



# KEY FINDINGS FROM MISSION CLA STOCKTAKING: Interviews with Early Adopters

In order to inform the ADS 200 series revisions, PPL/LER's Strategic Learning team conducted a stocktaking activity with CLA "early adopters" to make sure that the new guidance reflects the experiences of missions that have been at the forefront of implementing CLA. The team, along with the LEARN contract, interviewed selected Program Officers to identify how they are using CLA, what support they need, and what additional guidance would be most useful.

Rather than contacting a random sampling of missions to get a broad picture, LER used an appreciative inquiry approach with these positive deviants to learn from their innovations and experiences working to institutionalize CLA within their missions and to identify challenges and enablers that should be considered when developing the guidance.

## Interview Questions

- » What has been your experience with CLA at your mission?
- » How have you promoted a mission culture supportive of CLA?
- » How do you promote CLA objectives with implementing partners?
- » How can we better incentivize collaborating, learning and adapting?
- » Is there additional guidance or support from either DC or a Regional Mission that you think could prove beneficial? Particularly unhelpful?

## LEADERSHIP & MISSION CULTURE

» Mission leadership is key to creating a culture where CLA can thrive. The mission director and other leaders set the tone and the priorities.

» **CLA-conducive culture:**  
encouraging openness, creativity, frankness internally and with partners, and inclusivity of different viewpoints

» **CLA-hindering culture:**  
information silos, poor internal communication, and a tendency to avoid surfacing challenges, mistakes, or failures

"If we didn't have Front Office buy-in, CLA would never happen."

"People who understand [CLA], appreciate it, but until there's a plan that is endorsed by leadership, nothing serious will happen."

**14** Missions Interviewed  
13 represented by Program Offices



Guatemala  
Indonesia  
Kenya  
Liberia  
Macedonia

Malawi  
Mozambique  
Pakistan  
RDMA  
Rwanda

Sahel Regional  
Southern Africa Regional  
Uganda  
+ East Africa Regional  
Resilience Coordinator



## RESOURCING

- » Resources discussed included **TIME**, appropriate USAID **STAFFING**, and financial resources/**BUDGET** for IPs or contracts to support the mission.
- » Learning champions are considered critical to lead the effort. Even if the tools and resources are available, having someone at the helm will catalyze CLA institutionalization.
- » Several missions (at least 5 of the 14 interviewed) have, are bidding for, or are considering some kind of CLA contract support to supplement existing human resources.

“Time is the most precious resource we’ve got and there are a lot of competing priorities for it.”

“If missions aren't doing CLA, why? The answer is always time and too many demands. We need to look at the full range of responsibilities that people have and make sure that they have the time and space to do what is important. We have to address this root cause that is keeping people from doing what we all know is good development practice.”

## FLEXIBILITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

There is **TENSION** between:

- » Concern that mandating CLA will reduce it to a box-ticking exercise and compromise the quality of learning
- » Recognition that only required things get prioritized (and, therefore, accomplished)
- » Required processes need to allow enough flexibility to let missions operationalize CLA in ways that fit their specific contexts, especially in terms of size and staffing levels, the broader political economy environment, and the sources and earmarks of funding.

“What gets measured gets done, so give missions milestones—as long as they are flexible.”

## PRINCIPLES & PRACTICE

- » **PRINCIPLES:** The principles of CLA are viewed positively by staff and partners who intuitively see them as crucial to good development work (even if some of them are unsure how to operationalize those principles).
- » **PRACTICE:** There is a wide range of familiarity with concrete ways to put CLA into practice. Adapting appears to be a particularly challenging piece to operationalize. There is a strong desire for more examples of successful CLA in practice that also speak to the impact on development outcomes.

“[Some] mission staff don't get CLA. The first inclination of staff is ‘Where's the application?’ and ‘What's the mechanism?’ They grapple to find something concrete.”

## » Next Steps

- In addition to informing the ADS revisions as CLA is incorporated more formally into the guidance, feedback from the stocktaking activity is being used to:
- » Develop the CLA Maturity Matrix and supporting toolkit
  - » Support LER's Positive Deviance study
  - » Engage early adopters in ongoing dialogue regarding development of the CLA approach
  - » Identify areas where CLA messaging needs to be clarified
  - » Further build PPL's social capital with missions
  - » Identify specific areas for future collaboration with some missions