

This Case Story was submitted to the 2016 CLA Case Competition. The competition was open to individuals and organizations affiliated with USAID and gave participants an opportunity to promote their work and contribute to good practice that advances our understanding of collaborating, learning, and adapting in action.

Gender and Development Dialogues: A CLA Approach for Gender Integration among USAID Implementing Partners in Cambodia

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Participant speaks at Gender and Development Dialogue event. USAID/Ty Chan.

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

USAID/Cambodia is working with its partners to protect natural resources, improve health and nutrition, promote democracy and good governance, and help children improve their reading skills. This CLA case competition submission is a Mission-led initiative being implemented by USAID/Cambodia's Gender Working Group (GWG).

The GWG identified that USAID implementing partners and USAID staff lack continuous collaborating, learning, and adapting in our programing, addressing gender issues, and sharing best practices and lessons learned during the implementation stage. To help promote CLA, the GWG proposed to Mission leadership establishing a forum where implementing partners gather regularly with USAID staff to present, dialogue, test development hypotheses, and exchange their gender approaches in their respective fields. The initiative of the forum was later endorsed as the Gender

and Development Dialogue (GDD), a platform in which CLA is used to showcase how USAID works to increase its impact in gender equality and female empowerment.

The GDD takes place once a quarter and lasts approximately 1.5 hours. All U.S. Government agencies and implementing partners are invited. Each session has a theme, and an implementing partner is invited to make a short presentation/discussion. Members of the GWG mentor and guide the discussion, which is followed by a Q&A session led by a member of the GWG. Documentation of the findings/lessons learned are shared with the participants and USAID staff. Follow-up actions are then fed back into USAID's partners' implementation plans and USAID project/activity design cycles.

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

USAID's implementing partners vary in size and scope, ranging from an annual budget of \$50,000 to \$1 million. Most share limited best practices and lessons learned with each other and with U.S. Government agencies. Yet, all of them want a platform to showcase their work and learn from others in order to meet the growing priorities of their intended beneficiaries and donors (in this case, USAID). The USAID Program Cycle and its Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy encourage adaptive management and use evidence for project and activity designs. Therefore, USAID adopted a CLA approach to do better development and deepen the integration of gender in its priorities.

Lessons learned and findings from the USAID/Cambodia Gender Assessment 2010 and various GWG field reports/visits to implementing partners confirm that many USAID implementing partners do not have a good understanding of or the competencies to use and/or apply gender analysis in the implementation of development interventions. With their limited sharing of best practices and lessons learned, there was a need for USAID to develop a common platform that brings all partners and U.S. Government staff together to network and exchange ideas to improve CLA and their work performance from a gender perspective.

Describe the CLA approach or activity, explaining how the activity integrated collaborating, learning, adapting culture, processes, and/or resources as applicable.

The GDD uses CLA with the objective of increasing and improving the impact of gender equality and female empowerment efforts in USAID-funded development interventions. Its strategies and methodologies are based on the principles of promoting partners' success, lessons learned, and best practices that help our partners and USAID tell better stories to U.S Government staff, host-government counterparts, and other stakeholders.

We employed multiple collaborative methodologies before the start of the GDD, such as one-on-one mentoring with selected implementing partner(s), group discussions to shape guidance questions, and providing feedback to help presenters and other panelists incorporate best practices and lessons learned that would benefit the participants. This initial collaboration requires the



contracting/agreement officer representative (C/AOR), who is often responsible for overall project implementation.

By continuing to closely engage with the C/AORs, the GWG is able to support them in ensuring that future programming approaches will consider gender equality and female empowerment priorities and, in return, equip the GWG with new knowledge about the project activities. This two-way method is considered a “win-win” strategy where a knowledge gap is filled, shared, and considered for future adapting.

As the GDD has become more active the C/AOR and the GWG, other non-technical staff (e.g., from the office of financial management and administration) began participating and expressing themselves about the future commitment to learn and wanting to increase their overall understanding of USAID development programs. We believe this increased participation and subsequent demonstrated improved understanding of USAID programming correlates to the way the GDD executes its activities, as well as its engagement with the Mission staff and partners.

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

We have found that adapting is the most challenging aspect of the CLA approach. Being more adaptive will require a shift of perspective in the Mission; we hope to achieve this through the GDD. We hope that implementing partners will use this platform to enhance their projects and use the knowledge they gain from GDDs to improve the projects they submit to USAID.

The GDD is one the most efficient initiatives at the Mission, accounting for much less than 1 percent of the project design and learning budget line. (It is estimated to cost about \$1,000 per year). The GDD can be as successful as it is today only because everyone buys in, and because they see the benefits of learning from our partners and exchanging with USAID staff for continued partnership and collaboration.

With your initial challenge/opportunity in mind, what have been the most significant outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?

As a result of the GDD, implementing partners and USAID staff have a great space to talk about their programs and are challenged to question, test, and pilot them through a gender lens. The greatest impact of the GDD has been opening participants’ eyes to a broader understanding of the gender issues in Cambodia, to include the LGBTI population, and increased collaboration, networking, and sharing of best practices around implementing project activities with a gender perspective.

For the most recent GDD, we developed five key action points. Based on the issues discovered at previous GDDs, these points are being followed up on with the implementing partners. See below for more information on how we plan to evaluate GDDs in the future.



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If your project or activity is in the development phase or just recently underway (less than 1 year into implementation), how do you intend to track results and impact? What outcomes do you anticipate?

The first GDD event occurred about 1 year ago and required 3-6 months of preparation to get stakeholders on board. In the future, we plan to collect feedback on the sessions using online and paper surveys. We also plan to reflect on the follow-up plans of previous sessions to see which action steps have been taken, and have follow-up discussions with implementing partners.

We have already observed some of the ways in which the GDD has begun to change the way that individuals think about gender, expanding their perspective on gender issues from solely women's empowerment to include LGBTI rights. We expect that this broader definition of gender issues will have a long-term impact by contributing to a more accurate and inclusive gender lens in development projects. Though this is a less tangible, more long-term impact that may be difficult to measure, it will lead to better development outcomes for this population in Cambodia.

What were the most important lessons learned?

Throughout the GDD process, we have learned that it is important to engage with implementing partners' staff working on all levels of a project, and that engagement with C/AORs is especially important because they have the decision-making authority regarding how a project is planned and implemented. C/AORs also serve as a bridge to implementing partners, and can use their influence to drum up interest in the GDDs. Therefore, it is important to engage them early.

We also learned that it is often difficult for the development community in Cambodia to understand that gender relates to everything we do. The community often thinks of it in a siloed way. For example, they think we want to invite only their "gender people" to the GDDs, rather than seeing it as an opportunity for *everyone* to think about their work in terms of gender.

GDD sessions were originally planned to be presentations, but we quickly learned that participants wanted them to be more conversational, so we changed the format to be more like a facilitated discussion. We are trying to balance an informal feel with the responsibility of dealing with relevant and important information.

Any other critical information you'd like to share?

In the future, we may consider inviting other donors to participate in the GDDs.

The CLA Case Competition is managed by USAID LEARN, a Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) mechanism implemented by Dexis Consulting Group and its partner, Engility Corporation.

