EVALUATION

Learning from Experience

USAID
EVALUATION
POLICY

October 2020

PREFACE

A product of the USAID Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning's Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research, this technical revision of USAID's Evaluation Policy makes it consistent with the October 28, 2020 version of the USAID Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 201 Operational Policy for the Program Cycle. Changes include aligning the policy to the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 and with the 2020 ADS 201 requirements that USAID must commission an external evaluation for (1) all activities with a total cost expected to exceed $20 million and (2) each intermediate result within a country strategy. The requirement to conduct impact evaluations (if feasible) of new, untested approaches remains, with the addition that impact evaluations must now include cost analyses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 CONTEXT

USAID stewards public resources to promote sustainable development in countries around the world. Reflecting the intent of the authorizing legislation of the U.S. Agency for International Development (the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended), USAID pursues this goal through effective partnerships across the U.S. Government, with partner governments and civil society organizations, and with the broader community of donor and technical agencies. The Agency applies the Paris Declaration principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability.

To fulfill its responsibilities, USAID bases policy and investment decisions on the best available empirical evidence, and uses the opportunities afforded by program implementation to generate new knowledge for the wider community. Moreover, USAID commits to measuring and documenting program achievements and shortcomings so that the Agency's multiple stakeholders gain an understanding of the return on investment in development activities.

USAID recognizes that evaluation, defined in Box 1, is the means through which it can obtain systematic, meaningful feedback about the successes and shortcomings of its endeavors. Evaluation provides the information and analysis that prevents mistakes from being repeated, and that increases the chance that future investments will yield even more benefits than past investments. While it must be embedded within a context that permits evidence-based decision-making, and rewards learning and candor more than superficial success stories, the practice of evaluation is fundamental to the Agency's future strength.

This policy builds on the Agency's long and innovative history of evaluation. Since the 2011 release of the Evaluation Policy, USAID has worked to improve both the quantity and quality of its evaluations, to inform development programming that ultimately achieves better results. The number of commissioned evaluations has rebounded from an annual average of about 130 in the five years prior to the 2011 Evaluation Policy, to an annual average of 194 in recent years. USAID also continues to strengthen methodological rigor, improve evaluation quality, and increase utilization of its evaluations. The Agency offers classroom training in evaluation as well as a number of resources to improve the methodological quality, objectivity, access to evaluation findings, and use of evaluation conclusions for decision-making.

This policy responds to today's needs. High expectations exist for respectful relationships among donors, partner governments, and beneficiaries. Many stakeholders are demanding greater transparency in decision-making and disclosure of information. Development activities encompass not only the traditional long-term investments in development through the creation of infrastructure, public sector capacity, and human capital, but also shorter-term interventions to support and reinforce stabilization in environments facing complex threats. All of these features of the current context inform a policy that establishes higher standards for evaluation practice, while recognizing the need for a diverse set of approaches.

This policy is intended to provide clarity to USAID staff, partners, and stakeholders about the purposes of evaluation, the types of evaluations that are required and recommended, and the approach for designing, conducting, disseminating, and using evaluations. Intended primarily to guide staff decisions regarding the practice of evaluation within programs managed by USAID, it also serves to communicate to implementing partners and key stakeholders USAID's approach to evaluation.

This policy draws in significant ways on the evaluation principles and guidance developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Evaluation Network. In addition, the policy is consistent with the Department of State Evaluation Policy, and USAID will work collaboratively with the Department of State Bureau of

Resource Management to ensure that the organizations' guidelines and procedures with respect to evaluation are mutually reinforcing. USAID also will work closely with the Department of State's Office of the Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance in its efforts to strengthen and support sound evaluation policies, procedures, standards, and practices for evaluation of foreign assistance programs.

Finally, this policy helps to implement the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016 and the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 for USAID and works in concert with existing Agency policies, strategies, and operational guidance, including those regarding project and activity design, evaluation-related competencies of staff, performance monitoring, knowledge management, and research management. The policy is operationalized in USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 201 Program Cycle Operational Policy.

