

USAID PREG County Government Joint Work Plan: Promoting County-Led Coordination to Build Resilience of Local Communities in Northern Kenya



BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

County Governments have a unique responsibility to lead development at the local level. Their efforts cannot be successful without the inclusive and equitable participation of all actors. Recognising this, the County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) call for collective action by stakeholders to implement long-lasting development solutions. These includes the efforts by national and county governments, development partners, civil society organisations, the private sector, local media stakeholders, and communities who all have different and complementary roles to play in the collective impact of sustainable development. Inclusive engagement is essential in all aspects of the development process, beginning with planning and continuing through implementing and monitoring national development strategies.

Development partners play an important role in the socio-economic development of many developing countries. This may be through budgetary support, projects/programmes and technical assistance. As one of the largest bilateral donor to Samburu County Government, USAID/Kenya and East Africa Mission, is funding a dynamic portfolio spanning maternal and child health, family planning, infectious diseases, health financing, health governance, Human Resources for Health, agriculture, education, water, sanitation and hygiene interventions. Such an extensive portfolio elevates the importance of coordination and timely information-sharing across projects, to reduce duplication of partners' effort and leveraging resources.

Through its five-year funded Resilience Learning Activity (RLA), USAID has been at the forefront of collaborating with the County Government of Samburu, to create a joint work plan (JWP), and think collaboratively to discover points of intersection within the development activities. The County Government of Samburu spearheads this process through the Department of Economic Planning. RLA serves as the secretariate of all the other USAID funded programs that operate under the Partnership for Resilience and Economic Growth (PREG).

This learning brief summarizes the Joint Work Planning process mechanisms, including the lessons learned, challenges and recommendations to improve future sessions. The methodology of developing this brief was through an extensive desk review of the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 JWP documents and interviewing the RLA technical team that led the process.

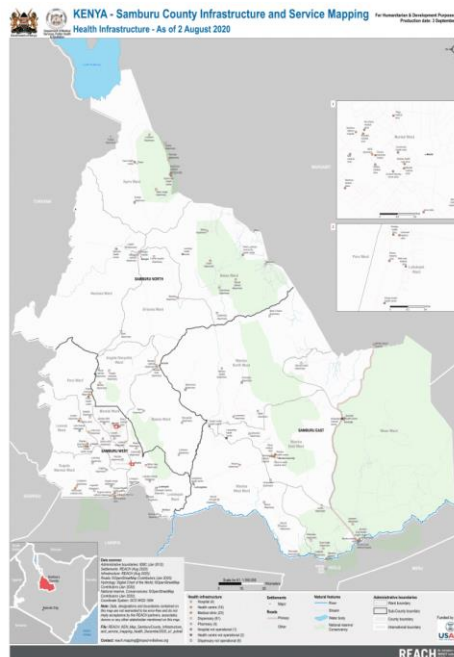
Objectives of the JWP process

- Provides a dialogue platform to review progress and agree on strategic areas for improvement.
- Provide multi-sectorial opportunities for leveraging on what other partners are doing, hence helping to eliminate duplication.
- Jointly examine data, evidence, and past progress to identify priority areas for the next fiscal year.
- Provide an agreement platform on a joint process of measuring progress and performance.

