KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT and ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING (KMOL) POLICY

DRAFT V10 (FOR PUBLIC COMMENT)

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ACRONYMS LIST

ADS	Automated Directives System
BIOM	Bureau, Independent Office, and Mission
CLA	Collaborating, learning, and adapting
DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
DEIA	Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility
Evidence Act	Foundations for Evidence-Based Policy Making Act
IT	Information technology
KM	Knowledge management
KMOL	Knowledge management and organizational learning
OL	Organizational learning
OU	Operating unit
PIVOT	Practical, InnoVative, On-the-Job Training
PSE	Private-sector engagement
SOP	Standard operating procedure
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

Everything the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) does involves people applying what they know to what they do. Staff and partners ground their work in personal knowledge, the Agency's cumulative knowledge, and outside knowledge. Through implementation of this policy, processes to generate, retain, transfer, and use knowledge to achieve Agency priorities will be strengthened and embedded systematically throughout USAID's structure and functions.

The vision of this Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (KMOL) Policy is to *Improve USAID's ability to harness its cumulative knowledge, learn from it, and apply those lessons to its work to achieve better results.* To achieve this vision—which will reduce burdens associated with accessing and transferring knowledge—the Agency will strengthen KMOL investments, infrastructure, and norms to fully and systematically leverage its knowledge. The policy's core aims lie in humanitarian and development outcomes, with a holistic approach that spans both **programs and operations**. This policy has three primary goals: 1. Steward knowledge as a shared Agency asset; 2. Leverage knowledge and learning as essential resources to achieve development and humanitarian goals; and 3. Invest in local knowledge systems to support locally led development.

Seven key principles will guide policy implementation: **Human-centered, Integrated, Resourced, Accessible, Focused, Local, Dynamic.**

The policy focuses on exerting **leverage points for action** (people, practices, systems, governance, culture, and resources) on **three core business processes covering a large portion of USAID's work:**
   1. **Programming:** Activity design, acquisition and assistance, and implementation.
   2. **Workforce:** Hiring, training, retaining, and transitioning staff.
   3. **Budgeting and Reporting:** Budget formulation and execution and results reporting.

To advance the vision and goals, the policy includes two requirements: The Agency will establish a governing body to address Agency-level KMOL issues; and operating units will establish KMOL plans.

1. INTRODUCTION

Everything the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) does entails people applying what they know to what they do, whether it is designing programs, responding to crises, procuring services, managing awards, hiring staff, crafting budget requests, analyzing evaluation results, training the workforce, or managing the motor pool. To do this work well, relevant knowledge must reach people as they are making decisions, in quantities and forms they can absorb, through processes that help them make sense of and apply this knowledge. In order to continuously improve these processes, the Agency must build knowledge management and learning into organizational infrastructure, processes, and skill sets rather than leaving it to chance. Though USAID invests in knowledge management and organizational learning (KMOL), too often these investments have been shallow, siloed, or ephemeral. To support the Agency's transformation into an effective learning organization and advance USAID's mission, this policy establishes the foundation for strengthening KMOL investments, infrastructure, and norms. This policy's core aims lie in improving humanitarian and development outcomes, with a holistic approach that spans both programs and operations.[1]

2. BACKGROUND

There is firm acceptance in business, academia, and government—and among leading international development donors[2]—that strong KMOL facilitates better results. The evidence reviewed to inform this policy supports this conclusion (see Annex 4). Data from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, evidence from collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA), and research from the business management and behavioral sciences fields confirm that KMOL advancements will also contribute to greater engagement and job satisfaction among USAID staff.[3] Staff demand a workplace where they can easily obtain the right information at the right time to inform decision-making.[4]

This policy builds on USAID's existing investments in knowledge and learning—such as CLA and Program Cycle evidence processes; the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policy Making Act (Evidence Act) efforts; sectoral learning agendas and KM efforts, such as the LINKS[5] sites and related knowledge sharing processes; and capacity strengthening around evidence use. The policy also builds on a host of operational examples, including Business Process and Operational Effectiveness Reviews. USAID staff established these lines of effort at a particular time in the Agency's evolution, and each reflects the best practices in its given field(s) as well as the institutional realities of USAID at the time. Strengthening Agency-wide KMOL, as the most recent line of effort, builds on this foundation, and seeks to fill gaps left by other efforts. A practical implication is that different operating units (OUs) will emphasize different aspects of KMOL, based on their existing investments in evidence, knowledge management, and learning; and all of these investments will evolve over time. Consequently, this policy allows OUs to customize their KMOL efforts, while also establishing, for the first time, standards for two essential functions required to reduce burdens and increase effectiveness: knowledge retention and transfer as staff move in and out of positions, and norms and standard naming conventions for Google folders and Google work products.

This policy is the next intentional step in catalyzing Agency-wide learning and putting in place processes that facilitate organizational change, addressing gaps in guidance, infrastructure, and business processes that existing efforts cannot fully address.

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1 The term "development" is used broadly in this policy and meant to encompass USAID's efforts in long-term development, disaster assistance, and humanitarian response.

2 See Piers Bocock and Chris Collison, *Return on Knowledge: How international development agencies are collaborating to deliver impact through knowledge, learning, research and evidence*, Florence, Italy: Multi-Donor Learning Partnership (MDLP), UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, 2022. See especially the theory of change, depicted graphically on pp. 21-23, which nine leading donors in development, including USAID, articulated.

3 See the "CLA Evidence Collection" on USAID Learning Lab.

4 See Annex 4, "Evidence Synthesis for KMOL Policy," which includes evidence from consultations with USAID staff.

5 The LINKS websites at USAID comprise a collection of learning sites modeled after the original microLINKS, now MarketLinks, and share similar functionalities and link to each other. The other sites in the LINKS family include AgriLinks, BiodiversityLinks, ClimateLinks, EducationLinks, GlobalWaters, LandLinks, Learning Lab, ResilienceLinks, and UrbanLinks.

3. KEY CONCEPTS

Knowledge Cycle—Knowledge is effectively managed via a cycle[6] that includes generating, synthesizing, curating, capturing, storing, sharing, and applying it to inform decisions, strengthen organizations, and improve outcomes.
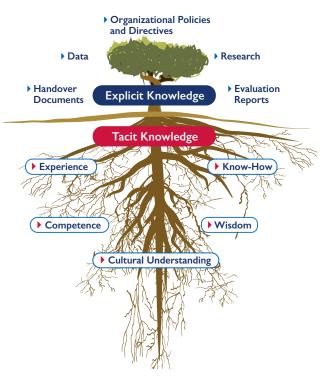
Knowledge Management (KM)—For the purposes of this policy, knowledge management is defined as generating, curating, organizing, sharing, and using knowledge to create value or support decision-making in context.

Organizational Learning (OL)—The process by which an organization improves itself over time by gaining experience and using it to create knowledge that can be transferred within the organization, applied again, and improved over time.

KM and OL are mutually reinforcing and often consolidated as KMOL, as in this policy. Both are critical programmatic and operational Agency capacities essential to strategy, resource allocation, program design and implementation, staff onboarding and transfer, crisis response, innovation, and adaptation.

KMOL at USAID must effectively manage **explicit knowledge** while surfacing, synthesizing, and sharing the **tacit knowledge**[7] of Agency personnel. As shown in Figure 1, explicit knowledge is more visible, like the top of a tree. It is knowledge that can be documented, curated, and stored via standardized systems and repositories, such as databases, documents, videos, or other media. It is relatively easy to share explicit knowledge with others. Tacit knowledge, meanwhile, is like the invisible and larger root system below the ground. It refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities staff acquire through experience, which are sometimes undervalued and often difficult to document. Rather than trying to make it explicit, tacit knowledge can be more meaningful when shared in context and via peer-to-peer discussion. Because the share of tacit knowledge is much larger than explicit knowledge, a focus on approaches that surface it and facilitate its circulation is critical in knowledge management.

