



Learning in USAID Mission Strategies and Projects to date (June 3, 2013)

The following countries have an approved CDCS (public version) and a CLA-related section in their CDCS:

- **Guatemala**
- **Uganda**
- **Liberia**
- **Zimbabwe**
- **Ethiopia**
- **Philippines**
- **Ghana**

Missions which are working to integrate learning into their Strategies, but without an approved CDCS at this time, include Rwanda, Mozambique, Kenya and East Africa, among others.

Guatemala (CDCS)

Appendix 3: Collaborating, Learning and Adapting

Development efforts yield more positive change more quickly if they are coordinated and collaborative, test promising new approaches in a continuous search for improvement and build on what works and eliminate what does not.

Creating the conditions for development success leads us to focus on the importance of three concepts: Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA). These concepts, and the Point of Contact (POC) who spearheads these efforts,⁶⁵ will ensure that the CDCS is not a static document. Instead, this strategy will provide guidance and reference points not only for strategy implementation but also for learning and course correction as needed.

The implementation of CLA:

Enhances collaboration among USG agencies, implementing partners, and with other donors and Government of Guatemala counterparts. Coordination can be aided by basic information management, as well as through facilitation of more collaborative relationships among actors engaged in high-priority activities.

Strengthens the evidence basis on which decisions about development assistance are made and ensures that experience and observations inform program decisions.

Facilitates necessary changes to the Mission's activities due to both changing conditions and/or new information about program effectiveness.



Implementing the concepts behind CLA will engage most staff and partners in some capacity, as learning and planning are widely shared responsibilities. Efforts will be led by the Mission Evaluation Point of Contact with significant input from M&E specialists in technical offices, the Mission coordinators on gender and youth, and subject matter experts in each technical area, including Contracting Officer's Technical Representatives/Agreement Officer's Technical Representatives (COTRs/AOTRs). Stakeholder engagement within the CLA framework will focus on complementary and coordinated interventions, information sharing and other forms of collaboration among stakeholders, and continuing feedback from partners on project implementation.

Collaborating – the POC leads the following activities:

Map the activities of USG and of stakeholders by ensuring that implementing partners submit Global Positioning System coordinates on their activities. This information will be tracked and shared so that programs will eventually use Geographic Information Systems technology to overlay key data sets on agriculture, health, etc. Identify opportunities for further collaboration based on mutual interest among donors, joint efforts among implementing partners and strategic learning opportunities among thought leaders in Guatemala. These include, but are not limited to, the activities of the donor coordination Grupo de Coordinación de la Cooperación and other ongoing donor coordination technical working groups.

Identify areas of collaboration among entities whose philosophical and practical differences keep them from realizing large benefits that could be gained through joint efforts. These partners could be any combination of political entities, private businesses or public organizations.

Learning – the POC leads the following activities:

Identify critical knowledge gaps and fill them with existing resources or commission new research/syntheses where necessary. Topics could include the climate change impacts on key crops and implications for agriculture-led economic growth projects; and unanticipated consequences of value chain projects on children's nutrition status and the role of women in household decision making.

Test selected development hypotheses, such as one of the ideas underpinning Feed the Future—that concentrating the activities of DO 2 in targeted geographic areas will yield improved development results. Improve the performance management process from data collection and analysis to the use of monitoring and evaluation findings to improve implementation. Facilitate dialogue at the Mission to improve the quality and substance of discourse on development theories of change. These discussions should serve to validate the direction of USAID development assistance or elicit suggestions for changes to that direction. For example, when evaluations on USAID projects or programs become available, these discussions should compare expectations for USAID development projects against observed outcomes. These forums should discuss



progress and setbacks along the way to achieving development goals and identify areas for a change in course.

Work with the Mission’s points of contact for Global Development Alliances, donor partnerships, and other initiatives to identify opportunities to pilot test innovative approaches to programming. This includes leveraged funding for new or ongoing projects and working with technical officers to spearhead proofs of concept for other projects that can be scaled up if proven successful.

Adapting – the POC leads the following activities:

Work with COTRs/AOTRs to engage implementing partners and other stakeholders in periodic, candid —big picture reflection on USG programs to validate strategy and implementation. Ideally these engagements should be held before any annual plans are finalized and should focus on analyzing unanticipated developments and articulating necessary course corrections.

