Focusing on the "C" in CLA: Monitoring Collaboration to Improve Multi-sectoral Nutrition Implementation and Impact

Webinar Transcript

Emily Cassio

Great! Thank you so much Yaritza and welcome again everyone to "Focusing on the "C" in CLA Monitoring Collaboration to Improve Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Implementation and Impact. We are really excited to dive more into discussing measuring and monitoring of collaboration throughout the USAID program cycle. This is a guidance that we are currently in the process of finalizing and will be made public in the coming months. So, we are also really looking forward to hearing from all of you in terms of the usability, applicability, and your general feedback on this guidance. It's really exciting to see those answers in the poll already so far. It seems like we have a really diverse set of perspectives on where everyone is coming from in terms of current collaborative work, current practices, monitoring collaboration. It looks like indicator usage is maybe the least current practice; which we will talk more about in today's webinar and it does sound like everyone is very interested in measuring and monitoring collaboration which is really exciting as we will talk a lot about that in today's presentation.

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In today's presentation, I will start by providing a little bit of background on collaboration generally. Excuse me, the collaboration framework that we have created in our guidance as well as providing more information on monitoring and measuring collaboration throughout the USAID program cycle. We will have another poll a little bit later to hear more of your feedback on the usability and applicability of this guidance and then we are very excited to have two of our colleagues from USAID-Rwanda here to discuss a real world example of measuring and monitoring collaboration in the CHAIN project. And of course we have time at the end of today's presentation for a Q & A. So please throughout the presentation today, any questions or points of clarification that you may have please use that Q & A function and we will get to all of those questions at the end.

Next slide please.

So in terms of speakers for today's session, my name is Emily Cassio. I am a project coordinator with USAID Advancing Nutrition where I support the Capacity strengthening and monitoring evaluation and learning teams. I am joined by my colleague Abby Conrad who is the learning and research advisor for USAID Advancing Nutrition. She sits on the nutrition team at results for development and works in research monitoring and evaluation. She also leads CLA for the USAID Advancing Nutrition project. And we are very excited to be joined by our colleagues from USAID-Rwanda: Khatidja Naithani and Alphonse Nkusi. Khatidja is the Health Program Management Advisor at USAID-Rwanda where she has been providing technical support to the PEPFAR program and the community health and improved nutrition or CHAIN project which we will be hearing about later in today's presentation. And finally Alphonse has been the Community and Health Empowerment Services team leader for USAID-Rwanda since 2011. Prior to joining USAID-Rwanda he worked on the World Bank funded Rwanda Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Program and with the National Aids Control Program.

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Now we would go ahead and dive into the guidance on monitoring and measuring collaboration starting with a little bit of background on collaboration work generally.

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I am sure we are all very familiar with collaboration as an integral part of multi-sectoral nutrition activities. This is emphasized in the USAID multi-sectoral nutrition strategy which specifies that enhanced coordination and collaboration is critical to optimizing synergies, increasing resource availability and impact, and promoting knowledge sharing and learning; which together result in more effective global efforts to improve nutrition. And I think we are all very well aware that multi-sectoral nutrition depends on successful nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions, which naturally necessitates effective collaboration of sectors and partners to achieve the desired results. Finally, an assessment by the USAID SPRING Project found that multi-sectoral nutrition, coordination and collaboration partners typically did not have specific objectives or metrics related to collaboration. But this assessment recommended that implementing partners measure collaboration to help prioritize, improve accountability for collaboration, monitor if the collaboration is on track, and determine necessary adaptations. With that in mind we began our process …

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In the development of this guidance. First with a desk review. So we developed search teams to find peer-reviewed literature which first identified 905 results. We also searched the Development Experience Clearinghouse for USAID-specific documents and ultimately reviewed 32 documents using a common abstraction template. We then conducted consultations with five USAID missions including DRC, Senegal, Uganda, Nepal and Rwanda, who we will be hearing more from later in today's presentation.

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So based on the desk review and the consultations we came up with the following definition of collaboration as "two or more professionals or organizations who have specific roles, perform interdependent tasks involving communication and leadership, and share the common goal of increased efficiency of resource use and program success. So this definition is sort of an amalgamation of definitions that we found in the literature that really highlights the specific key points of collaboration that are most useful or applicable to the USAID context.