There are many types of knowledge, including but not limited to general knowledge, global knowledge, rigorous scientific evidence, and local and Indigenous knowledge and evidence. L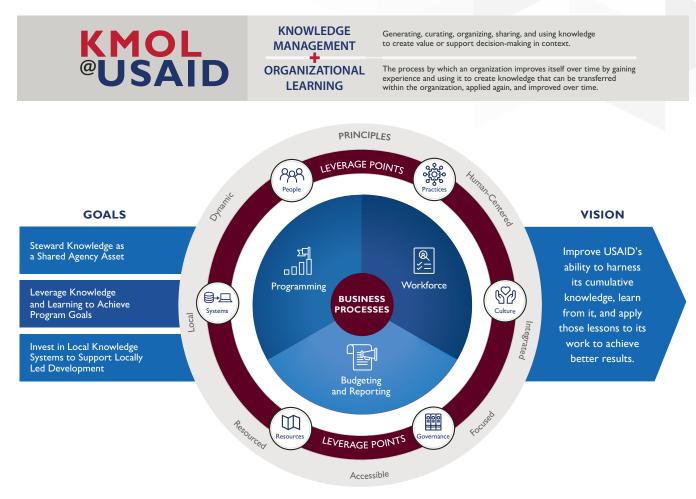ocal and Indigenous knowledge can be explicit or tacit, scientifically or empirically derived, grounded in other knowledge systems, or context specific. USAID is still learning how to understand, facilitate, and equitably integrate local and Indigenous knowledge.[8]

Figure 1: The "tree" metaphor describes the relationship between explicit and tacit knowledge. This figure depicts the relative roles of different types of knowledge in decision making. It is included here to prompt action towards the surfacing and greater utilization of tacit knowledge.

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6 In contrast, information management addresses only one or two components of the knowledge cycle.

7 For more on this concept, see Tacit Knowledge: Knowledge Management Briefs.

8 The Agency will implement relevant guidance issued under The Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships, and further elaborated in USAID guidance on Indigenous knowledge, and will continue to expand its understanding and use of good practices surrounding local and Indigenous knowledge in international development. "Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships," 86 Fed. Reg. 7,491, January 26, 2021; "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," Exec. Order No. 13,985, 86 Fed. Reg. 7,009, January 20, 2021; "Advancing Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders," Exec. Order No. 14,031, 86 Fed. Reg. 29,675, May 28, 2021.

Figure 2: KMOL at USAID

KMOL @USAID

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT + ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Generating, curating, organizing, sharing, and using knowledge to create value or support decision-making in context.

The process by which an organization improves itself over time by gaining experience and using it to create knowledge that can be transferred within the organization, applied again, and improved over time.

GOALS

Steward Knowledge as a Shared Agency Asset

Leverage Knowledge and Learning to Achieve Program Goals

Invest in Local Knowledge Systems to Support Locally Led Development

VISION

Improve USAID's ability to harness its cumulative knowledge, learn from it, and apply those lessons to its work to achieve better results.

PRINCIPLES
LEVERAGE POINTS
Dynamic
Human-Centered
Local
Integrated
Resourced
Focused
Accessible

People
Practices
Systems
Culture
Resources
Governance

BUSINESS PROCESSES

Programming
Workforce
Budgeting and Reporting

LEVERAGE POINTS

4. VISION AND GOALS

The overarching vision of this policy is to improve USAID's ability to harness its cumulative knowledge, learn from it, and apply those lessons to its work to achieve better results. Three interrelated goals will help the Agency achieve that vision.

GOAL 1: STEWARD KNOWLEDGE AS A SHARED AGENCY ASSET

The collective knowledge of USAID staff and partners is a critical asset. This knowledge must be effectively generated, stored, organized, and shared to be accessible for use in USAID programs and operations. These processes should not be left to chance, invented without regard to established good practice, or applied differentially across Bureaus, Independent Offices, and Missions (BIOMs). The Agency will therefore establish an infrastructure that ensures USAID and its partners effectively manage and use collective knowledge. USAID will strengthen existing or create new resources, systems, processes, and incentives in addition to fostering a culture of learning to take full advantage of its collective knowledge.

These efforts will include a systematic approach to knowledge transfer so the Agency does not lose valuable information and experience when staff rotate, as well as supporting knowledge flow across Missions and throughout the implementing partner community. Treating knowledge as an Agency asset enables the retention of Agency knowledge over time—through crisis, staff transitions, and political shifts—so lessons learned are not lost. KM helps to increase the likelihood of effective practices being shared internally and externally, increasing efficiency by ensuring that effective programs/practices are used more often, in more places. In short, the Agency will steward knowledge as an essential Agency asset in the same way it responsibly stewards financial resources.

GOAL 2: LEVERAGE KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING TO ACHIEVE PROGRAM GOALS

Knowledge and learning are program resources alongside funding and personnel, and should be used strategically to inform USAID's programs and influence development efforts beyond those USAID funds. Knowledge should also be viewed as a development outcome where USAID investments in learning—its own and others'—can advance shared development goals. USAID has significant knowledge resources and organizational strengths. The latter include a global presence, bipartisan support, some existing processes and investments that support research and learning from implementation, a credible voice, and convening power. USAID is well positioned to leverage its extensive knowledge and experience to influence the development landscape, and to help mobilize a diverse array of knowledge and knowledge holders, including local communities, the private sector, academia, research organizations, and host governments, to learn together, to inform and align programming, and to strengthen local knowledge and learning ecosystems. Mobilizing knowledge can catalyze positive change and reduce duplication of efforts across development organizations. This cannot be achieved or sustained through funding alone.

Further, the Agency has a substantial role to play in modeling inclusive development through engaging local stakeholders and their customary practices, understandings, and knowledge. This local knowledge will increasingly drive USAID's programming, policies, and investments, as part of USAID's broader localization agenda.[9] Agency knowledge is a public good. USAID will treat it as such and transparently deploy it to catalyze learning across the countries in which the Agency works and throughout the development sector. In this way, USAID extends its impact by influencing other development efforts beyond its own programming.

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9 For implications, see Integrating Local Knowledge in Development Practice.

GOAL 3: INVEST IN LOCAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge and effective KM are essential not only for USAID to achieve its mission, but also for country governments, local and regional organizations, and other development actors whose contributions advance locally led development. USAID will complement efforts to strengthen its own KMOL with programmatic investments that strengthen the knowledge and learning ecosystems in the countries and communities where it works. This can be accomplished as a program goal or as part of a broader program (i.e., investing in local health data systems and learning networks as part of a health systems strengthening program). This will include supporting the transmission and use of Indigenous knowledge and combating systemic stigma and discrimination against Indigenous identities and unique knowledge systems. Local development entities will see greater gains when they are better equipped to use local and global knowledge to inform their efforts. As part of a broader approach to localization and local ownership of development agendas and outcomes, USAID will include this third KMOL goal among the results it seeks to achieve through its programmatic investments and its thought leadership and convening authority.[10]

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10 Knowledge for Development Partnership, *Agenda Knowledge for Development: Strengthening Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals*, Vienna, Austria: International Fund of Agricultural Development (IFAD), 3rd edition, October 2018.

5. PRINCIPLES

Seven principles emerged as essential for KMOL at USAID based on an evidence review conducted for this policy (see Annex 4). These principles are: **Human-centered; 2) Integrated; 3) Resourced; 4) Accessible; 5) Focused; 6) Local; and 7) Dynamic.** For a fuller explanation of how these principles underpin this policy, see Annex 4.

Principle 1—Human-centered: Enable and incentivize people to share and use their individual and collective knowledge.

What this means: Humans generate, organize, share, and apply knowledge to create value or support their decision-making, and humans make sense of knowledge and learn in different ways (and in different environments, including a range of in-person, virtual, and hybrid settings). This human-centered nature of knowledge must provide the basis for KM processes, tools, and systems, so diverse individuals can contribute to, understand, and use the knowledge base to achieve USAID's objectives—or those of their communities or countries.

Principle 2—Integrated: Integrate KMOL practices into existing business practices.

What this means: KMOL cannot be siloed; it must be integrated into the Agency's **core business processes**, including 1) designing and awarding grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements and managing their implementation; 2) hiring, training, retaining, and transitioning staff; and 3) formulating and executing budgets and reporting results. (See Section 7 for more on what this looks like in three core USAID business processes.)

Principle 3—Resourced: Invest funding and staff talent to enable effective KMOL.

What this means: Recognizing knowledge as a critical and valuable asset, the Agency must intentionally invest funds and human resources within USAID and its implementing mechanisms to ensure Agency staff, programs, and functions can steward knowledge and continuously learn and improve.

Principle 4—Accessible: Strive to make knowledge transparent and accessible to everyone.

What this means: Accessible knowledge is easy to access and digest by all users, including staff, partners, and local counterparts. Grounding the Agency's KMOL approaches in human-centered design and resourcing them appropriately will support the development of processes and systems that make knowledge accessible. Knowledge accessibility and transparency is managed ethically,[11] in ways that ensure safety in sensitive contexts that may pose hazards to women, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ communities, and others. Other sensitivities and security considerations inform knowledge accessibility and transparency, protocols for what can/cannot be shared, and approval processes for knowledge sharing as relevant.

