2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Using CLA Methods to Enhance Kenya's Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable

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Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable members at a national business forum. Credit: CLEAR

Summary:

In Kenya, the rate of unemployment especially for youth who form approximately 75% of the population is high. With limited growth in formal sector employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship have become increasingly common. However, there are few opportunities for technical assistance or networks that are critical for strengthening entrepreneurial mind sets for youth business start-ups. USAID Cooperatives Leadership Engagement Advocacy and Research (CLEAR) Program established the Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable (YERT), a Community of Practice for youth in cooperatives and startup businesses to network with each other and connect with business experts to support them in developing their business ideas.

YERT took a big hit during the COVID 19 pandemic which also forced most members to shut down or downscale their businesses. CLEAR received mounting requests to maintain YERT and train members on adaptive business skills to help them survive the pandemic. With health and safety requirements to stop the spread of COVID-19, CLEAR had to reimagine its programming to suit the emerging needs of the youth.
CLEAR organized listening activities that include interviews and surveys with YERT members and thereafter facilitated pause and reflect sessions with the program team, to make meaning of data gathered and identify effective interventions. This intentional use of CLA allowed CLEAR to quickly adapt. Through utilizing CLA framework tools, CLEAR was able to maintain YERT amidst the pandemic and transform it from a physical to virtual platform, which led to a 400% increase of YERT registered members accessing business technical support from 11 counties in Kenya.

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?

Unemployment in Kenya is a challenge for youth who are reported to represent 80% of unemployed young people (United Nations Development Program, 2013). With limited growth in formal sector employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship have become increasingly common. However, there are few opportunities for technical assistance or networks that are critical for strengthening entrepreneurial mind sets and specific skills for youth business start-up and development. Lack of these skills and experiences forces many businesses to shut down.

To address this challenge, The USAID Cooperative Leadership Engagement Advocacy and Leadership (CLEAR) Program, as part of its mandate to support cooperatives in Kenya, established the "Youth Entrepreneurship Round Table (YERT)", a Community of Practice of youth entrepreneurs looking to increase their business skills. Initially YERT's focus was to encourage good business practice and promote knowledge sharing on entrepreneurship and cooperatives as well as communicate and channel feedback regularly to inform program support for youth in business. This was achieved through facilitating small group discussions focused on specific topics identified by the group itself, in a participatory round table fashion.

As with many in-person and participatory activities, YERT took a hit during the COVID 19 pandemic. The ability to facilitate impactful discussions was a challenge without some strategic adjustments. Additionally, many YERT members were forced to shut down or scale down their businesses and Government and stakeholders support shifted from economic to health, leaving many young businesses struggling. During this time CLEAR received mounting requests from YERT members to maintain the group and further, to train them in strengthening their business skills that would help them survive the impact of the pandemic. With the health and safety requirements to stop the spread of COVID-19, CLEAR had to reimagine its programming to suit the needs of the youth.

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

Implemented by Global Communities in Kenya, the CLEAR Program was designed using a CLA framework that capitalized on the use of collaboration, and M&E for learning to achieve program goals. Because of this focus and buy-in from the entire team, CLA has been prioritized throughout programming including the employment of a dedicated CLA Officer. Through training from the local USAID mission and technical support from the Global Communities Measurement and Evidence for Learning and Impact (MELI) team, the CLEAR program team learned how to integrate CLA within their work and developed a CLA Plan and Learning Agenda to guide in their efforts. The program has also succeeded in many ways, thanks to the organization and program's focus on adaptive management allowing the team to shift activities as needed to meet the needs of participants and ensure each activity is impactful.

In Kenya, youth are exposed to high levels of unemployment and poverty and therefore the constitution considers them to be a vulnerable group. Using CLA methods, CLEAR has become a leader in facilitating strategic collaborations and mobilizing stakeholder efforts towards strengthening youth capacities in business entrepreneurship to improve their economic development. CLEAR's Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable has been designed as a CLA resource to bring together young entrepreneurs to build connections with each other and access technical support from business experts to further their business ambitions.

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.

CLEAR utilized a CLA approach in both the initial design of the Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable as well as when adapting it during COVID-19. CLA was key to ensuring that youth engaged in the Roundtable, received meaningful and helpful information from professionals and one another to help create more employment and improved livelihoods. To achieve this, CLEAR used External Collaboration approach to co engage young entrepreneurs and business experts to grow and adapt the Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable (YERT) into a robust Community of Practice and platform for sharing. YERT began as a physical focus group discussion with 20 young cooperative entrepreneurs and business students from the Cooperative University of Kenya (CUK) who met physically to share experiences through peer-to-peer learning.

At the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, members of YERT were unable to meet due to Government health and social distancing regulations. Additionally, members' businesses were hit hard by the pandemic which forced some of them to close and others to downscale. YERT members reached out to CLEAR with requests to maintain the group and be trained on business skills that would help them survive the pandemic. To respond to this fluid situation, CLEAR used M&E for learning approach through conducting surveys, interviews, and program indicator assessments to determine the type and level of business support that was needed by the youth during the pandemic.

