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EVALUATION

USAID/Office of HIV and AIDS: Project SEARCH End of Project Evaluation

Supporting Evaluation and Research to Combat HIV

DECEMBER 2012

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Global Health Technical Assistance Bridge II Project (GH Tech) USAID Contract No. AID-OAA-C-12-00027

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS.....	v
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
Purpose.....	1
Background.....	1
Evaluation Methodology.....	2
Selected Evaluation Findings and Conclusions.....	2
Recommendations.....	4
I. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND MAIN QUESTIONS.....	5
II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	7
III. METHODOLOGY	11
Documentation.....	11
Key Informant Interviews.....	11
Limitations.....	12
IV. ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	13
Project SEARCH and USAID Research Priorities	13
Objective 1: Conducting Program Research and Evaluation.....	15
Objective 2: Promoting Use of Program Research Findings.....	18
Objective 3: Building Local Capacity to Conduct and Use HIV Research	20
V. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IQC MECHANISM: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	25
Advantages and Disadvantages of the IQC Mechanism.....	25
Recommendations	29
VI. CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS	33
Objective 1: Conducting Program Research and Evaluation.....	33
Objective 2: Promoting Use of Program Research Findings.....	33
Objective 3: Building Local Capacity to Conduct and Use HIV Research	33

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A. SCOPE OF WORK	35
APPENDIX B. PERSONS CONTACTED	43
APPENDIX C. REFERENCES.....	47
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW GUIDES	55

TABLES

Table 1: Project SEARCH Task Orders.....	8
Table 2: Project SEARCH: Illustrative Research and Evaluation Activities.....	10
Table 3: Examples of Outcomes and Their Use	15

ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral treatment
ARV	Antiretroviral drugs
BPE	Basic program evaluation
BU	Boston University
CA	Cooperative agreement
CDC	U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CEDEP	Center for the Development of People
COP	Country Operational Plan
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
CSI	Child Status Index
CSW	Commercial sex workers
DATE	Data Analysis and Triangulation for Evaluation, Nigeria—Task Order
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GGI	Go Girls Initiative
GH	USAID Global Health Bureau
HCT	HIV/AIDS Counseling and Testing
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IAS	International AIDS Society
IP	Implementing Partner
IPR	Implementation and Procurement Reform
IQC	Indefinite Quantity Contract
IRB	Institutional Review Board
JHU	Johns Hopkins University
JHUCCP	Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs
MARP	Most-at-risk populations
MCP	Multiple Concurrent Partnerships
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MUHAS	Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Tanzania
NIH	U.S. National Institutes of Health

NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OGAC	USAID Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator
OHA	USAID's Office of HIV and AIDS
OR	Operations Research
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
OVC-CARE	Orphans and Vulnerable Children-Comprehensive Action Research— Task Order
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PHE	Public Health Evaluation
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission
R2P	Research to Prevention—Task Order
RFTOP	Request for Task Order Proposals
SEARCH	Supporting Evaluation & Research to Combat HIV
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
SYMMACS	Systematic Monitoring of the Male Circumcision Scale-up in Eastern and Southern Africa
TA	Technical Assistance
TAYO	Thyolo Active Youth Organization
TLR	Technical Leadership and Research
TWG	Technical working group
TO	Task order
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
VCT	Voluntary counseling and testing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The purposes of this end-of-project evaluation are to determine the extent to which Project SEARCH achieved its objectives and to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the project in supporting operations research (OR) for HIV and AIDS. Use of the findings will inform design of follow-on operations research in USAID's Office of HIV and AIDS (OHA).

The evaluation examines the questions:

- To what extent was the project successful in achieving each of the stated objectives: conducting applied research and evaluation, promoting the use of program research findings, and building the capacity of local organizations, national governments, and local researchers to conduct and use research?
- What were the challenges of using the mechanism to achieve the intended objectives through the perspectives of implementing partners (IPs), USAID Missions, and USAID/Washington?

BACKGROUND

Supporting Evaluation and Research to Combat HIV (Project SEARCH) was designed to carry out research and evaluation so as to address information gaps and emerging issues and to provide findings that can be used to improve the coverage, quality, and effectiveness of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment programs worldwide. Through training and collaboration with its IPs, Project SEARCH was also expected to build the capacity of institutions and individuals in countries where USAID works to conduct HIV/AIDS research and public health evaluations.

Under an Indefinite Quantity Contract (IQC), awards were made to five IPs (also referred to as contractors) after a global open competition: Boston University, FHI 360, Futures Group International, Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs, and the Population Council. This mechanism was intended to promote competition and thereby assure that the best-qualified IP would be selected for any particular task order (TO), while at the same time dramatically reducing the time and effort needed to contract for any specific evaluation or research need. Project SEARCH, which was planned for 2007–2012, had a ceiling of \$200 million. By the end of the ordering period in February 2012, nine TOs had been issued and a total of almost \$100 million awarded. Five of the TOs were initiated and primarily funded from USAID/Washington; four were country-specific TOs initiated and funded from the field. As of December 2012, four TOs valued together at more than \$65 million continue; a few activities are not scheduled to end until 2015.¹

¹ Table I in section II of the full report lists the task orders, contractors (IPs), approximate funding and timing of each.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative performance evaluation. The analysis is based on both documentation and the knowledge and insights of informants who have had experience with Project SEARCH and other mechanisms that fund research and evaluation.

Under the GH Tech Bridge Project, two consultants with expertise in management, research and evaluation conducted the evaluation from October 9 to about December 15, 2012. The evaluators developed a set of basic questions for which information was needed in order to answer the questions set out in the evaluation scope of work. They then determined which data sources (documentation and interview responses) would inform each question and drafted interview guides. The evaluators spoke with 48 informants, including representatives of the five IQC partners, directors or managers of all nine TOs, USAID Washington and Mission officers, and research partners in 10 African countries.

Among the limitations were (1) interviews scheduled included some individuals with only cursory familiarity with the project and excluded some from USAID Missions and other PEPFAR members who could have provided different perspectives on the project; (2) documentation gaps, especially budgetary information; and (3) reliance on telephone rather than face-to-face contact for most interviews and for the evaluators' joint analysis.

SELECTED EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Relevance of project research and evaluation to USAID priorities: A number of factors limited the extent to which Project SEARCH could study the highest-priority research questions and generate useful outcomes: (1) USAID does not determine in isolation its research agenda for central projects. It must also take into account the ideas of other members of PEPFAR technical working groups, the PEPFAR annual budget process, and the availability of mechanisms to carry out the research. (2) The complicated PEPFAR research approval processes for public health evaluations and issues related to contracting made it difficult for implementers conducting and adapting research to be responsive to a rapidly changing programming environment. Nevertheless, Project SEARCH has already generated findings that informants consider valuable for future programming and is expected to produce more.

Conducting research and evaluation: Project SEARCH has not conducted applied research and evaluation in either the quantity or the quality expected at inception. Factors that often made it necessary to reduce intended project scope included the interagency review process, implementation issues, limited USAID experience in management of contract mechanisms for research, and at times mismatch of the skills of contractor personnel and the research to be done. Nonetheless, useful outcomes have been produced. Expectations of what the project could achieve were probably unrealistic, given the PEPFAR research approval process and time frame and budget constraints.

Promotion of use of research and evaluation findings/outcomes: Project SEARCH has achieved its objective of *promoting* the use of its findings, but information on the extent to which the findings of completed research have actually been *used* has not been collected. Continuing TOs have dissemination plans, and most of the completed studies reported organizing local and national events to present findings; some stressed the importance of reaching community stakeholders. Some activities staged events when the research was beginning to obtain inputs from potential users and engage government in the research. The project has produced peer-reviewed publications and more are likely from R2P, HIVCore, and Tathmini GBV, despite the absence of

direct USAID funding for these activities after individual TOs end. Informants suggested there was sometimes a conflict between the need to quickly get out program-useful results and the additional time and work needed to produce a publishable report. Lack of clarity over the relative importance of an immediate report responding to a particular program's needs and publication for global knowledge at times resulted in misunderstandings between USAID and IPs.

Building local capacity to conduct and use research: Less emphasis was given to local capacity building than to production of research and evaluation outcomes or promotion of the use of findings. Several TOs did not have any capacity-building requirements at all. Among other factors preventing most TOs from meeting the local-capacity objective were

- lack of clear definition of and objectives for capacity building to guide IPs,
- absence of requirements for capacity-building strategies and targets in research design,
- no specification of ways to assess capacity-building progress,
- lack of sufficient budget and time for effective capacity-building , and
- the inherent conflict between getting research findings out and building skills.

Except in a few components of R2P, there have been no notable capacity-building achievements, and those that have occurred appear to have built individual rather than institutional capacity.

Effectiveness of the IQC mechanism: Though IQCs enable users to compete TOs among prequalified bidders, for a research program like Project SEARCH there were many disadvantages. For example, although the USAID/OHA research team is highly competent, it is small and the expertise of its members is called upon worldwide. Some informants questioned whether a contract mechanism allows them enough time to cover their global responsibilities and still provide the necessary technical oversight.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To encourage competition and avoid a project too large for USAID research staff to manage effectively, consider having one project for evaluation and one or more separate research projects (e.g., one project for prevention, one for care and treatment, and one for orphans and vulnerable children), with mechanisms built in to ensure that the projects share information and collaborate. This requires clearly defining the differences between research and evaluation.
2. Specify in the project design the objectives and procedures for, e.g., intent and end-use of research, data use and marketing of project resources, and expectations about capacity building; these were unclear in Project SEARCH.
3. Give host country partners a much larger role than they had in Project SEARCH. While many still have weaknesses in such areas as qualitative research, research management, and data quality, these can be overcome through closer partnerships with U.S. IPs. Options include having African institutions as primes and U.S. partners as subs, or targeting a certain percentage of resources (say, 50%) to local institutional partners.
4. Increase field mission input into design and implementation of the program, and allow field personnel to manage activities for which they provide field support.
5. Make provisions to enable USAID to assess progress on use and capacity building after a particular activity ends, so that its effectiveness can be better evaluated. Resources must be set aside and means of assessing performance must be designed at the start for measuring success in achieving project objectives. This means that for capacity building and use of findings, some data will have to be collected after individual research activities have ended.

I. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND MAIN QUESTIONS

The purposes of this end-of-project evaluation are (1) to determine the extent to which Project SEARCH achieved its objectives, and (2) to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the IQC mechanism in supporting operations research for HIV and AIDS (see Appendix A for the full scope of work).

The evaluation examines the questions:

1. To what extent was the project successful in achieving each of the stated objectives: conducting applied research and evaluation, promoting the use of program research findings, and building the capacity of local organizations, national governments, and local researchers to conduct and use research?
2. What were the challenges of using the mechanism to achieve the intended objectives from the perspectives of the implementing partners (IPs), USAID Missions, and USAID/Washington?

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Supporting Evaluation and Research to Combat HIV (Project SEARCH) was designed to carry out research and evaluation to address information gaps and emerging issues and provide findings to be used to improve the coverage, quality, and effectiveness of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment programs worldwide. It was also expected to build the capacity of institutions and individuals in countries where USAID works to conduct HIV/AIDS research and public health evaluations through training and collaboration with the project's IPs.

The goal of Project SEARCH was to improve access to and quality of HIV services through applied program research. To do this, it was to perform three functions, using central (core) and Mission-funded (field support) task order (TO) activities²:

1. Design research that applies directly to developing country needs.
2. Disseminate lessons learned and best practices both locally and internationally; wherever possible, results should be submitted to peer-reviewed publications.
3. Work collaboratively with the public health sector and policy makers in-country.

