



How Missions are Implementing Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA)

What is collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA)?

The central function of CLA is to ensure that progress toward development objectives is guided by continuous learning through analysis of a wide variety of information and knowledge, including M&E data, innovations, and collected observations from those with particularly deep or unique insight in a given area, and iterative adaptation of program implementation and, where relevant, strategy. The intent is to continuously assess the causal pathway to desired outcomes and adjust activities as necessary to yield the most effective course of action. CLA is a key component of the Program Cycle and involves:

- **Collaborating:** Working with others where it makes sense to avoid duplication of efforts and outdated practice, increasing synergy, and sharing knowledge about what works and what doesn't.
- **Learning:** Drawing on evidence and experience to develop strategies and design programs that are grounded in good practice and tailored to the local context.
- **Adapting:** Making iterative course corrections while we implement to maintain the relevance and accelerate the effectiveness of our assistance

Although CLA is not required by the ADS, it is recommended, and many Missions are incorporating CLA processes and practices into their work. Each Mission has its own particular needs, requiring varying approaches to meet those needs, and therefore, CLA looks somewhat different in each Mission.

This document describes how a few Missions are implementing CLA by describing the processes and activities completed or underway, new activities or processes that are planned, and the resources the Mission has devoted to CLA.

Guatemala

- Collaborative, cross-team development of key Mission strategies and documents, including the CDCS, PADs, and communications strategy.
- Undertaking an integrated, cross-sectoral program in the country's Western Highlands region, with several technical teams coordinating on projects and activities. The approach was documented in this [report](#).
- Learning agendas identified and documented in PADs.
- Established channels for coordination with and among the Mission's implementing partners and with local governments, through the Western Highlands program and other regular meetings.
- CLA activities incorporated into the Mission's Performance Management Plan.

Planned:

- Collaboratively analyze monitoring data and share evaluation findings with partners and stakeholders.

Resources to support CLA:

- Mission staff members (program office, technical teams and support staff) have contributed to and led various aspects of CLA.

Liberia

- Established a two-track plan for building Mission, Government of Liberia and partner capacity—including an emphasis on skills related to collaborating, learning and adapting—as well as pursuing development results.
- Identified two main game changers, noted a third, and established key indicators for tracking the game changers.
- Incorporated CLA strategies into the Mission’s performance management processes.
- Collaborating strategically across DO teams and with other Missions on cross-cutting themes such as youth, nutrition, and human and institutional capacity building (HICD).

Planned:

- Develop an analytic agenda to plug knowledge gaps, firm evidentiary basis for CDCS and test development hypotheses.
- Plan for an annual “big picture reflection” with partners and Government of Liberia counterparts.
- Share knowledge more systematically with donors working in relevant areas.
- Create a robust agenda for monitoring program performance and context, risks, game changers, public perception, and activities undertaken by other development actors. Plan to engage the Embassy’s political/economic officers in monitoring their game changer indicators and request help from USAID/W and the State Department to conduct special assessments if required by emerging conditions.
- Strengthen processes for analyzing evaluation findings and adapting programs accordingly.

Resources to support CLA:

- Hired a full-time CLA Advisor.
- Devoting 5% of program budget to M&E and CLA activities.

Regional Development Mission in Asia (RDMA)

- Established a regional community of practice, open to the development community, on monitoring and evaluation, with plans to establish others on science and technology and other areas of interest.
- Hosted a number of regionally-focused learning events, including summits on evaluation, USAID Forward and mobile technology, and regularly organize other learning events, including a speaker series and After Action Reviews.
- Established and refined a mentoring program to include situational mentoring and other informal learning opportunities.
- Integrated CLA into Mission Orders on evaluation, performance monitoring, portfolio reviews, strategy and project design.
- Established Technical Advisory Group, which provides expertise to bilateral missions in the region in key focus areas such as gender, engineering, disaster risk reduction, monitoring and evaluation, local capacity development and CLA.
- Hosting TED Talks, open to all RDMA staff, at the beginning of weekly senior staff meetings to stimulate discussion and creative thought

Planned:

- Operationalize plans outlined in the Mission’s draft Learning Plan. Develop a learning plan for

the Mission's Performance Management Plan.

- Identify opportunities to pilot innovative approaches, and facilitate the matching of individuals to those opportunities.
- Expand RDMA's role in knowledge management and learning to bilateral missions from a one-to-one basis to that of a facilitator of networks and lateral knowledge exchange among bilateral missions. Draft a strategy to develop a stronger knowledge and learning ecosystem among missions in the region.
- Train RDMA staff in knowledge management and learning.
- Engage implementing partners and stakeholders to reflect on current USG programs, validate strategy and implementation, and collaborate to capture and share tacit knowledge.
- Identify critical knowledge gaps in RDMA and among Asia missions and fill them with existing resources or by commissioning new research or analyses where necessary.
- Offer support for After Action Reviews, Peer Assists and other facilitated discussions to enhance mission-wide learning as requested by mission staff

Resources to support CLA:

- Procured a mechanism to support M&E, learning, and knowledge management activities.
- Hired a learning, monitoring and evaluation advisor.
- Established a Learning Team, composed of five Mission staff and introduced on this [Prezi](#).

