FEED THE FUTURE
The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

Policy LINK Semi-Annual Report
April 1 – September 30, 2021

In partnership with: USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security | USAID/Bangladesh | USAID/Kenya and East Africa | USAID/Ethiopia | USAID/South Sudan

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Policy LINK
LEADERSHIP & COLLABORATION FOR BETTER POLICY SYSTEMS

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Bureau for Resilience and Food Security

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Introduction

About Policy LINK

Policy LINK is a global Feed the Future program to advance leadership and collaboration for better policy systems. Feed the Future is America's global hunger and food security initiative, led by USAID.

As a global program, Policy LINK offers thought leadership, facilitation, and other resources to support people, platforms, and participatory learning. We work through the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) and in partnership with USAID Missions in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya and East Africa, and South Sudan.

This report covers activities through each of these "buy-ins" and speaks to the ways in which Policy LINK is working with its partners to strengthen policy systems, contributing to food security and resilience in Feed the Future focus countries.

Our Core Principles

1. We work together in teams; we always put our teams' interests above our own.

2. We develop meaningful relationships based on listening, healthy communication, respect and humility.

3. We are self-aware of our competencies: we build on our talents and strive to contribute where they are greatest.

4. We learn and adapt from our successes and failures, always open to new ideas and better ways to work.

5. We are disciplined; we demand the most of ourselves in achieving our absolute best.

About This Report

Showcasing Milestones in Improved Institutional Architecture

For each Policy LINK buy-in activity, this report showcases milestones in improved institutional architecture (IA). These milestones are the culmination of work conducted throughout the year, but the narrative links to more information about activities that took place in the most recent half of the year.

IA looks at the performance and capacity of policy actors to function as a system. The term refers to the set of institutions – including their relationships, interactions, and collective capacity – involved in policy formulation and implementation. In IA, "architecture" is the capacity and processes within and among organizations involved in the policy system. The health of a country's IA determines its capacity to undertake transparent, inclusive, predictable, and evidence-based policy change. The IA framework consists of six policy elements, as shown on the following slide.

1. Guiding Policy Framework looks at the degree to which there is a strong set of legal processes and articulated roles and responsibilities that underpin policy development, coordination, implementation, and accountability.

2. Policy Development and Coordination looks at the degree to which policies are designed in adherence to the guiding policy framework and a set policy agenda with systemic organization and communication between the national and regional levels and with all relevant stakeholders.

3. Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement looks at the degree to which all stakeholders (private sector, civil society, etc.) are involved consistently in all aspects of the policymaking and implementation process.

The
Six Elements
of **Effective Policy**

4. Evidence Informed Policy Making looks at the degree to which policies are developed using relevant data and evidence to ensure development of contextually relevant and actionable policies.

5. Policy Implementation looks at the degree to which policies are enacted in a clear manner based on predetermined plans with multi-stakeholder ownership, sufficient capacity and resource commitments of relevant government institutions, and reliable feedback loops for adaptive management.

6. Mutual Accountability looks at the degree to which government and stakeholders co-implement and follow through on their commitments in policy development and implementation processes.

What are you interested in?

- **Policy Development and Coordination**

  Bangladesh Seed Policy Dialogue
  Bangladesh Nutrition Policy Dialogue

- **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**

  UNFSS Youth Engagement
  UNFSS Africa Common Position
  Centre for African Leaders in Agriculture
  Bangladesh Learning Events
  Strategic Partners Group
  Uganda Country Dialogue
  South Sudan Learning Forum
  South Sudan Civic Engagement Centers
  South Sudan Institutional Mapping

- **Evidence Informed Policy Making**

  African Union Events
  Bangladesh Learning Events
  East Africa Trade Study
  Strategic Partners Group
  Uganda Country Dialogue
  South Sudan Learning Forum
  South Sudan Institutional Mapping

- **Policy Implementation**

  Centre for African Leaders in Agriculture

- **Mutual Accountability**

  Biennial Review Use Study
  African Union Events
  Biennial Review Report
  Biennial Review Toolkit

Browse by Buy-In or Region

- USAID/Bureau for Resilience and Food Security
- USAID/Bangladesh
- USAID/Ethiopia
- USAID/Kenya and East Africa
- USAID/South Sudan

USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security

Through the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS), Policy LINK offers "backbone" support to the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) as well as incubates development solutions that can be scaled through USAID Missions in other countries. The following slides describe progress against these activities, which fall under the following categories: [TBD1], [TBD2], and [TBD3].

