

A young woman wearing a white headscarf and a white shawl is standing in a classroom, holding an open book. She is looking towards the right side of the frame. In the background, there is a chalkboard with some faint Arabic writing. In the foreground, the backs of several other students wearing white headscarves are visible, suggesting a classroom or lecture hall environment.

STRENGTHENING EVIDENCE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

FIVE YEARS OF BETTER
EVALUATION PRACTICE
AT USAID

2011–2016



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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ACRONYMS

- 3ie** International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
- AEA** American Evaluation Association
- BFS** Bureau for Food Security
- CDCS** Country Development Cooperation Strategy
- DEC** Development Experience Clearinghouse
- GAO** Government Accountability Office
- M&E POC** Point of Contact for Monitoring and Evaluation
- SEED** Scholarships for Education and Economic Development
- USAID** U.S. Agency for International Development



INTRODUCTION

With the release of the *Evaluation Policy* in 2011, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) made an ambitious commitment to building an evaluation practice that values good planning and design, independent judgment, high-quality methods and evidence-based findings for what is and is not working in USAID programs. USAID's *Evaluation Policy* has served as a model for other agencies, and external organizations have credited USAID for having one of the most comprehensive policies on evaluation of any federal agency. USAID takes an ongoing learning approach to evaluation, and the Agency is continuing to improve evaluation quality and ensure that information from evaluation findings is used to inform decisions and improve programs.

Doing Development Better: Evaluation Contributes to Better Development Outcomes

Relevant and high-quality evaluation is an important tool to track the results, effectiveness and impact of international development programs. Evaluation can help explain why programs are succeeding or failing and can provide recommendations for how best to adapt to improve performance. Along with monitoring, evaluation contributes evidence to improve strategic planning, project design and resource decisions, and evaluations are part of a greater body of knowledge and learning.

Evaluation is not a silver bullet, but without it managers may not have sufficient evidence to understand potential reasons *why* a program is exceeding, meeting or falling short of performance expectations. Without independent and transparent evaluation, stakeholders may lose confidence in a program's ability to achieve results. And without relevant evaluations, project designers and strategic planners may lack the necessary information to inform what works best for future interventions.

USAID Is Viewed as a Leader in Evaluation Standards among Federal Agencies

- The Government Accountability Office (GAO) cited USAID's *Evaluation Policy* as an example among federal agencies in its November 13, 2014, report: *Program Evaluation: Some Agencies Reported that Networking, Hiring, and Involving Program Staff Help Build Capacity* (GAO-15-25).
- In the American Evaluation Association's (AEA) April 2011 newsletter, a consultant to the AEA Evaluation Policy Task Force wrote about USAID's *Evaluation Policy* saying, "... what USAID has done here could well serve as a model for what other federal agencies might do."
- The Department of State modeled its 2012 *Program Evaluation Policy* on USAID's *Evaluation Policy*, adopting much of the language on purposes, methods and standards for evaluation.





**2010
SEPTEMBER**
Presidential Policy Directive on
Global Development Released
(Presidential Policy Directive 6)

**2011
JANUARY**
USAID Evaluation
Policy Released

**2012
JANUARY**
500 USAID Staff
Trained in Evaluation

**2010
NOVEMBER**
USAID Forward Reform
Agenda Launched

**2010
JUNE**
USAID's Bureau for
Policy, Planning and
Learning Established

**2011
DECEMBER**
Program Cycle
Guidance Released

FIVE YEARS OF BETTER EVALUATION PRACTICE AT USAID

**2013
AUGUST**

Meta Evaluation of Quality
and Coverage of USAID
Evaluations Published

**2015
OCTOBER**

More than 1,600
USAID Staff Trained
in Evaluation

**2014
OCTOBER**

800 Evaluations
Completed

**2013
OCTOBER**

500 Evaluations
Completed

2015
International
Year of Evaluation

**2016
FEBRUARY**

Evaluation
Utilization at
USAID Report
Published

**2013
APRIL**

1,000 USAID Staff
Trained in Evaluation

**2015
OCTOBER**

More than
1,000 Evaluations
Completed

EVALUATION PRACTICE AT USAID

Evaluation has been integral to USAID since the Agency was established. USAID's online archive includes a prospectus on an evaluation system as early as 1961, a study on how to improve USAID's evaluation practice published in 1970 and an Evaluation Handbook published that same year. However, USAID's evaluation requirements and practices have varied over time, as have the quality and use of USAID evaluations.

Organizational changes in 2005 left ambiguity about the expectations for evaluation at USAID, and the Agency saw a precipitous drop in the number of evaluations. With the creation of the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning in 2010 and the release of the *Evaluation Policy* in 2011, USAID renewed its commitment to investing in high-quality evaluation practices that inform effective program management, demonstrate results, promote learning, support accountability and provide evidence for decision-making. This has resulted in the number of commissioned evaluations rebounding from an annual average of about 130 the five years prior to the 2011

Evaluation Policy to an annual average of about 230 over the last five years. Evaluation practice was further reinforced by bringing back a holistic approach to strategic and program planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning, known as the Program Cycle.

