; at times USAID South Sudan has stepped back and quietly participated as other partners generate ideas and engage in designing the partnerships. This has been done through a series of collaborative and iterative meetings that require patience and persistence to achieve agreement around objectives, geographic priorities, key decisions, roles, time-frames, and next steps.

USAID South Sudan was also challenged to work across sectors internally. To build an internal approach through staff participation, MSI facilitated a workshop that engaged Mission staff in identifying practical ways to operationalize the partnerships. MSI probed what that means in an environment where the policy framework is either weak or non-existent. USAID staff agreed that to plan and deliver essential services through community institutions implies engaging them actively in the partnerships.

MSI also worked with USAID to convene a learning event in which twelve highly respected South Sudanese leaders helped USAID work through the definition of "community" in South Sudan by providing deep insight into local structures and experiences. That internal workshop achieved better understanding of the purpose of the partnerships and set the agenda for more collaborative learning meetings with other donors and UN agencies. These meetings are ongoing now. They will address a number of important concepts and questions as the partnerships take form and share the proceedings and outcomes with participants.

These experiences led USAID South Sudan began to begin to think differently about what it needed from a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning project. USAID redefined MESP's role to focus on facilitating collaboration, providing targeted research and analysis to inform critical decision-making, and establishing a CLA platform to support learning across the partnerships, and keeping participants informed.

In response, MSI has has shifted the focus of MESP to support the partnership. As a part of this new role, MSI field tested an approach for community consultations on resilience. MSI's team conducted consultations with traditional leaders, civil administration, women, youth, elders, private sector and faith based leaders. Each was asked to define resilience in their local language, the shocks they have experienced since independence, and what they relied upon as individuals, households, and communities to survive and begin to recover. Their answers revealed what resilience means in South Sudan and how to strengthen it through partnership. This information is being packaged to feed the conversations on partnership at numerous levels throughout the country.

USAID South Sudan began this initiative with a contextual focus on "community," while also sustaining an enriching dialogue with the other donors. MSI developed the “Faces of Resilience” series of small publications to promote and humanize the story of resilience in South Sudan through the experience of South Sudanese. These stories provide an entry point into each community, mapping and explaining its institutions, telling its story of shock and response,

5. Organizational Effectiveness: How has collaborating, learning and adapting affected your team and/or organization? If it's too early to tell, what effects do you expect to see in the future?

USAID South Sudan, while still in the early stages of supporting the Partnerships, is exploring internal structural changes in order to support this new approach and facilitate better ways to work across sectors, technical offices, and implementing partners. For example, USAID South Sudan plans to to designate a representative for each geographic area to be responsible for viewing programs through an integrated "community lens" rather than a more traditional sector-driven approach.

The Mission's new approach also challenged MESP to shift its center of focus from USAID South Sudan as its client to serving the partnerships more broadly. This meant continuing to uphold USAID South Sudan compliance and satisfaction, but expanding the concept of “the client.” To support the partnership, MESP transformed our project-based Third-Party Monitoring structure into an approach based on "one team," in which field monitors, enumerators, M&E specialists, the CLA advisor, the communications specialist, administrators, accountants, logisticians, security, IT and other MESP staff operate across offices and projects to deliver multiple related products out of one work flow. This revision and integration within MSI is generating a more agile, responsive and flexible organization in support of the partnerships. This is another major achievement we believe is credited to adaptive management.

6. Development Results: How has using a CLA approach contributed to your development outcomes? What evidence can you provide? If it's too early to tell, what effects do you expect to see in the future?

Two overarching benchmarks for success include reduced vulnerability, as measured by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), and increased resilience, as measured by the Resilience Analysis Unit (RAU). Evidence indicates that more lives can be saved through a resilience approach than a purely humanitarian approach. A recent USAID study found that "every US$1 spent on safety net/resilience programming results in net benefits of between US$2.3 and US$3.3 depending on the context" (The Economics of Resilience to Drought in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia, p.6).

