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Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)

AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT CLA LOOKS LIKE IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING





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Through the annual [Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting \(CLA\) Case Competition](#), USAID/PPL and LEARN invite USAID staff and implementing partners from around the world to submit examples of Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approaches that have added value to development programming. USAID/PPL and LEARN recognized that this collection of cases provided an opportunity to examine and synthesize learning about CLA that would be relevant to wider USAID, implementing partner, and donor audiences, so they conducted an analysis of the case submissions. In 2018, USAID/PPL and LEARN took a fresh look at a large sample of cases to reassess key findings from the previous analysis and explore enablers and barriers to CLA that contribute to organizational and/or development outcomes. This brief synthesizes findings from the full report and answers the following research questions:

- What patterns of contribution emerge from an analysis of results chains across strong CLA cases?
- Under what conditions does CLA contribute to improved organizational effectiveness and/or better development outcomes?

How did CLA practices and approaches contribute to organizational change or development outcomes?

A qualitative analysis of a sample of the highest rated 83 cases from the 2015, 2016, and 2017 CLA Case Competitions revealed six overarching patterns that demonstrate how CLA practices and approaches can contribute to specific development and/or organizational outcomes, as well as four areas of emerging findings. These findings are consistent with those from the [2015 Case Competition Analysis](#) and [evidence gathered through EB4CLA efforts](#).



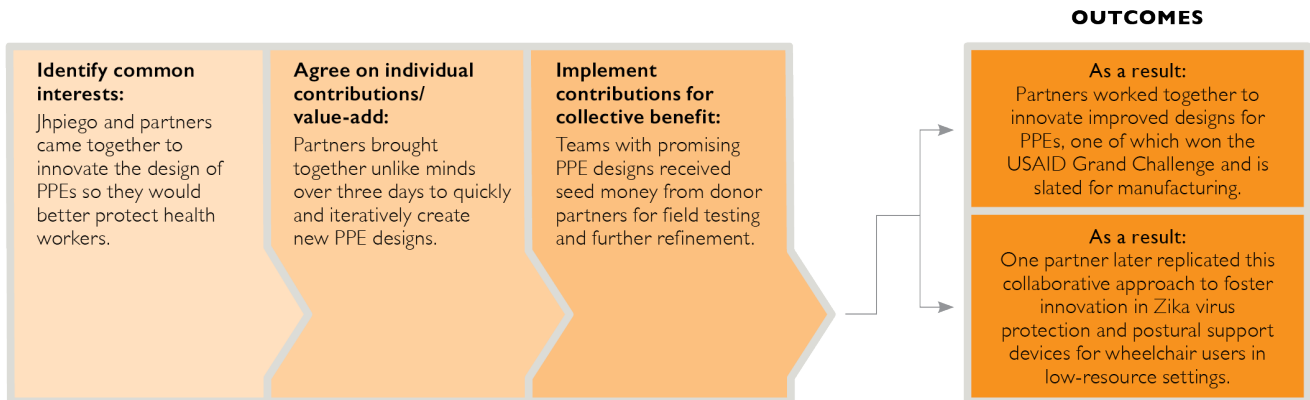
FINDING I: Collaboration leverages resources for collective benefit.

The Finding I cases illustrate how collaboration helps development actors to identify their respective comparative advantages in working towards a common goal. Stakeholders divvy up responsibilities according to their respective strengths: each stakeholder may provide funding, human resources, materials, and/or other contributions. This collaboration contributes to mutually beneficial organizational and/or development outcomes that may not have occurred otherwise.

Finding I in Action: Emergency Ebola Design Challenge: Crowdsourcing for Innovation

By the end of 2014, more than 14,000 cases of Ebola were recorded in West Africa, of which more than 5,000 were fatal. In 2014, USAID and partners launched The Ebola Grand Challenge to encourage crowdsourcing, competition, and partnerships to innovatively address barriers faced by health care workers in combating the Ebola epidemic and better prepare for future outbreaks. An implementing partner, Jhpiego, realized that one of the major challenges in protecting health workers caring for those with Ebola was the outdated design of personal protective equipment (PPE), and recognized these flaws as an opportunity for innovation. Jhpiego harnessed existing relationships and brought together unlike minds to create viable prototypes of PPEs, one of which won the USAID Grand Challenge and is slated for manufacturing.

FINDING I: Collaboration leverages resources for collective benefit.