In addition, where relevant contractors are expected to

- a. build local capacity by increasing the technical skills of developing country investigators, through training programs and by designing and implementing knowledge transfer to local in-country institutions; and
- b. work closely, as appropriate, with at least one U.S.-based or local (in-country) institutional review board (IRB).

Using an Indefinite Quantity Contract (IQC), after an open global competition awards were made to five IPs: Boston University, FHI 360, Futures Group International, Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs, and the Population Council. Individual task orders (TOs) were then issued for research or evaluation on specific topics, based on limited competition between the five IPs. This mechanism was intended to promote competition and assure that the best-qualified IP would be selected for each TO, while at the same time dramatically reducing the time and effort needed to contract for a specific evaluation or research need. USAID Missions could issue TOs themselves, and there were several broad Washington-issued TOs into which Missions could program field support for Mission-specific research or evaluation.

² From the Request for Proposals for TascThree, HIV/AIDS Research Sector Functional Area.

Project SEARCH, which was planned for 2007–12, had a ceiling of \$200 million. It was expected that most funding would come from Missions. A given TO could span five years starting at the time of award and could continue up to three years beyond the life of the Project SEARCH IQC.

The ordering period for the project ended in February 2012. By that time, nine TOs totaling close to \$100 million had been issued, mostly using core (USAID/W) funds. Five TO were initiated and primarily funded from core; four were country-specific and funded from the field. Four TOs with a total value of more than \$65 million continue; a few activities will not end until 2015. See Table I for all TOs and their current status.

Table I: Project SEARCH Task Orders

Task Order Title	Research/ Evaluation Question and Locations	Total Funding	Timing	IP*
Vulnerable Girls Initiative	Identify and evaluate promising practices that address the contextual factors that place some adolescent girls at high risk of HIV. Botswana, Malawi, and Mozambique	\$8 million (ceiling); used: \$4.45 mil. core, \$1.035 mil. field	2007–2010	JHU
OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children) Comprehensive Action Research	Address gaps in OVC programming knowledge and increase the evidence base for improving and scaling-up promising program models. Kenya, Nigeria, Namibia, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Zambia	\$18 million (ceiling), core and field	2008–2012	BU
Data Analysis and Triangulation for Evaluation (DATE)	Recommend changes in prevention programming based on an impact analysis of available quantitative and qualitative research findings. Nigeria	\$1 million field (Nigeria)	2009–2010	Futures
Ghana MARP (Most-at-Risk Populations) Program Evaluation	Conduct operations research (OR) on timely issues to improve design and implementation of interventions addressing MARP. Ghana.	\$796,000, field (Ghana)	2010–2014	BU
HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment, and Formative Research	Conduct evaluations and formative research to inform HIV/AIDS programming. Uganda	\$1.663 million, field (Uganda)	2008–2010	Pop. Council
HIV/AIDS Prevention Program Research (R2P)	Identify and address gaps in HIV prevention programming, provide tools for developing and evaluating prevention intervention models, and bolster the evidence base for improving HIV prevention programs. Worldwide	\$48.406 million (core and field)	2008 – 2013 (except Iringa project)	JHU

Task Order Title	Research/ Evaluation Question and Locations	Total Funding	Timing	IP*
OVC Mapping and Directory	Provide a directory of services and support for OVC. Throughout South Africa	\$2.992 million field (South Africa)	2008–2011	Pop. Council
HIV Core: Strengthening HIV and AIDS Treatment, Care and Support ,and PMTCT Service Delivery Programs	Identify critical knowledge gaps and conduct OR and evaluation to inform program strategies on treatment, care, support and PMTCT. Worldwide	\$11.9 million (core and field)	2010–2014	Pop. Council
PEPFAR Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Program Evaluation	Determine whether a multi-component model effectively and affordably addresses GBV. Tanzania	\$3 million (core)	2012–2015	Futures

*IP =Implementing partner.

As can be seen, the size and scope of individual TOs varied greatly. Table 2 shows activities performed under the nine TOs. Though space precludes listing all the activities under core projects, the activities noted here are those most often cited by informants.

Table 2: Project SEARCH: Illustrative Research and Evaluation Activities

Task Order	Activities
Vulnerable Girls Initiative (Go Girls Initiative)	Development and evaluation of a comprehensive program addressing girls' vulnerability, including structural (community, school), parental, and life skills factors
OVC Comprehensive Action Research (OVC-CARE)	10 research activities to improve OVC programming. Examples most often cited: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of the Child Status Index Tool in Malawi • Baseline evaluation of OVC services in Ethiopia • Costing of household economic strengthening interventions for OVC • Scale, scope, and impact of alternative care for OVC • Effectiveness of educational block grants to OVC
Data Analysis and Triangulation for Evaluation (DATE), Nigeria	Use of triangulation methodology to analyze data from different sources on PEPFAR ABC programs, determine impact of PEPFAR ABC programming, and identify data gaps
Ghana MARP Program Evaluation	Studies of nine different MARP groups, e.g., young female sex workers, prisoners in Kumasi Central Prison, post-secondary female students engaged in transactional sex, adolescent and young adult MSM, bar girls
HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment, and Formative Research, Uganda	Seven evaluative studies on, e.g., dimensions of vulnerability among children in Uganda, meaningful involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS through linkages between network groups and health facilities, formative evaluation of Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth, mid-term evaluation of AFFORD Health Marketing Initiative
HIV/AIDS Prevention Program Research (R2P)	29 activities addressing biomedical, structural, and behavioral aspects of prevention, some directed to data use and capacity building. Examples most often cited by informants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SYMMACS: Systematic Monitoring of Male Circumcision Scale-up in Eastern and Southern Africa • Combination Prevention for HIV in Iringa, Tanzania (and predecessor formative assessment) • Drug Use and HIV Risk among Young People in Guatemala • Formative Research among Female Sex Workers and MSM in Swaziland • Small Grants Program Round 2, MSM Research in Kenya, South Africa, and Senegal
OVC Mapping and Directory, South Africa	Inventory of all OVC programs in all nine provinces of South Africa to assess coverage and gaps
HIVCore: Strengthening HIV and AIDS Treatment, Care and Support and PMTCT Service Delivery Programs	Research in three areas: PMTCT, ART (antiretroviral treatment), and care and support; 14 studies underway or being designed, 12 core-funded and 2 field support. Illustrative topics: factors influencing adherence to treatment post-PMTCT testing; health system barriers to linkages from HCT to care and treatment; mental health needs of vulnerable children in Ethiopia
PEPFAR Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Program Evaluation (Tathmini GBV) Tanzania	Analysis of multi-component model to address GBV

The period for the overall IQC having ended, it is not available for new activities. USAID/OHA is considering a new project to meet the continuing need. This evaluation will inform its design.

III. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative performance evaluation. In addition to the document review, the analysis is based largely on the knowledge and insights of informants who have had experience with both Project SEARCH and other mechanisms for funding research and evaluation.

Under the GH Tech Bridge Project, two consultants with expertise in management, research, and evaluation conducted the evaluation October 9–December 15, 2012. The evaluators drew up a set of basic questions to elicit the information needed to answer the three questions set out in the evaluation scope of work (see Section I). The USAID/OHA Project SEARCH team helped to refine the questions. The evaluators then determined data sources (documentation and interviews) that would inform each one and drafted interview guides.

Documents were reviewed to identify what work has been done or is underway for each TO. Responses of those interviewed were assessed in order to

- determine where there is agreement on key activities and outcomes and the extent to which the project's objectives were or are expected to be achieved;
- identify specific examples that demonstrate the extent of progress on project objectives;
- gain perspectives on the importance or potential importance of project findings;
- find out how TO implementers plan to disseminate or have disseminated findings and learn how effective these efforts have been; and
- understand, in as much detail as possible, the extent to which efforts were made to build the capacity of local institutions.

Since many Project SEARCH activities are still underway, the evaluators were asked to make prospective assessments in terms of informant expectations about future outcomes, use of findings, and capacity-building achievements.

For reasons of procurement sensitivity, some information requested in the SOW was collected and provided to USAID separately in an 'internal memo' and is not included in this report.

DOCUMENTATION

Among the documents reviewed (see Appendix C) were the original IQC TO, TOs or requests for TO proposals (RFTOPs), concept papers for individual research activities, completed and interim reports of research and evaluation findings, recent workplans and semi-annual progress reports where available, examples of peer-reviewed publications, and project-related websites. The team also reviewed documents that described alternative funding mechanisms.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The evaluators used five interview guides (see Appendix D) tailored to separate groups of informants: lead personnel of IQC holders; TO project directors; USAID CORs (Contracting Officer's Representatives); USAID/Washington and Mission technical staff (who in some cases were TO activity managers); and host country IPs. In total 48 people were interviewed

(see Appendix B), encompassing the five IQC partners, directors or managers of all nine TOs, USAID Washington and Mission officers, and research partners from 10 African countries.

LIMITATIONS

Although evaluators made efforts to contact a wide range of informants, their familiarity with the details and functioning of Project SEARCH research and evaluation activities varied. For instance, USAID/Mission staff who had worked on the TOs for Uganda (HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment and Formative Research) and Nigeria (Data Analysis and Triangulation for Evaluation/DATE) were not available. Also, it was not possible to interview people in the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC), who might have presented different perspectives, for example on the role of the PEPFAR Technical Working Groups (TWG).

Most interviews were conducted by phone, and at times on international calls there were problems with technology and with language differences. Face-to-face interviews would have allowed for more probing and better follow-up.

Although background documents were provided to the evaluators, budget information was not made available.

It would also have been beneficial to review evaluations of alternative mechanisms for funding research, such as the Cooperative Agreement for HORIZONS.

The evaluation design allowed the evaluators one opportunity to meet to plan the design. If they could also have met for analysis, they would have been able to compare data more effectively.

IV. ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT SEARCH AND USAID RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Though not specifically stated in the scope of work, an important question for USAID is this: How relevant and valuable to PEPFAR future programming were the studies that were conducted?

Findings

1. Establishing Research Priorities

To assess the value of Project SEARCH's contribution, it is necessary to understand how USAID sets its own research priorities and how Project SEARCH fitted into that process.

As the process was described to the evaluators, the USAID/OHA technical advisor for a particular area identifies research and evaluation questions based on his or her expertise, sometimes with inputs from USAID Missions. The advisor then discusses these ideas with the PEPFAR TWG for that area, where members from other USG agencies may have different ideas about the most important research questions. Agreement has to be reached on what will be studied and how it will be funded. Since 2008 headquarters-funded activities, such as initiatives on vulnerable girls and on gender-based violence, have to be approved through the Annual Headquarters Operational Plan. One consideration is whether there is an appropriate mechanism, like Project SEARCH; whether the mechanism has sufficient time and funding ceiling remaining to carry out the work; and whether the IPs have the right skills and resources. Another consideration is where the research can be carried out. PEPFAR teams and relevant institutions of the countries in question have to agree.

Field-supported research and evaluation follows the same general procedures. Country PEPFAR TWGs review the USAID Mission's proposed activities, usually as part of the drafting of the Annual Country Operational Plan (COP). Missions take their research priorities not only from their own program questions but also from the national research agenda of the host country, which often emerges from multi-donor consultations.

2. PEPFAR Research Approval Process

How PEPFAR approves research and evaluation activities has evolved during the life of Project SEARCH. When Project SEARCH began, OGAC determined that the system of "targeted evaluations" then in use was resulting in poor-quality research and needed to be centralized. The result was a shift to public health evaluations (PHE). PHEs are studies that guide PEPFAR in formulating programs and policies, inform the global community, and identify areas where further evaluation and research may be needed. Funded centrally, PHEs support both globally significant and country-specific questions, though emphasis is on the former. PHE budgets receive intensive central interagency review and have to be approved before being incorporated into a COP.