Create and institutionalize a culture among USAID project managers, implementers and stakeholders that is conducive to learning. Key to this idea is that incentives for implementing partners are aligned with learning objectives and that people are rewarded for addressing difficult issues that may not yield immediate results.

Uganda (CDCS)

Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation: We lay out specific testable development hypotheses and evaluation questions in this CDCS. Our Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) methodology will use data from strengthened M&E processes to enlist USAID staff, partners and other stakeholders in collaborating and learning to continuously evaluate and adapt their programs in order to improve progress toward the outcome (see Annex 2 for details on CLA).

Overview and Rationale for M&E Approach

Traditionally, M&E, is a tool for tracking results and progress towards program and project objectives. It encompasses the systems, staff, and indicators by which performance will be measured and changes in implementation context will be recognized. M&E activities work primarily, but not solely, to improve project and program management and ensure accountability. Yet, without a dynamic dimension to M&E that allows for learning, adaptation and innovation, little value is added from simply tracking indicators, which alone will not lead us to achieve our objectives. As such, the Mission has committed to a CLA model in this strategy that we believe creates the conditions for development success. This model will ensure that the CDCS works as a living strategy, providing guidance and reference points not only for implementation but also for learning and course correction as needed.



As described below, the guiding principle of CLA is the continuous assessment and adjustment of DO-defined causal pathways. The ultimate goal is increasingly effective courses of action at all levels of the Results Framework. M&E provides this process with key information.

CLA adds innovative learning approaches and continuous consultations with stakeholders to the information provided by M&E to position the Mission to be proactive and able to learn from missteps prior to a project's end. M&E is a subset of the larger concept of CLA. M&E findings are key inputs to learning activities, serve as sentinels to changes in context which stakeholders may need to address, and allow systematic testing of key hypotheses and questions.

It will be important to forge a productive relationship between M&E and CLA activities without reducing the latter to merely a function of the former. It is also important to avoid inhibiting candid knowledge sharing, by adopting an accountability approach where the more conducive approach to learning emphasizes analysis and problem solving.

Dynamic M&E contributes to the CLA function in the following ways:

Coordinating and Collaborating

Use GIS and other technology to map activities aligned with USG development objectives, establishing a central repository of relevant information and overlaying key data sets on agriculture, health, etc.

Learning

Identify gaps in quality and availability of data needed to improve implementation, assess impact, and inform program and strategic adjustments
Serve as a vital component of program-level evaluations and strategically targeted impact evaluations
Provide knowledge centers within the Mission, among partners and alongside donors to improve the sharing of key data that informs implementation and partnerships

Adapting

Serve as the evidence base for supporting testable hypotheses throughout the CDCS Results Framework – an individual hypothesis must have clearly defined baseline and target data to support assumptions, risks and conclusions drawn which inform evolving programs.

Uganda is a focus country of several priority programs and initiatives, notably the Global Health Initiative and the Feed the Future Initiative. Our M&E systems and objectives will align with the increasingly evidence-based and adaptation focus. For example, the Mission's FTF strategy builds its M&E plan around increasing methodological rigor to increase accountability and testing concrete hypotheses. We will do this through a four-pronged approach: improved data quality, increased use of baselines, focused and



sensible targeting, and use of impact evaluations to build a validated evidence base. Increased use of baselines, testing and impact assessments will allow us to account for our contribution towards improved outcomes. Where we have evidence of our contribution and whether or not development hypotheses were correct, the Mission's CLA function will provide a means to make adjustments during implementation of individual programs and components of the CDCS (see also Annexes 2 on CLA, and 4 on Procurement).

Liberia (CDCS)

Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Plan Project and Program M&E

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is the cornerstone of an effective CLA process. The impacts of development assistance can diverge dramatically from intentions, depending on the quality of project analysis and design, the effectiveness of project implementation, the incentives, interest and commitment of local partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries, and a range of other factors that are often outside the control of the assistance provider.