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And based on this definition and the information we gathered through the desk review and the consultations, we created the following collaboration framework which contains five different types of collaboration. And it is important to highlight that this is not necessarily a levels of collaboration, it is not a scale or a value judgment. Each of these five types of collaboration are equally important and useful, just depending on the context in which you are engaging in collaborative work. So depending on the financial or human resources available, or in the intended results of that collaborative work, those are all things that might feed into the decision to use one type of collaboration over another. But they are all equally useful in the collaborative work that we engage in.

So the first type of collaboration is Networking which is characterized by loosely defined roles, infrequent communications and decisions that are made by organizations independently. So an example of networking in a USAID context might be quarterly mission multi-sectoral nutrition portfolio reviews.

The next type of collaboration is Cooperation which is characterized by providing information to one another, somewhat defined roles and formal communication, but decisions are still being made by

organizations independently. So an example of cooperation it might be quarterly meetings between multi-sectoral nutrition activities at a district or a national level.

Then we have Coordination which is characterized by defined roles, more information and resource sharing between partners, and more frequent communication. There is some shared decision making and there is some mutual investment of resources in Coordination. And an example of Coordination might be an activity that is maybe funded by the health office and the economic growth office with nutrition representatives from each of these offices frequently communicating, conducting joint site visits and other functions that would be important to that activity.

Our fourth type of collaboration is Coalition which is characterized by sharing ideas and resources, more frequent communication that is prioritized by the partners, some shared decision making and some mutual investment of resources. So an applicable example of Coalition in a mission context might be annual work planning that is discussed by partners to develop complementary interventions. But this work planning is not carried out through a joint process.

But integration, our final type of collaboration, is characterized by consistent communication and mutual trust between these partners, joint decision making and budgeting, and resource sharing that is systematically incorporated into the activities. So examples of that in the USAID context might be a joint annual work planning process, reporting on common indicators or even activity staff that are seconded with a partner.

So now that we have a little bit of a better understanding of what collaboration is and what it looks like in the mission context, and what all of these different types of collaboration look like, I am going to hand off to my colleague Abby who will talk a little bit more about measuring and monitoring collaboration throughout the USAID program cycle.

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Abby Conrad

Great! Thanks Emily. So there are opportunities for measuring and monitoring collaboration throughout the USAID program cycle which I'll discuss in a bit more detail in the next few slides; but I'll start with a few general considerations for measuring and monitoring collaboration. You want to monitor and report on collaboration in a way that is useful for the specific stage of the program cycle that you are in, and in a way that aligns with the types of collaboration that is intended - so going back to that, the different types of collaboration that Emily just went over. And you also want to make sure that any reporting and monitoring aligns with the role that collaboration is intended to play in a particular activity or project to achieve outcomes.

The role and intended outcomes of collaboration should be reflected in the project or activity theory of change or logic model so that the role of collaboration in the activity and the expected outcomes are clear. This provides a really important foundation to determine what, when and how to monitor collaboration, to ensure that it informs adaptive management. You also want to think about the types of information that you need to know about collaboration, to be able to make those decisions to improve programming. So this should inform the type and content of the collaboration monitoring and reporting that you do. There is no one-size-fits-all here. It is really to fit the particular need that your project or activity has.

Finally, it is important to consider feasibility when determining how and when to monitor collaboration. You want to make sure that the type and extent of the collaboration measurement that you are doing aligns with the goals of collaboration and the level of investment that you are actually making in the collaboration itself. Indicators can be a useful tool for monitoring collaboration but as we all know it takes time and resources to add additional indicators. So you want to make sure that you are monitoring and using indicators when it's effective and efficient for your program.

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During the country and strategic planning stage, measuring collaboration can allow missions to monitor collaboration that is intended to achieve goals or intermediate results in the results framework. Missions can develop indicators and establish targets to monitor collaboration progress as part of the CDCS and to understand how it may or may not be contributing to intended results. Collaboration indicators can focus on collaboration across offices in the mission or across activities. These indicators can help missions to more easily summarize and report on multi-sectoral nutrition collaboration to others in a mission or to other stakeholders. Missions can collect this data themselves or require activities to report on the indicators.

