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**EVALUATION AT USAID**

**NOVEMBER 2013  
UPDATE**

# EVALUATION AT USAID

NOVEMBER 2013 UPDATE

PD-ACX-099

Prepared by the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research in the USAID Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning.

## **About this report:**

This report is an update summarizing progress and challenges in rebuilding the evaluation practice at USAID since the USAID Evaluation Policy was issued in January 2011 and the previous report that was published in February 2012. Evaluation is part of a suite of [USAID Forward](#) reforms that have been integrated in the Program Cycle: policy formulation, strategic planning, project design and implementation, evaluation, performance monitoring, learning and adapting, and budget and resource allocation.

**Cover Photo:** A USAID-funded Feed the Future project links production in Tanzania to European markets.  
Photo Credit: USAID\_Images on Flickr.com.

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## ACRONYMS

ADS	Automated Directives System
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CY	Calendar Year
DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
DLI	Development Leadership Initiative
FY	Fiscal Year
LER	Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research, Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning
POC	Point of Contact
PPL	Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning, USAID
PPR	Performance Plan and Report
RFP	Request for Proposal
SOW	Statement of Work
SBU	Sensitive But Unclassified
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the nearly three years since USAID announced its Evaluation Policy, change in USAID evaluation practice is visible and accelerating. The Agency produced 186 evaluations as part of an ambitious USAID Forward reform agenda that spotlighted the importance of evaluation. Mission staff reported dozens of examples of how this set of evaluations were used: missions modified programs and projects to build on what works best and most efficiently, they reallocated resources to be most effective, and they made decisions on how to strengthen follow-on activities. Regional bureaus played an active role supporting these changes in the field.

As we learned from an external evaluation of the quality of USAID's evaluation reports (USAID Forward evaluations as well as others), there have been clear improvements in quality between 2009 and 2012, i.e., before and after the USAID Evaluation Policy was issued in 2011.

USAID's technical and regional bureaus are energized and are rigorously evaluating the effectiveness and impact of programs in their sectors and regions in ways that will continue to increase program quality. Technical bureaus have also reviewed the evaluations submitted to meet the USAID Forward targets and other analytical and research work to summarize best practices and lessons learned to be used by the field.

In 2013, a second external team examined the reforms in evaluation practice spelled out in the Evaluation Policy. In that study, staff reported that the Evaluation Policy has contributed to improvement of evaluation rigor, quality, and usefulness. It confirmed that missions have strengthened evaluation practices by forming working groups and collaborating within the mission as well as with their diverse array of partners. The report also identified areas that need improvement.

The Agency continues to build on what has been learned to improve evaluation practice so that managers have high quality evidence to strengthen projects and programs. Priorities include:

- Supporting the needs of USAID missions in evaluation planning and design including through training in program performance monitoring;
- Increasing focus on the use of evaluation findings including standard processes for tracking and acting on recommendations;
- Linking evaluation and learning to improved project performance and development outcomes;
- Improving systems that support evaluation, including those related to procurement and information systems management;
- Providing evaluation resources through online sites [ProgramNet](#) and [Learning Lab](#); and
- Continuing to improve transparency of and access to evaluation reports and findings.

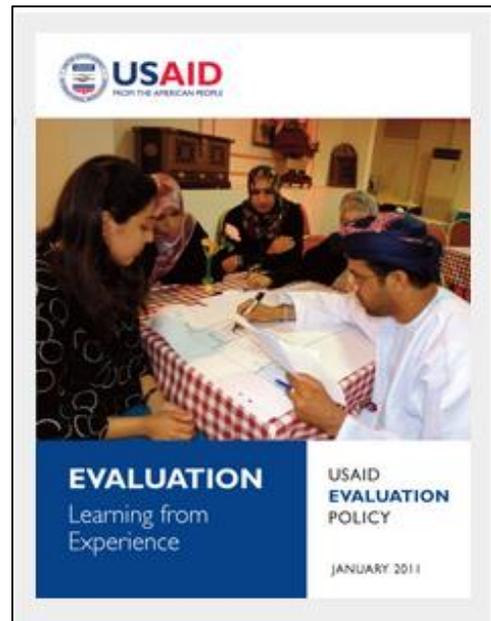


Figure 1: Cover of USAID's Evaluation Policy

Three years since the Evaluation Policy was issued, USAID has focused on building Agency capacity to meet the Policy’s requirements and on encouraging the use of evaluation findings to inform decision-making. The Policy set ambitious standards for high quality, relevant and transparent evaluations to demonstrate results, generate evidence to inform decisions, promote learning and ensure accountability. These efforts are part of the USAID Forward reforms which include development of the USAID Program Cycle: policy formulation, strategic planning, project design and implementation, evaluation, performance monitoring, learning and adapting, and budget allocation.

This report discusses the changes in evaluation practice and what progress has been made.

