SELF-RELIANCE LEARNING AGENDA

Evidence to Support the Journey to Self-Reliance

PHOTO CREDIT: TANYA MARTINEAU, PROSPECT ARTS, FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY

"… the ultimate goal of development assistance must be to work toward the day when it is no longer necessary, and we should measure our work by how far every one of our investments moves us closer to that day. USAID is realigning its policies, strategies, programs, and investments to support our partner countries on what we call their "Journey to Self-Reliance."

— USAID Administrator Mark Green, August 2017

CONTACT US:

For more information about the Self-Reliance Learning Agenda please email us: SRLA@usaid.gov

Tweet us at @USAIDLearning

SELF-RELIANCE is a country's capacity to plan, finance, and implement solutions to local development challenges, as well as the commitment to see these through effectively, inclusively, and with accountability. Policy makers and development partners alike need to understand how best to design and implement policies and programs and foster relationships that support countries on their journeys to self-reliance.

The Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) and the Global Development Lab (Lab) are leading USAID's Self-Reliance Learning Agenda (SRLA). Both a process and a set of products, the SRLA generates, collects, synthesizes, and disseminates evidence and learning, and facilitates their use to inform USAID's efforts to support countries on their journeys to self-reliance. The SRLA also aims to contribute to broader discussions in international development around aid effectiveness and local ownership. The SRLA consists of several complementary work streams that, together, build a base of evidence and practice to support USAID's self-reliance approach. The work streams:

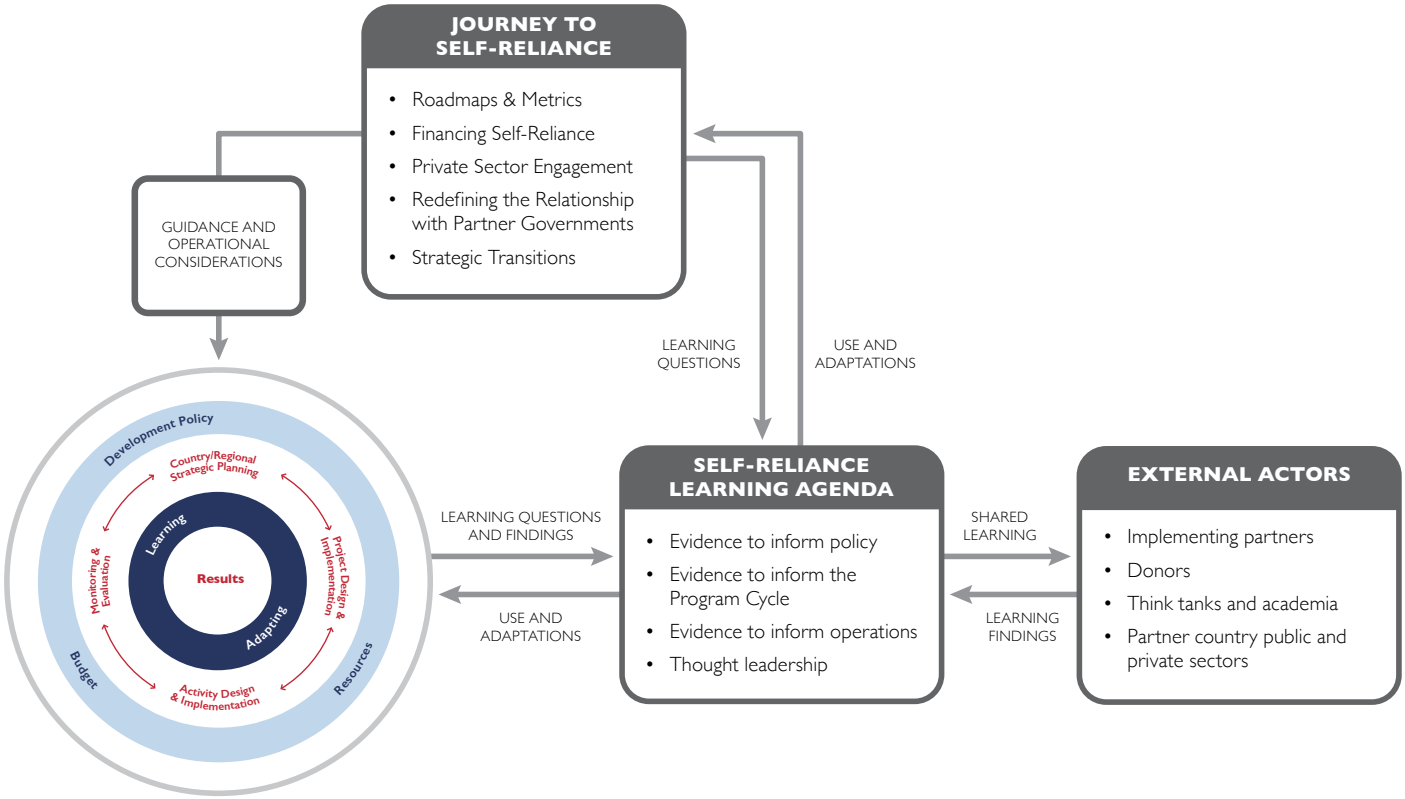
Identify the Agency's key questions related to self-reliance (conceptual, technical, and operational) and support answering those questions and using the resulting evidence
Provide a coordination forum for learning agendas throughout the Agency related to self-reliance
Facilitate rapid learning to meet near-term needs to adapt technical programs or operational processes to support self-reliance
Surface relevant practices and tools for broader uptake in Agency programs