BOX 1: CONCEPTS AND CONSISTENT TERMINOLOGY

To ensure consistency in the use of key concepts, the terms and classifications highlighted below will be used by USAID staff and those engaged in USAID evaluations.

Evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of data and information about the characteristics and outcomes of one or more organizations, policies, programs, strategies, projects, and/or activities conducted as a basis for judgments to understand and improve effectiveness and efficiency, timed to inform decisions about current and future programming. Evaluation is distinct from assessment (which is forward-looking) or an informal review of projects.

- **Impact Evaluations** measure changes in a development outcome that are attributable to a defined intervention, program, policy or organization. Impact evaluations use models of cause and effect and require a credible and rigorously defined counterfactual to control for factors other than the intervention that might account for observed changes. Impact evaluations in which comparisons are made between beneficiaries that are randomly assigned to either a treatment or a control group provide the strongest evidence of a relationship between the intervention under study and the outcome measured. Impact evaluations must use experimental or quasi-experimental designs. All impact evaluations must include a cost analysis of the intervention or interventions being studied.

- **Performance Evaluations** encompass a broad range of evaluation methods. They often incorporate before-and-after comparisons, but generally lack a rigorously defined counterfactual. Performance evaluations can address descriptive, normative, and/or cause-and-effect questions. Performance evaluations can focus on what a particular project or program has achieved (at any point during or after implementation); how it was implemented; how it was perceived and valued; and other questions that are pertinent to design, management, and operational decision making. Performance Evaluations include the following types of evaluations: Developmental Evaluation, Formative Evaluation, Outcome Evaluation, and Process or Implementation Evaluation.

- **Performance Monitoring** is the ongoing and systematic collection of performance indicator data and other quantitative or qualitative information to oversee implementation and understand progress toward measurable results. Performance monitoring includes monitoring the quantity, quality, and timeliness of activity outputs within the control of USAID or its implementers, as well as the monitoring of activities, projects, and strategic outcomes expected to result from the combination of these outputs and other factors.

- **Performance Indicators** measure expected outputs and outcomes of strategies, projects, or activities based on a Mission's Results Framework or project or activity logic model. Performance indicators help answer the extent to which a Mission or Washington Operating Unit is progressing toward its objective(s), but alone cannot tell a Mission or Washington Operating Unit why such progress is or is not being made.

- **Performance Management** is the systematic process of planning and defining a theory of change and associated results through strategic planning and program design, and collecting, analyzing, and using information and data from program-monitoring, evaluations, and other learning activities to address learning priorities, understand progress toward results, influence decision-making and adaptive management, and ultimately improve development outcomes.

2 PURPOSES OF EVALUATION

Evaluation in USAID has two primary purposes: to ensure accountability to stakeholders and to learn to improve development outcomes.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Measuring the effectiveness, relevance, and efficiency of projects and activities, disclosing those findings to stakeholders, and using evaluation findings to inform resource allocation and other decisions are core responsibilities of a publicly financed entity. For evaluation to serve the aim of accountability, metrics should be matched to meaningful outputs and outcomes that are under the control or sphere of influence of the Agency. Accountability also requires comparing performance to ex ante commitments and targets, using methods that obtain internal validity of measurement, ensuring credibility of analysis, and disclosing findings to a broad range of stakeholders, including the American public.

LEARNING: Evaluations of country and regional strategies, projects, and activities that are well-designed and executed can systematically generate knowledge about the magnitude and determinants of performance, permitting those who design and implement them—including USAID staff, host governments, and a wide range of partners—to refine designs and introduce improvements into future efforts. Learning requires careful selection of evaluation questions to test fundamental assumptions underlying strategies, project designs, and activity designs; methods that generate findings that are internally and externally valid (including clustering evaluations around priority thematic questions); and systems to share findings widely and facilitate integration of the evaluation conclusions to recommendations into decision-making.

