# DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE (DRG) LEARNING AGENDA OVERVIEW

**December 2020**

# DRG LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH ACTIVITY II

# DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE LEARNING AGENDA OVERVIEW

## December 2020

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# ACRONYMS

| Acronym | Definition |
|---------|------------|
| DRG | Democracy, Rights and Governance |
| CMIS | Case Management Information System |
| CVE | Countering Violent Extremism |
| DRG | Democracy, Human Rights and Governance |
| HRSM | Human Rights Support Mechanism |
| JSSP | Judicial Strengthening and Support Project |
| LER | Learning, Evaluation, and Research |
| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| NORC | National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago |
| PITA | Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability |
| PTD | Prolonged pre-trial detention |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| USIP | United States Institute of Peace |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The DRG Center's mission is to create and disseminate knowledge on the advancement of democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) abroad and to manage grants and provide technical support to United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Missions implementing programs in these areas. The current DRG strategy emphasizes a focus on learning – throughout the implementation of the current DRG Strategy, efforts have been made to build the DRG evidence base through improvements in evaluation and measurement, the development of hypotheses to guide programming, as well as efforts to strengthen USAID's capability to generate, curate, disseminate and promote learning, including through the establishment of the DRG Center's Learning Division. To organize the systematic generation of evidence in the DRG sector, the DRG Center developed an annual Learning Agenda initiative.

## LEARNING AGENDA DEVELOPMENT

The DRG Learning Agenda is a set of research questions in priority development areas for which the DRG Center organized existing data, generated new evidence, and produced conclusions and recommendations through academic research, program evaluations, and multi-method tests of the assumptions and theories of change that guide DRG programming. Formulated through a consultative process, the Learning Agenda initiative sought to organize the systematic generation of evidence in the DRG sector.

Theme teams, organized around the goals of the DRG Center strategy, were convened starting in the summer of 2015. The teams generated learning questions to address theories of change and development hypotheses that were often implicitly built into logical frameworks, but rarely tested explicitly. Questions were focused on enduring real-world problems for which there was a literature base that could be distilled with applicability across countries and regions. The final 2016 Learning Agenda questions were selected based on a collaborative process of prioritization with roughly 400 stakeholders.

The Learning Division created customized action plans to address each question. For a number of questions, small grants were awarded competitively to universities to conduct multi-disciplinary evidence reviews. Prior to the finalization of the reviews, the academic teams came together with USAID staff to discuss the findings and explore the implications for programming. These discussions informed the development of learning products (e.g. two-pagers and infographics) intended to distill interesting findings that could have relevance and draw people into documents where they could find more information. In addition to commissioning reviews, the DRG Center funded select research and evaluation activities to fill gaps in the evidence.

After one year, the DRG Center convened a Learning Agenda Advisory Group to assess the status of learning questions and provide guidance and oversight to the creation of the 2017 Learning Agenda. In all, the 2016 and 2017 Learning Agendas included 20 learning questions organized around five thematic areas: Participation and Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability, Human Rights, DRG Integration, and Theories of Democratic Change.

**LEARNING AGENDA REVIEW**

In preparation for formulating the 2021-2022 Learning Agenda, the DRG Center commissioned a review to catalogue the research generated by the DRG Center since the initiation of the Learning Agenda and assess the degree to which each of the questions from the 2016 and 2017 agendas had been addressed. In addition, the DRG Center requested a series of key informant interviews with individuals involved with the DRG Learning Agenda in various roles and time periods in order to identify lessons learned and recommendations for the future.

## LEARNING AGENDA EVIDENCE

The review generated a Learning Agenda Rack-up that compiles and summarizes evidence found in 107 documents across this body of research and provides details regarding findings, conclusions, and recommendations. In addition to research conducted since the beginning of the Learning Agenda initiative in 2016, the Rack-Up also identified a wide array of relevant policy research projects or evidence reviews that were commissioned by the DRG Center over the last decade. The documents included in the Learning Agenda Rack-up were classified into four types or categories reflecting the goals and methodologies of the research: evidence reviews, surveys, impact evaluations, and performance evaluations. Evidence reviews account for the greatest number of documents, at 47, followed by 23 impact evaluations, 22 performance evaluations, and 15 surveys.

The Learning Agenda Rack-up includes the key documents that address each learning question, some of the main findings emerging from those documents, an assessment of the evidence coverage, and future research opportunities for each learning question. In sum, 16 of the 20 learning questions were categorized as done, one is considered active as of October 2020, and three were put on hold.

Key research findings, as well as opportunities for further research, are summarized by Learning Agenda theme below.

**Learning Agenda Theme: Participation and Inclusion**

Findings:

- Supporting the formation of domestic alliances represents a relatively low risk but effective strategy for encouraging participation within restrictive political environments.

- Participation initiatives tend to be most effective when they include clear directives for action in addition to motivating information.

- An in-depth understanding of the roots of exclusion of marginalized groups is important to ensure that DRG assistance programs provide opportunities for participation in safe and non-coercive ways.

- External DRG practitioners should invest in learning about (and communicating with) local networks to identify pre-existing social structures that can ensure smooth implementation of programs and maintain participation once assistance periods have ended.

Research opportunities:

- Additional impact evaluations comparing alternative strategies for voting and other forms of political participation could help to determine which mobilization tools are most effective, and for which subsets of the population.

- In contexts where citizens demand transformative change, qualitative and comparative research could help to improve understanding of which forms of extra-institutional social action are most likely to minimize violence and maximize stability.

**Learning Agenda Theme: Transparency and Accountability**

Findings:

- Internal governance structures and external pressure towards accountability are not necessarily substitutes for one another but may instead interact in a complex way.

- Local informal institutions and cultural codes may be at least as important as formal organizational rules in shaping the behavior of state agents.

- Building institutions that support regular interfacing between state agencies and the citizens they serve may improve the effects of external pressure on government performance – since the same quantity of citizen feedback may give rise to stronger responses, to the extent that clear channels are open, and visible successes can lead to virtuous circles of participation and accountability.

Research opportunities:

- Future impact evaluations can build on insights from clusters of evidence already present within existing learning documents to design new combinations of internal and external accountability mechanisms, and then test these across multiple countries and/or across multiple state agencies within a single country.

- The evidence base could benefit substantially from qualitative studies that explore the subtleties of the decision-making processes undergone by state agents as they navigate multiple overlapping sets of goals, incentive structures, and sociocultural value systems.

**Learning Agenda Theme: Human Rights**

Findings:

- Connecting human rights leaders and civic networks with one another, and with global human rights communities, can represent an important step toward strengthening human rights.

- While democratic governments must forge their own national human rights institutions in dialogue with their citizens, donors and other external supporters can assist the process by helping to launch and manage databases, forensic information and response systems, and other management tools.

- The success of human rights campaigns and other initiatives depends heavily on the nature of the collective action frames they mobilize and the extent to which these frames resonate with key stakeholder constituencies.

Research opportunities:

- While impact evaluations are difficult to conduct for many human rights topics, they could prove useful to test and calibrate the effects of alternative human rights frames on decision-making processes, and also the effectiveness of individual-level rights programs like legal assistance.

- Qualitative and comparative studies could help to inform strategic planning by studying the circumstances under which human rights frames affect the behaviors of state actors, and the structural conditions through which these influences can translate into longer term institutionalization of rights protection.

## Learning Agenda Theme: DRG Integration

Findings:

- A wide array of Participation, Inclusion, Transparency, and Accountability (PITA) intervention models are found to be effective in improving both citizen engagement in service delivery and in improving service delivery outcomes, although it is easier to substantially impact the former than the latter.

- Grassroots reforms are most likely to scale up and cross sectors when defended by broad coalitions of local actors that hold autonomy from state authorities.

Research opportunities:

- Because the DRG Integration theme is inherently cross-sectoral, it may benefit future DRG policy research to ensure for each DRG project that cross-sectoral ramifications have been considered and explored, with time and resources allocated to inductive explorations of potential spillover effects.

## Learning Agenda Theme: Theories of Democratic Change

Findings:

- Transitions toward or away from democracy typically manifest in part as a series of changes in the rules that govern participation and/or rights.

- Democracy practitioners should look to the patterns of empowerment and disempowerment implied by these rule changes rather than their ostensible motivations when planning interventions.

Research opportunities:

- ■ Qualitative and comparative studies may yield important insights by examining in greater depth the roles played by external DRG assistance within recent transitions toward or away from democracy.

## LEARNING AGENDA PROCESS FINDINGS

Through key informant interviews, a number of lessons learned (associated with the development and implementation of the Learning Agenda) emerged. Most notably, informants felt that a major success of the Learning Agenda process was influencing the culture of reflection and deliberation. The Learning Agenda was credited with bringing questions to the fore in people's minds, providing an organized and visible agenda for thinking about how work related to answering the questions in a tangible way, and promoting a culture where people would consult literature, be thoughtful, challenge assumptions, fund research, and bring in evidence and data to support project design. Additionally, key informants highlighted the essential nature of leadership support to the success of the process and the challenge involved in ensuring consistent ownership and support over time. Several informants highlighted the ongoing and robust engagement with staff as a major success of the DRG Learning Agenda process. The high-level of involvement, facilitated through active participatory engagement approaches, was credited with creating a high level of ownership and commitment to addressing the learning questions.

Several informants praised the interdisciplinary approach of the literature reviews, which engaged academics from fields such as political science, sociology, anthropology, economics and psychology, thus ensuring that evidence reviews provided the broadest possible understanding. Across the board, informants stressed the importance of explicitly bridging the worlds of academia and practitioner and the role of the Learning Division in creating a process that brought the strengths of academics and the literature base to bear in a way that could be practical and applicable for practitioners.

## LEARNING AGENDA PROCESS IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on their experience, informants provided several recommendations for the future:

- **Stakeholder involvement.** As informants lauded the active engagement in the 2016 and 2017 agendas, the majority of comments were associated with providing an expanded list of additional stakeholders who could be engaged in the future including field staff, private sector, academia, and implementing partners.

- **Limit the number of Learning Agenda questions; increase the timeframe to address them.** There was also general agreement among key informants that it would be beneficial to consider *limiting the number of learning questions to three to six* and *expanding the time horizon for answering them from one to two years*. The complete list of recommendations can be found in this Overview document.

# BACKGROUND

The DRG Center's mission is to create and disseminate knowledge on the advancement of democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) abroad and to manage grants and provide technical support to United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Missions implementing programs in these areas. The Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance reaffirms USAID's commitment to "generate, analyze, and disseminate rigorous, systematic, and publicly accessible evidence in all aspects of DRG policy, strategy and program development, implementation, and evaluation."[1]

The 2008 National Research Council publication _Democracy Assistance – Building Knowledge Through Evaluations and Research_ informed a focus on learning in the current DRG Strategy. The 2008 report recommended (1) that USAID develop a pilot program of impact evaluations, (2) sector development of more objective indicators of democratic change, (3) development of case-study based hypotheses to guide programming, and (4) strengthened institutional capabilities for learning dissemination and utilization.

