2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Nuyok adaptive management to improve integration and service delivery in Uganda

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Nuyok implementing partners collaborate during a pause and reflection meeting. Credit: Rodwell Sibanda/CRS Uganda

Summary:

Nuyok is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance funded Activity in Uganda led by Catholic Relief Services in consortium with six implementing partners. Much as Nuyok was designed as an integrated program, its initial phase of implementation was quite siloed across implementing partners. A critical review of the field implementation challenges suggested that well designed organogram and theory of change do not automatically translate into an integrated program without an intentional collaboration among implementation teams.

During a community of practice meeting, the Nuyok Chief of Party learned about how, Budikadidi, a sister project in the Democratic Republic of Congo organized field implementation to increase collaboration among partners. He visited Budikadidi to study its organizational set up. He drafted the guiding principles, an outline of the implementation structure, staffing, and coordination processes and submitted to the consortium members for review and input. A key success factor was basing the Prime staff in the field offices to coordinate joint planning, use of logistics, monitoring, troubleshooting, and timely adaptive management.

Nuyok was entering its third year when its leadership decided to restructure. The staffing of the coordination unit was designed to ensure greater oversight of field implementation by the Prime while ensuring a general sense of inclusion. Two years into the implementation, the evidence-driven adaptation has contributed to efficiencies in business processes and quality service delivery to program participants. Nuyok used internal collaboration and adaptive management to guide the restructuring of its field implementation.

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 Nuyok Development Food Security Activity (Nuyok) is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) funded Activity in Uganda, led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with six implementing partners. Nuyok does this through interrelated purposes that focus on: governance improvements and gender transformation; building resilience to shocks and stresses; building resilient on-farm and off-farm livelihoods, including improved production for income and consumption and, improvement of nutrition outcomes of pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls, and children under five (CU5).

Much as Nuyok was designed as an integrated program, the initial phase of implementation was quite siloed, by purpose, within and across implementing partners operating in the same geographic area. The organizational set up did not give CRS the opportunity to fully exercise oversight over field implementation. The inadequate coordination of field implementa led to inefficiencies in the use of resources and to reduced cross-purpose integration. Cross-purpose integration, which refers to how households are benefitting from multiple interventions across purposes in a strategically coordinated manner, is critical to using resources efficiently to achieve maximum impact. The lack of a one project approach to field implementation also led to duplication of efforts in technical reporting with CRS receiving as many reports as the number of implementing partners operating in the same district. That delayed consolidation led to reduced project visibility with the local government authorities, threatening their support and buy in. Staff members from different purposes in the same geographic areas did not know each other and implementation issues were not promptly escalated for resolution.

Nuyok took advantage of its monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) incorporated into activity implementation to pause and reflect, and to initiate adaptive management to address the challenges on the ground, ensuring that project goals are attained.

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

A critical review of the nature of the field implementation challenges identified during the pause and reflect sessions suggested that a well designed organogram and theory of change do not automatically translate into an integrated program unless there is an intentional and purposeful collaboration and coordination among field implementation teams.

During a CRS Chief of Party (CoP) community of practice meeting, Nuyok CoP learned about how Budikadidi, a sister project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) organized field implementation to ensure increased collaboration and coordination among implementing partners. In the absence of documentation on the structure and its implementation, Nuyok CoP travelled to DRC in November 2019 to understudy the organizational set up and its implementation at the field level. A key success factor was basing the Prime staff in the field offices to coordinate implementation across consortium field staff. The coordination role includes joint planning, coordinated use of logistics, joint monitoring, troubleshooting, including escalating issues and quick follow up actions among others. While Nuyok project was programmatically integrated by design, field implementation processes were often overlooked, leading to each implementing partner operating in silo in pursuit of achieving their contractual deliverables. Nuyok leadership decided to adapt the DRC field implementation model to its operating environment. The Mid-term Evaluation in February 2020 later validated the move by Nuyok to improve internal collaboration and to adapt the management of field 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.

Nuyok was entering its third year of implementation when its leadership decided to restructure. In anticipation of the resistance to change, no matter how innovative it might be, the first step was to get the buy-in from all the stakeholders, including implementing partners leadership and staff. The CoP made a presentation of the DRC model at a consortium meeting by taking the participants through the structure and explaining how it functions. While the presentation generated a high level of interest and a general sense of endorsment, participants raised a number of questions for further clarification. The follow up questions prompted a conference call with DRC to address them.