These two purposes can be achieved simultaneously and span all evaluations. However, neither of these purposes can be achieved solely through the evaluation function. Each requires intentional actions by senior management to foster a culture of accountability and learning, and to provide appropriate incentives (and minimize disincentives) for staff at all levels.

3 BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each of the Agency's Operating Units that implement development activities will comply with this policy, supported by a set of central functions. Operating Units will:

- Identify an evaluation point of contact. This individual will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the policy across the breadth of the operating unit's projects and activities and will interact with the regional and technical bureau points of contact and PPL/LER. The time allocated to this function should be commensurate with the size of the evaluation portfolio being managed.

- Invest in training of key staff in evaluation management and methods through Agency courses and/or external opportunities.

- Actively encourage staff to participate in relevant evaluation communities of practice for knowledge exchange.

- Develop, as needed, the guidance, tools, and contractual mechanisms to access technical support specific to the types of evaluations required for the country, region, or topical area in the domain of the operating unit. In general, this will require collaboration between the Program and Technical Offices. USAID Missions will prepare a Mission Order on evaluation describing the context-specific approaches and expectations regarding evaluation.[1]

- Prepare, on a yearly basis, an inventory of evaluations to be undertaken during the following fiscal year, as well as those completed. In general, the evaluations will be identified in Performance Management Plans. The information will be included in the Evaluation Registry. Evaluation Registry guidance will indicate the specific information to be supplied.

- Develop, through the Program Office (as defined in ADS 100), a budget estimate for the evaluations to be undertaken during the following fiscal year. Operating Units should devote approximately one to three percent of their total program funding to external evaluation, on average.

- Ensure that final statements of work for external evaluations adhere to the standards described below (See Section 4). In general, this will require collaboration between the Program and Technical Offices. The Program Office may engage the regional and technical bureaus in reviews of evaluation statements of work. In missions, the Program Office will manage the contract or grant relationship with the external evaluation team or consultant except in unusual circumstances, as determined by the Mission Director.

- Ensure, through the Program Office, that evaluation draft reports are assessed for quality by management and through an in-house peer technical review, and that comments are provided to the evaluation teams.

- Ensure, through the Program Office, that plans for dissemination and use of evaluations are developed and that evaluation final reports and their summaries are submitted within three months of completion to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) at http://dec.usaid.gov.

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[1] An external evaluation is one that is commissioned by USAID, rather than by the implementing partner of the activity being evaluated, and in which the team leader is an expert external to USAID, who has no fiduciary relationship with the implementing partner.

- Ensure, through the Program Office, that evaluation datasets are submitted to the Development Data Library.
- Develop a post-evaluation action plan upon completion of an evaluation and integrate evaluation findings into decision making about strategies, program priorities, and project and activity design. In general, the Program Office will take responsibility for this function.
- Participate, where relevant, in the Agency-wide process of developing an evaluation agenda.

Each of the technical and regional bureaus will:

- Identify an evaluation point of contact. This individual will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the policy across the breadth of the Operating Unit's projects, and will interact with PPL/LER. The time allocated to this function should be commensurate with the size of the evaluation portfolio being managed.
- Invest in training of key staff in evaluation management and methods through Agency courses and/or external opportunities.
- Participate in an evaluation community of practice for knowledge exchange.
- Organize, on request of the mission Program Offices, reviews of evaluation statements of work and draft evaluation reports.
- Participate in the Agency-wide process of developing an evaluation agenda.

