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ASHA Partner Strategy Meeting Summary and Lessons Learned

Introduction

On Dec. 16th and 17th, 2013, the Office of American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA), part of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), convened its implementing partners to discuss the creation of a new strategy for the ASHA program. The two meetings allowed ASHA to introduce its strategy initiative, learn its partners' goals and expectations, and begin assessing how ASHA can measure its impact. This document reviews the process behind these meetings, the content discussed, and the major lessons learned by ASHA in the process.

Meeting Process and Content

ASHA invited all 56 of its implementing partners to participate. In all, over 30 organizations were represented at one of the two meetings, which had identical agendas and objectives. The agenda for the meetings, the presentation used by ASHA staff, and detailed minutes are included in the provided .ZIP folder.

Lessons Learned

In discussions facilitated by ASHA staff, participants each day produced a list of "consensus" goals and expectations for ASHA's strategy, suggestions for operational improvements in ASHA's business processes, and an illustrative list of "ideas and practices of the United States." These outputs are included in the provided .ZIP folder.

Throughout these discussions, a number of key themes emerged as priorities for ASHA's partners. They include:

- Greater policy and operational stability at ASHA.
- Greater alignment of ASHA's public diplomacy mandate with its character as part of a global development agency.
- Better, more consistent, and standardized communication.
- Models and templates to support partnerships with ASHA, such as model applications, an "ASHA Guidebook," and other tools.
- Simplified and more transparent requirements, policies, and procedures, particularly with regards to grant-making and grant management.
- More coordination with USAID Missions, including facilitating connections for ASHA partners locally, provided that ASHA maintains its unique mandate within USAID.
- Opportunities and platforms to share knowledge and best practices with other ASHA partners.

Next Steps

ASHA is producing a complete draft of its strategy, which will incorporate these lessons learned and input from other stakeholders. This document will be shared widely prior to the completion of a final strategy in early 2014. Partners and other stakeholders are welcome to continue providing their thoughts to ASHA. Please contact Brian Cognato at bcognato@usaid.gov for more information.