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CASE COMPETITION

Collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) have long been a part of USAID's work. USAID staff and implementing partners have always sought ways to better understand the development process and USAID's contribution to it, to collaborate in order to speed and deepen results, to share the successes and lessons of USAID's initiatives, and to institute improvements to programs and operations. Through this case competition, USAID and its LEARN mechanism seek to capture and share the stories of those efforts. To learn more about the CLA Case Competition, visit the USAID Learning Lab at usaidlearninglab.org/cla-case-competition.

Developing Country-Specific Gender Monitoring Indicators for Men and Women

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What is the general context in which the story takes place?

Gender inequality is a barrier to agricultural productivity and food security in smallholder agriculture systems. CARE's work in the agriculture sector aims to challenge social norms, starting with staff self-reflection and facilitating gender dialogues in the communities. Although we know that changes in social norms regarding women's participation in agriculture and access to resources are critical to the success of any food and nutrition security project, it is difficult to measure these changes using existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools. Quantitative approaches do not often capture the "whys and hows" of complex social change. Standard indicators such as "jointly controlling household decisions" mask nuanced power dynamics and degrees of involvement — from consultative or token participation to meaningful say and veto power. Qualitative data are crucial for understanding changes in relationships at the household level, but they are often dismissed as being merely anecdotal and failing to provide a clear picture of the extent of change.

To strengthen implementers' understanding of gender change and how to monitor it more rigorously, CARE's Pathways Program requested support from the Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program, a learning initiative funded by USAID/Food for Peace, to co-create a context-specific gender-monitoring approach that would provide visible, meaningful indicators of positive (and negative) change in gender relations. The TOPS Program aims to bring the highest-quality information, knowledge, and promising practices in food assistance programming to implementers and donors around the world to ensure more communities and households benefit from the U.S. government's investments to fight global hunger.

The TOPS microgrant was used to supplement monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities within CARE's Pathways Program, a six-country agriculture program that builds on the vital roles women around the world play in smallholder agriculture, meeting the food needs of their households and contributing to development and growth.

What was the main challenge/opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity?

The challenge that we sought to address was to take forward the rich findings from the qualitative midterm review, so that this midterm evaluation would not be a one-off exercise, but would rather feed into the development of

usable, user-friendly monitoring tools that could help program staff be alert to and promote some of the smaller, incremental behavior changes (called "progress markers" in Outcome Mapping methodology) that indicate men's and women's progress toward greater gender equality.

The use of Outcome Mapping concepts was valuable in that it translated abstract concepts of empowerment and men's engagement into visible, tangible, everyday behaviors (progress markers) that could be observed and monitored over time. During the qualitative midterm review of Pathways, each country team identified dozens of unique behavior changes (progress markers) they had seen happening in the communities. Some of these were aligned to our baseline/endline indicators (such as "women taking up leadership positions in community"), but many were not (for example, "men and women walking about together in public" or "men talking more, shouting less"). This provided a rich information for program implementers to identify where they had made progress — and where they could continue to promote change. One valuable outcome of the exercise was the teams' recognition that social transformation was possible, even within the short time frame of a project cycle.

During the qualitative midterm review, the Pathways teams also identified the frequency of the progress markers observed, and used this information to develop a progressive map of behavior changes, ranging from frequent, easy-to-see changes ("expect to see") to more challenging behaviors ("like to see") being observed among some role models or early adopters, to the most progressive or transformative ("love to see") changes. One of the most commonly observed ("expect to see") changes among men was "men fetching wood and water," while at the other end of the scale, there were a few observations of men registering women's names on their land titles (a "love to see" change).

TOPS funding was used to convene participants from five Pathways countries (India, Malawi, Tanzania, Mali, and Ghana) for a collective learning process with concrete, usable M&E outputs. During the workshop, participants discussed their qualitative midterm review findings (which focused on gender) and collectively developed a set of monitoring indicators based on their country-specific data but using a common framework for the Pathways Program.