Basic program evaluations (BPE) are local studies of how a program is implemented and its direct effect on the populations benefiting. BPEs tend not to generalize beyond the people

immediately served and do not compare program models or use a randomized design; rather, they usually include needs assessments, formative and process evaluations, and some limited outcomes evaluation. Plans for BPEs are included in the COP but until FY 2012 did not require prior central approval.³

Because many of the planned Project SEARCH activities fell within the PHE definition, they required much more interagency scrutiny and analytical rigor than either the IPs or USAID staff had anticipated, though over time both USAID CORs and IPs developed a greater understanding of PHE requirements and became more adept at navigating the interagency process. OGAC eventually revised the research approval process, such as shifting to Implementation Science, creating a scientific advisory board, and allocating available funds directly to the three agencies implementing competitive awards: USAID, the CDC, and the NIH.⁴ These steps have now accelerated the approval process, but it was a major stumbling block for at least the first half of the project.

3. The Pace of HIV/AIDS Programming

A final factor that affected the ability of Project SEARCH to address the most important needs for future programming is the exceptionally fast pace at which PEPFAR and the global HIV/AIDS community set programming priorities and scale up programs. Research, on the other hand, requires time-consuming design and review, IRB approval, implementation, and thorough analysis. Although PEPFAR guidance calls for scientific evidence before programmatic decisions are made, informants cited several examples in which PEPFAR program changes limited the value of Project SEARCH research:

- Voluntary medical male circumcision scale-up was well underway before the R2P male circumcision (SYMMACS) study results were available.
- PEPFAR prevention programming had moved beyond multiple concurrent partnership (MCP) issues by the time R2P work on MCP was finished.
- The Child Status Index was accepted by PEPFAR and UNICEF and marketed globally before OVC-CARE could evaluate its validity.

Conclusions

These factors, coupled with interviews and other considerations to be discussed later, led to the following conclusions about the relevance of Project SEARCH to USAID research priorities and to future programming:

1. The USAID HIV/AIDS is the product of many different factors, such as annual planning by individual TWGs (not necessarily done systematically) and OGAC special initiatives. There did not seem to be a coherent, global, longer-term agenda to address evaluation and research questions as they arise. Project SEARCH could not be expected to address the highest research priorities if these priorities were not clearly defined and communicated.
2. Other factors have prevented Project SEARCH from being nimble enough to get high-priority research done and research results out on a timetable that meets the rapid pace of PEPFAR program change. PEPFAR approval processes and contracting issues are

³ Information on PHEs and BPEs is taken from the FY 09 PHE Guidance.

⁴ Implementation science funds do not go through Project SEARCH but through a separate Annual Program Statement built on priorities set by the PEPFAR scientific review board.

complicated and themselves change rapidly (on this see Section V on the effectiveness of the IQC mechanism).

3. Nevertheless, Project SEARCH has generated many findings that informants consider valuable for future programming, some of which are described below. Major R2P and HIVCore activities still underway are also expected to have useful outcomes.
4. Project SEARCH has made contributions to global policy and programming (e.g., the OVC education guidelines, costing analyses) and is expected to contribute more when all TOs are completed. Based upon informant perceptions of the work to date, however, the greatest value for future programming is from research and evaluation activities that are specific to each country. Nearly all examples that informants were able to cite about how project outcomes have affected programming were at the country level.

OBJECTIVE 1: CONDUCTING PROGRAM RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

This section responds to the evaluation question: “To what extent was the project successful in conducting applied research and evaluation?”

Project SEARCH has funded at least 80 separate activities within its nine TOs, some of which are just now getting underway. Since this evaluation could not examine and assess the progress and findings of each, the team focused on how informants perceived the general success of the project in meeting their expectations and on research and evaluation activities that informants found particularly memorable—either for their importance or for issues they entailed (see Table 3, which gives a picture of the range of research and evaluation supported by the project).

Table 3: Examples of Outcomes and Their Use

Task Order	Illustrative Outcomes	Identified Uses
Vulnerable Girls Initiative (Go Girls)	<i>Achieved:</i> Teaching tools and methodology for programs to reduce girls’ vulnerability, including the Vulnerable Girls Index and the Supportive Community Index	Materials are being used by Peace Corps and IRD in Mozambique; JHUCCP has adapted materials for use in R2P; Peace Corps South Africa considering using it; Malawi communities in the GGI program continue to use elements of the program.
Data Analysis and Triangulation for Evaluation	<i>Achieved:</i> A good picture of current programs and program gaps in Nigeria and a balanced score card methodology.	Not known.
OVC Comprehensive Action Research	<i>Achieved:</i> Good baseline assessment in Ethiopia that provides protocols and a database for impact evaluation; knowledge about vulnerability of children in Zambia; improved understanding of education financing for OVCs; improved understanding of costing of basic services for OVCs.	Findings on the Child Status Index (CSI) contributed to revisions in how it is used. Education finance work fed into OVC educational guidelines. Vulnerability findings in Ghana were used for USAID follow-on activities. USAID/Ethiopia is designing impact evaluations using the baseline assessment.
HIV/AIDS Prevention Program Research (R2P)	<i>Achieved:</i> Confirmation of quality and safety of VMMC services and identification of areas for improvement; validation of adaptable methodology for country-level communications studies;	Swaziland outcome led USAID to focus on MARPs, Global Fund application focused on MARPs, and new multidonor MARP TWGs. Interim findings on male circumcision led

Task Order	Illustrative Outcomes	Identified Uses
	<p>identification of high prevalence rates among sex workers in Swaziland; effectiveness of small community engagement programs in reaching MSM and getting them tested.</p> <p><i>Expected:</i> Understanding of the impact of multiple interventions on prevention if brought to scale at once; knowledge of cost-effectiveness of alternative interventions.</p>	<p>to efficiency improvements in each site. Small-grants outcomes on MSM in South Africa fed into National AIDS Strategy.</p>
OVC Mapping and Directory	<p><i>Achieved:</i> Children’s service directory for every province, verification of service providers.</p>	<p>USAID procured follow-on support to update directory and alter IT system so that government can maintain it.</p>
MARP Program Evaluation	<p>Improved understanding of vulnerability factors for key MARPs in Ghana.</p>	<p>Based on three finished studies, prison service is using findings for informed support to prisoners with HIV; local groups and USAID-supported projects are using findings on MARPS (FSW and MSM).</p>
HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment, and Formative Research	<p>Identified sustainability of USAID-supported NGOs; recommended actions to strengthen M&E of organizations; recommended changes to improve effectiveness of organizations; confirmed effectiveness of social marketing.</p>	<p>Recommendations led to overhaul in Hospice Uganda operations. Ugandan government now willing to do social marketing through the private sector. Analysis of OVCs fed into Uganda HIV strategic plan.</p>
HIVCore	<p><i>Expected:</i> Understanding of how task-shifting affects adherence to treatment, how to ensure disabled people to access HCT, how to better link HCT and care; PMTCT guidelines adaptable to different countries; identification of OVCs in need of special psychosocial support in Ethiopia.</p>	<p>Too early to tell.</p>
Tathmini Gender-Based Violence Program	<p><i>Achieved:</i> Identified gaps in multicomponent GBV programs.</p> <p><i>Expected:</i> Understanding of the effect of a multicomponent model on GBV and factors that increased use of services.</p>	<p>Gaps in existing GBV programs are being filled.</p>

Findings

1. Some Dissatisfaction with the Research

Virtually all of the respondents who were familiar with more than one or two activities were disappointed that the project has not produced the number and breadth of high-quality research outcomes they expected, and that it has attracted much less field support than planned. USAID informants were particularly dissatisfied with research results that did not tell them anything new. Some of USAID’s disappointment had to do with process issues that reduced or revised project design. Misunderstandings and lack of agreement on research design between USAID

and the TO holders frustrated USAID officers and IPs and led to implementation delays. There were frustrations with the time each study took for review and approval and with the negotiation process with the contracting office. Negotiation costs and delays sometimes meant that the scope, timing, and budget of a research project had to be reduced. IPs were also disappointed by the small number and relatively low value of most TOs.

2. Variable Partner Performance

USAID informants were not entirely satisfied with the performance of any of the IPs who won TOs. For each IP, there were instances where USAID informants were pleased with its work and others where they were not. Performance issues were attributed to lack of understanding of contract requirements, differing views about how the research would be used, and mismatch between the needs of the research and the skill sets of investigators, including their knowledge of the problems to be studied. There was disappointment that even though an IP had expertise, the personnel selected did not always have the most experience with or knowledge of the issue.

3. Useful Outcomes

Despite these disappointments, most activities informants mentioned—even those with performance problems or delays—did produce valuable outcomes. For example:

- Go Girls! did not produce insights about what kinds of interventions are most helpful to reduce the vulnerability of girls to HIV risk, as had been hoped, but it did produce a series of toolkits that other programs have adopted. It has been popular where it was implemented and has received widespread recognition.
- The OVC Directory in South Africa used technology too complicated for the Department of Social Welfare to maintain, but it did provide the first-ever comprehensive child services directory, and USAID was able to improve the IT through a follow-on project.
- Although the OVC CARE project did not conduct a full-impact evaluation of USAID/Ethiopia's OVC program, it did draw up key questions for the impact evaluation and provided the baseline data.

In many cases, although USAID did not get as full or as in-depth an answer to its research questions as it wanted, it did get a partial answer—but getting even a partial answer sometimes entailed a degree of negotiation, communication, directiveness, and redesign that was frustrating to both sides.

4. Best Results on Small Projects

The project appears to have done best in achieving desired outcomes when a study was specific to the needs of a particular country and there was substantial involvement from knowledgeable people in-country—including USAID field staff—in defining the issues and research design. This was the case, for instance, of the R2P research on HIV prevalence among MARP in Swaziland, the OVC CARE research on household vulnerability factors for children in Zambia, the MARP program evaluation in Ghana, and the R2P impact evaluation of an MCP communications campaign in Mozambique. All were field-support funded.

5. Good Potential for Future Outcomes

For TOs where significant activities are still underway—HIVCore, R2P (especially Iringa Combination Prevention), and Tathmini GBV—expectations are high. There are good research

teams in place and good local partners. The challenge will be to complete ambitious research projects within the time and funding available.

Conclusion

Project SEARCH has not conducted applied research and evaluation in either the quantity or the quality expected, primarily because of the interagency review process, implementation issues, disagreements on research design, and personnel mismatches (see Section V). Nonetheless, some good research has been done and some useful outcomes produced. Expectations of what the project could achieve were probably unrealistic, given the timing and budget constraints.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTING USE OF PROGRAM RESEARCH FINDINGS

The second objective of Project SEARCH is to “Disseminate lessons learned and best practices both locally and internationally; wherever possible results should be submitted to peer-reviewed publications.” To assess progress here, the evaluators asked questions addressing the promotion and use of findings resulting from the TOs.

Findings

1. Usefulness of Findings

Most informants (e.g., USAID, IPs, and host country participants) found useful the findings of many Project SEARCH studies and evaluations, even if they did not provide the hoped-for breadth. In general, specific findings were most useful at the local and national rather than global levels. For example, in Uganda evaluation of a local hospice group led to reorganization of the program. In Ghana, the findings from the first study conducted in prisons are already being used to support services for HIV-positive prisoners (see also Table 3).

2. Variation in Dissemination Strategies

Although the IQC RFP requires that project findings be disseminated, the evaluation found variation in the specificity of strategies to promote use of research results. Most of the completed studies reported organizing local and national events to present findings, and some stressed the importance of reaching study participants in their communities. National dissemination formats included meetings or workshops with representatives from USAID Missions, Ministry of Health and other government departments, national HIV/AIDS commissions, local HIV/AIDS organizations, and other groups and individuals involved with related activities. The IPs, such as JHU, organized seminars for their own institutions, although permission for public dissemination required a lengthy USAID negotiation and approval process. Research findings were also shared internationally at AIDS conferences. For example, BU and JHU supported host country researchers to present at the International AIDS Society in Washington in July 2012. Some informants noted that budgets allow only limited participation in international venues.

