

USAID RESEARCH: POLICY FRAMEWORK, PRINCIPLES AND OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

I. POLICY FRAMEWORK

This policy document describes US Agency for International Development (USAID) policy with regard to Agency-funded research. It supersedes all previous research and science and technology policy statements. Principles, criteria and objectives described herein apply to all USAID organizational units (e.g. bureaus, centers, missions and other field-based units).

The policy specifies the role of Agency research in meeting USAID sustainable development goals. Furthermore, it serves as a format for determining the intent and scope of USAID-funded research, using standards and criteria for establishing research priorities, identifying new research initiatives, improving the management of research, and guiding the allocation of resources to research.

The policy will be instrumental in promoting and maintaining the highest standards of integrity and quality in the conduct of all Agency-supported research. It also provides operational guidance which establishes procedures for identifying priority research problems. It guides the development of a USAID Research Agenda, and through that Agenda, helps allocate necessary resources for implementing the Agenda. It serves as a primary basis for research allocations in the separate budgetary process.

In keeping with its Charter, the Agency Research Council will periodically review overall research priorities, programs, and budget allocations to ensure consistency with the Agency goals and principles set forth in this policy.

In addition to the areas cited above, this policy addresses the role of USAID-supported research in: 1) promoting the national interest; 2) facilitating effective donor coordination; and, in some cases, 3) creating opportunities for the private sector.

USAID will concentrate its efforts in five areas that are fundamental to sustainable development: broad-based economic growth; environment; population, health and nutrition; democracy; and providing humanitarian assistance and aiding post-crisis transitions. In addition, cross-cutting themes including human capacity development contribute to the integration of these endeavors. The sum of these research efforts is to promote equitable, sustainable development in the world's poorer countries and to address global problems where their source and/or consequences significantly involve developing countries.

Definition. For the purposes of this USAID policy statement, research is defined as the systematic investigation of a well-defined problem. USAID supports research that is intended to produce knowledge that will offer solutions to specific development challenges. The research process incorporates a well-defined hypothesis, a defined methodology for the gathering of information, analysis of data, and for interpretation of the data to formulate conclusions. This definition includes research, experimentation and product development in all fields.

This definition excludes routine product testing, quality control, geographic mapping, collection of general purpose data and statistics, experimental production, and routine monitoring and evaluation of an operational program. Research for the sole purpose of training scientific and technical personnel is not included. Routine activities which contribute to project design or assessment activities are excluded.

A. RESEARCH SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

- * **Development assistance:** Research is a fundamental element in development assistance. Technology transfer from developed to developing countries has also played an important role in many of the successes of the foreign assistance program (e.g. increasing agricultural productivity). Thus, a combined approach of supporting research and ensuring the appropriate use of the results continues to be the Agency's approach.

- * **Participation:** Experience has shown that solutions developed through research are not necessarily transferable. For example, current knowledge in the northern industrialized countries may not always meet the needs of developing countries in critical areas such as HIV/AIDS, tropical diseases, and tropical crops. Interventions that are not tailored locally may not be useful in building democratization and good governance in countries without those traditions. Often, the key to tailoring solutions is local and informed participation in both identifying the problem and conducting the research. Researchers from assisted countries bring the important local perspective and the relevant social and/or cultural factors to bear in research endeavors. Moreover, development of indigenous research capacity is a key contributor to sustainability; it enables those who are affected to find relevant solutions to a problem through research. Such participation increases the likelihood that results will be applied at a technical level. The anticipated outcome is that scientific information is correctly and fully used in making decisions on governance, economic development, institutional

management, public health, environmental protection and education.

- * **Global problems:** All countries have a stake in addressing global problems such as deforestation, environmental degradation, and devastating diseases such as AIDS. The effects of local problems often have repercussions far beyond political or geographic boundaries. Research is an inherent component in solving these problems. Investigators from USAID assisted countries, doing research in their own countries, have a vital role to play in understanding, and developing solutions to global problems.