Overview

Backbone Support to the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme

Supported the third Biennial Review (BR) cycle, including training national experts, raising awareness of the BR Toolkit, and preparing a BR Use Study learning brief.

Provided strategic, design, and facilitation support for the CAADP Partnership Platform and MAPLE; developed user-friendly platforms for these virtual events.

Institutional Architecture

Re-established the evidence base for the IA Framework and developed a theory of change.

Developed a new institutional architecture assessment (IAA) methodology and applied the new methodology in Tanzania.

Facilitator Network

Pivoted to a more facilitative role in the network's development, supporting the Advisory Group to achieve its vision—including legal registration of the network—rather than our own.

Held the inaugural event of the Learning and Sharing Program.

Leadership Development

With the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the African Management Institute (AMI), launched the Centre for African Leaders in Agriculture (CALA) and helped develop a 16-month leadership course.

Launched Leadership LINK, an online platform for leadership development and learning.

AKADEMIYA2063 (A2063)

Finalized the 2020 Annual Trends and Outlook Report, the official CAADP M&E report.

Challenges and Adaptations

Stakeholder Capacity

Low capacity among CAADP counterparts has led to significant demand for Policy LINK support. In response, the project is improving the AU's strategic planning and building capacity in communications and other areas. Policy LINK is also reorganizing its CAADP team to facilitate integration with partner teams and on-the-job mentoring.

Conceptual Clarity

Lack of clarity around the IA concept remains a challenge. Internally, Policy LINK dedicated a LINK Up session to IA, to ensure all staff work understand IA. Externally, Policy LINK is developing several knowledge products, including a concept note and a collaborative course on IA.

Facilitative Role

Policy LINK's pivot to playing a facilitative role in the Facilitator Network's development has required adjustments. The Advisory Group is finding its way in its leadership role, and Policy LINK is adapting its sub-team structure to its advisory role. To maintain momentum, Policy LINK has forged ahead with the Learning and Sharing Program, which engages members and demonstrates value.

Partnerships

Policy LINK has continued to navigate its relationship with AGRA and AMI for CALA. One effective approach has been bringing to bear lessons from past work (e.g., the importance of a competitive, transparent participant selection process).

Biennial Review Use Study

What It Is

Policy LINK conducted a qualitative study to understand how the Biennial Report (BR) report and data are used by CAADP stakeholders and developed corresponding recommendations to promote more effective use of the BR data at country-level by various stakeholder groups, including non-state actors for advocacy purposes. The study was overseen by a multi-stakeholder BR Study Advisory Group with members drawn from the African Union Commission, USAID, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), ReSAKSS, ActionAid, and Policy LINK. The methodology for the study included focus group discussions with CAADP Focal Points and representatives of RECs.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, **Mutual Accountability**

Why It Matters

Due to the participatory nature of this study, CAADP stakeholders are now more likely to adopt the proposed recommendations, which is leading to more effective design and dissemination practices of the BR data by the AU institutions.

Dig Deeper

- Read the IA MIlestone Brief
- Read the Policy LINK Newsroom story
- View the most recent Biennial Review data

What is the CAADP Biennial Review?

7 COMMITMENT AREAS TO TRANSFORM AFRICAN AGRICULTURE
Click on the icons below to navigate to the related commitment's scores

Halving Poverty through Agriculture by 2025

Ending Hunger by 2025

Boosting Intra-African Trade in Agriculture Commodities & Services

Enhancing Investment Finance in Agriculture

Enhancing Resilience to Climate Variability

Recommitment to the Principles and Values of the CAADP Process

Enhancing Mutual Accountability for Actions and Results

7 MALABO COMMITMENTS

The latest Biennial Review (BR) is the third such report to capture **performance against the AU's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP)**. The report draws on data self-reported by individual countries and then scored at the continental level to track their progress against the Malabo Declaration, the 2014 agreement that established continent-wide goals for "accelerated agricultural growth." Findings are based on **43 indicators, seven commitments, and 23 performance categories**.

