USAID/TANZANIA

EVIDENCE AND LEARNING (E&L) UTILIZATION MEASUREMENT ANALYSIS (UMA)

March 2022

The E&L UMA was conducted by The Cloudburst Group, namely Miriam Counterman (Team Lead); Simon Conte, Aleta Starosta, and Kate Marple-Cantrell (Senior Evaluation Specialists); and Makayla Barker and Ryan Hatano (Data Analysts).

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development, Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Center under the Learning, Evaluation and Research Activity II (LER II) contract: GS10F0218U/7200AA18M00017.

Prepared by:

The Cloudburst Group
8400 Corporate Drive, Suite 550
Landover, MD 20785-2238
Tel: 301-918-4400

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
E&L	Evidence and Learning
ET	Evaluation team
IP	Implementing partner
KII	Key informant interview
LER II	Learning, Evaluation, and Research Activity II
PEAP	Post-evaluation action plan
POC	Point of contact
RQ	Research question
SOW	Statement of work
UMA	Utilization Measurement Analysis
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Utilization Measurement Analysis (UMA) is intended to provide the Evidence and Learning (E&L) team at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Center for Excellence in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) with a systematic review of uptake and use of its learning products. The UMA explores how learning products from 22 taskings under the Learning, Evaluation, and Research Activity II (LER II) task order have been used and disseminated and provides recommendations for improving the presentation of findings, encouraging utilization, and expanding dissemination efforts.

The findings are based on 20 interviews, reflecting the views of 25 individuals, on 21 taskings. Taskings included performance evaluations, assessments, frameworks, and other guides. Interviews were semi-structured and addressed the utilization and dissemination of research findings. The findings are organized by research questions (RQs) and summarized here, the findings and conclusions are discussed separately in more detail in the full report.

Although the research acknowledges the challenges in conducting effective learning activities, the value of these products is clear. The purpose of the research is to identify factors that facilitate or hinder the utilization of research in order to improve future products. The recommendations provide actionable suggestions capitalizing on facilitating factors and overcoming hindrances.

RQ 1: HOW WERE THE FINDINGS AND/OR REPORT SHARED AND DISSEMINATED? TO WHOM AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE? WERE THERE DERIVATIVE COMMUNICATION OR DISSEMINATION PRODUCTS PRODUCED? IF SO, HOW WERE THEY USED?

Dissemination activities across the 22 taskings evaluated varied significantly: there were outbriefs, findings workshops, dissemination presentations, and launch events. Thirteen held an outbrief event to present preliminary findings to key stakeholders (out of 15 evaluations and assessments that would be expected to have an outbrief). The audience for these events most often included Mission and project staff, although, in select instances, the relevant Mission chose to present findings to a wider audience (such as government counterparts or other donors). Five additional taskings held a findings workshop or presentation specifically designed to provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to critique and discuss the prioritization of recommendations. Additionally, learning products from three interconnected taskings informed a thematic launch event that was externally facing. Audience members of this event included staff from the DRG Center and Mission staff and stakeholders working outside of USAID.

There were mixed views on the efficacy of these dissemination products. Four interviewees noted the outbriefs' effectiveness at efficiently conveying findings to a targeted audience and three posed the likelihood that audience members would find them redundant or forgettable. Four interviewees advocated generally for the use of presentations to disseminate findings rather than written materials because of the opportunity to include interactive elements such as Q&A segments, pause-and-reflect sessions, and guided discussions. Nine interviewees also discussed written materials supplementary to a report that could provide practitioners and key stakeholders an overview of the findings/relevant recommendations. Ideas included two-pagers, executive summaries, infographics, and comics. The advantage of these types of summative materials is that their brevity and non-technical nature make findings more accessible to some field staff and other non-DRG personnel who may find a targeted learning product useful but would otherwise not engage with the full findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Require dissemination plans at the concept note stage, with clear expectations in the statement of work (SOW).** This better ensures a holistic dissemination plan and checks that the planned deliverables meet the dissemination goals for the research. Plans should outline events and include a defined purpose, audience, and tool(s) for each activity.
- Scopes and designs should consider the audience and purpose of dissemination activities to **tailor dissemination products to the intended audience.** While some audiences read and benefit from a full findings report, many do not. Depending on the audience, summaries, abstracts, presentations, infographics, and other visuals may be a more effective means of communication.
- In considering the purpose and intended audience for the dissemination plan, **leverage digital tools to encourage participation in presentations, workshops, and other events.** More interactive activities are more likely to engage audiences and effectively deliver information. Particularly in an age of "Zoom fatigue," it is important to deliver presentations engagingly.

RQ 2: WERE THERE FINDINGS FROM THE LEARNING PRODUCT/REPORT THAT WERE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT? FOR EXAMPLE, ARE THERE FINDINGS THAT PEOPLE STILL REFER TO MONTHS AFTER THE EVALUATION?

