

THE INITIATIVE TO REVITALIZE EVALUATION AT USAID

In January 2005, USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios launched an Agency-wide Initiative to Revitalize Evaluation within the Agency. Evaluations were required until 1994, when new USAID regulations removed the requirement. Over the years fewer evaluations have been done.¹

In the March 2005 Frontlines, the Administrator explained his goals. "To make our role in development effective, good management practices are necessary. One area of our work that needs strengthening has to do with program evaluation. Evaluation is at the heart of three of the nine principles of development that guide Agency operations: the principle of accountability, the principle of assessment, and the principle of results."

In July 2005, the Administrator sent a cable (attached) to Mission Directors requesting action on the following items. Missions were asked to:

- 1. Plan for appropriate evaluation in the design of all activities and ensure that ongoing evaluations have an evaluation component;**
- 2. Improve the quality of evaluations;**
- 3. Undertake evaluations of all major programs;**
- 4. Appoint a monitoring and evaluation officer;**
- 5. Send the M&E officer to the PPC-sponsored Certificate Evaluation Training;**
- 6. Set aside necessary funds to conduct evaluations;**
- 7. Prepare a Mission Order;**
- 8. Prepare a Mission Evaluation Plan;**
- 9. Provide training for CTOs;**
- 10. Involve more US staff (FSO, FSN, PSC) in evaluations;**
- 11. Submit all evaluations to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC); and**
- 12. Set up incentives for employees who do evaluations.**

¹ Some 528 evaluations were submitted to the Agency's evaluations bank, the Development Experience Clearinghouse, in 1994; that number fell to 79 in 2001.

Text of the Cable from the Administrator to Mission Directors

SUBJECT: ACTIONS REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THE INITIATIVE TO
REVITALIZE EVALUATION IN THE AGENCY

UNCLAS STATE 127594
July 8, 2005

1. SUMMARY: This communication reiterates my emphasis on program evaluation, summarizes progress to date in implementing the Evaluation Revitalization Initiative, and specifies required actions by missions in an intensive effort to revitalize evaluation in the Agency. END SUMMARY.

2. In January of this year, I launched the Initiative to Revitalize Evaluation in USAID, and instructed PPC/CDIE to take the lead in this critical area of Management Reform. You may have seen the two articles in the March 2005 issue of Frontlines on the subject, including my "Notes From Natsios" Column. In that column I said that having objective and regular evaluations of the impact of our programs is essential to understanding the extent to which we are achieving results. Indeed, evaluations are at the heart of at least three of the nine principles of development assistance: the principle of accountability, the principle of assessment, and the principle of results.

3. HACFO Chairman Jim Kolbe's remarks at the May Worldwide Mission Directors' Conference give additional impetus to the requirement to strengthen evaluation in the Agency. You will recall that Congressman Kolbe noted the importance of being able to clearly demonstrate the results USAID is achieving with taxpayer dollars.

4. AGENCY ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE EVALUATION INITIATIVE

To date, USAID has undertaken actions in each of the four parts of the Initiative - Training, Standards and Guidance, Policy, and Outreach. Specifically, in collaboration with other Agency Offices, PPC/CDIE in recent months has:

- Provided evaluation training to 48 Washington and Field staff, expanding the training begun in the EE and Africa Bureaus. Additional courses are scheduled in Fall 2005 for Washington Staff and in 2006 for the ANE and LAC Bureaus;
- Drafted new guidance for USAID staff on preparing evaluation reports, available at [HTTP://CDIE.USAID.GOV/](http://CDIE.USAID.GOV/);
- Updated the TIPS Series on Performance Monitoring and Evaluation;
- Established a monthly forum in Washington for Evaluation Officers to identify actions to strengthen evaluations at the Bureau level;
- Increased outreach to partners and other donor organizations;
- Proposed inclusion of evaluation, specifically for Agency managers, in the AEF Precepts; and
- Drafted revisions to ADS Chapter 203 - Assessing and Learning

that will require mandatory evaluations of key programs.

5. ACTIONS REQUESTED OF USAID FIELD MISSIONS

A. Mission support for this Initiative is indispensable; capturing the results of our work can only be done at the Mission level. Accordingly, I expect you to plan for appropriate evaluations in the design of all activities and ensure that ongoing activities have an evaluation component. Also, I expect improvements in the quality of evaluations. Finally, I would like to hear from you on how you are applying the results of evaluations, such as in the design of new activities and strategies, and in making course corrections of ongoing work.

B. For medium and large missions, I expect you to undertake evaluations of all major programs. This general principle applies to smaller missions that may need support from regional office of Bureaus. PPC/CDIE will work with you and your Washington Offices to clarify requirements and do what makes sense.

C. Specifically, I want you to:

- Appoint a Mission Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. Each Mission will designate a Mission Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and nominate this individual to participate in the three week CDIE-sponsored Certificate Evaluation Training Course.
- Ensure that sufficient funds are set aside for program evaluation during the design phase of a given Strategic Objective, program, or activity.
- Prepare a Mission Order on Monitoring and Evaluation that establishes Mission procedures for conducting monitoring and evaluation activities. The Mission Orders should reflect the revised ADS that will be issued later this summer, and Agency Best Practices, such as instructing CTOs to provide evaluators open and complete access to program data and to implementing partners, and supporting objective evaluations that report both the negative and positive outcomes of a program. Examples of recent Mission Orders on monitoring and evaluation are available at [HTTP://ppc.usaid.gov/eval/orders](http://ppc.usaid.gov/eval/orders). PPC/CDIE is preparing additional guidance on evaluation best practices.
- Prepare an annual Mission Evaluation Plan. The Evaluation Plan parallels the Annual Performance Monitoring Plan. The combination of the two plans provides missions with a sound foundation for tracking results and assessing the need for program changes. The plans also provide information for the Mission Portfolio Reviews and Annual Reports. An example of such an evaluation plan is also found at [HTTP://CDIE.USAIID.GOV/](http://CDIE.USAIID.GOV/).
- Provide evaluation training for CTOs. PPC/CDIE is designing short evaluation training courses to prepare CTOs for their role in identifying the need for evaluations and best practices in preparing evaluation scopes of work. Increase the involvement of USAID employees in evaluations. A recent study of the USAID evaluation system noted that the majority of evaluations are conducted by contractors and hence the knowledge gained is not always being captured by the Agency. I strongly support returning to the practice of including USAID employees

(e.g., USDHs, FSNs and PSCs) on evaluation teams.

- Submit all evaluations to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) at [HTTP://WWW.DEC.ORG/SUBMIT.CFM](http://www.dec.org/submit.cfm). Evaluation results must be shared. Evaluation findings that indicate areas for improvement or approaches that did not work are as valuable as positive findings.
- Offer incentives to staff who promote the use of evaluations. Encourage staff to use evaluations not as punitive instruments, but rather as a way to increase our knowledge about what is working to achieve development objectives.

CONCLUSION: Evaluations are a principle means for understanding the results of our development programs and for helping the Agency learn and change. Given the rapidly changing global environment and new demands placed on U.S. Foreign Assistance, evaluations, more than ever, have assumed increased importance. I would like each of you to report to me within two months of receipt of this message, i.e. by the end of August 2005, your plan for ensuring that your programs are being evaluated sufficiently and objectively, and how the results of these evaluations are being used to both adjust, when necessary, ongoing program implementation and to inform future program development. RICE