3. Disseminating Findings Within USAID

Some informants raised questions about how best to engage USAID/HQ in dissemination activities. Project SEARCH did not budget for IPs to travel to Washington, which limited interaction between IQC holders located outside the DC area. Another issue relates to how best to organize dissemination meetings to fit into USAID/HQ availability; some USAID meetings were not well-attended.

4. Dissemination of Reports

All Project SEARCH studies and evaluations submit a final report to USAID. However, some were concerned that reports are not widely read. Reports also fall within the category of “gray literature” and although current technology has improved access to it, there is still no plan for formal distribution of unpublished reports. Short papers and newsletters are also distributed to share project outcomes and other findings. For example, several informants talked about the value of the R2P Prevention Intervention Fact Sheets for making earlier research findings more accessible. Websites can also be a venue for sharing research findings, although some IPs and contractors had problems getting permission to distribute research results via the web.

5. Use of Data

USAID has ownership of the data, which it can put on its website. Some informants are concerned about confidentiality issues related to public access to sensitive data because of the vulnerability of study populations. Also, IRB approval is given to the principal investigator, who is responsible for confidentiality but has no control because USAID owns the data.

6. Lack of a Project SEARCH Dissemination Strategy

Although IPs and contractors must have a dissemination plan, USAID itself does not have a detailed plan for promoting the use of project results.

7. Peer-reviewed Publications

Publication of peer-reviewed articles is a major issue for IPs, subcontractors, and USAID. It is generally agreed that one of the most effective ways to reach a global audience, especially policy makers, is through peer-reviewed journals. However, although the IQC RFP states that “wherever possible results should be submitted to peer-reviewed publications,” the TO contracts do not always allow time for writing articles or the financial resources to support this time-consuming process. Thus, there is inconsistency between what is expected and the reality. Nonetheless, at least four of the TOs (Go Girls!, R2P, OVC CARE, and HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment and Formative Research) have generated peer-reviewed publications.

The situation is complicated because the attitudes of USAID and of IPs and subcontractors differ. Some USAID HQ and Mission informants expressed a concern that IPs (especially university-based researchers) were withholding the most important research results from reports in order to present interesting findings in peer-reviewed articles. Several informants said that IPs were more interested in publishing than in sharing program-useful results. On the other hand, USAID/ Mission staff wanted findings to be available immediately to inform programming and did not want to wait for the results to appear in peer-reviewed articles.

8. Importance of Early User Involvement

Many informants have concluded that research findings are most likely to be used when host country stakeholders, both within and outside government, help to design the research. The Tathmini GBV TO characterizes this approach. To paraphrase one knowledgeable informant, “At the end there will be people and institutions in government who have had the experience and understand it. When positive outcomes are demonstrated, going to scale will be easy because protocols and methodology will have been tested and are understood.” Similarly, to paraphrase a Go Girls! informant, “This project design realized that the problems were the community’s problems, so instead of providing incentives to the community (as most projects

do), it persuaded the community to take ownership. As a result, most of the vulnerable girls were identified.”

9. Lack of Information about Actual Use of Research Results

Neither IP nor USAID informants could cite evidence that research results were actually used, because projects were not required to document that. Since findings are used after the evaluation or research is completed and IQC holders have no funds to analyze the extent to which they have been used, they cannot be expected to collect this information. Therefore what the evaluators learned about how findings have been used so far is anecdotal.

Conclusions

Project SEARCH has achieved its objective of promoting use of research findings, but it is not possible to assess the extent to which findings have actually been used. It has been successful in producing peer-reviewed publications and more are likely to emerge from R2P, HIVCore, and Tathmini GBV, despite the lack of direct USAID funding for these activities and the conflict that sometimes occurred between the need for immediate program-useful results and the additional time and resources needed to produce publishable reports.

Recommendations

1. USAID needs to resolve issues related to data use at the beginning of a project. Without agreement about how the researcher may use the data produced by the project, it is not realistic for USAID to expect researcher commitment and creativity beyond the terms of the contract. The issue also relates to control over presentation of sensitive and confidential data on public venues. All parties need to understand and agree about how data produced by an activity may be used.
2. Besides requiring IPs to have a dissemination plan, USAID needs to have its own strategy to more actively disseminate research findings and market outcomes.
3. Early in the research design, local populations and organizations should be involved in order to increase use of the outcomes.
4. If USAID wishes to understand which promotion activities work best, it needs to incorporate into the project a means of assessing actual use of research and evaluation results. This may require a separate survey after the project ends.

OBJECTIVE 3: BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY TO CONDUCT AND USE HIV RESEARCH

The third objective to improve access to and quality of HIV services through applied program research was “To build the capacity of local organizations, national government, and local researchers to conduct and use applied HIV research.”

Findings

1. Inconsistency in Task Order Capacity-building Requirements

The IQC RFP stated that contractors were expected to “develop local capacity by increasing technical skills of developing country investigators via training programs, and by designing and implementing knowledge transfer to local in-country institutions.” However, based on a review of the TOs and interview data, it is clear that less focus was given to local capacity-building than the RFP called for. Several TOs did not incorporate any capacity-building expectations. Among the field-generated RFTOPs, only the Nigeria project (DATE) had a specific capacity-building

objective. Among the core-funded RFTOPs, only R2P and HIVCore have capacity-building objectives, though the HIVCore workplan contains no reference to capacity building. The Population Council did propose two HIVCore capacity-building activities, but USAID did not approve them, presumably because the TO did not allow sufficient time to obtain study results. The evaluators did not have access to the RFTOP or task order for Tathmini GBV but were advised that it does not give any priority to capacity building.

During discussions with USAID Mission and HQ staff and IQC and project personnel, informants emphasized the technical inputs and skill sets required to work quickly within a tight time frame to get the type of product needed and the time and input required for capacity building. For most contracts, the emphasis was on the research or evaluation product, which limited the involvement of local research groups in capacity-building, such as collaboratively designing the research.

2. Lack of Capacity-Building Strategies

Most IPs and contractors said that there was a requirement to work with local partners, and many identified working together with local researchers and local organizations as capacity building through learning by doing. Although presumably there was learning and some enhanced skill development from such shared experiences, it can also be questioned whether just working with a local partner is any guarantee that research capacity is being built. Some IPs take standard capacity-building actions. For example, BU puts together a capacity-building plan with senior and junior researchers on the team, but this is strictly informal and not measured.

Most TOs specified no formal capacity-building activities, such as specific technical assistance (TA), training, and a strategy to assess skill development. Informants said that in many countries, local partners already have solid research skills. Where capacity building is especially needed is in areas like research design, data collection, data analysis, report writing, and presentation. These activities would require budgeting to provide specific TA, training, and follow-up with local researchers and organizations to assess progress and intervene as needed. Informants emphasized follow-up as a serious need. Other areas identified as weaknesses of local partners were management of research, data quality, qualitative research, and community-based research.

Informants were asked about methods for identifying local research partners. The approaches described were again primarily informal, e.g., references through personal and professional networks, through their organization's country or regional offices, and through USAID Missions. Because there was pressure to deliver a product within a specified time, IPs said they looked for groups that already had experience and relevant skills and thus could work quickly without needing extensive support. However, it was not clear how the capacity of local researchers was assessed other than by reputation.

3. Capacity Building in R2P

R2P is the only TO that incorporates activities specifically designed to promote capacity building and performance monitoring plan (PMP) indicators to measure capacity development beyond just training. R2P workplans reportedly incorporate capacity-building plans, but these are not spelled out in the concept papers.

The most important single R2P capacity-building activity is the Small Grants Program, particularly in the second round of grants, which went to studies in Kenya, South Africa, and Senegal. In addition to a formal training session at JHU in Baltimore for study participants, the

project director provided mentoring for all components of the research process, including assistance with preparation of findings for publication and presentations at local, national, and international venues. Participation in international meetings was viewed as part of capacity building by providing opportunities for interaction with the global HIV/AIDS community and broader exposure to the issues, such as participation in the IAS. The Small Grants Program had a budget to support these activities, including building presentation skills for getting information back to the community. The project director suggested that indicators of capacity development include increased ability to think through and draft concept papers and design studies, collect and analyze data, and write up and present the findings with a minimum of outside support. For example, researchers could be encouraged to write follow-on proposals independently, then provide feedback on them. To build capacity, follow-up and longer-term support is necessary. Interviews with in-country informants confirmed the perception that principal investigators, researchers, and institutions felt that they benefited from participation in Small Grants Program-supported studies and their follow-on activities, most of which were apparently activities conducted without Project SEARCH support but motivated by researcher concerns.

Small Grants researchers interviewed cited such achievements in capacity building as

- health workers trained in social and behavioral research;
- heightened skills of coordinators and counselors in research management, data management, and community-based data collection; and
- increased capacity of local community organizations to provide outreach to MSMs.

Building the capacity of front-line health workers and community organizations is no doubt of importance in improving community-based research because it promotes access to MARP groups. Informants tagged the need for academic researchers to learn more about working with community-oriented programs and qualitative research. The evaluators wonder, however, if USAID had such a broad view of capacity building when Project SEARCH was launched, or whether USAID intended that the focus be on building capacity of research institutions themselves.

The Iringa Combination Prevention Project also reportedly has a strong capacity-building component that includes

- training community workers to improve outreach to high-risk people;
- building capacity for laboratory infrastructure;
- improving the training program at the Primary Health Care Institute at Iringa;
- a grants program for training in public health based on the project database, to help grantees use and synthesize data; and
- production of a web-based data system that will enable people to use data effectively by more sophisticated reporting of results in real time.

4. *Lack of Time and Resources for Capacity Building*

Designing and doing research takes longer when it is being used as a means to build capacity. Because of time and resource constraints and the pressure to produce results quickly, IPs chose

local partners on the basis of their ability to contribute to the process rather than on their capacity- building needs.

5. No Measurement of Progress in Building Capacity

There are no criteria to measure learning or assess change in capacity as a result of participation in Project SEARCH research activities. Even the R2P indicators are primarily counting output numbers. Changes in skills are admittedly difficult to measure, but some informants suggested possible proxy measures, such as whether the individual or organization was asked to do other research projects or received research grants as a result of this experience, and whether a group serving as a sub becomes the prime on a later project.

6. Capacity of Individuals Versus Institutions

Most of the capacity building described, except for the R2P activities, focuses on individuals and assumes that individual will translate into institutional capacity building. For example, for the GBV project in Tanzania, the local partner was MUHAS and the research team consisted of a senior and two junior faculty members. Although the informant did not describe any formal training component, it was assumed that the capacity of junior faculty would be enhanced through participation in the research under the direction of the senior faculty member, who was only available part-time. It was also assumed that enhancing the skills of junior faculty would build institutional capacity. However, questions were raised about how to ensure that junior faculty members would remain at the university, as there is no program or incentive to retain people who are trained or obtain research experience. Similarly, in Ghana it was said that a mechanism or agreement to build on successful research capacity (for example, by awarding follow-on research contracts or grants) would benefit the university and USAID in the long term, by building a database of expertise. In Uganda, it was suggested, an MOU with the university, rather than contracts with individual faculty members, would help build institutional capacity.

7. Definition of Research Capacity

The evaluators found a lack of clarity about how USAID defines research and evaluation capacity building; informants seem to interpret it very broadly. From USAID's perspective, what was the purpose of incorporating capacity building into Project SEARCH? Was the intent to build the capacity of local researchers to design and conduct research, for local health workers to better understand and utilize research findings, or both?