There has been significant progress since that time and throughout the implementation of the current DRG Strategy to build the DRG evidence base through improvements in evaluation, including pioneering work on DRG impact evaluations, and through improvements in DRG measurement, including measurement of the disaggregated subcomponents of democracy, most dramatically by V-Dem. In addition, considerable progress has been made to develop hypotheses to guide programming, including the Theories of Democratic Change Research Initiative implemented by the Institute for International Education and the Theories of Democratic Change II: Paths Away from Authoritarianism study prepared by Michigan State University, as well as efforts to strengthen USAID's capability to generate, curate, disseminate and promote the utilization of learning, including through the establishment of the DRG Center's Learning Division.

To organize the systematic generation of evidence in the DRG sector, the DRG Center developed an annual Learning Agenda initiative. Formulated through a consultative process, the DRG Learning Agenda is comprised of questions in priority development areas for which the DRG Center sought to organize and disseminate existing data, generate new evidence, and produce recommendations by using academic research, program evaluations, and multi-method tests of the theories of change that guide DRG programming.

This document outlines the process undertaken to develop and implement the 2016 and 2017 Learning Agendas; briefly describes the USAID DRG sector learning activities and products that address the Learning Agenda questions by thematic area; outlines lessons learned from the Learning Agenda process; and highlights considerations for further research to increase evidence in relation to the Learning Agenda questions and/or areas of focus for a subsequent Learning Agenda.

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[1] USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, June 2013

# PROCESS

This section describes the process used to develop and implement the DRG 2016 and 2017 Learning Agendas. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction created by the Learning Division in 2016 to capture the intended process.

## FORMULATION OF THE 2016 DRG LEARNING AGENDA

The 2016 DRG Learning Agenda was developed in a highly participatory process over a five- to six-month period of time.

### INITIATION

A concept note developed in the summer of 2015 captured the purpose and direction of the Learning Agenda effort and clarified how the Learning Agenda would be aligned with the DRG Center's strategy (see Figure 1 below). The concept note enabled the Learning Division to secure the support of the DRG director and the deputy assistant administrator of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA).

### THEME TEAMS

Theme teams were convened starting in the summer of 2015 to engage D.C.-based staff in thinking about the most important learning questions within DRG. Theme teams were organized around the goals in the DRG Center strategy, thereby creating diverse teams that cut across DRG units. Each team was paired with a facilitator from the Learning Division and supported through a process of compiling theories of change and developing a list of "middle-range" learning questions.

Middle-range questions were intended to be those that addressed theories of change and development hypotheses. The theories of change were those that USAID field missions implicitly built into logical frameworks, but rarely tested explicitly. They were broader than questions about specific intervention impact and narrower than questions about sector development, and were intended to focus on enduring real-world problems where there was a literature base that could be distilled with applicability across countries and regions.

### PRIORITIZATION

After the theme teams developed their lists of questions, the Learning Division initiated a survey process with the larger DRG cadre to prioritize questions. Using an online survey tool, roughly 400 stakeholders in Washington, D.C. and Missions were asked to assign each question to one of three priority buckets (low, medium, and high) based on criteria such as importance and relevance.

### QUESTION WORKSHOPPING

Each of the top learning questions were then workshopped to sharpen the focus, relational logic, and relevance outside of the USAID context. Small groups worked to explicitly state assumptions and underlying motivations and develop the final learning questions.

**Figure 1: How to Create a Learning Agenda**
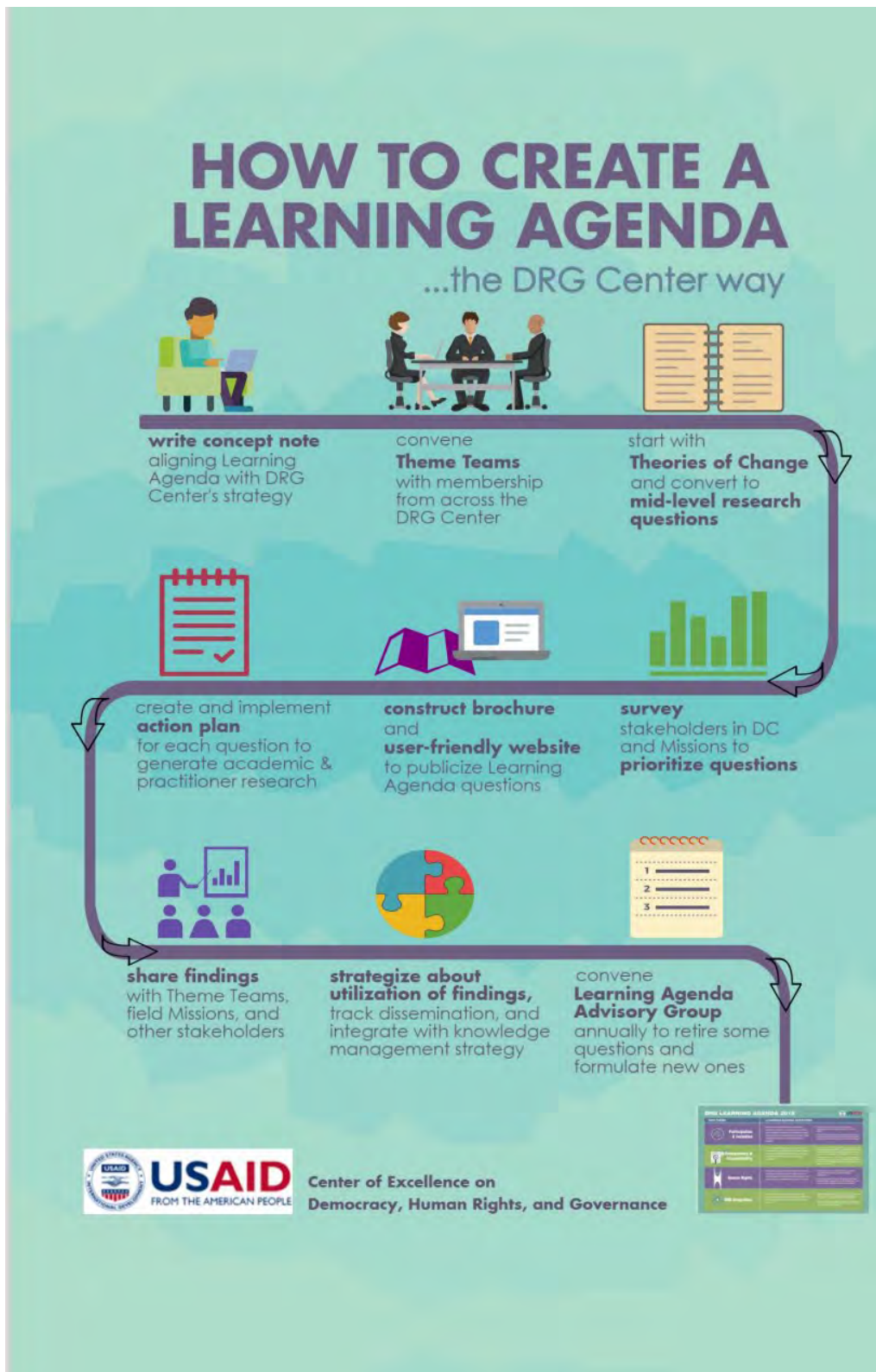
## IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNING EFFORT

Once learning questions were finalized, efforts began to address the questions through a variety of methods.

### ACTION PLANS

The Learning Division created a customized action plan to address each question. Graduate student interns assisted with conducting quick literature reviews to verify the quality of existing evidence in the academic literature. As the action plan was developed for each learning question, questions tended to be covered in one of four ways depending on the level of evidence available and other Center priorities. A number of questions were addressed through commissioning evidence reviews followed by workshops, public presentations, and the production and dissemination of learning products in a variety of forms and channels. Where literature reviews already existed, the focus of the action plan proceeded directly to producing learning products such as two-pagers and infographics that could communicate what was already known. A third method, applied to several questions, involved incorporating them into various existing Center research or products. Finally, some learning questions were not addressed due to preliminary research suggesting research activities that could not be easily conducted or questions, that upon further reflection, had to be adapted to be addressable or dropped due to a lack of resources or lack of relevance at the time

### EVIDENCE REVIEWS

Small, competitive grants were awarded to universities to conduct multi-disciplinary literature reviews around a number of high-priority questions. These reviews brought together academics in a variety of fields including political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, and psychology, thus ensuring that reviews provided the broadest possible understanding. As the academic teams started working, USAID staff from across the DRG divisions provided them with the vision for how the findings from the literature review could be used by USAID and articulated the assumptions DRG officers were making in the field. Prior to the finalization of the reviews, the academic teams came together with DRG team members in workshops to discuss the findings and explore implications.

> "The workshops with the academic teams were powerful events and effective products in and of themselves. As technical staff, we were involved in conversations with researchers and were then able to understand and incorporate the research at a much deeper level than if we had just read a literature review. A lot of this understanding informed subsequent trainings and technical assistance provided to Missions." – key informant

### NEW RESEARCH AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

To fill gaps in the evidence, the DRG Center funded select research and evaluation activities. The DRG Center arsenal of research activities included impact evaluations, population-based surveys and survey experiments, classic performance evaluations, comparative case studies, evidence reviews, computational data analysis, ethnographic research, and focus groups.

Starting in 2013, the DRG Center conducted annual Impact Evaluation Clinics for USAID Missions interested in planning impact evaluations in the DRG sector. Preceding the creation of the Learning

Agenda, these clinics brought together academics and Mission staff involved in program design to think about what Missions wanted to learn from the programs, inform that with what was already known from the literature and work together with academics to design appropriate impact evaluations. The impact evaluations provided relevant studies for the subsequent literature reviews around learning questions and the Learning Division conducted several mappings of impact and program evaluations to identify connections. When the Learning Agenda was developed in 2016, it provided a framework within which impact evaluations could be considered.

> "The Learning Agenda brought in an organizing framework. We had a million questions before and all of them were good. The Learning Agenda was a way to present answers in a more digestible format. Through this framework, it was easier to access information when it was needed to inform design." – key informant

## PACKAGING AND DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

### LEARNING PRODUCTS

A major focus on the Learning Agenda effort was creating engaging, program-relevant learning products. With a focus on simplicity of message, products were carefully planned for accessibility to distill interesting findings that could have relevance and draw people into documents where they could find more information. Formats included two-pagers, short video posts, webinars, and infographics.

### DISSEMINATION

Dissemination was considered an essential element of the Learning Agenda in order to enhance utilization by the DRG cadre and partner community. Strategies employed included postings on listservs, evidence summits, newsletters, publications, panels, and webinars. The DRG Learning Community of Practice was a formed during this time to share findings among DRG donors and practitioners. Another venue for dissemination was associated with the literature reviews commissioned to address the Learning Agenda questions. At the end of each literature review award, academic teams presented publicly on their findings. These were open meetings hosted by various implementing partners. Additionally, the DRG Center actively promoted the use of products by supporting strategic planning, project design, and evaluation at the Mission level and by integrating new evidence into training and technical tools.

