



RESEARCH AND LEARNING BRIEF

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Mid-term Evaluation: Results and Lessons Learned from Cooperatives Development Work in Kenya

Introduction and Purpose

This learning brief provides a snapshot of The Cooperative Leadership, Engagement, Advocacy and Research (CLEAR) Program's successes and challenges based on findings from the Mid-term Evaluation (MTE) that draws on interviews and surveys from program partners and stakeholders in Kenya. The MTE examined how stakeholders perceive CLEAR's success in achieving its objectives – specifically how its interventions are contributing to creating an enabling environment for cooperatives to thrive. Global Communities' CLEAR Program (2019 – 2023) works to support and enhance Kenya's cooperative ecosystem. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) [Cooperative Development Program \(CDP\)](#) through the Local Sustainability Unit and implemented by Global Communities, the program aims to: Support cooperative legislation, policy, and regulations in counties; Provide technical assistance to cooperative businesses in housing, producer and service sectors to improve their business performance, and enhance cooperative networks to improve education and learning among cooperators. Using the USAID Collaboration Learning and Adaptation (CLA) approach, CLEAR program will use an iterative approach to share the findings with stakeholders for their input and use recommendations to inform activity adaptation to improve the program and strengthen the cooperative sector in Kenya.

addressed.

Less than half (40%) of the survey respondents were female. A third (33%) of the survey respondents were young, between 18 and 34 years old, and 15% were over the age of 60 (Figure 1). The age distribution was similar between male and female, with slightly more young females than males, and slightly older males than females. The average age of all respondents was 41 years.



Methodology

From June 21, 2021, to December 15, 2021, The CLEAR (Cooperative Leadership Engagement Advocacy and Research) Program conducted a mid-term evaluation that included key program partners and cooperative sector stakeholders to capture a diverse range of feedback. The informants provided their observations on the feasibility of different solutions and recommendations to improve implementation.

The evaluation utilized a mixed-methods study design to facilitate data triangulation, which included desk review, quantitative surveys, and qualitative interviews. Informants included cooperative stakeholders namely, the Cooperative Alliance of Kenya (CAK), the Cooperative University of Kenya (CUK), the Council of Governors (COG) and representatives from the county governments among others, CLEAR program-based consultants and sub-awardees, partner cooperatives and CLEAR staff representatives.

The MTE (Mid Term Evaluation) and its interpretation provides a starting point for program adaptation for most impactful cooperative and cooperative sector strengthening. The process will highlight the opportunities and barriers that need to be

Key Findings

The MTE appraised the project's performance critically and objectively in terms of the following key indicators: *Relevance*, *Effectiveness*, and *Sustainability* and below are key findings along the three indicators:

Relevance is a core concept to the CLEAR program, as is the ability to adapt to varying changes over time, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from the MTE indicated that CLEAR program interventions were useful and relevant to the needs of the key stakeholders in Kenyan cooperatives. 70% of participants interviewed reported to have acquired new skills in financial management, leadership, communication, and governance thanks to CLEAR's cooperatives training and capacity building approach. Cooperatives interviewed reported improved capacity in marketing of their businesses (70%), increased value of services provided (70%), expanded market targets (60%), and more revenue generated for the cooperatives (51%). Some cooperative leaders reported to have gained clarity in their roles because of training.

On *Effectiveness*, most participants felt that CLEAR's training and other capacity strengthening activities were effective and successful. For instance, it was reported that the trainings had helped county officials to identify gaps in their policies, and as a result, majority have started implementing gender equality policy by ensuring that women get involved in cooperative affairs. Half of the participants reported increased participation in their cooperative decision-making activities. More than 70% of survey respondents reported improved women and youth involvement in cooperative management and coordination thanks to CLEAR's interventions and notably, more female than males agreed or strongly agreed with these statements.