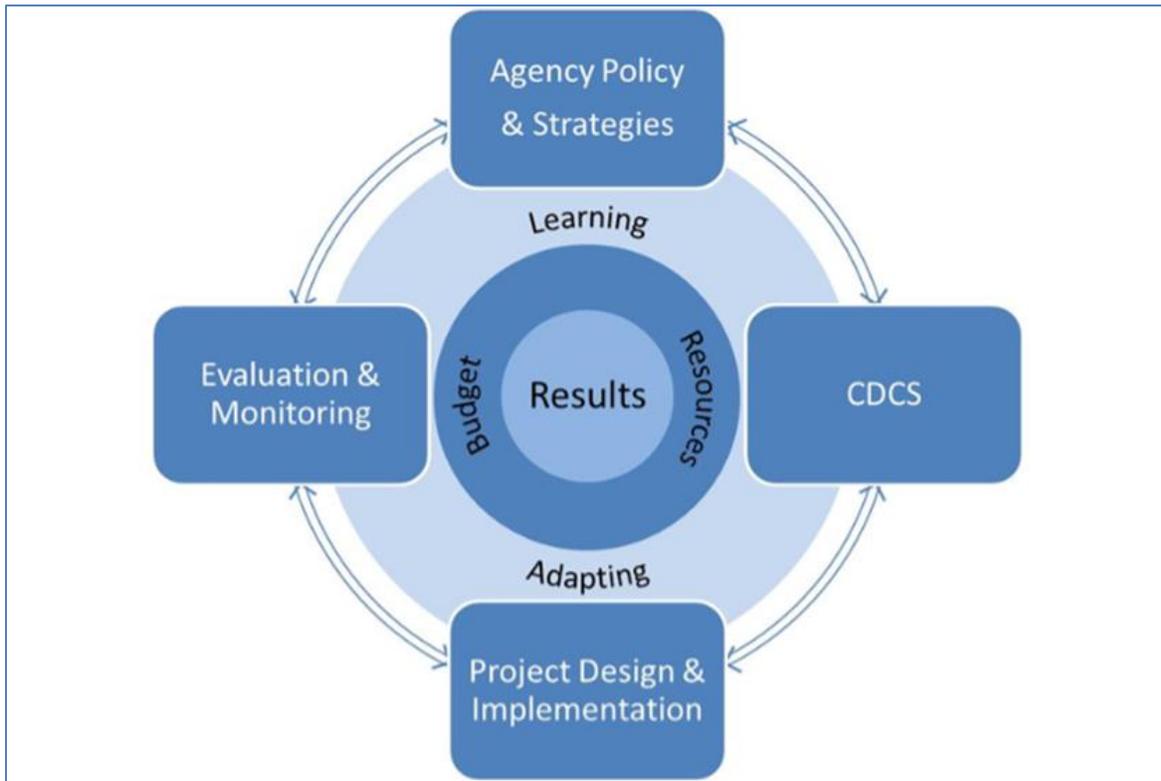


Figure 2: USAID Program Cycle Graphic

## EVALUATION PROGRESS AT USAID SINCE THE POLICY

In the nearly three years since USAID announced its new Evaluation Policy change in evaluation practice is already evident. As part of the USAID Forward reform agenda the Agency invested to produce 186 evaluations in 18 months and mission staff submitted dozens of examples of how they used these evaluations.<sup>1</sup> Use fell into several categories: they refocused to build on what was working best, they reallocated resources to be most effective, and they made multiple decisions on how to strengthen follow-on activities. As we learned from an external evaluation of the quality of all USAID evaluation reports, there have been clear quality improvements between 2009 and 2012.<sup>2</sup> USAID technical and regional bureaus are energized and rigorously evaluating the effectiveness and impact of programs in their sectors and regions to provide best practices and lessons learned to be used by the field. Many of these evaluations are several years in duration and their strong methods are not represented in current quality assessments. Their completion will continue to contribute to stronger USAID programs.

Another external evaluation was conducted in 2013 of reforms supported by PPL which included evaluation reforms.<sup>3</sup> That study concluded:

- Mission staff think the Evaluation Policy has contributed to improvement of evaluation rigor, quality, and usefulness as well as the number conducted;
- Missions have strengthened their evaluation practices by forming working groups to collaborate internally as well as cooperating with external partners; and
- There are many areas where strengthening in USAID's evaluation practice is still needed, particularly in terms of stronger quality and increased use in design and decision making.

### Evaluation Use in Decision-Making, Learning and Accountability

The two purposes of evaluation are to provide information for decision making and contextual learning and to demonstrate accountability for resources. Making evidence-based decisions to adjust programs during implementation or to strengthen designs of new programs maximizes the results achieved with foreign assistance resources. This is one way in which USAID demonstrates that it is accountable for resources and results. Three quarters of missions reported that they are using evaluation results to inform project design and improve implementation.<sup>4</sup> In the current constrained funding environment missions are using evaluations to make strategic choices regarding selectivity and focus of their investments.

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<sup>1</sup> As part of the USAID Forward set of reforms, a target was set of 250 high quality evaluations to be completed in 18 months, by January 31, 2013. Reporting on this set of evaluations took place in December of 2012 in concert with reporting on the other USAID Forward targets. See USAID Forward Progress Report 2013 <http://www.usaid.gov/usaidforward>.

<sup>2</sup> Hageboeck, Molly, Micah Frumkin, Stephanie Monschein, "Meta Evaluation of Quality and Coverage of USAID Evaluations 2009-2012," August 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Franco, Lynne et al., "Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning: Evaluation of Program Cycle Implementation," September 2013.

<sup>4</sup> USAID Forward Reporting, December 2012.

