

Integrated Development in Action: Innovation and Collaboration in Community Connector

WHAT IS INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT?

Global shifts in the economy, technology, and demographics are forcing the development community to rethink the way we address today's complex interrelated challenges. Our response must reflect the multifaceted reality of people's lives and experiences.

FHI 360 defines integration as **an intentional approach that links the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs across sectors to produce an amplified, lasting impact on people's lives**. Integrating development programs has the potential to make a deeper, more enduring difference in people's lives, not only through multisector activities, but through collaboration, partnerships, and coordination. FHI 360 is working to improve the evidence and advance the global conversation on integrated development, as well as collaborate with other organizations interested in the approach.

Integrated Development Resource Package: From Learning to Action offers collective lessons learned, tools, and other resources from a diverse array of FHI 360's program and research efforts.

In an effort to better understand the effectiveness of multisector, integrated approaches, FHI 360 systematically aggregated information from 68 integrated development (ID) programs that we have delivered or are currently implementing. Rarely are distinct programs, even from the same sectors, offered the opportunity to combine their lessons. By packaging and sharing this body of knowledge, we aim to inform and improve the design, delivery, and evaluation of integrated development approaches. This series of case studies — on select FHI 360 programs in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania — is one product of that collected knowledge. The perspectives in each study are based on desk reviews of project materials and in-person interviews with the project staff, partners, and community members. Each case study provides three common challenges documented by the 68 integrated projects examined through this review, and illustrates how each project approached those challenges.



Tessa Ahner-McHaffie/FHI 360
A community connector officer walks through a learning site in Budongo, Uganda

COMMUNITY CONNECTOR OVERVIEW

Community Connector (CC) is a USAID-funded project operating in 15 districts in Uganda. The project is designed to improve the nutritional status of women and children through an integrated suite of interventions focused on nutrition and health; agriculture and food security; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); gender; and economic livelihoods. The original solicitation from USAID was structured to encourage innovative responses, as they recognized the complex nature of undernutrition and poverty in the targeted communities. The CC project is centered on community-based savings groups where members set aside money and develop plans to invest in productive assets for their families, such as farm inputs or school fees. Members meet at a multisectoral learning site to grow various produce — including avocados, papaya, and onions — through which they learn improved agricultural and business practices and how to produce more nutritious foods. Members also attend family life schools at the learning sites, where there is an integrated curriculum on various topics, including health, WASH, nutrition, agricultural productivity, savings, and gender. The project also collaborates with local governments, helping to train (and participate in) the District Nutrition Coordination Committees, which establish multisectoral nutrition action plans. The CC project has a flexible funding contract, which is implemented with the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach, both of which facilitate integration (see below). This approach binds a diverse array of interventions that address undernutrition from many angles, rather than focusing simply on nutritional inputs.

COMMON ID CHALLENGE

Responsiveness to evolving circumstances and the application of learning are important for any development program — but they are especially critical for more complex, integrated program models — yet funding mechanisms are often not flexible enough to accommodate the adaptation needed for these interventions.

COMMUNITY CONNECTOR APPROACH

The CLA approach, in combination with a flexible funding contract, is used to learn and work with the community and to make real-time adjustments (when needed) throughout the design and implementation of the project.



FUNDING

This pairing is particularly beneficial for CC's integrated nature because it allows project partners to remain flexible and it accommodates the complexities of the project and the local context

The USAID CLA approach provides opportunities for intentional participatory learning and course correction throughout the term of a project.¹ The CC project's progress toward the desired outcomes — improving the nutritional status of women and children, and improving the livelihoods of vulnerable households — is regularly assessed with the opportunity for adjustment. The 5-year plan includes three phases, each of which includes a 6-month learning module followed by an implementation module. The first two learning modules include a stakeholder analysis and a situation analysis of the status of poverty and undernutrition in the target communities. The final learning module expands to include measurements of the project's impacts in these areas. These modules offer the community and other stakeholders a way to participate in the design of the project. It also provides them with a clear picture of the issues that need to be addressed, the approaches that will be used, and the progress of current efforts. This stands in stark contrast to traditional project planning, where 5-year plans are written at the outset with very little room for adaptation.

Pairing the CLA approach with a flexible fixed-price contract allows the project's staff to learn, make corrections, and (importantly) for those changes to be funded through the contracting mechanism. This pairing is particularly beneficial for CC's integrated nature because it allows project partners to remain flexible and it accommodates the complexities of the project and the local context. Using this structure allows CC to develop solutions for unique challenges as they arise, and to adapt to reduce costs and improve effectiveness.