Produced through broad consultation with USAID/Washington and Missions, the key SRLA questions represent a variety of learning needs related to self-reliance. They range from questions about how countries move along the path toward self-reliance to how USAID's programs can support that movement, both from a technical standpoint and in terms of operational considerations such as staffing, resources, and processes. The questions were developed to be useful, focused, inclusive, and balanced across a range of interests, perspectives, and applications.

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

We expect that answering these questions will benefit USAID and the wider development community, because they are central to current discussions about aid effectiveness. As such, we see perspectives and evidence from outside USAID as essential to contributing to the SRLA. It is our intention that publishing these questions and engaging partner countries and the development community will help surface evidence and learning from a wide range of development actors. The availability of evidence from other sources will guide PPL and the Lab in prioritizing 3–4 questions or sub-questions (to be determined) to address with our own resources.

THE ROLE OF THE SRLA IN FURTHERING THE JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE:



A note on process:

An Agency-wide webinar and consultations with 14 USAID/Washington operating units, 27 USAID Missions, and Agency leadership contributed to the final selection of learning questions. An initial list of 260 questions was winnowed and refined into these final 13 questions. Additional Mission input and external perspectives will be critical going forward. To that end, the SRLA team will facilitate ongoing engagements with these groups (and others) to identify opportunities for them to contribute evidence and learning to address these questions, and to build awareness and demand for utilizing the evidence in development programs.

In order to increase the utilization of evidence generated and synthesized through the SRLA, the SRLA team is working to understand the needs of stakeholders and provide them with evidence that can aid them in their work. We will play a role in supporting evidence users in understanding the implications of learning findings and determining how best to apply this evidence to USAID programs and operations.

