2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

Case Title:

Collaboration in strengthening value chains

SVC ccomponents' staff Participanting in the Annual pause-and-reflect workshop. Credit: SVC Team

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Summary:

The Feed the Future DRC Strengthening Value Chains Activity (SVC), a five-year program is USAID's premier development assistance initiative in South Kivu. SVC works with market actors in the private sector, the government of DRC, and civil society to enhance the capacity of farmers, enterprises, and associations engaged in the production, processing, and marketing of dried beans, soybeans, and specialty coffee. Coordinated planning and implementation have been challenging in Eastern DRC due to structural and operational circumstances and technical differences in approaches. Therefore, collaboration, continuous communication, and learning remain success factors for reaching a large number of clients with concerted and complementary approaches, a considerable package of activities for the benefit of the project participants, and the reduction of operational costs and outcomes at a large scale.

The effective collaboration with Development Food Security Activity (DFSA) has enabled approximately 45,000 households to access joint SVC and DFSA support in the territories of Walungu, Kabare, and Kalehe. Through the collaboration of its implementing partners(IPs), components, and other stakeholders, SVC has reached over 80,000 individuals with diversified technical support which has resulted in the following outcomes: an operational market information system in 6 markets, facilitation of market linkages, technical support to 256 producer organization/cooperative/enterprises, creation of 3,918 seasonal jobs, export of 56 containers of specialty coffee, process and sale of 3,295 tons of beans and soybeans, generation of $8,284,278 as sales value from its clients, mobilization of $12,548,248 from financial institutions (Equity BCDC bank), social investment organization and other value chains companies.

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?

The purpose of SVC is to increase household incomes and access to nutrient-rich crops by linking smallholder farmers to strengthened and inclusive value chains and supportive market services. Actions range from creating and strengthening producer networks, increasing production and coffee quality for export and access to inputs, structuring organizations, post-harvest processing, promoting the business environment, market linkages, nutrition, gender, and equity.
A hypothesis: If organizations implement actions with the same targets in a scattered and dispersed manner, efforts are not capitalized upon and actions are not visible or not very visible, which has a direct effect on sustainability. This has been demonstrated over time as many USAID and other donor-funded projects have implemented with the same target audience without incorporating collaboration into their intervention strategy, which has shown major limitations in community resilience after the projects have ended.

In the same area, it was found that interventions were duplicated through uncoordinated intervention strategies by several organizations, sometimes receiving funding from the same or different donors. This did not allow the organizations and beneficiaries to build their knowledge base and effective ownership after the projects ended. Several challenges were observed in value chain development, such as governance in producer organizations, access to inputs, private sector investment, involvement of technical services, access to finance, knowledge of legislation, and business climate.

In light of the above challenges and the need for sustainability, the SVC activity has adopted a collaborative approach with stakeholders (internal and external), IPs, including banks and other financial institutions, producer networks, cooperative networks, CCPA/Carg, DFSA, and other USAID partners, government services, ETDs, civil society organizations) to deliver a package of activities to improve and contribute to the inclusive development in Eastern DRC.

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

Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) has been a building block that is integrated into the SVC design. The CLA approach is integrated into the Activity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan where the emphasis has been placed on internal and external collaboration, continuous communication, and learning.

The SVC Activity contributes to IR 3.2, as part of an integrated package of USAID investments designed to build a foundation for durable peace in Eastern DRC. USAID/DRC developed a shared project-level results framework to coordinate agriculture and nutrition programming from the health, WASH, economic growth, FFP, and humanitarian assistance sectors to address the shared goal of reducing poverty and malnutrition.

The SVC interventions build on those of complementary USAID/DRC Food for Peace (FFP) and health activities. SVC is solely responsible for coffee value chain development; however, USAID/DRC FFP, health, and WASH activities within the same communities will provide a full range of household- and community-level assistance, resulting in an integrated package of livelihood, health, and nutrition activities delivered to the same households. Collaboration and continuous communication with a multifaceted array of stakeholders remain important factors in providing an integrated package of support to clients.
The CLA approach was used: a) to strengthen coordination and partnerships, b) to limit the risk of duplicating interventions with beneficiaries and wasting resources and c) to bring staff, practitioners and value chain actors together regularly to foster dialogue, share emergent knowledge and lessons learned for collaborative learning and exercise flexibility for adaptive management during implementation.

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.

The SVC Activity is executed by six implementing partners, including Tetra Tech as the prime contractor, TechnoServe, Search for Common Ground, Banyan Global, World Coffee Research, and J. E. Austin and Associates as subcontractors.

SVC holds coordination meetings on regular basis (monthly) with all its IPs to share challenges and lessons learned for decision making and improving performance, which enables better results (management level). In addition, collaboration agreements are signed and occasional collaboration meetings are organized with actors in the value chain to identify the needs and areas for technical/financial assistance. These actors are concessionaires, financial institutions, exporters, producer networks, cooperatives, public and private enterprises, and local authorities.

Internally, the technical team members from all sub-components hold weekly meetings under the leadership of the SVC's Chief of Party to review activities, challenges, and weekly planning. Quarterly, during the Strategic Review of Activity progress, all staff including those based on the field participate in the workshop to share their progress, challenges, and lessons learned in the field. During the workshop, recommendations are made for improvement and learning, and decision-making.

Annual pause-and-reflect sessions and learning events before annual work plan development allow stakeholders to assess achievements and enable contextually adaptive planning that is linked to challenges and lessons learned. This is an important collaborative event where all stakeholders in the activity are invited (DFSA, networks of cooperatives and associations, ETDs, value chain actors, and public and private sector actors. During this joint event, planning is done with other USAID programs highlighting points and themes of collaboration and leveraging resources.

