2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

Case Title:

Design-stage CLA Engagement Helps ‘Get it Right’ Early

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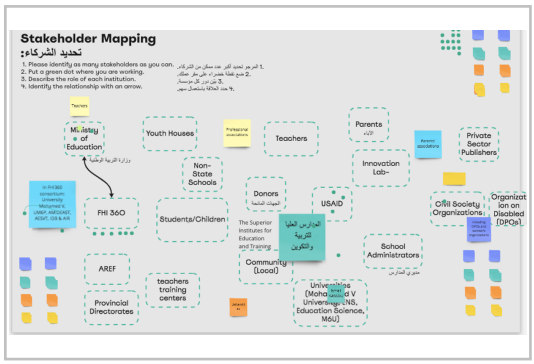

Virtual Co-creation sessions, such as systems mapping, between program stakeholders set the stage for a CLA-centric design and implementation

Summary:

USAID/Morocco embraced CLA approaches early in a flagship education design, to create multi-stakeholder buy-in to the foundational learning and adaptive management principles for the next five years of programming. The new program is an evolution of historical and successful education activities in Morocco, with a significant and momentous shift in focus from exclusively primary education towards lower secondary grades.

The mission, in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MOE), launched a co-creation workshop to bring critical stakeholders together to collectively design solutions and agree on a detailed vision and work plan for the Bridge to Middle School Project that will be launched in 2022. In previous activities, there were many challenges with the disconnect between Ministry officials and USAID’s partner regarding priorities and scalability. Fostering external collaboration during the design phase, and adapting to discussions and debates, have allowed the apparent successful applicant to learn, and adapt as needed.

The main outcomes of the co-creation workshop were: fostering a deeper understanding from all stakeholders about resources and needs and agreeing on priorities and evidence-based scalability approach of activities beyond the project lifetime. USAID, the MOE and the apparently successful applicant (ASA) agreed on the revised project description that will cover the Bridge to Middle School Activity (Bridge) scope, to maximize use of resources and ensure timely coordination with all partners.

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?

USAID/Morocco launched a co-creation workshop to bring critical stakeholders together to collectively design solutions and agree on an action plan to most effectively deliver programmatic outcomes for the Bridge to Middle School Activity. The co-creation process also aimed to foster strategic and programmatic cohesion among USAID, its partners, and key institutional stakeholders representing the GOM. The series of co-creation workshops addressed USAID's vision to deliver a cohesive program with buy-in from all stakeholders prior to the final procurement of the program.

USAID Morocco incorporated design thinking and a step-by-step approach through the decision-making components behind a successful co-creation activity. USAID/Morocco deployed a skilled facilitation team to support the co-creation with the MOE and other stakeholders, which helped partners set priorities, identify issues to tackle, specific activities to undertake, and design work plans with clear responsibilities and timelines.

This new design represents a continuation of USAID's support to the GOM's next steps in its ongoing education reforms, with particular attention to inclusion and equity, gender dynamics, the realities of education in a post-COVID environment, and the growing need for appropriate education sector responses to the challenges of climate change.

Through Bridge to Middle School Activity, USAID will partner with the MOE to improve learning outcomes in Arabic and STEM subjects (grades 4-9) as well as in English (grades 7-9). In doing so, Bridge will better prepare the education system for a scale-up of high-quality instruction in key subject areas in both the upper primary and lower secondary grades.

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

here is a long history of USAID supporting education reforms in Morocco. The portfolio is a whole-of-system intervention where testing and piloting of approaches leads to evidence-based scaling by the GOM throughout the entire system. Building consensus on critical learning modalities and adaptive management practices is vital. Getting out in front on this requires CLA to be built into the program before it even exists. Thus, the stakes are high for getting program design right and the Mission embraced CLA to deliver on building this strong foundation.

USAID's policy framework to co-create and work closely with local governments towards the journey to sustainable programming was a main driving factor to integrate the CLA framework, in addition to factors such as, improving the final outcomes of the project and adopting a systemic approach for development.

USAID/Morocco integrated a CLA approach from the beginning of the conceptualization of the Bridge to Middle School activity. USAID held intensive consultations with the Ministry on the gaps that the project can fill and carefully studied existing relevant research and analysis. Following this early design stage, USAID built the co-creation workshops around the identified themes that encourage Learning and Adaptation while collaborating with all partners. USAID included MOE officials in the initial stages of planning and scope development for the activity. The co-creation workshops included the Apparently Successful Applicant potentially responsible for the project implementation. USAID/Morocco Education Team, ensured close coordination with the Assistance and Acquisition Office so that the co-creation and the outcomes of these workshops are factored into the procurement cycle.

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.

To ensure continuous alignment of USAID's work in the field with Ministry priorities, the Mission engaged in an intensive consultation on the GOM's "Education Vision 2030." This process led to clearly identified priorities, learning needs, and evidence behind the proposed interventions to fulfill this vision. USAID/Morocco used all tools at its disposal to solicit ideas, input and potential blind spots in program design. Aside from extensive consultations with donors, technical experts and a wide range of GOM counterparts, the phased procurement process included a Notice of Intent announcement, a Request for Information (RFI) and other tools that allowed USAID to adapt its programmatic scope based on the inputs the team received. The Mission finalized the new scope of work and announced a Notice for Funding Opportunity asking potential partners to submit concept notes which led to the identification of the ASA that would participate in the co-creation process.