What's the LINK?
Click here to learn more.

Strategic Support to Key AU Events

What It Is

During FY20, the design and execution of several key Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) events demonstrated an improvement in the depth and quality of participation of various stakeholders to engage in reflection and dialogue on the agricultural transformation agenda in Africa. During this reporting period, Policy LINK provided strategic, design, and facilitation support to the AU as it prepared for its two annual, continental learning events, the CAADP Partnership Platform and Malabo Agricultural Policy Learning Event (MAPLE).

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, **Mutual Accountability**

Why It Matters

With Policy LINK support, these AU-convened events served to create more space for diverse stakeholders to interact and to help inform the agenda. In addition, the events prioritized consensus-building and interrogation of evidence among the various participants and represented a milestone in the practice of evidence-informed policymaking, through CAADP, for AU member states.

Dig Deeper

- [View a recording of the 2020 Partnership Platform](#).
- [Register for the 2021 MAPLE](#).

Supporting the 3rd Biennial Review

What It Is

Earlier this year, Policy LINK provided support to the third cycle of the BR by delivering a five-day virtual training to national experts on BR technical guidelines, data collection methods, templates, e-system, validation, reporting and advocacy processes led by the African Union and Regional Economic Committees (RECs). The training took place from March 15 -19, 2021 and reached 402 national experts, including public-sector experts from more than 45 countries and representatives of NSAs, the media, the AU, and RECs.

Why It Matters

Policy LINK was instrumental in shifting this large-scale training program to a virtual format given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. A user-friendly training platform enabled national experts to access live and recorded training sessions, as well as an extensive library of resources that included details on the BR technical guidelines and individual Malabo commitments.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about Policy LINK's support to the 3rd Biennial Review](#).

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, **Mutual Accountability**

Developing the CAADP BR Toolkit

What It Is

During FY2020, Policy LINK facilitated a review of the BR toolkit by gathering feedback and input through six dialogues with the AU and RECs and conducting a webinar entitled "Strengthening African Country Data Systems: The CAADP Biennial Review Toolkit" with BR stakeholders. Policy LINK is incorporating feedback from the AU, RECs and BR users into an update to the toolkit that is now underway.

Why It Matters

By focusing on improving the accessibility and usability of the toolkit, Policy LINK is supporting more effective dissemination and engagement practices around the BR data -- which will lead to more effective mutual accountability platforms for CAADP implementation and agricultural transformation more broadly.

Dig Deeper

- [View the CAADP Biennial Review Toolkit here.](#)
- [Read about Policy LINK's work to ground agricultural transformation in data systems](#).

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, **Mutual Accountability**

Supporting Youth Engagement in the UNFSS

What It Is

With support from Policy LINK, a network of youth engaged in the AU's CAADP developed a youth-centered policy position paper ahead of the United Nations Food Systems Summit held in September 2021. Anchored in the Summit's five action tracks, which include access to "safe and nutritious food for all," the group's position paper emerged from two days of intensive consultations held in June. Both days featured contributions from young leaders throughout the continent, including Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Zambia.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

This inclusive and participatory platform, coordinated by the CAADP Youth Network, represents an important milestone in improving the capacity of youth actors to advocate and engage in policy-relevant dialogue for CAADP and food systems more broadly.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about the youth position paper](#).
- [Listen to podcast episodes featuring young agriculture leaders](#).

Supporting the AU's UNFSS Common Position

What It Is

With Policy LINK support, the AU hosted a series of meetings to develop the Africa Common Position for the Pre-Summit of the UNFSS. Intended for ministers of agriculture, the virtual meeting in July 2021 drew representatives of all 55 member states. Participants proposed numerous improvements to the draft Common Position, including greater emphasis on evidence-based interventions, scalable and politically viable solutions, investment in research and innovation, the inclusion of rural women and youth, mapping and gazettement of agricultural land, and government-to-government learning.