Many instances were cited of evaluation findings leading to evidence-based decisions:

- In Indonesia evaluation findings significantly informed the re-design of a follow-on education project. After the evaluation the program was revised to: better coordinate with government at national, provincial, and district levels; improve sequencing and coordination of program inputs; and limit the program objectives and the complexity of components;
- At USAID/Liberia one evaluation provided important insight into its ecosystem preservation project. The evaluation pointed to the need to incorporate conflict mitigation strategies into implementation and Peace Committees have been established in all of the communities involved in the follow-on project;
- In Ethiopia, based on evaluation recommendations, USAID allocated additional funding to increase the level of training and implementation of a food security early warning system component of a livelihoods project. Also, a technical coordination unit was created, housing all technical advisors in one office;
- Based on evaluation findings, USAID/Armenia refined its approach in cross-border activities to concentrate on fostering commercial and economic ties while scaling down engagement with civil society and cultural programs; and
- In Colombia an evaluation recommended that the areas of work of a democracy and governance project had to be more precise and the goals more focused within USAID's manageable interest. As a direct result of the evaluation's findings, some components of the program were dropped and others modified to achieve that focus.

Staff also noted that evaluations are instrumental for learning opportunities which allow missions to critically look at recently completed activities. Broader learning is advancing and improving USAID programming as well. Two key initiatives are Evidence Summits and sector summaries of USAID Forward evaluations.

## Evidence Summits

USAID hosted five Evidence Summits in 2012. These summits share knowledge, learning, and experience among development practitioners and researchers.

Evidence Summits in 2012	Sector	Dates Held
<a href="#">From Microfinance to Inclusive Market Development</a>	Economic Growth	December 12 – 13
<a href="#">Country Systems Strengthening Experience Summit</a>	Governance	November 27 – 28
<a href="#">Enhancing Child Survival and Development in Lower- and Middle-Income Countries by Achieving Population-Level Behavior Change</a>	Global Health	June 14 – 15
<a href="#">Community and Formal Health System Support for Enhanced Community Health Worker Performance</a>	Global Health	May 31 – June 1
<a href="#">Enhancing Provision and Use of Maternal Health Services through Financial Incentives</a>	Global Health	April 24 – 25

Figure 3: List of Evidence Summits in 2012

Evidence Summits serve several purposes. They gather the best evidence available and update practitioners on the state-of-the-art in their field and more broadly they demonstrate a commitment to learning and basing decisions on evidence. Examples of results from the evidence summits include draft guidance for country systems strengthening and “Evidence Packets” synthesizing findings from the summit on Microfinance to Inclusive Market Development.

## **Sector Summaries of USAID Forward Evaluations**

USAID technical bureaus reviewed USAID Forward evaluations relevant to their sectors to summarize learning that may be generalizable and applicable to future programs.

In Global Health there were a total of 33 evaluations of USAID mission-funded programs: 11 each on health systems/integrated programs and on HIV/AIDS programs, four on maternal and child health, four on family planning, and three on infectious diseases (two on TB and one on Malaria). Several evaluation recommendations that could have wider application than just for the program being evaluated include:

- Adopting more structured approaches for strengthening health systems; continuing to focus on institutionalizing changes, including metrics for community and health systems in performance management plans;
- Using technologies such as mobile phones and internet in behavior change interventions where appropriate;
- Establishing a clear project logic in the design stage that relates various activities to overall strategy; establishing realistic expectations, timelines and targets for capacity building; and
- Developing models to evaluate public-private partnerships.

In the Economic Growth, Education and Environment areas the E3 Bureau reviewed 60 USAID Forward evaluations. Overall, the review showed that USAID is still in the process of improving both project design and evaluation design and these affected the quality and rigor of the evaluations reviewed. Gleanings from these evaluations included:

- Water programming would have benefited from more rigorous and systematic project design including consultation with key stakeholders;
- Coordination with the private sector is critical when implementing new trade and regulatory policies;
- Value-chain programs need to improve the use of market-based approaches;
- Land tenure and natural resource management evaluations showed "tried and true" practices of community forestry program development and implementation to be effective; and
- Reductions in Greenhouse Gases can be had through low-cost measures in existing coal-fired power plants.

The Bureau for Food Security reviewed 17 evaluations on relevant programs. That review found some promise in the following program innovations:

- Land disputes solved through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms versus through judicial processes;

- Creation of alternative income generation mechanisms for farmers, to supplement their core farming activities;
- Improving the quality of packaging and the marketing of products;
- Buyer-led approach to agricultural value chain strengthening; and
- Development of a geo-reference database that allows producers to monitor the progress of their activities, plot by plot, from planting to harvesting.

## **Independent Meta-Evaluation Shows Improved Quality of Evaluation Reports**

USAID commissioned an independent evaluation of the quality of USAID’s evaluation reports in 2013.<sup>5</sup> The purposes of this analysis were to determine to what extent evaluation quality had changed since the Evaluation Policy and to identify which aspects of evaluation quality standards were done well and which could use improvement. The timeframe covered by this evaluation straddles USAID Forward and the introduction of the Evaluation Policy in January 2011.

The study examined a sample of 340 evaluations representing every geographic region and technical area in which USAID works and gathered qualitative data from USAID staff and evaluation providers. The region with the largest number of evaluations was Africa (38 percent) and evaluations of health program and project evaluations (29 percent) were the lead sector.