## FORMULATING THE 2017 LEARNING AGENDA

After one year, the DRG Center convened a Learning Agenda Advisory Group[2] to assess the status of learning questions and provide guidance and oversight to the creation of the 2017 Learning Agenda. After a two to three-month process, the 2017 Learning Agenda emerged as a compilation of 2016 questions that were still in process, new questions that had emerged as urgent field questions (ex. countering violent extremism and e-governance), and priorities supported by other DRG teams (ex. theories of democratic change). Implementing this agenda and disseminating the findings followed the same path outlined for the 2016 Learning Agenda.

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[2] The Advisory Committee was composed of one member from each team and the Learning Division.

In 2018, it was determined that many of the 2016 and 2017 questions were still being addressed and a new set of questions was not warranted. The Learning Division took stock of the Learning Agenda initiative during 2019 to determine how to improve the structure and process of generating new learning questions. The DRG Program System was designed to provide a systematic and intentional way to identify sector specific evidence needs and develop sector specific learning questions.

## MOVING FORWARD

### DRG PROGRAM SYSTEM

The DRG Program System will be used to develop new learning questions for the next iteration of the Learning Agenda. Underlying this system is the creation of an explicit inventory of technical approaches currently used by DRG. In conjunction with ongoing research, the Learning Division developed the DRG Program System as a way of framing and organizing the universe of common programming in the sector, identifying relevant third-party metrics, and making available the latest evidence in a user-friendly format. The System will be used to support program design and management in the DRG sector. For example, when an officer is developing or reviewing a program design, the System will serve as an easy reference to ensure that a range of programming options, indicators and evidence have been considered.

For each of the six areas of the DRG Foreign Assistance Framework, the DRG Program System will include:

- An inventory of commonly-used technical approaches and theories of change;

- A list of available indicators from external data sets like V-Dem, Freedom House and others to track contextual factors and USAID program outcomes;

- High-level evidence summaries for select technical approaches;

- An evidence gap map to identify which technical approaches currently lack a strong evidence base; these approaches can then be prioritized for future learning.

The DRG Program System will be used to formulate sector specific learning priorities and questions for the next Learning Agenda that will begin 2021-2022. The next Learning Agenda will prioritize questions that address the most common technical approaches and current gaps in evidence. In addition, the formulation process will review previous findings and learning topics from past Learning Agendas. The formulation and implementation of the learning agenda will seek to incorporate lessons learned from these processes including ongoing consultation with DRG Center teams and DRG officers as well as relevant external stakeholders.

## LEARNING QUESTIONS

The following learning questions were addressed from 2016-2020.

**Table 1: 2016-2017 Learning Questions**

| DRG Learning Agenda Themes | 2016 Learning Questions | 2017 Learning Questions |
|---|---|---|
| **Participation & Inclusion** | What are the most effective civic engagement/participation strategies for maintaining and creating political space in restrictive environments, including closing spaces and violence-affected societies? What strategies then result in participation becoming habitual? | What are the most effective civic engagement/participation strategies for maintaining and creating political space in restrictive environments, including closing spaces and violence-affected societies? What strategies then result in participation becoming habitual? |
| | What factors influence youth to become involved in constructive political participation instead of violence or apathy? | What are the effects of various kinds of external DRG support on the success of social movements? Under what conditions is such support successful. |
| | What are the most effective ways to encourage women's civic and political participation in contexts of resistance to gender equality, and what are the risks to women of these strategies? | How do differences in electoral systems affect conflict dynamics, and how can we use that knowledge to develop more conflict-sensitive elections programming? |
| **Transparency & Accountability** | How well does external pressure from civil society organizations, media outlets, and citizen participation improve accountability and transparency compared to internal reforms within judicial and political institutions? | Does the introduction of e-governance (e.g. computerized case management) improve the performance of, and increase public confidence in, public institutions—e.g., the justice system? |
| | In what ways might decentralization or deconcentration affect (i) the nature of citizen participation in political processes; (ii) citizen support for the national government; (iii) policy outcomes; (iv) electoral accountability; and (v) the quality of service delivery? | When a government sets up separate institutions in the justice sector that address gender-based violence (e.g. police units, prosecutors, courts), what are the implications for both the victims' access to justice and the mitigation of harm to victims? |
| | In the context of hiring civil servants and providing positive and negative incentives for their behavior, what kinds of interventions are most effective at reducing the propensity of civil servants to engage in corruption? | - |
| **Human Rights** | In what ways are human rights awareness campaigns successful and what are their unintended negative consequences? | In what ways are human rights awareness campaigns successful and what are their unintended negative consequences? |
| | What types of support to human rights defenders and institutions most improve human rights outcomes, and what aspects of political regimes, institutions and society condition the likelihood of success or failure? | What are the drivers of radicalization? How do violations of human rights and rule of law lead to radicalization? |

| DRG Learning Agenda Themes | 2016 Learning Questions | 2017 Learning Questions |
|---|---|---|
| | In what contexts does assistance to national human rights institutions lead to improved human rights outcomes? How can the possible risks of such assistance be mitigated? | To what extent does targeting marginalized groups for DRG assistance have spillover or multiplier effects on DRG outcomes among untargeted groups? |
| **DRG Integration** | When participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability elements have been implemented in non-DRG programming, how do outcomes in that sector change? | When participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability elements have been implemented in non-DRG programming, how do outcomes in that sector change? |
| | When citizen participation has led to local reforms in a particular sector, what processes lead to these reforms influencing changes at the regional or national level of that sector? | How and under what circumstances can citizen engagement in community decision-making, advocacy, and monitoring influence reforms at higher levels of government? And how does this vary across sectors? |
| | Where there has been collective action to improve local service delivery in one sector, how does that affect collective action to improve delivery in other sectors? | - |
| **Theories of Democratic Change** | - | What factors explain momentary openings and lasting liberalization of authoritarian systems, short of regime change? To what extent do institutional, cultural, geographic, and other conditions shape the paths away from authoritarianism? |

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTS

The DRG Center commissioned a review to catalogue the research generated by the DRG Center since the initiation of the Learning Agenda and assess the degree to which each question had been addressed. This review generated a Learning Agenda Rack-up of 107 documents, produced for internal use by USAID staff, that compiles and summarizes evidence across this body of research and provides details regarding findings, conclusions and recommendations. In addition to research conducted since the beginning of the Learning Agenda initiative in 2016, the Rack-Up also identified a wide array of policy research projects or evidence reviews that were commissioned by the DRG Center related to the learning questions over the last decade. The review's protocol is explained in Annex A.

The documents included in the Learning Agenda Rack-up were classified into four types (see Annex B for a description of each type), or categories reflecting the goals and methodologies of the research: evidence reviews, surveys, impact evaluations, and performance evaluations. Evidence reviews account for the greatest number of documents at 47, followed by 23 impact evaluations, 22 performance evaluations, and 15 surveys.

It is important to note that a small number of documents does not necessarily indicate that a question was not addressed. In the case of the edited volume, "Decentralized Governance and Accountability", for instance, this one document represents an extensive resource addressing the relevant learning question.

**Table 2: Learning Agenda Question Themes – Association of Documents by Type**

| | All | Evidence Review | Survey | Impact Evaluation | Performance Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Participation & Inclusion* | *41* | *16* | *7* | *10* | *8* |
| Restrictive environments | 9 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Youth participation | 17 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Women's participation | 21 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| Social movements | 11 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Electoral systems | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Transparency & Accountability* | *43* | *27* | *2* | *9* | *5* |
| External vs. internal accountability | 33 | 18 | 2 | 9 | 4 |
| Decentralization | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Civil service | 7 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| E-Governance | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Gender-Based Violence | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Human Rights* | *49* | *21* | *9* | *8* | *11* |
| Information campaigns | 4 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Human rights defenders | 17 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| National human rights institutions | 33 | 15 | 8 | 5 | 5 |
| Radicalization | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Cross-group spillover | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *DRG Integration* | *3* | *3* | *0* | *0* | *0* |
| Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability (PITA) | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| National expansion | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cross-sectoral expansion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Scale expansion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Democratic Change* | *5* | *4* | *0* | *1* | *0* |

The following tables provide a summary of the documents in the Rack-Up. Table 3 provides a delineation of the key documents that address each learning question and some of the main findings emerging from those documents. Table 4 provides an assessment of the evidence coverage based on the Rack-Up review and future research opportunities for each learning question.

Table 4 also includes the main actions undertaken by the DRG Center and an assessment of question completion status based on the November 2018 version of the 2016-2017 Learning Agenda Action Planning document with updates from key informants. Based on this assessment, 16 of the 20 learning questions were categorized as done, one is considered active as of October 2020, and three were put on hold.

While Tables 3 and 4 provide information by learning question, **Annex D** provides a description of studies, coverage, and gaps by theme.

**Table 3: Summary of Learning Agenda Key Documents and Findings**

| Topic | Learning Question | Key Document(s) | Summary of Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Theme: Participation and Inclusion** | | | |
| Restrictive environments | What are the most effective civic engagement/ participation strategies for maintaining and creating political space in restrictive environments, including closing spaces and violence-affected societies? What strategies then result in participation becoming habitual? | "Maintaining Civic Space in Backsliding Regimes" | ▪ While a variety of resistance-oriented strategies have proved effective at loosening restrictive environments in the past, forming domestic alliances stands out as the lowest-risk strategy. <br> ▪ The internet and social media can provide important civic spaces in many contexts, but these spaces are limited in the most restrictive environments and can present unique risks as well as opportunities. <br> ▪ Election observation and forensic analysis can provide valuable insights about election quality and, when actively disseminated, can lead to ground-level civic action. |
| Youth participation | What factors influence youth to become involved in constructive political participation instead of violence or apathy? | "Cambodia Advanced Democracy Seminar"; "Georgia Civic Education Initiative" | ▪ Youth civic engagement programs can exert substantial effects on the perceptions and beliefs of young citizens vis-à-vis democratic participation. <br> ▪ Political information on its own is typically insufficient to spark the participation of youth (or other citizens); instead, interventions may require more concrete and actionable messaging to exert meaningful effects. <br> ▪ Pre-existing informal networks can serve as effective platforms for civic and political discussion and mobilization. |
| Women's participation | What are the most effective ways to encourage women's civic and political participation in contexts of resistance to gender equality, and what are the risks to women of these strategies? | "Increasing the Civic and Political Participation of Women"; "Strengthening Women's Civic and Political Participation"; "Women in Power Project" | ▪ Resistance to women's participation is widespread and potentially deleterious, meaning that risk assessments should be included in most women's engagement initiatives. However, low to moderate resistance is the norm, so assessments should be attuned to relatively subtle forms of backlash, while areas of high resistance should be identified and approached with appropriate precautions. <br> ▪ The effects of participation programs tend to differ by gender, but whether effects are stronger for women relative to men varies depending on the nature of the intervention, the social context, and the specific outcome in question (e.g., political efficacy, voting behavior, etc.). |

