2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

Case Title:

Using CLA to Reinvigorate Partnerships in Zambia: EDEV's Journey

Name: Andrew Reuter

Organization: SoCha LLC

Attendees analyze the learning captured during a "World Cafe" on market-based poverty reduction.
(Photo by Muyunda Katundu)

Summary:

Partnerships are central to how USAID approaches development. The Agency's New Vision for Global Development is increasingly stressing the importance of localization and private sector engagement. USAID/Zambia's Office of Economic Development and the Environment (EDEV) is adopting a more partnership-based approach to expand localization. As part of this initiative, the office implemented a Learning Agenda in 2021 that asks the most salient development questions impacting rural enterprises, the business enabling environment, and natural resource management. It ensures that USAID/Zambia will engage a broad set of local voices to steer those important discussions with clearly defined learning priorities and annual Learning Events.

The Learning Agenda helped EDEV, its implementing partners (IPs), and its stakeholders stay focused on priority questions through a complex period of change in Zambia punctuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, significant turnover in the office's portfolio, the remote start ups of new IPs, and the Government of the Republic of Zambia's (GRZ) peaceful transfer of power to the New Dawn administration. EDEV embodied two subcomponents of CLA: External Collaboration and Adaptive Management. For the former, EDEV engaged external stakeholders virtually and in-person by hosting its inaugural two-day Annual Learning Event in November 2021 that convened USAID/Zambia staff, GRZ representatives, academics, private sector participants, and civil society leaders. For adaptive management, EDEV promoted sequencing, layering, and integration (SLI) with team Champions and IPs having the responsibility to own questions in the Learning Agenda. This shared responsibility catalyzed IP-led discussions that explored how EDEV's activities could better integrate gender initiatives across conservation, nutrition, land, and economic growth programs.

Which two subcomponents of the Collaborating, Learning & Adapting (CLA) Framework are most reflected in your case? Please reference them in your submission.

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

1. WHAT: 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?

EDEV's CLA work occurred in the context of shifting priorities, uncertainty, and complex change. Internally within USAID, Administrator Power launched the New Vision for Global Development and put a renewed focus on localization. Within USAID/Zambia, a significant portion of EDEV's portfolio turned over in 2020 and 2021 as it replaced legacy activities with new awards. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Zambian government's debt burdens led to a challenging economic conditions and inflation. At the same time, Zambia's peaceful transition of power to a new president, promoting a "New Dawn Administration" opened a new chapter for close collaboration between the U.S. Government and the GRZ.

CLA played an important role as EDEV adjusted to these challenges and opportunities.

First, EDEV's CLA initiatives helped it embrace new priorities. For example, Administrator Power's November 4, 2021 speech occurred a week before EDEV's inaugural Learning Event in November 2021. This fortuitous timing allowed EDEV to stress USAID's renewed commitment to localization directly to the stakeholders in attendance at the same time it highlighted its progress to increase engagement with Zambia's private sector and civil society.

Second, EDEV's ability to make awards and launch new activities during the pandemic showed that it had the management capacity to adjust on the fly. EDEV kept vital economic development work going at a time when Zambians were struggling with the impact of COVID, inflation, and economic uncertainty.

Third, the New Dawn Administration had recently created a new Ministry of the Green Economy and Environment. Since its inception, the Ministry has worked proactively with EDEV on aligning priorities for sustainable natural resource management.

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

USAID/Zambia's Program Office conducted a rapid stocktaking in August 2018 that reviewed CLA practices across the Mission's portfolio. The assessment recommended strengthening the Mission's working relationships with GRZ and the private sector. In 2020, EDEV determined that an office Learning Agenda would be the best tool to focus its learning about enterprise-driven rural poverty reduction. It approached the newly-awarded USAID/Zambia Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Platform (Z-MELP) to facilitate the creation of a Learning Agenda with questions that would advance sectoral knowledge. EDEV wanted the Learning Agenda to be aligned with the results framework, owned by Champions in the office, vetted by IPs, and assigned to activities. EDEV also envisioned holding annual Learning Events that would create opportunities for external collaboration and stakeholder engagement.

The Learning Agenda will help EDEV validate SLI. EDEV oversees a complex portfolio that includes not only enterprise-driven economic growth and NRM, but nutrition, water, and sanitation work that support USAID/Zambia's health objective. Diverse IPs must sequence and layer their interventions to achieve outcomes that increase household income and encompass food security, healthy diets, clean cooking, equal access to land, conservation, and the preservation of Zambia's biodiversity.

3. How: 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.

EDEV was the primary stakeholder of the CLA initiative. Adam Norikane, EDEV's Director, is the CLA initiative's executive sponsor. Shawna Hirsch, EDEV's Deputy Director, oversees and manages CLA. The entire EDEV office contributed questions to the Learning Agenda. Z-MELP provided support throughout the process.

Secondary stakeholders included USAID Program Office due to its interest in CLA processes and IPs who aligned their activity CLA plans with the Learning Agenda. Tertiary stakeholders included Learning Event participants from the GRZ, the private sector, and civil society.