To maximize aid effectiveness, it is critical to continually monitor the implementation and outcomes of assistance activities at and below the DO level, and to track progress toward the intended long-term development impacts at the DO level and above. The Mission is committed to continually building its performance management capabilities and improving transparency and accountability through performance management and reporting.

USAID/Liberia is committed to a robust M&E agenda that will allow the Mission and its stakeholders not only to determine whether project work plans are being adhered to, which is integral to meeting the Agency's accountability requirements, but also to test whether the underlying development hypotheses, analysis and project design are proving valid and effective. Since external factors may heavily influence project success or failure, this agenda will track major program impacts at the level of Development Objective and Intermediate Results, as well as the internal performance of individual activities expected to contribute to those objectives and results.

Tracking results of cross-cutting activities involving multiple DOs, such as those relating to sustainable human and institutional capacity development (HICD), gender and youth, will be an important dimension of the Mission's M&E agenda. Given the critical importance of capacity building for the Government of Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy and for this CDCS, the Mission is committed to strengthening its internal capacity – and the capacity of our Liberian partners -- to identify key learning priorities, collect appropriate baseline data, and effectively monitor and evaluate the results of the Mission's programs. As part of the first portfolio review, the CLA team will consider



ways governance and HICD efforts can be most effectively integrated between the four DOs. Among other considerations, the Mission will identify possible analytic and research questions which need to be tracked over time to ensure that HICD issues Mission-wide are tracked, and if feasible programs adapted and modified across the DOs to support the HICD and governance objectives needed to help in moving forward the CDCS Goal.

In this context, impact evaluations anticipated under this CDCS will include:

- Capacity building for public sector economic governance
- Feed the Future
- Access to energy
- Farm to market roads
- Global Health Initiative
- Primary education

More detail on these plans will be included in the Mission's PPR.

Pursuant to USAID Evaluation Policy (2011) and USAID Evaluation Guidance (2009), the Mission will identify and undertake evaluations of large projects and those project activities that involve untested hypotheses or new approaches that the Mission anticipates scaling up (i.e., pilot or proof of concept projects). In order to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, impact (rigorous study of direct attribution or plausible attribution), sustainability, and/or relevance of project or program activities and results, and to ensure the integrity and objectivity of evaluations, external (independent) evaluations as well as rigorous collaborative, participatory, or internal evaluations and evaluability assessments will be undertaken, as appropriate to the key learning objectives identified.

At least 60 percent of the Mission's anticipated program budget will be covered by these evaluations. The Mission will engage qualified, independent organizations to conduct external evaluations and lead collaborative evaluation teams, as appropriate. The Mission is committed to building the capacity of Liberian partners to support this effort.

Zimbabwe (CDCS)

Collaboration, Learning and Adaptation

The Mission plans to roll out its collaboration, learning and adaptation (CLA) approach concurrently with its CDCS. While the coining of this approach is new, many of the practices are familiar to and within USAID programming. USAID/Zimbabwe has responded to restrictions on GOZ engagement with a highly synthesized and collaborative interaction with donors and partners. This approach has resulted in



opportunities for information and resource sharing and leveraging. There are other opportunities for capitalizing on the existing strategies used, to disseminate best practices for each sector/DO approach, to enhance the strategic use of influence as well as support for collaboration among implementing partners, and to refine and extend an adaptive management approach that will enable the program to meet its goal and objectives while at the same time adapting and remaining relevant to evolving conditions.

Adaptive management

DO 1 is currently testing a new approach to transitional development assistance and creating a hybrid traditional and rapid response mechanism, which maximizes flexibility to both enhance work that is producing results and eliminate activities that are not having their intended impact. This allows the Mission to take calculated programmatic risks without committing to inflexible long-term programs. The focus on learning is approached through ongoing research on key issues to identify what is not working, integrating MEL information from all partners, and the use of a rolling assessment model from the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA)'s Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI).

As this approach is refined, and more is learned about employing adaptive management to DO 1's program, options for implementing this approach it across other parts of the Mission program will be explored, as a means to ensure continued relevance of USAID assistance as new learning emerges and the local context evolves.