| Topic | Learning Question | Key Document(s) | Summary of Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ▪ Programs that support women in running for office can yield substantial influence on political perceptions and behaviors. |
| | | | ▪ The presence of women within government on its own does not guarantee equity in participation or representation. Constraints to women's participation tend to involve systemic issues that can be deeply rooted within institutions and political practices. |
| Social movements | What are the effects of various kinds of external DRG support on the success of social movements? Under what conditions is such support successful. | "Donor Assistance in the Transparency and Accountability Movement"; "Struggles from Below" | ▪ Social movements figure prominently in civic efforts for accountability, good governance, and democracy, but they tend to be relatively spontaneous and decentralized, and thus complex for donors to engage with. |
| | | | ▪ External assistance to movement can provide much-needed resources and, in some contexts, legitimacy; but in other cases external assistance can erode legitimacy or alter movements' agendas. |
| | | | ▪ In the contemporary age of dense global trade and production networks, transnational links are critical for labor organizations seeking to improve wages and working standards. |
| | | | ▪ Transnational corporations may constitute promising targets for social movements, since under some circumstances they may be easier or safer to target than government and can exert strong pressure through their financial behavior. |
| Electoral systems | How do differences in electoral systems affect conflict dynamics, and how can we use that knowledge to develop more conflict-sensitive elections programming? | Theories of Democratic Change Phase III: Transitions from Conflict | ▪ Parliamentary systems may tend more toward stability in post-authoritarian or post-conflict settings than presidential systems, since the former systems involve a larger scope for power-sharing and compromise. |
| **Theme: Transparency and Accountability** | | | |
| External vs. internal accountability | How well does external pressure from civil society organizations, media outlets, and citizen participation improve accountability and | "Does Incorporating Participation and Accountability Improve Development Outcomes?" | ▪ The effects of internal and external accountability approaches—along with their efficacy relative to one another—depends heavily on political, social, and economic context. |

| Topic | Learning Question | Key Document(s) | Summary of Findings |
|-------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | transparency compared to internal reforms within judicial and political institutions? | | ▪ Internal and external intervention models may interact with one another in complex ways, sometimes complementing one another, sometimes undermining one another, and sometimes operating independently.<br>▪ A variety of organizational forms, from diffuse social movement networks to NGOs and even private companies, can act as loci channeling external pressure toward government accountability.<br>▪ Interventions that attempt to institutionalize accountability through external pressure within government agencies can help to channel citizens' political will into concrete governance systems. |
| Decentralization | In what ways might decentralization or deconcentration affect (i) the nature of citizen participation in political processes; (ii) citizen support for the national government; (iii) policy outcomes; (iv) electoral accountability; and (v) the quality of service delivery? | "Decentralized Governance and Accountability" "Infographic/Brief-Decentralized Governance and Accountability" | ▪ Decentralization may improve accountability and reduce corruption within government institutions by bringing them closer to the people and insulating them from elite capture at the national level (or at the provincial level in the case of decentralization within sub-national units).<br>▪ Conversely, decentralization may increase the scope for local-level elite capture, and thereby reduce accountability for non-elites.<br>▪ While decentralization programs usually focus on formal institutions, locally-relevant and historically-embedded informal or extra-state institutions may exert strong influence at the local level, and should thus be centrally considered in decentralization policies and programs. |
| Civil service | In the context of hiring civil servants and providing positive and negative incentives for their behavior, what kinds of interventions are most effective at reducing the propensity of civil servants to engage in corruption? | "Combatting Corruption Among Civil Servants" | ▪ While many conceptual approaches and program frameworks have treated corruption as a problem of individual deviance, in many cases behaviors seen by outsiders as corrupt represent alternative social orders that can be integrated into the governmental social contract to most effectively ameliorate inequity and injustice.<br>▪ Successful efforts to curb corruption within government bureaucracies historically have tended to involve wide-ranging efforts that address multiple systemic problems at once across much of the state apparatus, assistance to citizens in navigating bureaucracies, and/or efforts to thoroughly reform a particular state organization or set of organizations. |
| E-governance | Does the introduction of e-governance (e.g. computerized case management) improve the performance of, and | "Combatting Corruption Among Civil Servants" | ▪ Although research on the topic is new and continues to evolve, studies so far show substantial promise for e-governance strategies.<br>▪ As indicated by the only impact evaluation in the rack-up centrally focused within this research question, e-governance platforms do not necessarily lead to noticeable changes in service delivery even when |

| Topic | Learning Question | Key Document(s) | Summary of Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| | increase public confidence in, public institutions—e.g., the justice system? | | citizens make use of them; additional enforcement mechanisms may be needed beyond the transparency effects of e-governance to ensure accountability. |
| Gender-based violence | When a government sets up separate institutions in the justice sector that address gender-based violence (e.g. police units, prosecutors, courts), what are the implications for both the victims' access to justice and the mitigation of harm to victims? | "The Impact of Information Communication Technologies on Gender-Based Violence" "Violence Against Women in the Informal Sector" "Village Savings and Loan Associations and Intimate Partner Violence" | <ul><li>Multi-faceted, cross-sectoral strategies tend to be most effective in reducing gender-based violence.</li><li>Successful interventions typically address formal legal frameworks as well as informal cultural norms, and take the perspectives of both perpetrators and survivors in designing strategies to reduce gender-based violence and hold perpetrators accountable.</li><li>Interventions promoting women's livelihood and socioeconomic empowerment may reduce gender-based violence but can also spark violence in the short-term, necessitating close attention to violence risks for all such projects.</li><li>Workplaces constitute risk sites for gender-based violence, and these risks may be especially severe within the informal economy.</li></ul> |
| **Theme: Human Rights** | | | |
| Information campaigns | In what ways are human rights awareness campaigns successful and what are their unintended negative consequences? | "Making Human Rights Campaigns Effective While Limiting Unintended Consequences" "Infographic: Design and Implement Effective Human Rights Campaign" | <ul><li>The success of awareness campaigns tends to depend heavily on the ways that messages are framed and the combination of media types used to disseminate these messages.</li><li>In addition to the benefits that awareness campaigns may achieve through pressure on government to respect human rights, they may also spark backlash, confusion, desensitization, and/or frustration.</li><li>In some cases, awareness campaigns may find it effective to target influential corporations in addition to broader public opinion, since these corporations may have the capacity to exert strong financial pressure on governments to follow human rights guidelines.</li></ul> |
| Human rights defenders | What types of support to human rights defenders and institutions most improve human rights outcomes, and what aspects of political regimes, institutions and society | "Struggles from Below" "Infographic: Supporting Civic Action in Successful Human Rights Programming" | <ul><li>Among the most promising and least risky strategies for supporting human rights defenders is in domestic coalition-building, which can be encouraged through external assistance that supports the convening of defenders with diverse goals and/or strategies.</li><li>Selecting partners who use the "human rights" label or frame, and/or encouraging its use, can help to embed defenders within a transnational community that may help to build insulation from government crackdowns.</li></ul> |

| Topic | Learning Question | Key Document(s) | Summary of Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| | condition the likelihood of success or failure? | | ■ As with social movements more broadly, human rights defenders working within social movements or civic organizations may benefit from external resources, but may face challenges from external support to the extent that it binds the defenders' agenda or activities, or reduces defenders' legitimacy in the eyes of domestic constituencies. |
| National human rights institutions | In what contexts does assistance to national human rights institutions lead to improved human rights outcomes? How can the possible risks of such assistance be mitigated? | "Legal Enabling Environment Project II (LEEP II)" | ■ External development assistance programs have successfully provided support for national human rights institutions on a range of issues, including human trafficking reduction, judicial fairness and efficiency, and crime reduction.<br>■ As with support for human rights defenders, externally-funded programs could run the risk of altering institutions' goals and undermining domestic legitimacy.<br>■ The provision of data and technology may be one viable means through which development assistance can support national human rights institutions while reducing the risk of excessive external interference. |
| Radicalization | What are the drivers of radicalization? How do violations of human rights and rule of law lead to radicalization? | "Countering Violent Extremism" "Counteracting Violence Through Narrative Media" | ■ Many of the most effective strategies for countering violent radicalization is the strengthening of a "moderate middle" embedded within civil society.<br>■ Targeting pro-social individuals who may be at-risk for radicalization and supporting them in pursuing nonviolent social leadership pathways may additionally prove effective.<br>■ Media can play an important role in either reducing or sparking violent extremism; while results vary with context, interventions that attempt to leverage media to reduce radicalization are effective in doing so or at least do not intensify radicalization. |
| Cross-group spillover | To what extent does targeting marginalized groups for DRG assistance have spillover or multiplier effects on DRG outcomes among untargeted groups? | N/A | N/A |
| **Theme: DRG Integration** | | | |

| Topic | Learning Question | Key Document(s) | Summary of Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability (PITA) | When participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability elements have been implemented in non-DRG programming, how do outcomes in that sector change? | "Does Incorporating Participation and Accountability Improve Development Outcomes?" | ▪ A wide array of intervention types have been found to be effective in improving both citizen engagement in service delivery and improving service delivery outcomes.<br>▪ Effects tend to get smaller down the chain; even interventions that strongly impact participation may have only small impacts on service provision quality. |
| National expansion | When citizen participation has led to local reforms in a particular sector, what processes lead to these reforms influencing changes at the regional or national level of that sector? | "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" | ▪ Grassroots reforms are most likely to scale up and cross sectors when defended by broad coalitions of local actors that hold autonomy from state authorities.<br>▪ As was noted for supporting human rights defenders and reformers within closing spaces, the establishment of and/or support for convening spaces through which grassroots reform coalitions grow may be one of the most promising and least risky ways for external assistance to aid democratization.<br>▪ External development practitioners may further contribute to this process by supporting organizations or individuals who can help to identify emergent compromises. |
| Cross-sectoral expansion | Where there has been collective action to improve local service delivery in one sector, how does that affect collective action to improve delivery in other sectors? | "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" | ▪ Grassroots reforms are most likely to scale up and cross sectors when defended by broad coalitions of local actors that hold autonomy from state authorities.<br>▪ As was noted for supporting human rights defenders and reformers within closing spaces, the establishment of and/or support for convening spaces through which grassroots reform coalitions grow may be one of the most promising and least risky ways for external assistance to aid democratization.<br>▪ External development practitioners may further contribute to this process by supporting organizations or individuals who can help to identify emergent compromises. |
| Scale expansion | How and under what circumstances can citizen engagement in community decision-making, advocacy, and monitoring influence reforms at higher levels of | "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" | ▪ Grassroots reforms are most likely to scale up and cross sectors when defended by broad coalitions of local actors that hold autonomy from state authorities.<br>▪ As was noted for supporting human rights defenders and reformers within closing spaces, the establishment of and/or support for convening spaces through which grassroots reform coalitions grow may be one of |

| Topic | Learning Question | Key Document(s) | Summary of Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| | government? And how does this vary across sectors? | | the most promising and least risky ways for external assistance to aid democratization.<br>▪ External development practitioners may further contribute to this process by supporting organizations or individuals who can help to identify emergent compromises. |
| **Theme: Theories of Democratic Change** | | | |
| Democratic change | What factors explain momentary openings and lasting liberalization of authoritarian systems, short of regime change? To what extent do institutional, cultural, geographic, and other conditions shape the paths away from authoritarianism? | "Theories of Democratic Backsliding"; "Paths Away from Authoritarianism"; "Transitions from Conflict" | ▪ Democratic backsliding occurs when there is a series of changes in the rules governing electoral procedures, civil and political liberties, and/or accountability; attempts to slow or reverse backsliding must confront these institutional changes.<br>▪ Apparent moves toward political liberalization may in some cases constitute disguised attempts by authoritarian governments to entrench non-democratic control. |