8. Informants Unable to Give Examples of Improved Capacities

This is perhaps the most telling finding of all about capacity-building: if a wide range of informants could not cite many examples demonstrating that capacities were improved by Project SEARCH activities, it is necessary to conclude that either (a) there are not many, or (b) nobody cared enough to check back. Of generalizations, the team heard many; of specifics only a few, and even those were quite general:

- CEDEP, the Malawi group that was a sub of JHUCCP for work with MSM, is now applying for a research grant on its own, with only some technical support from JHU.
- The researcher who worked with JHUCCP on the Guatemala drug use risk study learned NVIVO and is now applying it in other studies.

- TAYO, the Malawi organization that participated in the Go Girls! activity, learned how to approach the community effectively and monitor projects. This has enabled TAYO to work on other projects with the AIDS Commission.
- Graduate students who participated in data collection and analysis in the Uganda Formative Research project have been made supervisors in another study and have been asked to work with other organizations because of the experience they gained.

Conclusions

A combination of factors prevented most Project SEARCH TOs from meeting the stated objective of building local capacity, among them

- lack of clear definition of and objectives for capacity building to guide IPs;
- no requirements for incorporating capacity-building strategies and targets in research design;
- no agreed ways of measuring and assessing capacity building progress;
- lack of sufficient budget and time to conduct capacity-building activities effectively; and
- the inherent conflict between getting research findings out and working with local institutions to build skills.

Except in a few components of R2P, there were only anecdotal reports of capacity-building achievements.

Recommendations

1. USAID needs to clearly define capacity building, the intended targets (those whose capacity should be built), and the resources required (e.g., financial, TA, and time-frame).
2. To achieve the capacity-building objective, it will be necessary to balance the emphasis on desired product outcomes and on capacity building.
3. In-country university-based senior researchers are aware of local research needs and could be consulted on the best ways to build capacity.
4. Measures and targets for capacity building should be agreed upon between USAID and the IPs from the very beginning, and baseline information collected and resources in place to measure changes in capacity, even if this means that some data collection occurs after the activity has ended.
5. To build institutional capacity, agreements or MOUs should be made with institutions rather than individuals.
6. For Project SEARCH research studies not yet completed, such as Iringa and Tathmini GBV, efforts should be made to include formal assessment of capacity-building activities and outcomes.

V. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IQC MECHANISM: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE IQC MECHANISM

Findings

I. *Issues not Related to the Procurement Model*

A number of implementation issues prevented Project SEARCH from making as much progress as USAID had hoped or attracting as much field support as was projected. As informants responded to interview questions about the effectiveness, strengths, and weaknesses of the mechanism, they cited some issues that were *not* a function of the mechanism—issues that would have arisen no matter what model USAID used.

- a. PEPFAR processes and relationships: PEPFAR interagency review, especially the PHE process, made it difficult and very time-consuming to access project resources for some activities. This was considered the most important reason for limited field buy-in.
- b. Overambitious planning: For many activities, both USAID and the IPs had unrealistic expectations about how much can be accomplished within three to five years and within approved budgets. Considering the whole process from research design through post-activity analysis, a three-year activity really could not plan on more than one year of implementation. The IRB review, which in some cases had to take place in multiple countries for just one study, was frequently cited as a reason for delay. Even five years is barely enough to allow for activities that promote use of findings and build institutional capacity. Given the strictures of the USAID procurement process, a project meant to support research does better to address relatively small research questions of importance to particular programs or country situations rather than broader programmatic questions that require multi-year implementation and analysis.
- c. Inexperience: Some problems related to IPs and USAID CORs being inexperienced in managing contracts. As a result there was miscommunication and learning by trial and error that frustrated both sides, especially early on. When both sides learned the ropes or more experienced personnel took over, many of the problems subsided.
- d. Partner performance: There were some performance problems unrelated to the contracting mechanism, as might be found with any procurement model.
- e. Differing perceptions of the purpose of the research: USAID staff and IPs may have had different expectations about the results desired. Even within USAID, the evaluators found a lack of clarity about the relative importance of peer-reviewed publication to promote global dissemination of research results versus immediate release of program-useful findings. This appears to be much more a communications issue than a function of the procurement mechanism.
- f. Tacking research on to field programs: There can be difficulties aligning centrally funded research with field projects carried out by different IPs, but given its research focus and the

time limitations of individual TOs, Project SEARCH cannot be used for the entire activity (implementation and research). Some informants thus found that the project worked best for formative research or for field-supported or single-country activities where Mission staff could coordinate the work of the research partner with that of the IP.

2. Advantages of the IQC Mechanism

USAID uses IQCs because they provide for wide competition over a broad scope of services yet allow Missions to choose among pre-qualified partners and thereby expedite contracting for specific activities. Informants noted several strong points of the IQC mechanism, but most have to be qualified.

- a. Simplified competition process: The IQC competition means that for a given TO, competition is limited to previously qualified partners. As noted in the “disadvantages” section below, however, the TO process was itself a disincentive to use by field missions.
- b. Ease of field buy-in to large TOs: Within one of the global TOs (OVC-CARE, R2P, HIV Core), field support buy-in is a quick, easy way to obtain needed resources. The limitation here is that the activity must fall within the general purpose of the TO and cannot exceed the time or ceiling remaining in it.
- c. Confidence in the partners: Some respondents felt that because the partners were selected on the basis of their competence to do HIV/AIDS research and evaluation, scopes of work can be written rather broadly. However, others felt that the project worked best when there was greater clarity about what USAID wanted and how it was to be done.
- d. Ability to deal with performance issues: When there are issues of partner performance, USAID can be more directive under a contract than under a cooperative agreement.

3. Disadvantages of the IQC Mechanism

- a. Time and resources needed for TOs: Except for buy-ins to existing TOs, the mechanism is time-consuming to access and expensive for partners. For USAID, the process of getting TOs competed and approved takes considerable time: the South Africa OVC Directory (about \$3 million) took a year, the Ghana MARP Program Evaluation (less than \$1 million) 13 months, and R2P (\$49 million) 18 months. Partners have to write numerous proposals: once for the IQC and once for every TO they bid on. One IP estimates having spent about \$500,000 just on proposal preparation for the IQC and its task orders. Unless there is heavy field demand or the task orders are large, some question whether it is worth the effort to compete. For several informants, time lost for review and approval was a major concern, although a few did note that even though the process took time, USAID/W was usually quick in responding.
- b. Impact on collaboration, flexibility, creativity: This type of research calls for collaboration between researcher, donor, and participating country institutions. All have issues and ideas to be considered and contributions to make. The research also requires flexibility, because from start to finish changes occur frequently. Under a contract, USAID calls for a specific deliverable the partner is to produce. The contract has to be very clear as to how the work will be done, the intermediate steps, and how much each will cost. Changes require approvals, but with research frequent changes are the rule rather than the exception. One IQC informant described a plethora of communications just to host a brown bag seminar. With such disincentives to make changes, there is little scope for collaboration and little

flexibility. Innovation and creativity can be stifled. It is possible to do research under these circumstances without major implementation problems if both partner and USAID COR are experienced and share a good relationship. Lack of collaboration matters more for research than for evaluation, for which the partner is asked to provide an independent judgment, and collaboration is not expected.

- c. Impact on trust: The relationship between USAID as purchaser and an IP as producer of a deliverable specified by USAID sets up a very different relationship than would be the case under an Assistance mechanism. To paraphrase one informant, “A contract shifts the mindset of how you expect people to work.” Some informants felt that the researchers could not take ownership of the activity because the product belonged to USAID. It was clear from comments by both USAID and IPs that the mechanism had the effect of eroding trust. USAID staff often questioned the motivation of IPs (e.g. more interested in publications than in getting useful program information out); IPs at times expressed frustration with USAID’s limited research capabilities. As one USAID informant put it, “The relationship with partners has not been mutually respectful and collaborative.”
- d. Capacity of the OHA research team to manage contracts: USAID/OHA has a highly competent but very small research team whose expertise is called upon worldwide. USAID has no real research infrastructure. Many USAID and IP informants alike questioned whether, with its global responsibilities for technical support, USAID has sufficient in-house expertise to give the time needed for contract oversight. One USAID officer put it very well: “We do not have enough people who understand the methodologies needed for Implementation Science research to provide the kind of direction to the research partner that is expected under a contract—and our implementing partners know it. It makes us look bad to try to do that when we’re not staffed to do it.”
- e. Absence of broad vision: The IQC mechanism in this case, informants felt, did not lead to a broad vision or holistic approach to research. Though USAID made efforts to bring the five IPs together to discuss progress and do brainstorming on research needs, the mechanism worked against this, because the partners were in competition with each other. There was no central dissemination of results, and no formal (funded) mechanism to share information and issues either between the partners and the OHA research team or more broadly within USAID and PEPFAR. There is not even a good, up-to-date website.
- f. Limited involvement of host country in research design: Informants felt that the contracts in this case made it difficult for the IP to involve host country representatives in research design early on unless this was built into the contract. Informants felt it was important for the success of any activity that the IPs have close relationships with local institutions, particularly because so much HIV/AIDS work is sensitive. It is challenging to build such relationships and obtain rapid approvals if local institutions are not in from the very start. In recent procurements the project has gotten better at ensuring this. In the Iringa Combination Prevention Study and Tathmini GBV, Tanzanian institutions have been active early participants.

- g. Low Mission awareness of project resources: Marketing of project resources is problematic. Because they are contractors, IPs are prohibited from marketing the project. Without a marketing push from USAID/OHA, Mission knowledge of the mechanism was limited to what they found on the USAID website or from OHA technical advisors responding to specific queries.
- h. Compromises on research/evaluation scope and quality: Preparing a TO takes more time and effort than many Missions can afford. The ability to obtain technical resources by providing field support to an existing TO is a major plus but is sometimes outweighed if there is not a good fit with the research the Mission needs. Partners selected for broad expertise in HIV/AIDS research do not necessarily have the best skill set for a particular activity or an in-country network of contacts to facilitate the work. Time remaining on a TO may not be enough to complete the local research desired. Missions in some cases compromised on the partners they used and cut back on research in the interest of moving quickly on the procurement. It is recognized, however, that this can also be an issue with other procurement models.
- i. Lack of consistent core staff to undertake research: Under a contract, because partners have little or no budget to maintain a core staff, staffing for individual activities within a TO has to be piecemeal. There is no guarantee that the most qualified investigator will be available for a particular activity. It also means that USAID and the IP have to build new relationships for every TO and every activity within it. This has strained USAID relationships with partners, which further undermines trust.
- j. Lack of clarity on data use: With Under a contract, USAID owns the data and the deliverables, but the IP must secure IRB approvals. This is a built-in conflict. USAID has encouraged IPs to incorporate Project SEARCH findings into peer-reviewed publications, but data use is still problematic and came up frequently in interviews. The evaluators were advised that USAID does not have a data use policy; nor does it have a data warehousing facility.

Conclusion

Though the IQC mechanism provides a greater measure of competition than cooperative agreements, for a research program like Project SEARCH many informants found that the disadvantages far outweigh that. It is generally believed that good research results from collaboration among many parties and the ability to make changes and adapt the research design as new information emerges. Contracts seem to make both collaboration and adaptation difficult.

USAID ADS 304, “Selecting the Appropriate Acquisition and Assistance (A&A) Implementation Instrument,” states that a contract is indicated when USAID “acquires surveys, studies, and research which provide specific information to USAID for its direct activities.” Among situations where a grant or cooperative agreement should be used, it specifies when “the funded activities complement USAID’s mission but the awardee will not implement the program as agents of the U.S. Government; i.e., the USG is supporting the program but is not running it.” Although the ADS indicates the use of a contract for surveys, studies, and research, many of the informants felt that with a contract day-to-day oversight and technical direction was unduly burdensome.