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

HOW TO ENGAGE:

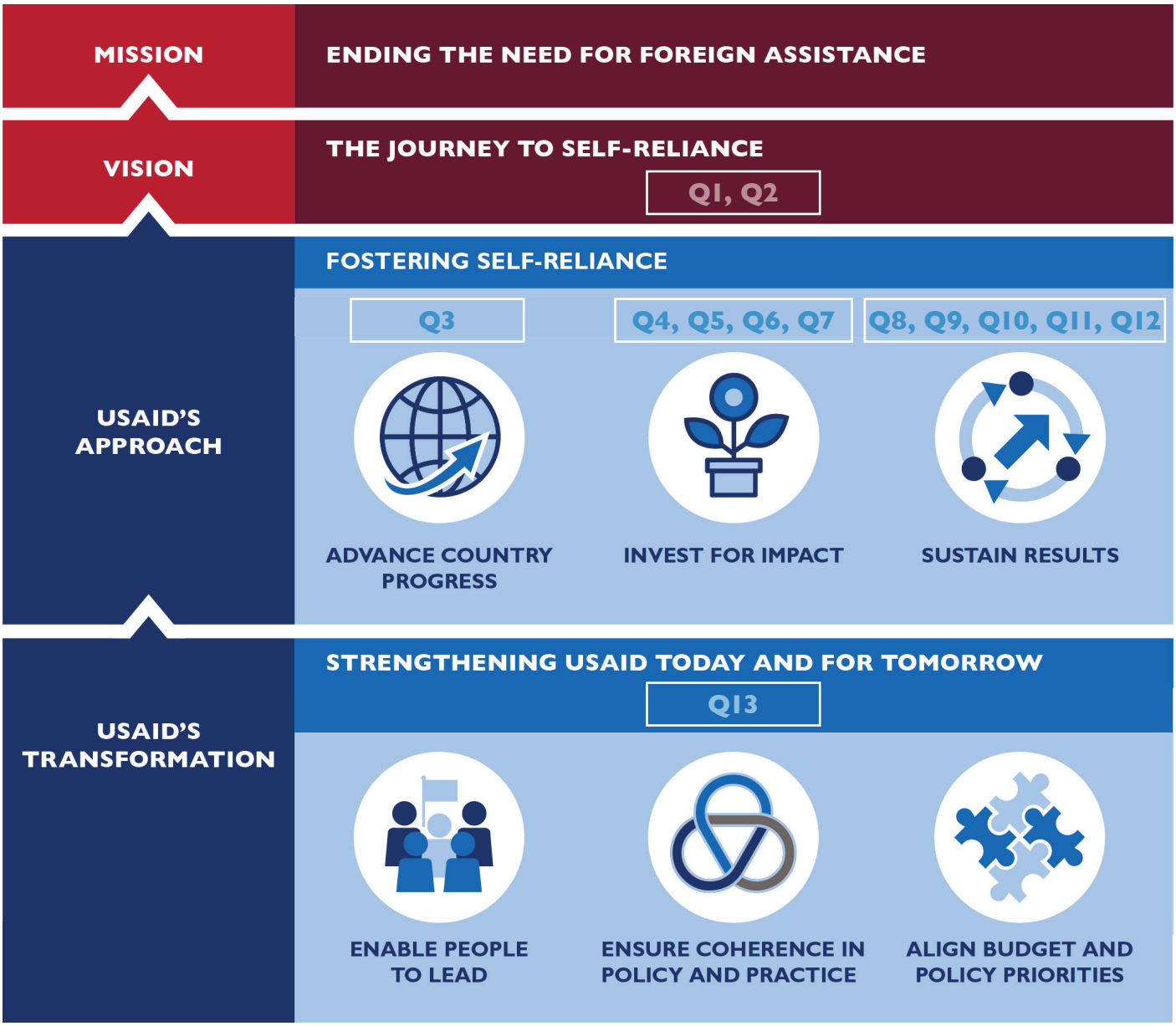
Contact the SRLA team at SRLA@usaid.gov. Learn more about the Journey to Self-Reliance at https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance.