**Table 4: Summary of Learning Agenda Coverage and Future Research Opportunities[3]**

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Theme: Participation and Inclusion** | | | | |
| What are the most effective civic engagement/ participation strategies for maintaining and creating political space in **restrictive environments**, including closing spaces and violence-affected societies? What strategies then result in participation becoming habitual? | Commissioned evidence review: "Maintaining Civic Space in Backsliding Regimes" | Done | ■ The "Maintaining Civic Space" review addresses the question segment on participation strategies with reference to "closing spaces", although not for "violence-affected societies" or other "restrictive environments". <br> ■ The remaining relevant learning documents are diffuse; topics include election forensics, social media in restrictive spaces, and constituency dialogue. <br> ■ Few learning documents provide insights for encouraging participation in "violence-affected societies". <br> ■ The segment on strategies for making participation habitual was deemed unanswerable with existing research. | ■ Searching for or commissioning long-term longitudinal studies could help to address the question on habituation. <br> ■ The "Maintaining Civic Space" review presents domestic alliance building as an especially promising strategy; a comparative case study of alliance-building efforts could be helpful in guiding future policymaking. |
| What factors influence youth to become involved in constructive political participation instead of violence or apathy? | Action planning document states question was addressed through a meta analyses on civic education and youth programs and a literature on youth and countering violent extremism (CVE) included in a CVE field guide.* | Done | ■ No Learning Agenda evidence review yet directly addresses this question. <br> ■ Learning documents relevant to youth participation fall into two main clusters: political participation (often overlapping with efforts for inclusion of women and ethnic minorities) and reducing extremism. <br> ■ Documents provide rich descriptive data on youth participation, as well as substantial evidence relevant to encouraging youth participation vs. "apathy". <br> ■ There are relatively few documents that provide direct insights into how youth who do become | ■ There are enough rigorous studies of youth participation programs at this point to warrant a full systematic review. <br> ■ Given the overlap between this topic and the human rights radicalization question, more studies would be helpful that examine the nexus between processes of youth mobilization and the character of politics engendered. |

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[3] * Indicates source: 2016-2017 Learning Agenda Action Planning document

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | politically active move toward "constructive" participation vs. "violence". | |
| What are the most effective ways to encourage women's civic and political participation in contexts of resistance to gender equality, and what are the risks to women of these strategies? | Commissioned evidence reviews:<br>"Increasing the Civic and Political Participation of Women"<br>"Strengthening Women's Civic and Political Participation" | Done | ■ The reviews on increasing and strengthening women's civic and political participation summarize large swathes of the existing literature, although given the breadth of the topic there are other areas that remain to be covered<br>■ The "Women in Power" report provides a high-level overview of nearly 100 relevant development assistance activities<br>■ Many of the impact and performance evaluations pertain to broad participation programs that also include youth and ethnic minorities or other groups<br>■ While there is robust descriptive evidence relating to women's participation summarized in the documents, there is relatively little rigorous impact evidence to discern which strategies are most effective. | ■ Existing empirical literature describes a range of participation strategies and accompanying risks; but impact evaluations and other direct tests are lacking.<br>■ The impact research that does exist focuses disproportionally on women as political leaders rather than as citizens or activists. |
| What are the effects of various kinds of external DRG support on the success of social movements? Under what conditions is such support successful. | Action planning document states question was addressed through United States Institute of Peace (USIP) research described as a three-year research project including literature review, case studies, and participatory action research.* | Active | ■ In addition to USIP's Donor Assistance in the Transparency and Accountability Movement, the DRG-commissioned backsliding regimes, grassroots reform, and bottom-up human rights support reviews involve relevant considerations of social movement dynamics.<br>■ A cluster of three learning documents examine policy factors pertaining to global labor campaigns and collective action in the context of the digital platform economy.<br>■ The remaining content on social movements is diffuse and mostly peripheral to this Learning Agenda question.<br>■ There is relatively little evidence pertaining to the specific role of "external DRG support". | ■ More research is needed that focuses on the effects of external assistance on social movement outcomes within a development context to expand the explorations that USIP has spearheaded.<br>■ Impact evaluations on social movement support programs may be warranted, e.g., randomizing cash grants and/or networking support for civic movement organizations. |

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ■ There is relatively little rigorous impact evidence of any type relating to social movements among the learning documents. | |
| How do differences in electoral systems affect conflict dynamics, and how can we use that knowledge to develop more conflict-sensitive elections programming? | This question was folded into a report focusing on post-conflict transitions from a series of reviews on Theories of Democratic Change: [Theories of Democratic Change Phase III: Transitions from Conflict](#) | Done | ■ The "[Transitions from Conflict](#)" evidence review presents relevant evidence, but the focus is on democratic change more broadly and insights for electoral systems are relatively peripheral. <br> ■ Two documents describe election forensics methods, one providing an [overview](#) and the other a detailed [manual](#). <br> ■ Aside from these few exceptions, the question on electoral systems and especially the segment on "conflict-sensitive elections programming" remain largely unaddressed. | ■ Political economists and institutionally-oriented social scientists have produced dozens of quantitative and comparative-historical analyses of the effects of structural elements of electoral systems; a systematic review would be worthwhile. |
| **Theme: Transparency and Accountability** | | | | |
| How well does external pressure from civil society organizations, media outlets, and citizen participation improve accountability and transparency compared to internal reforms within judicial and political institutions? | This question was deemed unanswerable.* | Hold | ■ No DRG-commissioned evidence review directly addresses this question. <br> ■ In its narrower interpretation (i.e., comparisons between external vs. internal accountability mechanisms, the question is addressed by a handful of impact evaluations that examine external alongside internal interventions, e.g., in [Ghana](#), [Malawi](#), and [Zimbabwe](#). <br> ■ The vast majority of Transparency & Accountability documents were relevant to this question when understood broadly as increasing understanding of the effectiveness of both internal and external accountability tools. | ■ While the current formulation of the question presents external vs. internal accountability mechanisms as potential alternatives, some political frameworks see them as working together. <br> ■ Future research could more directly explore what conditions facilitate synergy between external and internal accountability mechanisms. |
| In what ways might decentralization or deconcentration affect (i) the nature of citizen participation in political | Determined that need was met by edited volume already | Done | ■ The edited volume "[Decentralized Governance and Accountability](#)" covers a wide range of relevant research. | ■ A next step for decentralization research may be to explore which national, institutional, and sectoral characteristics make decentralization |

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| processes; (ii) citizen support for the national government; (iii) policy outcomes; (iv) electoral accountability; and (v) the quality of service delivery? | underway, sponsored by Rule of Law Division: "Decentralized Governance and Accountability" | | ▪ There is relatively little evidence on the potential roles for development assistance activities in supporting decentralization. | initiatives beneficial to DRG outcomes in some contexts but not in others.<br>▪ Country-by-country accounts and systematic comparisons may be especially helpful, given that decentralization typically occurs at a nationwide level. |
| In the context of hiring civil servants and providing positive and negative incentives for their behavior, what kinds of interventions are most effective at reducing the propensity of civil servants to engage in corruption? | Commissioned evidence review: "Combatting Corruption Among Civil Servants" | Done | ▪ The "Combatting Corruption" review directly addresses this question, finding a substantial body of evidence across multiple literatures.<br>▪ The sole other document to substantially confront this question was a performance evaluation of the USAID/Paraguay Democracy and Governance Project.<br>▪ There is little evidence within either document pertaining to the potential roles that external assistance can play in supporting within-government anti-corruption initiatives. | ▪ Given recent research trends and the progression of the underlying policy logic, it may be best to split this in two directions: one focusing in greater depth on reviewing recent impact evaluation evidence on micro-level interventions, and the other using national case studies for macro-level comparisons (since civil services often develop in response to countrywide governance logics) . |
| Does the introduction of e-governance (e.g. computerized case management) improve the performance of, and increase public confidence in, public institutions—e.g., the justice system? | Preliminary literature review concluded that the evidence base at the time was too sparse to be able to answer this question.* | Hold | ▪ This question is mostly absent from learning documents, in part as a result of the relatively thin evidence base during the early stages of the Learning Agenda's development.<br>▪ The "Combatting Corruption" review covers the e-governance research up to 2016 on bureaucratic corruption, and finds substantial evidence showing promising results.<br>▪ Only one other learning document, an impact evaluation of a text message accountability program in Uganda, substantially addresses this question. | ▪ Although the literature base was thin when the DRG Center first considered commissioning a review, it has grown explosively over the last few years.<br>▪ Given this spike, in addition to the finding in the "Combatting Corruption" review that e-governance shows strong promise, suggest that a review would now be worthwhile.<br>▪ As with the civil service Learning Agenda question, e-governance involves micro-level dynamics of citizens leveraging technology to improve government accountability as well as macro-level dynamics of |

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | nationwide governance reforms and biometric systems. |
| When a government sets up separate institutions in the justice sector that address gender-based violence (e.g. police units, prosecutors, courts), what are the implications for both the victims' access to justice and the mitigation of harm to victims? | Rather than directly address the question as formulated, the DRG Center folded this question into a series of commissioned evidence reviews focused on topics relating to gender-based violence | Done | ■ There is little evidence pertaining to this question within the learning documents, in part because DRG elected to fold the question into a broader gender-based violence initiative.<br>■ The documents relevant to gender-based violence tend also to under the national human rights institution question discussed below, in that aid agencies typically work through governments to increase capacity to protect against gender-based violence. | ■ In addition to continuing the gender-based violence research program, this question could help to motivate additional research on supporting national human rights institutions (discussed further below). |
| **Theme: Human Rights** | | | | |
| In what ways are human rights awareness campaigns successful and what are their unintended negative consequences? | Commissioned evidence review:<br><br>Making Human Rights Campaigns Effective While Limiting Unintended Consequences | Done | ■ The "Making Human Rights Campaigns Effective" review directly addresses this question and covers most of the literature, with a focus on the mobilizing power of frames.<br>■ There is less coverage within learning documents of structural characteristics of campaigns or the regimes they are targeting that may precipitate political change beyond mobilization.<br>■ Although less directly connected, the "Struggles from Below" human rights literature review also contains insights relevant for information campaigns.<br>■ There is little within the learning documents as far as insights on how information campaigns may operate within broader structural contexts to engender change. | ■ A follow-up review could complement the "Making Human Rights Campaigns Effective" review's focus on framing and micro-mobilization with more structural analyses of when and how campaigns lead elites to respond institutionalize change. |
| What types of support to human rights defenders and institutions most improve human rights outcomes, and what | Commissioned evidence review:<br><br>Struggles from Below | Done | ■ The "Struggles from Below" review covers important contextual considerations for human rights defenders | ■ While the "Struggles from Below" review already covers consideration from defenders' perspectives, a next step in this line of inquiry could be to identify cases of external support for |