The USAID *Evaluation Policy* sets high standards for ensuring quality, relevance and transparency. It builds on past USAID evaluation practices and brings the Agency up to date with international standards. When work began to implement the *Evaluation Policy*, USAID identified several major challenges to overcome or mitigate. These included the need to balance the use of evaluations for learning and accountability; the lack of recent staff experience in designing, managing or using evaluations; and the reality

that some business processes, particularly related to procurement and implementation of contracts, make it difficult to ensure that evaluations are timely for decision-making and that program managers have the ability to make changes based on relevant evaluation findings.

Over the past five years, USAID has worked to address these challenges. The Agency now offers classroom training in evaluation that more than 1,600 USAID staff members have completed. Guidance for program planning and management now includes evaluation planning from the very beginning rather than as an afterthought. While there are still areas for improvement, USAID has made strides in making the ambitious vision of the *Evaluation Policy* a reality.

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PURPOSES OF EVALUATION: ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

Why and How We Evaluate

Evaluation at USAID has two primary purposes: accountability to stakeholders and learning to improve effectiveness.

- **Accountability** includes ensuring taxpayer dollars are used efficiently, measuring project effectiveness, transparently disclosing findings to all stakeholders and using evaluation findings to inform resource allocation.
- **Learning** includes systematically generating and sharing knowledge about how best to achieve development outcomes through well-designed and executed projects and using that knowledge to inform decisions, adapt ongoing projects and improve the design of future projects.

While sometimes seen as in conflict with each other, these two purposes can be mutually reinforcing, achieved simultaneously and span all projects as long as both are valued.

USAID staff members are encouraged to take a variety of approaches to

evaluating programs, including arranging internal evaluation teams staffed by USAID employees or partners when appropriate for non-required evaluations. When required by the *Evaluation Policy*, evaluations are to be conducted by an independent evaluator using the best methods appropriate to answer the evaluation questions with the resources that are available. Methods can range from qualitative only, to mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches, and in some cases, may include the use of randomization or statistical matching to develop a counterfactual by comparing a treatment and a control group.

Evaluations should focus on a few key questions that go beyond what can be answered using monitoring data (e.g., whether a project or activity is meeting its performance targets) and go further

to explore why and how a project or activity is achieving, or not achieving, its objectives. Final evaluation reports should be clear and concise and shared transparently, at a minimum by posting final reports on the [Development Exchange Clearinghouse \(DEC\)](#).*

USAID uses evaluation for many purposes. Most individual evaluations are commissioned by program offices in USAID missions. Therefore, the most common uses are to inform decisions about ongoing project management and follow-on programs, projects or activity designs and to make a judgment about project performance. Evaluations are also used to influence decisions by host governments or other donors, to document good practices and lessons learned, and to inform country or sector strategies.

... evaluations are to be conducted by an independent evaluator using the best methods appropriate to answer the evaluation questions with the resources that are available.

* USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) is the largest online public resource for USAID evaluations. You can learn more by visiting dec.usaid.gov.



USAID defines evaluation as the systematic collection and analysis of information to improve effectiveness and inform decisions about current and future programming. There are two major types of evaluation at USAID:

- **Impact evaluations** measure the change in a development outcome that is attributable to a defined intervention. They are also based on models of cause and effect and require a credible and rigorously defined counterfactual to control for factors other than the intervention that might account for the observed change.
- **Performance evaluations** focus on descriptive and normative questions for projects or programs, for instance, how it is being implemented, how it is perceived and valued, and whether expected results are occurring. Performance evaluations also ask questions that are pertinent to program design, management or operational decision making.

CHANGING THE CULTURE OF EVALUATION AT USAID

The *Evaluation Policy* was a necessary first step to create the impetus for improvements in evaluation practice at USAID. To be successful in implementing the policy, USAID works to provide staff and partners with resources to help meet evaluation standards and cultivates a supportive environment and culture for learning and evaluation.

These efforts are beginning to bear fruit. USAID staff members are moving beyond a compliance mindset to a more holistic approach in the way they think about evaluation. Implementing the policy has required meaningful change to USAID's organizational culture to ensure staff members have time for and value periodic reflection and learning and to encourage managers to seek out evidence to inform decision-making. In addition, evaluation is recognized as one part of an integrated Program Cycle where the components — strategic planning, project design and implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning — build on and inform each other.

It Starts with Leadership: Setting the Tone

Consistent emphasis from Agency leadership on the importance of evaluation and evidence in programmatic decision-making has supported this cultural shift. Senior leaders in USAID missions and offices expect substantive answers to how decisions were informed by evidence, including from evaluation. This consistent drumbeat did not exist a decade ago.