B. ROLE OF USAID-SUPPORTED RESEARCH IN DEVELOPMENT

The role of USAID-supported research is derived directly from the Agency's mission which is to support the United States' national interests by promoting sustainable development through programs that foster broad-based economic, social and political participation in four interrelated strategic areas: economic growth, democracy, population and health and environment. Research to better identify, test, improve and adapt solutions to priority problems in developing countries is of central importance to this mission. In addition, a part of the Agency's research portfolio is devoted to identifying and understanding dimensions of anticipated, but poorly understood development challenges and to addressing key global problems. Thus, USAID supports applied and development research that addresses both immediate and long-term strategic objectives.

- * **Research and sustainable development:** New knowledge and technology generated and derived from behavioral, biological, physical, social science, and other research is critical to solving key problems confronting developing countries. Technological innovation has been a major focus of USAID's development efforts. Making innovations accessible through technology and knowledge transfer is also an important part of the process.

Scientific knowledge is particularly needed in the areas of tropical diseases, sustainable agriculture, rapid population growth, health and nutrition, defense conversion, democratization, and free market development. The US is a world leader in USAID-relevant areas of research and technological innovation and is thus uniquely positioned to use this infrastructure to attack problems in international development. Therefore, USAID-supported research, utilizing US expertise, fills a critical need.

- * **Technology and development:** Technology development along with operations research and policy research serve to increase the field relevance of our research efforts, and in

so doing, enhance the quality, efficiency, and impact of those efforts as well as the dissemination of research-generated knowledge to the field. Thus, USAID supports policy research, adaptive research or technology development, and operational research as integral components of its global and country development programs.

- * **Capacity strengthening:** USAID seeks to strengthen the science and technology (S&T) capacity of host country institutions and people, as well as relevant international institutions. That capacity plays a critical role in improving information for technological, entrepreneurial, economic, environmental, and political decision making. As research is the key underpinning for S&T, so is research capacity the key to S&T capacity; research funding is thus often an appropriate instrument for S&T capacity building. S&T capacity is ultimately dependent on professional researchers from the host country conducting research within their own institutions. It then follows that investment in intellectual capacity is essential for providing host country researchers the opportunity to participate in the development and the use of relevant science and technology. Building intellectual capacity provides the means to establish rational systematic approaches to problem solving and the means for propagating self-education. Thus, an important focus of USAID-supported research is to further sustainable development through participation via intellectual capacity building.

- * **Networks:** Many USAID research programs build networks of institutions, organizations and individuals who collaborate in creating and using knowledge and technologies. These collaborations promote mutual understanding and provide mutual benefits. A role of USAID research includes the recognition and support of linkages in research. Such mutual understanding may be extremely important in transition countries or in the peace process itself--thereby supporting other goals of US foreign policy.

C. USAID-SUPPORTED RESEARCH PROMOTES THE U.S. NATIONAL INTEREST

USAID-funded research promotes the interests of the American people by addressing important global problems and by assuring sustainable progress toward broad-based economic growth, protection of the environment, stable and healthy populations, and respect for democratic institutions, here and throughout the world. Support for research also contributes to improved humanitarian assistance and post-crisis transition in developing countries. Many products developed and improved through USAID-supported research also directly benefit U.S. consumers, e.g. the availability of new contraceptive and health technologies.

II. POLICY PRINCIPLES

A. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF USAID RESEARCH

Two key objectives guide USAID's overall research effort:

- To enhance the nature, effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of interventions that improve the well-being of women, men and children by offering long-lasting solutions to key development challenges in the areas of population, health and nutrition, economic growth, democratic governance, management of the environment and humanitarian assistance.
- To foster creative scientific and technological discoveries, innovative strategies and self-reliance. Research should develop host country capacity, when appropriate, for identifying and solving local problems and be readily available to decision makers.

B. KEY PRINCIPLES

Several key principles guide all aspects of Agency-supported research.