The figure in the slide shows some illustrative examples that can be used to inform country and strategic planning. These are the examples of indicators on the next few slides drawn from our desk review and the mission consultations. The first two are examples of indicators that can be used to monitor collaboration between offices; so you could look at the number of joint multi-sectoral nutrition reviews or the assessment or assessments that happened between offices on a quarterly or annual basis. You could also track the number of nutrition activities with co-funding from multiple offices each year. The second two examples are indicators that you could use to look at activity collaboration. You could track the number of activities that collaborate on multi-sectoral nutrition or the number that are co-located in a particular year.

For these indicators, you could disaggregate them by the type of multi-sectoral nutrition intervention that they are implementing such as complementary feeding or WASH so that you can get a better sense of where collaboration is happening within multi-sectoral nutrition and what components of it you may need to have more collaboration on.

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Next is the project and activity design and implementation stage. The purpose of measuring and monitoring collaboration at this stage for USAID and implementing partners is to monitor and adapt collaboration to support the achievement of specific project or activity results. The indicator should relate to the specific types of collaboration needed to achieve the intended results, whether that collaboration is supposed to be between activities or between implementing partners and host country government, civil society or private sector actors. There are a range of types of indicators that might be appropriate. Input or output indicators can be used to monitor the implementation of cooperation while output indicators can be used to monitor the benefits of that collaboration. You may also want to use a combination of indicators to monitor the intermediate steps required to achieve your longer-term collaboration outputs or outcomes. Activities may also report on the same nutrition outcome or impact indicators such as prevalence of children 6 to 23 months receiving a minimum acceptable diet to understand which activities are contributing to common results in a particular district or region or COI.

Activities may also report on the same … or you can see some illustrative examples in the figure again, you can look at indicators that are broader about partnerships or mechanisms that activities might use for collaboration. So those are shown in the top in dark blue. For example a standard USAID indicator is the number of public-private partnerships formed with U.S government assistance. An example of a custom indicator is tracking the number of functioning multi-sectoral nutrition working groups or platforms. Indicators might also track joint implementation or implementation outputs resulting from collaboration on a quarterly basis. So you could look at things like the number of joint events implemented, or the number of new individuals or households reached, or the number of new individuals or households reached receiving an expanded package of services due to collaboration. These types of indicators should align with the intended outputs of collaboration. You can also assess outcomes of collaboration like cost savings.

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Finally, there are several ways to incorporate a collaboration measurement and monitoring and evaluation. Measuring and monitoring collaboration should be included in project level or activity level monitoring evaluation and learning plans, or performance management plans. And including collaboration indicators and projects or activities can help ensure that implementing partners set clear expectations and targets related to collaboration and also help ensure that implementing partners are held accountable for collaboration, and that collaboration is sufficiently resourced and achieves its intended results.

Collaboration can also be measured as part of project or activity level process, performance or impact evaluations. This can help to understand how collaboration was implemented and how effective or efficient it was. Collaboration makes sense to include in evaluation questions when collaboration is part of the activity theory of change or logic model and collaboration can be assessed to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the approach; things like the efficiencies or cost savings resulting from collaboration, or potentially how collaboration has contributed to observed outcomes or impacts.

For evaluations, it may also be appropriate to use a little bit more complex collaboration indicators or metrics to assess the extent or the quality of collaborations; so that you can better understand how that collaboration may have contributed to results or what types of factors might have affected the effectiveness of the collaboration. Through the literature review we identified a number of existing collaboration measures that have been developed and used to assess the level of collaboration, and also the quality of inter-organizational collaboration. These indicators have been used in program evaluation, commonly, but not necessarily in the context of international development programs. But we think that there's a lot of applicability for using some of these indicators in international development.

The figure shows some examples of these existing collaboration measures. The top section are measures that assess the extent or level of collaboration. The extent of collaboration measure looks at items across five domains related to collaboration implementation. The domains are activities, communication, information, resources and policy. The levels of collaboration is another measure that looks at the level of collaboration but it's a very simple scale that partners use to rate the level of collaboration that they have with other partners.

The middle section shows measures that focus more on the factors that may affect collaboration and the perceived success of that collaboration. The inter-organizational collaboration indicator is one actually that was developed to use with humanitarian projects and was tested with some humanitarian projects. It assesses factors that may affect collaboration like trust and commitment, and also looks at the perceived performance of the collaboration. The collaboration factors inventory is a more detailed indicator that looks at 22 different factors that can influence collaboration, and there is a free online tool that exists for this measure, that you can send out to partners to take the survey and do that self-assessment. And then the collaboration success measure is a simple three item measure that looks at satisfaction, perceived effects, and implementation capacity.

