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Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting Framework & Key Concepts

Implementing Partner Version 1.0

Although collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) are not new to USAID and its implementing partners, they often do not happen regularly or systematically and are not intentionally resourced. The CLA Framework above identifies components and subcomponents to help you think more deliberately about what approach to CLA might be best tailored to your organizational or project context. The framework recognizes the diversity of what CLA can look like in various organizations and projects while also giving CLA structure, clarity, and coherence across two key dimensions:

CLA in the Program Cycle: how CLA is incorporated into planning and design processes throughout the Program Cycle in order to improve their effectiveness; and

Enabling Conditions: how an organization's culture, daily operating processes, and resource allocation support CLA integration.

Organizations need both integrated CLA practices appropriate for their context and conducive enabling conditions to become stronger learning organizations capable of managing adaptively. The framework stresses the holistic and integrated nature of the various components of CLA to reinforce the principle that CLA is not a separate workstream—it should be integrated into existing processes to strengthen the discipline of development and improve aid effectiveness.

CLA in the Program Cycle

Enabling Conditions

Collaborating

Internal Collaboration

1. Identify and prioritize other colleagues/teams for strategic collaboration.
2. Decide how to engage those colleagues/teams.
3. Collaborate with those colleagues/teams based on decisions reached.

External Collaboration

1. Identify and prioritize key stakeholders for strategic collaboration.
2. Decide how to engage key stakeholders.
3. Collaborate with key stakeholders based on decisions reached.

Learning

Technical Evidence Base

1. Track the technical evidence base.
2. Apply the technical evidence base in planning and implementation.
3. Contribute to/expand the technical evidence base.

Theories of Change

1. Quality of theories of change.
2. Testing and exploration of theories of change.
3. Awareness among stakeholders about theories of change and the learning that results from testing them.

Contextual Awareness

1. Identify risks and opportunities in the local context.
2. Monitor shifts in the local context.
3. Respond to and apply learning from monitoring.

M&E for Learning

1. Ensure relevance of monitoring data to decision-making.
2. Design and conduct research and internal evaluation activities to inform ongoing and future programming.
3. Align monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts across the organization.

Adapting

Pause & Reflect

1. Variety and purpose of pause & reflect opportunities.
2. Timeliness of pause & reflect opportunities to inform decision-making.
3. Quality of pause & reflect opportunities.

Adaptive Management

1. Analyze learning from implementation and/or pause & reflect opportunities.
2. Inform decision-making.
3. Follow through on decisions reached to manage adaptively.

Culture

Openness

1. Sense of comfort in sharing opinions and ideas.
2. Openness to hearing alternative perspectives.
3. Willingness to take action on new ideas.

Relationships & Networks

1. Development of trusting relationships.
2. Exchange of up-to-date information.
3. Use of networks across the system to expand situational awareness.

Continuous Learning & Improvement

1. Prioritization of learning and reflection.
2. Motivation for learning.
3. Use of iterative approaches that enables continuous improvement.

Processes

Knowledge Management

1. Source various types of knowledge from stakeholders.
2. Distill knowledge.
3. Share knowledge with stakeholders.

Institutional Memory

1. Access to explicit knowledge.
2. Tacit knowledge capture.
3. Management of onboarding and staff transitions.

Decision-Making

1. Awareness of decision-making processes.
2. Autonomy to make decisions.
3. Appropriate stakeholder involvement in decision-making.

Resources

People

1. Roles and responsibilities vis-a-vis CLA.
2. Capacity development in CLA.
3. CLA skills in hiring and performance reviews.

Other Resources

1. Time and budget for CLA activities.
2. Resource flexibility.
3. MEL and KM systems.

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