- **Quality.** USAID supports high quality research that not only meets the USG standards for research implementation but also assures review of the research at all appropriate stages, from proposal to outcome, through specified mechanisms such as peer review processes.
- **Responsible Management.** An appropriate technical staff will be maintained to assure responsible management and oversight of research.
- **Integration.** As appropriate, it is the policy of USAID that research be fully incorporated and integrated into development assistance activities.
- **Coordination.** Research efforts will be coordinated internally, and where appropriate externally, to ensure efficiency and maximum impact of resource allocation. Coordination includes the broad and timely dissemination of research priorities, efforts, and results with our development partners.
- **Ethics.** USAID-supported research must meet the highest ethical standards and the highest standards of accountability and social responsibility. Research will be conducted according to the highest scientific and professional standards of integrity. Research involving

human volunteers or laboratory animals will conform to all the relevant ethical standards designed for the protection of human subjects and laboratory animals by the U.S. government, as well as by the governments of the host country and the countries of the researchers involved (see USAID's "Policy and Procedures for Protection of Human Subjects in Research Supported by USAID" and the USG's "Common Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects"). Research will also conform to all applicable international, U.S. and host country regulations relating to environmental risks and/or safety hazards. Research risk assessment will include long term as well as short term risks. USAID will not support research in situations in which instability or other factors threaten adherence to ethically required safeguards.

- **Equity.** USAID research must meet the highest standards of equity in access to research funds, participation in research, benefits from research findings, and safety in research efforts. Issues of gender equity will be of special concern. Furthermore, assessment of equity in research programs will include concern for ethnic and racial minorities, the handicapped and other disadvantaged groups. Research on human subjects will not be conducted in countries in which the populations which participate in the research will not benefit from the research findings.
- **Local Involvement.** Where appropriate, research projects will be designed and undertaken in a manner to foster local intellectual capacity strengthening and participation.
- **Long-term Research.** Sustainable development includes the anticipation of factors that affect future outcomes of programs. Therefore, long-term and/or high risk strategic research efforts need to be protected where appropriate.
- **Critical Technologies.** USAID will identify a small group of technologies or new research approaches, characterized by rapid emergence of technological possibilities, critical relevance to sustainable development problems, and U.S. international leadership in the relevant scientific and technological areas. The Agency will emphasize cooperative programs in the application of such technologies to selected key development problems.

C. CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The USAID Research Agenda identifies priority problems that require research. The Agenda is established with the full recognition that research is an integral component of USAID's sustainable development programs. As such, the research

priorities within a given topic or sector will reflect USAID strategic goals in each area. Within this context, a determination of the magnitude of the problem and/or the role of research is made for each priority. The Agency's overall research budget allocations are based upon those determinations. The operational guidance that establishes procedures and criteria to assess competing demands for scarce resources and set priorities is summarized in Section III.

Compared with the magnitude and scope of research needs in international development issues, USAID has limited resources to bring to bear. Thus, the degree of the Agency's support for and involvement in a particular research activity may vary: The Agency may be the leading supporter of research; it may share that leadership with other donors; it may only participate in an effort which others are leading, or it may just observe rather than support the effort. The following criteria are to be used by all operating units in selecting topics for investigation and for guiding the degree of Agency involvement and allocation of resources to research. They are factors to be considered not only in initiating research but in continuing ongoing efforts and terminating programs as well.

- Relevance. Relevance to USAID's strategic priorities is clear including the attainment of functional and cross-functional goals as delineated in USAID's Strategy for Sustainable Development .
- USAID's Unique Role. There is a critical need for and comparative advantage of USAID support as a unique or important donor.
- Importance of the Problem. Magnitude or severity of the problem is large and opportunities for impact and involvement are great. Significant factors include, but are not necessarily limited to: numbers of people affected; geographic area affected; and economic impact.
- Consistency. Consistency with ongoing development assistance activities and strategies is clear so that the research contributes to and builds upon current activities and promotes the Agency's strategic objectives.
- Feasibility. There is a reasonable likelihood that research will produce useful knowledge or understanding or critical related technology(ies) within a specified time.
- U.S. Institution's Unique Role. When a U.S. institution is involved, its comparative advantage as a participant in the research is clear.

To facilitate the use of these criteria, operating units as well as the Agency Research Council and Working Group/Sector Councils should use appropriate analytical tools (e.g., cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis) to determine the relative value of USAID research efforts.