Then finally is the collaboration evaluation and improvement framework. This is a broader mixed methods approach to evaluating collaboration and it can be applied throughout an activity life cycle to measure and inform improvements for a collaboration and would be better suited to a longer term impact or performance or process evaluation.

Thanks so much I will turn it back to Emily.

Emily Cassio

Great! Thank you Abby that was a really helpful overview of how and why to monitor collaboration. Now we are going to launch another quick poll before we pass off to our colleagues from Rwanda. Just to get a quick sense from the audience on how clear and easy to understand these guidances as well as just generally how applicable these types of collaboration are to the work that you are all doing, so if

you could give us a quick rating from one to five for each of the following questions, from 'one' being not at all to 'five' being very clear or very applicable, that would be really helpful.

Great! So we will give another minute or so to answer.

Our first question is how clear and easy to understand are the definitions for each type of collaboration?

So that was the framework we reviewed a couple of minutes ago with each of the five different types of collaboration, from one to five.

The second question is how applicable are the types of collaboration for your specific project?

I know based on the poll we launched at the very beginning of this webinar it seems like we have a pretty diverse array of projects represented here today. So it is really great to hear how applicable these different types of collaboration are across all of those different types.

The third question is how useful these collaboration indicators would be for your project and finally how feasible is this guidance for you to apply in your work?

And all of these answers are completely anonymous so please feel free to answer completely freely based on your experience with your work and your project.

Great! We can go ahead and close the polling now. I think it looks like many of you would find this guidance fairly feasible and seem to feel like it is easy to understand and useful for the project that you are currently working on. That is really great to hear. As I mentioned earlier we are in the process of finalizing this guidance now and then we will share it publicly in the coming months but these answers are immensely helpful to us in our process of finalizing this guidance. So thank you all so much for your feedback.

And now at this point I am going to hand over to our colleagues from USAID-Rwanda who have experience measuring and monitoring collaboration in a mission context on the CHAIN project. At this point I will go ahead and pass over to Khatidja Naithani.

Khatidja Naithani

Thanks Emily. I am going to be doing the presentation and then my colleague Alphonse will be available to answer any questions that people might have as we present our example from USAID-Rwanda.

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So USAID-Rwanda's community health and improved nutrition project known as CHAIN was valued at 251 million dollars. It was a cross-sectoral project that was housed in the health office but with contributing activities in the offices of economic growth, education, and democracy and governance. The overall objective was to increase the utilization of quality health services and products by target populations and communities. It was designed to contribute to USAID's country development cooperation strategy from 2015 to 2020, and specifically the development objective 3: "Health and nutritional status and Rwandans improved".

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So the CHAIN project developed and actively tested three learning hypotheses. A whole project evaluation of CHAIN was conducted at the midterm and this midterm evaluation along with the individual activity, midterm and online evaluations, found that with greater collaboration each of the CHAIN mechanisms was not only able to meet its objectives but also exceeded and or achieved other unexpected positive outcomes. In addition, overall costs were reduced as a result of greater efficiency gained by better planning, sharing and coordination of resources, and finally there was stronger alignment and coherence in the strategic design, planning and implementation of community-based

health and development work carried out by USAID partners, which also furthered the government of Rwanda's development agenda.

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So what was the role of collaboration in the project?

We really worked to harmonize our interventions which reduced duplication and increased complementarity among partners. It enabled USAID and the implementing partners to discuss with local partners on the ground their main challenges and development priorities. It created learning opportunities; sharing knowledge and experience among partners. It also increased the cost effectiveness in the activity implementation. It improved communication and information sharing among USAID implementing partners and local partners.

So CHAIN brought together implementing partners in partnership to enhance multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration among USAID supported programs. The partners met periodically to develop activity plans, appoint task heads, set deadlines, define indicators, and discuss reports, share lessons from the ground, and budget and plan activity execution together. Partners noted that coordination helped them to speak with one voice and better articulate to district officials how their interventions were working together toward a common goal. The CHAIN initiative's innovative approach to collaboration provided USAID with opportunities to increase outreach to more beneficiaries, promoted sectoral growth and efficiency by avoiding duplication, and spurred cost savings and improved learning capacity for implementing partners.

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So the way we monitored collaboration.