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11 As defined in this policy, knowledge encompasses more than just data and knowledge from scientific research. With the recognition of the value of many types of knowledge, USAID should apply its existing policies and guidance on the ethical and responsible use of data broadly to knowledge and harmonize and provide explicit guidance on how to adapt those to knowledge beyond data. A foundation in the federal government's ethical treatment of humans and their knowledge is the Common Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects included in USAID's Scientific Research Policy. The federal government further expanded upon the Common Rule in the Federal Data Ethics Strategy, which is recognized in USAID's Considerations for Using Data Responsibly. Additionally, USAID should harmonize guidance on knowledge where available, including Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge.

Principle 5—Focused: Tailor KMOL to fit purpose and circumstances.

What this means: For USAID programs and operations, people need curated, synthesized, and packaged knowledge that is actionable and tailored to their context and the functions they are performing.

Principle 6—Local: Value and equitably engage local and Indigenous knowledge.

What this means: To ensure greater sustainability of USAID investments, USAID will value and equitably engage local and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. This may include mindsets, worldviews, experiences, evidence, and know-how that enable locally led and sustainable development that revolves around local ownership, priorities, and perceptions of progress.

Principle 7—Dynamic: Update knowledge through continuous learning.

What this means: For knowledge to remain a key asset driving development impact, the Agency cannot treat it as static. In line with the focus on continuous learning in the CLA Framework, organizational leadership and infrastructure must support staff's ability to engage in learning and use iterative approaches that enable updating of individual and collective knowledge.

6. LEVERAGE POINTS FOR ACTION

Six "leverage points" are essential action points that USAID will exercise in its core business processes to achieve the vision and goals described below. They are people, practices, systems, governance, culture, resources. These are covered in detail in Annex 2. Their role in achieving this vision in USAID core business processes is explored below in Section 7.

7. KMOL IN THREE USAID CORE BUSINESS PROCESSES

This policy focuses on three targeted processes central to the Agency's mission: Programming, Workforce, and Budgeting and Reporting. These business processes cover a large portion of USAID's work and represent opportunities for the Agency to realize operational efficiencies and burden reductions, as well as gains in programmatic effectiveness. A key finding of the evidence review conducted for this policy is that building KM or OL into existing processes, systems, or documents is an important way to enhance the work rather than add undue burden.

BUSINESS PROCESS 1—PROGRAMMING: DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND ASSISTANCE, AND IMPLEMENTATION

Programming includes Agency policies, practices, and systems around the design process, acquisition and assistance actions, and the implementation that results through activities under USAID's Program Cycle.[12] This core business process is an essential USAID function, as demonstrated by the increasing demands of programming, which has grown from under $10 billion annually in the early 2000s to more than $25 billion annually in 2022.[13]

This business process involves staff in Missions and Washington and requires coordination and collaboration across OUs, functions, roles, and external actors. Having access to evidence, data, and other information that supports analytical thinking and decision-making is imperative to program design, award, and implementation. USAID invests a great deal in generating evidence to inform programs through assessments, evaluations, sector learning agendas, the Agency Learning Agenda, and other analytic processes. The Agency can enhance these processes in several ways:

Systems—Improve data resources and technical repositories making more of them interoperable. Strengthen local knowledge systems to support local actors.

Practices—Ensure that strategic planning and program designs teams intentionally use the Agency's knowledge to inform the work of other development actors.

People—Support the Agency's ability to use local and Indigenous knowledge by strengthening staff skills as well as programming processes that emphasize local and Indigenous knowledge. Facilitate local knowledge and learning systems by strengthening staff skills to design programs that do this.

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12 "The USAID Program Cycle," *USAID Learning Lab.*
13 "USAID's Foreign Assistance Spending by Year (20 Year Horizon)," *ForeignAssistance.gov.*

Resources—Dedicate human and financial resources for KMOL to inform program design, implementation, and adaptation; ensure staff capture; understand, share, and apply learning around program results and deliverables; and strengthen knowledge aggregation and sharing across partners, portfolios, and sectors.

BUSINESS PROCESS 2—WORKFORCE: HIRING, TRAINING, RETAINING, AND TRANSITIONING STAFF

USAID's global workforce possesses the knowledge essential to everything the Agency does; however, it is often a struggle for staff to find the specific knowledge they need. A key element of strengthening USAID as a learning organization involves approaching workforce functions as a critical opportunity to build, retain, and use the Agency's knowledge. Through this policy, USAID aims to strengthen this business process by:

Hiring—USAID's approach to strengthening KMOL capacity will inform hiring. The KMOL governance body will develop an Agency-wide KMOL staffing plan and define KMOL competencies and workforce coverage. Workforce planning will include hiring staff with learning mindsets and attitudes who are skilled in KMOL, systematically staffing the Agency with KMOL positions, and adding KMOL responsibilities into key technical and management position descriptions to ensure a supportive structure for KMOL staff and accountability for KMOL functions.

Training—Training for the USAID workforce will emphasize adult learning methodologies for enhanced engagement and effectiveness.[14] USAID will offer KMOL training and hands-on learning opportunities to all staff.

Retaining—Staff retention strategies will reduce barriers and increase equitable access to knowledge and continuous learning.[15] USAID will reward staff for managing the Agency's dynamic and exponentially growing evidence base.

Transitioning—USAID will establish standard processes and tools to support effective and efficient access to and use of knowledge assets to foster smooth transitions as new employees come onboard and transition. Strong KM capabilities, particularly knowledge retention and transfer approaches, are critical to maintaining programmatic momentum with staff changes. The **Knowledge Retention and Transfer process and toolkit**[16] support this effort.

BUSINESS PROCESS 3—BUDGETING AND REPORTING: BUDGET FORMULATION AND EXECUTION AND RESULTS REPORTING

One of USAID's core functions is to strategically program Congressionally appropriated resources to achieve and regularly report on results. The underlying processes are multifaceted, toggling among budget planning and execution, and reporting on multiple fiscal years of funding, often at the same time. These tasks demand cooperation, collaboration, and strong information sharing among multiple agencies, Bureaus, and offices.

The Agency has employed increasingly sophisticated systems to ensure transparency of funding and results. Still, opportunities remain to ensure stakeholders can parse this information in ways that serve their different needs. In some cases, staff can search for and find reliable data about funding levels or results in enterprise systems. However, these systems often cannot provide the kind of business intelligence Washington-based decision-making requires. In addition, these systems are not interoperable, resulting in underutilization and data disparities. At the same time, emergency supplemental appropriations and off-cycle requests for information sometimes distort existing processes and highlight a need to strengthen these systems further. There is not a consistent approach to budget formulation, execution, and reporting and there are inconsistent knowledge handover practices. Documenting OU processes through standard operating procedures (SOPs), clearance roadmaps, or other tools reduces this challenge.

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14 Training should reflect the highest standards for collaboration with local and Indigenous communities as well as respect for the retention of widely varying knowledge systems when integrated into USAID resources, including avoiding appropriation or presumptuous translations.
15 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) data indicates that effective KM is an essential component to staff engagement.
16 "Toolkit and Implementation Checklist for Knowledge Retention and Transfer (KRT)," *USAID ProgramNet.*

Several KMOL leverage points could dramatically improve the efficiency of these business processes by standardizing practices (or better informing staff about existing practices) to reduce unnecessary, time-intensive, informal knowledge sharing, and ensure Agency staff can access corporate data and knowledge as needed.

People—Missions and regional, technical, and central Bureaus all fulfill the budget formulation and results reporting processes. Guidance or SOPs delineate different staff responsibilities in these processes in some Bureaus and Missions but not in others. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different entities and disseminating that information widely would better support staff. Staff responsibilities will include sharing knowledge across BIOMs engaged in these processes to strengthen codification of standard processes and leverage tacit knowledge effectively.

Processes—The annual budget and results reporting cycles repeat with usually modest changes. Developing intra-Agency SOPs would support and clarify these processes. Standardized timelines and links to guidance and information technology (IT) systems would remove the need for BIOMs to duplicate efforts and make resources available for staff responsible for those business processes. Housing these SOPs in a central location and regularly referring back to them could improve their accessibility and staff awareness. Strengthening the feedback loop between Washington and Missions could increase Missions' awareness of how their reporting feeds into Washington-level decision-making. Making Mission staff partners in these efforts could incentivize their commitment to the process and improve the overall quality of the information provided.

Systems—Enhancing the functionality of existing enterprise IT systems could improve how BIOMs complete different phases of the budget build or the annual reporting process. Greater awareness of the data available in these systems, and how to aggregate them in different ways, could support BIOMs in responding to unanticipated needs. Supporting interoperability or user interfaces for systems could enhance the ability of BIOMs to report on results and lessons learned using data and information from these systems. Standardized guidance and best practices on the process, use, and integration of various products (e.g., templates, Development Information Solution, Foreign Assistance Coordination and Tracking System Next Generation project,[17] etc.) could help increase productivity and decrease burden during the high-pressure annual reporting process.