Why It Matters

Policy LINK provided technical and logistical support for the process, which needed to be carried out in the four AU languages and required comments and suggestions to be integrated into the Common Position.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about the AU's Common Position for the UNFSS](.).

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Launching the Centre for African Leaders in Agriculture

What It Is

As part of its partnership with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), Policy LINK is playing a key role in rolling out the inaugural coaching program of the Centre for African Leaders in Agriculture (CALA). The first cohort of 80 leaders from eight countries across sub-Saharan Africa will participate in a 16-month program focused on leadership in Africa's food security and sustainability. Representing government, the private sector, and civil society, participants were selected from nearly 1,000 applicants.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, Evidence Informed Policy Making, **Policy Implementation**, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

The design and launch of the program in FY20 represents an important milestone in investing in the institutional capacity, networks and individual leadership skills required for improved policy implementation and coordination and highlighting the significance of these investments in order to transform the agricultural sector across Africa. The program focuses on developing the competencies of leaders in four core interrelated dimensions: management skills for improved implementation, leadership skills, institutional development, and systems change.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about Policy LINK's work with CALA here.](#)

USAID/Bangladesh

In partnership with the USAID/Bangladesh Mission, the purpose of the Feed the Future Bangladesh Policy LINK Agricultural Policy Activity is to strengthen the capacities of Bangladesh's key agricultural actors and institutions, improve the policy environment and cultivate the policy-making processes that will enable inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth, strengthen resilience among people and systems, and create a well-nourished population, especially women and children. The Policy Activity was initiated in September 2020.

Overview

Collaboration

The Activity connected with 18 Feed the Future (FtF) Implementing Partners (IPs) involved in policy related work through one-to-one virtual coffee sessions to identify scope of collaboration.

Knowledge Building and Co-Creation

Convened a learning and sharing event with 11 FtF IPs and the USAID/Bangladesh Mission to kick off knowledge building and co-creation.

Leading for Results

Established the "Leading for Results" webinar series for IPs and agriculture stakeholders and delivered to two initial cohorts.

IA Milestones

The team supported 8 milestones in improved institutional architecture including:

- 5 learning and sharing events (555 participants) held at national and regional levels broadening the consultation process and building awareness, trust and networking among agricultural stakeholders.

- 2 regional workshops (107 participants) facilitated with stakeholders from Khulna and Barisal to establish common understanding and open dialogue on policy directives around seed breeding, licensing, quality, and trade.

- 1 nutrition policy roundtable (45 participants) convened where national nutrition stakeholders discussed evidence, experiences and learning around nutrition policy development, implementation and performance.

Challenges and Adaptations

Recruitment

Since this was the first year of the Policy Activity roll out, head office and regional staff recruitment took a considerable amount of time as the senior management needed to flesh out the required skillsets and align them with ideal candidate capacities.

Internet Connectivity

In the virtual learning sharing events for regional stakeholders based at Khulna, Barishal, Jashore and Cox's Bazar, many of the participants were not able to participate due to unstable internet connectivity and lacking familiarity with the digital tools.

Scheduling

To meet rushed deadlines, the Policy Activity had organized a series of virtual events within short notice. Therefore, some of invitees were unable to confirm attendance due conflicting schedules. These issues can be mitigated through more cohesive planning and coordinated measures.

Honoraria

Adhering to protocol against giving cash-based honoraria, the Policy Activity faced challenges when liaising with senior level government officials and/or inviting them to events.

Engaging Stakeholders Nationally

What It Is

Policy LINK engaged policy stakeholders across the 4 policy pillar areas in a National-Level Network and Learning Event to help to build awareness with Bangladesh agricultural stakeholders around the Policy Activity, build a network of counterparts, and to collect insights from across a wide range of stakeholders across the 4 policy pillar areas (the seed sector, food safety, social safety nets, and nutrition).