Senior attention from the USAID administrator and USAID mission directors on increasing the number of high-quality evaluations signaled to staff and partners that increased investment in evaluation was strongly encouraged. USAID creatively incentivized quality in evaluation by holding a contest on excellence in evaluation where the winners were invited to present their work to the administrator and were featured around the Agency. There was also a competition to fund innovative ideas that fell outside of the

evaluations required by missions and Washington bureaus, as well as a joint competition for evaluation funding co-sponsored with the State Department. Each month, the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning highlights an exemplary evaluation in its internal newsletter that goes to missions and Washington staff.

To better understand whether these and other efforts are working, the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning commissioned independent studies to examine evaluation quality (2013) and evaluation use (2016) at USAID. These two studies found there has been an increase in the quality and use of evaluations over time, and the studies inform ongoing evaluation improvement efforts. (For more information, please see the text boxes on page 16.)



Building a Foundation: Improved Staff Capacity

Because the quality and utility of evaluations are greatly influenced by the initial evaluation questions and design parameters that are used to commission them, USAID has prioritized efforts to build capacity in monitoring, evaluation and organizational learning among USAID staff and partners. USAID offers formal classroom training in monitoring and evaluation, training more than 1,600 staff in evaluation since 2011. USAID also offers workshops on specific topics in evaluation, for example, on designing impact evaluations at the same time as activities. Classroom training is supplemented by a range of tools, publications, webinars and targeted technical assistance available online or in print to USAID missions and offices.

In addition to bolstering technical skills, improving staff capacity also requires ensuring adequate staffing. USAID missions and offices have found it can be difficult to dedicate a position to monitoring and evaluation or to find someone with the right set of skills to fit that position. USAID has recently begun recruiting Monitoring and Evaluation Fellows who are placed for six months to two years in missions or Washington offices that require additional specialized assistance. Fellows are embedded in technical or program office teams and work alongside them while sharing expertise and building staff capacity in monitoring and evaluation among their colleagues.

The Power of Networks

Knitting together staff, partners and other stakeholders who work on monitoring and evaluation has proven to be a powerful catalyst for strengthening the Agency's evaluation culture and bolstering USAID's credibility as a leader in evaluation. USAID has several evaluation communities of practice that connect staff with a common interest in evaluation regardless of geographic distance or differences in technical expertise. Building stronger relationships with evaluation-focused groups outside of the Agency has also been important in bolstering the shift in USAID's evaluation culture.

Internal Evaluation Community

USAID maintains internal communities of evaluation practice. Each bureau and independent office at USAID headquarters has at least one formally designated point of contact for monitoring and evaluation (M&E POC) who also provides support and technical assistance to respective missions. These M&E POCs meet on a monthly basis to share updates on important developments, disseminate useful tools and provide a regular space to share challenges and solutions. USAID also hosts an Evaluation Interest Group, a global community of practice open to all staff interested in evaluation. To facilitate these groups and also ensure resources are available on demand, USAID offers online forums available to USAID staff and stakeholders for learning and discussion about evaluation and its role in more effective development programs.

Staying Connected with the External Community

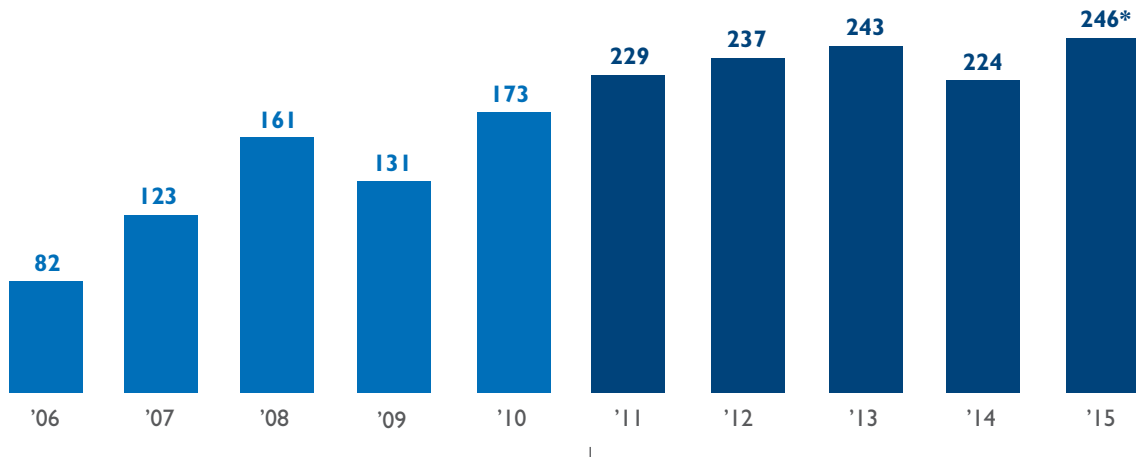
USAID partners with others to stay current on state-of-the-art evaluation methods and is actively applying new tools for evaluating development programs in a variety of contexts. USAID is a board member of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) and is active in the Network for Development Evaluation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee. USAID has partnered with a number of organizations such as the Overseas Development Institute and the U.K. Department for International Development to explore how best to identify and apply methods to evaluate complex programs. Ongoing research and collaboration with universities and technical leaders in evaluation sponsored by USAID is expected to broaden the approaches and methods available for monitoring, evaluation and learning.