With the emphasis on participatory learning, the initial situation analysis showed that communities were most interested in addressing the scarcity of economic opportunities. This insight contributed to the design of the project, which incorporated savings groups and business training as the primary entry strategy into the communities. Involving more community members in an activity in one sector (livelihoods) helped to sustain their activities in other sectors (food security and nutrition), and achieve the desired outcomes in those sectors.

Together, these activities directly met community demand and, through the insights gained in the learning phase, addressed the underlying cause of undernutrition in this area — vulnerability to poverty. Iterative learning modules helped to establish that once the households were on a path to economic security, they felt that achieving goals related to the lessons on agriculture, nutrition, health, and gender were feasible. The analyses also showed that increasing the ability of households to provide nutritious food and access to preventive health care allows them to invest their money in long-term activities (such as education and productive assets) that can ensure a more stable economic future. Referring to savings groups, a staff member in Budongo noted, “money would still go to the hospital if there were no other interventions.”

The CLA structure also supported more flexibility for the project among implementing partners. During the second learning module, the project team realized that many of the most vulnerable households were not accessing services supported by CC because they did not belong to a savings group. The project was able to revise its statement of work and move resources to add another partner, Village Enterprise. This flexibility increased the project's reach among vulnerable populations. The CLA approach with a responsive

1. More information on CLA: [USAID Community Connector Technical Note Series No. 9, 2015](#).

contract is not the only strategy for flexibility — it is one example of how flexible approaches can be leveraged to facilitate integration and adaptation in a complex system.

COMMON ID CHALLENGE

Even with the political will to collaborate, steep learning curves for each sector's language, work culture, operating procedures, and other issues can inhibit shared understanding, efficient communication, and collaborative program delivery.

COMMUNITY CONNECTOR APPROACH

Community Connector developed an integrated management and training structure for its staff, and maintains a reciprocal partner consortium.



PROGRAM
IMPLEMENTATION &
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER
COORDINATION

The CC project introduced personnel and structures at every level to facilitate communication and training. Staff members at the sub-county level, called community connector officers (CCOs), directly coordinate the integration of training and partners. The CCOs have expertise in particular areas (such as agriculture, nutrition, and health), but they are also cross-trained to offer multisector expertise. The community knowledge workers (CKWs), who are trained and supervised by a CCO, work with savings groups and family life schools to implement the project's integrated curriculum. They encourage communication between the project staff and the communities, and they have access to multidisciplinary experts through the partner consortium to supplement these demonstrations.

The consortium was developed with seven implementing partners who have a broad range of expertise. The partners work together through project staff members who are mandated to coordinate integration. Integrated implementation is coordinated with local government officials, USAID, implementing partners, and community-based organizations. All partners are required to integrate their staff and structures, which is incentivized through capacity building in USAID structures and in different sectors. The delivery of services was also integrated through the close coordination established by the District Nutrition Coordination Committees. Joint partner meetings in the consortium facilitate the exchange of data and ideas to ensure co-planning toward the same goals outlined in CC's theory of change. These meetings also ensure that partners collaborate on strategy, harmonize activities, and identify other opportunities for integration. Through the consortium, partners found that they could act within their strengths while building their capacities in other sectors, fostering relationships with other organizations, and improving their materials and approaches.

Initially, the implementing partners were hesitant to collaborate — fearing the loss of intellectual property or staff members, and the loss of control over their activities. However, CC's synergistic approach helped the implementing partners recognize the added value of integrated services, so much so that some expanded their other projects (outside of CC) to take a more integrated approach. Thoughtful coordination and training at all levels and key players who supervised integration were crucial to ensure that effective integration took place.

COMMON ID CHALLENGE

Results from integrated programming are often more difficult to demonstrate and communicate than the results of vertical programs.

COMMUNITY CONNECTOR APPROACH

Working with communities early in the project, CC developed the "CC see 10" — a group of 10 indicators, spanning five sectors — that enables community-driven tracking of multisector outcomes at the household level.



MEASUREMENT,
RESEARCH &
EVALUATION



Members of a savings group in Northern Uganda show the fruits of their labor

Through the second learning module, the CC team discovered that they were not reaching vulnerable households in certain areas. More than a year after the CC project was initiated, Village Enterprise, an organization that works to equip people with the skills needed to start sustainable businesses and savings groups, became a partner. The CC project was able to add partners midway through its implementation and increased the project's overall impact because of the flexible CLA approach and funding structure.