PPL/LER is an institutional source of guidance, support, and quality assurance for the design, conduct, dissemination, and synthesis of evaluations. PPL/LER will:

- Develop training curricula and evaluation tools that have wide application across the Agency's portfolio. Identify opportunities for external training in specialized topics.
- Organize and lead the Evaluation Interest Group and other cross-Agency evaluation-related knowledge networks.
- Develop and/or update, with the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, capabilities statements for evaluation specialists and senior evaluation specialists.
- Organize technical resources for evaluation that can be accessed through a flexible mechanism. This includes, among other services: developing appropriate technical specifications for competitively procured evaluation expertise, reviewing, and approving evaluation statements of work, coordinating access to evaluation services, and providing estimates of evaluation costs.
- Respond on a priority basis with technical input for evaluation design and implementation, particularly for Presidential Initiatives and large country programs. This includes providing input into the requests for proposals for mechanisms to access technical support for evaluations.
- At any time, and particularly when requested by the Administrator, undertake or require a performance and/or impact evaluation of any project or activity within the USAID portfolio.
- Undertake occasional thematic or meta-evaluations to generate recommendations regarding Agency priorities, policies, and practices. These evaluations will adhere to the standards described below.
- Encourage occasional ex-post evaluations to examine long-term effects of projects and activities.
- Lead the preparation of an Agency-wide evaluation agenda. Broad input from across the Agency, and from external stakeholders, will be sought during this process.
- Prepare a periodic report highlighting recent key evaluation practices and findings, and changes and challenges in evaluation practice. Information for this will come from the Evaluation Registry, among other sources.

- Serve as the main point of contact on evaluation with domestic and international agencies and donors, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, academic institutions, multilateral organizations, and local governments and organizations in the countries where USAID works.
- Participate with other development actors, including partner countries, implementing partners, and other USAID and U.S. Government entities, in joint cross-cutting evaluations.

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 requires each Agency covered by the Act to designate a senior employee of the Agency as the Evaluation Officer. The Agency Evaluation Officer provides technical and methodological leadership on evaluation activities across the Agency. The Agency Evaluation Officer will:

- Play a leading role in overseeing the agency's evaluation activities, learning agenda, and information reported to Office of Management and Budget on evidence.
- Collaborate with, shape, and make contributions to other evidence-building functions within the agency.
- Provide clearance to requests to use an internal evaluation to meet an evaluation requirement.
- Provide clearance on principled exceptions to the requirement of public disclosure of evaluation findings.

4 EVALUATION PRACTICES

Evaluations at USAID should be:

INTEGRATED INTO DESIGN OF STRATEGIES, PROJECTS, AND ACTIVITIES

USAID's focus on evaluation has a complementary and reinforcing relationship with other efforts to focus projects and activities on achieving measurable results. These include improving project and activity design capacity and strengthening disciplinary expertise in priority areas, including stabilization, agriculture, economics, health, and democratic governance. Compared to evaluations of projects and activities with weak or vague logic models, we can expect to learn much more from evaluations of projects and activities that are designed from the outset with clear development hypotheses, realistic expectations of the value and scale of results, and clear understanding of implementation risks.

For each project or activity, consideration will be given during the design phase to the performance evaluation(s) and, in some cases, impact evaluation(s) that will be undertaken. For Missions engaged in the preparation of a Country Development Cooperation Strategy or Regional Development Cooperation Strategy, Mission leadership will address evaluation priorities and approaches. Planning for evaluation and identifying key evaluation questions at the outset will improve the quality of strategic planning and the design of projects and activities, and will guide the collection, management, use, and delivery of data during implementation.

When a project or activity that will be subject to evaluation is initiated, baseline data, including variables that correspond to key outcomes and impacts, will be collected using high-quality methods and analyzed to establish a reference point. As a rule, baseline studies should collect sex-disaggregated data. To obtain baseline data, household or individual surveys are often valuable baseline data, and can be replicated toward the conclusion of implementation to assess changes.

Significant attention is required to ensure that baseline data are collected early in the project or activity lifespan, before any significant implementation has occurred. In addition, the baseline data collection should be designed based on a plan for analysis of the data, to ensure that the appropriate variables are obtained and that, if probability sampling is used, the sample size is large enough to permit valid statistical comparisons.

Working closely with the responsible Program Office, project and activity managers will ensure that implementing partners collect relevant monitoring data and maintain data and documentation that can be accessed for future evaluations.

