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KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER TO ACHIEVE OUTCOMES



Photo: Elena Borasino

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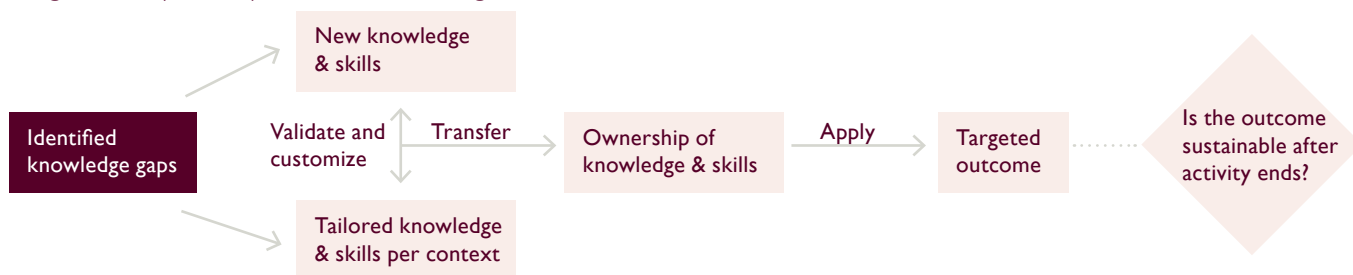
IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THE USAID/PERU EVALUATIONS PROJECT (THE PROJECT) HAS CONDUCTED TWENTY-SEVEN STUDIES AND EVALUATIONS.

The current USAID/Peru portfolio is increasingly focused on building capacity among local partners. As a result, the majority of evaluated activities include knowledge and skills transfer interventions. These function through structured training courses, coaching, peer-to-peer learning, and other approaches. This learning brief reflects on how the knowledge and skills transfer has occurred in seven USAID activities examined through three evaluations and assessments. Each study is presented as a case.

Knowledge and skills transfer is a ubiquitous approach to improving individual and organizational performance. Training is a common knowledge and skills transfer methodology in which USAID has significantly invested. It “is a structured experience that helps individuals acquire new, predetermined knowledge, skills, and attitudes to address or solve targeted operational problems” (Human and Institutional Capacity Development Framework, 2010, p.5). To introduce flexibility and promote the adaptation of knowledge and skills to solving particular problems in unique contexts, development partners have increasingly incorporated peer-to-peer learning, coaching and mentoring to their knowledge and skill transfer approaches. More and more, USAID recognizes that off-the-shelf approaches or solutions must be adapted and grounded in the local context and respond to local participants’ characteristics.¹ USAID considers training successful when new skills are applied and lead to a measurable improvement in performance (Human and Institutional Capacity Development Framework, 2010). In this brief, we discuss these results in terms of intervention outcomes.

This brief considers four interrelated areas: i) the knowledge and skills transfer process; ii) the challenges encountered during the transfer process; iii) the intervention outcomes; and, iv) the sustainability of outcomes². Diagram I presents this dynamic process, where the implementing partners (IPs) validate the knowledge and skills proposed with target beneficiaries in a back and forth to ensure it responds to the local context, including socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic realities.

Diagram I: Dynamic process of knowledge and skills transfer



Source: Own elaboration based on performance evaluations and studies conducted.

This adaptation process should facilitate ownership among targeted beneficiaries, and, once applied, result in the targeted outcome. As emphasized in the ADS 201.3.4, achieving an outcome is not enough, results should be sustained even after an activity ends.

The three cases presented span the fields of Alternative Development, health, and environment. The activities engaged teachers and adolescents, national malaria control programs staff, and rural families. This brief is informed by a review of relevant activity documentation (case studies, methodological guides when available, quarterly and annual reports) and the Project’s assessments and evaluations. The brief also draws on lessons learned from field visit activities, mainly interviews with participants in rural communities.

1 Young, S. (2014). Collaborating, learning, and adapting for more effective development programs. USAID Learning Lab. Retrieved on March 6, 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7x6XdqyZzk&feature=youtu.be>.

