



LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND ANALYSIS PROJECT (LEAP)



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 **OPTIMAL**
SOLUTIONS GROUP, LLC

Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Project

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Starting in 2011, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Project (LEAP) contractor, Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (Optimal) and its subcontractor, Cambridge Research International (CRI), began providing performance and impact evaluations and analytical support services to the USAID Economic Growth, Education and the Environment (E3) Bureau. LEAP was a contractual mechanism for the E3 Bureau to increase access to rigorous, independent technical evaluation and analyses. As a part of this contractual mechanism Optimal provided quantitative and qualitative performance and impact evaluations, inclusive growth diagnostics studies, cost-benefit analysis and cost-effectiveness analyses. This contract also presented and disseminated analyses, findings, and lessons learned that are being used by USAID operating units to help guide the design and implementation of E3 Bureau, other USAID operating units, and international funders activities today and in subsequent years.

As part of the LEAP contract, Optimal has conducted 12 performance evaluations, four analytical studies, and 14 cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis studies, in 22 countries including Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Kosovo, Latin American and the Caribbean region (LAC), Liberia, Macedonia, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, The Philippines, Rwanda, Uganda, and West Bank/Gaza.



Partnership for Growth (PFG) meeting in El Salvador

In 2014, Optimal conducted the mid-term evaluation for two USG Partnership for Growth (PFG) Initiatives in El Salvador and the Philippines. PFG is a USG presidential initiative using a “Whole of Government” approach in four countries to promote inclusive economic growth through a partnership between the USG and the selected countries. As part of this evaluation, Optimal evaluated individual country initiatives and developed a Cross-Cutting Report that compared and assessed the overall PFG initiative. Optimal’s researchers provided rigorous economic analysis and technical advice for two inclusive growth diagnostic studies in the Dominican Republic and Indonesia.



Survey Enumeration, Nimba County, Liberia

Optimal’s largest LEAP task order was a population-based survey (PBS) of 2,400 households for the Feed the Future Initiative in Liberia. Optimal implemented the PBS while building the capacity of a locally based organization to ensure that they could conduct a similar survey in the future, in line with USAID Forward.

Optimal is a U.S.-based monitoring, evaluation, and technical assistance firm with more than 12 years of experience doing business with U.S. federal agencies including USAID, the State Department, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Small Business Administration. With more than 50 full-time employees and 45 consultants in over 24 countries, Optimal provides subject matter experience in agriculture and food security, education, entrepreneurship, governance, nutrition, public health, and trade. Optimal’s commitment to conducting cost-efficient and timely research is evident in its real-time analysis approach that bridges technology and research to provide high quality and timely evaluation results. Optimal looks forward to working with USAID Missions in their efforts to provide quality, rigorous evaluations that measure the impact and gauge the effectiveness, and sustainability of USAID programs globally.



Mark Turner, LEAP Chief of Party; Alexandre Monnard, LEAP Evaluation Analyst, and Junior Achievement of Armenian High School students

Task Orders

- Dominican Republic Inclusive Growth Diagnostic
- Ethiopia Agricultural Investment Cost Benefit Analyses
- Non-Experimental Program Evaluations of USAID Assistance to Smallholder Farmers in Guatemala and Honduras (between 2006 and 2010)
- Indonesia Inclusive Growth Diagnostic
- Liberia Feed the Future Population-Based Survey
- Bangladesh Poverty Reduction by Increasing the Competitiveness of Enterprises (PRICE) Final Performance Evaluation
- Performance Evaluation of USAID/Macedonia's Investment Development and Export Advancement Support (IDEAS) Project
- Rwanda Nutrition, Behavior Change, and Social Marketing Cost Effectiveness Analysis
- Tanzania Irrigation Cost-Benefit Analysis Review
- Uganda Agricultural and Nutrition Investments Cost-benefit and Cost-effectiveness Analyses
- Performance Evaluation of [Instituto Libertad Y Democracia] (ILD) Activities to promote legal empowerment of the poor
- Training in Support of the Power Africa Initiative
- USG Partnership for Growth (PFG) Mid-Term Evaluations: El Salvador and the Philippines
- Evaluation of USAID/Armenia Entrepreneurship and Civic Activism for Young People Project
- Performance Evaluation of the USAID/Nepal's Nepal Economic Agricultural and Trade (NEAT) Program Activities
- Europe and Eurasia Regional Energy Sector Activity Evaluation
- Mid-Term Evaluation of the Enterprise Development for Global Competitiveness Project (COMPETE)
- USAID LAC Crime and Insecurity Analytical Study – Determining the Causal Relationship between Crime/Citizen Insecurity and Investment
- Technical Review of E3/Trade and Regulatory Reform Results Framework
- EVALUATION of the WASHplus: Supportive Environments for Healthy Communities Project