Resources—The Agency will conduct a review, establish a threshold for resources it should devote to KMOL, and plan a phased approach to achieving those levels. The Agency will develop a toolkit with sample KMOL budgets, mechanisms, position descriptions, etc., to support resourcing KMOL across the Agency's programs and workforce.

The Agency will invest more in data analysis capabilities and technology that could potentially automate functions to better serve timely decision-making. Missions spend a significant amount of time reporting on the annual Performance Plan and Report process; however, stakeholders do not always feel they have sufficient data to inform their decisions. To bridge the gap between the reporting burden and a perceived lack of data, the Agency will devote more resources toward analyzing the existing data in a way that serves a diverse array of needs and exploring how existing systems can make these analyses more efficient and customer-focused.

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17 "U.S. Department of State's FACTS Info System Evaluation," Integra LLC, January 2016.

8. REQUIREMENTS

By way of this policy, the Agency is developing a deliberative and focused approach to strengthening the foundation for KMOL. The key to realizing the vision articulated here will be investing the leadership, resources, and time to allow for the policy's implementation to pay dividends in the form of more efficient systems, reduced frustration, and better development outcomes. Implementation of the vision described in this policy will be supported via:

1. **A KMOL governance body**, convened by the Chief Knowledge Officer and including principals from across Agency functions to maintain a high-level commitment to Agency KMOL and develop a plan to address resources, workforce, and accountability considerations. This body will be composed of leaders from key Bureaus and Independent Offices, and constituted as a subcommittee of the Management Operations Council.

2. **KMOL plans to be established by BIOMs at the relevant levels**[18] to institutionalize KMOL in USAID business processes, adhere to the principles, and use the leverage points described in this policy. Each BIOM must establish, implement, and regularly update KMOL plans at the appropriate level(s). These will be adapted and customized to their priorities, operating contexts, and organizational structure. BIOMs may exercise discretion to determine the appropriate level of detail and specificity needed in the KMOL plan to effectively and efficiently carry out activities and achieve KMOL objectives. KMOL plans may be integrated with CLA plans, at the discretion of the BIOM. The KMOL plan must include a structured process for knowledge retention and handover (building on or aligning with the Knowledge Retention and Transfer toolkit[19]) and Google Workspace norms and standard naming conventions for Google folders and Google work products (per example included in the KMOL Resources on the Agency intranet). These two measures will reduce systemic burdens at USAID that currently create massive inefficiencies across the Agency. BIOMs are encouraged to include in their plans additional KMOL processes as relevant, with an emphasis on reducing burdens. These plans will be supported by a new chapter on KMOL in the 200 series of the Automated Directives System (ADS), which will provide actionable guidance on these processes and other optional KMOL processes.

3. **Guidance and additional support materials.** The Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning's Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research will provide core resources on knowledge retention and transfer and standard file structure, additional KMOL resources, and peer learning opportunities.

4. **Other knowledge and learning investments and staff across the Agency.** Additional investments will be required by BIOMs throughout the Agency. Some of these are in place and others will need to be established.

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18 BIOMs will adapt and customize their KMOL Plans to their priorities, operating contexts, and organizational structure. BIOMs may exercise discretion to determine the appropriate level of detail and specificity needed in the KMOL plan to effectively and efficiently carry out activities and achieve KMOL objectives.
19 "Toolkit and Implementation Checklist for Knowledge Retention and Transfer (KRT)," *USAID ProgramNet.*

9. CONCLUSION

Effective implementation of this policy will improve USAID's ability to harness its cumulative knowledge, learn from it, and apply those lessons to its work to achieve better results. The benefits of getting it right are vast. Resourcing and systematically applying strong KMOL practices will contribute to better generation, retention, dissemination, and application of knowledge from a wider range of sources. Improved KMOL capacity strengthens the Agency's core business processes and reduces burdens.

Finally, better KMOL contributes to more effective stewardship of public resources. It is incumbent on USAID and its personnel to ensure the most efficient use of its resources as a taxpayer-funded agency. This responsibility extends to every Agency employee, and USAID needs to create an enabling infrastructure and environment to best fulfill it. Cultivating Agency knowledge and making it easily available to staff strengthens organizational learning, improves decision-making, and leads to better returns on USAID development investments.

ANNEX 1: PRINCIPLES

Principle 1—Human-Centered: Enable and incentivize people to share and use their individual and collective knowledge.

Humans make up the Agency and are central to how the Agency does its work. Improving work—staff, partners, counterparts, and local actors—and improving the lives of humans of all diverse identities and experiences is USAID's mission. USAID is committed to engaging and supporting staff and beneficiaries. In its earlier phases, the KMOL field tended to reduce KM to technology, particularly document repositories, which are necessary but far from sufficient for a holistic, effective KMOL approach. More recently, the KMOL field has increasingly acknowledged that humans and their interactions are central to knowledge generation, sensemaking, transfer, and use. To be effective, USAID's systems and practices need to recognize this fundamental concept. Human-centered systems and practices that support the work of Agency staff are much more effective, decrease time and resource burdens, and have a higher likelihood of adoption.

Because a person rarely creates knowledge alone, USAID must also create a culture with opportunities to generate knowledge through collaboration and engagement, including fostering behaviors and actions that facilitate learning across Agency staff, partners, and local counterparts. All Agency staff—junior staff, Foreign Service Nationals, Institutional Support Contractors, Personal Services Contractors, to Foreign Service Officers, Civil Service, and appointees—have knowledge that is of value. Moreover, human-centered approaches must acknowledge intersectionality[20] and the different positions of individuals and groups in broader social contexts, and must embrace tenets of inclusion, such as "do no harm" and "nothing about them without them."[21]

Stewarding tacit knowledge of Agency staff and partners is key. Explicit formats, which tend to be more static and less contextually grounded (such as project reports), cannot easily capture the full breadth of tacit knowledge. KMOL approaches must include eliciting, retaining, and using tacit knowledge more efficiently and effectively. Local and Indigenous knowledge are fundamental to this principle. Elevating methods for drawing out culturally and context-specific knowledge and ensuring a spectrum of users can share and use it effectively is key. Thought leaders, especially at local levels, have tools and skills for capturing and sharing their knowledge in a range of formats that align with diverse learning needs and styles. Current USAID examples include the use of after-action reviews and peer and local knowledge exchanges.

USAID Learning Lab has many examples of how USAID staff and partners are using human-centered design approaches for better KM and collaboration. USAID Tanzania's Advancing Partners and Communities Project used a human-centered design approach to policy design and implementation, with collaboration at the core.

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20 An intersectional approach recognizes that many elements of a person's identity can impact how they experience the world. In combination with systems of inequality, these intersecting identities can lead to varying degrees of power and privilege that, in turn, create unique power dynamics, effects, and perspectives impacting individuals' place in society, experience of, and potentially access to development interventions, with implications for the knowledge they hold and their role in KMOL.

21 For more information and training, go to: https://www.usaid.gov/e-learning/drgcenter/do-no-harm/.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Putting people at the center and ensuring dedicated discovery time to understand users' wants and needs before building or upgrading any new system or website.
- Improving stewardship of tacit knowledge through mentorship, peer-to-peer sharing, listening sessions, inclusive consultations, and communities of practice, such as private-sector engagement (PSE) knowledge exchange.
- Strengthening staff skills and adapting tools to equitably engage local and Indigenous knowledge as a key element in elevating methods for drawing out contextual and culturally specific knowledge, ensuring it can be shared and used effectively across a spectrum of users.
- Capturing and sharing knowledge in varying formats internal and external to the Agency, including those that are locally accessible and useful.
- Developing a culture that does not assume it has the answers, but instead seeks understanding through collaborative learning.
- Examining Agency and staff biases that foster inaccurate assumptions and narrow the range of evidence and knowledge staff consider credible and relevant.

Principle 2—Integrated: Integrate KMOL practices into existing business practices.

