

Part 3 — LiA Reflection

During my six-week tenure with the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), one of the most enriching aspects of my experience was the opportunity to work with an incredibly diverse team. CGAP's composition reflects a true melting pot of cultures, backgrounds, and expertise, which significantly enhanced our approach to addressing complex issues in digital finance and financial inclusion.

My supervisor, for instance, brought a unique perspective shaped by his Peruvian origins and his graduate studies in the United States. This blend of Latin American insight and American academic rigor provided a nuanced understanding of how different cultures adapt to financial technologies. Other team members hailed from places as diverse as the Czech Republic, China, India, and various African nations. This diversity wasn't just geographical; it also encompassed a wide range of professional backgrounds, from economists and policy experts to technologists and social scientists.

The value of this diversity became particularly apparent when discussing the global landscape of digital payments. For example, my supervisor shared fascinating insights about the rapid adoption of QR code payments in Peru following the COVID-19 pandemic. He described how even traditional cash-only vendors in local markets had swiftly transitioned to accepting QR code payments, illustrating the transformative power of digital finance when backed by societal acceptance and necessity.

These accounts opened my eyes to the stark differences in financial ecosystems across the globe. It became clear that solutions that work in North America might not be directly

applicable to other regions. For instance, while mobile banking apps are prevalent in Canada and the U.S., in many African countries, USSD-based mobile money services are more widespread due to the prevalence of feature phones over smartphones.

Moreover, these diverse perspectives helped me understand the nuanced challenges faced by different communities. In some regions, the primary barrier to financial inclusion might be a lack of physical infrastructure, while in others, it could be regulatory hurdles or cultural resistance to formal banking systems. This understanding was crucial in developing more inclusive and adaptable strategies for CGAP's sustainable digital financial ecosystem framework.

My experience at CGAP also highlighted the critical role of effective communication in a high-functioning team, especially one working on complex, global issues. Throughout my time there, I made a concerted effort to maintain open lines of communication with my supervisor and team members. This approach was instrumental in helping me identify areas where I could contribute most effectively to the team's goals and CGAP's broader mission.

However, I quickly learned that effective communication in a professional setting is a skill that requires constant refinement. One key lesson was the importance of setting clear objectives for each meeting. Before any interaction, I would prepare a list of topics to discuss, questions to ask, and goals to achieve. This preparation ensured that our time was used efficiently and that we made tangible progress in each session.

Another crucial aspect was the practice of documenting meeting takeaways. After each discussion, I would jot down the key points, decisions made, and action items assigned. This

habit not only helped me stay organized but also ensured that I had a clear roadmap for implementing the ideas and tasks discussed.

Interestingly, I also discovered the value of what I call “breathing spaces” in communication. These were short periods, usually at the end of formal meetings, where we would engage in more relaxed, idea-driven conversations. During these moments, we often bounced ideas off each other, discussed emerging trends in digital finance, or shared personal experiences related to our work. For instance, during one such conversation, a team member shared their experience with microfinance initiatives in rural India, which sparked a discussion about how similar models could be adapted for digital lending platforms in other developing countries.

These informal exchanges often led to creative problem-solving and collaborative thinking. They allowed us to explore unconventional ideas and draw connections between seemingly unrelated concepts. For example, a casual discussion about the gig economy in Southeast Asia led to insights about how digital finance tools could be tailored to meet the unique needs of informal workers in that region.

Moreover, these communication practices helped me better understand CGAP's workstream project, which involved reviewing digital finance policies implemented by governments worldwide. By regularly discussing the project with team members, I gained deeper insights into the complexities of policy evaluation and the challenges of implementing effective regulatory frameworks in diverse economic contexts.

This enhanced understanding was particularly valuable when I was tasked with drafting the 30-page internal brief and report. The conversations and insights gathered through these

communication channels allowed me to provide a more nuanced critique of CGAP's existing sustainable digital finance framework. I was able to highlight how the framework, while comprehensive, needed to better account for the varied on-the-ground realities in different developing countries.

In conclusion, my experience at CGAP underscored the immense value of diverse perspectives and effective communication in tackling global challenges like financial inclusion. It taught me that in the realm of international development and digital finance, solutions often emerge from the intersection of varied viewpoints and open, collaborative dialogue. This experience has not only contributed to my professional growth but has also shaped my understanding of how multifaceted approaches are essential in addressing complex global issues.

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