Project SEARCH was able to accomplish some good research and evaluation; despite the perceived challenges of conducting research under a contract mechanism. USAID and the IPs found ways to make work, but it was often at a high cost in time and resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Four important policies affect the design of any project with aims similar to those of Project SEARCH:

1. USAID's evaluation policy calls for more rigorous, independent evaluation of all major projects, specifying that on average, at least 3 percent of the program budget managed by an operating unit should be dedicated to external evaluation. This policy creates both demand and resources for high-quality evaluations.
2. USAID's Implementation and Procurement Reform (IPR) calls for increased reliance on new partners—particularly from the host country—for program implementation, to support increased country ownership and capacity building. USAID's goal is to provide 30 percent of program resources directly to host country partners by 2015.
3. The Global Health Initiative also calls for greater country ownership and gives priority to strategic integration and coordination among USG programs and global health partnerships to share knowledge and use resources more efficiently.
4. Finally, interagency decision-making continues to be the operating principle for PEPFAR, which also calls for closer involvement of host country governments and other stakeholders.

Interagency Involvement

Project designers should think carefully about how other PEPFAR agencies will be engaged, both in Washington and in the field, and spell this out clearly in the project design, with the emphasis on getting initial inputs from other agencies on research design to be built into individual activity agreements with partners.

Clarity on Project Objectives and Procedures

- *Overall project objectives:* It is probably unrealistic to expect that USAID can develop its own longer-term research agenda and priorities in more than a general sense, given the interagency process and the rapidity of changes in HIV/AIDS programming. Project SEARCH has done best at answering questions of immediate relevance to specific country programs or specific programming issues. Such worthy research outcomes are perhaps as much as USAID should strive for.
- *Project priorities and implementation arrangements:* Clarity is needed in areas where misunderstandings hampered implementation under Project SEARCH. What results are expected from the research? What urgent programming need should be addressed? How important is achieving global dissemination and potential use of data through peer-reviewed publication and how important is obtaining information for immediate application to programs? How important is the capacity-building objective relative to other objectives? (The kick-off process used for the APS this past year seems to provide a good model.) How will project resources be marketed and what contribution can IPs make? Who owns the data and findings and how will they be shared for broader use (e.g., data warehousing)?

Role of Host Country Partners

In keeping with PEPFAR, GHI, and IPR priorities, host country partners can have a much bigger role than they did in Project SEARCH. There are well-qualified researchers and good research institutions in PEPFAR countries, and Project SEARCH partners have worked with some of them. While many still have weaknesses in such areas as qualitative research, research management, and data quality, these can be overcome through close collaboration with U.S. partners. Informants suggested a number of ways to build up the role of host country partners that a USAID design team could consider:

- Make African research institutions the primes, with US partners as subs, and clearly define roles (including capacity-building roles and resources to support strengthening of the primes).
- Use consortia with U.S. IPs as primes but with several developing country institutions as subs, with options for buy-ins directly to the subs and targets for the amount of funding to be funneled to these institutions (e.g., 50 percent).
- Specify that partnerships between U.S. IPs and host country researchers must be with institutions, not individuals.

Field Mission Involvement

Missions made limited use of Project SEARCH for several reasons, not least of which was the interagency review process during the PHE years. Other factors were lack of field knowledge about project, timing, and ceiling issues related to particular TOs, and insufficient control through field buy-in to active TOs. Informants suggested some ways of increasing project relevance to and use by the field:

- Bring senior FSNs from PEPFAR missions (who will remain at post long after their American colleagues leave) into USAID/W to participate in project design.
- Provide authority for field personnel to act as in-country managers when they use field support.
- Provide project funding and technical resources to support Missions in setting research and evaluation priorities and writing research proposals and evaluation scopes of work.

Resources to Support Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Provide ample funding in projects to support brainstorming, collaboration, and sharing of research plans and results. This should include networking within the GHB to find common themes between HIV/AIDS and other health issues; among IPs, both US and host country; between IPs, USAID/OHA, and TWGs; and with the global HIV/AIDS research and program community, including governments in countries fighting the epidemic. Collaboration can also be supported by designing the project to welcome public-private partnerships and other means of pooling resources.

Realistic Approach to Time and Funding Needs

Project SEARCH showed that, while it is possible to complete a research activity within three years if there are no IRB issues and if the implementation period is no longer than a year, it appears from experience that a five-year timetable is more realistic, particularly when activities to promote data use and build research capacity are factored in. Proposed timing and funding of future research activities should recognize the experiences of Project SEARCH and allow flexibility to account for probable delays. For example, the IRB process always runs into delays. Adequate time is also needed for design. If a research activity is too ambitious to be carried out within the funding and timing constraints of the project, a decision to do it anyway should be made consciously, and the additional workload involved should be thought through from the start.

Provisions for Assessing Progress after an Activity Ends

While this evaluation was able to assess the extent to which use of findings was promoted, and capacity building was explicitly addressed, the team was not able to get a good sense of how findings were actually used, or how much capacity was built. There was no provision in the project for measurement of actual use. Capacity building was measured occasionally by the number of people trained. It is a major deficiency that a project designed specifically to carry out evaluation does not incorporate a plan for evaluating its own effectiveness. In the future, resources must be set aside and a means of assessing performance designed at the start for how project success will be measured. For capacity building and use, this means some data must be collected after individual research activities have ended.

VI. CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS

OBJECTIVE 1: CONDUCTING PROGRAM RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

No recommendations.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTING USE OF PROGRAM RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Without prior agreement about use of data, it is not realistic for USAID to expect researcher commitment and creativity beyond the terms of the contract. The use of data issue also relates to control over public presentation of sensitive and confidential data. All parties need to have the same understanding of how data produced by an activity may be used.
2. In addition to requiring IPs to have a dissemination plan, USAID needs a strategy of its own to more actively disseminate research findings and market outcomes/products.
3. Early involvement of local populations and organizations should be the norm so as to increase use of research and evaluation outcomes.
4. If USAID wishes to understand which use-promotion activities work best, it needs to incorporate into the project a means of assessing actual use of research and evaluation results. This might be done in a separate survey after the project ends.

OBJECTIVE 3: BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY TO CONDUCT AND USE HIV RESEARCH

1. USAID needs to carefully define capacity building; the intended target (whose capacity is to be developed); and the resources required (financial, TA, time).
2. To achieve the capacity-building objective, it will be necessary to balance the emphasis between production and capacity building.
3. In-country university-based senior researchers are aware of local research needs and could be consulted on the best approaches to building capacity.
4. Measures of and targets for capacity building should be agreed upon between USAID and the IPs at the start, baseline information collected, and resources in place to measure changes in capacity, even if this means that some data are collected after the activity has ended.
5. To build institutional capacity, agreements or MOUs should be made with institutions, rather than individuals.
6. For Project SEARCH studies that have not yet been completed, such as Iringa and Tathmini GBV, an effort should be made to formally assess capacity-building activities and outcomes.

APPENDIX A. SCOPE OF WORK

GLOBAL HEALTH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BRIDGE II PROJECT GH TECH

Contract No. AID-OAA-C-12-00027

Scope of Work

September 25, 2012

I. TITLE

Project SEARCH: Supporting Evaluation and Research to Combat HIV—End-of-Project Evaluation

II. PERFORMANCE PERIOD<<CB>>

The maximum time frame will be 60 days. The desired start date for the evaluation is o/a October 1, 2012.

III. FUNDING SOURCE

OHA central funds

IV. SUMMARY: EVALUATION PURPOSE AND USE

The purpose of this evaluation is to conduct an end-of-project evaluation of Project SEARCH and to understand the strengths and weaknesses of this mechanism in supporting operations research for HIV/AIDS. The use of the findings will be critical to learn lessons and to inform designs of follow-on operations research mechanisms in the Office of HIV/AIDS.

V. DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

PEPFAR II aims to scale up and expand effective prevention, care, and treatment programs drawing on proven interventions. As such, the millennium development goal of combatting HIV/AIDS can only be achieved if the evidence of proven interventions is clearly understood. Program effectiveness and efficiency is important in deciding not only which programs to take to scale, but also how to achieve optimal coverage while simultaneously minimizing costs. While several program modalities are established as effective, determining the best approach to implementing these programs in order to achieve the desired level of effectiveness remains a challenge. In addition, many programs currently being implemented have not been deemed effective through systematic program evaluations, nor is there a clear understanding of the factors that would affect program effectiveness for large-scale implementation. In sum, operations research is needed to provide the evidence needed to improve the implementation of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment interventions.

VI. BACKGROUND

Made possible through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the goal of the Project SEARCH—Supporting Evaluation and Research to Combat HIV/AIDS (SEARCH)—IQC is to carry out research and evaluation to improve the coverage, quality, and effectiveness of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment programs worldwide, and to strengthen local capacity

in HIV/AIDS research and public health evaluations through training and in-country collaborations. The five implementing partners are Boston University, Futures Group International, Family Health International, Johns Hopkins Center for Communications Programs, and the Population Council.

The awards—based on full and open competition—were under an Indefinite Quantity Contract (IQC), which is a mechanism designed to provide a more efficient response to the short- and long-term needs of Missions by establishing a competitive bidding process among only the Project SEARCH contractors. Over the planned five-year implementation period (2007–2012), 10 task orders were awarded, totaling a combined award amount of nearly \$100 million. Some task orders represent one study or evaluation, whereas other task orders consist of multiple studies and other activities.

The ordering period for Project SEARCH ended in February 2012, with some of the task orders still ongoing.

The goal of Project SEARCH was to improve access to and quality of HIV services through applied program research. The task order activities, both central and Mission-funded, were designed to contribute to accomplishing this goal through the following objectives:

1. To conduct applied program research and evaluations that aim to improve the quality, coverage, and effectiveness of HIV programming.
2. To promote the use of program research findings and data in HIV program design, strategic planning, implementation, and revision of ongoing prevention efforts.
3. To build the capacity of local organizations, national governments, and local researchers to conduct and use applied HIV research.

VII. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team should answer the following key evaluation questions:

1. To what extent was the project successful in achieving each of the stated objectives of conducting applied program research and evaluation, promoting the use of program research findings, and building the capacity of local organizations, national governments, and local researchers to conduct and use research?
2. What were the challenges of using the mechanism to achieve the intended objectives through the perspectives of implementing partners, Missions, and USAID Washington?
3. Based on the findings from Project SEARCH, how could the bottlenecks that were encountered in utilizing the mechanism be avoided in the future and what specific recommendations and actions can be taken to facilitate improved implementation of a future project design for operations research?

The evaluation methods and design for data collection will be qualitative and include:

Desk Review:

The team should perform a desk review of all project documents, including the project statement of work, project progress reports, research findings from partners (reports, briefs, papers, conference abstracts, conference posters, conference Power Point presentations, unpublished papers, and workplans of planned and on-going activities). The team should also familiarize themselves with the current evaluation guidance documents.

The desk review will include a full range of project documents (see section XIII). The key informants for the interview phase of the evaluation will be selected from a sample of studies/activities conducted under the IQC.

Team Planning Meeting:

It is anticipated that the Team Leader, assisted by the Evaluation Specialist, will facilitate and conduct a two-day team planning meeting (TPM) in Washington, DC, to launch the assignment. In addition, the team will meet with USAID/OHA during the TPM to discuss the scope of work in detail and obtain any necessary clarifications. The purpose of this meeting will be as follows:

- Clarify team members' roles and responsibilities;
- Establish a team atmosphere, share individual working styles, and agree on procedures for resolving differences of opinion;
- Develop and finalize a workplan for the evaluation;
- Review and request clarifications on evaluation questions;
- Review and finalize the assignment timeline and share with USAID;
- Finalize data collection plans and tools;
- Review and clarify any logistical and administrative procedures for the assignment;
- Develop a preliminary draft outline of the team's report; and
- Assign drafting responsibilities for the final report.