Game changer: Zimbabwe's political environment

Given the highly fluid political environment, its far-reaching influence over many aspects of the Mission's programs, and the uncertainty about how conditions will evolve over the coming 9-12 months, close monitoring of emergent trends, combined with rapid analysis of the implications for Mission programs, will be critical to the Mission's ability to identify triggers, respond to threats and ensure the program's relevance. As a complement to Annex 2's scenario analysis, processes will be put in place to track evidence of substantive changes in the environment and facilitate Mission staff and partners in analyzing such changes and making appropriate course corrections in strategy or implementation.

Research and collaborative learning

The Food for Peace (FFP) solicitation under DO 2 will also contain a research component, and requests a design for an annual learning summit that brings together numerous partners working in food security to share evidence-based lessons learned. And the Mission will assess prospects for building a learning network methodology into any small grants work it does in the future.

Mission Processes

Portfolio Reviews, Partner Meetings and the Mission’s new mentoring program all offer opportunities to build on existing processes to enhance coordination and collaboration, learning and adapting. Portfolio Reviews will be reconsidered for ways that they can be structured around higher-level questions of the soundness of the program’s evidence base and development hypotheses as supported or otherwise by monitoring data and other information.

Options will be explored for using partner meetings to enable partners to share technical, contextual and experiential knowledge with each other. The mentoring program will build from existing peer support practices, will include coaching around collaborating and continuous learning, will leverage site visits and Mission exchanges, and will be considered as a means for providing FSN-led orientation to incoming American staff.

Science & Technology Innovations

Several new technology-based approaches - including GIS mapping, innovative technology use in elections work, and a more efficient method for testing for tuberculosis and drug resistance – represent learning opportunities for the Mission and its partners. Experiences with implementing these innovations will be captured and shared widely, and analyzed for potential for scaling.

Other Tools

Approaches employed and found useful by other Missions will be assessed for their useful application in the USAID/Zimbabwe program. These include mapping relationships with other development actors as a way to plan for collaborating with them and/or strategically influencing them; After-Action Reviews to quickly identify lessons that can feed into subsequent efforts; the use of advisory groups to ground-test Mission initiatives; and so on. USAID/Zimbabwe will capture key learning from these and other efforts for sharing them broadly via the ProgramNet and Learning Lab websites.

Ethiopia (CDCS)

(p 5, CDCS) Knowledge and learning have also contributed to the evidence base, which have also influenced policy and improved program impact, in particular in the pastoralist programs where this has been tested. In line with the new USAID Monitoring and Evaluation policy, impact assessments will be extended across the portfolio, focused on “a learning agenda,” testing a development hypothesis or new approach. Larger projects will be independently evaluated to ensure rigor and learning.

Philippines (CDCS)

Knowledge and learning have also contributed to the evidence base, which have also influenced policy and improved program impact, in particular in the pastoralist programs where this has been tested. In line with the new USAID Monitoring and Evaluation policy, impact assessments will be extended across the portfolio, focused on “a learning agenda,” testing a development hypothesis or new approach. Larger projects will be independently evaluated to ensure rigor and learning.

Ghana (CDCS)

LEARNING

USAID/Ghana is a leader in the implementation of USAID Forward principles; in this CDCS, USAID/Ghana will realize its greatest contribution: strengthening local capacity by carefully increasing the proportion of assistance that is delivered through host country systems. This approach will boost Ghana’s capacity to take charge of its development, as signaled by the GoG’s stated goal of reaching established middle-income status.

Through the implementation of performance management plans (PMPs) that include indicators aligned with GoG and other DPs’ metrics and through USAID support to national M&E systems, USAID/Ghana will coordinate and collaborate with sector ministries, agencies of government, and departments, including development partners to test new models and approaches, build on successful interventions, and address any existing gaps.

The underlying critical assumptions and causal linkages between the IRs, DOs, and the Ghana CDCS goal will be assessed periodically to guide implementation, adapt to changes, and scale-up successful interventions based on evidence. USAID/Ghana will ensure that this approach enhances continuous learning by staff and partners to positively influence strategy implementation. USAID/Ghana plans to build an internal knowledge management database for reference and decision-making. USAID/Ghana will continue to collaborate, create synergies, and work to strengthen Ghana’s M&E systems by providing support and aligning with them when developing our own PMPs.