In cases where impact evaluations are undertaken to examine the relationship between an intervention or set of interventions and changes in a key development outcome, a parallel contractual or grant agreement will be established at the inception to accompany implementation. That contractual or grant agreement will include sufficient resources for data collection and analysis, including cost analysis. Under unusual circumstances, when a separate arrangement is infeasible, implementing partners may subcontract an impact evaluation of an activity subcomponent.

When opportunities exist to evaluate the impact of particular interventions, or to compare variations in implementation strategies, implementing partners are encouraged to bring these opportunities to the attention of the responsible technical officers. Technical officers can determine whether and how to support such impact evaluations to be conducted by the partner or, ideally, externally through a separate mechanism.

UNBIASED IN MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

USAID must undertake evaluations so they are not subject to the perception or reality of biased measurement or reporting because of conflict of interest or other factors. Evaluators should strive for objectivity in the planning and conducting of evaluations and in the interpretation and dissemination of findings, avoiding conflicts of interest, bias, and other partiality.

Evaluations conducted to meet evaluation requirements will be external (i.e., led by a third-party contractor or grantee, managed directly by USAID), and the contract or grant for the evaluation will be managed, in most cases, by an operating unit's Program Office. However, an Operating Unit may request to use an internal evaluation to meet evaluation requirements in cases in which the Operating Unit believes the evaluation meets or exceeds the Agency's evaluation standards.

Whereas most evaluations will be external, funding may be dedicated within a project or activity design for implementing partners to engage in evaluative work for their own institutional learning or accountability purposes. In cases where funding from USAID supports an evaluation conducted or commissioned by an implementing partner, the findings from that evaluation must be shared in written form with the responsible technical officer within three months of the evaluation's conclusion.

In cases where USAID Operating Unit management determines that appropriate expertise exists within the Agency, and that engaging USAID staff in an evaluation will facilitate institutional learning, an external evaluation team may include USAID staff. However, an outside expert with appropriate skills and experience will be recruited to lead the team, mitigating the potential for conflict of interest. The outside expert may come from another U.S. Government Agency uninvolved in project or activity implementation or be engaged through a contractual mechanism.

RELEVANT AND USEFUL

Evaluations will address the most important and relevant questions about strategies, projects, or activities that routine monitoring data alone, or other existing evaluations and studies, typically cannot answer, and that serve the informational needs of stakeholders. Evaluations should present information in ways that are understandable and that can inform the Agency's activities, such as budgeting, the improvement of programs, accountability, learning, adaptation, management, and the development of policies.

In general, the importance and relevance will be achieved by explicitly linking evaluation questions to specific future decisions to be made by USAID leadership, partner governments, and/or other key stakeholders. Those decisions frequently will be related to how resources should be allocated across and within sectors and thematic areas and/or how implementation should be modified to improve effectiveness. To ensure relevance, consultation with in-country partners and beneficiaries is essential. Evaluation reports should include sufficient local and global contextual information so that the external validity and relevance of the evaluation can be assessed. Evaluations that are expected to influence resource allocation should include information on the cost structure and scalability of the intervention, as well as its effectiveness.

BASED ON THE BEST METHODS OF APPROPRIATE RIGOR

Evaluations will use the most appropriate design and methods to answer key questions that generate the highest-quality and most credible data and evidence that corresponds to the questions being asked, while taking into consideration time, budget, scale, feasibility, and other practical considerations. Evaluations must produce well documented findings that are verifiable, reproducible, and on which stakeholders can confidently rely, while providing clear explanations of limitations. Qualified evaluators

with relevant education, skills, and experience for the methods undertaken must manage credible evaluations.

Given the nature of development activities, both qualitative and quantitative methods yield valuable findings, and a combination of both often is optimal; observational, quasi-experimental, and experimental designs all have their place. No single evaluation design or approach will be privileged over others; rather, the selection of method or methods for a particular evaluation should principally consider the appropriateness of the evaluation design for answering the evaluation questions as well as balance cost, feasibility, and the level of rigor needed to inform specific decisions. When USAID needs information on whether an intervention is achieving a specific outcome, the Agency prefers impact evaluations to performance evaluations.