KMOL approaches will build on and integrate with existing USAID processes. Anchoring KMOL practices to core business processes supports day-to-day work, increases efficiency, and makes it easier for staff to adopt new, more effective practices. Impactful KMOL approaches require shifts in both systems and mindsets to integrate KMOL at all levels of programming and operations. Current USAID examples of this principle in action include documenting changes in the Country Development Cooperation Strategy[22] to help new staff understand the context; offboarding and onboarding of staff that embeds the Knowledge Retention and Transfer tools; applying a pause and reflect process to Agency operations through the Office of Management Policy, Budget, and Performance's business process and operational effectiveness reviews.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Further embedding the Knowledge Retention and Transfer processes throughout the Agency.
- Leveraging the Agency Approach to Field Services and its Universal Technical Request and Mission Support system's trip report element to capture and analyze information about Missions' experiences implementing Agency priorities.
- Regularizing co-creation to integrate local and Indigenous knowledge early and on an ongoing basis throughout the design, award, and implementation process.
- Scaling peer learning among Mission leaders confronting similar challenges.
- Utilize internal sites such as ProgramNet and the Development Information Solution to capture and share internal knowledge.
- Strengthening USAID staff capacity to integrate, understand, utilize, and implement geospatial information to support activities.

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22 USAID, "Regional and Country Development Cooperation Strategy Updates, Amendments and Extensions: A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 201," March 20, 2020.

Principle 3—Resourced: Invest funding and staff talent to enable effective KMOL.

The Agency will invest resources—both money and time—in managing its knowledge. USAID will ensure solicitations and activity-level CLA and monitoring and evaluation plans include funding for KMOL. To create timely, purpose-driven, and actionable knowledge, resources must be devoted to data curation, quality, and organization.

Investing in KMOL will include staffing resources, such as hiring KMOL experts and building KMOL skills generally within the USAID workforce; funding KMOL infrastructure to strengthen Agency systems and processes; incorporating KMOL into funding mechanisms and managing funded activities in ways that strengthen KMOL; and investing leadership support in advancing KMOL across USAID. Current USAID examples of this principle include dedicated funding to support the purchase of Agency-approved hardware and software and leaders who empower staff to dedicate time to manage knowledge and engage in peer learning, knowledge synthesis, and other learning activities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Incorporating language, based on the KMOL principles in this policy, into funding mechanisms to establish KMOL that supports the goals and objectives of the given activity.
- Designing and awarding mechanisms to support integrated KMOL across portfolios in BIOMs.
- Developing an Agency-level staffing plan to ensure KMOL staff and skills exist in each BIOM.
- Developing strategies and funding support for knowledge sharing across implementing mechanisms and portfolios to synthesize learning and inform future work.[23]
- Continuing to fund enhanced technology and web development at the Agency level that is critical to KMOL, such as the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) (including ongoing and planned improvements) and Universal Technical Request and Mission Support.
- Resourcing data lifecycle management, user support, and training.
- Maintaining a master list of mechanisms for Mission and OU buy-ins for KMOL support services.
- Pursuing creative staffing options, such as deploying local staff with the right skills (including relevant skills in languages, contextual awareness, inclusive development, and collaboration skills) to embed KMOL in implementation.

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23 Prior and current examples of KM and learning mechanisms include Sharing Environment and Energy Knowledge (SEEK); Feed the Future Knowledge, Data, Learning, and Training (KDLT); Practical, InnoVative, On-the-Job Training (PIVOT); and Accelerated Microenterprise Advancement Project Knowledge Management and Communications (AMAP KMC).

Principle 4—Accessible: Strive to make knowledge transparent and accessible to everyone.

Knowledge needs to be available, organized, searchable, screen readable, translated when possible, intellectually clear and understandable across different learning styles, mindful of equity,[24] and inclusive of diverse knowledge frameworks systems, in ways that also protect those for whom disclosure may pose particular risks. Knowledge products will be framed and socialized to help people understand and use them. Ideally, USAID's practices to capture tacit, experimental, experiential, contextual, generalizable, local, Indigenous, and external knowledge will produce materials translated for local audiences, compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act for accessible materials (audio and video materials), and reflective of systematic efforts to support more diverse engagement and delivery methods. Practically, because of resource limitations and other considerations that can make accessibility difficult, incremental progress in this direction would be a good start.

Increasing accessibility inherently increases equity. It reduces power imbalances associated with knowledge hoarding and judgments about whose knowledge counts—judgments that suppress non-dominant voices and perspectives. By fostering greater access to knowledge, USAID uses knowledge better across a broader range of stakeholders; supports more relevant, locally owned development; and mitigates power dynamics and negative legacies across development work. Ultimately, accessible knowledge enhances transparency and productively increases knowledge sharing.

Current USAID examples include public-domain knowledge repositories such as Learning Lab, the LINKS family of websites, and a panoply of Global Health knowledge resources; USAID Data Services' dashboards, which standardize and present fundamental economic, social, governance, educational, and health data through portals found on aidscape.usaid.gov; and field-based portfolio reviews designed for sharing results, information, and knowledge with local stakeholders.[25]

OPPORTUNITIES

- Placing as much of USAID's documented knowledge and knowledge sharing events as possible on the DEC and elsewhere in the public domain for access by implementing partners and others in the broader development sector.
- Broadening access to knowledge sharing events by intentionally engaging a wider range of participants, including a broad range of knowledge sources and types in the events, and using these events to address areas of emergent evidence to advance learning across the development sectors.
- Expanding the use of knowledge product formats beyond standard reports where possible to include alternative auditory formats, such as podcasts; and visual formats, such as data visualization, photos, infographics, maps, and videos. Complementing those knowledge products with sensemaking processes that engage staff with new knowledge and help them apply it.
- Incorporating the use of social learning methods such as storytelling, art, and music forms, including but not limited to those that convey local and Indigenous knowledge.
- Intentional exploration and elevation of local and Indigenous knowledge frameworks and the insights they bring to complement the knowledge USAID typically emphasizes (arrived at through evaluation, repeated experimentation, etc.).
- Utilizing the Agency's enterprise geospatial infrastructure to securely store, manage, share, analyze, and visualize geospatial data.

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24 For more information, see Checklist for Assessing Equity in Knowledge Management Initiatives: A companion tool to the Building Better Programs guide, USAID Knowledge SUCCESS, 2022.

25 For example, see recent work by Developing Local Extension Capacity, which partnered with DigitalGreen to use innovative methods to share local knowledge.

Principle 5—Focused: Tailor KMOL to fit purpose and circumstances.

Curated knowledge is up-to-date, credible, and context oriented. When focused, KM prioritizes and organizes relevant knowledge and data. Actionable knowledge is often brief and presented as recommendations. Focused KM ensures actionable knowledge is consistently structured where possible for discoverability and synthesized for digestibility. This focus is important because decision-makers need timely knowledge for planning and decision-making for both immediate and longer-term needs. Current USAID examples include the Agency Learning Agenda, sector-based learning agendas, curated collections on the LINKS websites,[26] and CLA plans, which practice focused and tailored KM by identifying specific thematic learning needs and addressing them with holistic approaches to generating or curating evidence.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Timing portfolio reviews and country government national plans to inform program planning.
- Helping translate evidence to and from the local context to inform program decisions with context-specific evidence or other analysis, or sensemaking workshops with local actors.
- Designing and implementing learning agendas that facilitate the flow of knowledge in multiple directions, from Missions to USAID/Washington and vice versa, and laterally across Missions and other OUs, with peer learning as a central element.
- Supporting learning networks or communities of practice at the national or sub-national level that center learning, exchange, and adaptation locally to support locally led development efforts.

The Practical, InnoVative, On-the-Job Training (PIVOT) program takes a holistic approach to building Mission change teams with the full range of technical, relational, and power skills to implement Agency priorities. PIVOT uses immersive, cohort-based training of diverse USAID staff teams to advance PSE. PIVOT provides PSE, leadership, and CLA skills to USAID field staff. In a Learning Review, participants reported that the hands-on approach was critical to strengthening their capacity and confidence to apply their new skills. Participants noted PIVOT's success in demystifying PSE, making it relevant, accessible, and actionable across sectors.

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26 See, for example, https://biodiversitylinks.org/learning-evidence/learning-and-evidence#one-health.

Principle 6—Local: Value and equitably engage local and Indigenous knowledge.

USAID benefits most from an expansive approach to relevant knowledge, with attention to the forms and sources of knowledge that people in countries receiving aid say are important to them. To achieve this, USAID staff will examine their, and the organization's, biases and assumptions; demonstrate humility and openness to new ideas; and actively seek to understand locally derived evidence and learning as well as local contributions to global scientific knowledge. Staff will value, understand, and integrate local and Indigenous knowledge throughout USAID's work and explore connections between this and other USAID efforts around inclusive development as well as diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). To this end, a local approach must be inclusive, examine inherent biases, and identify ways to overcome power imbalances development work may reinforce. This entails understanding the diversity of local groups, and approaching local engagement with an understanding of how racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ communities,[27] and other populations hold distinct perspectives and knowledge and make distinct contributions to our shared development agendas.