This process was inspired by Outcome Mapping, a methodology that recognizes that complex social change is the result of the incremental actions of individual actors. In documenting our collective learning process, we hope that other organizations and development partners may find the processes or tools applicable to their work, and that we may collectively contribute to more gender-equitable smallholder systems at scale.

This data from the different countries was the starting point for a collective learning process that engaged all five countries in a sense-making exercise, the Gender Indicator Design Workshop.

Describe the CLA approach or activity employed.

The program, implemented with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, targets 52,000 poor female smallholder farmers and others in their households and communities. The design of Pathways drew on CARE's Women's Empowerment in Agriculture framework, developed to guide planning, implementation, and evaluation of agriculture programs. This framework builds on CARE's long history of work on women's empowerment and sustainable livelihoods, which shows that in order to have a sustainable impact, CARE must work across three dimensions of empowerment: Agency, Structure, and Relations.

The purpose of Gender-Indicator Design Workshop was to use the data and experiences from the qualitative midterm review to develop a common framework of semi-standardized behavior change indicators that the different Pathways teams can use to continue to measure, monitor and encourage changes in gender relations among key actors in the Pathways program.

Team members from five Pathways countries and invited gender specialists took part in the March 2015 workshop in Lilongwe, Malawi. Each team arrived with the progress marker lists they had generated from the midterm review process. Over three days, participants worked on refining and reorganizing this data to develop appropriate behavior-change indicators around gender and social norms, which are structured and standardized

around similar themes but at the same time tailor-made and context-specific for men and women in their countries (Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Tanzania and India). The process for developing these indicator sets is described below.

- **Step 1: Defining the categories to structure the behavior changes**
Participants clustered their initial progress markers according to five categories, reflecting the main types of changes observed in the midterm review and aligned to the domains in the Women's Empowerment Index of the Pathways baseline tool. Using the initial five categories was key to ensuring a semi-standardized approach and a more focused design for behavior change indicators across the different Pathways countries.

- **Step 2: Sorting the existing progress markers into the five categories (per country)**
The five categories (for men and for women) were workload-sharing; household decision-making; control over productive assets and income; self-confidence, autonomy, and leadership; and respect and intimacy in the relationship. At this stage, participants sorted their initial progress lists into the different categories, eliminating those that did not fit. By categorizing, participants reviewed together the meaning of each progress markers and began to provide contextual content to each type of behavior change for women and men.

- **Step 3: Peer review of the progress markers for all categories**
Reviewing the progress markers of each country group, participants discussed the nature of the progress markers and provided critical feedback on the positioning of the progress markers in the categories.

- **Step 4: In-depth review of progress markers for each category across countries**
In mixed groups, participants reviewed each country's progress markers and discussed similarities and differences among the different countries. Participants also collectively decided on progress markers that did not fit into each category. By doing so, participants enhanced their collective understanding of the category and its different meanings for women and men.

- **Step 5: Formulating a graduated set of behavior changes for each category (per country)**
Returning to their country groups, participants fine-tuned their progress marker sets for each category for women and men. As a final exercise, participants re-shuffled the progress markers within each category, ordering the whole set from easiest to achieve ("expect to see") to most transformative progress markers ("love to see). Finally, the whole team reviewed potential templates and monitoring processes and collectively agreed on a monitoring time frame, format, and reporting process that would be most convenient and effective for the entire team.

Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources or enabling factors)?

Working across a multi-country program, there are few opportunities to support in-person exchanges of ideas and learning. Engaging program implementers in reflection and sense-making processes such as this design workshop require an investment of time and human resources, and the space, time, and financial resources to bring the right people together. Making meaningful use of the gender/behavior change indicators (or progress markers in general) entails an initial investment in refining the conceptual monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework. It also requires ongoing investment in M&E capacities and qualitative skills, and ongoing attention to the organizational conditions that facilitate a learning-oriented M&E process. Some of these essential conditions are as follows:

- Providing space and time for reflection to create a culture of learning among staff, partners, and communities

- Setting up the right incentives for actors to view monitoring as opportunities to discuss, critically reflect, and learn in order to improve the program (not as performance reviews)

- Building human capacity (analytical and facilitation skills) to foster social learning and facilitate face-to-face events for collective sense-making

- Embedding all M&E processes (including the gender indicator monitoring) into the organizational spaces and rhythms of the program

- Building relationships of trust between staff, partners, and communities, which guides and determines who people talk to and share experiences with, and whether people challenge one another in an honest discussion

What have been the outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?