Over the four years covered by this study there were clear improvements in the quality of USAID evaluation reports. Quality improvements included: findings were better supported by data from a range of methods; study limitations were clearly identified; clear distinctions were made between findings, conclusions and recommendations; and recommendations were more specific about what changes USAID should make. While the overall picture is positive, ratings on some factors declined over the study period, including factors that focused on data precision in evaluation findings. The study found no difference in quality ratings between USAID Forward evaluations and others. Although evaluation quality has clearly improved since the Evaluation Policy was issued and USAID invested in rebuilding evaluation capacity, the average score was just below six on a 10 point scale. USAID aspires to higher quality evaluation work and is working to achieve that.

The study identified patterns of higher scores on key evaluation quality factors when the team included an evaluation specialist. Therefore, it recommended including evaluation specialists as the single easiest recommendation for improving evaluation quality in the future.

## **Evaluation Targets Increase the Supply of Evaluations**

USAID’s evaluation practice had waned as the evaluation function was shifted out of the Agency in 2005. Improvements in evaluation quality are one form of evidence of strengthened USAID evaluation practice; the rebound in the number of evaluations being conducted is another. It should be noted that the Evaluation Policy encourages more rigorous and independent evaluation practices not just an increased number of evaluations. But the overall number

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<sup>5</sup> Hageboeck, Molly, Micah Frumkin, Stephanie Monschein, “Meta Evaluation of Quality and Coverage of USAID Evaluations 2009-2012,” August 2013.

conducted had sunk so low that the increased number in the last several years demonstrates the Agency's increased ability to learn from evaluation findings.

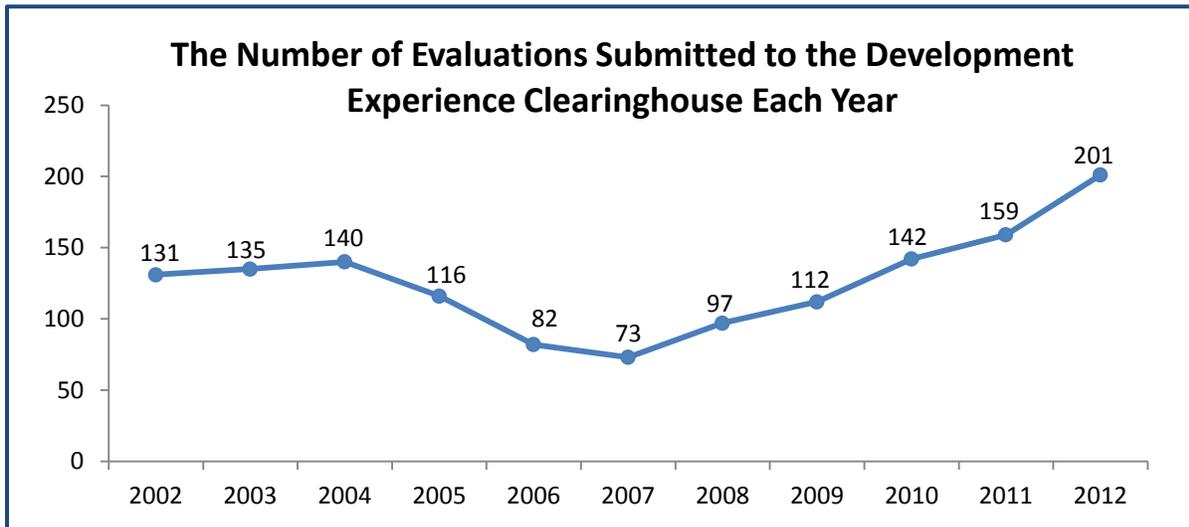


Figure 4: Number of Evaluations Submitted to the Development Experience Clearinghouse Each Year

The USAID Forward target setting initiative clearly focused Agency attention on completing evaluations in a timely way. Evidence shows that these efforts helped all USAID staff understand the standards for quality in the Evaluation Policy and the management actions required to achieve them consistently.

### USAID Forward Evaluations

As part of the USAID Forward reform agenda, USAID set a target for 250 high quality evaluations to be completed between July 2011 and January 2013. Establishing the quality and quantity of evaluation as one of the top-level indicators of Agency-wide progress catalyzed a cultural change, elevating the importance of good evaluation practice. Each mission set its own target for how many evaluations it would complete. (Not all evaluations discussed in this update are USAID Forward evaluations; the report covers a longer time period and other evaluations were completed during that time. Particularly the technical bureaus completed a number of evaluations not represented in what was largely a mission-oriented exercise.)

As a result of this target, missions increased the demand for monitoring and evaluation support and guidance from technical and regional bureaus and from PPL. Regional bureau evaluation points of contact (POCs) collaborated closely with PPL/LER to coordinate support to missions to review statements of work and perform quality reviews of the USAID Forward evaluations. The review process itself also built the capacity of Washington-based evaluation specialists through application of the standards in the Evaluation Policy to assess the evaluations. The Agency designed these evaluation reviews to provide useful feedback to missions.

The actual number of evaluations submitted under USAID Forward was 186, or 74 percent of the 250 target. Reasons for this shortfall vary and include: changes in country context that made doing evaluations more challenging (such as in several countries in the Middle East

region); a lack of evaluation capacity of USAID staff; unavailability of external evaluators; and overestimation at the time of setting the targets by some USAID missions of what could be accomplished given the timeframe and resources available. Of the 186, 166 were commissioned by 67 missions and 20 by bureaus. Almost 30 percent of the evaluations focused on health topics; 20 percent on economic growth; another 20 percent on democracy, human rights and governance, 10 percent on food security; with the remaining 20 percent split between education, energy, natural resource management and cross-cutting themes.