Nor Kharbed High School, Armenia

Dominican Republic Inclusive Growth Diagnostic

USAID piloted the application of two inclusive growth diagnostic (IGD) models in the Dominican Republic to determine the binding constraints to broad-based growth for the country. Optimal assisted USAID economists in collecting data from National Statistics Offices in the Dominican Republic and three comparator countries (Jamaica, El Salvador, and Costa Rica) in conducting a variety of economic analyses, create data codebooks, and provide technical advisory assistance.

Ethiopia Agricultural Investment Cost Benefit Analyses

Optimal conducted cost benefit analyses (CBAs) of four agriculture-related projects in Ethiopia to assess the beneficiary, social, and financial outcomes of these interventions – Agribusiness and Market Development (AMD), the Livestock Growth Project (LGP), Pastoralists Resiliency Improvement and Market Expansion Project (PRIME), and Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development Project (GRAD). These projects were designed to strengthen agriculture and rural transformation through Value Chain (VC) development.

Guatemala and Honduras Pre-Feed the Future Agricultural Interventions Retrospective Evaluations

Optimal designed and implemented retrospective evaluations of pre-Feed-the-Future agricultural interventions in Guatemala and Honduras. Optimal initially assessed the feasibility of conducting impact evaluations of USAID's agricultural interventions on household outcomes in Guatemala and Honduras prior to 2010. The feasibility studies required document reviews, in-country interviews with USAID program staff and the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Institutes), and data analyses. Using the available data, Optimal conducted a quasi-experimental evaluation to assess the effectiveness of USAID interventions in both countries.

Indonesia Inclusive Growth Diagnostic (IGD)

USAID piloted the application of an IGD model in Indonesia to determine the binding constraints to broad-based growth. Optimal assisted USAID economists with completing the growth diagnostic study, which was data intensive and required not only data from Indonesia, but also benchmarking data from a select group of comparator countries (India, Malaysia, Brazil, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand). Optimal analyzed national-level macroeconomic statistics as well as household- and firm-level microeconomic statistics.

Liberia Population-Based Survey

USAID/Liberia contracted with Optimal to plan, design, and implement a population-based baseline survey for the Feed the Future Liberia initiative. This project comprised several steps that occurred concurrently, including

- capacity assessment and development of a local research organization, which was actively involved in the implementation of the survey;

- modification of the survey instrument to fit Liberia's cultural and social contexts, followed by field testing and the selection and training of 90 enumerators and 10 field supervisors; and
- planning and deployment of the survey in the field and data entry; analysis and reporting of the results.

Evaluation of USAID/Macedonia's Investment Development and Export Advancement Support (IDEAS) Project

Optimal performed a mid-term performance evaluation of the USAID-funded Investment Development and Export Advancement Support (IDEAS) project. The IDEAS project was initiated to enhance the government's capacity and coordination related to domestic and foreign investment under its new industrial policy, export promotion, public procurement, public-private dialogue, and laws related to the planning and permitting of construction land. Optimal conducted a performance evaluation that focused on the project's implementation; examined its inputs, outputs, and outcomes; and assessed its progress toward target results and goals. The evaluation included a document review, a site visit, data analysis and reporting, and leveraging a mixed-methods approach.

Rwanda Nutrition, Behavior Change, and Social Marketing Cost Effectiveness Analysis

USAID/Rwanda requested that Optimal develop a cost-effectiveness analysis for an FtF project, Nutrition, Behavior Change, and Social Marketing. The team analyzed the cost-effectiveness of breastfeeding on both infants and mothers in terms of nutritional status indicators as well as disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and/ or quality-adjusted life years (QALYs). Indicators of effectiveness included reductions in the diarrhea morbidity and diarrhea mortality rates of infants, reductions in breast cancer rate in women, DALY gain and QALY gain. As part of the study, the team also conducted a beneficiary and sensitivity analysis to identify stakeholders that would benefit most from the program and any that may be at a loss.

Tanzania Review of Cost Benefit Analysis of the Dakawa Irrigation Scheme

Optimal reviewed the cost-benefit model of selected irrigation investment, and provide conclusions as to the comparability of analysis results under the approach used versus the approach described by Jenkins, Kuo, and Harberger (2011) for an already existing study on an irrigation scheme in Dakawa, Tanzania. The results of the review were used to finalize the program model and report.