Another case that supports Finding I demonstrates how strategic collaboration among implementing partners helped identify synergies and successes to scale up successful practice in the Sahel. As a result of the initial collaboration, implementing partners have begun to put their own resources towards knowledge exchange and conjunctive activities as they realized that sharing information, learning from one another, and collaborating not only made their work more cost-effective, but also obtained better results.



FINDING 2: Local engagement leads to local ownership and, ultimately, improved development outcomes.

The cases that shaped Finding 2 demonstrate that collaboration with beneficiaries improves development outcomes. When organizations invite local stakeholders to actively participate in development processes, local stakeholders become agents of their own change process and are motivated to achieve the desired development outcomes.

Finding 2 in Action: Stop, Reflect, Improve: Using CLA to Engage Men to Improve Women and Children’s Health

In certain communities of western Zimbabwe, men exert significant influence over mothers’ ability to feed children and the related choices mothers make as caregivers. The Amalima program (implemented by the Manoff Group) explored reasons why men were not active supporters of exclusive breastfeeding through research and consultations with men and women about breastfeeding practices. Recognizing the need to directly engage men in their efforts, the team designed the Male Involvement Campaign with activities tailored to appeal to men and led by male champions. As a result, men in the campaign area began practicing supportive behaviors for infant and young children’s nutrition, including cooking.



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FINDING 2: Local engagement leads to local ownership and, ultimately, improved development outcomes.



Another case that supports Finding 2 demonstrates how enhancing dialogue between Ugandan communities and their leaders led to improvements in social service delivery.



FINDING 3: Intentional knowledge management generates standard good practices for broader application.

The Finding 3 cases demonstrate how knowledge generation, capture, and sharing can contribute to improvements at the organizational level when this knowledge is applied. The application of new knowledge contributes to improved programming and eventually better development results.

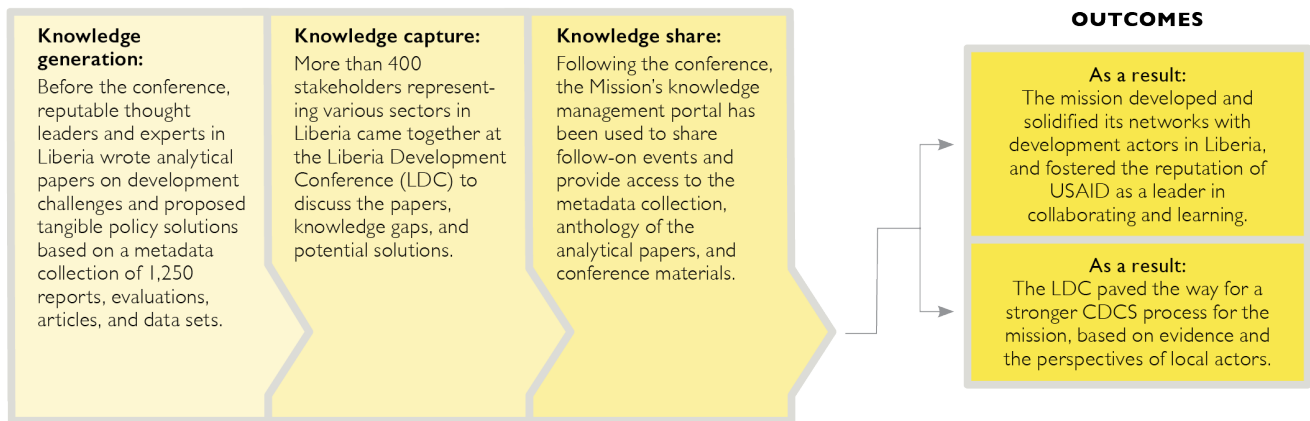
Finding 3 in Action: Development Conference Builds Technical Evidence Base in Liberia

Information about the efficacy of development programming at the country level in Liberia is difficult to come by. USAID/Liberia and Social Impact organized the first Liberia Development Conference (LDC) with the theme “Engendering collective action for advancing Liberia’s development.” More than 400 stakeholders came together at the conference to collaborate, present evidence on Liberia’s development challenges and potential solutions, share knowledge, and help integrate this information into the redesign of the mission’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). Following the LDC, the mission developed and solidified its networks with development actors in Liberia and incorporated the perspectives of local actors in the CDCS.



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FINDING 3: Intentional knowledge management generates standard good practices for broader application.