For impact evaluations, experimental methods generate the strongest evidence. Alternative methods should be utilized only when random assignment strategies are infeasible.

Evaluation methods should use sex-disaggregated data and incorporate attention to gender relations in all relevant areas. Methodological strengths and limitations will be communicated explicitly in evaluation reports.

ORIENTED TOWARD REINFORCING LOCAL OWNERSHIP

The conduct of evaluations will be consistent with institutional aims of local ownership through respectful engagement with all partners, including local beneficiaries and stakeholders, while leveraging and building local evaluation capacity. When possible, evaluators should include relevant local stakeholders in determining the timing, questions, and design of an evaluation; the joint development of its recommendations; and strategies for the dissemination and use of its findings.

To the extent possible, evaluation specialists with appropriate expertise from partner countries, but not involved in activity implementation, will lead and/or be included in evaluation teams. USAID will place priority within its sectoral programming on supporting partner government and civil society capacity to undertake evaluations and use the results generated.

TRANSPARENT

Evaluations must be transparent in the planning, implementation, and reporting phases to enable accountability. Before conducting an evaluation, Operating Units should clearly document decisions about its purpose and objectives, key stakeholders, design and methods, and its timeline and dissemination plan. These decisions should take into consideration any legal, ethical, national security, or other constraints for disclosing information. USAID commits to full and active disclosure and will share findings from evaluations as widely as possible. Furthermore, an executive summary including a description of methods, key findings and recommendations will be available to the public online in a fully searchable form within three months of an evaluation's conclusion, as described below. Principled exceptions will be made per Agency guidance.

CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE HIGHEST ETHICAL STANDARDS

USAID must conduct evaluations to the highest ethical standards to protect the public and maintain public trust in the U.S. Government's efforts. Operating Units should plan and implement evaluations to safeguard the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants and other stakeholders and affected entities. Evaluators should abide by current professional standards and legal requirements that pertain to the treatment of participants. Evaluations should be equitable, fair, and just, and should consider cultural and contextual factors that could influence the findings or their use.

5 EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS

Recognizing the diversity of strategies, projects, and activities across the Agency, the application of evaluation requirements will occur at the level of the Operating Units. Operating Units must evaluate the majority of their Program resources through a combination of required and non-required, external and internal, evaluations.

Evaluations of each Intermediate Result: Each Operating Unit or Mission with a Country Development Cooperation Strategy, Regional Development Cooperation Strategy, or other strategy must conduct at least one evaluation per intermediate result (IR) defined in the Operating Unit's strategy. This evaluation can focus on any level within the IR: intervention, activity, set of activities, or the intermediate result as a whole.

The evaluation must be timed so that the findings will be available as decisions are made about strategies, project and activity designs, and procurements. This will mean that adequate lead time must be allocated to design and commission the evaluation.

When determining the scope of an evaluation under this requirement, operating units are encouraged to identify opportunities for evaluations of an entire IR rather than focusing only on the activity level. Such evaluations are particularly valuable in the period preceding the development of a new strategy, when questions are likely to be asked about the overall effectiveness of engagement in a particular sector or broad set of activities.

Evaluations of large activities: Operating Units must conduct at least one evaluation per activity with a Total Estimated Cost/Total Estimated Amount expected to be $20 million or more.

Evaluation of innovative development interventions: Each Mission and Washington Operating Unit must conduct an impact evaluation, if feasible, of any new, untested approach[2] anticipated to expand in scale or scope through U.S. Government foreign assistance or other funding sources (i.e., a pilot intervention). Operating Units should identify pilot interventions during the design of projects or activities and should integrate the impact evaluation into their design. If it is not feasible to effectively undertake an impact evaluation, the Mission or Washington Operating Unit must conduct a performance evaluation and document why an impact evaluation was not feasible.

A single evaluation may fulfill more than one of the three evaluation requirements described above.