Current USAID examples include co-creation tools, listening sessions, participation in locally led evaluations,[28] language translation efforts, and co-designs with governments, Indigenous populations, and local actors leading development efforts in their communities; and work that uses local institutions to generate relevant knowledge connected to development challenges.

The Contracting Officer's Representative and Agreement Officer's Representative community of practice and the Local Capacity Strengthening Policy have developed resources to elevate USAID's practices and peer learning on local systems. This knowledge can be shared in more intentional ways across the Agency. These resources "amplify [local knowledge as] vital to ensuring marginalized and underrepresented groups have the skills and opportunities to lead on their country's development."[29]

29 USAID, USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, October 2022

The importance of listening to local voices

In early 2018, USAID/Philippines organized a nationwide listening tour that reached more than 500 Filipinos. The listening sessions were intentionally broad. USAID staff engaged communities in dialogue unconnected to particular program investments, seeking to listen and more thoroughly understand what was working well and where there were nagging or unaddressed challenges in local communities. In many cases, local communities articulated priorities, including challenges with access to water and the importance of cooperatives, that the Mission did not previously know or capture in its five-year strategy. The listening tour enabled the Mission to quickly design solicitations that responded to sectors local actors identified, while also addressing overlapping Agency priorities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Sharing recommended tools for stakeholder engagement and listening more widely across the Agency, and developing staff skills to increase their uptake; analyzing the difference these methods enable in program approaches, results, breadth of local buy-in, etc.

- Engaging local anthropologists and non-credentialed experts to share their knowledge and help strengthen staff capacity to identify, value, and equitably engage local and Indigenous knowledge.

- Developing language for inclusion in funding agreements to strengthen investments in and use of local and Indigenous knowledge.

- Developing a plan to implement forthcoming guidance from the interagency working group on Indigenous Technical and Ecological Knowledge.

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27 For more information, see "LGBTQI+ 102: LGBTQI+ Inclusion in USAID Programs," https://www.usaid.gov/e-learning/inclusivedevelopment/lgbtqi-plus-102/#/.
28 For example, see this guidance on participation in locally led evaluation.

Principle 7—Dynamic: Update knowledge through continuous learning.

As the Agency generates new knowledge, older knowledge can quickly become outdated. The half-life of knowledge[30] (a measure of how quickly knowledge becomes outdated) and the knowledge doubling curve (the rate at which new knowledge is generated[31]) are well-known concepts. Companies such as IBM point to the need to shift from seeking employees with particular knowledge to seeking those with the skills required to continuously update their knowledge.[32]

In light of this, USAID needs to structure itself for continuous learning and evolution of knowledge. Facts, data, knowledge, etc. change as context, conditions, resources, mindset, and societies develop, and as knowledge gathering processes grow faster and more robust. Because knowledge changes as contexts and evidence evolve, organizations engaging in dynamic KM must have practices that update knowledge systematically.

From policy to programs to operations, USAID needs to build continuous learning systematically across Agency functions—while also preserving customization in KMOL practices to account for context, organizational unit, and knowledge type. The rapid evolution of knowledge and the high degree of context-specific knowledge needed for effective programs require dynamic organizational leadership and structures and a culture that supports continuous learning. Current USAID examples include the Agency's robust approach to assessments, program monitoring and evaluation, evidence gap maps, and learning agendas, such as the Agency Learning Agenda, all of which support the continuous evolution of USAID's evidence base. Another example is USAID's adaptive acquisition and assistance approaches, which demonstrate the dynamic KM principle through adaptive management clauses, such as the "refine and implement" approach or a rolling program design approach.[33]

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Fostering a culture and leadership that acknowledge the inherent uncertainty in the Agency's work and incentivize continuous inquiry and adaptive management.
- Supporting strong staff skills and organizational processes for understanding, valuing, and leveraging local and Indigenous knowledge.
- Improving systems and repositories for organizing, accessing, updating, and retiring knowledge products.
- Offering intentional, resourced knowledge-sharing forums (ranging from intimate change teams to communities of practice to listservs with large memberships) built on adult learning and human-centered design principles to accelerate peer knowledge sharing and learning.
- Reduce knowledge loss during staff transitions by systematically using an approach such as the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning's Knowledge Retention and Transfer Model.
- Dedicating staff positions and time for collaboration that supports continuous learning.
- Developing intentional relationships based on mutual interests and shared engagements to target knowledge gaps, updating USAID's knowledge base as change happens.

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30 Scott Sorokin, "Thriving in a World of "Knowledge Half-Life," CIO, April 5, 2019.
31 This concept is widely attributed to Buckminster Fuller (although an exact citation remains elusive). Sources referencing the knowledge doubling curve assert an exponential growth in knowledge that puts comprehensive understanding beyond human grasp and requires organizational and technological solutions to ensure evidence-based strategies and practices.
32 David Leaser, "How Do We Skill Up the Next Generation of IT Talent?," IBM Training and Skills Blog, October 15, 2018.
33 For examples of adaptive funding mechanisms, see USAID Procurement Executive, "Adaptable and Flexible Contracting Types," Procurement Executive Bulletin 2014-01.

To more effectively manage its knowledge assets and become a stronger learning organization, the Agency will need to institute changes around six key organizational leverage points, namely: People, Practices, Systems, Governance, Culture, Resources.

People—All staff create and use knowledge and all staff have a role in maintaining and using OL processes. Therefore, helping staff understand their respective KMOL responsibilities while also building their capacities in this area is important. KMOL roles and expectations for people and BIOMs must be clear.

USAID's Foreign Service National staff are particularly important across all KMOL roles and responsibilities. As linchpins of knowledge retention and transfer, they provide specific and critical support for institutional memory for OL. They are steeped in their local contexts and have unique access to local stakeholders, which is essential to realizing the Agency's goals around using local and Indigenous knowledge and advancing locally led development. Foreign Service National staff are a key part of the Agency's solution for ensuring diversity in viewpoints and advancing DEIA in its workforce and programs.

Leadership roles critical in advancing the KMOL Policy include:
- **Chief Knowledge Officer:**[34] This role provides top-level vision and leadership for KMOL at USAID, including championing the KMOL policy and its implementation, leading KMOL governance, engaging Agency leadership, advancing USAID's thought leadership in KMOL, and convening and supporting staff engaged in KMOL.
- **Chief Information Officer:** This role provides top-level leadership for the Agency's Information Resource Management. This role provides direction on Agency-wide IT governance and strategic planning, the review and approval of the Agency-wide IT budget, the oversight and approval of IT acquisitions across the Agency, and the approval of IT position descriptions in BIOMs.
- **Agency Evaluation Officer:** This role provides top-level leadership for the implementation of and compliance with the Evidence Act, including the Agency Learning Agenda and Evaluation Plan. This role also collaborates with, shapes, and contributes to other Agency evidence-building functions.
- **Chief DEIA Officer:** This role provides leadership in advancing, coordinating, and providing technical expertise in support of DEIA to ensure the Agency's people, partners, and programs promote respect, safety, and inclusion.
- **Agency Chief Economist:** This role provides top-level leadership in economic policy and analysis to inform programs, initiatives, and operations. The Chief Economist assists the Agency in making evidence-based and cost-effective awards; champions and leads efforts to generate rigorous evidence; and provides leadership in economic policy and analysis.
- **Chief Data Officer:** This leadership position has authority and responsibility for data governance, policy, and full lifecycle data management across USAID's programs and operations.
- **Chief Scientist:** This role oversees USAID's Scientific Research Policy and its Council on Research and Development, and thus plays a critical role in identifying some of the Agency's knowledge generation needs and considering how the Agency can best disseminate research-generated knowledge.

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34 Formerly the Agency KMOL Officer.

- **Scientific Integrity Official:** This role is responsible for overseeing the implementation of USAID's Scientific Integrity Policy, ensuring the conduct, management, and use of science is free from political interference.
- **Agency senior leaders:** These are the KMOL champions. They create an environment for staff to acknowledge and seek to fill gaps in evidence and learning; identify resources to dedicate to KMOL staff, systems, and processes; and establish expectations around KMOL practices, including evidence seeking and use, contributions to evidence and learning processes, and maintenance of KM systems.

Staff across the Agency will be critical to implementing this policy; its success will depend on their ability to integrate knowledge management and organizational learning in their day-to-day work in carrying out the Agency's business. All staff have basic responsibilities for KMOL, such as seeking and using knowledge, organizing it effectively, and sharing knowledge as a fundamental component of their work. In addition, it is critical for OUs to assess their needs for specialized KMOL staff to ensure effective knowledge management and organizational learning across all OU functions. (Likewise, the KMOL governance body will assess KMOL staffing patterns Agency-wide.) Staff assigned to KMOL functions contribute to implementing the KMOL Policy, advancing practices, and integrating KMOL innovations. These staff can include advisors specializing in KM, CLA or learning, monitoring and evaluation, those leading learning agendas, community of practice facilitators, data stewards, and others. All staff should gain and use facilitation skills and effective meeting skills to ensure that knowledge is effectively and efficiently brought to bear on decision-making in internal and external meetings. For more on staff roles, see Annex 3.