In recent years, USAID has been cited as a leader in evaluation, both among bilateral donors and U.S. Government agencies. For example, the organization, Results for America, USAID scored among the highest performing agencies in its *Federal Investing in What Works Index* for 2015. In the April 2011 issue of the AEA's newsletter, a member of the Evaluation Policy Task Force described USAID's *Evaluation Policy* as a "model for other federal agencies." Additionally, each year at AEA's annual conference, USAID staff from all over the world share Agency progress in evaluation through papers and presentations.



USAID Is Commissioning More Evaluations Each Year

With the release of the *Evaluation Policy* in January 2011, USAID made an ambitious commitment to quality program evaluation.



1,179 evaluation reports completed within the past five years

Sources: DEC, by calendar year (2006–2010) and from the Evaluation Registry, by fiscal year (2011–2014)

*based on preliminary data

EVALUATIONS CONTRIBUTE TO BETTER

USAID uses evaluations to inform programming and project decision-making.

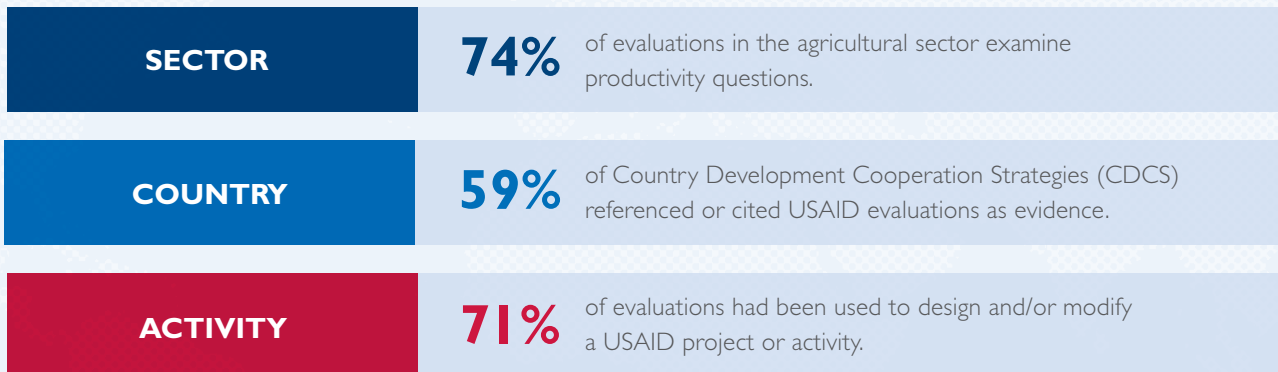
Evaluations help tell us why projects succeed or fail.

They provide findings and recommendations for how to best adapt to improve performance.

They contribute evidence to a growing body of knowledge that informs planning, project design and resource decisions.



Evaluations Improve Programming at Multiple Levels

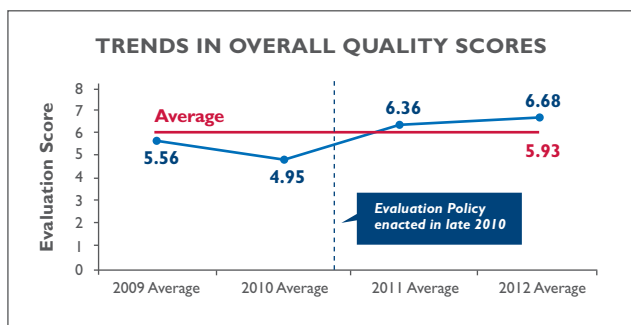


Source: Evaluation Utilization at USAID (February 2016, Management Systems International)

DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

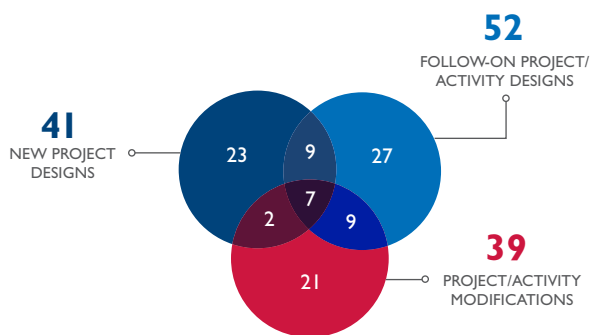
Evaluation Quality

In 2013, the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning commissioned an independent study to examine to what extent evaluation quality had changed since the *Evaluation Policy* was put into place. 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. Over the four years covered by this study, there were significant improvements in the quality of USAID evaluation reports, and while the *Evaluation Policy* was an important factor in these improvements, other inputs, such as training for relevant staff, also contributed to rising evaluation quality.