Beyond CLEAR's intervention, *Sustainability* was a concern to the partners involved in addressing capacity, skills and policy issues that are part of the challenges facing cooperatives in Kenya. At large, findings from this study indicated that changes associated with CLEAR 'interventions will sustain after project completion. For instance, over half of the respondents believe that they will successfully manage their cooperative operations including accounting and management systems, linking with the government, managing communication with members and stakeholders, and self-managing the development and implementation of Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs). Additionally, the participatory approach used by CLEAR, such as participants' engagement in collaborative trust-building activities, improves the likelihood of sustainability of results. CLEAR was also seen to be at the center of a network of collaborative efforts that work to deliver support to cooperatives and counties in Kenya and to build connections that enhance networking between cooperatives and stakeholders. Some of these collaborations have now proceeded beyond direct CLEAR activities. Lastly, most participants expressed the willingness of their cooperatives to sustain the gains of the project after the exit of CLEAR.

Factors Affecting Performance

The MTE revealed some key enabling and disabling conditions affecting the performance of CLEAR program's goal of supporting, enhancing, and modernizing the cooperative ecosystem in Kenya.

Enabling Factors:

Participatory approach to implementation:

The CLEAR Program Public Policy Making Process (PPMP) Executive Course: The participatory approach used by CLEAR, such as partners' engagement in collaborative trust-building activities, improves the local ownership and increases likelihood of sustainability of results. For instance, the CLEAR PPMP Executive Course, developed in partnership with Strathmore Business School (SBS) was a consolidated effort among various key stakeholders aimed at establishing a curriculum that improves the capacity of county cooperative officers to address key gaps within their county specific cooperative policy and legislation. This curriculum attracted contributions from 30 of the 47 counties in Kenya, through an extensive baseline assessment, input from the Council of Governors (COGs) – which is the key mechanism for Governors to address matters pertaining to their respective Counties, Global Communities, and the Strathmore Business School (SBS). The PPMP strengthened CLEAR's collaboration with COGs in developing county cooperative model frameworks that counties will use to tailor their own county cooperative legislations. Deliberate efforts were also made to engage County Executive Committee Members (CECs) for cooperatives, Chief Officers, Directors for cooperatives and the County Attorneys to ensure an all-inclusive involvement of cooperative stakeholders.

The Cooperative Performance Index (CPI) Assessments: CLEAR holds CPI Assessment result dissemination sessions with partner cooperatives to inform the design and development of cooperative business curriculum and training approaches. This is done through open conversations and feedback sharing. The outcome of these sessions forms the basis for the identification of capacity gaps and key priority areas for individual cooperatives, pointing to a healthy starting point in capacity development.

Resource Hub for Cooperatives Knowledge and Information

Networks for Collaboration and Learning: As part of the Collaboration and Learning approach, CLEAR has brought together cooperatives stakeholders including youth to harness and consolidate the growing knowledge base on cooperatives development solutions in Kenya. Through CLEAR learning networks that include; Kenya Cooperatives Development Organization (KCDO), Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable (YERT) and the Cooperatives Policy Network, the program has been able to draw and share key lessons while highlighting issues that need to be considered for increased support to cooperatives. CLEAR has used the KCDO and Cooperatives Policy Network to facilitate dialogues between the county and national level stakeholders to ensure that their objectives align with those of the cooperatives they represent. Through these networks, CLEAR has also mobilized support and resources to build towards achieving key cooperatives development goals that include passing of the National Cooperatives Bill of 2021.

These networks' growth has continued to amplify CLEAR's role in enhancing lessons sharing among various stakeholders within the cooperative ecosystem and providing opportunities to learn from industry experts. These platforms also served as avenues to bridge the gap between cooperative members, county cooperative officers and cooperative leaders by engaging them in dialogues both in-person and virtually. Through this opportunity to dialogue, these key stakeholders can learn together and understand cooperative development perspectives at both the cooperative level and the government level. This networking will also ensure

sustainability of CLEAR Program interventions due to continuous public private dialogue aimed at prioritizing the needs of cooperatives for improved business performance.

The Gender Agenda: Capacity building on Gender Equity and Good Governance promotes women engagement in cooperatives. Over 70% of respondents felt that women and youth involvement in cooperative management and coordination had improved. CLEAR developed a Gender Equity & Good Governance manual that was rolled out to county officials, cooperative leaders & members, and media personnel. These training courses were geared towards the adoption of gender inclusive policies within the cooperative operations, utilization of a gender lens in media reporting and mainstreaming gender in all county and cooperative activities. All these were aimed at beginning the process of unpacking the systemic gender inequality and sex and age discrimination challenges in the structures and network of relations of targeted cooperatives.