Key Informant Interviews:

The team should conduct interviews with key stakeholders of Project SEARCH, including USAID Mission staff, IQC holders, and GH Bureau leadership. Local research institutions supported by Project SEARCH may also be interviewed to seek information on capacity building performance. A list of key informants and their contact information will be provided to the consultants, who should arrange for one-on-one meetings (USAID DC-based staff and implementing partner staff) and/or telephone interviews (Mission staff and implementing partner staff).

VIII. TEAM COMPOSITION, SKILLS, AND LEVEL OF EFFORT

The evaluation team will consist of two consultants who have demonstrated knowledge and experience in the areas described below. The suggested team composition should include one Team Leader and one additional Evaluation Specialist with collective skills that encompass the following competencies: evaluation design and implementation, qualitative data analysis, research methods, and knowledge of USAID health programs.

Team Leader:

Expectations

The Team Leader will oversee all aspects of the evaluation. The Team Leader will be the main contact person for the evaluation, will be responsible for primary communications with USAID staff, will direct the other consultant, and will also be responsible for delegating tasks, and providing oversight in the design, collecting, and analysis. The lead will also be responsible for

compiling and submitting a draft evaluation report, integrating USAID feedback into the final report, and providing an oral presentation at USAID headquarters of the final results.

Qualifications

The qualifications of the team lead include:

1. Advanced degree (master's or doctoral level) in a public health-related field;
2. Previous experience in serving successfully as a lead evaluator for a health evaluation; experience evaluating HIV/PEPFAR programs highly desirable;
3. Previous experience with or understanding of operations research desirable;
4. Demonstrated expertise and experience in designing qualitative and survey research instruments and methodologies;
5. Excellent oral and written communication skills in English, including the ability to conduct and analyze in-depth interviews;
6. Demonstrated knowledge of USAID's policies and priorities; and
7. Experience in working in a developing country context preferred.

Evaluation Specialist:

Expectations

The Evaluation Specialist will be expected to participate with the Team Leader in helping to design the evaluation, review and finalize the interview guides and survey questions, collect, analyze, and interpret findings, and write up various components of the final evaluation report under the direction of the Team Leader.

Qualifications

The qualifications of the consultant include:

1. Advanced degree (master's or doctoral level) in a public health-related field;
2. Demonstrated expertise in designing qualitative and survey research instruments and methodologies; experience evaluating HIV/PEPFAR programs highly desirable;
3. Previous experience with or understanding of operations research desirable;
4. Excellent oral and written communication skills in English, including the ability to conduct and analyze in-depth interviews;
5. Demonstrated knowledge of USAID's policies and priorities; and
6. Experience in working in a developing country context preferred.

Activity	Team Leader	Evaluation Specialist	Total LOE
Desk review (remotely)	3	3	6
Travel to DC	0	1	1
Team planning meeting (to include: evaluation design; drafting and submission of evaluation questionnaires and survey instruments; and revisions of data collection instruments based on feedback)	3	3	6
Conduct interviews and administer survey in DC and Baltimore	2	2	4
Return home	0	1	1
Conduct interviews and administer survey (remotely)	13	13	26
Data analysis	5	5	10
Development and submission of draft report	5	5	10
Debrief with USAID/W OHA research team (remotely)	1	1	2
USAID reviews draft report and provides comments to TL	-	-	-
Incorporation of feedback in final report	2	0	2
Development of and presentation of findings to USAID/W	1	0	1
TOTAL	35	34	69

IX. LOGISTICS

GH Tech will be responsible for all travel and consultant logistics.

X. DELIVERABLES

The evaluation team will be responsible for preparing the following deliverables, all requiring final approval by USAID/W:

Draft and final workplan, research design, and survey instruments: During the team planning meeting, the team will prepare a detailed workplan, which will include the methodologies to be used in the evaluation, as well as a research design, evaluation questionnaires, and survey instruments. All of the above will be submitted to USAID/Washington for approval by the end of the first week. The team will revise these documents after receiving feedback and comments from USAID/Washington.

Weekly progress reports: The team will provide brief (one-page) weekly progress reports to GH Tech and USAID/Washington.

Debriefing with USAID/OHA: The team will present its preliminary findings to USAID/OHA. The team will consider USAID's comments and include them in their draft report, as appropriate. This meeting will be conducted by teleconference.

Draft evaluation report: The team will prepare and submit a draft report to USAID. The report should clearly describe findings, conclusions, and recommendations. USAID will provide consolidated comments to GH Tech and the Team Leader within 10 days of submission.

Final draft evaluation report: Incorporating USAID's comments and feedback as appropriate, the team will revise and submit a final draft evaluation report to USAID/W.

Final Presentation to USAID/Washington: The Team Leader will present the team's findings, conclusions, and recommendations to USAID/Washington.

Draft and Final Versions of Evaluation Report

The evaluation report will include the following sections: (1) Table of contents, (2) Executive summary, (3) Evaluation questions, (4) Introduction/Background, (5) Methodology, (6) Findings, (7) Conclusions, (8) Recommendations, (9) Annexes (Statement of Work, Sources of information: people interviewed, documents reviewed, other data sources; and Data collection tools (questionnaires, discussion guides, checklists).

Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report

1. The evaluation report should represent a thoughtful, well-researched, and well-organized effort to objectively evaluate what worked in the project, what did not, and why.
2. Evaluation reports shall address all evaluation questions included in the scope of work.
3. The evaluation report should include the scope of work as an annex. All modifications to the scope of work, whether in technical requirements, evaluation questions, evaluation team composition, methodology or timeline need to be agreed upon in writing by the technical officer.
4. Evaluation methodology shall be explained in detail and all tools used in conducting the evaluation, such as questionnaires, checklists, and discussion guides, will be included in an annex in the final report.
5. Evaluation findings will assess outcomes and impact on males and females.
6. Limitations to the evaluation shall be disclosed in the report, with particular attention to the limitations associated with the evaluation methodology (selection bias, recall bias, unobservable differences between comparator groups, etc.).
7. Evaluation findings should be presented as analyzed facts, evidence, and data, and not be based on anecdotes, hearsay, or the compilation of people's opinions. Findings should be specific, concise, and supported by strong quantitative or qualitative evidence.
8. Sources of information need to be properly identified and listed in an annex.
9. Recommendations need to be supported by a specific set of findings.
10. Recommendations should be action-oriented, practical, and specific, with defined responsibility for the action.

Given that the final draft report will not be available by November 16, 2012, the final deliverable for this assignment will be the final *draft* report, as GH Tech will not have time prior to the end of the contract to professionally edit and format the final draft report. If the final draft requires professional editing and formatting, this will have to be completed through another mechanism.

XI. RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

GH Tech will coordinate and manage the team and will undertake the following specific responsibilities throughout the assignment:

- Recruit and hire the team.
- Make logistical arrangements for the consultants, including travel and transportation, country travel clearance if required, lodging, and communications.

USAID will provide overall technical leadership and direction for the team throughout the assignment and will provide assistance with the following tasks:

Before Field Work:

- SOW. Respond to queries about the SOW and/or the assignment at large.
- Consultant Conflict of Interest (COI). To avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance of a COI, review previous employers listed on the CVs for proposed consultants and provide additional information regarding potential COI with the project contractors evaluated/assessed and information regarding their affiliations.
- Documents. Identify and prioritize background materials for the consultants and provide them to GH Tech, preferably in electronic form, at least one week prior to the inception of the assignment.
- Site Visit Preparations. Provide a list of site visit locations, key contacts, and suggested length of visit for use in planning travel to partners in the DC-Baltimore area.

During Field Work:

- USAID Point of Contact. Throughout the assignment, ensure constant availability of the Point of Contact person and provide technical leadership and direction for the team's work.
- Meeting Space. Arrange for meeting space for the final presentation of findings at USAID/W.
- Meeting Arrangements. Assist the team in arranging and coordinating meetings with stakeholders if needed.
- Facilitate Contact with Stakeholders. Introduce the team to key stakeholders and, where applicable and appropriate, prepare and send out an introduction letter for team's arrival or anticipated meetings.

After Field Work:

- Timely Reviews. Provide timely review of drafts and final reports and approval of deliverables.

XII. WASHINGTON CONTACTS

Benny Kottiri
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Elizabeth Drabant
HIV Technical Advisor, OHA
edrabant@usaid.gov

XIII. COST ESTIMATE

GH Tech Bridge II will provide

XIV. REFERENCES

Project Documents

- Project SEARCH statement of work
- Task order statements of work
- Project SEARCH websites for individual task orders
- Deliverables from completed task orders (study protocols, published and unpublished papers, project briefs, websites, reports, conference posters, conference Power Point presentations)
- Deliverables from ongoing task orders (workplans for planned activities, workplans for ongoing activities, unpublished data and reports)
- IQC partners' meeting notes

USAID Policy/Guidance Documents

- How to Prepare Evaluation Reports
- Checklist for use of Qualitative Methods
- TIPS–Key Informant Interviews

APPENDIX B. PERSONS CONTACTED

IQC HOLDER LEADS

Boston University

Jon Simon

Futures Group

Farley Cleghorn

Shannon Hader

Johns Hopkins University & Tulane University

Jane Bertrand

FHI 360

Ward Cates

Population Council

Naomi Rutenberg

TASK ORDER PROJECT DIRECTORS

Boston University

Jennifer Beard, Ghana Project

Malcolm Bryant, OVC CARE

Jill Costello, OVC CARE

Futures Group

Susan Settergren, Tathmini Gender Based Violence

Johns Hopkins University

Stefan Baral, Research to Prevention/R2P Small Grants

Caitlin Kennedy, Research to Prevention/R2P

Deanna Kerrigan, Research to Prevention/R2P

Carol Underwood, Go Girls!

Population Council

Sam Kalibala, HIVCore & HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment and Formative Research—Uganda

USAID/MISSION

Jennifer Albertini, USAID/Africa Bureau (Formerly USAID/Swaziland)

Rene Berger, USAID/Kenya (former Zambia Mission)

Win Brown, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (formerly with USAID/South Africa)

Rene DeMarco, USAID/Ethiopia

Seth Greenberg, USAID/Tanzania

Todd Koppenhaver, USAID/HIV/AIDS Program Southern Africa

Anita Sampson, USAID/South Africa

Peter Wondergem, USAID/Ghana

USAID/WASHINGTON

Gretchen Bachman, OVC Technical Advisor, OHA

Delivette Castor, Technical Advisor, Research methodology

Alison Cheng, Public Health Advisor; COR for Research to Prevention (R2P) Task Order

Robert Ferris, Technical Advisor for Counseling and Testing

Emily Harris, COR for GoGirls! Task Order

Benny Kottiri, IQC COR, OHA Research Team Leader

Timothy Mah, Technical Advisor for Prevention

Walelign Meheretu, USAID/Ethiopia

Molly Mimier, Acquisitions and Assistance Officer for OHA/TLR (Technical Leadership & Research)

Dianna Prieto, COR for Tathmini Gender Based Violence (GBV) Task Order

Kristin Saarlus, USAID/W, previously USAID/Ethiopia

Sarah Sandison, COR for HIVCORE Task Order, alternative COR R2P4

Janet Schriberg, Technical Advisor for OVC

David Stanton, OHA/TLR Division Director

Vincent Wong, Technical Advisor, HIV Testing and Counseling

HOST-COUNTRY PARTNERS

Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation, University of Capetown

Linda-Gail Bekker, R2P Small Grants, South Africa

Ben Brown, R2P Small Grants, South Africa

Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), Kenya

Eduard Sanders, R2P Small Grants

Elise Vanderelst, R2P Small Grants

Makerere University, Uganda

Paul Bukuluki, HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment and Formative Research - Uganda

Stella Neema, HIV/AIDS Evaluation, Assessment and Formative Research - Uganda

Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS), Tanzania

Jessie Mbwambo, Co-PI for R2P/Combination HIV Prevention Evaluation, R2P/SYMMACS, Tathmini GBV

Thyolo Active Youth Organization (TAYO), Malawi

Willard Mwambo, Executive Director; Go Girls!