Another case that supports Finding 3 demonstrates how using real-time reporting, adaptive management, and a lessons learned tracker enabled a project to operate continually despite conflict-related challenges in South Sudan.



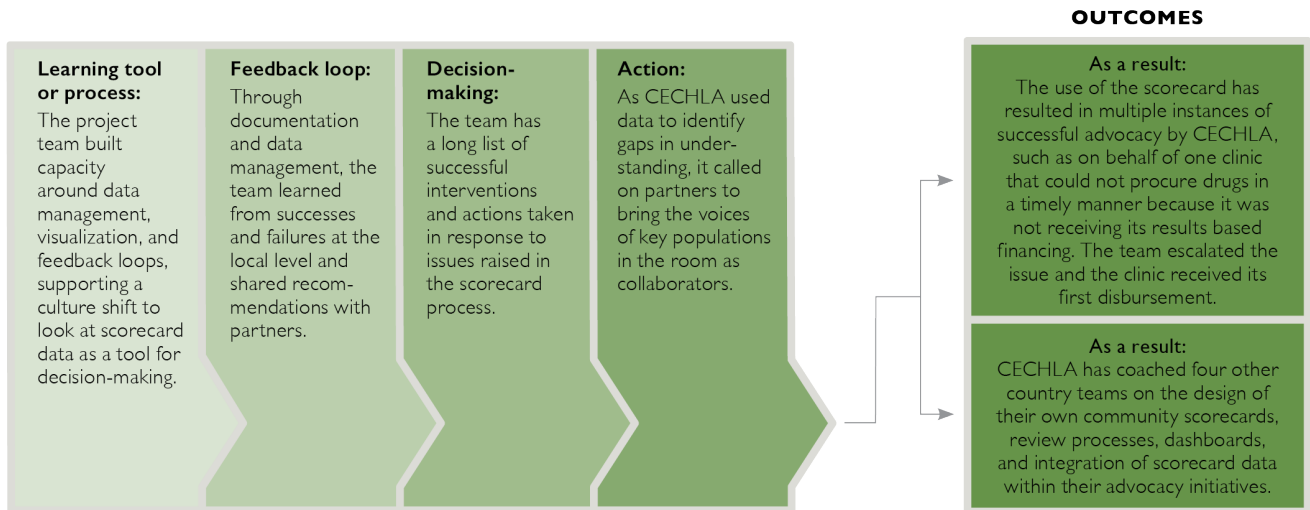
FINDING 4: Feedback loops increase the likelihood that evidence will inform decision-making.

Finding 4 mirrors the articulation of adaptive management in the CLA framework: teams and organizations analyze learning, make decisions based on learning, and follow through on decisions reached. The cases that comprise this finding showcase this process and describe specific tools and processes for creating feedback loops that enable continuous learning to inform decision-making. Interestingly, the most commonly found results chain in the cases involved the use of feedback loops (23 of 63 cases, 36.5%).

Finding 4 in Action: Data, Dashboards, and Dialogue for Policy Advocacy Wins in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, district health executive (DHE) teams gathered community scorecard data to understand major health challenges facing local communities and take action to reduce barriers to care, but the data was largely used for reporting rather than decision-making. The Coalition for Effective Community Health & HIV Response, Leadership, and Accountability (CECHLA) built capacity around data management, established feedback loops, and supported a culture shift among partners, encouraging them to use their monitoring data to elevate advocacy issues above the clinic level to the district level. CECHLA used the scorecard data to achieve several of its advocacy goals and coached four other country teams on the design of their own community scorecards.

FINDING 4: Feedback loops increase the likelihood that evidence will inform decision-making.



Another case that supports Finding 4 demonstrates how regular feedback loops enabled a program team to respond dynamically as markets developed, so Ugandan farmers were able to receive vouchers for tillage and gradually make payments to the bank for the services.