Disabling Factors:

Cooperative Political landscape: Following the just concluded general elections in Kenya, CLEAR anticipates new cooperative officers and officials within Government, which means that the program will need to slow down its implementation pace to on-board new officials and bring them up-to-speed on the progress made in collaboration with their predecessors.

Recommendation and Action: Collaborating with the COG (Council of Governors) that is the lead coordinator on county engagements on policy and legislation will cushion the program against extensive delays. CLEAR is currently validating county model frameworks that will be disseminated to the counties through the COG as the program supports in the technical sessions to draft county specific legislations guided by the model frameworks.

The divide between the two levels of government (national and county governments): With the promulgation of the Kenyan constitution in 2010, cooperatives became a devolved function however there has not been clarity on separation of roles between national and county governments.

Recommendation and Action: CLEAR has supported the two levels of government in trying to unpack the devolved cooperative function to be able to move forward with county cooperative legislation. Continuous engagement with both levels of government through the CLEAR Cooperatives Policy Network has facilitated dialogue that ensured alignment of government objectives with those of the cooperatives they represent. Additionally, the county model frameworks have considered the provisions of the National Cooperative Bill of 2021 to ensure a harmonious legislative environment.

The aging movement dynamics: Although most men (70%) and even more women (84%) reported that there had been positive changes in capabilities of various management skills and tasks because of CLEAR's intervention, older people felt less positive about CLEAR's intervention. Additionally, satisfaction with how CLEAR prioritized its programming was high but decreased with age: 77% of respondents in the age group 20-34, 68% of the age group 35-59, and only 33% of cooperative members and leaders that were 60+ said they were satisfied with the prioritization of CLEAR's programming. Overall, this age category (60+) had a representation of 15% of survey respondents with youth representation standing at 33% of respondents while the rest (52%) came from the 36-59 age category. This result suggests that while CLEAR's activities were effectively able to respond to younger participants' needs, they were less able to address the

needs of older participants. CLEAR supports the advancement of inclusion and participation of all the members though there is a focus on recruitment of new members, particularly youth.

The digital divide continues to pose a critical concern regarding access to information and technology. While CLEAR quickly and aggressively adapted to COVID-19 public health requirements, the 60+ age category may not have appreciated the virtual approach to activities. 34% of the survey respondents for instance were not sure if CLEAR adaptations were effective while 5% outright indicated that these adaptations were not effective.

Despite many program efforts to ensure participation through provision of data bundles and being flexible on activity hours, some participants still reported that they could not join the online training as they did not have smart phones or did not have access to the internet, especially those residing in rural communities. The disparity in digital amenities such as electricity, internet connections and other utilities between urban and rural counties played out in the experiences of some of the participants dwelling in rural areas. This is particularly true for the 60+ age group. The CLEAR project noted this disparity at every stage of implementation and was aware that project activities were hindered by the depth and frequency at which some cooperative members benefited from CLEAR activities.

Recommendation: Closing the Generational Gap – CLEAR has on-boarded several producer cooperatives where a majority of members are adults nearing retirement age, CLEAR in close collaboration with the county cooperative officers will adapt to local context and languages to suit the various categories of cooperative members. Due to the digital divide, this age group is more challenged to communicate digitally, with the reducing of COVID restrictions, CLEAR will do more to connect in-person with cooperatives that have technological challenges. CLEAR has also embarked on cooperative specific diagnostic of accessibility to devices and technology literacy to better use the right tools and facilitation for a specific cooperative. The results noted that physical meetings are more trusted by older members and government officials allowing them to speak more freely. CLEAR will also support cooperatives to continue advancing their use of technology and building capacity to embrace digital learning with changing times.

Another observation highlighted by the CPI and MTE is that cooperatives are segregated by age. While CLEAR works with many youths via worker cooperatives, there is little intergenerational mix in the cooperatives. One suggestion is to continue to advocate for more youth leadership in “older” cooperatives in addition to supporting youth specific cooperatives. Diversity of age and gender in all cooperatives makes for a more inclusive and sustainable business model.

