

USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance



Women participate in a community meeting.
Credit: Panos

“...all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.”

-President Barack Obama, Cairo, Egypt, 2009

In recent decades, the world has witnessed dramatic moments of political change that have created sweeping opportunities for democratic reform and the expansion of human rights. Fewer than half of the world's nations were democracies in 1991. By 2006, 64 percent were democracies. In 15 years, democracy went from being considered a mostly Western construct to being the predominant form of government globally, universally perceived as an essential source of legitimacy. In recent years, the historic nature of this global progress has been tempered by a partial backsliding trend in some countries. Political transitions do not necessarily lead to sustainable democracies.

Since the early 1990s, USAID has promoted political freedom as an integral part of development. The Agency's new Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) Strategy highlights the centrality of participation and accountability to the achievement of human rights and democratic governance. It also recognizes that support for democracy, human rights and governance is vital to the pursuit of freedom and national security and is essential to achieve USAID's and the U.S. Government's broader social and economic development goals.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of USAID's *Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) Strategy* is **to support the establishment and consolidation of inclusive and accountable democracies to advance freedom, dignity and development**. To achieve this goal, the Strategy sets four strategic objectives:

1. Promote participatory, representative and inclusive political processes and government institutions.
2. Foster greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and to the law.
3. Protect and promote universally recognized human rights.
4. Improve development outcomes through the integration of DRG principles and practices across USAID's development portfolio.

What's New about this Strategy?

- **The strategy replaces a 20-year-old set of categories with a framework that describes what we are accomplishing, not what we are doing.** USAID has revisited its 20-year-old strategic approach of emphasizing core institutional components of democracy – civil society, governance, elections and political processes, and rule of law – and designed a new strategy which focuses on higher level objectives.
- **The framework re-focuses traditional DRG activities into objectives on participation, inclusion and accountability.** USAID's traditional programs on civil society, governance, elections and political processes, and rule of law are encompassed and reframed under these new objectives. The framework seeks to empower reformers and citizens from the bottom up, while shifting the incentives of the ruling elite by enhancing accountability systems and encouraging support meaningful reforms.
- **The strategy elevates human rights as a key USAID development objective.** USAID is making human rights an explicit component of the Agency's approach to democratic development. USAID places particular emphasis on inclusive development, expanding rights and opportunities for women, person with disabilities, displaced persons, LGBT persons, indigenous peoples and other historically marginalized populations, including ethnic and religious minorities.
- **The strategy encourages integration of DRG principles and practices into other development sectors.** Technical efforts to promote poverty reduction and socioeconomic development must address democracy, human rights and governance issues, including a lack of citizen participation and poor government accountability. The strategy describes DRG concepts and tools that can be leveraged to enhance outcomes in support of the three core presidential development initiatives, Feed the Future, Global Climate Change and the Global Health Initiative, as well as other development sectors.
- **The strategy promotes DRG through the innovative use of technology.** USAID is increasingly integrating technological innovations into its DRG portfolio to enable democratic progress by leveraging mobile technologies, social networks and youth engagement.

Implementation

With the support of regional and global operating units and other U.S. Government counterparts, USAID Missions will play the primary role in implementing this strategy by designing and implementing DRG-focused programs, integrating DRG principles and practices throughout the Program Cycle and ensuring that DRG strategies are guided by realities on the ground. The release of the strategy will be followed by “how-to notes” and supportive tools to assist Missions and operating units with implementation of the strategy, including alignment with existing policies, strategies and country programs.

For more information:

- Visit our website at www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance
- Contact USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Communications Specialist, Emilie Yam, eyam@usaid.gov.