Source: Meta Evaluation of Quality and Coverage of USAID Evaluations 2009–2012 (August 2013, Management Systems International)

Evaluation Utilization



In 2016, the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning commissioned a study of how USAID evaluations completed in 2011–2014 have been used, and what characteristics of these evaluations and USAID business processes most clearly foster or impede evaluation use. Evaluation use was evident at several stages in the USAID Program Cycle, and the study team concluded the overall evaluation utilization at USAID is strong. In all, 71 percent of evaluations were used to support and/or modify Agency activities, and overlap between circles in this Venn diagram indicates that 27 percent of those used to support design or modifications were used for more than one of these purposes.

Gathering and Using Evidence

Along with improving evaluation culture and practice, USAID promotes learning as a discipline throughout the Agency. This has translated into more resources and emphasis on gathering and using evidence from a variety of sources (evaluations, assessments, monitoring data, research studies and more). At the headquarters level, this includes support to Washington bureaus to develop annual plans for improving evaluation practice or for answering higher-level questions such as, what works in specific sectors. At the field level, USAID provides a set of tools and suggested processes that can help missions amplify learning from evaluation, including by holding stakeholder consultations before commissioning an evaluation, creating more user-friendly ways to share evaluation findings and monitoring the implementation of recommendations with evaluation utilization trackers. At both the headquarters and the field level, these efforts will help ensure that evidence — whether an impact evaluation, a monitoring report or an after-action review — is used appropriately to inform ongoing project management and adaptation as well as the design of new strategies and projects.

Quality of Evaluations at USAID

The *Meta Evaluation of Quality and Coverage of USAID Evaluations 2009–2012* (August 2013, Management Systems International) report reviewed to what extent evaluation quality had changed since the *Evaluation Policy* was put into place. 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. Over the four years covered by this study, there were clear improvements in the quality of USAID evaluation reports. Quality improvements included the following:

- 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;
- Recommendations were more specific about what changes USAID should make.

Evaluation Utilization at USAID

The *Evaluation Utilization at USAID* (February 2016, Management Systems International) report reviewed how USAID evaluations completed in 2011–2014 have been used, and what characteristics of these evaluations and USAID business processes most clearly foster or impede evaluation use. Evaluation use was evident at several stages in the USAID Program Cycle. At the country level, 59 percent of approved strategies were found to have referenced USAID evaluations and 71 percent of evaluations were used to support and/or modify a USAID project or activity. The most common changes found were actions that refocus ongoing activities, including revisions to delivery mechanism work plans, extending activity timelines or expanding activity geographic areas. The study team concluded that USAID evaluation utilization practices are already strong and compare well to those of other U.S. Government agencies examined in previous studies conducted by the U.S. GAO.



THE ROAD AHEAD

Over the past five years, USAID has made considerable progress in advancing the role of evaluation. The data on the number of evaluations produced each year, critical staff trained, and improvements in quality and use of evaluations together tell a story of significant change and show that USAID is moving in the right direction. Despite the progress, there remains significant work ahead. In the coming years, USAID will continue to build on its evaluation practices and go deeper in a few key areas. These include building the capacity of staff and partners to better integrate evaluative thinking throughout the planning and managing of projects and programs; expanding tools and partnerships for evaluation; and, creating the space for learning and adapting.

Build Capacity and Empower Staff

Impact Evaluation Clinics

To ensure high-quality impact evaluations and the development of sector learning agendas, USAID will partner with academic experts to host impact

evaluation learning clinics in key sectors. These clinics will review the evidence base in a given sector and then work with missions to design impact evaluations that address gaps in the evidence. USAID has successfully completed three impact evaluation clinics in the democracy, human rights and governance sector and is exploring applying this clinic model to other sectors.

Broaden and Deepen Evaluation Training

New foreign service officers in most professional backstops will be offered new training in performance monitoring and evaluation. Over the next few years, USAID will be adding training in advanced topics in monitoring and evaluation to keep staff engaged and further update their skills. In addition, other basic training required for the majority of USAID program managers, such as Programming Foreign Assistance, Contracting Officer's Representative training and certification, and Project Design and Management will feature strengthened modules on evaluation.

Expand Tools and Partnerships for Evaluation

Evaluations for Higher-level Results

To examine whether USAID interventions are achieving higher-level outcomes, USAID will encourage project-level evaluations at every mission. These evaluations will not take the place of evaluations at the activity level, but will examine the extent to which individual contracts and grants and other activities are adding up to achieve higher-level results.

Gap Maps and Systematic Reviews

USAID will expand partnerships to commission evidence gap maps and systematic reviews in key sectors. Gap maps consolidate what is known about a particular sector by mapping out evidence identified through a comprehensive search of both published and unpublished literature. This enables the identification of "gaps" where little or no evidence from evaluations exists and where evaluation research should be focused. Systematic reviews use internationally recognized standards to synthesize the



available research on a specific question, providing the best possible evidence of what is known. USAID has partnered with 3ie to commission gap maps and systematic reviews in early childhood literacy, governance and preventing gang violence. These tools enable USAID staff, partners and stakeholders to make informed decisions about development programming.