Initially we started with a quarterly survey that asked questions around how implementing partners were collaborating. Then when we conducted the midterm evaluation, a recommendation was made to add indicators to monitor and hold the implementing partners accountable for collaboration. So these indicators included some of the ones that Abby presented on an earlier slide. So it included number of new beneficiaries reached due to collaboration, number of beneficiaries receiving an expanded package of services due to collaboration, number of joint activities undertaken by chain partners at district level and amount of money saved due to CHAIN IP collaboration.

In addition, our implementing partners conducted joint field visits and also conducted joint field visits with USAID for supervision and monitoring of activities. So the midterm evaluation examined both project performance and chains collaboration model and it found that collaboration between health and agriculture activities resulted in expanded reach and exceeded targets. CHAIN helped implementing partners delivered a more comprehensive package of services, in-depth training and strengthened income generating skills of beneficiaries through economic growth investments. Activities were able to scale more quickly and increase coverage through collaboration under chain than would have been possible on their own.

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Some of the lessons that we learned from monitoring collaboration

We learned that there were many benefits to collaboration. One in particular was that USAID visibility was increased; this was particularly at the district level. District authorities recognized the USAID activities having one voice, and really was able to see all of the activities under the umbrella of USAID as opposed to the individual implementing partners. There was a complementarity of services which increased the quality of services that were provided to the beneficiaries. Instead of different partners having their own set of beneficiaries, we were able to provide an expanded package of services to our beneficiaries. In addition we found that coordination required total commitment from both

implementing partners and USAID for the best results. Also that we didn't need to collaborate on everything. Collaboration activities needed to make sense for the partners.

Initially we had started with integrated work plans but realized that that could be burdensome for the implementing partners and found it was actually better to have a section on collaboration within the individual work plans, rather than having them come together to develop integrated work plans.

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We also learned that there were differences in implementation approaches by different IPs and these had to kind of be harmonized in order to collaborate. So initially this was a challenge but then implementing partners were able to come together to look at how they could harmonize tools and approaches to work together. Also that having a dedicated USAID project manager and one CHAIN implementing partner leading coordination at district level was key. Collaboration learning and adaptation (CLA) across different technical teams was really only made possible with the full-time efforts of a dedicated project manager in USAID who acted as a champion for CLA. In addition, implementing partners took turns rotating as District CHAIN lead and this ensured that the burden was shared and that all partners were able to participate. The CHAIN project management team which was a team of different people from different offices at USAID who oversaw the running of the different activities of CHAIN had to have their position descriptions revised to include coordination. This encouraged them to see CHAIN work as a part of their responsibilities and not as something that was extra.

In addition, the terms of reference for coordination was developed, that the implementing partners found extremely useful. District-level CHAIN partner WhatsApp groups helped to improve communication between IPs. And budgeting for coordination costs during joint work plans was helpful to address collaboration cost issues in addition to having direct communication from the agreement officer authorizing those expenses.

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And finally how it is applied

So I just wanted to share some quotes from some of our implementing partners talking about the benefits and how they were actually able to really benefit from the collaboration. Every quarter we shared survey results back to the IPs and discussed the usefulness and utility and different methods of collaboration among the partners. These are just a couple of quotes that we have. The first quote says "some beneficiaries of CIP are not in Harvest Plus' list, but we help our beneficiaries get the iron-rich bean seeds. And also with SFH to get the water purifying … CIP trains on Monday, Twiyubake on Tuesday, [and] Harvest Plus was training the next day. We decided to save time by doing the training all in one day. CIP brings orange flesh sweet potato. Twiyubake saves money too and are able to implement more activities because they are saving money and time. When we implement in partnership, we learn". Another implementing partner staff member said "I go to district level and explain our plans to government. The next day, another organization comes in and explains almost the same things to the same person. Local government gets confused - what is the difference? But if the two IPs plan together before going to district government it helps. Now we can show that our joint goal is to eliminate malnutrition. Government requires that groups are working together; now that we can show that we are doing that already".

So this was really you know seeing some of the benefits of collaboration and looking at some of the data from the indicators that we were collecting to show that it really was beneficial both, not just to USAID but to the implementing partners, and enabled them to have a bigger voice at the district level when they were implementing their activities. And in addition, while the CHAIN project did end in 2020, moving forward, the mission is looking at what we are calling a hub approach and looking at collaboration between activities at the district level, and how we implement that across the different sectors and monitor that as well. So this is something that with our new country development

cooperation strategy, we are moving forward with, and are starting in its design phase, and looking at more cross-sectoral activity at the district level. So really learning from what was done during CHAIN and the successful collaboration of the CHAIN project and how this can be applied going forward within the mission. So I think that is the last slide for me. Thank you very much and we look forward to answering some of your questions in the remaining time. Thank you.