Uganda Agricultural and Nutrition Investments Cost-benefit and Cost-effectiveness Analyses

USAID's Bureau for Food Security (BFS), E3, and Bureau for Global Health (GH) launched efforts to complete economic analysis of agricultural and nutrition investments under FtF Initiative in Uganda. These programs were designed to increase rural incomes through promoting and raising crops that boost production in

strategic value chains and through improving market linkages. For this study, Optimal conducted CBAs for the Strengthening Agriculture and Rural Transformation through Value Chain Development (START-VC); a CEA for a new procurement producing ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF) from local raw materials and distribution; SPRING (field support mechanism that will carry out nutrition prevention and treatment activities in Southwest Uganda); and Northern Uganda Health Integration to Enhance Services (Nu-HITES) (bilateral design that integrates nutrition with the Mission's other health programs); and a beneficiary analysis that clearly defined and estimates the number and key characteristics (income, gender, age) of the beneficiaries to benefit from agricultural and nutrition investments under the USAID/Uganda Feed the Future portfolio. Optimal conducted extensive data collection activities through a field visit to Uganda, analyzed the data collected, and developed models and final reports that include recommendations for USAID Uganda as they implement these projects.

Performance Evaluation of Instituto Libertad Y Democracia (ILD) Activities to promote legal empowerment of the poor

USAID provided core funding to the Institute for Liberty and Democracy Program (ILD) to support its efforts to legally empower the poor. ILD provided technical assistance, shared research and collaborated with partners to build awareness and advocate on behalf of the poor. Optimal was contracted to conduct a performance evaluation of the ILD. The evaluation of the ILD program assessed whether the organization met its objectives and deliverables in increasing the legal empowerment of the poor, including women's empowerment and gender equality, as detailed in its grant agreement with USAID. As part of this evaluation, Optimal conducted an extensive document review, site visit to Peru, Nigeria and Tanzania to interview the ILD staff and key stakeholders, and data analysis, after which an evaluation report was provided to USAID officials and to Congress.

Performance Evaluation of the USAID/Nepal's Nepal Economic Agricultural and Trade (NEAT) Program Activities

USAID/Nepal requested that the LEAP team conduct a performance evaluation of the USAID/Nepal Economic Agriculture and Trade (NEAT) program. To promote economic growth, USAID has worked on the macroeconomic level to improve the business environment for private sector-led growth while helping industry sectors increase their competitiveness and productivity. The LEAP team conducted a program evaluation of the large, multi-faceted program with a broad range of activities and stakeholders. As part of this project, the evaluation team conducted semi-structured interviews with high level government officials, business people, and various stakeholders on the agriculture value chain in Nepal, reviewed and assessed progress of implemented policies, and disseminated surveys to beneficiaries, in addition to completing documentation review. The data



Nepal Survey Team

collected were analyzed and produced into a final report with recommendations for improving future programs, while highlighting the program's successes.

Evaluation of USAID/Armenia Entrepreneurship and Civic Activism for Young People Project

USAID/Armenia funded the four-year Entrepreneurship and Civic Activism for Young People program, which was launched in April 2011 by Junior Achievement of Armenia (JAA). The project combines a longer-standing effort to improve youth education in economics with the added goals of increasing entrepreneurship and community-based civic activities that address community needs by equipping Armenian youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete and succeed in tomorrow's world. JAA operates a number of related programs to educate students on international business practices, ethics, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) issues. Under the LEAP contract, Optimal was tasked with planning, designing, and conducting a mid-term performance evaluation of the JAA program, which included a site visit to Armenia to interview teachers, students and key stakeholders of the program.

Partnership for Growth (PFG) Mid-Term Evaluation

Optimal was contracted to plan, design, and conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of the United States Government (USG) Partnership for Growth (PFG) initiative in El Salvador and the Philippines. The first purpose is to evaluate whether or not the PFG process demonstrates improvements over pre-PFG assistance approaches. The second purpose is to: 1) evaluate whether PFG efforts have been developed in such a way as to allow for the eventual determination of their impact on addressing the identified constraints and desired outcomes; and 2) to evaluate the performance of certain initiatives to date to determine whether or not they are moving in the desired direction and are considered necessary and sufficient to achieve PFG goals. Prior to conducting the performance evaluation, an evaluability study was conducted to identify goals and lines of action (LOAs) for a more in-depth, second tier, performance evaluation. Key stakeholder interviews were conducted with host government official, USG staff, and key

stakeholders in Washington D.C., El Salvador and the Philippines. The final study deliverables include separate country-specific reports for each PFG initiative, and a Cross-Cutting Report that compares the two country programs and provides recommendations for improving future PFG initiatives.