2 To examine sustainability, this analysis uses the widely known Kirkpatrick’s four level model for assessing training effectiveness: i) reaction (degree to which beneficiaries find training favorable and relevant); ii) learning (participants acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes); iii) behavior (participants apply what they learn); and iv) results (degree to which targeted outcomes occur because of training and support).



Case I: Teacher collaboration and coaching to embrace and apply the Education for Work (EfW) methodology

The activity Support and Expansion of the Active Schools Methodology, implemented by the *Centro de Estudios y Promoción Comunal del Oriente* (CEPCO), transferred the EfW methodology to high school teachers and school principals to develop work competencies and soft skills in high school students. CEPCO worked with EfW, mathematics, and communications teachers and principals to jointly draft tutorial plans to transfer the EfW methodology to students. These tutorial plans, developed in a collaborative manner, took into consideration the limited social capital of students affected by a context where the main economic activity was coca cultivation. In transferring the EfW methodological expertise, CEPCO hosted several workshops on the EfW methodology and provided teacher coaching to strengthen pedagogical capacity. Frequent site visits allowed for joint reflection with teachers on their own performance in implementing the methodology. These efforts enabled the EfW methodology to be institutionalized in the school curriculum. Challenges encountered during the transfer of the EfW methodology include high rotation and limited baseline knowledge on EfW. In addition, the shortage of teachers specialized in EfW required teachers with other specializations to pick up the task.

Teachers and students demonstrated increased EfW knowledge and skills. In addition to theoretical knowledge, students developed attitudinal skills that promoted responsibility, teamwork and sense of achievement. Teachers and students experienced a reenergized, more relatable learning shaped by their life experiences and local contextual reality. By the end of the activity, teachers and students began applying the EfW methodology in productive projects. About two years into the implementation of the EfW methodology, the sustainability of the knowledge generated and applied through those productive projects, including individual student ventures, was seriously threatened by structural contextual factors such as poor market access, low demand, and startup capital requirements that were not addressed by the activity.



Case 2: Peer-to-peer learning to adopt and implement evidence-based solutions according to malaria realities

The Amazon Malaria Initiative (AMI) aimed to reduce malaria related mortality and morbidity through prevention and control efforts in eleven partner countries in South and Central America. AMI technical partners provided innovative, evidence-based solutions to strengthen the capacity of National Malaria Control Programs (NMCPs) in their fight against malaria, mostly through knowledge and skills transfer implemented through supporting technical partner-to-NMCP collaboration and peer-to-peer collaboration, as well as training. This case discusses the former two approaches.

NMCPs took the drivers' seat in their country's response to malaria by first identifying their own capacity gaps and approaching AMI for solutions. Working with AMI technical partners, NMCPs chose among available evidence-based solutions and validated them in their context, thus legitimizing the final proposed package. Knowledge and skills transfer was included in country work plans jointly discussed by participant NMCPs and technical partners, which fostered ownership from national counterparts and enabled peer-to-peer learning among NMCPs. The achievement of outcomes sought through knowledge transfer and technical assistance was challenged by issues including the heterogeneous capacity of national counterparts to implement proposed solutions in terms of financial resources and decentralized health system capacity; high staff rotation at all levels; limited advocacy skills and management capacity of senior health staff; and, political will, among others.

AMI managed and overcame these factors to generate significant outcomes through sustained support, promotion of peer collaboration, and targeted, tailored technical assistance, knowledge and skills transfer included. For example, improved skills and capacities allowed Peruvian authorities to evaluate the efficacy of antimalarial treatment, to establish national policies, to formulate norms and protocols on new treatments, and to conduct trainings for healthcare workers on the use and prescription of treatments and the monitoring of adverse reactions, among other applications. Likewise, Honduras established a national reference laboratory for the quality control of microscopy diagnosis and extended access to it. Countries participating in AMI will need to continue the culture of knowledge sharing and skill building to keep pace with evolving malaria scenarios. A threat to the sustainability of these gains achieved with AMI support is reduced national funding as resources are shared among programs for other vector-borne diseases.