SELF-RELIANCE LEARNING AGENDA QUESTIONS

	QUESTIONS	Link to the Policy Framework	Role of PPL and the Lab
1	What are the change pathways around how capacity and commitment come together to build self-reliance, and what are the implications for USAID programs? How can we foster the capacity and commitment of all actors at different levels of the system (local, sub-national, national, and regional)?	The Journey to Self-Reliance	Leader
2	What is the spectrum of trajectories countries follow toward self-reliance? What determines these trajectories? What are the implications for how we best support countries at different points along the spectrum?	The Journey to Self-Reliance	Leader
3	How are countries, Missions, donors, implementing partners, and local actors using metrics and data to understand progress toward selfreliance? How are they applying this understanding?	Advancing Country Progress	Leader
4	How can private sector engagement support countries in advancing on the Journey to Self-Reliance?	Investing for Impact	Convener
5	How can we apply evolving approaches to Financing Self-Reliance in different contexts?	Investing for Impact	Convener
6	In what ways can humanitarian assistance approaches and funds contribute to country progress toward self-reliance, while also meeting urgent needs?	Investing for Impact	Convener
7	How can USAID and its partners foster self-reliance in fragile contexts?	Investing for Impact	Convener
8	How can different approaches to design, procurement, and management of programs foster self-reliance? What promising partner engagement practices emerge from these approaches?	Sustaining Results	Convener
9	In fostering self-reliance, how can we use influence, knowledge, and convening power to complement projectized support?	Sustaining Results	Leader
10	How can local, sub-national, national, and regional voices, priorities, and contributions be integrated into how USAID fosters self-reliance?	Sustaining Results	Convener
11	How can we engage local and other relevant systems such that they become more self-reliant and sustain results?	Sustaining Results	Leader
12	How can we best measure USAID's contribution to countries' progress on their journeys to self-reliance at the local, sub-national, national, and regional levels?	Sustaining Results	Leader
13	How can USAID's organizational structures and staffing, policies, guidance, technical assistance, and capacity-building enable us to foster self-reliance? In what ways can USAID/Washington provide effective field services to operationalize the Journey to Self-Reliance?	Strengthening USAID Today and for Tomorrow	Leader

LEADER: PPL and the Lab aim to generate evidence ourselves in addition to engagement with the Agency, with partners, and with the broader development community to generate evidence toward the learning questions. CONVENER: PPL and the Lab will convene those that are generating evidence through evaluation, research, and learning activities and will contribute to synthesizing and sharing the evidence.

THE SELF-RELIANCE LEARNING AGENDA LINKAGES TO USAID'S POLICY FRAMEWORK



For more information on USAID's Policy Framework, please visit: www.usaid.gov/policyframework

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SELF-RELIANCE LEARNING AGENDA

1. **QUESTION: What is the overall scope of the effort? What parts of the Agency are implicated?**

   ANSWER: The Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) and the Global Development Lab (Lab) are leading the SRLA. As an Agency-wide learning effort, the SRLA serves both field-based and Washington-based staff, and will draw from the experience of Missions, operating units, partners, country actors, academics, and others to address the questions. The answers to these learning questions will aim to assist all USAID staff, programs, and partners in operationalizing the Journey to Self-Reliance. The current list of learning questions is divided into two categories: 1) questions that PPL and the Lab will lead the effort to answer; and 2) questions that will be answered by convening various actors and coordinating evidence and learning from efforts across the Agency and among partners and colleagues. We anticipate that the questions and implementation plan will be updated on a regular basis.

2. **QUESTION: Who is going to be involved with the SRLA, and how can we contribute?**

   ANSWER: SRLA is guided by a core group, made up of PPL and Lab staff, and a steering committee, in consultation with others throughout the Agency. Over the coming months, the SRLA team will continue to solicit feedback across the Agency and engage with external stakeholders to identify learning and evidence gathering activities that will contribute to the development of a full learning agenda. We expect that a variety of internal and external stakeholders, such as local and international partners, practitioners, and academics, will continue to be involved in refining and answering the questions moving forward. If you or your Mission or organization has useful evidence and examples about fostering self-reliance, or you would like to contribute to the learning process and products, please contact the SRLA team at SRLA@usaid.gov.