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| aspects of political regimes, institutions and society condition the likelihood of success or failure? | This question was incorporated into the monitoring, evaluation and learning plan for the Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM) Leader with Associates Award.[4] | | ▪ However, these seems to be little research that focuses directly on how external support affects defenders, e.g., by increasing resource flows or altering legitimacy<br>▪ The remaining documents pertaining to human rights defenders are relatively diffuse, with little strong evidence in any particular area. | defenders to explore what features were most strongly correlated with human rights gains. |
| In what contexts does assistance to national human rights institutions lead to improved human rights outcomes? How can the possible risks of such assistance be mitigated? | Existing evidence base summarized into a 2-pager for dissemination* | Done | ▪ Numerous learning documents refer to particular systems, such as those that protect against human trafficking or excessive pre-trial detention.<br>▪ The question of which support roles can be efficiently filled by external supporters (e.g., to avoid too much foreign control or administrative reliance) remains relatively open. | ▪ This question may best be split up into particular sets of institutions, e.g., those intended to defend specific rights.<br>▪ The question of which support roles can be efficiently filled by external supporters remains (e.g., to avoid too much foreign control or administrative reliance) relatively open, and would require case comparisons or other forms of analysis to address. |
| What are the drivers of radicalization? How do violations of human rights and rule of law lead to radicalization? | This question was incorporated into a CVE field guide.* | Done | ▪ This question is addressed in a small but focused subset of studies on "countering violent extremism".<br>▪ Most directly applicable are two literature reviews in the learning documents, one that focuses on the issue with respect to Bangladesh, and one that takes a global scope but focuses on the role of media.<br>▪ The question of human rights and rule of law violation affect radicalization is not substantially addressed in the learning documents. | ▪ Follow-up research may split to focus on 1) the unique psychosocial and economic conditions of youth in particular places and, in doing so, intersect with the youth participation question discussed above and 2) broader ideological systems within particular political and cultural contexts. |
| To what extent does targeting marginalized groups for DRG assistance | The DRG Center solicited a review on this | Hold | ▪ As is the situation for some of the DRG Integration questions (discussed further below), this question is mostly absent from the learning | ▪ This question may be best pursued in the context of specific country cases |

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[4] Personal communication

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| have spillover or multiplier effects on DRG outcomes among untargeted groups? | topic, but no applications were submitted | | documents (at least in explicit form) perhaps since it essentially asks about unintended consequences. | where there are multiple marginalized groups with non-identical interests. |
| **Theme: DRG Integration** | | | | |
| When participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability elements have been implemented in non-DRG programming, how do outcomes in that sector change? | Commissioned evidence reviews: "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" "Does Incorporating Participation and Accountability Improve Development Outcomes?" | Done | ▪ While implications that are subtly relevant to this question may arise in many studies, only two learning documents substantially address this question: the systematic review "Does Incorporating Participation…" and an observational quantitative analysis exploring the correlations between power imbalances (i.e., lack of participation or inclusion) and DRG outcomes. | ▪ This question could be usefully addressed through a systematic analysis of a sample of intervention reports in a particular set of sectors, and specifically exploring the relationship between outcomes and intensity of PITA components. |
| When citizen participation has led to local reforms in a particular sector, what processes lead to these reforms influencing changes at the regional or national level of that sector? | Commissioned evidence reviews: "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" "Does Incorporating Participation and Accountability Improve Development Outcomes?" | Done | ▪ While the "Grassroots Reform" review most directly addresses the question on scaling reforms associated with citizen participation, it also contains insights relevant for the following two questions. ▪ Learning documents reference a range of cross-sectoral dynamics, but there is little in the way of concrete or rigorous evidence. | ▪ The "Grassroots Reform" review covers a wide array of issues relevant to scaling participatory reform, but the wide scope makes specific policy inferences difficult; a series of in-depth case studies exploring a range of trajectories may be a productive next step. |
| Where there has been collective action to improve local service delivery in one sector, how does that affect collective action to improve delivery in other sectors? | Commissioned evidence reviews: "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" "Does Incorporating Participation and Accountability Improve Development Outcomes?" | Done | | |

| Learning Question | DRG Actions Taken | DRG Status* | Question Coverage | Research Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| How and under what circumstances can citizen engagement in community decision-making, advocacy, and monitoring influence reforms at higher levels of government? And how does this vary across sectors? | Commissioned evidence reviews: "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" "Does Incorporating Participation and Accountability Improve Development Outcomes?" | Done | | |
| **Theme: Theories of Democratic Change** | | | | |
| What factors explain momentary openings and lasting liberalization of authoritarian systems, short of regime change? To what extent do institutional, cultural, geographic, and other conditions shape the paths away from authoritarianism? | Pursued within Theories of Change II research* "Theories of Democratic Backsliding" "Paths Away from Authoritarianism" "Transitions from Conflict" | Done | ■ The reviews on backsliding, post-authoritarian, and post-conflict transitions address elements of the democratic change question, albeit not always framed in the same way as the Learning Agenda question<br>■ Only one other piece addresses this topic, a national-level case study that focuses on Armenia's democratization.<br>■ There is little research presented within the learning documents institutional, cultural, and other social factors shape openings for democratization. | ■ In practice, democratic change seems to be heavily conditioned by place and time (i.e., democratic and counter-democratic reforms often come in waves); further work in this area could compare regional experiences during particular historical episodes, and examine subtle differences in outcomes for particular countries. |

# LESSONS FROM THE LEARNING AGENDA PROCESS

Nine key informants involved in various roles and time periods associated with the DRG Learning Agenda were interviewed to elicit lessons learned from their experiences. A summary of their input and insights is included below.

### POSITIVE CULTURE CHANGES

Informants felt that a major success of the Learning Agenda process was influencing the culture of reflection and deliberation. The Learning Agenda was credited with bringing questions to the fore in people's minds, providing an organized and visible agenda for thinking about how work related to answering the questions in a tangible way, and promoting a culture where people would consult literature, be thoughtful, challenge assumptions, fund research, and bring in evidence and data to support project design.

> "Having questions is itself a product – when you know what's 'top of mind', you can begin to see how your work speaks to those things even without a dedicated research project. It orients how you make sense of things and it's exciting to realize that answers do exist." – key informant

### IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Multiple key informants highlighted the important role of leadership in supporting the Learning Agenda process. Leadership was credited with building the excitement and fanfare around the agenda, actively encouraging wide staff participation, and allocating the necessary budget. One informant stressed the importance of engaging the right stakeholders in leadership early on in the process in order to elicit support and address any concerns. The creation of glossy brochures for the 2016 and 2017 agendas was seen as a leadership decision that was extremely effective in raising awareness around the learning questions and the DRG effort.

> "The DRG Learning Agenda brought broad recognition and respect for the DRG Center." - key informant

### CHALLENGE OF CONSISTENCY

One challenge raised by several informants was maintaining ownership and leadership support over a period of time in order to be able to adequately address learning questions. With regular staff turnover, there is the challenge to maintain momentum and resources amidst changing priorities. While a learning advisory group was initially formed to review the status of addressing the 2016 questions and inform the 2017 questions, ownership and leadership by this group did not continue. Recommendations from key informants included providing an easily understood narrative around the learning effort in a form that senior managers can use and providing regular updates with answers to emerging questions that are addressed over a period of time. One informant stressed the need to maintain vision and discipline on what USAID is trying to accomplish for the benefit of the sector.

> "In order to be effective, learning needs to be systematic, intentional and resourced." – key informant

## ACTIVE STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Several informants highlighted the ongoing and robust engagement with staff as a major success of the DRG Learning Agenda process. Out of approximately 100 people in the Center, it was stated that one third were involved on one or more theme teams, developing Learning Agenda questions and guiding learning activities. Due to active participatory engagement approaches, staff across the office "owned" the questions and were excited to see research going forward on their behalf.

In addition to lauding the engagement efforts, several informants provided recommendations for additional groups to engage in the future. There was general agreement on the importance of engaging field staff with suggestions for involvement including targeted engagement of regional bureaus and selecting a subset of learning questions appropriate for regional level learning. Additional stakeholders suggested included private sector, academics, and implementing partners. One informant recommended focusing efforts for inclusion on staff writing calls for proposals given the importance of the content of calls for proposals and instructions on subsequent programming.

## BRIDGING THE WORLDS OF ACADEMIA AND PRACTITIONER

Several informants described the importance of bringing the strengths of academics and the literature base to bear in a way that could be practical and applicable for practitioners. One informant stated, "Not many on our staff were knowledgeable about the different ways we could sift through evidence. The Learning Agenda process worked well clarifying what would be useful to ask and where we could ask and expect answers." Another informant stressed the importance of having people in the DRG Center who understood academic research while also seeing the real constraints for officers designing programs in the field. These individuals created a process where they could distill practitioner questions into academic questions and bring the two groups together to ensure there was a good understanding of the needs and assumptions of practitioners informing the literature review and subsequent learning products. Stated one informant, "It was that magical nexus of what is possible and what can be absorbed and used in the field and is also possible for academics to generate."

## INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Several informants praised the interdisciplinary approach of the literature reviews which engaged academics from fields such as political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, and psychology.

> "The review on countering violent extremism provided an excellent synopsis of the research to better understand the drivers of conflict. By crossing disciplines, the report was able to demonstrate the lack of strong drivers from the economic or political perspectives and the strong drivers that resided at the individual, psychological level." – key informant

## NUMBER OF QUESTIONS

There was general agreement among key informants that 11-12 questions per year were too many. Recommendations were for a range of three to six. A smaller number of learning questions were

considered easier to manage and maintain given the challenges in formulating and addressing learning questions.

## TIME HORIZON

There was also general agreement that one year was too short for the formulation and implementation of the Learning Agenda and that that time could be expanded to two years. The initial framing for the agendas by years was considered successful for promotion, but was ultimately potentially confusing as the process to answer the questions stretched over multiple years and agendas.

## EFFECTIVE USE OF MIXED METHODS

One informant applauded the diversity of methods brought to bear to respond to various questions. This individual appreciated that the Learning Division did not come with a prefixed plan of approach, but worked with each technical team to anchor the learning plan in what USAID staff needed to know, resisting the urge to focus solely on commissioning original research.

# EXAMPLES OF UTILIZATION

Key informants were asked for examples of the utilization of the Learning Agenda evidence. Several informants stressed the importance of the articulation of learning questions and provision of an evidence base that could inform decision making and program design. According to one informant, "The Learning Agenda products [ex. 2-pagers and infographics] gave actionable, concrete advice that could improve programming. The literature reviews and impact evaluations called attention to things that were suboptimal in previous programs and produced some empirical evidence to inform where we were making mistakes based on repeating past program designs."

While it is difficult to assess actual utilization and impact, the following stories provide a snapshot of learning informing the program design of three different research questions.

**Human Rights Defenders:** What types of support to human rights defenders and institutions most effectively improve enabling environments for human rights outcomes, and what aspects of political regimes, institutions, and society condition the likelihood of success or failure?

> USAID implementing partner Freedom House initially incorporated this DRG learning question into the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) plan for the new Center-funded Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM) Leader with Associates Award. In 2018, Freedom House hosted public presentations of the literature review findings that addressed this human rights questions. Several of the findings were then taken up by the program design teams in HRSM coalition partner organizations. One finding in particular was that "strong horizontal ties can create mass mobilization and lead to successful human rights advocacy. Broad coalitions are often more successful than individual movements. Vertical ties are also critical for advocacy, and transnational ties enable advocacy on a much broader scale". This finding influenced Freedom House to pilot a new MEL practice in 2020. Civic network analysis became a component of two HRSM projects in early 2020 in order to get better data on the depth and breadth of their local partners' networks, beyond the usual recipients of foreign aid or other members of the human rights community in their country.