Practices—A wide array of practices support KMOL. Many of these practices focus on engaging staff with evidence for sensemaking and use, with each other for knowledge sharing, and with systems to promote functionality and use. Where it can, the Agency will standardize practices to reduce burdens and gain efficiencies while leaving room for customization of KMOL. It is expected that units will go beyond the standard requirements and customize additional KMOL efforts for their own needs. USAID will ensure KM practices and processes are tailored to the type of knowledge and level of human interaction required to share and use that knowledge.

USAID has many strong KM practices in use, including program planning, management and assessment processes, pause and reflect processes such as portfolio reviews and mid-course stocktaking, knowledge sharing via communities of practice, topical repositories, etc. Additionally, implementing partners play important roles in documenting and sharing Agency knowledge and identifying learning opportunities.

Knowledge retention and transfer is an example of a KMOL practice that supports effective knowledge handover and continuity as staff transition in and out of positions, addressing a longstanding Agency deficit given the regular rotation of Foreign Service staff and frequent transitions among other staff as well. Sectoral councils and other technical communities of practice offer pause and reflect opportunities for staff to incorporate new evidence and learning and the Agency to strengthen its learning and knowledge infrastructure on an organizational level. USAID's CLA Toolkit provides a robust collection of practical guidance and tools to support many KMOL practices. The database of CLA Case Competition submissions provides numerous examples of effective CLA in practice, while the Agency Learning Agenda includes a question on strengthening operations to support evidence use, and plays a role in amplifying knowledge and evidence. These are just a few of many examples.

Finding ways to make data accessible for decision-making is key to activity design, implementation, and learning. Using Mission Performance Management Plans to capture lessons from the past can create KM and learning opportunities for adaptive management.

Systems—For the purposes of this policy, a system is a collection of IT tools linked with associated processes that support Agency KMOL. USAID has scores of these systems. They are indispensable to carrying out many core business functions, including activity award and implementation, the budget cycle, reporting, and human resources, as well as supporting different parts of the knowledge cycle—information collection, information storage through digital repositories, and dissemination (e.g., the DEC, websites, KM portals, etc.). USAID can better harness these systems to support KMOL efforts.

Specifically, the Agency will enhance efforts to ensure its staff and implementing partners upload information and knowledge products to relevant systems – e.g., the Development Information Solution, the Development Data Library, the DEC, etc.—so that critical data is not lost. Strengthening practices around taxonomies and methods to classify content could dramatically enhance the organization of information once uploaded to these systems. USAID's data repositories will be strengthened so they support user needs and have enhanced functionality to maximize use of USAID's knowledge and evidence by staff, partners, and members of the public, consistent with relevant laws and regulations.

USAID has a plethora of databases and knowledge platforms, including externally facing knowledge websites for partners and the public, that are relevant to decision-making and that support learning and collaboration.[35] Navigating this vast array of evidence and resources can be overwhelming for users. Thus, there is an urgent need for USAID to prioritize and strengthen organizational processes for curating KM platforms, database content, and finding information. As the Agency migrates fully to Google Drive, improved practices around file naming and management protocols will better enable staff to find the information they need for their day-to-day work.

Given the exponential increase in information, evidence, and knowledge Agency staff and partners engage with, other technologies and techniques not currently in wide use at the Agency will need to complement improvements to existing systems. Improving how USAID systems function and integrate with the work processes they support will yield long-term benefits. To continue to build into the future, USAID's Chief Knowledge Officer will partner with the Chief Information Officer, the Chief Data Officer, the Agency Statistical Official, the Performance Improvement Officer, the Chief Scientist, the Office of the Chief Economist, and others to advance the Agency's engagement with artificial intelligence and machine learning. Together, they will explore how these tools can support knowledge synthesis and streamline knowledge seeking to better inform Agency programs and operations.

While the Agency fills gaps in its systems, works toward greater access and interoperability, and increases the coherence between technology and business processes, it will also be mindful of scaling systems' size and complexity to suit use and sustainability by partners and local actors as relevant. Staff responsible for systems should consider simplicity and replication as they implement programs, to ensure that requirements for data collection, analysis, and storage facilitate use by smaller organizations (and therefore enhance sustainability after USAID programs conclude). The ability of smaller organizations to invest in and maintain knowledge management systems after a program's end should be considered when designing programs.

Governance—This KMOL leverage point includes the authorities, means, and structures for overseeing implementation of the KMOL policy and aligning it with related efforts at USAID. Given USAID's global work across sectors, the Agency will employ cross-functional, cross-sectoral, championing BIOMs to guide, coordinate, and support KMOL practices.

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35 A notable example is aidscape.usaid.gov.

This policy aligns with several existing policy and guidance sources, including aspects of document and data warehousing (DEC and the Development Data Library through ADS Chapters 540 and 579), records management (ADS Chapter 502), using data in programming in the Program Management Improvement Accountability Act, the Evidence Act that addresses evidence-based programming, and ADS Chapter 201 on the Program Cycle, including the Evaluation Policy. Finally, at the BIOM levels, there are SOPs, Mission Orders, etc., that touch on KMOL practices and systems. In spite of these many sources of policy and guidance on evidence generation and management, USAID recognizes some gaps in policy and guidance regarding KMOL. USAID does not have central guidance and tools for managing the range of knowledge and evidence sources (in particular local knowledge), or for knowledge capture and sharing (in particular how to capture experiential and tacit knowledge). Moreover, the Agency has lacked a central governance body with the authority to address KMOL issues that rise above the level of individual OUs, and therefore will establish such a body to oversee and facilitate implementation of this policy.

Culture—This includes common behaviors, values, norms, and customs across the Agency that support KMOL directly or indirectly. Culture is a critical leverage point or inhibitor for KMOL efforts. The CLA Framework includes specific aspects of culture, such as fostering a climate of openness, encouraging the use of relationships and networks to broaden situational awareness and update individual and collective knowledge, and fostering continuous learning. All of these subcomponents are mutually reinforcing for KMOL. Nonetheless, Agency culture remains uneven with regard to support for KMOL.

It is vital to explicitly acknowledge the role of leadership. Vocal and visible leadership support for KMOL will be critical to successfully implement this policy and realize the benefits it envisions for achieving USAID's mission. Leaders who promote transparency, openness, and learning contribute to a positive organizational culture where KMOL can flourish and contribute to better results. Thus, USAID's leaders need to champion KMOL, resource it, and help move Agency staff toward implementation by creating clear expectations and incentives and removing obstacles. USAID will promote a culture of collaboration, communication, and willingness to share knowledge, learn, and change behavior. KMOL practices can foster this culture by creating or supporting venues to acknowledge, share, and learn from mistakes and failures. Furthermore, implementation of this policy will help create awareness of KMOL's value in helping staff meet their needs and facilitate their jobs.

Resources—This leverage point includes guidance for how BIOMs resource KMOL, KM staff, or KM or OL capacity strengthening, practices, systems, or support. Successful KM initiatives require adequate financial resources to support staff time devoted to KM and learning, purchase Agency approved hardware and software, facilitate knowledge sharing events and training, print or post publications or products, and facilitate engagement. The Agency will consider how to dedicate resources to support KMOL within and across implementing mechanisms and Agency functions. Agency leaders and KMOL experts alike play key roles in clarifying for Agency staff and partners the resources robust and effective KMOL require, and advocating for those resources to advance Agency goals.

> USAID will avoid duplication of effort and reduce burden by developing central guidance and tools and establishing a central governance body to coordinate implementation of this policy.

ANNEX 3: STAFF ROLES IN IMPLEMENTING KMOL POLICY

Staff across the Agency will be critical to implementing this policy; its success will depend on their ability to integrate and innovate knowledge management and organizational learning in their day-to-day work in carrying out the Agency's business.

- **Agency technical staff:** These staff help advance KMOL by contributing to and making use of the Agency's evidence base via the Agency Learning Agenda, sectoral learning agendas, knowledge sharing forums, geospatial data, and other opportunities.

- **Management Bureau's Office of Acquisition and Assistance Director:** This is the Senior Procurement Executive, Chief Acquisition Officer, and Assistance Executive for USAID and has delegated authority to establish procurement and assistance policies for the Agency. This position is responsible for ensuring that KM requirements designated by the planners of acquisition and assistance activities are included in solicitations and awards to enable effective KM and learning created, curated, or synthesized via funded activities.