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

The national engagements set the stage for engagement with a diverse set of Bangladeshi agricultural stakeholders, both inside and outside of the government, at the community and regional levels, where seeds, food safety, social safety nets, and nutrition top the development agenda. Ensuring the activities of donor-funded projects are aligned with and support these national priorities is core to Policy LINK's work, which is helping build and strengthen platforms for collaborative planning and implementation among diverse stakeholders in other FtF priority countries like South Sudan.

Dig Deeper

- [Read about the launch of the Policy Activity](#).

Engaging Stakeholders Regionally

What It Is

Policy LINK engaged policy stakeholders in Jashore, Cox's Bazaar, Khulna, and Barishal in a series of Regional-Level Network and Learning Events to help build awareness and to collect insights from across a wide range of stakeholders at the regional level across the four policy pillar areas (the seed sector, food safety, social safety nets, and nutrition).

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

The regional engagements set the tone for the Policy Activity by making a deliberate effort to include voices of stakeholders outside of the capital Dhaka and enabling the team to develop strategic partnerships with non-state actors, particularly those representing smallholder farmers, women, and youth as well as private businesses, industry associations and the media, and to promote learning networks that enable stakeholders from government, the private sector, academia, and civil society to collaborate across a region, technical challenge, or cohort.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about Policy LINK's Bangladesh work](#).

Engaging Nutrition Stakeholders

What It Is

National nutrition stakeholders were engaged in a collaborative roundtable discussion focused on sharing evidence and experiences around nutrition policy to build shared understanding and trust as well as set a strong foundational understanding of the challenges/opportunities in this area. Stakeholders were then able to collaboratively identify key challenges and opportunities within the nutrition sector.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, **Policy Development and Coordination**, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

The sectoral dialogues deepen Policy LINKs engagement with the stakeholders at the forefront of food systems in Bangladesh. These dialogues further underscore the Policy Activity's commitment to including voices of stakeholders outside of the capital Dhaka and enabling the team to develop strategic partnerships with non-state actors, particularly those representing smallholder farmers, women, and youth as well as private businesses, industry associations and the media, and to promote learning networks that enable stakeholders from government, the private sector, academia, and civil society to collaborate across a region, technical challenge, or cohort.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about Policy LINK's Bangladesh work](#).

Engaging Seed Stakeholders

What It Is

The Policy Activity hosted a webinar titled "An Introduction to Seed Policy in Bangladesh" with key representatives from the public and private sectors of the regions of Khulna and Barishal. The Policy LINK-facilitated discussions were the first in a series of planned engagements to build and cultivate a coalition of individuals and institutions who will contribute to national- and regional-level policy formulation, implementation, and regulation processes. The virtual events established a foundational understanding of the policy and regulations dictating seed production, research, and market promotion.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, **Policy Development and Coordination**, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

The sectoral dialogues deepen Policy LINKs engagement with the stakeholders at the forefront of food systems in Bangladesh. These dialogues further underscore the Policy Activity's commitment to including voices of stakeholders outside of the capital Dhaka and enabling the team to develop strategic partnerships with non-state actors, particularly those representing smallholder farmers, women, and youth as well as private businesses, industry associations and the media, and to promote learning networks that enable stakeholders from government, the private sector, academia, and civil society to collaborate across a region, technical challenge, or cohort.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about Policy LINK's Bangladesh work](#).

USAID/Ethiopia

In partnership with the USAID/Ethiopia Mission, Policy LINK is working to provide technical assistance and institutional capacity strengthening support to the Government of Ethiopia and other policy system actors as they transition to a more inclusive and transparent policy development process. The activity will assist the government to create space for inclusive, participatory policy dialogue with the private sector and civil society, introduce evidence and analysis into the dialogue, and expand economic opportunities.

Overview

Start-up Activities

Given its recent addition to the Policy LINK portfolio, the Ethiopia Activity has yet to attain its first milestone. That said, during the reporting period, Policy LINK undertook key start-up activities, including:

- Met with key stakeholders such as the Agricultural Transformation Agency.