Cooperatives require more support from Counties: 40% of County Officials surveyed said that their county government develops business plans, allocates funds to achieve them, and that cooperative hubs are funded and operational. This low level of governmental collaboration may hinder future growth of cooperatives as businesses.

Recommendation: CLEAR will continuously engage the county cooperative officers during cooperative development initiatives for a more inclusive approach and sustainability of the program gains. Additionally, the program will provide opportunities for cooperative officials to engage in dialogues with cooperatives to better understand the nature of support needed and the level of support that the directorates of cooperative can offer them.

Unsurprisingly, the cooperatives’ greatest need is finance. About half (48%) of the respondents said that CLEAR does not meet their financial needs like loans and grants provision. CLEAR, per the regulations of its award, does not provide direct financial support, but it does provide technical support around finance to

cooperatives so that they are financially viable for loans from financial institutions. This mismatch of needs and programmatic activities resonates with the findings that the most prevailing challenge cooperatives are facing is finance, as CLEAR was not designed to directly provide financial aid. However, 27% of the respondents said that CLEAR's financial management training has been addressing their cooperatives' challenges even though it did not incorporate direct funding or buying of equipment.

Recommendation: While CLEAR's focus is on capacity strengthening and not financial lending, the program will provide linkages between cooperatives banks & finance institutions, government, local, and international organizations that work towards improving access to finance. For sustainability purposes, CLEAR will include a 'Financial Savings' module as part of the financial management curriculum and explore mobile banking options for cooperatives. As a result, cooperative members will gain confidence in their cooperatives' capacity to become sustainable businesses. CLEAR will also work with the Counties to support cooperatives in accessing affordable finances through available government revolving fund kitties. Bridging the financial gap for cooperatives to ensure improved performance through provision of financial resources is critical towards the journey to self-reliance for cooperatives as 58% of respondents cited this as their most challenging issue currently.

Next Steps: From Evaluation to Adaptation – How CLEAR Program is adapting from MTE

Policy and Legislation Engagement:

The engagement strategy in policy interventions will remain open to provide broad-based inclusion of actors at national and county government levels supporting the evolving devolved status. CLEAR will maintain an active role of advocate during the national legislative process. CLEAR will also continue to serve as a convener and/or facilitator in the coming months following the just concluded Kenyan general elections and change in leadership within the directorate of cooperatives in the counties and nationally.

CLEAR has experienced that the co-design approach to policy and legislative frameworks is a model that works given the positive outcome CLEAR has experienced so far in its engagement at the national government level. CLEAR's partnership with the Council of Governors (COG) in co-designing county cooperative model frameworks is an excellent example of how effective this approach can be. The approach serves to increase compliance as the legislation will be locally led and owned in addition to attaining a harmonized legislative environment between the two levels of government for more sustainable outcomes. To promote County governments' support to cooperatives, CLEAR will engage the county cooperative officers during cooperative development initiatives to ensure a more inclusive approach and sustainability of program gains.

Peer-to-peer learning symposiums aim at providing opportunities for counties to learn from each other and share best practices towards developing and operationalizing county cooperative legislations. CLEAR will deliberately and continuously conduct cooperative check-in forums to allow for 360 feedback and co-creation



of activities with cooperatives and cooperative officers. Engaging county officials in these activities will also promote ownership and improved understanding of CLEAR's work for sustainability and ensure that cooperative members of all ages appreciate CLEAR program interventions.

Today's Kenyan population is increasingly accepting digital formats for education and online content which is a flexible option for participants of all ages to watch and learn at their convenience. CLEAR will combine this effort with a campaign to engage cooperative leadership to ensure the online content is accessible to all cooperative members, particularly adults who do not regularly access online content. This will be done through deliberately allocating time during 'normal' cooperative meetings to go through the material together.

Anchored on the 6th cooperative principle of Cooperation among Cooperatives, CLEAR will facilitate Coop2coop exposure forums between the cooperatives and mid-level and/or industry leaders to address key challenges faced by cooperatives in the industry. This will be in addition to holding industry platform forums in housing, worker and producer cooperatives in key agreed upon topics such as resource mobilization among others to address the most pressing unmet cooperative needs.

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