- **Contracting Officer's Representative/Agreement Officer's Representative:** These roles monitor that implementing partners execute effectively the KM strategies according to award agreements, including evidence use to adapt programs, knowledge handover and retention, and that data and knowledge products are submitted to USAID systems as required in the award, including the DEC and the Development Data Library.

- **Human Capital and Talent Management staff:** Supported by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning subject matter expertise, these staff ensure USAID hires, trains, and retains a workforce skilled in KMOL.

- **Staff involved in management operations:** These staff align their work with KM needs and good practices as well as with knowledge and learning systems and OL practices.

- **Performance Improvement Officer:** This role works across the Agency to improve operational effectiveness and communication of organizational performance; supports Agency leaders in setting goals, reviewing progress, making course corrections, and making results transparent; and helps Agency program managers and goal leaders promote the adoption of effective practices to improve outcomes.

- **Mission Executive Officers and Program Officers:** These roles ensure the Mission puts in place, implements, assesses, and updates plans for KMOL staffing, skill-building, and knowledge retention and transfer.

ANNEX 4: EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS FOR KMOL POLICY

1. OVERVIEW

This document summarizes background research done to develop a knowledge management and organizational learning (KMOL) policy at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). An Agency Policy Working Group led by staff from the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning conducted evidence gathering efforts in three parts: a document review, focus group sessions with USAID staff, and key informant interviews with other development partners and non-governmental organizations. More details on the methodology used as well as a full version of the evidence synthesis can be found here.

2. EFFECTIVE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Several best practices were so commonly held in the KM and OL fields and among peer organizations that they rose to the level of principles which underpin USAID's KMOL Policy. One such principle is to place people at the center of any organization-wide KMOL effort. All staff create and use knowledge, so finding ways to help them understand their respective KMOL responsibilities is important. While all staff have basic KM and OL responsibilities, having dedicated, resourced KM or OL staff is critical for data management, records management, learning facilitation, staff transitions, etc. Designating a top-level leader to oversee the KM or OL function is a clear best practice.[36]

Another finding highlights that roles and expectations for people and units must be clear. This can be accomplished by adding KM or OL functions to job descriptions, core competencies, work objectives, and performance evaluations. A related finding pertains to skills and capacities. It is important to recognize that time and support are needed to build staff skills to support KM and OL. Finally, soft skills including facilitation, listening, and self-examination are critical, especially when engaging tacit, experiential, and local knowledge.

The evidence base on information technology (IT) systems and KM recognizes that while technology can enable knowledge management, it must be integrated with the way people work, address their needs, and be appropriate to the setting. Technology should be built around staff needs and behaviors and be easy and intuitive to use. Other important insights the Agency should consider regarding IT systems and KM include: Reducing cognitive effort to find and share information; using existing platforms, consolidating information, and using social networks to promote sharing; designing search functions to raise the most relevant information first; elevating norms to signal information sharing as an appropriate behavior; developing digestible and navigable formats and using interactive elements; and creating feedback loops around user needs, motivation, and experience. In addition, strengthening taxonomies and using standard file structures and naming protocols would improve efficiency and overall file management.[37]

The review also found KMOL efforts should leverage, align with, and support an organization's core business processes to ensure easy uptake and organizational buy-in. Making data accessible for decision-making is key to activity design, implementation, and learning, especially for adaptive management. Further, simplified knowledge products and tools for evidence tracking are often more user-friendly and preferred to those that may be more sophisticated or complex yet challenging to use.

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36 "USAID Knowledge Management Recommendations: Deliverable for Knowledge Management (KM) Project under Outcome 4 (Empower People to Lead) of USAID's Transformation Task Team (T3)," *USAID (unpublished)*, December 2018, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RPmrmyTfYY5Q1xqpgdtdP2DAY8XR0nt3.
37 "USAID Knowledge Management Recommendations."

A clear best practice from peer organizations is having cross-functional, cross-sectoral championing units to guide, coordinate, enforce, and support KMOL practices. Under this approach, a broadly-composed advisory group meets regularly, led by a particular person or unit with KM expertise to tackle organization-wide impediments while a network of KM focal points lead implementation. These networks are responsible for sharing information, tracking implementation, and testing innovative approaches to KM. Such bodies consider what incentives can be provided at appropriate levels for positive behavior, legal compliance, and the balance between knowledge sharing and knowledge protection. Governance bodies periodically assess compliance with KM or learning strategies or oversee certain aspects of implementation.

The importance of culture for any organizational change effort is broadly documented and universally noted as a critical enabler for KMOL efforts. Specifically, leaders who promote transparency, openness, and learning support a positive culture. A clear finding around culture that emerged is that transparency and openness are key to the flow of knowledge and learning. Collaboration and communication are positive cultural enablers, as are valuing humility and willingness to share and learn from mistakes.

The document review and consultations identified many good KM practices across USAID, including approaches to support peer-to-peer learning like communities of practice, pause and reflect exercises, newsletters tailored to specific knowledge needs, and unique dissemination approaches such as podcasts. A particularly notable practice is the use of learning circles, which are highly interactive, small group supportive discussions about what works and what does not in program implementation.[38]

3. NEEDS WITHIN USAID, AND TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The research identified several key KMOL needs within USAID, elevating their importance for consideration in a policy.

Governance/guidance gaps: USAID does not have central guidance nor tools for managing the range of sources of knowledge and evidence or for knowledge capture and sharing, particularly how to capture experiential and tacit knowledge. Additionally, many good practices are developed repeatedly within individual OUs. It could save time to elevate some of those practices to the Agency level. Focus group participants stressed the need for standardization and dissemination of standardized tools, templates, and standard operating procedures to accomplish repeatable tasks.

Resourcing KMOL: The research also highlighted the importance of the intentionality and resourcing of KMOL. This resourcing issue applies within OUs, with several examples of Bureaus or Missions hiring KM or OL experts to support the critical work of managing knowledge and supporting learning across mechanisms, portfolios, or sectors. It applies equally to USAID activities, with strong calls to require implementing partners to include funding for KM and to provide sample language about KMOL for Contracting and Agreement Officers to insert into solicitations and final agreement language.

38 Sarah Hopwood and Hauwa Okorie, Hauwa, *What Can Behavioral Economics Tell Us About Knowledge Management? A Desk Review for the Knowledge SUCCESS Project*, Nairobi, Kenya and Baltimore, MD: Busara Center for Behavioral Economics and Johns Hopkins Center for Communications Programs, November 19, 2019, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00X1K6.pdf.

Trends: One leading trend, particularly among development banks, is viewing knowledge generation and dissemination as a core business practice. Consequently, they integrate multi-year knowledge agendas into their work and have strict quality standards and accountability around knowledge gap assessments, knowledge generation, and knowledge dissemination. Some of these partners have corporate level KM strategies with explicit theories of change around KM and metrics for implementation. Several organizations cited the importance of collaborating with local organizations and governments to share knowledge or solve problems. Examples of this approach include: supporting grantees on results frameworks, project management, data collection, and monitoring and evaluation; encouraging grantees to use their generated knowledge to raise more resources for their projects; co-creating knowledge products with local organizations.

Opportunities: KMOL Policy implementation will enable USAID to make a substantive contribution to the broader development and humanitarian field. The policy elevates the role of local knowledge in contributing to USAID's localization vision. By situating local and Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate source of knowledge and placing it alongside empirical and other western forms of knowledge, the policy can spotlight these often untapped sources of knowledge.[39] USAID also has a wealth of local and contextual knowledge within its Foreign Service National staff.[40] Secondly, the KMOL Policy can reinforce other USAID policy priorities, such as local capacity strengthening, the Evaluation Policy and Digital Strategy, among others, emphasizing catalyzing learning and knowledge ecosystems. Research in the development sector emphasizes the need for approaches embedded in a local context and negotiated and delivered by local stakeholders. This type of development emphasizes learning partnerships between donors and local actors based on trust and transparency and where actors' power differences are acknowledged and addressed.[41]

Finally, implementation of the KMOL Policy will enable USAID to project its thought leadership by elevating knowledge as a resource. Framed this way, KMOL efforts can accelerate development processes. Promising USAID practices include: funding research to generate evidence to influence local actors' behaviors; engaging local knowledge to identify information needs of local actors; promoting USAID-managed knowledge platforms as public goods.

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40 Gretchen King, Larry Garber, and Karen Hirschfeld, *The Four Approaches Final Report*, Washington, DC: The Mitchell Group, Inc., January 28, 2022, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z8KS.pdf.

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