

The USAID Cooperative Development Program – CLEAR

Learning Agenda Summary



Introduction

The USAID [Cooperative Development Program](#) (CDP) – Cooperative Leadership, Engagement, Advocacy & Research (CLEAR) (2018–2023) was implemented by Global Communities with a goal of strengthening Kenya’s cooperative ecosystem. CLEAR’s objectives include actively engaging in the reform of cooperative policies both at the national level and within Kenyan counties, working in close collaboration with the State Department for Cooperatives, Council of Governors, and County Governments to ensure effective oversight. CLEAR strengthens cooperative enterprises through provision of technical assistance through coaching and mentorship, nurturing growth, enhancing governance, and facilitating connections to markets. CLEAR also facilitates education and learning on cooperatives through collaboration, learning and adapting (CLA).

The CLEAR **Learning Agenda** was designed to establish solid evidence on effective strategies for promoting an enabling environment for cooperative development in Kenya. The objective was to provide insights that inform decision-making in program implementation to ensure the right support for cooperatives to thrive.

This Learning Brief not only highlights findings from the learning agenda questions, it also showcases insights and best practices in Learning Agenda design and implementation.

CLEAR extends gratitude to implementing partners for their invaluable contributions to this Learning Agenda.

The Design and Implementation Process of the CLEAR Learning Agenda

Step 1: Collaborative Design Sessions – These sessions facilitated a comprehensive understanding of learning opportunities derived from programmatic activities, gaps in knowledge, and evidence needed to support assumptions within Kenya’s cooperative ecosystem. A set of prioritized learning questions were developed from these discussions. These questions were formulated with input from program team members, to address each program objective and ensure clarity and relevance.

Step 3: Refinement of Learning Questions – High-level learning questions were outlined, followed by specific, measurable inquiries to inform these broader questions. The feasibility and potential impact of each question on advancing knowledge within the cooperative sector was carefully considered, leading to critical evaluation and refinement to improve outcomes.

Step 4: Alignment with Monitoring and Evaluation Goals – The learning questions were aligned with CLEAR’s monitoring and evaluation goals to ensure that learning activities advanced data collection and analysis efforts effectively.

Step 5: Development of Learning Activities – Following the identification of priority questions, discussions centered on appropriate measures to answer them, ensuring that data systems and collection procedures were in place. Tasks, responsibilities, and timeframes were defined to facilitate continued collaboration in implementing learning activities.

Step 6: Linking Learning Activities with Products – Each learning activity was linked to a specific learning product, providing opportunities to disseminate evidence. In some instances, stakeholders and partners were engaged in co-development of the learning products, to ensure credibility and collaboration.

Step 7: Dissemination Planning – A dissemination plan was developed to define target audiences, distribution dates, and platforms for sharing learning products, ensuring effective communication of findings across various areas of CLEAR Program implementation.

A key lesson learned from the above process was that designing and implementing learning agendas collaboratively, intentionally, and with the right teams “in the room”, can be a rocket-launcher for larger, transformative outcomes. This together with having buy in and support from program leadership helped reinforce positive learning mindsets, kick-start behaviors that stick, and build collective ownership and accountability for continuous improvement across program activities.



CLEAR Program Stakeholder Learning Forum

CLEAR Learning Agenda Questions and Findings

Theme 1: Creating an Improved Cooperatives Enabling Environment

Learning Question 1: In reviewing the challenges counties are facing in the implementation of cooperatives policy and legislation framework in Kenya, what enabling conditions should be put in place to support cooperative enterprise development?

Finding 1: CLEAR program's collaborative efforts with county and national stakeholders, facilitated through engagements with the Council of Governors and the State Department of Cooperatives respectively, have played a pivotal role in shaping policy reforms and achieving alignment. By co-organizing policy review meetings and legislative drafting workshops, CLEAR has demonstrated the significance of collaborative engagement in policy development. These efforts, conducted across multiple counties where CLEAR was implemented, coupled with CLEAR's legal expertise and recommendations, have led to substantial amendments to county government cooperative bills, ensuring alignment with Kenya's updated constitution and national cooperative policies. Through these efforts by CLEAR and stakeholders, the cooperatives national bill was completed and presented to Cabinet in 2023, model county cooperative policies, bills, and regulations were developed and disseminated to all 47 counties through collaboration with the Council of Governors. Additionally, 21 county governments benefitted from CLEAR technical assistance in drafting their cooperative policies and legislation.