**Decentralization:** In what ways might decentralization or deconcentration affect (i) the nature of citizen participation in political processes; (ii) citizen support for the national government; (iii) policy outcomes; (iv) electoral accountability; and (v) the quality of service delivery?

> As part of the Learning Agenda effort, the DRG Center supported the development of an edited volume on decentralization.[5] According to key informants, the decentralization edited volume included provocative findings and a number of articles that demonstrated that decentralization can have both positive and negative effects on governance, not necessarily creating the assumed local control and empowerment. While practitioners previously supported decentralization as an article of faith, the compiled evidence base challenged some of the orthodoxy and advised USAID to use caution in supporting decentralization and consider local contexts and necessary preconditions for success. DRG staff involved in TDYs were able to bring this information to various posts who could then consider their programming approaches within this sphere.

**National Human Rights Institutions:** In what contexts does assistance to national human rights institutions lead to improved human rights outcomes? How can the possible risks of such assistance be mitigated?

> Under this question, an impact evaluation[6] was conducted on a program seeking to build the capacity of Haiti's justice system and protect the rights of those caught up in it. The following update on utilization was received in October 2018 from a staff member in Haiti involved in the impact evaluation.
>
> "As you know the [impact evaluation] report suggested the following four recommendations as ways to help reduce prolonged pretrial detention (PTD) through future justice-sector programming in Haiti:
>
> 1. Widespread free legal assistance is critical to reducing PTD in Haiti.
>
> 2. Legal assistance is necessary but not sufficient to eliminate illegal PTD in Haiti.
>
> 3. Investment in recordkeeping may complement legal assistance in addressing PTD.
>
> 4. Reform of criminal law may help to alleviate excessive rates of illegal PTD in Haiti.
>
> I am pleased to inform you that these recommendations are considered by our current Judicial Strengthening and Support Project (JSSP) which is the follow on to ProJustice. JSSP is in fact very engaged in activities aimed at reducing pretrial detention and reforming the criminal procedure code and the penal code. So far, they made a lot of progress partnering with five (5) local bar associations to continue our assistance aimed at providing free legal assistance to detainees who can't afford the cost of hiring a private attorney. In addition, JSSP's support also led to the adoption in September 2018 of a legal assistance legislation which creates Haiti's first Public

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[5] Rodden, Jonathan and Erik Wibbels. *Decentralized Governance and Accountability: Academic Research and the Future of Donor Programming.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

[6] Slough, Tara and Christopher Farris. "Impact Evaluation of USAID Haiti PROJUSTICE Program Pretrial Detention Component." Report submitted to USAID. Chicago, IL: NORC at the University of Chicago, April 21, 2017.

Defender's Office. If properly funded, that legislation would provide Haitians with access to government-funded public defenders and reduce prolonged pre-trial detention. The law must now be promulgated by the President in order for it to be enacted.

JSSP also provided significant technical assistance to Ministry of Justice to help implement recommendation 4 regarding the reform the criminal procedure code and the penal code. As a result of that effort the Ministry of Justice submitted to parliament a new criminal procedure code and penal code. These two documents were added into the Senate's legislative agenda in April 2018. USAID is now working with the Justice Committee in the Senate to review the two bills prior to their adoption by the Senate.

JSSP is also working with the Government of Haiti for the deployment of the USAID funded Computerized Case Management Information System (CMIS) to 13 courts and Prosecutor's Offices. The CMIS is Haiti's first computerized information system designed to help track criminal cases from the time a case is received by the Prosecutor's Offices until it reaches final resolution at the Courts. The CMIS is the first step toward modernizing case management in Haitian courts. The system is now fully operational in five courts and Prosecutor's Offices that are located into USAID's target jurisdictions."

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE LEARNING AGENDA PROCESS

As they thought back about their experience with the DRG Learning Agenda, key informants provided several proposals for the future. The majority of suggestions concerned stakeholder involvement. There was general agreement on the recommendations listed under logistics and a few other recommendations for future consideration.

### STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

- Further expand stakeholder engagement. Expand field involvement through engagement of regional bureaus and selecting a subset of learning questions appropriate for regional level learning. Engage additional stakeholders such as private sector, academics, and implementing partners. Focus learning and dissemination efforts on staff writing calls for proposals.

- Consider creating a political science academic group to advise the DRG. Engage luminaries on democracy promotion to bring in influential voices to understand, amplify and advocate for DRG learning efforts.

- Bring other sources of questions to the initial discussion. Since DRG is moving into a different bureau, it may be good to reach out across centers, hubs, etc. in developing new learning questions. Engage with the foreign policy community or interview those in the partner community. Bring in questions from academia by summarizing annual reviews of the state of the field in various journals.

- Reconsider theme team approach and organize question development by units in order to build on existing needs, ownership, and resources. Take the time to learn the 'lay of the land', unobtrusively getting to know teams and what they care about. Listen in meetings and use the

knowledge of who's who and who would be champions to help structure teams and advisory groups.

- Provide an easily understood narrative around the learning effort in a form that senior managers can use and providing regular updates and emerging answers to questions that are being addressed over a period of time.

- Look for opportunities to keep DRG plugged in to other Learning Agendas in the agency. Consider reviving the 'learning dojo' organized by USAID's Learning and Knowledge Management (LEARN) contract to bring together individuals involved in implementing Learning Agendas across USAID.

## LEARNING QUESTIONS AND LOGISTICS

- Limit the number of learning questions to three to six.

- Expand the time horizon for answering questions from one year to two years.

- Consider having learning questions at multiple levels and not focused solely on the middle-range questions. Consider prioritizing a Mission or regional mission for one round that might include questions such as drivers of extremism in the Sahel.

- Continue to generate hypotheses, as well as test existing hypotheses. In the DRG field, there is a need to understand what hypotheses USAID might have initially and generate them based on research and theory and then, in context, test hypotheses to see how they play out. Casual implications and relationships are not clearly understood yet.

## PACKAGING AND DISSEMINATING FINDINGS

- When developing learning products, think about how to qualify kinds of evidence nuggets. Think about the policy implications of the research findings and provide a rating (red/yellow/green light) for how much officers should trust a specific finding.

## OTHER

- Revisit where the agency has come since the 2008 National Academy of Science report on improving democracy assistance raised the importance of using diverse, rigorous research methods to inform USAID DRG programming.

- Include on the Learning Division staff, Ph.D. social scientists coming from the world of academia. This inclusion ensures a familiarity with current academic discourse and findings about DRG topics as well as good methodological training to ensure that the learning process goes more smoothly.

- The DRG Center should serve as a central think tank investing in knowledge creation and research to inform field programming in this sector. Impact evaluations are one important approach for learning that should be resourced and sustained. Incorporate learning from failures.

# ANNEX A: LEARNING AGENDA EVIDENCE REVIEW PROTOCOL

This protocol describes the analytical steps taken to evaluate the extent to which DRG Learning Harvest research documents address the Learning Agenda questions.

- Compiling and cataloguing component research documents

    – All documents from the Learning Harvest were placed into the new Learning Rack Up spreadsheet format

    – Additionally, all relevant research documents sent by key informants or available on the Institute for International Education and USAID DRG websites were added to the spreadsheet

    – Research documents that were available to the reviewers were downloaded to a folder as PDFs

    – The following fields were transferred directly from the Learning Harvest (for those documents that had been included in the Harvest): Title, Author, Date, Learning Document Type (referred to in the Learning Harvest as "Methods"), Region, Countries, Research Questions, Main Findings, Identification Number, Related Documents, and Web URL

    – Documents were read in their entirety and summarized in the Project Summary column

    – 39 documents from the Learning Harvest were excluded because they were not publicly available or did not contain empirical information that was substantially relevant to addressing any of the Learning agenda question; these documents are listed in the "Additional Documents" sheet of the Rack-Up Excel file39

- Coding documents for relevance to Learning Agenda themes and questions

    – For each learning document, the team considered the extent to which it addressed each Learning Agenda question and coded accordingly, also indicating the theme for each of the selected Learning Agenda questions

    – Team members then added a brief phrase or set of phrases describing how the document was relevant to any applicable Learning Agenda questions

- Question-by-question review

    – Once the Rack-Up dataset had been configured, the team sorted the spreadsheet by each successive Learning Agenda question and compiled identification codes for all studies relevant to that question before resorting

    – Research documents within Learning Agenda questions were then additionally sorted by research design

- The reviewers then read through their notes on each successive document, ordered by Product/Service code, moving from relatively macro-oriented to relatively micro-oriented document type

  - Began with literature reviews that had been specifically commissioned to address Learning Agenda questions

  - Moved on to the Literature Reviews and Systematic Evidence Reviews that were deemed next most relevant to the Learning Agenda question, and so on

  - Next, Country Data Portraits and observational quantitative studies that demonstrated broad relationships between relevant variables (these latter documents are typically but not always classified within the original Learning Harvest spreadsheet as Surveys)

  - Next, Impact Evaluations, which seek to identify the causal effects of a well-defined intervention

  - Last, Performance Evaluations and case studies, which focus on ground level mechanisms and implementation experiences using primarily qualitative or descriptive quantitative data

- Analysis

  - The team divided material for each Learning Agenda question with sufficient material to address into three sections:

    - Background notes (includes comments from key informants and contextual observations where relevant)

    - Evidence Review (core section describing the data itself)

    - Lessons and next steps (overarching findings and priorities)

  - For each question, they then evaluated the extent to which that question was addressed by documents of each product type

  - Last, they considered each question within the context of the current literature and policy discourse, and provided recommendations for potential deliverable types for future rounds of Learning Agenda research

  - This analysis provided content that was then reorganized into the present Learning Agenda Overview and accompanying Research Rack-Up documents

# ANNEX B: DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING DOCUMENT TYPES

*Evidence reviews*, which include formal reviews of academic and/or policy literatures as well as looser scoping efforts, synthesize existing research in order to distill findings, contextualize a particular topic, and weigh multiple bodies of evidence against one another. The DRG Center commissioned [seven evidence reviews](#) specifically to address Learning Agenda questions.

*Surveys*, for present purposes, include documents for which original quantitative analysis and/or observational field research has been conducted. They typically involve data on large samples of individuals or households who answered a uniform list of questions with fixed response categories. Several of the documents classified as surveys contain non-survey components (e.g., qualitative interviews), and conversely performance evaluations and especially impact evaluations frequently make use of survey methodology. The distinguishing feature of products of this type is that they attempt to capture ground realities relating to DRG issues without focusing on the effects of or circumstances surrounding a particular program or intervention.

*Impact evaluations* are empirical studies that attempt to estimate the causal effects of a well-defined intervention, e.g., a particular development activity or set of activities. Field experiments, or randomized controlled trials, are the impact evaluation design considered by social scientists and policy researchers to be most rigorous. When it is implausible, inefficient, or unethical to randomize participants into treatment and control groups, researchers typically draw from a body of designs known as *quasi-experiments* that attempt to statistically approximate random assignment to the intervention in question.