Emily Cassio

Great! Thank you so much Khatidja. I think it's really helpful and very insightful for everyone to see such a useful example of how collaboration was really intentionally done during the CHAIN project, and how that measurement and monitoring of collaboration was done during CHAIN as well. So thank you so much for providing that example. Before we dive into the Q&A, we did just really quickly want to pull up the results from the last poll that we conducted. There was a request to see those so apologies for not sharing those earlier. Thank you Yaritza. For our second poll on how clear and easy to understand the definitions for each type of collaboration it looks like the majority of participants found them to be clear and understandable or very clear and understandable. There were a few people who may be found them to be a little bit less clear. If you have any specific clarifying questions on the definitions for each type of collaboration definitely feel free to type it in the chat or add it to the Q&A box and we are happy to elaborate on those further if you do still have questions on how applicable these types of collaboration are for your project. It seems like most participants in today's webinar found it to be applicable, very applicable or somewhat applicable. So that is very exciting to see as well. For how useful are the collaboration indicators for your project it looks like the majority of people found them to be useful, there were some very useful, and some neutral, and then a few somewhat useful but no not useful at all, which is very encouraging to see as well. And then finally for the feasibility of this guidance for you to apply in your work, it seems like the majority of you found it to be feasible, very feasible or somewhat feasible. Which again is very encouraging to see that the majority of those of you attending this presentation do find these guidance points to be applicable and useful in your work. So that is fantastic.

Along those same lines and following on our discussion of the CHAIN project, we did have a comment earlier that … somebody recalled during a CLA workshop hearing a project leader comment they were too busy implementing to coordinate. And I think that is a really insightful comment because I think that is definitely something that a lot of projects or partners can relate to: having so much work on your plate that you're not sure exactly how to prioritize collaboration. So I think it would be great if either Khatidja or Alphonse or both of you could provide a little bit further insight on your recommendations for missions or implementing partners who don't feel that they have the time for collaboration, let alone the monitoring of reporting and collaboration.

Khatidja Naithani

Hi! I can take that question maybe and then if Alphonse wants to add but I think the comment also was that this was evidence to build in monitoring indicators. And I think for us what was really key was really building collaboration into the project and making it a key part of the implementation. So it wasn't seen as something extra, as I mentioned, even for us at USAID we sometimes see collaboration as extra and so having it built into terms of reference for the project management team and then having it really built into the awards themselves. And even allowing for budget for collaboration, because we know like just sometimes having a meeting does have a cost. It's not always … this was pre-virtual meetings, when you had to maybe serve some coffee and tea at a meeting. But there were some costs to some of these things. And so having that built into the budget into the award, and really just making it like an integrated part of the project and part of each activity is key to kind of having that there. But when it's seen as something extra then it's always difficult. And I think for, I mean particularly for our implementing partners, they found it was one of the helpful things was they could use each other when they had similar activities to help monitoring with some of the activities if you're in different districts. We had a

school monitoring we have an orphans and vulnerable children program where we had multiple partners in one district and so they would actually split up the districts and monitor other activities the children in the different schools. So that was actually really helpful to them and save time, saved money for them; from going out to the field all the time. To go to maybe instead of having to go to 10 districts they could go to 5 districts and they could split it up. So they actually found that really helpful and just building it right in from the beginning. Alphonse I don't know if you have anything to add.

Alphonse Nkusi

Thank you! I don't have much to add but I can say that at IP level, as time goes on, implementing partners are able to see the benefits of collaboration and when they see the benefit they embrace it. The same with the USAID. At USAID level it's not easy because people's jobs are already set so they see this as something extra. So again, with the involvement ops directors and the entire mission leadership to encourage AOR's or agreement officer representatives, activity managers and having, as my colleague mentioned, a project manager who is dedicated and can easily go around mobilizing people to collaborate is important. So at USAID level, the activity managers have a big role to play in mobilizing their implementing partners. And as I said, for implementing partners as time goes on, as we have more coordination meetings and they see the benefits, they begin embracing coordination and collaboration. Thank you.