Village Enterprise benefited from the partner consortium by expanding its capacity in other sectors, and by developing relationships with other organizations working in the same communities. "Savings groups together with family life schools increase group cohesion," a staff member noted, "and Village Enterprise wouldn't do that alone." With this additional ability, the organization was able to provide integrated services to communities they serve outside of the CC project, including education programs paired with their standard business package. For Village Enterprise, the partnership enabled by the flexible funding structure allowed this economic empowerment-focused organization to expand its services and expertise.

About FHI 360: FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

CC SEE 10:

- 1) Family savings,
- 2) WASH facilities,
- 3) Clean compound,
- 4) Traditional vegetables planted,
- 5) Fruit trees planted,
- 6) Small livestock,
- 7) Agricultural income-generating activity,
- 8) Production assets,
- 9) Long-term food stocks, and
- 10) Shared production and child-feeding decisions among spouses

FHI 360 HEADQUARTERS

359 Blackwell Street, Suite 200
Durham, NC 27701 USA
T 1.919.544.7040
F 1.919.544.7261

WASHINGTON DC OFFICE

1825 Connecticut Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20009 USA
T 1.202.884.8000
F 1.202.884.8400

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE

19th Floor, Tower 3
Sindhorn Building
130–132 Wireless Road
Kwaeng Lumpini, Khet Phatumwan
Bangkok 10330 Thailand
T 66.2.263.2300
F 66.2.263.2114

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE

333 Grosvenor Street
Hatfield Gardens, Block B
Hatfield, Pretoria 0083 South Africa
T 27.12.762.4000
F 27.12.762.4001

www.fhi360.org

Measuring integration can be one of the most difficult aspects of an integrated project. With at minimum two sectors, projects could have to measure at least twice the number of standard indicators to cater to each sector. Yet none of these indicators specifically measure integrated outcomes or the added value of integration. Even if measurements are developed to target integrated outcomes, it is difficult to distinguish between the effects of combined interventions. Although they have the ability to illuminate some of the questions about integrated projects, non-standard measures — such as cost-effectiveness, process, and qualitative assessments — are rarely used and disseminated for application by others.

The CC project took an innovative approach to the challenge of evaluation. By applying the CLA approach it worked with the community to develop simple measures that could track multisector outcomes for each household. The “CC see 10” consist of 10 measures that should be seen in a CC household.

Although the “CC see 10” is not itself a solution that can be used widely, the approach used to develop it has broad utility. These clear indicators were created using a data collection method in which the community and the staff worked together to measure integration according to the local context. The 10 indicators can be easily identified within communities and counted by participating households. They have also been combined with the curriculum to create another way for community members to conceptualize the linkages of the multisector parts of the project. Many community members speak clearly about the connection between different sectors. When speaking about the indicators, a savings group member from Northern Uganda said, “If I am feeling well, generating income, having animals there, how can you not be happy?... Integration is a gift.” Other group members described saving money from agricultural income to pay for school fees or to invest in new businesses. The “CC see 10” also helped measure other improvements in the communities, including a greater amount of productive agricultural assets under women's control, increased confidence among women to bargain for shared household resources and time, an increased proportion of land held by women to grow nutritious food for the household, as well as greater involvement by men in childcare. A household-based group of indicators enables tracking of multiple sector outcomes at a household level in relation to each other (rather than overall trends in the community). As of 2015, 66 percent of surveyed households in the Northern Uganda communities had achieved seven or more targets.

The “CC see 10” is an innovative step toward better measurement of integration, yet it is not sufficient to determine impact without a rigorous evaluation design. Even so, using the community's input to develop a multisectoral group of indicators can produce an evaluation plan that measures some aspects of integration and improves local buy-in and accountability of goals within the community.

CONCLUSION

The Community Connector project demonstrates the power of a flexible implementation approach and funding mechanism to spur innovation in integrated design, management, and measurement. However, these are not the only lessons that emerged from the CC project, nor are they the only approaches that could have been used. Other briefs in the FHI 360 Case Study Series describe additional approaches used by other successfully integrated projects. FHI 360 has also developed a resource package with additional guidance and tools that can be used to explore unique multisector models and improve approaches for more effective, meaningful development practice.

The Community Connector Project is implemented by FHI 360 on behalf of USAID/Uganda. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government. This brief was produced by FHI 360's Integrated Development Initiative funded by the FHI Foundation, in consultation with Community Connector staff members. The ID team is grateful for the support of the Community Connector team, who provided valuable technical expertise and facilitated interviews with key stakeholders.

INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

1825 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20009
T 202.884.8000 | E AskID@fhi360.org

FHI 360 UGANDA

Plot 15 Kitante Close; P. O. Box 5768
Kampala, Uganda
T +256 312266406 | E Aakol@fhi360.org