Benefits of the Joint Work Planning Process

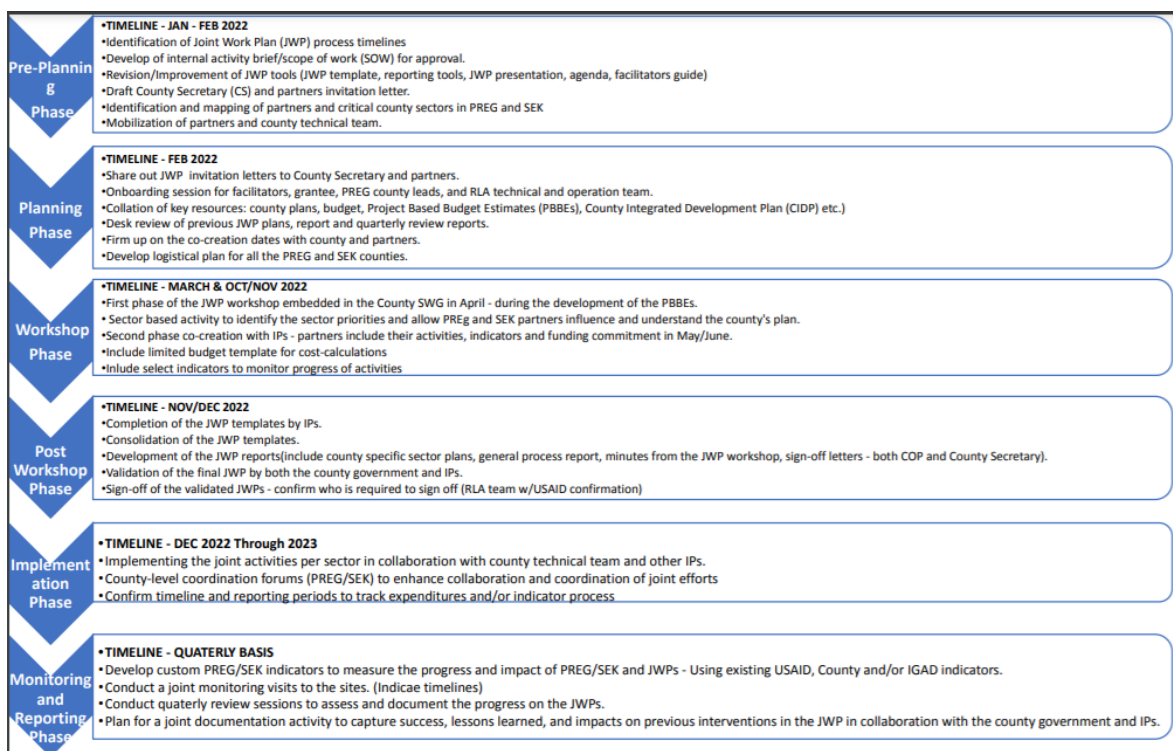
Joint work planning and budgeting activities help to achieve greater coherence that supports county governments' development priorities and needs. They also:

- Generate **integrated responses to complex and multifaceted development challenges**. By working together, the County Government and USAID implementing partners across agriculture, environmental, health, education and trade sectors find sustainable solutions to economic challenges.
- Generate **platforms for dialogue**. The process promotes intersectoral dialogue where county governments and development partners debate common challenges facing local communities.
- Help counties to own, lead, and **coordinate development programs** themselves.



How it Works-Locally led-locally owned Joint Work Planning Process

USAID-RLA convened all stakeholders, including all USAID-funded implementing partners in the county and County Governments, to a series of joint work planning sessions. These were led by skilled facilitators and agenda that included a review of the county technical documents. The process has six phases with specific activities under each phase. Depending on each phase and activity, several methods, tools, techniques, and expertise are required and used.



LESSONS LEARNED

Backbone organizations play a critical role in the joint work planning process: USAID-Resilience Learning Activity served as the backbone organization in this process. RLA did more than just convene all stakeholders to the JWP meetings. RLA worked to ensure mutually reinforcing activities occurred. The team facilitated communications between partners, provided technical assistance and coaching or mentoring to partners, incubated new collaborations, and recruited new PREG partners to JWP processes. RLA guided the vision and strategy, supported aligned activities, established shared measurement practices, built political goodwill with the counties, and mobilized teams to take part. For all stakeholders to come together, one organization must be tasked with this specific coordination role.

Involvement of the top county leadership in the JWP process improves participation and engagement of all the relevant department: While there was no involvement of a senior county official in the JWP process in Financial Year (FY) 20/21, the involvement of the Chief Executive Committee (CECs) members in Samburu and Turkana Counties in the FY 21/22 JWP process propelled the mobilization and participation of county government officials. These officials served as county champions and mobilized their colleagues.

Engaging personnel with the relevant technical qualifications improves planning, mobilization, and execution of the JWP: County economists and development partners experts added value to the process by guiding participants based on data, analytics, and evidence for decision making. This improved the quality of the JWP process output. The introduction of dedicated technical personnel to serve as liaison officers for PREG at the county level improved planning, mobilization, and execution of the JWP.

Constant communication and proper planning improved participation of stakeholders: Timely communication from RLA to all stakeholders about the meeting dates, venue, and timelines supported individual participation and planning. Activities of the joint work plan process were well planned to improve the quality of the outputs. This was visible through the good turnout rates of participants and ownership and commitment to the processes by actively engaging in dialogues. Creativity and innovations were highly encouraged to adopt new management approaches. Clear and open communication fostered buy-in and incorporated feedback from partners.

Alignment of the USAID implementing partners JWP process sector thematic areas to those of the Samburu County government improves ownership by the county: The realignment of the PREG sector thematic areas with the county government departments and thematic areas brought ownership of the programs by the county governments department.