*Performance evaluations* are studies centered on a particular program that focus on ground-level realities associated with implementation of the program, as well as proximate inputs and outputs (in contrast to the longer-term goals that can be tested by impact evaluations). They include descriptive methods like key informant interviews, ethnographic observation, and analysis of program monitoring statistics.

# ANNEX C: LEARNING AGENDA QUESTIONS – REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

**Table 5: Learning Agenda Questions – Regional Breakdown**

| | All | Global | Africa | Asia | Europe & Eurasia | Latin America & Caribbean | Middle East |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Participation & Inclusion* | *41* | *16* | *10* | *8* | *2* | *2* | *3* |
| Restrictive environments | 9 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Youth participation | 17 | 2 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Women's participation | 21 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Social movements | 11 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Electoral systems | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Transparency & Accountability* | *43* | *20* | *9* | *2* | *8* | *3* | *1* |
| Ext vs. internal account. | 33 | 12 | 9 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 0 |
| Decentralization | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Civil service | 7 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| E-Governance | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gender-Based Violence | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| *Human Rights* | *49* | *16* | *9* | *8* | *5* | *8* | *3* |
| Information campaigns | 4 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Human rights defenders | 17 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| National human rights institutions | 33 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 7 | 3 |
| Radicalization | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cross-group spillover | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *DRG Integration* | *3* | *3* | *0* | *0* | *0* | *0* | *0* |
| Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability (PITA) | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| National expansion | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cross-sectoral expansion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Scale expansion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Democratic Change* | *5* | *3* | *0* | *1* | *1* | *0* | *0* |

# ANNEX D: LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTS: DESCRIPTION OF STUDIES AND COVERAGE BY THEME

## PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Forty-one (41) learning documents were coded as relevant to the Learning Agenda questions contained within the Participation & Inclusion theme. These included 16 evidence reviews, seven surveys, ten impact evaluations, and eight performance evaluations. Around 40% were global in scope, just over a quarter focused on Africa, and the rest focused mostly on Asia.

The DRG Center commissioned one evidence review – Maintaining Civic Space in Backsliding Regimes – that directly addresses the question on participation strategies in restrictive environments with regard to closing spaces. However, few of the documents provide insights for optimizing participation strategies in other types of restrictive environments, including those afflicted by violence. This pattern of relatively more focus on closing spaces than other types of restrictive environment holds generally for the remaining documents that are relevant to this question. The second segment of this question, on how participation becomes habitual, is also largely unaddressed by evidence within the learning documents. This gap reflects an absence of research on this topic more generally. Aside from the "Maintaining Civic Space" literature review, the learning documents relevant to this question are diffuse in focus, ranging from election forensics and social media to constituency dialogue.

No wide-ranging evidence reviews address the question on youth participation. The documents that are relevant to this question tend to focus either on how to encourage youth participation in political activities like voting, or how to avoid youth radicalization toward violent extremism. There is little research reflected within the learning documents that integrates these two issues into a common framework. In other words, there are few insights that explore the decision structures faced by politically active youth that would steer toward "constructive" vs. "violent" participation. The cluster on youth participation tends to approach the issue as "countering violent extremism" and thus falls most naturally within the question on radicalization in the human rights section, discussed below.

Research focusing on youth voting and other forms of routine political participation tend to cluster youth involvement with the participation of other oft-excluded groups, including women and ethnic minority. Overall, the body of research represented within the learning documents pertaining to women's inclusion is larger and more robust than that pertaining to youth participation. Two DRG-commissioned literature reviews directly address this question: Increasing the Civic and Political Participation of Women and Strengthening Women's Civic and Political Participation. These reviews summarize substantial segments of existing social science literature, although the topic is so large that some segments are still inevitably omitted. Overall, the impact evaluation literature review is least well-covered within these reviews. Additionally, the Women in Power report provides a wide-ranging review of actual development assistant activities seeking to encourage women's participation, with nearly 100 activities covered.

Although 11 documents contained insights relevant to the social movement question, these insights were generally more diffuse with the component studies less focused specifically on social movements, aside from the exploratory USIP study. An exception is a cluster of three documents relating to global labor movements, which provides in-depth context for one particular movement. Similarly, the documents relevant to restrictive environments were fairly diffuse and, other than the Learning Agenda

literature review, address only small portions of the question. Similarly, there was little work with direct bearing on structural elements of elections (as opposed to participation within existing electoral structures) with the exception of two documents on electoral forensics classified as applying to both the restrictive spaces and electoral system questions.

Finally, the question on electoral systems remains largely unaddressed, other than one relevant literature review on democratic transitions, and a pair of technical pieces relating to election forensics.

## TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Forty-three (43) learning documents were coded as relevant to the Learning Agenda questions contained within the Transparency & Accountability theme. These included 27 evidence reviews, two surveys, nine impact evaluations, and five performance evaluations. As for Participation & Inclusion, around 40% of documents were global in scope with just over a quarter focused on Africa. However, for this theme, the remaining portion contains mostly studies on Europe and Eurasia rather than Asia.

The external accountability question can be interpreted broadly, to refer to any insights on the efficacy of external pressures or internal reforms, or narrowly, to refer only to studies that explicitly compare interventions with internal vs. external orientations. If interpreted broadly, the question subsumes most of the learning documents on transparency and accountability, which include research on a huge range of programs. When interpreted narrowly, there are a handful of impact evaluations that provide direct and rigorous evidence by comparing interventions in separate treatment groups alongside one another that can be seen as approximating approaches to internal and external accountability mechanisms, respectively. While rigorous, these studies only represent a beginning, since there are numerous intervention models for both internal reform and external pressure. There is a substantial body of relevant evidence that has been conducted but not yet integrated into DRG evidence reviews.

The question on decentralization is broadly covered by the edited volume "[Decentralized Governance and Accountability](#)". Other than this volume, there are relatively few documents that focus on decentralization, and almost no clear evidence on how development assistance can best support decentralization.

The civil service corruption question is directly addressed by a DRG-commissioned literature review and represents one of the only learning documents relevant to this question. This review overlaps substantially with several of the other questions—including the ones on e-governance and decentralization—insofar as these other intervention topics have been used specifically to address the issue corruption within government bureaucracies.

Other than the civil service corruption review and one study on a text messaging-based accountability program in Uganda, e-governance is largely absent from the learning documents. This may in part be a result of the fact that the e-governance literature was relatively thin when the Learning Agenda planning began, although it has since taken off. Finally, the gender-based violence question was folded into a broader research program on gender-based violence, rather than a focus on comparing specialized vs. integrated institutions for gender-based violence.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Forty-nine (49) learning documents were coded as relevant to the Learning Agenda questions contained within the Human Rights theme. These included 21 evidence reviews, nine surveys, eight impact evaluations, and 11 performance evaluations. The regional distribution is similar to Participation & Inclusion and Transparency & Accountability, with a slightly more even distribution across regions (other than the Middle East with only two—although of course comparison is arbitrary in the absence of population weights).

The DRG Center commissioned two literature reviews to address Learning Agenda questions relating to human rights. One of these focused on the information campaigns question. This review focuses primarily on individual social and psychological considerations, for example the framing of messages mobilized within human rights campaigns. Although less directly related, the "Struggles from Below" human rights literature review also contains some relevant content. There is little, however, within the learning documents that positions the role of human rights information campaigns within broader political structures. For example, it may be possible to design an intervention that successfully mobilized popular support, but there is little insight to guide the situations under which particular types of attitude changes could precipitate greater human rights protection.

The human rights defenders and national human rights institutions questions respectively address actors external to the state (such as civic and social movement leaders) and state institutions themselves (such as legalistic frameworks and administrative structures). The "Struggles from Below" review focuses on human rights defenders, documenting a range of potential strategies along with associated likely opportunities and drawbacks. However, there is little information here or elsewhere within the learning documents on the specific roles external assistance can play in supporting human rights defenders. For instance, grants can provide defenders with resources and, in some contexts, legitimacy. In other contexts, foreign support may delegitimize human rights defenders and even draw opposition.

The largest number of studies focused on topics falling within the national human rights institutions questions. This is perhaps not surprising, given that a large percentage of foreign assistance flows through governments. Many of these studies fall into particular sectoral clusters, such as building capacity to combat human trafficking. However, there is very little with regard to cross-sectoral lessons on how foreign assistance can help to build capacity, beyond simply promoting particular policies.

The question on radicalization is addressed in several documents that pertain to "countering violent extremism", as discussed above with regard to the intersection between youth participation and violence. This research contains substantial insights for informing programs that aim to reduce ideologies and behaviors associated with violent extremism. However, the segment of the question pertaining to how violent extremism emerges in the first place—or continues to emerge, even as it is being countered through de-radicalization strategies—remains mostly unaddressed within the learning documents. Last the question on spillover effects across different marginalized population has remained mostly unaddressed, perhaps because it essentially asks for unintended consequences that might not be considered in evaluations.

## DRG INTEGRATION

Only three learning documents were coded as relevant to Learning Agenda questions contained within the DRG integration theme. Each of these focused at the global scale, rather than on particular

countries or regions. Two of the documents were evidence reviews commissioned specifically to address Learning Agenda questions within this Theme. The relative scarcity of DRG learning documents and of research more generally pertaining to this theme may in part have to do with the tendency of policy research systems and incentives to focus around particular sectors. There is not sufficient research to warrant distinction between the different questions falling under this theme, except to some extent in separating the Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability (PITA) question from the rest.

One DRG-commissioned systematic review, "Does Incorporating Participation and Accountability Improve Development Outcomes?" addresses the question on PITA (participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability as integrated across sectors through a meta-analysis (i.e., statistical synthesis) of impact evaluations on participation and accountability centered interventions. However, the methodology employed allows only for documenting broad trends, and does not involve nuanced analysis of which types of PITA strategies would likely be effective in particular cases.

The DRG-commissioned literature review "Grassroots Reform in the Global South" covers topics relevant to the remaining DRG integration question, albeit with a particular focus on local to national scaling of grassroots reforms. One additional learning document, "Women's Political Empowerment, Good Governance and Human Development", was categorized as relevant to this theme. This document presents an observational analysis (albeit classified as an evidence review since it is based on existing datasets including V-Dem) linking women's political involvement to a variety of human development outcomes. While their analysis cannot resolve the extent to which these correlations occur as a result of DRG integration/spillover, it does provide suggestive evidence on characteristics relating to women's political participation improves the forms of governance that underpin human development.

Collectively, these products highlight a range of mechanisms by which DRG-related tendencies flow across sectors and scales, but there is little concrete, quantifiable evidence.

## DEMOCRATIC THEORIES OF CHANGE

Finally, five learning documents were coded as relevant to the single Learning Agenda question associated with the Theories of Democratic Change theme. Of these, three documents were global in scope, while one each focused on Asia and Europe/Eurasia respectively. The three global pieces are evidence reviews that were commissioned by the DRG Center to address the overarching theme, respectively examining the topics of Theories of Democratic Backsliding, Paths Away from Authoritarianism, and Transitions from Conflict.

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