

DGP LEARNING AGENDA (INACTIVE)

The 2012-2013 learning agenda for Local Capacity Development emerged from an evaluation of USAID's DGP, and became instrumental in establishing *localworks* (housed in USAID's Local Sustainability Office in E3). With learning questions grounded in USAID Forward reform principles, independent evaluation consultants, led by external evaluation consultant Tom Dichter (former research director of USAID's Capable Partners Program), conducted extensive learning activities and developed a wide array of learning products that received Congressional attention and support (i.e., championed by Senate Committee on Appropriations staff).

The learning agenda generated a new evidence-base around partnership with local organizations and local ownership, and developed/disseminated a wide range of innovative learning products, such as films, policy papers, research publications and a website. The learning agenda became a (somewhat controversial) advocacy tool for organizational learning and reform at USAID and the broader field of international development. Although this agenda is no longer active, *localworks* is currently in an exploratory phase of developing a new agenda that integrates current USAID learning efforts (in Washington and the field) aligned with its mission. Experiences from this learning agenda initiative highlight the importance of working with strong learning champions at senior levels across the Agency, and effectively navigating the Agency's political economy and organizational culture. It suggests that organizational learning begins with small, practical steps that create time and incentives for staff learning.

Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Created learning agenda (complete) ✓ Generating knowledge (complete) ✓ Capturing/synthesizing knowledge (complete) ✓ Sharing knowledge (complete) ✓ Applying knowledge (ongoing) <input type="checkbox"/> Updating/adapting learning (ongoing through <i>localworks</i>)
Materials	Learning Agenda For Capacity Development website ; Learning Agenda Full Report to USAID: Executive Summary ; Summary Recommendations
Key Learning Questions/ Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can USAID improve partnerships with local organizations? ● How can USAID bolster country ownership of development?
Key Learning Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extensive research, including interviews with 325 organizations and 70 USAID staff in Missions in nine countries ● Mini case studies of local capacity development in nine countries ● Historical analysis of USAID capacity development efforts ● Network analyses in two countries ● Literature reviews ● Learning product development, including practitioner guidelines, a cartoon strip, a website, films, research reports, and policy papers
Start of Process	<p>May 2012-August 2013: learning agenda emerged out of an evaluation of the DGP, championed by Congressional staff, and conducted by external evaluation consultant Tom Dichter (former research director of USAID's Capable Partners Program)</p>
Steps in Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identified learning agenda and learning questions from evaluation of DGP 2. Conducted research and literature reviews to fill knowledge gaps 3. Organized learning agenda Advisory Council (with senior development leaders) 4. Integrated feedback from diverse stakeholders 5. Produced products to disseminate evidence 6. Used evidence/findings from learning agenda activities to conduct advocacy around local partnerships and ownership

Current Learning Agenda Work	<i>Localworks</i> was established out of this effort.
Next Steps	<i>Localworks</i> is in the exploratory phase of developing a new learning agenda.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Congressional support for the learning agenda initiative • Learning agenda products and evidence are compelling and of high quality • Learning agenda questions and themes aligned with USAID Forward, Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and other international development policies • Consultative process in agenda development and use that extend horizontally (e.g., with other international development organizations) and vertically (with Missions & local NGOs)
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A perception that USAID leadership was left out of the loop and this was an initiative driven from the outside • Powerful forces holding current development systems in place—hard to change USAID organizational culture around learning
Promising Practices	The learning agenda produced a variety of high-quality products for a broad range of audiences (e.g., film, research reports, policy papers, and a website)
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain senior leadership support/commitment to improve organizational learning strategies within USAID • Develop influential learning agenda champions across the Agency • Improve knowledge management systems for collecting and disseminating evidence • Start with small, practical steps to encourage staff reflection and learning (e.g., voluntary book clubs) • Create time and incentives for staff learning (e.g., sharing and applying learning become performance measures) • Foster learning that is external (i.e., relevant to development outcomes and impact) and internal (i.e., relevant to organizational operations, culture, and structure) to USAID • Focus more on process of developing the learning agenda at the beginning than on the content
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