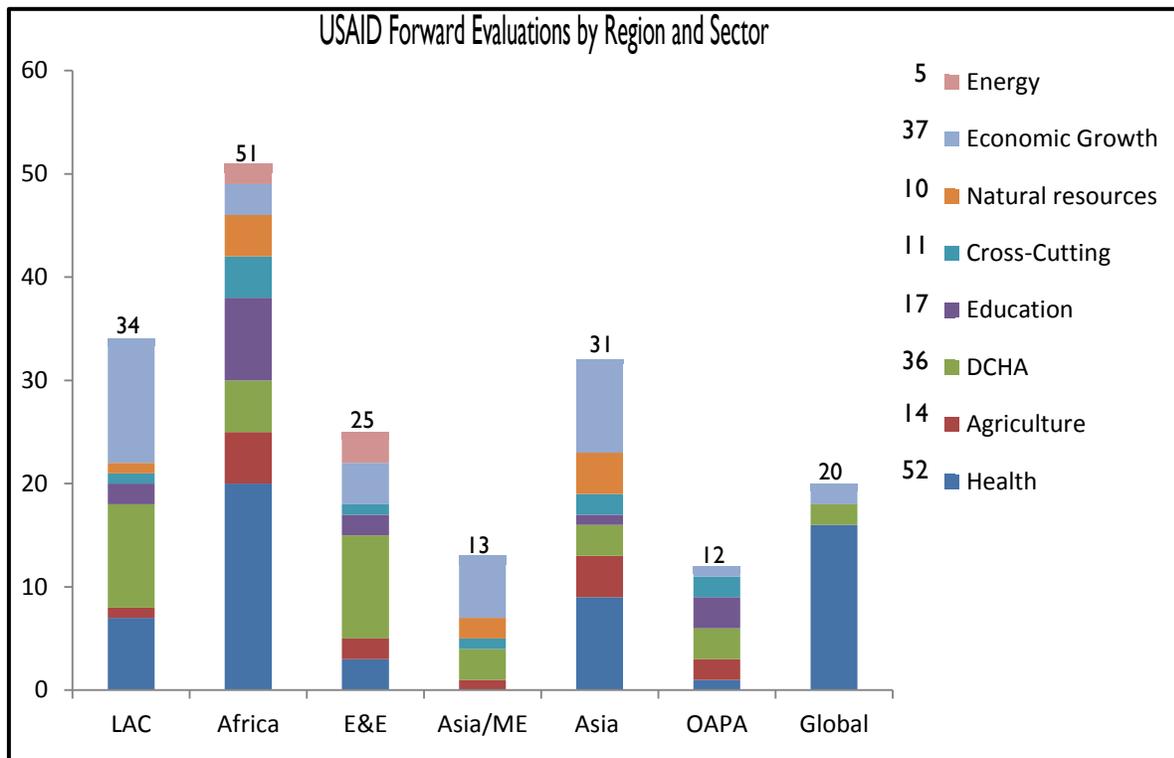


Figure 5: USAID Forward Evaluations by Region and Sector

The modest quality score from the meta-evaluation of quality and not having reached the USAID Forward target combine to show that the Agency still has work to do to achieve the high expectations of the Evaluation Policy. But the improvements in quality reported in the meta-evaluation, USAID staff perceptions of the importance of evaluation from the external evaluation of Program Cycle reforms, and the rebound in the increasing number of evaluations combine to provide clear evidence that USAID’s evaluation practice is improving. The issuance of the Evaluation Policy was the foundational change and USAID has made significant investments in strengthening USAID’s capacity to design, manage and use evaluations to improve program outcomes and to promote learning in the field of development assistance.

## CAPACITY BUILDING IN EVALUATION

The Agency has followed up on the Evaluation Policy with multiple activities to rebuild USAID’s evaluation practice. USAID has invested in training for staff and has provided tools, resources

and approaches to strengthen the evaluation culture of the organization. Some of these investments have short term effects and others are expected to have longer terms impacts.

### Classroom Training and Workshops

PPL continues to offer the one and two-week formal evaluation courses for USAID staff. These courses are delivered in Washington, D.C. and in the field at USAID missions. Evaluation course curriculum focuses on skills and knowledge necessary to implement the USAID Evaluation Policy, including formulating good evaluation questions, developing evaluation statements of work, understanding evaluation methodology, managing evaluations, and using evaluation findings. In 2012, approximately 500 USAID staff participated in formal evaluation training offered at 10 USAID missions and 10 courses in Washington, D.C. As of the date of this report, over 1200 staff and partners have been trained.

In 2012, PPL also organized and hosted four one-day workshops to continue building staff capacity by focusing on a particular aspect of evaluation such as design or methodology. Approximately 120 USAID staff participated in these workshops led by world-renowned evaluation experts Patricia Rogers and Jim Rugh. Informal brown bags and discussions provided even more opportunities for staff to learn more about evaluation.