Uganda

- Formed a Mission-wide Community of Practice to coordinate CLA efforts and build staff interest.
- Revised the Mission Order on project design to have teams create more rigorous development hypotheses and evaluation plans and include learning agendas in Project Appraisal Documents.
- Identified critical "game changers" and associated indicators that signal the need to adjust strategy or program direction.
- Piloting District Operational Plans that bring together local government officials with all USAID implementing partners working in a particular district to improve coordination, troubleshoot operational issues, align interventions to district development plans, and gradually empower Ugandan officials' capacities to enhance development assistance.
- Collaboratively developed a Mission-wide "Leadership Charter," as part of an effort to build individual staff leadership and adaptive capacity, strengthen teaming processes and behaviors, and transform the Mission's culture to one of a learning organization.
- Piloted a Mission-level leadership training program, tailored to the Mission's Leadership Charter and organizational development needs, with a special focus on CLA as it relates to leadership behaviors, change management and individual resilience.
- Adapting Portfolio Reviews for an increased learning focus, including designing a field-based Portfolio Review, incorporating learning guides and in-field review processes with participation from implementing partners and Government of Uganda representatives.
- Incorporating CLA into all awards, as well as embedding adaptive management approaches throughout new activity designs.
- Increasing tacit knowledge exchange and strategic and program continuity through a capture-and-convey process, with strong FSN leadership, that includes recording exit interviews with departing USAID staff and conducting on-boarding briefings with arriving staff.
- Integrating learning agendas and plans into project and activity-level Monitoring & Evaluation plans.

- Conducting learning reviews, events and activities to create and capture programmatic and operational knowledge; utilizing After Action Reviews and other formats to enhance dialogue.
- Facilitating the development of learning networks, to enhance operational integration and collaboration among activities.
- Piloting organizational networking analysis as a means to map and strengthen collaboration and knowledge networks across stakeholder groups.
- Prioritizing collaborative learning methods and innovative and varied learning products for evaluation.
- Conducted a mid-point 'CLA in Action' Strategy/CDCS Stocktaking to capture lessons learned, contextual shifts and ongoing adaptation over the first half of the CDCS.

Planned:

- Map the activities of USG and stakeholders and establish a central repository of relevant information, using GIS technology to overlay key data sets on agriculture, health, etc.
- Developing CLA case studies, tools, and communities of practice among partners to enhance activity-level CLA approaches, adaptive management, organizational learning and improved program results.
- Designing a CLA/Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning blended learning program for implementing partner and Mission technical staff, to strengthen capacities in program planning as it relates to monitoring and evaluation plans, as well as the development of learning agendas, techniques and adaptive management.

Resources to support CLA:

- Procured a contract that provides M&E and CLA support and assists the Mission in implementing CLA analyses and processes.
- Hired a full-time Organizational Learning Adviser to shepherd the CLA function.

Zimbabwe

- Responded to government restrictions with highly synthesized and collaborative interaction with donors and partners for information and resource sharing.
- Established a plan for testing several science and technology and social media innovations and capturing and sharing lessons learned.
- Identified and analyzed a key game changer--the country's political situation and an upcoming election--and developed an adaptable and flexible approach to its CDCS. Following the election, the Mission was able to quickly adjust its strategy in response.
- Awarded a five-year Food for Peace contract, which included activities to assess USAID and partners' knowledge needs and gaps.
- Conducted a strategic portfolio review to consider big picture issues such as the theory of change, adequacy of partnerships and the strengths and weaknesses of activities.
- Testing and refining an adaptive management model, initiated with OTI. OTI's Rapid Awards model involves a coordinated effort between USAID, the implementing partner and local organizations to respond to immediate and pressing needs. Awards infuse needed cash and TA into sensitive and changing operating environments in a sector that is under particular scrutiny.

Planned:

- Review other Missions' CLA approaches and tools for their applicability in Zimbabwe.
- Operationalize the initial learning plan included in the Mission's Performance Management Plan.

Resources to support CLA:

The Mission is considering this issue.

For information on integrating CLA throughout the Program Cycle, refer to the [Learning Guide](#) on the [Learning Lab](#) or to [ProgramNet](#). If you would like to include your Mission's activities in this summary or for questions or more information, please contact the Strategic Learning team at learning@usaid.gov.