Photos: Karla Vergara and Elena Borasino

Case 3: Combining technical and local knowledge to implement adaptive measures

The Project conducted case studies for five activities that aimed to improve the adaptive capacity of families living in high mountain ecosystems toward climate change.³ The IPs approached communities with the sensitivity needed to allow for the required knowledge and skills transfer to implement adaptive measures, combining the technical with local knowledge in a participatory manner. In CATIE, for example, communities received training on how to become involved in the drafting of investment projects for ecosystemic services, and intercommunal courses enabled peer to peer learning on adaptive measures from other communities with similar experiences. In AEDES, contests provided a hands on opportunity to acquire knowledge on adaptive measures through communal work and exchange visits to other communities. In TMI, community-led research committees combined the technical know-how provided by the university with their local knowledge to identify adaptive solutions.

Different challenges were encountered by each activity during the transfer activities, including heterogeneous education levels among participants of intercommunal trainings (CATIE), shortage of technical personnel to cover the intervention's vast geographic extension (AEDES), high migration of young labor force (AEDES & TNC), initial distrust from communities given an association to a mining company (LWR), and, generalized throughout all activities, the cultural resistance associated with women's participation in politics.

Program outcomes derived from the aforementioned transfer process are evidenced in all activities. For example, in the case of CATIE, communities monitor the implementation of green investment profiles. In AEDES, beneficiaries have implemented adaptive measures (eg. water reservoirs) and shared knowledge with other farmers and associations to replicate measures, even within other districts. In TMI, community researchers are capable of identifying and implementing successful adaptive measures, such as bioremediation. The application of the different methodologies for adaptive measures and knowledge sharing among neighboring communities evidences a successful knowledge and skills transfer.

³ The five activities systematized are: i) Strengthening the Climate Change Adaptive Capacity of Local Government and Organizations in Rural Southern Peru implemented by the Asociación Especializada para el Desarrollo Sostenible (AEDES) in Arequipa; ii) Climate Smart Territories implemented by the Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE) in Junin; iii) Securing Mountain Waters and Livelihoods by the The Mountain Institute (TMI) in Ancash; iv) Adapting Together by Lutheran World Relief (LWR) in Cajamarca, and v) Climate Change Adaptation for the Communities of the Lima Watershed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

IN SUM...

THE THREE CASES ARE DIVERSE IN TERMS OF THEIR SCOPE AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TARGET BENEFICIARIES. Located in rural communities, Case 1 demonstrated the effectiveness of knowledge transfer using a locally adapted EfW methodology jointly with pedagogical coaching. Case 2 is an illustration of the effectiveness of iterative knowledge sharing among technical partners and peers across multiple nations, the target NMCP, and NMCPs from other AMI partner countries. Case 3 succeeded in promoting the exchange of technical and local knowledge between IPs and participating communities located in alpine ecosystems. This horizontal approach, wherein beneficiaries learn through working side by side with the IP, succeeded in convincing and enabling participants to adopt climate change adaptations.

Reflecting on the knowledge transfer process itself, the following lessons learned emerge. First, participants must find the knowledge and skills acquired relevant and beneficial. Second, the transfer should promote the ownership and application knowledge and skills through a participatory process that entails an iterative exchange of knowledge and the adaptation of content to the local context. Third, to sustain the application of new knowledge and skills, the learning must respond to an established demand. Cases 2 and 3 clearly identify the demand for the shared knowledge and skills, the threat of malaria and water insecurity, respectively. In Case 1, the absence of market demand for the product of individual student ventures and productive projects threatens their future viability. Fourth, enabling contextual conditions must be in place for direct beneficiaries to apply acquired knowledge. In all three cases, the sustainability of results is threatened to one degree or another by contextual factors. Since they cannot be controlled, the design of knowledge and skill transfer interventions should anticipate, to the degree possible, how exogenous factors contribute to or threaten the targeted outcomes. The lessons learned identified through these three cases are also evidenced in other evaluations and studies conducted by The Project, e.g. Prodescentralización III, Pro-Integridad, and Healthy Communities and Municipalities II, among others. Knowing your target population and designing the intervention with them fosters the achievement of desired outcomes.