- Set up an office and hired key positions, including the Country Lead.

- Developed and submitted the buy-in Refine and Implement (R&I) phase work plan to USAID for review and feedback.

- Developed the draft monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan and shared it with USAID.

- Began preparatory work for the stakeholder mapping study.

Challenges and Adaptations

Recruitment

Given the current volatility gripping the country, Policy LINK has had to remain flexible to USAID's needs, especially as political discussions around the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia's northern regions continue. Identifying work candidates with the same flexibility has been a challenge, especially as cautious budget projections have pushed the activity to combine roles — such as, for example, those of program coordination and communications. Most applicants have shown modest strengths in one or the other of these skill-sets, and few have been up to the task with both.

At the same time, Policy LINK has put in place a rigorous recruitment process that, while time-consuming, yields valuable insights into a candidate's fit for a given position. Taking the time to remain true to this process will pay dividends as this activity ramps up in the coming months.

Global Team Support

Overcoming this challenge has meant drawing on Policy LINK's global monitoring and evaluation, operations, and communications resources. The global program's operations team, for example, spearheaded the conceptualization, advertising, and interviewing of candidates across a variety of roles, including in program coordination, communications, and finance. Meanwhile, the global team's monitoring and evaluation experts have supported the drafting and revision of the Ethiopia Activity's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning plan, which is currently being finalized.

USAID/Kenya and East Africa

In partnership with the USAID/Kenya and East Africa Mission, Policy LINK focuses on strengthening the competitiveness of regional agricultural commodities, including identifying key factors to regional competitiveness, identifying value chains that can be competitive, and suggesting interventions with the greatest potential to increase competitiveness in the selected value chains and the agriculture sector more broadly. To these ends, Policy LINK has focused on stakeholder engagement, including by building a Strategic Partners Group (SPG), and onboarding two strategic partners, Akademiya2063 and DevPact to carry out a competitiveness analysis aimed at informing enhanced intra-regional trade.

Overview

Trade Competitiveness Analysis

Analyzed regional trade competitiveness with A2063 (trade landscape, critical factors for competitiveness, and the selection of the most competitive value chains) and DevPact (evaluation of past and current efforts, lessons learned, options to improve value chain competitiveness).

Stakeholder Engagement

Engaged trade stakeholders, regional economic communities, and private sector actors (e.g., trade associations, financial institutions). Held 11 one-on-one meetings with potential SPG members to gauge interest and solicit input, which influenced our focus areas and A2063 and DevPact's research.

Strategic Partners Group (SPG)

Established the SPG, whose 14 members represent development partners, private sector associations, financial service providers, and the EAC, to provide strategic guidance, dialogue, and a platform for collaboration. Convened four SPG meetings, which helped refine the competitiveness analysis and inform intervention areas and strategic actions to address agriculture trade competitiveness.

Sharing Findings

Shared competitiveness analysis findings with stakeholders via USAID implementing partner (IP) meetings, the East Africa Business Council (EABC) Technical Committee, Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture marketing strategy development meeting, and one-on-one meetings with IPs and national stakeholders. Presented the model for trade programming and options to USAID/KEA. Partnered with country stakeholders in Uganda to hold a national dialogue and began preparations in DRC, Kenya, and Zambia.

Trade Facilitation Programming Model

Through stakeholder consultations and analysis of previous trade facilitation efforts developed a model for practical trade facilitation programming that would address gaps in previous efforts by ensuring stakeholders ownership, proper diagnosis, and pragmatic solutions.

Challenges and Adaptations

Revised Activity Description

In September 2020, Policy LINK revised the buy-in activity description based on discussion and consultation with USAID/KEA, which resulted in a shift in scope that brought the project back to square one. Policy LINK had to socialize the new activity with stakeholders, explain the reasons behind the change, and reaffirm stakeholders' interest, which was confusing to some stakeholders. The recruitment of consultants and partner engagement also took time as the new activity began during the holiday season.