The office executed the following steps to actualize CLA to support the External Collaboration and Adaptive Management components of CLA.

1. EDEV held three facilitated workshops in October 2020 to create a Learning Agenda and CLA Action Plan.

2. EDEV hosted a "Introduction to CLA" meeting with IPs in December 2020 to socialize them to the learning questions and solicit feedback. EDEV also asked select partners to share how they successfully engage GRZ, the private sector, and other donors with the entire portfolio.

3. EDEV launched the final Learning Agenda in April 2021 with IPs' feedback incorporated.

4. Throughout 2021, EDEV Champions encouraged IPs to develop CLA plans aligned with the Learning Agenda and consider SLI.

5. EDEV captured four five-minute videos of Chief of Party discussing how their teams apply CLA and SLI in their work with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), NRM, nutrition, and land use.

6. EDEV hosted a two-day hybrid Learning Event entitled "Pivoting to Market-Based Poverty Reduction" in November 2021. The event paired two livecast streams with three in-person World Café sessions that allowed small groups of socially-distanced participants to engage in robust discussions about market-based poverty reduction, the green economy, the enabling environment, and the rural/urban dynamic.

7. EDEV developed a five-minute "Partnering for Success" video and complementary external report that communicates EDEV's core messages to its stakeholders.

8. EDEV revisited its Learning Agenda in May 2022 to evolve its approach and streamline questions to improve its manageability.

9. EDEV will host a Gender/Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Learning Day in June 2022 to share approaches and align with GRZ, USAID and U.S. Government priorities.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT: 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?

By deploying the Learning Agenda and hosting the inaugural Annual Learning Event, EDEV:

1. Established itself as the first Development Objective team at USAID/Zambia to embody CLA in a learning agenda;

2. Identified Learning Champions within the EDEV team, thereby decentralizing the responsibility for CLA to the Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) who oversee the Intermediate Results (IRs) and and Sub-IRs;

3. Promoted the importance and uptake of learning, adaptive management, and sequencing, layering, and integrating (SLI) among implementing partners;

4. Engaged development stakeholders including the Government of the Republic of Zambia, civil society, and the private sector to share EDEV's approach to reinvigorating partnerships; and

5. Offered the Z-MELP platform better insight into EDEV's portfolio and strategic priorities, which have ancillary benefits for MEL, including supporting Mission priorities like the Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment and Mid Course Stocktaking of the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS).

5. DEVELOPMENT IMPACT: 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?

Although it is too early to quantify the strategic impact of the Learning Agenda at the Development Objective-level, it has generated benefits in its first year. First, it contributed to heightened SLI in the EDEV portfolio. The Learning Agenda catalyzed discussions among EDEV's four largest activities to explore opportunities to layer gender interventions; for example, providing additional access to finance to women who want to purchase liquefied natural gas cook stoves as an alternative to charcoal. This coordination laid the foundation for EDEV's June 2022 Gender/Women's Economic Empowerment Learning Day. Second, it documented the office's learning priorities for recently-awarded activities such as the Business Enabling Project and clearly defined the expectations for how they will contribute to and advance the Learning Agenda.

An expected benefit of the Learning Agenda is that it will answer the strategic question, "In what ways does an enterprise-driven approach engage the most vulnerable rural populations sufficiently to reduce rural poverty?" This question tests EDEV's theory of change inherent in its results framework. Over the years, USAID has evolved its approach to private sector development, most recently by embracing a framework for inclusive, resilient market systems. Now halfway through its CDCS, EDEV can use its Learning Agenda to test its own assumptions and understand how its sectorally-diverse, enterprise-driven approach impacts poverty reduction. Moreover, with USAID's recent elevation of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) as a strategic Agency priority, EDEV's emerging understanding how how it reaches vulnerable and marginalized populations will benefit the Mission's broader mandate to hear all Zambian voices and practice inclusive development.

6. 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?

The following conditions have enabled EDEV to institutionalize CLA:

1. PRM's CLA stocktaking in 2018 recommended strengthening external collaboration.

2. EDEV's leadership prioritized CLA and requested a Learning Agenda as a practical management tool.

3. PRM established the Mission's first MEL platform in June 2020. Z-MELP offered EDEV the additional resources and horsepower it needed to start its CLA journey.

4. IPs bought into the Learning Agenda. Many of EDEV's Chiefs of Party were familiar with CLA and SLI from prior activities they led.

There have been challenges, of course. The first is the time and effort required to build a culture of CLA. There is a balance between being overly focused on specific learning questions on one end of the spectrum and embodying the "spirit of CLA" in concrete actions on the other. EDEV is still finding the right balance between these two poles. The second challenge is that EDEV developed too many learning questions initially. The office streamlined its questions in mid-2022 to make the Learning Agenda more manageable. The third challenge is ensuring the 2022 Learning Event moves beyond socializing CLA to focusing on evidence, learning, and actionable recommendations--a vision that will be easier with streamlined Learning Agenda.

Despite these challenges, the biggest opportunities lie ahead as Zambia returns to normal operations and benefits from the face-to-face interactions that optimize external collaboration and camaraderie.