Collaboration and adapting comes at a cost to the participants: whether in time spent to try something new, opportunities foregone by adapting to a counterpart's schedule and a shared agenda, or the compromises that are an inevitable part of coming to an agreement on a shared path forward with another party. Therefore, to be successful, the collaborative effort must yield specific, tangible results and benefits for the parties involved. Collaboration that does not lead to a "win-win" for both sides will not be sustainable or effective.

Incentivizing and motivating participants is key to the success of the JWP process: RLA provided data bundles to County government officials, thus enabled their effective engagement in the virtual meetings. In-person meetings yield better outcomes in JWP than in virtual sessions. JWP is a technical process that involves prolonged discussions guided by sector-specific themes. The previous sessions lasted for full days. It was difficult to uphold the virtual delivery approach during the COVID-19 period as participants experienced virtual fatigue. Some participants also struggled to adapt to the new online meeting tools and software, thus affected participation.

Aligning and integrating the JWP process calendar with the County government's gazetted planning, budgeting, and implementation calendars would increase participation, provide linkages at the SWG level, and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the JWP development process and implementation outputs. Although the JWP process has been on for two consecutive years, a conflict in the planning and budgeting calendar of the county government and USAID programs has been a challenge. The county government planning budgeting cycle begins in August to June of the subsequent year. On the contrary, USAID's program planning starts in September and ends in December, while the implementation

begins in January of the subsequent year to December. Harmonization with the county Government processes calendars will improve the effectiveness of the JWP process.

Skilled facilitation of collective action is key: the JWP process presents scenarios with conflicting interests and high sensitivities, thus requires a skilled facilitator whose leadership enables adapting depending on the situation the team is facing. When the coordinator is directive, he or she initiates action, structures activities, motivates others, and gives feedback to participants. The influencing style is assertive, using advocacy rather than threatening and demanding. The collaborative style gets results by leading discussions, asking questions that involve others, encouraging others to volunteer for responsibilities, confirming commitments, and asking for a vote to get a consensus decision or a majority decision.

Monitoring and Evaluation of JWP implementation is key in delivering the intended purpose: Despite two consecutive years of joint work plan developments by the County Government of Samburu and USAID IPs, there is little information on the monitoring and evaluation process to track progress. Generating learning from M&E and sharing for adaptive management in the earliest time possible would have improved program implementation and performance.

CHALLENGES

COVID-19: The pandemic orchestrated global restrictions on physical meetings, thus limited the JWP sessions through virtual meetings. Adapting to the use of new technologies and internet connectivity in remote areas of the county affected stakeholders' engagement.

Competing priorities affected implementing partners commitment: Participation and budget committee of the IP was not immediate. This was because some of the team members who participated needed to consult with their seniors before making any budgetary commitment. This didn't just delay the process but also demoralized the participation of county government teams.

CONCLUSION

County-led, county-owned joint work planning process is evolving and becoming more inclusive of other sector players, like civil society organizations and other donors and the private sector partners. However, more systematic and meaningful engagement of diverse stakeholders throughout development processes is needed. While consultations are extensively done, more must be done to ensure these consultations are conducted in a way that provides the collective action, collective impact approach for the benefit of local communities at the county level by shaping priorities and tracking implementation. All stakeholders need to focus on areas of mutual interest and have the JWP sessions, inclusive of all partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SCALING-UP FUTURE SUCCESS OF THE JWP PROCESS

Need to align the County Government vs the USAID IPs joint work planning and budget cycle processes to achieve effectiveness and efficiency: Process and conversation should begin at the PBBE stage.

Financial and technical resources are needed to address capacity constraints that limit participation in the JWP process. The most notable progress from the desk review was the increased participation by the County governments in this process in the previous years. The review also indicates that development partners have sometimes been non-committal in terms of budgets and other resources. In order to increase stakeholders' readiness and ability to engage with one another, there is a need to strengthen county governments and development partners' internal co-ordination and access to financial and technical resources. For development partners, such resources are required to strengthen capacity to co-ordinate and assess the collective needs and views of the sectors. For county governments, such resources are required to strengthen the capacity to analyze and formulate policy proposals and communicate effectively with relevant stakeholders.

Continuous communication: Openness, trust and mutual respect, as well as a recognition of these different and complementary roles of different stakeholders, are equally crucial to ensuring that all stakeholders are willing and able to work together to facilitate the joint work planning process.

Formation of the County Joint Work Planning Review Committee (CJWPC): To reinforce county ownership of local development strategies, county governments and development partners led by USAID should make progress reports on implementation publicly available, bolstering transparency and accountability through accessible information. To achieve this, there is a need to establish a fully functional County Joint Work Planning Review Committee as a senior-level advisory group that provides strategic advice and policy guidance, to ensure that the principles for effective JWP through development co-operation address the concerns and ambitions of all partners. This should be financed to undertake quarterly review progress.