Learning Curve

As this is the first Policy LINK activity focusing on trade, we had to quickly assess the project's technical skills. Based on the assessment, Policy LINK contracted a trade expert and engaged two strategic partners with trade expertise who have provided technical support and helped shape the buy-in's scope and strategies.

Co-Creation

Genuine co-creation requires significant time. The activity involves many consultations with stakeholders, who, in some ways, dictate the pace of the process. Moreover, it takes time to bring stakeholders together, build consensus, and manage stakeholder expectations, especially as the scope evolves.

Analyzing Agricultural Sector Competitiveness

What It Is

To support evidence-based policy implementation, investment, and implementing partner programming around agricultural trade in East Africa, Policy LINK conducted an Analysis of Agricultural Sector Competitiveness in Eastern Africa and has shared findings through numerous multi-stakeholder platforms at the national and regional levels.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

The Policy LINK-supported analysis will offer a "menu" of models for facilitating trade, especially in agricultural sectors. Building on the work of other USAID programs, like the East Africa Trade and Investment Hub and Africa Lead as well as the promise of a recently launched African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA), the Policy LINK-led effort will explore ways to boost competitiveness across five value chains, including through digitization and regional infrastructure development.

Dig Deeper

- [Read more about this activity in the Policy LINK Newsroom](#).

Forming a Strategic Partners Group

What It Is

During the reporting period, Policy LINK helped form an Africa-based Strategic Partners Group (SPG) — composed of representatives of the Regional Economic Community, trade associations, research institutes, financial service providers, and development partners — to advance evidence building and provide a platform of sharing and action around trade and competitiveness in East Africa.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

Policy LINK has facilitated these strategic meetings, together with one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders, to reflect on the implications of this evidence on the way market actors conduct trade, to inform donor programming, and to promote the use and application of these findings. The Strategic Partners Group discussions also informed the next phase of the Policy LINK-led East Africa Regional Trade Competitiveness Activity, which focuses on generating innovative approaches that the private sector, governments, and development partners can invest in to improve trade.

Dig Deeper

- [Explore the outcomes of a recent Strategic Partners Group meeting](#).

Facilitating a Uganda Country Dialogue

What It Is

During the reporting period, Policy LINK laid the groundwork for a national dialogue with stakeholders in Uganda to assess – and act upon -- the findings of an agricultural trade competitiveness analysis along with studies from other partners. Drawing on the Analysis of Agricultural Sector Competitiveness in Eastern Africa conducted by Policy LINK, the activity developed a summary of key national-level issues to inform the Uganda country-level dialogue.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

Participants agreed that Uganda needs to industrialize its agriculture sector by creating an enabling environment for industries to thrive, including by reducing the cost of doing business through lower power tariffs and interest rates, investing in infrastructure and agro-processing, supporting data quality by through a digitized accountability platform, increasing funding for regulations and standards, enhancing off-take capacity, and strengthening public-private sector partnerships through institutionalized dialogue.

Dig Deeper

- [Read about the dialogue in the Policy LINK Newsroom](#).
- [Access resources from the Uganda Country Dialogue](#).

USAID/South Sudan

Policy LINK has provided backbone support to USAID/South Sudan for coordination on the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR). In support of PfRR, Policy LINK actively contributed to learning, focusing on how best to track and measure resilience and engage communities as well as facilitating effective partnerships with donors, UN agencies, and other implementing partners. Policy LINK also works closely with Civic Engagement Centers and Civil Society Organizations to strengthen their capacity to engage with external partners. During the reporting period, Policy LINK, under USAID's direction, shifted its focus to a new Resilience Focus Zone consisting of 13 counties.

Overview

Mapping

Under the Institutional Architecture for Resilience community mapping exercise, Policy LINK surveyed 600 institutional respondents to map local institutions' experience responding to shocks and stressors. Through 30 town hall "sense-making" workshops and follow-up face-to-face events across the four partnership areas (PAs) of Aweil, Torit, Wau and Yambio, developed community suggestions for how to prepare for, respond to and recover from shocks and stressors and prioritized outputs for presentation at the Annual Learning Forum.