### Evaluation Field Experience for New USAID Officers

Evaluations Selected for Field Experience Pilot	
Moldova	Mid-Term Performance Evaluation of Competitiveness Enhancement and Enterprise Development II (CEED II)
Sri Lanka	Mid-Term Performance Evaluation of the Eastern Garment Alliance (EGA) Project
Kenya	Final Performance Evaluation of the Decentralized Education Management Activity (DEMA)
Uganda	Performance Evaluation of an HIV/AIDS project

Figure 6: List of Evaluations Selected for Field Experience Pilot

With support from USAID’s Development Leadership Initiative (DLI) program, PPL sponsored a pilot to provide field experience in evaluation for new Foreign Service Officers to complement and reinforce core evaluation competencies. The purpose was to build evaluation skills through hands-on learning and to meet the need for additional internal evaluations of programs that do not require an external evaluation. Four evaluations were conducted by fielding evaluation teams with a team leader from LER and up to three new Foreign Service Officers who had completed an evaluation training course. In total, 12 new officers participated in all aspects of evaluation, including developing the statement of work, planning, background research, data collection and analysis, completing an evaluation report, and presenting findings to client missions.

### Technical Assistance to Missions

In 2012, almost every USAID mission received evaluation support and guidance through in-person or virtual technical assistance provided by USAID regional and technical bureaus, the Program Cycle Services Center and/or PPL staff. USAID headquarters staff traveled to more than 45 USAID missions to provide direct technical support at various stages of the evaluation

process, including advising on draft evaluation statements of work (SOW). For example, Guatemala staff received a customized training in evaluation and in-person review of evaluation SOWs. In addition, headquarters evaluation staff provided virtual assistance by reviewing more than 120 evaluation SOWs, close to 40 draft evaluation reports, and several draft evaluation “mission orders” (a form of standard operating procedures). Regional bureau staff also hosted regular phone calls with missions to provide advice and troubleshoot evaluation issues.

## Guidance

The Evaluation Policy has been further institutionalized by incorporating it into the Agency’s formal guidance system, called the Automated Directives System (ADS 203). In addition to codifying the Evaluation Policy itself, performance monitoring guidance was updated in the ADS to reflect the new Program Cycle requirements for monitoring strategic plans and project designs. This integrates routine data collection with improved evaluation practices and portfolio reviews, as well as serving the purpose of external reporting.

## Tools

PPL has developed guidance on implementing evaluation requirements and quality standards required by the Evaluation Policy. As of the date of this report, PPL published eight supplementary guidance documents based on best practices for monitoring and evaluation and intended to support work across the Agency. All of these resources are available online for both USAID staff and partners at [ProgramNet](#) (USAID staff only) and [Learning Lab](#) (open to the public). These sites provide one-stop shops for evaluation and performance monitoring tools for both audiences.

M&E Guidance Tools
How-To Note: Prepare Evaluation Reports
How-To Note: Prepare an Evaluation Mission Order
How-To Note: Prepare an Evaluation SOW
How-To Note: Performance Management Plan
Technical Note: Impact Evaluation
Technical Note: Conducting Mixed-Method Evaluations
Template: Data Quality Assessment
Template: Performance Indicator Reference Sheet
Checklist: High Quality Evaluation Criteria

Figure 7: List of Supplementary Guidance Published by the PPL Bureau

Another set of tools to help missions implement the Program Cycle reforms are the newly required Standardized Mission Orders for evaluation and performance monitoring.<sup>6</sup> These mission orders distill guidance to the specific requirements for offices and staff in USAID field missions. Missions are required to adapt and adopt these new Mission Orders by December 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Mission Orders are also required for Country Development Cooperation Strategies, project design, portfolio review, and budget.

## Online Learning Communities

USAID's PPL Bureau has created two online learning communities to facilitate information sharing among staff and partners. One is [ProgramNet](#), available only to USAID staff. It is designed to accommodate program planning and design work that is procurement sensitive and therefore not public. The other, [Learning Lab](http://usaidlearninglab.org) at <http://usaidlearninglab.org>, is available to partners and the public to facilitate collaboration and learning among all development actors. Both of these sites have sections on evaluation and areas for sharing learning around topic areas or geographic regions.

USAID staff is increasing their use of ProgramNet to get support for Program Cycle implementation including strengthening evaluation practice. Launched in July of 2012 with under 200 users, ProgramNet had 1800 users by September 2013. Just over half of users are USAID staff in field missions with the rest based in DC. ProgramNet has close to 500 items in its library (documents, tools, online training and other files) and hosts webinars and discussion forums on development topics on a regular basis.

Learning Lab is a public site that has been active for about five months. As of July 2013 there were more than 7,000 members of the site. The most popular document downloaded from the site is an overview guide to the Program Cycle.

The screenshot shows the USAID Learning Lab website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the following items: HOME, LEARNING GUIDE, LAB NOTES, EVENTS, RESOURCES (with a dropdown arrow), and GROUPS. A search bar is located on the right side of the navigation bar. Below the navigation bar, there is a prominent red button that says "CREATE AN ACCOUNT". To the right of this button, the text reads "Join Learning Lab" and "Learning Lab is a collaborative space where USAID staff and partners jointly create, share, refine and apply practical approaches in order to ground our programs in evidence and adapt quickly." Below this text is a small "Expand" button with a dropdown arrow. In the center of the page, there is a large banner for a "LAB SESSION" titled "A CLA Dialogue: Missions and partners share experiences and best practices". The banner includes icons for "COLLABORATING" (three people), "LEARNING" (a lightbulb), and "ADAPTING" (a circular arrow). To the right of the banner, there is a dark grey box with the text "Missed the event? Catch up here!" and "View the webinar or link to the discussion from the June 5 Lab Session on Collaborating, Learning and Adapting. Discussion summaries are available from the two-day online conversation as well as many of the resources participants shared." Below this text is a "LEARN MORE" button with a right-pointing arrow. The USAID logo is visible in the top right corner of the page.