Kumasi University of Science and Technology, Ghana

Yaw-Adu Sarkodie, MARP Program Evaluation

Zimbabwe Association for Planned Parenthood

Webster Mavhu, R2P SYMMACS

APPENDIX C. REFERENCES

GENERAL REFERENCES

- International AIDS Vaccine Initiative-funded. Undated. “Respect, Protect, Fulfill: Best Practices in Conducting HIV Research with Gay, Bisexual and Other Men who Have Sex with Men (MSM) in Rights-Constrained Environments.” Copublication: amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, Johns Hopkins University—Center for Public Health and Human Rights, United Nations Development Program.
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APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW GUIDES

INTERVIEW GUIDE: IQC HOLDER LEADS

Introduction: Evaluator will introduce self, describe purpose of the evaluation and purpose of the interview, advise interviewees that while we will be taking notes their comments will be confidential and no comments in the report will be attributed to them. Advise that we expect this interview to take 45 minutes to one hour, and ask how much time they have available.

1. What is your experience with Project SEARCH? How long have you been involved with Project SEARCH? Over what time frame?
2. We understand you have had X number of Task Orders (we will name them). What do you consider the key outcomes?

Probe: what was the applied research and evaluation carried out under the project and the key outcomes? (Actual or anticipated/planned)

3. What were the constraints and issues that you have had to address in implementing these activities (e.g., research and evaluation)?
4. How effective, in your view, has the IQC mechanism been in achieving Project SEARCH's objectives (conducting OR and evaluations, promoting use of findings and building capacity of host country partner organizations)?
5. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the IQC mechanism? (Probe on open competition?)
6. What changes or improvements could be made in a future mechanism with similar goals that would facilitate implementation of research and evaluations? Have you had experience in carrying out research and evaluations with other mechanisms? How do they compare?
7. What have you learned from your research and evaluations thus far and how do you see these findings having broader implications for future programming?
8. How do you plan to promote the use of these findings? Please give examples/specifics.

Probe: What can you or USAID do to better facilitate improved use of the evaluation and research findings produced under Project SEARCH to ensure wide application?

9. What have you done to address the Project SEARCH objective related to building local research capacity? What is your strategy or approach and what are the key areas you are focusing on?
10. How did you identify the individuals or institutions that you would work with to build capacity and how did you determine their capacity-building needs? How could this process be improved in the future?
11. What evidence is there to demonstrate that local research capacity has been improved as a result of the project? Please be specific.
12. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to know or that you recommend we follow up on and/or look into?
13. Do you have recommendations of other people we should interview, including local partners?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: IQC HOLDER PROJECT DIRECTORS

Introduction: Evaluator will introduce self, describe purpose of the evaluation and purpose of the interview, advise interviewees that while we will be taking notes their comments will be confidential and no comments in the report will be attributed to them. Advise that we expect this interview to take 45 minutes to one hour, and ask how much time they have available.

1. What is your role in Project SEARCH? How long have you been involved with this project (time frame)?
2. Would you please briefly describe your task order under Project SEARCH and the research and evaluation that is being carried out [or was carried out in the case of completed projects]? Although we have conducted a desk review of the background information provided by USAID, it would be helpful if you could give us an overview of the key work conducted under the Task Order.
3. What have been [or do you expect to be] the important outcomes of this research / evaluation?
4. What have you learned from this research/evaluation that will be helpful for future programming? What are the broader implications for scaling up? (Probe if necessary regarding specific findings and how/why they are valuable.)
5. How has the project promoted [or how does it plan to promote] use of project outcomes/findings? (Ask for copies of presentations, articles in peer-reviewed journals, etc., where relevant.)

(Probe: What can you and/or USAID do to facilitate improved use of the evaluation and research findings produced under Project SEARCH to ensure wide application?)
6. Can you cite any instances that you are aware of in which data/findings have been or will be used by others, either in country or in other countries? Please be specific.
7. What is the project's strategy to build the research capacity of local organizations? What are the key capacities that need strengthening that you are focusing on, and what is your approach?
8. How did you identify the individuals or institutions that you would work with to build capacity and how did you determine their capacity-building needs? How could this process be improved in the future?
9. What evidence is available to demonstrate that local capacity has been improved as a result of the project? (We are interested not only in individual capacity, but also institutional capacity.)
10. How effective, in your view, has the Project SEARCH IQC mechanism been in achieving the project's three objectives (conduct of operations research/evaluation, promotion of use of findings, and capacity building of local organizations)?
11. What were the strengths and weaknesses of this mechanism?
12. What changes or improvements could be made in the procurement mechanism to increase the effectiveness of future projects?
13. Is there anything else it is important for us to know or that you recommend we follow up on?
14. We would like to get inputs from your host country partners. Which of them do you recommend that we contact? Can you give us contact information and an introduction?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: USAID CORS

Introduction: Evaluator will introduce self, describe purpose of the evaluation and purpose of the interview, advise interviewees that while we will be taking notes their comments will be confidential and no comments in the report will be attributed to them. Advise that we expect this interview to take about one hour, and ask how much time they have available.

1. What is your role in managing Project SEARCH? How long have you been involved with Project SEARCH? Over what time frame? Were you involved in writing RFTOPs?
2. What do you consider to be the important research and evaluation carried out under the project (or under the task order that you manage)?
3. What are the key outcomes already achieved or expected? Provide examples where possible.
4. What were the constraints and issues that you have had to address in managing this project (or task order)? What did you do to address those constraints?
5. How effective, in your view, has the IQC mechanism been in achieving Project SEARCH's objectives (conducting OR and evaluations, promoting use of findings, and building capacity of host country partner organizations)?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the IQC mechanism?
7. What changes or improvements could be made in the procurement mechanism for future projects with similar goals? Have you had experience with research and evaluations in projects using other mechanisms? How do they compare?
8. What has been learned from the research and evaluations conducted in the project (or your task order) thus far that will be helpful for future programming? Either research findings or other lessons learned?
9. How has the project (or task order activity) promoted use [or how does it plan to promote use] of data and findings? Please give examples/specifics.
10. Can you cite examples of how the data and findings have been used?
11. What has the project (or task order) done to address the Project SEARCH objective related to building local research capacity?
12. What evidence is there to demonstrate that local research capacity—institutions as well as individuals—has been improved as a result of the project? Please be specific.
13. Can you cite any cases in which project outcomes and/or findings have been used outside the project, especially by local partners?
14. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to know or that you recommend we follow-up on or look into?
15. Do you have recommendations of other people we should interview, including local partners?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: USAID TECHNICAL STAFF AND MISSION STAFF

Introduction: Evaluator will introduce self, describe purpose of the evaluation and purpose of the interview, advise interviewees that while we will be taking notes their comments will be confidential and no comments in the report will be attributed to them. Advise that we expect this interview to take 45 minutes to one hour, and ask how much time they have available.

1. What has your involvement been in Project SEARCH or its task orders or, if you have not been directly involved, what do you know about it? (Provide list of task orders if requested.)
2. If you looked into using Project SEARCH for a research activity but were not able to, what were the impediments that restricted you for using it and what mechanism did you eventually choose? In your opinion, how can these impediments be addressed in a future operations research mechanism?
3. [For USAID/W technical officers:] How is the agenda for research and evaluation developed in your technical area, and what role does Project SEARCH play within this agenda?
4. [For Mission staff:] How is the research and evaluation agenda developed in your Missions and what is the process of selecting a mechanism? How has Project SEARCH come into this process?
5. For the task orders in which you have programmed research activities, how do you feel the contractor's performance has been? Were you satisfied with the quality of work, the technical approach, and the knowledge of the contractor?
6. [For Mission staff:] Were you satisfied with the contractors' interactions with country stakeholders and government, if applicable?
7. [For Mission staff who contributed field support only:] Did you provide field support to Project SEARCH for a research or research-related activity? How did you learn of Project SEARCH and decide to use this mechanism?
8. From what you know about Project SEARCH, what do you feel are its major research and evaluation activities, and what outcomes has it achieved or do you expect it to achieve?
9. How do you expect the data to be utilized or to further your technical field or HIV work in your country? Please be as specific as possible.
10. Are you aware of ways that the project has promoted utilization of research and evaluation findings/outcomes? If so, do you consider these promotion efforts to be effective? In what way?
11. Do you know of instances in which Project SEARCH results have been used by others outside the project? Please provide specific examples if possible.
12. Do you know of cases in which Project SEARCH activities have increased the research capacity of local partners, either individuals or institutions? If so, please be specific about what capacities were built, and how you know they have been built.
13. How effective, in your view, has the IQC mechanism been in achieving Project SEARCH's three objectives (conducting OR, action research, and evaluation; promoting utilization of research and evaluation findings; and building capacity of host country institutions)? Can you provide examples?
14. [Follow-up question for Mission staff:] How effective have Project SEARCH research findings been in informing local program and policies, or driving future research agendas?

15. What have been the strengths and weaknesses of the IQC mechanism for Project SEARCH? Have you had experience with research and evaluation conducted under other contracting mechanisms? How do they compare?
16. What changes or improvements could be made in the procurement mechanism to increase the effectiveness of future projects of this nature?
17. Is there anything else it is important for us to know or that you recommend that we look into?
18. Are there other people you recommend we speak with? What insights would you expect them to bring?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: HOST COUNTRY PARTNERS

Introduction: Evaluator will introduce self, describe purpose of the evaluation and purpose of the interview, advise interviewees that while we will be taking notes their comments will be confidential and no comments in the report will be attributed to them. Advise that we expect this interview to take 45 minutes to one hour, and ask how much time they have available.

1. How have you been involved with Project SEARCH [or what do you know about Project SEARCH]? How long have you been involved with this project (time frame)?
2. Could you describe your relationship with the prime contractor (IQC holder)? How did you interact? What was the division of responsibilities?
3. Would you please briefly describe what research and evaluation is being carried out as part of your project [or was carried out in the case of completed projects]?
4. What have been [or do you expect to be] the important outcomes of this research / evaluation?
5. What have you learned from this research/evaluation that is helpful for future programming? (Probe if necessary regarding specific tools, methodologies, or findings and how/why they are valuable.)
6. How has the project promoted [or how does it plan to promote] use of project outcomes/findings? (Ask for copies of presentations, articles in peer-reviewed journals, etc., where relevant.)
7. Can you cite any instances in which outcomes/findings have been used by others, either in country or in other countries? Please be specific.
8. Does the project you worked on have any direct activities to strengthen the research capacity of your organization? What are/were these activities? Be specific.
9. Were these activities effective? Could you give examples of how?
10. How has your organization benefitted from this relationship with the prime contractor/IQC holder? How has your organization benefitted from the research and evaluation components of the project?
11. How was this project structured and what were the strengths and weaknesses of this structure? If there were any weaknesses, do you have recommendations about how to avoid and/or address these problems?
12. What changes or improvements could be made to increase the effectiveness of future projects?

13. Have you worked with other projects that had a research and evaluation component? If so, how did they compare with this project?
14. Is there anything else it is important for us to know or that you recommend we follow up on?
15. Are there other host country partners you recommend we contact? Can you give us contact information and an introduction?

For more information, please visit
<http://www.ghtechproject.com/resources>

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