2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Sheik Musa (livestock trader, left) and Ifrah Ahmed Abdi (one of his mini-collectors, center) were recipients of local BDS services and DRM training. Credit: Mercy Corps

Case Title:

How CLA became a catalyst for integration, impact and resilience

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Summary:

Multi-sector development programs regularly default to working largely in sector-siloes, with cross-sector collaboration only happening sporadically and opportunistically. A siloed approach undermines program effectiveness and impact, in particular in shock-prone environments where program participants require integrated support systems to achieve resilience. This was exactly the situation that the 'Resilience in Pastoral Areas - North' (RIPA-North) Activity in Ethiopia found itself in, through an internal pause and reflection process after 18-months of implementation.

This CLA case describes how RIPA-North introduced simple but rigorous steps to systematically adapt our interventions through integration between components. The starting point was a learning and adaptation workshop, in which team members brainstormed and prioritized possible integration points. The far harder part was to operationalize these ideas through internal collaboration on the ground. This was achieved through putting in place: i) Incentive structures to motivate and reward integration achievements and ii) A suite of practical work processes and management practices that enabled team members to collaborate effectively. RIPA-North's CLA process has been successful beyond expectations. Within one year, RIPA-North had successfully integrated 13 of 17 prioritized interventions and the process has transformed the culture of the RIPA-North team. Most importantly, we've found that each intervention adaptation through cross-component integration has contributed to increased scale, depth of impact and enhanced sustainability of the adapted intervention. A key insight that has emerged, is that each of these 'internal collaborations' has ended up fostering 'external collaboration' between government and private sector system actors, contributing to the transformation and dynamism of market systems serving vulnerable communities in Ethiopia.

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

A common challenge faced by large multi-sector programs, such as USAID-funded RFSAs and Feed the Future Activities, is the difficulty of finding ways to systematically integrate approaches across components and sectors. This is a missed opportunity in terms of internal organizational efficiencies, for example taking advantage of different skillsets that exist within component teams. More importantly, it also compromises a program's ability to achieve its development objectives and transform the lives of vulnerable populations. This is because a lack of internal collaboration limits opportunities for synergies in approaches that can result in: (i) multiplier effects to reach scale (breadth of impact); (ii) greater benefits for participant households (depth of impact); and iii) mutually reinforcing outcomes that help build sustainability.

This situation was exactly that faced by RIPA-North after 18-months of implementation. During an internal pause and reflection process, prompted by the arrival of a new Chief of Party, the lack of internal collaboration was identified by RIPA-North team members as a major challenge hindering our work and potential impact. This was particularly concerning given the resilience goals of the program. A seminal TANGO-study from Ethiopia provided strong evidence that the resilience of households is meaningfully enhanced when they receive three or more resilience-enhancing services. Layering interventions in a particular geography increases the chances of a household accessing multiple services, but 'integration' of interventions goes one step further by ensuring that participant households in one intervention are automatically reached through another intervention / service. In summary, RIPA-North's lack of internal collaboration was preventing integration of approaches across components, and this was limiting our ability to build the resilience of vulnerable households in the Ethiopian lowlands.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

Internal Collaboration

Adaptive Management

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

The CLA approaches that RIPA-North took to address this challenge may seem simple, but the impacts have been far-reaching and profound in terms of the way this process enabled us to systematically adapt and integrate our interventions. We launched our initiative by organizing a 'Cross-Component Integration Workshop' involving senior team members from the four RIPA components (C1 = Disaster Risk Management; C2 = Youth and women economic opportunities; C3 = Agriculture systems; and C4 = Nutrition / Hygiene). The workshop was structured into three parts: Learn, Adapt and Collaborate. In the first part ('Learn'), each component presented an overview of all their interventions and posted each intervention title on A4 paper on the wall. In the second part ('Adapt'), each component team identified points of potential synergies, and brainstormed ways that they could intentionally integrate their own interventions with those from other components. They posted these ideas for adaptations on sticky notes next to the relevant intervention title on the wall, and then presented these ideas back to the whole group, to ground truth the ideas and get feedback. In the third part of the workshop ('Collaborate'), the whole team identified concrete strategies to operationalize these intervention integrations through collaboration between components. This meant not just the technical integration approaches, but also the collaboration mechanisms, were owned by the whole team.