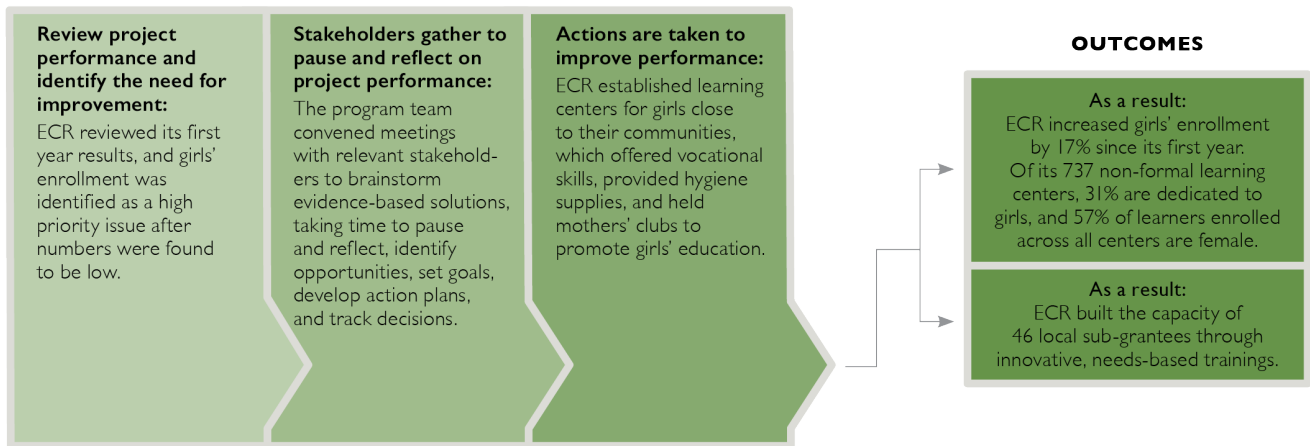
FINDING 5: Taking the time to pause and reflect leads to improved organizational and development outcomes.

The cases that shaped Finding 5 describe how taking time to pause and reflect helps development actors better understand challenges and opportunities in their work and adapt to improve. In the majority of cases, partners had the opportunity to review project success (e.g., through a mid-term evaluation or assessment process) and identified the need to improve. Then, partners convened a group of internal and external stakeholders to pause and reflect together, to understand why they were not making the progress they intended and identify needed changes. Partners made adaptations accordingly, which resulted in improved organizational and/or development outcomes.

Finding 5 in Action: Nigeria Education Crisis Response: Using Feedback Loops to Drive Project Success

In the volatile operating environment of northern Nigeria, there was a lack of coordination between many IPs and development actors. The Education Crisis Response (ECR) team focused on expanding access to relevant and high-quality, non-formal education opportunities for internally displaced and out-of-school children and youth. An array of feedback loops and reflection moments built on the collective input of stakeholders and beneficiaries were developed to process data, review progress, and allow for decision-making and adaptation. Through these reflection opportunities, ECR decided to build the capacity of 46 local sub-grantees through innovative, needs-based trainings. As a result of the trainings, they observed an increase in girls' enrollment by 17% since its first year.

FINDING 5: Taking the time to pause and reflect leads to improved organizational and development outcomes.



Another case that supports Finding 5 demonstrates how pause and reflect moments can create space for insights and empathy, improving work with communities on sensitive issues such as gender norms around women farmers and their workloads.



FINDING 6:
 CLA begets CLA
 and sometimes leads
 to scale-up.

The cases that comprise this finding underscore how

implementing a CLA approach can lead to increased CLA uptake and potentially improved organizational and/or development outcomes. Some cases show a “demonstration effect,” whereby stakeholders learn about the benefits of a successful CLA approach implemented by another development actor and then adapt the approach to their own context.