Civic Engagement Centers

User Committee members from the Civic Engagement Centers in all four PAs conducted community wide consultations to understand citizen perspectives on how to influence PfRR programming through collaborative governance and convergence of resources.

Annual Learning Forum

Hosted 3rd Annual Learning Forum where community members from the four PAs voiced their priorities for resilience programming directly to officials from government, UN, and donor agencies. The event drew 200 attendees, featured a series of videos on the "Faces of Resilience," and will inform post-pandemic recovery.

Radio Shows

Supported community radio shows to increase community awareness, elicit feedback and endorsement of identified convergence points as part of community mobilization for implementation of the 2021 PfRR Framework.

Challenges and Adaptations

Political Context

Limited infrastructure, delayed formation of local government and political challenges made stakeholder and community engagement a delicate undertaking. It required a high level of situational awareness, respect for local dynamics, and relationship management.

Trust-building

Policy LINK deliberately started community engagement with a period of trust building targeting all four corners of the community and built on that trust during the IA4R Plus deployment.

Facilitating an Annual Learning Forum

What It Is

During the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR) 2020 Annual Learning Forum, which was held in April 2021, community members from four counties: Aweil, Wau, Torit and Yambio voiced their priorities for resilience programming directly to officials from the government, the United Nations, and various donor agencies working in the country.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

With Policy LINK support, community members from four rural counties in South Sudan voiced their priorities for resilience programming directly to officials from the government, the United Nations, and various donor agencies working in the country. The event, which drew more than 200 participants over two days, earned plaudits from government officials and the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan.
That kind of direct interaction was a first for the annual gathering. The Partnership, which brings together government, donors, community representatives, and the private sector, drew on Policy LINK expertise to plan and execute the virtual event.

Dig Deeper

- [Read highlights from the Annual Learning Forum](#).
- [Visit the PfRR Resilience Marketplace](#).

Supporting Civic Engagement Centers

What It Is

Civic Engagement Center User Committee members in Aweil, Torit, Wau, and Yambio conducted community-wide consultations in seven payams across the county to understand citizen perspectives on how to form an inclusive, democratic leadership body to influence PfRR resilience programming through collaborative governance, facilitative leadership, and convergence of community and donor resources.

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, Evidence Informed Policy Making, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

Through local Civic Engagement Centers (CECs), Policy LINK is deploying technology platforms to mobilize communities in rural and often vulnerable counties of South Sudan. As virtual engagement in the Covid-19 era has upstaged in-person work and social gatherings, the CECs in Aweil, Torit, Wau, and Yambio have become technology hubs for the local communities. That kind of leapfrogging has helped transform physical distancing barriers into wider collaboration and networking, bringing local voices into the national conversation around South Sudan's future.

Dig Deeper

- [Read about the CECs' use of technology in the Policy LINK Newsroom](#).

Supporting an Institutional Mapping Effort

What It Is

Communities in four PfRR counties of Aweil, Torit, Wau, and Yambio reviewed findings of a Policy LINK-led institutional mapping exercise that surveyed 600 institutional respondents to map local institutions' priorities. Through 30 Town Hall "sense-making" workshops across the four partnership areas, the communities developed recommendations for community preparation for shocks and stressors and contribute to development of priorities for resilience programming based upon the four pillar (outcome) structure of the PfRR ecosystem..

IA Element(s): Guiding Policy Framework, Policy Development and Coordination, **Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement**, **Evidence Informed Policy Making**, Policy Implementation, Mutual Accountability

Why It Matters

By involving communities in mapping their own priorities, POlicy LINK is helping lay the groundwork for forthcoming engagement in 13 counties that form USAID's Resilience Focus Zone — an area spread across five states largely unreached by the international donor community. Coping with "shocks and stressors" like flooding, conflict, and political instability, the county's more than 200,000 residents have reaped relatively little from the international donor community, which has reserved the bulk of its resources for less volatile areas. Overcoming that gap will take the buy-in of a broad swath of the county's population.

Dig Deeper

- [Read about Policy LINK's work in the USAID Resilience Focus Zone](.).

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