D. QUALITY OF RESEARCH AND PROCESS OF REVIEW/EVALUATION

Research progress and results are monitored and evaluated on impact, quality, participation, coordination (with the scientific/research and donor community) and investment. In many areas, research is assessed through a peer review process such as technical advisory committees and groups and a formal review through peer-reviewed publications.

E. COORDINATION OF RESEARCH

Coordination of Research within USAID: Research is supported by many operational units in the Agency. Research plans and strategies are usually specific to a particular sector, office or region. This USAID Policy on Research and the USAID Research Agenda derived from this Policy serve to enhance a synergy, an integration of research plans and strategies throughout USAID, with respect to USAID strategic goals. To ensure coordination and integration of research within the Agency, research activities should be specified in the Strategic Plan, Action Plan and (for Missions) Country Strategies of all operational units. The Agency's management process for reviewing and approving Strategic Plans and Action Plans will provide the oversight for review and approval of specific research activities contained in operational units' portfolios.

Coordination of Research Supported by Others: USAID does not provide support for research on problems that are adequately addressed by other public agencies, other donors, or private or voluntary organizations. This, however, does not preclude USAID participation in multilateral research efforts.

Scarce resources necessitate effective coordination with other donors. This coordination is an increasingly important aspect of USAID research efforts. The coordination and management of development research must emphasize results that are linked to program objectives and the use of those results must be promoted in developing countries and in the U.S. Donor coordination has the potential of creating a catalytic effect that may be instrumental in leveraging additional resources and maintaining on-going support for strategic research.

Research that is best funded and managed by for-profit enterprises is generally not funded by USAID, except when there is a compelling reason to do so. The Agency promotes policy

environments and institutions which generally enable private sector research technology development and transfer to flourish. USAID research cooperation with the private sector may be required to ensure development and use of critically important products for the public good in the field.

F. DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

The results of research must be widely disseminated through formal and informal systems to include the end-user(s), local community, host country institutions (including technical units and policy makers), regional networks, donor community, and international community. Research results are shared through publications in professional and technical journals, through research networks, conferences, and electronic communications. Less formal mechanisms need also to be employed including media, informal networks, general publications and communications. The results of research must not be limited to the domain of the scientific community; they must also reach the policy makers and the end-users.

G. IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

RESEARCH MANAGEMENT. USAID funds and usually manages research activities implemented by others (including US universities, contractors, grantees, host country universities). The management and funding principles which govern these activities are described above and are reiterated as follows:

- Research is managed to emphasize results, and the use of those results is promoted in developing countries and in the US.
- Research is managed to foster a capacity strengthening partnership with developing country researchers and research institutions where appropriate.
- Research is funded on a timely basis after careful and open evaluation of research proposals/protocols.
- Research is managed by technically capable USAID staff.

H. RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

USAID has three purposes in supporting research: 1) creating development-relevant knowledge and products; 2) validating that knowledge; and, 3) institutionalizing a sustainable research capacity that serves the needs of host countries and the global community. Thus in planning and then implementing research the following issues should generally be addressed:

- * **Public versus Private Sector:** US research policy has been based on the belief that in most cases product and commercial process development research should be conducted and financed by the private sector. Many transition and developing countries have no tradition of private sector research, nor are there always adequate markets to interest foreign commercial firms. However, much new technology in the U.S. which is crucial for development in host countries (for example, biotechnology) is proprietary in nature and therefore, access to this technology requires cooperation and collaboration with private industry. USAID is therefore faced with the need to analyze each specific research situation to determine if the research is best conducted in the public sector, the private sector, or through collaboration. The over-arching concern should be on solving a particular developmental constraint in the most effective, timely and efficient manner.

- * **Inherently Commercial Research:** In general, USAID will not fund research which should be funded by commercial interests. USAID may seek to encourage the private sector to undertake research needed for sustainable development, using appropriate policy instruments (procurement, taxes, intellectual property rights, or regulatory functions), providing seed capital, and demonstrating and encouraging innovative partnerships with the public sector. In some cases, where public welfare requires that a technology best developed in the commercial sector be made available, but where the potential market does not justify commercial investment adequate to develop the technology, USAID may provide necessary support.