Expand Monitoring and Evaluation Tools and Frameworks

Through research and partnerships with academic institutions, practitioners and implementers, USAID is expanding the range of approaches and methods available for monitoring, evaluation and learning. Many of these methods show promise for use in programming where there is significant uncertainty or rapidly changing contexts. USAID will learn from these efforts and assess how to incorporate state-of-the-art methods into the Agency's monitoring and evaluation tools and guidance.

Assess and Improve Quality of Evaluations

USAID will commission an independent "meta" evaluation to examine whether the quality of evaluations has continued to improve from 2012–2016 and what factors contribute to improvements in quality. USAID conducted a quality assessment in 2013 that will serve as a baseline for this follow-on study. Together with the 2016 independent study of evaluation use at USAID, these studies will provide evidence and practical recommendations for improving the quality and use of evaluations.

Create the Space for Learning and Adapting

Annual Evaluation Action Plans

In a recent innovation to improve learning from as well as the quality and use of evaluations, each Washington bureau developed an evaluation action plan for 2016. The action plans highlight what is working well in their evaluations, where there are challenges in quality and use, and priorities for the year ahead. Promising best practices and opportunities for collaboration have emerged from this stocktaking and prioritization process, which will take place on an annual basis.

Evaluation Synthesis

To promote learning within sectors, USAID will build on the nascent practice of synthesizing evidence from USAID evaluations. Sector syntheses summarize knowledge gained from evaluations conducted around a particular sector, which provides a useful overview of what has been learned and can also help inform USAID strategy, project and activity development. USAID's Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment pioneered the practice and produces a synthesis of evaluation findings in their relevant sectors on an annual basis. The synthesis identifies cross-cutting findings on specific issues like gender and adaptation to climate change. The findings are shared with all relevant staff engaged in designing new projects or updating sector strategies and policies.

Learning Agendas

To develop a comprehensive approach to evidence and research in a given sector, USAID will build on the example of specific bureaus to pilot the development of learning agendas. Learning agendas will identify and prioritize areas where greater evidence and learning is needed. They will also include planned evaluations, assessments and studies that will be conducted by USAID and possibly partners, which together will help inform future programming.

Country-Level Learning Plan

USAID is currently updating its operational policy for planning and implementing country programs. A key change in the policy is that missions will include a learning plan as part of their five-year strategic plan, also known as the CDCS. The plan will outline how missions will incorporate learning into their programming, including activities like regular portfolio reviews, evaluation tracking and dissemination plans, and other analytic processes to better understand the dynamics of their programs and their country contexts.



CONCLUSION

Over the past five years, USAID has made impressive strides to improve the quality of evaluation and learning, and in turn, the effectiveness of development programs. Decisions at every level are better supported by evidence, and USAID has regained credibility among peer organizations as a leader in evaluation practice. USAID staff and partners are building capacity to plan, manage and use evaluation to improve programs and the Agency is promoting a culture of learning. In the coming years, USAID will continue to improve the quality and use of evaluation to ensure that taxpayer resources are used effectively and that development programs are continuously improved by evidence.