## Perceptions of Evaluation Capacity Building Efforts

In 2012, PPL commissioned an evaluation of the introduction and support of the Program Cycle, including elements related to evaluation. Survey data from that evaluation indicate that the majority of USAID staff think that the Evaluation Policy has contributed to improvement of evaluation rigor, quality, usefulness, and the number of evaluations conducted.<sup>7</sup>

Missions also reported having strengthened organization around evaluation, such as forming evaluation working groups and collaborating internally and externally on evaluation. Despite Agency staff's overall positive perception of the Evaluation Policy, qualitative data highlighted several issues with the evaluation process: low evaluation quality, disconnect between evaluation activities and project design and implementation, and a perception that evaluation results are not informing funding allocations at the Agency level. Both quantitative and qualitative data show that Mission and USAID/W staff believe that products and tools developed by PPL (including guidance summaries, templates for Mission Orders, case studies, and other practical documents that make the Program Cycle relevant to staff) are important for institutionalization and "absorption."

## The Role of USAID's Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research

The Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning works closely with USAID missions, and regional and functional bureaus to strengthen evaluation practice. Key achievements over the past two years include:

- Integrating evaluation throughout the Program Cycle through six new supplementary guidance documents and related courses and workshops;
- Sharing evaluation tools, resources and best practices on USAID's two new online learning communities: [ProgramNet](#) (USAID staff only) and [Learning Lab](#);
- Managing the training of approximately 1200 USAID staff in formal evaluation courses and conceiving of and conducting four additional workshops for continued learning;
- Providing expert technical advice on more than 120 evaluation statements of work;
- Supporting evaluation points of contact in every USAID field mission through close coordination with regional bureau evaluation staff;
- Promoting evaluation field practice by leading teams to train 12 new Foreign Service officers conducting four performance evaluations;
- Coordinating the Evaluation Interest Group, a voluntary community of practice for USAID staff to share evaluation good practices;
- Facilitating five evidence summits; including managing one on Country Systems Strengthening;
- Supporting EvalPartners, a network of professional evaluation organizations within developing countries, with a grant to strengthen capacity of evaluators around the world; and
- Liaising with International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) on USAID's membership and managing systematic reviews of impact evaluation evidence.

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<sup>7</sup> Franco et al.

## Impact Evaluations at USAID

The Evaluation Policy highlighted impact evaluation as the method to use when the greatest rigor is needed. The majority of USAID evaluations do not require that level of rigor but it is a particularly useful tool in circumstances requiring the most rigor. Over the past two and a half years, the Agency has increased the rigor of its evaluation work by more use of impact evaluation methods. Although a number of missions have used impact evaluation methods, the real momentum is in the USAID technical bureaus that have been investing resources in designing and managing impact evaluations.

The Bureau for Food Security's (BFS) monitoring and evaluation tools and resources are focused on the *Feed the Future Learning Agenda*. Impact evaluations are being conducted on 30 FTF programs as part of that agenda. The Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Center's evaluation priorities focus on two Development Objectives from the new *Strategy for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG)* – citizen participation and government accountability. BFS and the DRG Center work with Missions to identify projects that would further learning agendas through evaluations. They then conduct scoping trips (typically comprised of both USAID/W staff and external academics) to identify evaluation questions and provide input into key elements during the project design stage. A similar model is being followed in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and the Environment (E3), where each office has identified evaluable questions. These offices are now identifying interventions of high policy relevance that could be good candidates for evaluation.

An alternative model is that of Development Innovation Ventures (DIV), which uses a three-tiered funding model to test new ideas. Tier 1 funding is intended to test the real-world viability of an innovative development solution with a small amount of funding. Tier 2 funding is provided to innovative solutions that have demonstrated success at a pilot or small-scale stage, and now require impact evaluation to assess if the solution can achieve larger scale development impact and whether it can be successfully implemented at this larger scale (Tier 3). This meets the requirement in the Evaluation Policy for impact evaluation in preparation for scaling up an activity.

## Transparency and Accessibility of Evaluation Reports

All USAID evaluations must be submitted to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC), an online archive of all USAID program documentation available at <http://dec.usaid.gov>. USAID Evaluations can also be found by visiting <http://www.usaid.gov/evaluation>. Here visitors can browse evaluations by country and sector and find links to evaluation resources. Incentives provided for submitting evaluations to the DEC have increased the number of older evaluations being submitted in the last two years, as shown in Table 5. Finally, USAID has created an application that allows anyone to browse and read a selection of evaluations on a mobile device.

While USAID is committed to sharing evaluation findings, a small number of evaluations is not made publicly available due to risks to partners, containing information that is proprietary, or on the basis of national security. These exceptions must be approved and tracked by PPL. In

2012, exceptions were granted at the rate about three out of every 100 evaluations. All exceptions in 2012 were on the basis of risks to partners.

## **USAID EVALUATION PRIORITIES**

Building on the accomplishments and challenges of evaluation practice since issuing its Evaluation Policy, USAID has identified several priorities for efforts that build staff capacity and systems to support USAID's evaluation practice. These include strengthening the Agency's evaluation culture and incentivizing good practice, emphasizing the use of evaluation findings, building staff and partner capacity in evaluation and disseminating knowledge by improving accessibility to evaluation reports and findings.