Finding 2: Capacity building through training plays a crucial role in equipping county officials with the essential skills needed for effective involvement in the development of cooperative policies. The success of the Public Policy Making Process (PPMP) Executive Course, conducted by CLEAR in collaboration with Strathmore Business School, serves as a compelling example of how educational initiatives can empower county stakeholders, including County Executive Committee Members (CECM), Chief Officers, County Cooperative Commissioners, Directors for cooperatives, and Officers. PPMP emphasized the significance of comprehensive skill development, covering not only policy design but also implementation, evaluation, and stakeholder engagement. This holistic approach equips officials with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of cooperative enterprise development. Collaborative partnerships, such as the one with Strathmore Business School, proved invaluable in combining resources and expertise for impactful training, thereby enhancing officials' learning experiences. Moreover, the ability to adapt and remain resilient is crucial, as demonstrated by the successful transition to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring uninterrupted access to training even in challenging circumstances. A total of 264 participants benefited from the PPMP training which also influenced 21 counties to collaborate with CLEAR in adapting their specific cooperative policies and bills to align with the National Policy, bill, and the constitution of Kenya.

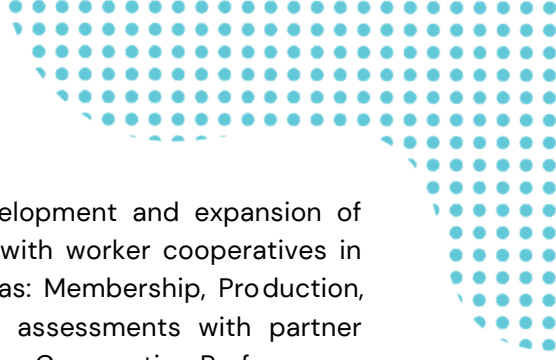


Youth Entrepreneurship Roundtable (YERT)

Theme 2: Improved Cooperative Business Performance

Learning Question 2: Which capacity-building interventions are the most effective in improving business performance of CLEAR's supported cooperatives? with a focus on worker cooperatives.

Finding 1: Collective advocacy and collaboration play a vital role in establishing a legal framework for worker cooperatives, as exemplified by the case of worker cooperatives in Kenya. This case underscores the critical need for a specific legal framework tailored to the unique characteristics of worker cooperatives. Previously, the absence of such guidelines often compelled newly formed worker cooperatives to register as marketing or Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs), hindering their formalization and growth. However, collaborative efforts between CLEAR, the State Department of Cooperatives, and the Council of Governors led to recognition of worker cooperatives in the draft national cooperative policy and bill. This collaborative approach and active advocacy have played a pivotal role in influencing legal developments concerning worker cooperative legislation. Furthermore, the involvement of government stakeholders in facilitating the registration process and formulating bylaws specifically tailored to worker cooperatives adds another layer of support and legitimacy to the cooperative model.




Finding 2: Technical support is paramount for the successful development and expansion of emerging cooperative enterprises, as evidenced by the experience with worker cooperatives in Kenya. CLEAR’s business training approach focused on five key areas: Membership, Production, Marketing, Governance, and Management. By conducting baseline assessments with partner cooperatives and continuously monitoring their performance using the Cooperative Performance Index tool, CLEAR utilized feedback from these assessments to identify capacity-building areas for each cooperative. Throughout the program’s duration, CLEAR successfully partnered with ten worker cooperatives during their early-stage formation and startup. Crucial areas for business training included the development of essential business documents, formulation of operational policies, implementation of digital marketing strategies, and establishment of communication systems to enhance transparency and accountability. These efforts are essential for positioning cooperatives on a trajectory toward growth and long-term sustainability.

Finding 3: The establishment of a worker cooperative curriculum is crucial for fostering sustainable cooperative development. The introduction of the Worker Cooperative Business Course (WCBC) in collaboration with the Cooperative University of Kenya (CUK) and the Democracy at Work Institute (DAWI) signifies significant progress in promoting and institutionalizing the worker cooperative model in Kenya. Integrating this course into CUK’s curriculum lays a solid foundation for education and training in the field of worker cooperatives, while also extending its reach to county cooperative officers. This initiative ensures a wider comprehension of cooperative principles, governance, and management among students, faculty, and government stakeholders. As the curriculum continues to expand its outreach, it will contribute to a growing pool of cooperative experts and advocates, thereby facilitating the development and sustainability of worker cooperatives nationwide.