3. **QUESTION: What methods and activities will be used to address these questions?**

   ANSWER: A number of evaluation, research, and learning activities related to self-reliance are already ongoing or planned. For example, the Private Sector Engagement Evidence and Learning Plan has outlined learning questions and activities to answer them. Both the questions and the activities link to the SRLA learning questions on private sector engagement and self-reliance. For these questions, PPL and the Lab will play a role in convening Private Sector Engagement stakeholders and others to synthesize the evidence and amplify the efforts of all involved.

   For questions where PPL and the Lab will be taking a lead role in answering the learning questions, the SRLA will use a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches, including but not limited to: literature reviews, synthesis of existing evidence and learning from USAID and others, primary research, consultations, feedback mechanisms, learning events, monitoring, and evaluation. In order to ensure the findings' robustness, the SRLA will adhere to current Agency policy and guidelines regarding monitoring, evaluation, and learning. PPL's Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (LER) expects to commission an evaluation on one of the questions or forthcoming sub-questions. The Lab has also funded research through the Higher Education Solutions Network to learn more about the linkages among programming, capacity, commitment, and country self-reliance.

   Additional investments and resources in research, evaluation, and learning relevant to the self-reliance approach from other USAID learning agendas and activities will also contribute to the SRLA.

4. **QUESTION: How will the learning be used to inform USAID programs and guidance?**

   ANSWER: The SRLA's strong emphasis on utilization will help ensure that evidence and learning will inform USAID's policies and programs at all levels (country strategies, projects, and activities, as well as policy dialogue and thought leadership) and at all stages (planning, implementing, and assessing our work). The questions have been developed with and for those who will use the learning to ensure greater utilization of findings in USAID's policy guidance, programming, and operations. While we expect that USAID staff will be the primary users, we also expect that the Agency's local and international partners and other development actors will find the evidence and learning generated through the SRLA useful in supporting countries and communities on their journeys to self-reliance. For example, insight gained through the SRLA will inform future use of the country roadmaps and metrics and how they are applied to USAID's Program Cycle. Lastly, the Policy Framework articulates USAID's overarching approach as the lead implementer of U.S. humanitarian and development assistance. USAID has already begun translating its principles into practice and the SRLA will evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts.

5. **QUESTION: How and when will the learning be shared within USAID and with partners?**

   ANSWER: After we publish the learning questions, the SRLA team will engage others inside and outside of the Agency to develop the full learning agenda with specific research and learning activities for answering these questions by pooling evidence available from others and by investing in evidence generated around the questions that PPL and the Lab will prioritize in this first year. By the summer of 2019, we expect to be able to release some early learning to address some of these questions. We will continue to share learning as it is generated for questions that take longer to answer, and as USAID transforms its programming and operations. We will employ a variety of methods, such as webinars, conferences, brown bag discussions, newsletters, listservs, and blogs. USAID staff can find up-to-date information on ProgramNet (https://programnet.usaid.gov/library/self-reliance-learning-agenda) and external audiences can find this information on USAID Learning Lab (https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/usaids-self-reliance-learning-agenda).

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6. **QUESTION: Where can I find definitions for the different terms in the learning questions?**

   ANSWER: Terminology for key concepts such as capacity, commitment, partner engagement, etc., that are used in the learning questions are defined by USAID policy and strategy documents related to the Journey to Self-Reliance. These include USAID's Policy Framework (https://www.usaid.gov/policyframework), the Acquisition and Assistance Strategy (https://www.usaid.gov/work-usaid/how-to-work-with-usaid/acquisition-and-assistance-strategy), and the Private Sector Engagement Policy (https://www.usaid.gov/work-usaid/private-sector-engagement). Additional definitions can also be found on the Journey to Self-Reliance portal (selfreliance.usaid.gov).

IF YOU HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS OR FEEDBACK, PLEASE WRITE TO US AT SRLA@usaid.gov.