Following the workshop there was a brief period of consolidation and prioritization, at the end of which the team had compiled an 'Integration Priorities Matrix' which included 17 interventions for adaptation with 29 cross-component integration/collaboration points. Of course, this identification process was the relatively easy part. The far more challenging task was to translate these integration points into action through internal collaboration and adaptation of interventions, in particular between team members in the three RIPA-North field offices. We used multiple strategies to achieve this. Firstly, component teams were tasked with developing detailed activities to move the integration forwards and inserting these into the component workplans they develop each quarter through a participatory process with team members from sub-national offices. To maintain a focus on integration among team members at field level, 'Cross-component integration' was added as a permanent agenda item in the monthly coordination meetings in each field office. The RIPA-North CLA team also now organizes bi-annual 'Cross-Component Integration Workshops', to celebrate progress, reflect on lessons-learned, identify sticking points and solutions, and add new priorities for integration that have emerged over the past six months. These meetings have helped hold everyone mutually accountable to driving a truly integrated program approach.

The results of this CLA process have been successful beyond all team member expectations. One year after the initial workshop, RIPA-North had successfully adapted 13 of the 17 prioritized interventions. The process has transformed the culture of the RIPA-North team, to the point that we now see collaboration and integration of interventions emerging spontaneously through team member interactions without requiring a formal ideation process in a workshop. From initially being a RIPA-North weakness, internal integration through systematic collaboration has now become arguably the strongest attribute of the team and the program. Moreover, this culture of integration and collaboration has contributed to a 'one-team' spirit of support and mutual appreciation that has galvanized team efforts and sense of purpose more broadly.

4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

A. DEVELOPM ENT RESULTS

Each intervention adaptation through cross-component integration has contributed to either expanded reach, increased depth of impact or enhanced sustainability of the adapted intervention (or a combination of the three).

For example, under C1 (Disaster Risk Management) one intervention aims to strengthen government systems for providing timely climate advisory and early warning information to communities. The adaptation introduced by the team was to empower government to specifically target their outreach and messaging to RIPA-North community platforms, including Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs under C2), Mother-to-Mother Support Groups (MtMSGs under C4) and integrate the messaging through a new private sector digital platform for agriculture services (C3). The result was that 10,290 households received climate advisories who previously didn't have access ('expanded reach'), of which 70% took action based on the information they received. Another successful collaboration resulted in our VSLA approach (C2) deliberately targeting members of MtMSGs (C4), and permagarden training by government (C4) targeting members of VSLAs. To-date, this integration has resulted in 4,441 HHs accessing these two resilience-enhancing services ('depth of impact'). Under C2, RIPA-North has also developed a network of local private sector business development service (BDS) providers, providing fee-based support to micro- and small-enterprises (MSEs) with the aim of stimulating growth and therefore job creation. Through a collaboration with C3, these local BDS providers are now providing services to 183 agri-business partners, such as livestock traders, agri-input retailers and milk processors, contributing to an average of 300% growth of these businesses ('expanded reach') and also the sustainability of the local BDS providers themselves since these agribusinesses have become some of their most reliable fee-paying clients. Perhaps the most innovative collaboration has been the introduction of DRM training and planning for businesses (C1), focusing in particular on agribusinesses under C3. More than 213 businesses have received DRM training and planning support, with emerging evidence showing this has resulted in adaptation of business practices to prepare for shocks, contributing to market system resilience. An added iteration has been that the local BDS providers (C2) have added a module on DRM planning to the core services they are providing to businesses, contributing to sustainability of these DRM services.

The final interesting piece of this CLA journey that the RIPA-North team has observed, is that the end-result of these multiple 'internal collaborations' is almost always to foster 'external collaboration' between system actors, in the form of mutually beneficial and sustainable interactions. This is because all our interventions use a systems-strengthening approach working with government and private sector partners, so when we integrate interventions, we are invariably fostering new relationships between different types of partners on the ground.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

There were three main obstacles to cross-component integration identified through the pause and reflect process. First, a lack of detailed understanding about the interventions being implemented by other components. Second, a lack of programmatic structures and work processes conducive to designing and implementing interventions collaboratively across components. Third, a perceived sense of limited staff time for anything 'extra' beyond individual component priorities (including collaboration with other components).

A key category of enabling conditions for RIPA-North to radically change the culture of the team was therefore the presence of incentive structures to motivate team members to invest time in cross-component integration. Initially, this was as simple as formerly identifying cross-component as a top priority for RIPA-North and communicating this repeatedly and clearly to all team members. This was then reinforced through positive feedback mechanisms that recognized and celebrated successes in cross-component integration. As time passed, the role of MEL data also became influential, as our data systems highlighted how the integration points were contributing to sustainability, scale and impact. A second category of enabling conditions was the suite of practical work processes and management practices that enabled team members to collaborate effectively. Some of these were already in place, for example component leads sitting in the same room, and partner organizations co-locating in all field offices. Others RIPA-North had to introduce, such as adding cross-component integration as an agenda in monthly coordination meetings in each field office. Most important was the requirement that integration activities must be included in component team workplans; one year after the launch workshop, the common factor in the four interventions (out of 17) with no progress was the failure to include integration activities in these workplans.