

How Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) can shine light on organizational capacity building programs: a case study from strengthening the social service workforce in Colombia

Background: CLA is a set of practices implemented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that involves strategic collaboration to improve organizational performance, continuous monitoring and evaluation for learning, and data-driven adaptive management to ensure that programs use information to make better decisions. However, there are many challenges to making CLA “work”, including resource limitations, communication roadblocks, lack of expertise, or viewing CLA as a separate workstream.

In Colombia, the USAID Human Resources for Health in 2030 Program (HRH2030) uses CLA approaches in our work with the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) to strengthen organizational capacity to provide violence prevention and protection services to children and families. Despite having a small team in Colombia, we developed a CLA approach that focused on strong collaboration, robust formative evaluation, and formal opportunities to pause and reflect.

Our CLA Process:

Engage ICBF in close external collaboration, including a formal agreement and relationship building

Identify technical evidence we needed to inform activities (see formative evaluation questions at right)

Collaborate with ICBF to identify, adapt, and implement appropriate assessment methods

Use results of formative evaluation assessments to inform activity planning

Create formal opportunities to pause, reflect, and adapt throughout implementation

Collaboration, Learning, and Adapting has helped HRH2030 and the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare build trust, ground activities in strong formative evaluation, and create opportunities to learn and adapt in our work to strengthen social services.



Want to incorporate CLA into your work? Here are our tips:



Be Prepared

- Plan for CLA from the beginning
- Set aside time and budget for CLA
- Set expectations with stakeholders, including donor



Be Flexible

- Incorporate pause and reflect opportunities
- Identify milestone moments that would be critical times to make program decisions/adapt approaches



Be Open

- Incorporate stakeholder involvement during formative activities and methodology design, not just implementation
- Build trust so that stakeholders can openly share ideas

Learn more at: <https://hrh2030program.org/where-we-work/Colombia/>

Formative Evaluation Questions:

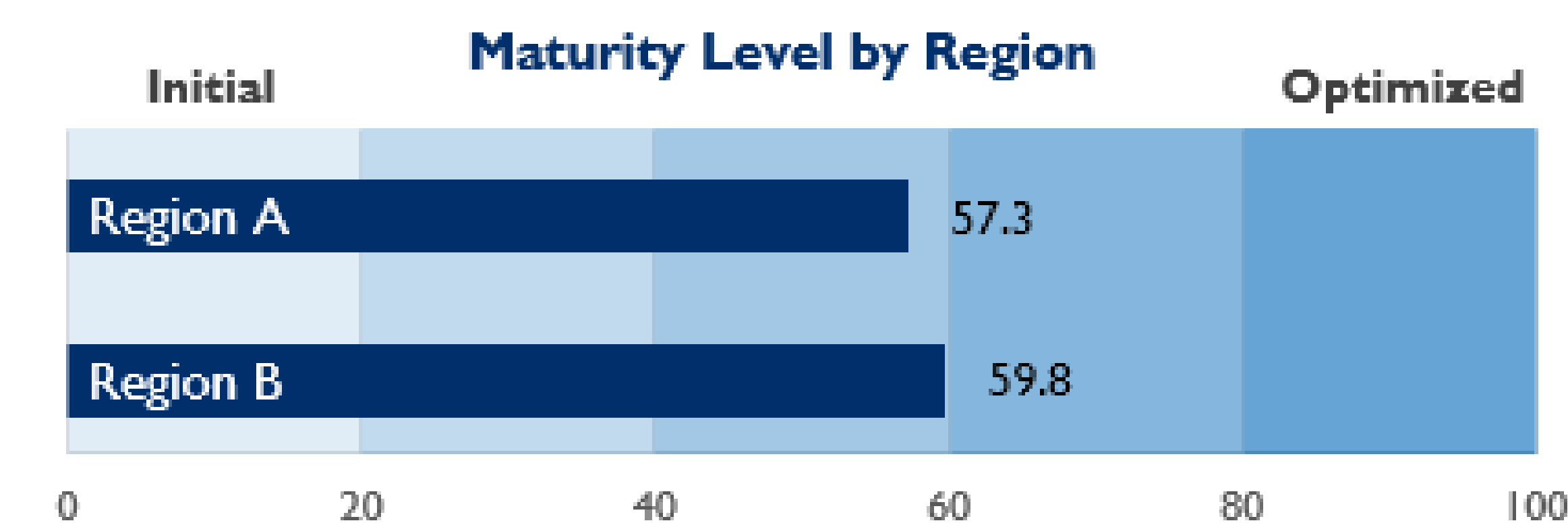
Question 1: Where is coordination breaking down between national ICBF technical offices?

Evidence: Implemented the Brandeis University relational coordination survey on concepts like communication accuracy and mutual respect to build a matrix demonstrating strength of working relationships.

Example coordination matrix:	Relational Coordination (on a scale from 0 to 4) Reported With:		
	Directorate A	Directorate B	Directorate C
Directorate A	3.2	2.0	2.1
Directorate B	1.2	1.7	1.2
Directorate C	2.2	1.7	3.7

Question 2: What do ICBF's regional organizational processes look like, and what could be strengthened?

Evidence: Used a capability maturity model approach to measure processes on a scale of initial, reactive processes to optimized processes. We broke processes down into components to identify regional priorities.



Question 3: What is the quality of case management processes at the local level?

Evidence: Measured case management at macro and micro level using the USAID Case Management Toolkit.