The co-creation workshops took place during six, half-day virtual sessions over two weeks and gathered approximately 30 participants in each session representing different offices of USAID, the MOE, the Apparently Successful Applicant, and its proposed consortium members. Day 0, or Orientation Day, served as an introductory session and a catalyst for the co-creation process. Both USAID and the Ministry presented their work and their vision for the Bridge to Middle School activity to frame the upcoming discussions and work. Days 1-3 focused on a discussion about the Theory of Change, integrating cross-cutting themes (gender, climate change, new technologies, and private sector engagement), and implementation challenges. Days 4-6 centered on scale-up, adequate integration of evidence, research and learning, and concrete action towards implementation.

The ASA presented its concept, suggested approaches, timelines, and program milestones to the MOE and received immediate feedback from Ministry officials. Mixed breakout groups with participation from all parties allowed for in-depth discussions into the theory of change and other key elements of the program. Subsequent plenary sessions strengthened a sense of collaboration and the opportunity to share open and candid feedback and insights. The MOE had opportunities to openly and freely offer strategic guidance to USAID and the ASA. USAID/Morocco would use these inputs to ensure that these priorities are appropriately included in the final Program Description.

To ensure inclusivity and candor in the workshops, USAID employed a full Arabic translation and interpretation team. While the workshop was facilitated in English, simultaneous interpretation into Arabic was vital to allow active participation from Ministry officials. A separate team member who worked closely with the facilitation team, spoke both Arabic and English in plenary to quickly translate anything in the plenary chatbox as well as translate any inputs where participants spoke English and Arabic. All written materials were translated in Arabic, so slides, agendas, and other pertinent information were translated and shared before workshop sessions in both languages. The co-creation workshops used a variety of techniques such as small group discussions and Miro collaborative tools where bilingual participants took notes in one or both languages. The small groups always included high-level officials from the Ministry to provide sufficient guidance and feedback during the co-creation.

In order to optimize international funding in the education field, USAID/Morocco invited another key donor to participate, which is currently collaborating with the Ministry on the educational reform of mathematics. This session allowed the ASA to see where both projects could cooperate and specify areas of collaboration. USAID/Morocco also included a session where representatives from the private sector shared their ongoing cooperation with the MOE as a private sector company and opened up a discussion and possible areas for cooperation with the Bridge.

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 co-creation workshops concluded on March 2, 2022. Over the next few months, the ASA will present its final submission for the program description, detailed activities, and timeline. Following the workshops, partners and participants expressed an appreciation for the participatory approach, sense of buy-in, and meaningful discussion which helped build their understanding and vision of the upcoming project. USAID, the MOE, and the ASA discussed both the Theory of Change and MERL at length, along with suggested timelines and milestones, thus allowing for a common understanding of the Bridge to Middle School activity goals and impact.

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 followed through the co-creation process brought together the critical institutional and implementation stakeholders, which allowed for fruitful and honest conversations. These exchanges will certainly lead not only to a stronger application on behalf of the applicant but also to build a stronger partnership and communication among the key stakeholders throughout the implementation process.
The following objectives were achieved as indicated below:
Objective1: To co-create a detailed action plan, a revised Theory of Change, and a Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Plan (MERL). All the cited documents were created and/or reviewed and revised as necessary with input from all stakeholders.
Objective 2: To foster a reform environment, with adequate buy-in from USAID, prospective implementation partners, and Government of Morocco stakeholders, namely the Ministry. All partners were active in the discussions and there was a strong consensus on the importance of bringing positive change to the lives of all students in Moroccan schools. All stakeholders understood the ambitious scope of the program and what will be required to reach the program objectives.
Objective 3: To clarify any further detail for the next stage of the process to finalize the program's procurement. All participants were clear that the ideas expressed throughout the workshop will be incorporated into a final application submitted by the applicant to USAID for review before a final award is granted.
Objective 4: To effectively integrate key USAID priorities of gender equity and inclusion; to adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 situation; to embed the innovative use of technology for improved learning outcomes; climate change related-innovation; and private sector partnership. Private Sector engagement was discussed on a more limited basis but these discussions opened up many possibilities for future planning.

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?

USAID/Morocco is 'all in' on phased procurements that allow for robust co-creation. The Mission's government counterparts know now that CLA methodologies and principles are prioritized throughout the portfolio.

Human resources and available funding were the main influences on the co-creation process, which enabled the team to fully implement CLA approaches. USAID/Morocco's Education Team valued and secured resources to implement the co-creation workshop, including hiring qualified facilitators for all the sessions, providing translators (Arabic and English), and also hiring a private consultant to coordinate the whole process.

Additionally, the Mission engaged experts from USAID Washington who guided technical discussions and offered a deep understanding of areas like MERL, gender integration, climate action integration, and private sector engagement.

USAID's acquisition processes that allowed for co-creation to take place were definitely an enabling factor as well. Procurement processes that allowed for open and direct conversation with the Apparent Successful Applicant, and with ministry officials enriched the discussions and ensured strong coordination towards a shared vision and activities.