USING EVIDENCE TO ADAPT EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

USAID/Mozambique: Helping Children to Read

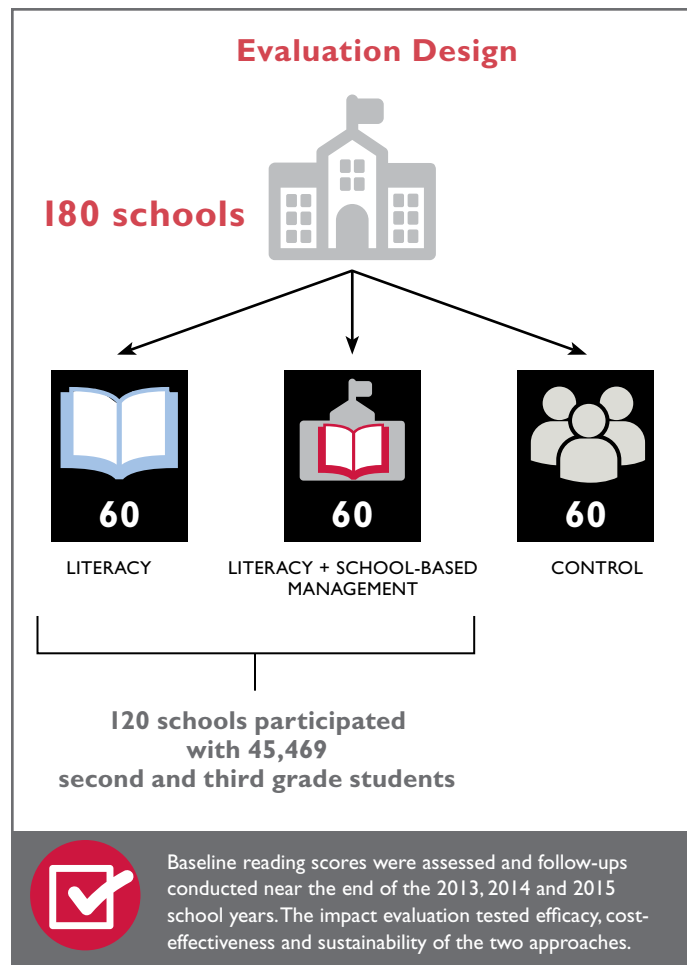
Program Description

In 2012, the USAID mission in Mozambique and the Government of Mozambique collaborated to launch Aprender a Ler (Learn to Read), an education project primarily focused on improving reading outcomes for second and third grade students in more than 1,000 urban and rural schools in the Nampula and Zambézia provinces of Mozambique. The program sought to achieve two outcomes: an increase in the quality of reading instruction through in-school coaching, teacher training and distribution of reading materials; and an increase in the quantity of reading instruction in school by strengthening school management practices to maximize the value of instruction time in school.

At the start of the program, USAID commissioned an impact evaluation to collect data on the reading skills of second and third grade students. The main purpose of the impact evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the intervention and the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of two intervention levels. The two levels included medium treatment, which focused on improved student learning, and full treatment, which added components for more effective school management.

Results

After the first school year, students from all three groups improved their reading skills. Students who received assistance doubled their average word-per-minute reading. Students in schools with school management increased reading by 287 percent versus 221 percent for the schools that received reading instruction only. Contributing to this were significant improvements in attendance by both students and teachers. One year after USAID support ended, students continued to show improvements in critical aspects of reading. Additionally, the full treatment group, incorporating both literacy and school-based management, was also the more cost-effective approach.



Action Taken

Because USAID incorporated the impact evaluation into the program design, the implementing partner could quickly adjust its programming based on the results and recommendations. At the request of the Government of Mozambique, USAID expanded the full program to an additional 538 schools with 109,021 students and 2,002 teachers.

USING EVALUATION RESULTS TO CHANGE GOVERNMENTAL POLICY

USAID/Ethiopia Supporting Highly-Vulnerable Children

Program Description

Since 2011, USAID has funded the Yekokeb Berhan program in Ethiopia to support highly-vulnerable children and their families. Working with children who have lost one or more parents, the program builds a network of volunteers and community-level caregivers to provide for the needs of these children. One of the key areas of focus is in health, including vaccination coverage as well as HIV testing.

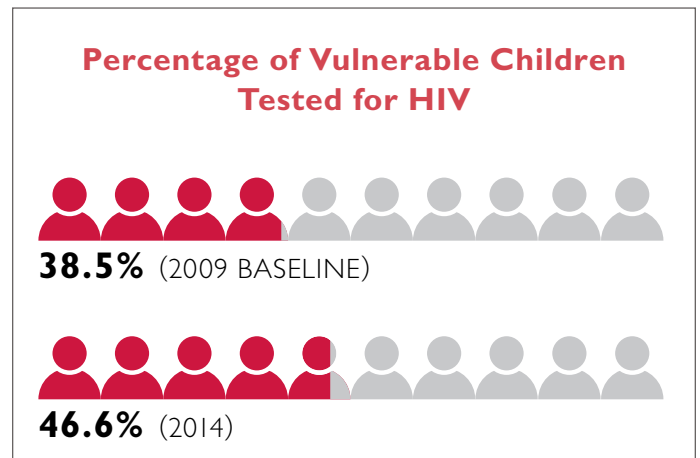
A 2014 mid-term evaluation collected evidence to understand how the program was performing.

Results

The evaluation found that USAID funding increased the percentages of the most vulnerable children in Ethiopia who had been tested for HIV, were provided with their test results, and were on antiretroviral therapy.

However, despite this positive progress, still less than half of the vulnerable children population had been tested for HIV and knew their status. This was an important finding because these children are at an elevated risk for contracting HIV.

USAID went beyond measuring program performance to using its evidence to help change the Government of Ethiopia's guidance on HIV testing for vulnerable children.



Source: Yekokeb Berhan Program for Highly-Vulnerable Children in Ethiopia: Mid-Term Evaluation Report (June 2014)

Actions Taken

USAID staff expressed to Ethiopian government counterparts their suggestions that highly-vulnerable children should be prioritized for counseling and testing services.

The Federal Ministry of Health and Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs agreed, and in 2014, the National Guidelines for Comprehensive HIV Prevention were revised. The new version includes helpful guidance on disclosing HIV status results to testers, including vulnerable children. As a result of this policy change, HIV testing for vulnerable children has been prioritized both for USAID programming and for the Government of Ethiopia.