- * **Academic versus Non-Academic:** In the U.S., public support of research in academic institutions, especially in research intensive universities, provides a key element in the educational system. In transition and developing countries, however, the traditions of research in academic institutions are gravely lacking; rather in such countries research has often been institutionalized in government research organizations. USAID is therefore faced with the need to determine if the human capacity building externalities of funding research in academia warrant such a move, or if research should rather be funded in commercial or governmental institutions.

- * **Host Country, Regional or International Institutions:** U.S. science policy generally suggests that the U.S. be at the state-of-the-art in all scientific and technological areas, and in selected areas retain world leadership. However, it seems clear that developing countries and frequently transition countries can not hope to achieve such a situation. To the degree that first class research capacity

is needed to serve such countries, it seems mandatory to develop regional or international research centers that provide research capacity that can not be afforded in all countries. However, experience has shown that it is difficult to sustain such regional or global research institutions. USAID funding of research in such institutions can on the one hand provide needed support for sustenance of the necessary capacity, but on the other hand can contribute to an ultimately unsustainable situation. USAID policy is again to analyze individual research situations in order to fund regional and international centers where that is appropriate overall, and to fund U.S. or host country research where support for a regional or international center is not appropriate.

- * **U.S. or Overseas Funding:** Clearly, one of the objectives of USAID research policy is for the Agency to support the international collaboration of the U.S. research community as it focuses on problems of sustainable development. However, too great a dependence of host country institutions on U.S. collaboration is counterproductive to the development of indigenous research capacity, and is ultimately unsustainable. Therefore, USAID must allocate research support to encourage the U.S. research community to focus on problems of sustainable development, and must also encourage indigenous research institutions to develop independent support mechanisms.

- * **Sustainability:** Sustainability depends in large part on a favorable policy environment, one that is conducive to sustaining an institution through the provision of funding and other resources needed by the institution, political support and leadership, etc. The interpretation of these factors will of course depend on the nature of the research institution (e.g. commercial, governmental or academic; national, regional or international.) Still, USAID should be prepared to analyze the sustainability of different options for institutionalizing research, and to participate in policy dialogue with host countries and other donors, or to undertake specific institution building efforts where needed to achieve sustainability.

I. BENEFITS TO THE U.S.

Domestic benefits to the U.S. are not the principal objective of USAID's foreign assistance program, but such benefits are frequent outcomes from research on development problems. Examples of these domestic benefits of USAID-supported research include: 1) new contraceptives; 2) new farming techniques that promote sustainable agriculture and minimize environmental impacts; and 3) new food crops that are more disease-resistant and of higher nutritional value.

The Agency will take the necessary measures to see that potential domestic benefits of research supported by USAID are actually realized. This policy includes supporting the manufacture of products in the U.S. that result from USAID-funded research.

III. OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

A. CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES IN RESEARCH

This section provides guidance on how the Policy is to be implemented through operational units. As a key first step, the Policy will be used to establish research policies in each of USAID's sustainable development strategic areas. Using the criteria herein and area-specific issues, research agendas for each sustainable development strategic area will be developed which describe research priorities and directions with each area. From those agendas, an Agency Research Agenda, which describes overall Agency research directions and priorities, will be developed.

1. OPERATIONS

The process of establishing a research agenda for each strategic area and for the Agency as a whole, will involve identifying priorities and target levels of effort for research supported by USAID. The agendas will be used as a key factor in basis for resource allocation decisions.

This agenda-setting process involves:

- using criteria set forth in this document and in other policy guidance to establish priorities;
- assigning an appropriate target level of effort (budget and personnel resources) within and between priorities; and
- providing a decision process for reviewing and evaluating ongoing and proposed research.

The implementation of this process and who participates (in both advisory and decision-making roles) in this process is as follows:

- * **Agenda-Setting Teams:** In order to develop a research agenda in each of the five USAID strategic areas (listed on page 1) and cross-cutting teams as needed, an ad hoc Agenda-Setting Team for each area will be formed and co-chaired by the Bureau for Global Affairs, Field Support and Research and the Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination. Teams will include representatives identified by all affected bureaus. (Existing Sector Councils or members from them may

constitute part or all of a team.) As needed, the Teams may seek external advice. Once the agendas are developed, the Agency Research Council will review and approve the Agency's research priorities in each of the strategic areas. The Research Working Group (an existing advisory group includes technical staff from throughout the Agency) of the Agency Research Council will then produce a USAID Research Agenda combining these five specific agendas. The Agenda will include research priorities that will already be addressed through ongoing research as well as priority areas that may require new research.