The South Sudan partnerships will seek to prove that coherent investments across sectors based on co-location, coordination and collaboration, with explicitly documented commitments and accountability, and aligned results, can double food production at significantly lower cost than humanitarian aid alone. We expect to demonstrate that lives can be saved and famine averted or at least significantly ameliorated through this new and dynamic approach.

The partnerships have also encouraged the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Program (WFP), the United National International Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to incorporate governance as a key component for assessing resilience. Their approaches have now been expanded to incorporate local governance as a key dimension.

7. What factors affected the success or shortcomings of your collaborating, learning and adapting approach? What were the main enablers or obstacles?

Several factors have enabled achievements to date. First and foremost, the urgent humanitarian crisis in South Sudan is driving key stakeholders to be open to new ideas to be more effective. Second, USAID South Sudan was an important catalyst in support donors and participants for a new approach. Third, an important cadre of experienced supporters evolved who are willing to champion this new approach and "win others over" as the effort gains momentum. Fourth, USAID South Sudan and MESP have been able to facilitate strong relationships around the partnerships. This requires a patient and thoughtful adaptive and iterative approach that identifies and builds on areas of consensus and incrementally builds agreements. It is also highly dependent on the ability of key managers to build trust and credibility and maintain them over time. Finally, USAID South Sudan redefined the role of the MESP project to support and serve the interests of USAID South Sudan and other donor participants in the partnerships. This was a significant change based on a decision quickly considered and taken by the Mission.

Two obstacles are worth highlighting. The first is the serious complexity of this approach in the midst of increasing famine and violence. It requires priority attention, quick decision-making, and commitment by communities as well as coordination across a wide range of stakeholders. Moreover, each organization has its own systems, processes and culture. Considerable time and resources are required to build understanding and negotiate details. MESP sees its role at the center of this complexity, providing information, planning and facilitation to make the partnerships operational. MSI perceives much of this role as practical development management in partnership with USAID South Sudan The second obstacle is the urgency to move beyond information sharing. MSI elaborated a model that identifies different degrees of collaboration, moving from simple information sharing to joint planning (where partners coordinate on planning, but implementation remains independent; to resource sharing (where partners share access or co-fund, key inputs, services or infrastructure); and finally, at the highest level, integrated action (which requires protocols for collective or fully aligned actions, unified metrics, common reporting, and mutual accountability) to clearly identify objectives and achieve real collaboration.

8. Based on your experience and lessons learned, what advice would you share with colleagues about using a collaborating, learning and adapting approach?

Substantive CLA takes time, and it is important to use time wisely to prepare for collaboration in order to achieve it. The partnerships will need structured time to pause and reflect upon a broad range of issues, decisions, and opportunities. It will also be important to achieve consistency in the learning agenda and its analysis in order to turn threads of experience into knowledge with confidence over time from various perspectives in numerous locations. It is a challenge to be inclusive and dynamic anywhere, but this is a particular challenge in South Sudan due to violence and extremely difficult logistics. Regular sharing of information among donors at the national level and among partners in the communities will be essential. Structured communications well written and distributed in a timely manner are part of the answer; strong data analysis to inform policy and decision-making is another.

For those directly charged with CLA, it is necessary to remain in contact and interactive with colleagues and demonstrate interest in their work and a commitment to contribute to it. Substantive interest and friendly but robust debate with colleagues, practicing courtesy, but also debating robustly builds confidence and trust. Even in South Sudan's harsh environment, it is wise to invest in field visits, exchanges in which colleagues learn from other colleagues facing the same problems, and bring partners together regionally and nationally to share information, learn from each other, and inform senior officers and managers. Such an approach gives reality to collaboration, shows appreciation for partners, and contributes to the morale of staff and beneficiaries.

Finally, too much data poorly collected and hastily analyzed leads to paralysis of decision-making, or poor decisions. It will be important for the partners to collaborate on the most vital data and indicators that will benefit the partnership initiative -- not everything of interest -- and structure the monitoring and evaluation system accordingly.