The CoP built on the clarifications provided to draft the adaptation of the DRC approach to Nuyok operating environment in light of the project implementation stage. The next step in the adaptation process was to clearly identify the building blocks of the DRC model and match them with Nuyok existing setup along with proposed adjustments to be made. That step included the defintion of the guiding principles followed by an outline of the implementation structure, staffing, planning and coordination processes. The added value of the Nuyok adapted model was in a writeup for documentation purposes and to help with replication by others. It was critical to submit the draft proposal to the consortium members for review and input before the necessary adjustments were made. That step was taken to diffuse any pending anxieties and to increase a sense of ownership. The consensual draft was also shared with BHA as part of the action plan to address the recommendation of the Mid-term Evaluation.

The adapted structure included a new CRS position of Field Implementation Lead reporting to the Deputy Chief of Party and with dotted lines to the Technical Leads. The Field Implementation Lead supervises District Implementation Lead (DIL) positions filled by existing CRS Managers who have been redeployed to the field and housed in implementing partner field offices. The filling of the DIL positions with existing Managers was to take advantage of their familiarity with the program, including implementation issues. To ensure a sense of inclusion, implementing qualified partner staff were selected to assume the sub-county Implementation Leads' role under the supervision of the DIL, a CRS staff. As the project gets closer to its end, Nuyok does not plan to replace any member of the field implementation coordination team, but will reassign the role taking into consideration the familiarity of staff with the adapted structure and functions.

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 restructuring of Nuyok field implementation has enhanced team work and created a sense of " one project " among the consortium members. Implementing partners ' staff who initially could only speak to their specific activities are now able to effectively represent and present the project activities across partners at the sub-county or district levels. The increased level of understanding of the project resulting from purposeful internal collaboration makes staff engagement with project participants more effective. Nuyok has enhanced joint planning, coordination, integration and reporting of field activities. The pooling of the logistics facilitates more efficient support to field monitoring. The presence of a CRS staff at implementing field offices has contributed to a speedy escalation of operational bottlenecks for prompt resolution.

Under the COVID-19 lockdown, Nuyok consortium was able to contain weekly online program meetings to one and a half hour cutting down previous trends by half, mainly because one staff member from an implementing partner presented on behalf of all partners operating in each district. The adapted field implementation also helped Nuyok to identify areas with likely geographic overlap and discuss strategies for convergent technical approaches to maximize benefits to target communities and leveraging the relative strengths of each implementing partner and technical personnel. The implementation of a unified management structure has contributed to a better oversight of Nuyok field implementation, thus ensuring a more effective sequencing, layering and integration of activities at district, sub-county and consortium levels.

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 improved internal collaboration and teamwork resulting from the adaptation of the management of Nuyok field implementation has contributed to efficiencies in service delivery. Integration has not only improved participant access to services but saved time for both program participants and Nuyok staff as result of joint engagements. The regular visits to program participants by the sub-county and District Implementation Leads have improved feedback on implementation processes to achieve program quality and behavior change across purposes. A visit to Nuyok field sites by BHA in October 2021, noted that "There is evidence of adoption of improved practices and behaviors among project participants and other community members across all purposes. Nuyok is encouraged to use the remainder of the project time to consolidate these positive outcomes in a sustainable manner."

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 sustained commitment of Nuyok ' s leadership and staff to drive an effective multi-sectoral collaboration was a key enabler in the successful restructuring of its field implementation. CRS ' organizational culture of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) perfectly fit into the CLA framework. That organizational culture recognizes the dynamics of the development process and encourages necessary adaptations grounded on careful review of gathered evidence during the to pause and reflect sessions embedded into program implementation. The 2020 Mid Term Evaluation (MTE) report and other Nuyok progress reports provided evidence that siloed implementation was crippling the Nuyok project through inefficiencies and missed opportunities for integration. The evidence gathering coupled with the openness of the donor to experiment and to incorporate lessons learned into programmatic and management decisions created a conducive environment for risk taking and adaptation.

The Nuyok experience confirms the critical need to anticipate resistance to change and to take the necessary steps to generate adhesion and ownership by all stakeholders. Methodic and systematic approach to outlining the rationale, the process and expected outcome of the proposed adaption are paramount and should be documented. While CRS was successful in adapting the restructuring of the field implementation to the implementation phase of the project, it is strongly recommended to intentionally incorporate a clear description of a coordinated field implementation structure in the context of consortium management. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that integration is process intensive and time consuming.