- * **Funding decisions:** The process of using the Agenda to assign level of effort must adhere to the following principles: the funding decision process must be transparent; it should work within established budget and activity review procedures; and it must focus on research topics/projects in order of their priority within each of the sectors/operational units supporting research. It is expected that research directed at lower priority problems, and research which is not yielding results or useful insights, will be discontinued in a timely manner.

- * **Ongoing research:** As part of the budget planning process, central and regional bureaus will briefly describe how current and proposed research-coded activities address Agenda priorities. Plans for phasing out research on low priority problems will be submitted as part of the budget planning process. The Bureaus for Policy and Program Coordination and Management will review these submissions to ensure consistency with the Agenda and performance towards meeting research goals. Adjustments will be negotiated with affected units.

- * **New research:** New research activities will be reviewed in a manner that is in keeping with new Agency management principles and procedures so that bureaus have a timely opportunity to assess if and how the proposed research fits within strategic objectives. Authorization by bureaus of a new or amended research activity must be given in conformance with the priorities established in the Agenda.

2. BUDGET: USAID funds and often manages research activities implemented by others (including US universities, contractors, and host country universities). The funding principles which govern these activities are incorporated within the criteria previously listed (Section II.B). In addition, several other principles need to be considered.

Management for research results, particularly if the research is long term in nature, may exceed timeframes established for other development interventions. Regardless of whether the research is of a longer or shorter term in expected impact, indicators or milestones should be established that allow periodic assessment of progress.

Research activities and funding are incorporated into the total program planning and budget process. There is not a separate budget for research. Establishment of a Research Agenda which includes priorities is done with the understanding that research is an integral component of the sector or topic program budget. It is within that context that research support is considered. In this regard, there is not an incentive or need to compare one strategic sustainable development area with a different area for funding purposes (e.g. democracy research vs. agriculture research). The relative support for the area identifies the budget. Within each area, the support for research determines the budget allocation. Therefore, support for research activities should be determined during the review of operational units' Strategic Plans and Action Plans. The Agency's Research Agenda will use the criteria established herein to identify Agency-wide research priorities; it will be the Agency's research "roadmap."

The critical issue of long-term research investments and global research initiatives should be considered within this budget framework as well. Exceptions to this process or decisions to terminate long-term investments with the potential for broad impact and significant changes to the Research Agenda should be reviewed through the Agency Research Council.

3. CAPACITY BUILDING: Research support for the single purpose of human and institutional capacity building should not be through the research topic mechanism. As such, capacity building would not be included as a research problem within the Research Agenda. However, capacity building is recognized as integral to the concept of sustainable programs; i.e. the ability of individuals to identify priority problems, propose reasonable solutions, and continue efforts to solve problems. As indicated previously, capacity strengthening is considered a key role of Agency supported research.

4. ROLES: In addition to the Agenda-Setting Teams described in Section III.1, responsibilities for fulfilling this Policy rests with the following entities.

Operational Units: Day-to-day implementation of and adherence to this Policy rests with the operational unit which manages the research activity. Promotion and oversight of the coordination of research efforts with other research activities

resides with the operational unit. Research not meeting the criteria specified herein will be modified or terminated by the unit.

Agency Research Council: As stated in its Charter, the Council ensures overall compliance with this Research Policy through periodic reviews of the Agency's research portfolio. As part of the reviews, the priorities, results and investments made within each strategic area will be assessed by the Council (using external groups as necessary). The Council will review and approve the Agency Research Agenda and, in so doing, will ensure general research coordination within the Agency, and consistency between the Agenda and Agency priorities, and to the extent possible, the financial resources necessary to conduct/continue the research identified as priorities by the operational units and the ARC.