Coordination/collaboration meetings are organized periodically between the senior management of SVC and DFSA programs (FSP, Tuungane Pamoja, ADIJ, IGA,...) for decision making . These meetings are followed by other technical staff meetings for planning joint activities and analyzing needs and participants' profiles.

Another level of collaboration is through the technical support that SVC provides to DFSA partners. This is done through the co-location of funds. This approach aims at designing a common methodology for integrated partner support, which has the effect of reducing costs and resources. SVC conducts Producer Organization Sustainability Assessments of common partners annually, to identify areas of capacity improvement. The results are shared with the partners including partner originations and project partners. In collaboration with the public sector and private enterprises, SVC has facilitated the establishment of an alert committee to track cases of harassment and fraud in the export of coffee.

To achieve greater impact in communities, SVC is intensifying collaboration with state structures and local authorities for greater sustainability of action. SVC's actions are broadly based on holistic care and encourage local initiatives and investment at the household and community level to guide the overall vision in linking with the local development plan. To achieve this, SVC organizes experience-sharing workshops between local leaders and chiefs in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, Walungu, and Idjwi, meetings in which success stories are shared to create emulation for others.

Through the chiefs of the chiefdoms, and in collaboration with CPCA/CARG, SVC has implemented the information system in 6 markets in South Kivu. This collaboration aims to support the MIS so that by the end of the project, the system is fully supported by the chiefdoms. A progressive appropriation is already visible by the support of certain costs by the chiefdoms.

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?

The SVC Activity includes these components C1: Build the capacity of vertical and horizontal actors in targeted value chains, C2: Enhance coffee production, C3 Develop and implement public-private partnerships, C4 Access to Finance. Collaboration between the component members, field teams, and management is important in the implementation of SVC activities. This allows the team to strengthen the team spirit. The culture of openness, relationships, and continuous learning is an important aspect of the SVC activity. Team members are always motivated to achieve project goals. Lessons learned, challenges, opportunities, and success stories are shared among the entire team for continuous learning.

During Quarterly Strategic Reviews of Activity progress and Annual pause-and-reflect sessions and learning events, exchanges are made between the SVC technical staff and the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist regarding supporting documentation and evidence-based data, data quality requirements, and reporting time. This allows team members to better understand their roles and responsibilities and to stay focused on SVC's expectations in terms of quality and quantity for better program performance. This allows the program management team to make adaptive, evidence-based decisions.

During weekly internal staff coordination meetings, the agendas of all components are shared among all, which gives a global overview in terms of planning, and allows for proper allocation of human, financial, and logistical resources. The team member collaboration has allowed members to prepare and anticipate activities for the quarterly/annual planning. This collaboration has allowed the initiation of integrated planning of the members of the components and sub-component to offer a complete package to the clients. This integration of activities from components while highlighting the cross-cutting themes of gender, equality and Social Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) allows SVC to support a large number of clients in a coordinated and non-dispersed approach.

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?

The CLA approach contributes to the impact of the SVC activity, especially the collaboration. Collaboration with the chiefdoms and CCPA/CARG has enabled the establishment of the market information system where prices of 10 agricultural products are displayed and information shared among actors in six markets in the SVC zone, POs, and other actors involved in the value chain.

SVC has facilitated the creation of the coffee producers' network in Kivu, where they have an executive secretariat and advocacy actions are carried out at the provincial and national levels. Through collaboration with state services, SVC has set up an alert committee to track cases of fraud and harassment in the coffee sector. The follow-up is done regularly, cases are documented and reported, and washing stations not in compliance with the legislation are closed. The collaboration with the state services involved in the seed sector has allowed, through the SVC activity, to certify the seed fields of the companies supported by the SVC activity.

Collaboration with concessionaires has enabled them to formalize contracts with tenant farmers. To be more effective, some tenant farmers within the concessions have organized themselves into POs for market-oriented agriculture.
Market linkages have been facilitated by SVC activity between coffee companies and exporters, SVC has developed a profile of 21 coffee companies and shared it with international exporters and financial institutions as a marketing tool. Commercial relationships are developed between actors in terms of purchase contracts and pre-financing. Collaboration with USAID IPs (FSP-Enyanya and World Vision) has allowed SVC to support organizations with additional technical support in financial management, governance, structuring, and market-oriented agriculture. These jointly supported organizations now have bankable business plans, facilitated market linkages, and developed trade relationships.

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?

For the SVC activity, the factor that favors internal collaboration is the learning culture. The culture of openness of the SVC technical team is staffed by specialists in the sectoral areas of its scope. Experts within the components constructively exchange ideas and opinions with the willingness to act and adapt to new perspectives and changing context (case of COVID 19, ...). Continuous learning and improvement remain a factor in the development of the CLA approach within the SVC activity, through the occasional coordination events, breaks, and learning reflections (weekly, quarterly and annual).

Factors such as the development of networks have favored the implementation of the SVC activity on a large scale through platforms of producers, traders, and enterprises. These networks have enabled members to access services that they would not have access to if they were dispersed. The involvement and participation of local authorities remain an important factor in the development of SVC activity within the beneficiary communities. Collaboration with the government's technical services favors the improvement of services for the clients assisted by SVC.

However, factors that do not favor collaboration are the effective coordination of actions and the sharing of information (reports, tools, database, planning, etc.). The SVC Mid-Term Evaluation noted that effective coordination between SVC and other USAID Implementing Partners would be a factor for more impactful action in the field. Another factor is the adaptation and standardization of approaches among implementing partners where some, in the same area, with the same beneficiaries, use a humanitarian approach in terms of distribution or donations whereas the SVC activity seeks to develop the entrepreneurial spirit and holistic care of communities to develop and invest in the economic sector to increase their income.