Emily Cassio

Thank you so much both Khatidja and Alphonse. I think that that's really insightful on the intentionality behind collaboration being so key to getting coordination or collaboration started and kind of how that builds throughout the implementation with coordination of collaboration. While we're still on the CHAIN project, we have another question for both of you about how you measured money saved through collaboration on the CHAIN project.

Khatidja Naithani

All right thanks Emily. So actually that's a great question because I think that was one of the most challenging indicators to explain to our implementing partners on how to calculate that. And so really, we actually had performance indicator reference sheets for each of our indicators, and went through them, had multiple meetings with our implementing partners to talk through how to collect data for the different indicators. And so for this one, we really looked at having implementing partners estimate the cost they would have incurred if they organized the activity on their own. So this was really looking at some of these joint activities that were implemented with different IPs. So they would look at if they did a training for example, if they had organized that training on their own; you know renting a space and having training refreshments, lunch, all the training materials, the cost of that. And then look at when they shared that cost, how much did they actually spend on that activity or on that event. Then they would then calculate the cost savings that way. So that was kind of the way that we had them calculate that. So that was for things like joint events, joint trainings, and joint meetings. And so they would just kind of try to estimate and most of them had budgeted for those individually at the beginning so they had their initial budget. And then they could look at the actuals they spent on that and look at the cost savings that they had. And that was how they calculated that … that was how we found the easiest way for them to do that.

Emily Cassio

Great! Thank you. And it looks like we have a couple of other questions specifically for UNL funds from the CHAIN project. Another question asked - can you talk more about the challenges of integrated work plans versus identifying collaboration opportunities?

Khatidja Naithani

I think I will let Alphonse take that.

Alphonse Nkusi

Okay I tried to respond to that in the Q&A. What I can say is that, you know, we used to organize annual meetings to develop work plans. So the partners would come together and those working in the same sector would identify joint activities: those activities they would collaborate in implementing. And so once they have identified those, those activities would be part of the integrated work plan. Those that did not fit; those where any two or three or four partners were not able to collaborate on because maybe they were specific, they were peculiar to those organizations, those remained in their ordinary work plans. So as time went, more activities were identified and the implementing partners were really excited on working together on any particular activities and the results were amazing. This encouraged them to continue identifying, where possible, activities on which to collaborate. I don't know whether that makes sense or answers your question.

Emily Cassio

Yes great. Thank you Alphonse. I think that's a very insightful answer. Another question for you both from USAID-Rwanda. A participant asked if you could please share how you measured the increase in number of beneficiaries attributed to increased collaboration. Did you measure it against a baseline?

Khatidja Naithani

So it wasn't measured against a baseline. That one was measured against … because each of our implementing partners would have like a certain number of beneficiaries. And then if they reached beneficiaries that were not part of their activity but was part of another activity beneficiary pool, I think in the example that we gave at my last slide around iron-rich beans. So for example, if the activity had a set of beneficiaries somewhere where they were distributing iron-rich beans and then they were able to actually expand their reach by providing those beans to another implementing partner to distribute to their beneficiaries, then that was considered expanded reach. So it wasn't necessarily against a baseline but it was more expanding beyond their initial set of beneficiaries by working with another implementing partner, to provide that support to them. So that is how it was measured.

Emily Cassio

Thank you and while we are discussing indicators and measurement, I will go ahead and pass off to Abby now. Since we have had a couple questions for our colleagues from Rwanda, we will give you guys a bit of a break. We did have a question Abby on one of your slides on collaboration indicators that there were quite a few items 22 or 23 items which suggests that maybe the concepts aren't tight enough and the question was 'would it be a challenge to prioritize and move forward with that volume'?

Abby Conrad

Yes that is a great question and you are right that collaboration is not a particularly tight or specific concept and that is why those measures really do look at a number of different items. So if you are trying to understand all of the different types of factors that might affect collaboration, there really are a number of different things that can affect it. Looking at leadership to organizational, culture, resource sharing, trust collaboration, capacity there etc. There are so many different things that affect collaboration. So for those measures that are trying to understand the quality of collaboration and the different types of things that might be influencing collaboration, they are sort of larger measures that would take some more time to collect, and those are all done through partner surveys.