From these assessments, CLEAR learned that YERT members needed to congregate and share experiences with each other and with experts to increase their sustainability since it was difficult for them to access incentives and support programs during the pandemic. Members also reported the need for technical support in developing adaptive business strategies, training support in business plan development, marketing, and customer service relations. Through Pause and Reflect on the feedback received from these assessments a collaborative decision was made to adapt the mode and content of YERT to better support the youth's entrepreneurship and business resilience during the pandemic. This decision forced CLEAR to transform what was once a physical group discussion to a virtual platform through zoom – where young entrepreneurs would congregate to exchange their experiences, share ideas on how to rebuild their businesses, interact and network with business experts and advisors.

Through surveys CLEAR sought to establish members' capacity in using zoom, and whether they were equipped with smartphones and laptops to connect virtually. The team learned that even though most members had access to smart phones, they did not have experience using zoom. This feedback enabled CLEAR to provide in-depth support to familiarize members with zoom and offer guidance on building relationships, networking and learning in a virtual environment. Through Pause and Reflect, CLEAR learned that there was a need to adapt the structure and content of YERT to suit a virtual environment. A decision was thereafter made to increase the frequency of the meetings from quarterly to monthly and reduce duration from full day to 2-hour sessions.

Initially CLEAR played the convener role through mobilizing members to join the group. Recently, YERT members have taken up most of the mobilizing through referring their peers to join membership and suggesting topics and speakers for sessions. This has shifted CLEAR's support from the leader to a more participatory advisory role and this has allowed network members to take more ownership of the platform through determining what they want to learn. Using the CLA mindset and allowing the activity to adapt to meet the needs of the participants and the COVID-19 climate, YERT membership has grown from 20 to over 500 members across 11 of 47 counties in Kenya.

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?

Practicing a CLA approach has enabled CLEAR to increase its reach of youth entrepreneurs far beyond what was initially envisioned. Before adapting to a virtual platform, the YERT network had a membership of about 20 participants who were mostly based in Nairobi County. After the transition to virtual, the membership has grown to over 500 registered participants across 11 counties who are benefiting from CLEAR business technical support. If CLEAR had not been flexible and had not gathered data on how to adapt based on the needs of the Roundtable members, this would not have been possible.

CLEAR has also become more inclusive in programming through prioritizing youth participation in training and capacity building initiatives and through this, young entrepreneurs are able to voice their business ideas and needs. Creating opportunities for youth to build their business ambitions and interact with business leaders and experts reduces the knowledge and information gap and ensures that youth are part of the economic development process. Providing access to business trainings and technical support has also enabled CLEAR to provide a conducive environment for YERT members to grow their businesses and this has contributed to USAID's goal to further inclusion and accessibility.

Through CLA CLEAR has built an evidence base for youth programming in Kenya and this has made CLEAR a resource hub for best practice in positive youth development. Another lesson that CLEAR learned in this process is the importance of promoting local ownership and how this has elevated CLEAR's role from being a mobiliser to a facilitator. This approach has improved CLEAR's relationship with stakeholders, increased their engagement and promoted a unified vision for the program and partners.

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 CLEAR CLA approach has contributed to achieving CLEAR's objectives, as measured through performance monitoring indicators. YERT has enabled CLEAR to reach more stakeholders through business entrepreneurship training and has provided a platform for CLEAR to disseminate program lessons learned on best business practice. The YERT platform will create opportunities for ownership and sustainability of the CLEAR program work and through collective sharing of knowledge and information, CLEAR is able to contribute to the evidence base on youth entrepreneurship.

CLA has increased CLEAR's ability to co design activities with stakeholders for more effective outcomes. Through engaging youth and business development experts as partners in decision making around YERT there is increased ownership by members and increased motivation to engage further in their startup journey that is usually difficult due to economic and social challenges. Members have reported to have improved their business plans, adopted digital marketing tools such as Canva, and social media marketing platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook to market and increase their business sales. Through continued Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning, data will be used to explore the critical success factors underpinning the most effective youth entrepreneurship activities and therefore YERT network is positioned to contribute to youth entrepreneurship discussions and data that can influence policy and action for positive youth 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?

CLEAR was designed with a dedicated CLA aspect, but at the time the concept was still new to the team and many partners. The CLEAR team has undergone training and helped our partners to incorporate CLA into their own work. The team has also been able to participate in discussions and re-fresher trainings on CLA with the local USAID mission, USAID Washington, and with other Global Communities programs. The team also received technical support from the Global Communities Monitoring Evaluation Learning and Impact (MELI) team.

The CLEAR Program leadership has also played a key role towards incubating an organizational culture of CLA. This organizational culture has allowed for open communication about program challenges and opportunities for re-design. It has also created shared commitment to integrate reflection and learning across program activities and to openly share ideas and adapt programing on the go. Through prioritizing M&E for Learning CLEAR is using program indicator results to reflect on what worked, what did not work and opportunities for adaptation. Continuous pause and reflect sessions have improved the structure and design of the YERT network and enabled CLEAR understand members' needs and match them with the support necessary to boost their enterprise performances. CLEAR has also strategically invested in resources towards the implementation of CLA and this has enabled the team to conduct learning activities and moreover has a dedicated CLA contact person to support the team in CLA activities. This dedication to CLA made it possible for the team to take the time to review the YERT activity, speak to the participants to better understand their evolving needs during COVID, and adapt the activity which ultimately led to an unexpected viral success!