USAID operates in many environments where, due to security concerns, evaluations involving extensive site visits, interactions with beneficiaries, and other standard approaches are impossible. Moreover, even where security concerns are not paramount, some of the contexts in which USAID operates are so complex that standard linear and/or causal models may have little relevance. While this does not obviate the need for evaluations, creative and sometimes unorthodox approaches will be required to measure achievements in complex and/or insecure environments. PPL/LER, in collaboration with the relevant technical and regional bureaus, will provide guidance and tools to support this work.

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[2] Whether an approach is "tested" or "untested" is often a matter of professional judgment. However, in the activity design phase an effort should be made to synthesize the best available evidence regarding the intervention(s) being included in the activity—for example, the approach to teacher training, the use of performance incentives to improve health worker productivity, or the strategy to foster community development through strengthening local governance bodies. Where a truly novel approach is being introduced and there is little or no empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness in any setting, this would be characterized as untested.

EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Evaluations will be undertaken in a manner that ensures credibility, unbiasedness, transparency, and the generation of high-quality information and knowledge. Given the variation in evaluation questions and conditions, the means toward these ends will vary greatly from case to case. However, USAID evaluations of all types will use sound social science methods and should include the following basic features:

- Establishment of team with the appropriate methodological and subject matter expertise to conduct an excellent evaluation.
- Written design, including identification of key question(s), methods, main features of data collection instruments, and data analysis plans. Except in unusual circumstances, the design will be shared with the implementing partners for comment before being finalized.
- Written dissemination plan taking into account how key partners and other development actors best receive evaluation information.
- Gender-sensitive design and measurement, including sex-disaggregated data, where appropriate.
- Approach that encourages participation by national counterparts and evaluators in the design and conduct of evaluations.
- Use of data collection and analytic methods that ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that if a different, well-qualified evaluator were to undertake the same evaluation, he or she would arrive at the same or similar findings and conclusions.
- Application and use to the maximum extent possible of social science methods and tools that reduce the need for evaluator-specific judgments.
- Standardized recording and maintenance of records from the evaluation (e.g., focus group transcripts).
- Collection of data on variables corresponding to inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts, as well as financial data that permits computation of unit costs and analysis of cost structure, as needed to answer the evaluation questions.
- Evaluation findings that are based on facts, evidence, and data. This precludes relying exclusively upon anecdotes, hearsay, and unverified opinions. Finding should be specific, concise, and supported by quantitative and qualitative information that is reliable, valid, and generalizable.
- Evaluation reports that include the original statement of work, a full description of methodology (or methodologies) used, as well as the limitations in the inferences that can be drawn. Readers should have sufficient information about the body of evidence and how information was gathered to make a judgment as to its reliability, validity, and generalizability.
- Evaluation reports that include action-oriented, practical, and specific recommendations, if requested.
- Evaluation reports that are shared widely and in an accessible form with all partners and stakeholders, and with the general public.
- Post-evaluation action plans to help ensure that institutional learning takes place and evaluation findings are used to improve development outcomes.
- Adequate budget and timeline for a high-quality evaluation.

To assure evaluation quality, the following systems will be put into place:

- Statements of work for evaluations shall include criteria for the quality of the evaluation report. These are provided in ADS 201maa, "Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report."

- The operating unit Program Office will organize peer reviews of evaluation statements of work and draft evaluation reports, seeking support from the corresponding regional and technical bureaus.

EVALUATION TRANSPARENCY

The presumption of openness in the conduct of USAID evaluations will be manifested at two stages: (1) when an evaluation design is agreed upon; and (2) when the evaluation report has been completed, that report will be disseminated. Compliance will include:

Evaluation Design: After finalization of the evaluation design, it must be shared with the relevant implementing partners and funders and be made available upon request to development actors in a format deemed appropriate by the Mission or Washington operating unit. Summary information, including expected timing of release of findings will be included in the Evaluation Registry and may be communicated to the public on the USAID website.