But some of the other indicators that are looking at just the level of collaboration can be more simple. That levels of collaboration indicator is just a single question like scale ranking of the level of collaboration with another partner. So something like that is simpler and then some of the other

indicators that we gave examples of where you are really just looking at the output that you are interested in from that collaboration. So rather than trying to assess all of the different things that might be affecting the collaboration, you are just really looking at what is that outcome of the collaboration. And that can be a lot more efficient and simpler to measure.

Emily Cassio

Great! Thank you Abby. And circling back really briefly to Khatidja and Alphonse. We had a couple of quick follow-up questions regarding the saved money through collaboration on the CHAIN project. So one person asked along the continuum of value for money reporting, where would you place CLA initiative or collaboration initiatives, any concrete examples you have? And someone else asked if you know the whole amount of money saved with collaboration as of to date or the last reporting date on the CHAIN project.

Khatidja Naithani

So, the first question there was around the continuum of value for money reporting, where would you place collaboration? I am not sure if I understand that question. Maybe I will … Sorry what was the second question. I was trying to see …

Emily Cassio

Yeah sorry for the second. There is a lot to throw at you at once, apologies. So the second question was if you know the whole amount of money that was saved with collaboration either to date or as of the last reporting date, since the CHAIN project has not ended.

Khatidja Naithani

I don't know the whole amount of money saved. As I said, I think this was one of probably the most challenging indicators to capture just based on the understanding from implementing partners. So I don't actually think we got a full picture of the amount of money saved because it was one of those indicators we had to re-explain quite a few times to the implementing partners. So it's really hard for us just because it was very new and the idea of collaboration indicators was also new to us at USAID and new to the partners, and that was probably the most challenging one to capture. So I don't have like a number. I think one of the things also to know is that … I mean it was great money saving. It's a great indicator to just sort of monitor when we have things. I think it was another question around the contracting mechanisms. But you know we have a cooperative agreement. The goal is to spend all of the money. So even if you do save money then you are looking at "it was great because we could expand sort of, they could do other activities, they could do more. Particularly in Rwanda, we work very closely with the government and get a lot of asks from the government particularly for working in the district and supporting some of the district initiatives. So we were able to support more of these initiatives through the money saving aspect. But when you look at overall spending, people are still spending to their ceiling pretty much because they are mostly cooperative agreements. But it was great because we kind of had a little bit more flexibility in the budget to support some of these last minute requests that come from the government here as well. But yeah it was kind of challenging. I wouldn't be able to really give an overall figure of how much was saved.

And then the question around 'value for money for collaboration'. I think it is value for money but I think a lot of it like value for time. So a lot of it is looking at kind of instead of having beneficiaries come three days in a row for three different trainings you combine them and you all meet together and provide the training in one venue, at one time. So it's time for the implementing partners, time for the beneficiaries especially. Also I think in terms of meetings with government. If the district is meeting with 10 different implementing partners on 10 different days, they get a little bit frustrated when they are constantly hearing USAID is doing this and we are you know this USAID implementing partner in that,

and they are able to kind of go meet them together. Especially with the way CHAIN worked having sort of one lead partner at the district level, so they were the ones … it was a rotating. I think it rotated every year so they were able to go with one voice. So a lot of it … there's like the saving money aspect of doing it but it's also the time of both district stakeholders, government beneficiaries and the implementing partners, which I think was really one of the biggest benefits of the CHAIN model and the CHAIN project.

Emily Cassio

Great! Thank you so much Khatidja. I think that was a really great overview of all of those nuances that we can all see in USAID funded projects and the contracting mechanisms that we see and just the nuances inherent to collaboration. So I think that was a really helpful answer to all of those different questions that were thrown at you. Unfortunately we are at time. I know we had quite a few questions that we did not get to so apologies if we did not get to your question but thank you all so much for your engagement with the content in this presentation today. We will be sharing the recording from this webinar as well as the slides from our presentation. We had a couple of requests for that so we will be able to share those. And as I mentioned previously, we are in the process of finalizing the guidance we presented here today so definitely watch the USAID Advancing Nutrition website for the final guidance document on measuring or monitoring collaboration as well. And of course an enormous thank you to both Khatidja and Alphonse from USAID-Rwanda for joining us today. Your insight was really invaluable and the real world experience you guys have with implementing collaboration measurement and monitoring was a really valuable resource. So thank you so much and thank you to everyone who joined us today.