Theme 3: Gender and Cooperatives

Learning Question 3: How can cooperative businesses effectively integrate gender mainstreaming into their operations and enhance women’s participation in cooperative business activities?

Finding 1: A fundamental change in perspective concerning traditional gender roles is imperative for enhancing women’s participation and fostering their leadership within cooperatives. By acknowledging women as equal members with equal rights to engage in decision-making processes, cooperatives can tap into the full potential of diverse perspectives and talents among their members. This shift in cultural norms is not solely about achieving equality but also represents a savvy business decision, as research suggests that diverse leadership teams often outperform homogeneous ones. Furthermore, empowering women, boosting their confidence, and enabling them to take on more active roles in their communities not only contributes to the success of cooperatives but also promotes broader social development.



Finding 2: Cooperatives have the opportunity to intentionally gather gender-disaggregated data, which can inform the development of targeted policies and programs addressing the specific needs of women members. To foster gender inclusivity, cooperatives should establish gender policies that not only cater to women's needs but also facilitate their active involvement at all levels of the cooperative. These policies may include mandatory gender sensitivity training for members, designated quotas for women in managerial positions, initiatives for skills development among women, and campaigns aimed at raising awareness about cultural gender norms.

Establishing dedicated gender committees within cooperatives, in collaboration with spouses, can prove to be an effective strategy for identifying and addressing gender-related challenges. These committees should actively participate in educational and training initiatives aimed at shifting community perceptions regarding gender roles and promoting inclusivity. In support of these training efforts, the CLEAR program has developed a Gender Equity and Good Governance Training Guide, designed to facilitate discussions aimed at advancing gender equity and good governance within cooperatives. This guide primarily targets cooperative champions who have successfully completed a Training of Trainers (TOT) program conducted by Global Communities' CLEAR Program. Furthermore, the guide is adaptable and accessible for use by various NGOs and organizations committed to promoting gender equality and equity.

Finding 3: While men may sometimes act as barriers to women's participation, they hold the potential to facilitate women's engagement in cooperatives. By actively supporting gender equality initiatives, men can play a pivotal role in fostering women's involvement. This can be achieved through actions such as sharing household responsibilities, providing financial assistance and business development opportunities to women, advocating for women's land and property rights, and challenging societal stereotypes and attitudes.

Engaging men as gender champions in gender sensitization trainings and business workshops, as demonstrated by the CLEAR Program, represents a valuable strategy for increasing their understanding of how they can contribute to and advocate for gender equality within cooperatives.

This approach highlights the importance of transforming traditional gender norms and involving both genders in the pursuit of equitable participation and empowerment within cooperative settings.

Acknowledgements

CLEAR extends gratitude to partners and stakeholders who have significantly contributed to the implementation of the CLEAR Learning Agenda. Many thanks to Strathmore University, with whom CLEAR collaboratively launched and executed an executive program on the Public Policy Making Process (PPMP). This groundbreaking initiative has proven immensely beneficial to county cooperative officials and various stakeholders by enhancing their comprehension and proficiency in cooperatives policy matters. A total of 264 individuals have undergone comprehensive training through the PPMP executive course, attesting to its far-reaching impact. To amplify the influence of this training, partnership with the Council of Governors and the State Department of Cooperatives, collectively facilitated the development of an extensive framework governing county cooperative policies, bills and regulations. This partnership has culminated in 21 counties actively engaging with Global Communities to conduct legislative drafting workshops and successfully domesticating their policies and bills to align with the Constitution of Kenya.

The transformational potential of cooperatives has also been disseminated through educational channels, thanks to the collaborative efforts of CLEAR, the Cooperative University of Kenya, the Democracy at Work Institute, and partner cooperatives that saw the launch of the Worker Cooperative Business curriculum which has enriched the knowledge and insights of educators and students in the field of worker cooperative management. 10 worker cooperatives have since partnered with CLEAR to grow and improve their businesses.

This case study was developed by Tindi Sitati, CLA Officer, CLEAR Program, with contributions from Ashley Holst, Acting Chief of Party and Technical Specialist, Olga Oyier, Team Lead and Policy and Legislation Affairs Specialist, Pamela Kaburu, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Specialist and Mike Kipngeno, Senior Cooperative Officer.

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