Providing grants to local organization to drive this process: While RLA provided the backbone support that facilitated the successful engagements, the JWP is elaborate and requires consistent engagements with all stakeholders. USAID-RLA should provide financial grants to local organizations that are within the Counties to drive the JWP process. This will improve the monitoring and evaluation process. This requires human personnel and resources available at the local level to keep the process operational.

Providing standardized incentives for coordination by establishing buy-in from the partners: The joint work plan had to result in win-win opportunities that created value for all USAID projects and the County team, or there would not have been sufficient buy-in from the projects to succeed. Projects were involved in supporting logistics coordination to make the session successful during the 2019/2020 JWP process that had physical sessions. Some projects faced pressure to provide higher per diems to participants in trainings or activities. It is recommended that the donor and county government can direct all partners to develop a common travel and per diem policy that would be consistent across projects, and would provide a fixed reimbursement rate for any participant traveling from one point to another point. This may require extensive work and coordination among the IP home offices in the U.S. to agree on a common rate structure. Yet, once established, this action will eliminate significant headache for the projects, by having a common reimbursement policy.

The project directors/program leadership teams (USAID-funded projects) highly recommended to attend the JWP sessions: The inclusion of the Chiefs of Party in the second phase of the JWP and exploring ways to empower county leads in making decisions through the CoPs should be explored.

MOVING FORWARD: FACILITATING THE 2022/2023 JOINT WORK PLANNING PROCESS

Pause and Reflect JWP Learning Questions

- What systems changes are occurring within and across IP organizations and the region as a result of the JWP process?
- How is the JWP being implemented on the ground?
 - Role of various partners and County Government
 - Plans and actions of key working groups
 - Supports provided by the backbone organization (RLA)
- How can development agencies support county governments to adapt effectively?
- What can be done to align the timelines between the County and National Governments vs the development partners budgeting cycles to improve efficiency in the joint work planning process?
- How can the County Governments bring all development agencies under one platform to cohesively and effectively undertake the joint work planning process?

Joint Work Planning Guiding Principles

1. **Inclusive country ownership:** Strengthening coordination, alignment and capacity building at the country level- County Government leadership, inclusive and coordinated processes and capacity at local levels impact the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the JWP.
2. **Results and targeted impact:** Realizing sustainable development outcomes through mutual benefits- The effectiveness of Joint Work Planning process in achieving significant, sustained and sustainable development impact requires a focus on maximizing clearly identified, well defined and measurable, sustainable development outcomes, predicting, avoiding and remedying unintended negative impact and ensuring that partnerships recognize and respect the needs and incentives of all partners.
3. ***Inclusive partnership: Fostering trust through inclusive dialogue and consultation-*** County Government technical teams, members of the county assemblies (MCAs), the private sector, business associations, civil society and trade unions all play roles and have valuable contributions to make in the county-level economic growth to improve the lives and livelihoods of the local communities. The County Steering Groups or the Joint Work Planning Review Caucus should work to promote processes for regular and ongoing dialogue, as well as targeted consultation in the development of specific partnerships and programmes.
4. ***Transparency and accountability: Measuring and disseminating sustainable development results for learning and scaling up of successes-*** Timely information, evidence and data related to performing partnerships to achieve sustainable development are lacking. This needs to be improved through the creation and use of frameworks that identify and measure results in terms of county and national level defined sustainable development targets. Such results frameworks provide a transparent and mutual understanding of what is expected of the partners and of what constitutes success for the partnership. They should set out roles and responsibilities for data collection, and provisions for information disclosure, communication of results, and independent evaluation.
5. ***Leave no one behind: Recognizing, sharing and mitigating risks for all partners-*** Targeting the furthest behind requires greater risk-taking by all partners engaged. It is essential to recognize, share and mitigate such increased risk. This is necessary as diverse actors engage in partnerships, make investments to deliver development results, and to incentivize greater private sector contributions to sustainable development. This endeavor requires comprehensive and inclusive approaches that involve private investors, governments, civil society, and in particular local communities that are excluded from competitive markets, employment opportunities and key economic and social services, or those operating in areas and economic sectors where market failures, poor infrastructure, difficult access and weak governance make both private and public investment costly, difficult and risky. Private investment in these contexts is essential for addressing income poverty, food security, decent employment, inequality and economic inclusion.

Adapted from the (GPEDC, 2019), *Effective Private Sector Engagement through Development Co-operation for Sustainable Development: Towards Principles and Guidelines*

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