



**Strengthening Country Systems:  
An Experience Summit**  
Washington, DC | November 27-28, 2012

## **Strengthening Country Systems Experience Summit: Overview**

USAID is sponsoring a two-day Experience Summit on “Strengthening Country Systems,” November 27-28 in Washington, DC. The Summit will bring together USAID staff and partners to examine past and present efforts to strengthen country systems and to distill the lessons and identify the challenges that USAID should bear in mind as it develops policy and program guidance to guide its support to country systems.

The Experience Summit and the guidance to follow will bring together two strands of development practice and chart a common way forward. One strand encompasses USAID’s programming, motivated by our long-standing commitment to aid effectiveness and promoting country ownership, currently exemplified by USAID’s implementation and procurement reforms. The other strand embraces efforts across the Agency to approach development more systematically—to think, for example, of health care delivery in terms of health systems or food production in terms of agricultural market systems, and to design development projects that seek to improve the performance of the system as a whole. A systems approach shares a focus with more traditional interventions on building the capacity of the constituent elements of a system—capacities within governments to mobilize funding and provide policy direction; capacities within government units, private sector firms and non-governmental organizations to provide quality services; capacities of individuals to use services effectively and wisely; and capacities of governmental and non-governmental bodies to provide oversight and ensure accountability. A systems approach also addresses the capacity of all constituent elements to engage effectively.

Thinking of country systems this way certainly adds a level of complexity to development programming, but it also increases the likelihood that development investments will lead to sustained improvements in results. Merging a systems approach with current efforts to promote aid effectiveness provides a stronger conceptual foundation for supporting country ownership, government-to-government assistance and local capacity development.

The Experience Summit is born out of a recognition that, while the articulation of a comprehensive approach to strengthening country systems may be new, a large body of past and present work experience exists. Certainly contemporary initiatives centered on health systems strengthening and market systems development are germane. Similarly, past work to promote effective public management and to implement policy reform through non-project assistance seem relevant. Papers summarizing each of these areas of experience will serve as one input into the Summit.

However, the accumulated experience of USAID staff and implementing partners is another important source to tap. Consequently, we have designed the Summit to maximize opportunities for participants to share their experiences and to build consensus on the most important lessons. USAID will then consider these inputs in developing policy and program guidance for strengthening country systems over the next few months.