Standard Reporting and Dissemination: In addition to the findings and methodology documented in each evaluation report, other key characteristics of each report include:

- Disclosure of conflict of interest: For external evaluations, all evaluation team members will provide a signed statement attesting to a lack of conflict of interest or describing an existing conflict of interest relative to the projects or activities being evaluated.
- Statement of differences: When applicable, evaluation reports will include statements regarding any significant unresolved differences of opinion on the part of funders, implementers, and/or members of the evaluation team.

Completed evaluations must be submitted to the Agency's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). Principled exceptions will be made per Agency guidance. Each completed evaluation must include an abstract and a two to five page executive summary.

Development Data Library: Datasets—and supporting documentation such as code books, data dictionaries, scope, and methodology used to collect and analyze the data—compiled under USAID-funded evaluations are to be submitted to the USAID Development Data Library. The data should be organized and fully documented for use by those not fully familiar with the project or the evaluation.

UTILIZATION OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

Evaluation is useful only insofar as it provides evidence to inform real-world decision-making. Every step of USAID's programming model—from design to implementation to evaluation—will be undertaken from the perspective not only of achieving development objectives, but of contributing to the broader goal of learning from experience. The learning from previous experience that is captured in evaluation findings should be easy to access and considered whenever an officer is designing and implementing new activities, and activities and policies should be designed so they are evaluable (when possible). The utilization of evaluation findings will be encouraged in the guidance in Mission Orders, and will be highlighted in Country Development Cooperation Strategies. In addition, PPL/LER will commission occasional external technical audits to determine whether and how evaluation findings are being used for decision-making by operating units.

EVALUATION RESOURCES

USAID recognizes that evaluation findings have significant value to the institution's effectiveness, and merit adequate resources. Resources at the central level, for training, technical support, quality control, and guideline development help to leverage the investments currently being made in evaluation throughout the Agency. Moreover, additional resources—primarily in the form of qualified professional

staff at the mission and regional missions—and access to technical support through indefinite quantity contracts and other flexible mechanisms are also needed.

Additional Human Resource Development and Staff: Explicit competencies for evaluation specialists and senior evaluation specialists will be developed by PPL/LER, integrated into human resource policies and practices, and updated as needed. These competencies will reflect the skill sets required to implement this policy. One or more training courses will be offered to enhance the skill set of existing staff. In addition, the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, with input from PPL/LER will determine the complement of evaluation specialists required within the staffing model to fulfill the needs of policy implementation. It is anticipated that this will require hiring and/or redeployment of evaluation specialists and senior evaluation specialists.

Procurement Mechanisms for Evaluation Services: Implementation of this policy will induce a demand for highly trained and experienced evaluation specialists. In particular, indefinite quantity contracts focusing on particular thematic areas and/or methodologies may, when appropriate, be used as mechanisms to ensure timely access to specialist services of high-quality. Country and regional missions, as well as technical bureaus, are encouraged to develop procurement mechanisms that permit timely access to appropriate evaluation expertise.

Financial Resources: USAID will devote approximately one to three percent of total program dollars, on average, to external performance and impact evaluation. This is distinct from resources dedicated to monitoring. In some instances, this may require reallocation away from project and activity implementation, particularly when the opportunity to improve effectiveness through learning is deemed to be very large. In addition, USAID acknowledges that more intensive evaluation efforts may increase the need for dedicated monitoring and data collection resources within contracts and grants to implementing partners.

6 CONCLUSION

USAID's ability to fulfill commitments to accountability and obtain the benefits of institutional learning depends, in large part, on embedding excellent evaluation practices throughout the organization. No single policy can anticipate and provide detailed guidance for the diverse set of USAID projects, activities, and operating contexts. However, this policy seeks to establish the roles and responsibilities, and the key expectations regarding the design, conduct, dissemination, and use of evaluation. While the policy has an indefinite term, we expect that as it is implemented, new and better ideas will emerge about how to improve evaluation and make it more relevant to USAID's institutional environment. Over time, those ideas will be integrated into the Agency's work through further updates of this policy.