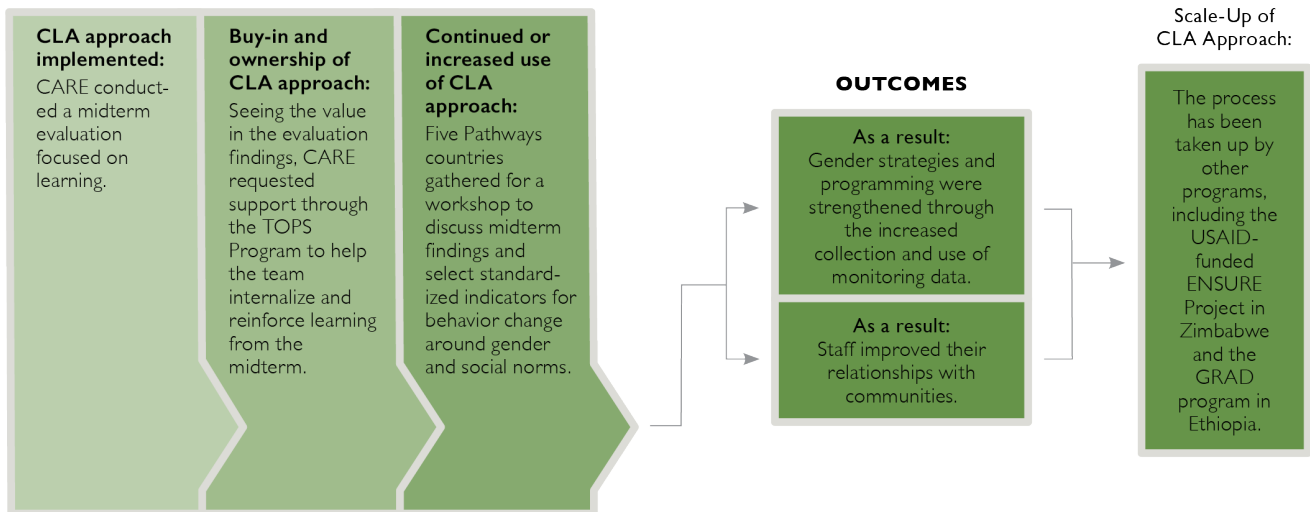


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Finding 6 in Action: Developing Country-Specific Gender Monitoring Indicators for Men and Women.

In order to ensure that its midterm evaluation findings fed into the development of improved monitoring, CARE led a Gender-Indicator Design Workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to use the data and experiences from the midterm review to develop a common framework of semi-standardized behavior change indicators that teams could use to continue to measure, monitor, and encourage changes in gender relations among key actors in the Pathways program. CARE strengthened gender strategies and programming, developed an improved monitoring framework, and increased understanding of gender among staff and communities. As a result, CARE has improved their reporting on impact as well as their relationships with the communities. The process has been taken up by other programs, including two USAID-funded initiatives, the Enhancing Nutrition, Stepping Up Resilience and Enterprise (ENSURE) Project in Zimbabwe, and the GRADuating Families Out of Poverty (GRAD) project in Ethiopia.

FINDING 6: CLA begets CLA and sometimes leads to scale up.



Another case that supports Finding 6 demonstrates how USAID/Morocco modeled the use of feedback loops with implementing partners, who then **identified synergies and increased collaboration in their work** in a variety of areas, such as providing positive opportunities for marginalized youth in Morocco.

What are the implications of learning for USAID staff, implementing partners and development practitioners?

The cases demonstrate that CLA begets more CLA in service of improved organizational and development outcomes. Based on this finding, CLA champions trying to introduce or expand CLA practice within their team or organization might consider:

- **Emphasizing what teams or organizations are already doing to collaborate, learn, and adapt** to further expand their practice in service of their objectives. This may also include putting CLA practices in terms that colleagues are more familiar with (such as thinking and working politically, locally led development, adaptive management, etc.).
- **Starting small, and showing what CLA looks like in action.** For example, starting small could be encouraging staff to take **five minutes at the end of a work day** to pause and reflect. Once people see the value of this, they may encourage others to do the same, or to incorporate this kind of practice at the team level at the beginning of staff meetings.
- **Beginning with the experience of CLA rather than the theory.** From the cases, it is clear that experiencing CLA helps people understand its value. Rather than beginning with the theory behind CLA or explaining the CLA framework in great depth, consider providing people with a taste of CLA by facilitating a learning-focused discussion.

Given that the most commonly found results chain in the cases involved the use of feedback loops to inform decision-making, technical specialists and learning advisors need to focus on how to manage feedback loops in a way that supports effective learning and adaptive management. Technical specialists and learning advisors might consider:

- **Starting with the end in mind.** Determine the critical decision points up front and identify the information needed to support evidence-based decision-making.
- **Ensuring teams have an opportunity to reflect and internalize data** in order to determine actions and get to evidence-based decision-making.

Some of the cases, particularly under the local ownership finding, show that CLA supports the Agency's strategic focus on self-reliance. With this in mind, **leaders and technical specialists should invest in resourcing effective collaboration and adaptive management in service of the journey to self-reliance.** USAID cannot support countries on that journey without working in partnership with local stakeholders and the private sector, understanding local contexts, and continuously improving programming in order to achieve greater local ownership, and the cases in this analysis demonstrate CLA's contribution to those ends.

This analysis is part of a larger effort known as the Evidence Base for Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (**EB4CLA**) to understand whether and how strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management make a difference to organizational effectiveness and development results. For comments and questions, please reach out to learning@usaid.gov or info@usaidlearninglab.org.