Training in Support of the Power Africa Initiative

The Power Africa Initiative is a five-year USG Presidential initiative that is being implemented by several USG agencies. Led by USAID, the Initiative seeks to increase access to reliable, affordable and sustainable electric power availability by promoting private investment in power generation across East and West Africa. Optimal and CRI provided a training course to USAID officials, partner government officials, and private investment representatives on technical and managerial topics in Nairobi, Kenya.

Mid-term Evaluation of the Enterprise Development for Global Competitiveness Project -- COMPETE

USAID West Bank/Gaza (USAID/WBG) requested a mid-term performance evaluation of the COMPETE project. The COMPETE project promotes economic growth in the agribusiness, tourism, ICT, and stone and marble sectors in Palestine. The project includes two generally distinct components: 1) assisting Palestinian firms to better compete internationally through innovation, skills training, and by linking them to sustainable, high-value distribution channels; 2) developing Palestinian service providers and business support organizations so as to foster a market-friendly environment and improve the likelihood of sustainable results in the Palestinian economy. Optimal's mid-term evaluation focused on the project's implementation; structure, the various activities that constitute each component, their outputs, and intermediary outcomes; and assessed progress toward target results and goals.

Europe and Eurasia Regional Energy Sector Evaluation

Optimal conducted a performance evaluation of the USAID Europe and Eurasia (E&E) Regional Energy Sector. The purpose of the USAID-funded interventions was to improve the efficiency and growth of the energy sector in the selected Balkan and Eastern European countries to establish an electricity market and increase energy security, leading to economic growth and social stability within the E&E region. As part of the performance evaluation, Optimal completed an extensive document review before collecting data through individual interviews with a variety of key stakeholders in five different countries in the region.

Crime and Investment Analytical Study in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

The objective of the study was to analyze the relationship between crime and investment, and to determine to what extent crime affects investment and vice versa. The study analyzed the LAC region with a focus on Mexico. Time

series data and panel econometric techniques were used to determine the magnitude and causal relationship between crime and investment. The study included crime and investment trends in LAC, a literature review of previous work related to the crime-investment relationship, and an empirical analysis of the crime investment relationship at the country level for LAC and at the state level for Mexico.

E3/Trade and Regulatory Reform (TRR) Results Framework Technical Review

Optimal planned, designed, and conducted a technical review of the trade facilitation (TF) activities that have been supported by the Trade and Regulatory Reform (TRR) office, and to obtain and synthesize documentation that can inform and facilitate TRR's role in planning, assessments, and on-going technical assistance related to trade and regulatory reform activities. This task was composed of several steps, some of which occurred concurrently. As part of this task order, Optimal developed a dashboard which collated data collected, and produced graphical data to analyze and report TRR's reach across the world. In addition, similar projects were also reviewed for the World Bank and Department for International Development (DFID) to identify good practices and lessons learned by similar international organizations.

WASHplus: Supportive Environments for Healthy Communities Project Performance Evaluation

USAID launched the water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASHplus) Cooperative Agreement, a 5 year project that focuses on implementation and scale-up of proven environmental health interventions to prevent morbidity and mortality from infectious diseases, primarily in young children. Optimal used a mixed-method evaluation approach to conduct a desk review and virtual interviews of WASHplus staff, and USAID Missions using the mechanism and beneficiaries. Based on the results of the evaluation, Optimal identified the program's successes and made recommendations regarding any changes in approach or implementation that can improve the project outputs and outcomes, or can be leveraged for future programming.



Survey Capacity Development with UL PIRE Team in Monrovia, Liberia



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Optimal's International Group (IG) provides monitoring, evaluation, and technical assistance on a range of rigorous research and analysis to enhance evidence-based decision making in the international development and public policy disciplines. Optimal's IG team consists of policy analysts, economists, statisticians, international development, public health, and computer scientists. Projects by the International Group cover a range of economic development issues including education, public health, entrepreneurship, export promotion, agriculture, and food security globally. Our team has experience working in these topic areas and collaborating with culturally diverse groups, reflecting Optimal's own diversity.

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