The process has been taken up by other programs, including two USAID-funded initiatives, the ENSURE Project in Zimbabwe, and the GRAD program in Ethiopia. CARE has shared the process widely within the organization and with external audiences, including the Outcome Mapping Learning Community. Some benefits of this approach that have been identified so far include:

- **Better reporting on impact:** Participants saw it as "a possible solution for under-reporting — there is much more happening then we read in the reports." The progress markers provide a tool to report on earlier progress toward changing social norm that field staff see happening.

- **Complementing the quantitative data:** The use of progress markers translates sometimes-abstract indicators into real-life, observable, and contextually meaningful changes, making it easier for program staff to recognize risks and encourage progress in their ongoing work. As one workshop participant noted, "We have the opportunity to use this methodology to go beyond the numbers. The programmatic questions that we have are usually related to qualitative questions, not numbers."

- **Improving gender strategies and programming:** Many thought the participatory reflection on the progress markers could help community members, partners, and country office teams better understand gender. "Understanding gender as a behavior is a very powerful part of this process," noted one participant. This understanding could help CARE and the communities with which it works to continually improve strategies toward gender equality.

  One workshop participant had this to say: "We're all aware social norm change is complex. We have to be complex also in our systems of monitoring change. This is a beautiful model to understand the pathways where we're shifting, where we're not. It's especially helpful for the staff/implementers – the process of reflection, the sense of achievement and motivation, understanding why. I will take it back to my partners and organizations."

What were the most important lessons learned?

Outcome Mapping places a lot of emphasis on the process of collective sense-making — reflection and analysis on the progress toward desired behavior changes among women and men in the communities and implementing staff. Outcome Mapping invites programs to do more than simply making a checklist of the effects of a program (the behavior changes), but to stimulate learning within the program, which can in turn stimulate further progress in behavior change. Outcome Mapping, therefore, relies heavily on facilitated self- or group assessment as a data generation and learning process. Similar to the Participatory Performance Tracker or Participatory Rapid Appraisal exercises, the idea is that if the right people are brought together and guided through a process of critical reflection, debate, validation, and negotiation, then the group will be able to collectively agree on (and provide evidence of) the progress that has been made toward the behavior changes.

Depending on the resources that are available, the self-assessment approach can be complemented (for triangulation of data) with additional data-generation methods such as field observations, focus group discussions, interviews, surveys, most-significant change, participatory video monitoring, or SenseMaker. For ongoing monitoring, data is best gathered by the program teams and partners who can apply the findings to

implementation. However, at given times (i.e., for midterm or endline evaluations), external evaluators may also be useful and relevant.

An important element that lifts the discussion to a higher level is connecting the monitoring with the next planning or implementation phase of the program. Based on the insights gathered, program implementers can discuss the intervention and identify actions that need to be taken to make adjustments or improvements to the program.

Any other critical information you'd like to share?

The use of Outcome Mapping concepts, with their focus on outcomes as changes in individual behavior, is particularly appropriate for gender work, as there is often a disconnect between attitudes (what people say) and practices (what people do in the home). Breaking abstract concepts of power relations into meaningful, everyday actions — defined by the communities themselves — creates a tool for making the daunting idea of social transformation seem more attainable. When communities work together with project teams to describe a shared vision for gender equality and how it would look for both men and women, in terms of individual behaviors, they create a tool for celebrating the smaller achievements along the way, while keeping their sights set on aspirational, transformative goals.