

As USAID works to improve development results by strengthening the program cycle through more effective planning, implementing and assessing practices, missions are increasingly emphasizing collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA). This integration of CLA aims to:

- improve the quality and relevance of USAID's development programs by grounding them in evidence
- make programs adaptive to new learning and changing contexts
- extend USAID's influence through sharing knowledge and collaborating with other development actors
- catalyze learning among country development actors to build capacity and facilitate country-led development

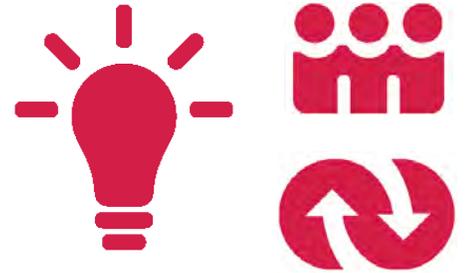
Through policy, tools, and technical assistance, USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning promotes planning, implementing, and assessment practices designed to improve development results. A key element of this program cycle is the integration of collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) throughout program cycle processes.

CLA AND THE PROGRAM CYCLE

[C] Collaborating intentionally happens when USAID staff and stakeholders identify areas of shared interest and work together where it makes sense, reduce duplication of efforts, and share knowledge across sectoral and institutional boundaries. **USAID/Rwanda introduced collaboration mapping during the development of its Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) to identify other development actors and pinpoint where USAID could be most effective and avoid duplicating others' work.**

[L] Learning systematically takes place when USAID and stakeholders utilize performance monitoring data, take time to pause and reflect on implementation, and review and synthesize relevant assessments and evaluations. This helps the Agency draw on evidence and experience from many sources to share what works and what doesn't, and employ participatory development methodologies that catalyze learning for stakeholders. **As just one example of many, USAID/Zimbabwe has conducted strategic portfolio reviews to consider "big picture" issues such as development hypotheses, adequacy of partnerships, and the strengths and weaknesses of activities.**

[A] Adapting effectively happens when USAID and partners apply learning and make iterative course corrections during implementation to increase the impact of development assistance. **USAID/Liberia collaborates closely with host government counterparts and is conducting a stocktaking and knowledge capture effort around the Ebola crisis in order to inform the response to a possible future outbreak. This has ultimately influenced the design and implementation of all agreements and activities during this period.**



Here are a few reasons why learning matters

- We gain new insights that enable us to course correct and adapt activities to the local context when we **systematically** collaborate with and learn from our colleagues, partners, stakeholders, and activity participants
- We reduce the challenges associated with staff turnover and transition when we **resource** the capture of knowledge gained by our staff about the local context, our past and present activities, and key relationships
- We make better decisions that improve program design and implementation when we **intentionally** apply our knowledge
- We impact people's lives for the better when we do more effective development work

LEARN SUPPORT

Learning is always taking place, but it is not always systematically planned or adequately resourced, nor is it always facilitated or acted on in ways that are strategic to maximize results. PPL has established the LEARN mechanism to help missions develop tailored practices in collaborating, continuous learning, and adaptive management for more effective development.

More than 30 missions have developed a wide range of context-specific CLA approaches to strengthen their programs and operations. Based on lessons learned from these approaches the LEARN mechanism helps missions adopt and strengthen CLA. Support to USAID missions includes:

ASSESSING MISSIONS' CURRENT CLA CAPACITY.

LEARN facilitates this self-assessment process for missions to better understand CLA in practice—identifying their current practices and approaches and ways to enhance them, such as portfolio reviews. This is a participatory process, engaging USAID staff from across the mission and inviting them to reflect on how to make CLA more intentional, systematic, and properly resourced.

DEVELOPING CLA PLANS. This participatory process is based on assessment results to develop a CLA action plan that meets the mission's specific needs and outlines how the mission will further institutionalize CLA. Action plans will focus on integrating learning into existing

Program Cycle processes (e.g., strategy, project design, and monitoring and evaluation) and wherever possible, existing procedures (e.g., partner meetings, portfolio reviews, and site visits) to reduce the time and resource burden on USAID staff. Implementing partner agreements can also be leveraged in support of CLA.

PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ONGOING SUPPORT.

As missions develop action plans tailored to their CLA needs, LEARN can provide assistance and ongoing support for missions in implementing those plans. This may include:

- Designing and facilitating Big Picture Reflections or other 'pause and reflect' moments with multiple stakeholders
- Mapping and leveraging the experiences and knowledge of other development donors, implementing partners, host governments, local partners, or activity participants
- Training and providing consultations to mission staff on how to take advantage of CLA tools, resources, and processes, such as After Action Reviews, to improve results within existing staff and program resources.
- Mentoring and supporting staff assigned with CLA responsibilities and connecting them to a broader network of learning champions throughout USAID
- Capturing and sharing missions' experience with CLA activities and their impact on development outcome

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

LEARN can provide short-term and long-term technical assistance for the services described above, tailored to a mission's needs and resources.

PPL supports two online platforms to share tools and models and to facilitate learning opportunities, peer engagement and collaboration among USAID staff and partners across the globe.

Together, USAID Learning Lab and ProgramNet (an internal site) support USAID staff and partners by providing a space for knowledge sharing on how to operationalize CLA. Please visit usaidlearninglab.org and programnet.usaid.gov for more information.

CONTACT US

For more information on how to access services and support from the LEARN mechanism, please visit usaidlearninglab.org/LEARN or contact the COR, Thom Sinclair at learning@usaid.gov.