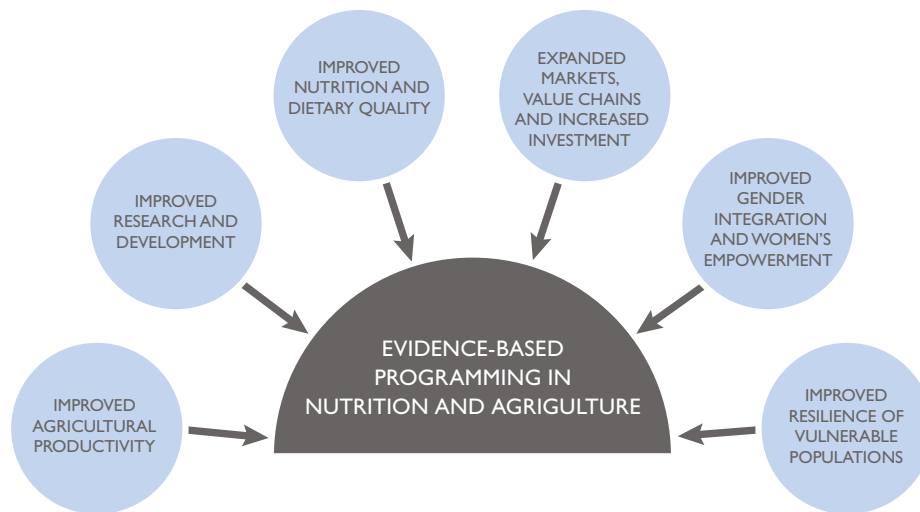
LOOKING ACROSS EVALUATIONS FOR LEARNING

Synthesizing Food Security Evaluations to Inform a Learning Agenda

In leading the implementation of the U.S. Government's Feed the Future initiative, USAID's Bureau for Food Security (BFS) has put evaluation at the forefront of its global efforts to strengthen agriculture, while reducing poverty, hunger and undernutrition. With a focus on evidence, results and accountability, the initiative has driven research towards understanding what interventions are successful, in what contexts and why. In 2011, to assist in designing effective programs and projects, and measure progress, BFS developed the [Feed the Future Learning Agenda](#).

In the development context, Learning Agendas are often used to prove or disprove untested assumptions in development hypotheses. The Feed the Future Learning Agenda includes a set of key questions related to the causal linkages in the [Feed the Future Results Framework](#) to be answered through evaluations and other rigorous tools. These questions fall into six general themes (highlighted in blue circles below).

Since Feed the Future began implementing programs in 2010, numerous evaluations have been commissioned. To summarize knowledge gained from evaluations, in 2015, BFS synthesized 196 performance and impact evaluations from Feed the Future projects that focused on the six themes outlined in the Learning Agenda. Across the themes, the synthesis illuminated trends and patterns summarized in the points found below the graphic. These trends can be shared with relevant staff and stakeholders engaged in designing new projects, or updating sector strategies and policies. The synthesis also identified gaps where more evaluation research is needed, helping to inform the design of future evaluations that can contribute to the body of knowledge on food security to improve the design and management of interventions in the agriculture and nutrition sectors by specifically addressing Learning Agenda questions.



COMMUNITY

Results improve when programs involve trusted and transparent community organizations.

EMPOWERMENT

When programs enable people to take ownership of their own advancement, they produce better results.

TIME

Large-scale impact in reducing poverty and hunger requires long-term effort, including investing in research and development.

ACCESS

Increasing agricultural productivity often hinges on farmers' access to markets and farm inputs like seeds.

ASSETS

Access to assets, from land to income, is critical to women's economic and social empowerment as well as the health and welfare of families and communities.

TRAINING

When integrated as part of a project, quality training leads to success and lasting change.

USING EVALUATION TO REVISE PROGRAM DESIGN

Strengthening Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

USAID used evaluations to strengthen program design and implementation during successive programs across three decades.

Program Description

From 1985 to 2015, USAID provided two-year technical training for economically disadvantaged high school graduates from underserved areas of designated countries across Central America and the Caribbean.

The program, Scholarships for Education and Economic Development (SEED), provided participants with technical training, leadership development, English as a Second Language classes and cultural exchange enrichment. Programs ranged from six months to two years in duration through a network of community colleges and universities across the United States. They also lived with U.S. host families as part of their curriculum. Nearly 10,000 scholarships were awarded over the 30-year period.

In 1994 and 2002, USAID conducted mid-term evaluations and used the findings to refine program implementation. The scholarship program was modified to add professional development training for rural-based, mid-level professionals.

In 2012, USAID commissioned a final evaluation of the entire SEED program. At the time of the evaluation, there was evidence that the higher-education landscape in the region had changed. The evidence showed there had been a proliferation of local institutions designed to provide post-secondary training.



Results

The evaluation concluded that SEED effectively targeted disadvantaged and marginalized populations. Moreover, it recommended USAID move training offerings in-country or in-region, thereby contributing to the capacity-building of local higher-education institutions and greater integration of disadvantaged or marginalized youth into labor market pools.

Actions Taken

Based on the evaluation results and additional evidence, USAID designed a new regional program that incorporates best practices and lessons learned from SEED. The new program focuses on strengthening the capacity of two- and three-year technical training institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean to provide market-relevant, quality training to youth from disadvantaged populations for employment.





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