Improving evaluation practice will require a supportive institutional culture with staff at all levels of the Agency contributing. Evaluation has received the attention and support of the Administrator and other senior leaders as one of the priorities of the USAID Forward reform agenda. USAID's evaluation culture will continue to strengthen as the Agency uses evaluation findings increasingly to learn about what is working and to help inform program management decisions. USAID will focus on ensuring evaluations are used, building staff capacity in evaluation, and making the learning from evaluation easily accessible to USAID staff and to the public.

### **Strengthen Evaluation Culture**

PPL plans to further support an evaluation culture within the Agency through several key areas:

- Targeted communications to middle managers, bolstering existing evaluation communities of practice, spotlighting areas of good practice within the Agency, and providing further practical experience in evaluation to staff. By targeting communications and shorter versions of evaluation training to middle managers who likely do not have time to participate in formal classroom training, PPL can sensitize a key cohort to the time and resources required for quality evaluation work;
- PPL will provide more opportunities for collaboration and sharing among agency staff charged with planning, managing and using evaluations through its Evaluation Interest Group, ProgramNet and Learning Lab as well as less technology-intensive investments in relationships among staff in Washington bureaus;
- To incentivize good work as well as provide practical examples of how to do it, PPL will highlight offices and missions who are doing strong evaluation work through various means; and
- Finally, in an effort to continue fostering evaluation champions within the agency, PPL will continue to support efforts to provide hands-on evaluation experience and coaching/mentoring through the evaluation process to USAID staff. This will include opportunities for participation on evaluation teams sponsored by PPL as well as several Washington bureaus.

## Evaluation Use

Evaluations play a key role in development work to inform program decision making. To support this objective, USAID is creating an evaluation recommendations action plan and tracking template to ensure that the important lessons learned from evaluations are recorded and used to inform programmatic decisions. Mission portfolio reviews will include a review of the status of each action plan for evaluation recommendations. USAID will continue to promote learning and to apply knowledge gained from evaluations and performance monitoring to improve development project outcomes and performance through a collaborative and adaptive approach to managing projects. Examples of good practice will be identified and shared through the online communities [ProgramNet](#) and [Learning Lab](#) for USAID staff and partners.

## Build USAID's Capacity

USAID will continue to focus significant effort on building USAID's capacity in evaluation. This includes creating and improving tools and systems that support evaluation. For example, USAID has developed standardized mission orders, including one for evaluation, to institutionalize various reforms. PPL is also developing 11 new Technical and How-To Notes as supplemental guidance. USAID will expand and improve a pilot management information system called "AidTracker" that will help the Agency manage data for performance monitoring and evaluation. In another example, evaluation requests for proposals (RFPs) will include standard language where appropriate to ensure Evaluation Policy requirements are met. To support the use of these tools, USAID is proactively delivering training to its staff in classroom settings and more informally via online platforms. The Agency will also continue to encourage peer review of evaluation SOWs and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation working groups at missions to share lessons, experience and good practices.

Evaluation courses are already scheduled to reach an additional 500 staff in FY2013. These trainings are supplemented with a number of online training materials such as recorded webinars or workshops. Important to supporting evaluation work, PPL has conducted eight Performance Monitoring (PM) workshops at regional missions in 2013. PPL will expand the offering to bilateral missions in 2014. These workshops explain the links between performance monitoring and evaluation and include evaluation planning guidance. Online training modules for both performance monitoring and evaluation will be added to [Learning Lab](#) and [ProgramNet](#) in 2014.

Beyond formal trainings and workshops, USAID evaluation experts will continue to provide direct technical assistance to USAID offices and missions and partners on applying the Evaluation Policy to ensure sufficient evaluation planning, design, management, quality control, and use. Building on the integration of evaluation with the other elements of the USAID Program Cycle (policy development, country level strategic planning, project design and implementation, performance monitoring, and learning), particular emphasis will be placed on staff capacity to use evaluation findings to improve development outcomes.

## Disseminate Knowledge

USAID is committed to transparently sharing evaluation findings, whether positive or negative, through a variety of venues and media. The Agency will continue to improve online access to evaluation reports and findings, and to increase the accessibility of evaluation reports through mobile applications.

As a complement to the sharing of evaluation reports, USAID is creating a “Development Data

Unit” that will serve as a central location for all of the Agency’s quantitative and qualitative data sets. Once up and running, this will support the Evaluation Policy requirement that all data sets collected by USAID or one of the Agency’s contractors or grantees for the purposes of an evaluation be uploaded and stored in a central database. The intent is to allow anyone access to the data for re-analysis or new research. In the meantime, USAID missions will require that evaluation teams provide their data and will safeguard the data for future submission to a central repository. USAID will also continue to host evidence summits of thought leaders and stakeholders to share current knowledge around topics of high priority.



## Conducting Priority Evaluations

In the next several years, the Agency will conduct several series of multi-country, multi-sector evaluations to inform future programming and policy. PPL is currently leading a process to identify two or three topics for evaluations in areas that are high priorities for USAID policy and programming.

## CONCLUSION

USAID has seen a real shift forward in its evaluation work in just a couple of years. Progress is evident in terms of increased numbers of evaluations, improvement in the quality of evaluations, improved perceptions of evaluation, and mission initiated activities and working groups to improve their evaluations and Washington support for systems, processes and tools for evaluation. While there is more progress to be made, USAID has begun to improve its evaluation practice and is on the road to rebuilding its leadership in evaluation and learning.

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