Few interviewees reported specific findings that were important, although many referenced using findings collectively. For a majority of interviewees, too much time had elapsed to remember specific findings and, as discussed in RQ 3, only one had a written record of what was done with the findings and recommendations for reference. However, interviewees reported minor to moderate influence on program design, activity implementation, USAID strategy, and general learning or understanding (discussed further in RQ4). Interviewees reported using findings from learning products for: activity design, arguing for increased funding, continuing a certain type of programming, starting a program in a new sub-sector, observation by a third party outside the implementation or USAID team, and relationship-building and getting stakeholders on the same page.

In discussing why findings were utilized or not utilized, interviewees praised both broad, high-level findings and specific, highly targeted findings and recommendations. This largely results from different products used for different purposes; however, in at least one case, an interviewee praised both broad findings and specific, targeted findings in a single product. Broad findings and recommendations inform thinking, engage a maximum number of people, and inform strategy. However, others felt that specific, actionable findings and recommendations were more useful to implementation. Interviewees expressed a need for easily digestible information. Useful findings and recommendations may be buried in long reports and complex language. Many interviewees also raised infographics, abstracts, and two-page summaries as useful tools; however, these must be tailored to the needs of the audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Determine the intervals for utilization follow-up between the E&L team and the commissioner of the research and incorporate it into the post-evaluation action plan (PEAP).** The correct timing for follow-up is likely to vary from one tasking to another; one will not use findings for the first year, while another will have forgotten findings after a year. Regular follow-up is resource-intensive and risks being annoying to the user, but best ensures the collection of accurate information and encourages utilization.
- **Consider the use of findings outside of activity design or implementation.** When looking at the utility of a report, there are many uses outside of activity design and implementation that are still worthwhile. These may include relationship-building and providing an objective or outsider

opinion. The way that findings are presented can be tailored to better suit those uses—for example, targeted two-pagers or summaries can be used for meeting with counterparts and communicating findings.
- **Incorporate visually appealing and brief presentations of the findings in tasking scopes, where appropriate.** Interviewees indicated that the audience for a findings report is limited; infographics, brief summaries, and visual presentations are more useful for a broad audience. The tasking timeline and budget need to account for these products.

RQ 3: WAS THERE ANY FORMAL PROCESS OF DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH THE FINDINGS OR RESULTS (E.G., A WORKSHOP OR MEETING)? WAS A PEAP PRODUCED? WAS IT UPDATED?

In general, few taskings had updated PEAPs or other formal processes to decide what to do with the findings or results. Among 17 Cloudburst LER II taskings that had recommendations (some learning products were guides and toolkits that would not have had actionable recommendations comparable to an evaluation or assessment), five taskings had action plan templates required in the scope; Cloudburst provided the template filled in with recommendations and suggested timelines after completion of the findings report. Of those five, one tasking had taken the template provided and updated it with actions undertaken. An additional six taskings had validation or recommendation workshops to formally discuss recommendations. Other examples of processes to decide what to do with findings are the creation of a guide to the next internal steps, a learning and synthesis event, and other workshops.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Consider ways to encourage the use of the PEAP.** PEAPs are now consistently being produced for applicable research products. These can be a tool to help Missions discuss and decide how to use recommendations; however, they do not appear to be well used, even within taskings with recommendations workshops. Following up to ask about the PEAP may help to encourage its use in some cases and additional education for Missions or others using evaluations would help users understand the purpose of the PEAP, what to do with it, and how it can benefit them.
- **Support users with other processes for determining recommendation implementation.** In some cases,Missions or other users may have alternative processes that they use to decide how to implement recommendations. Interviewees mentioned written plans for implementation in other formats, or "roadmaps," and various forms of meetings and discussions to determine implementation. In these instances, users could be guided on adapting the PEAP to their process to make it most effective for tracking utilization.

RQ 4: WERE THERE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REPORT THAT WERE ACTED UPON? WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS AND WHAT WAS DONE? HOW DID THE EVALUATION INFLUENCE USAID STRATEGY, PROGRAM DESIGN, ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION, AND UNDERSTANDING?

A large majority of interviewees were able to discuss ways in which the recommendations from their learning products were used—only one felt that the recommendations were not useful at all. Interviewees rated most learning products as having a moderate to major effect on activity implementation (n=8, 53 percent), activity design (n=12, 75 percent), strategy (n=8, 50 percent), and general learning (n=9, 60 percent). Activity design had the most interviewees who considered their learning product to be moderately or majorly influential. This likely reflects the purpose of most of the evaluations and assessments, which was to inform program design. In 15 interviews, respondents struggled to name specific examples of recommendations that were particularly important, either because they used the report more holistically for background information, because not enough time had elapsed for implementation, or because they simply could not recall individual recommendations. Six interviewees were able to name specific recommendations, the lessons from which are discussed below.

A common theme among interviewees was that **evaluations and their recommendations need to be carefully designed to serve the needs of the Mission or other users.** Five interviewees felt that this had significantly contributed to the learning product's success while three felt doing so would have resulted in a better product. A related common perception was that close collaboration between the research team and Mission or other users was beneficial.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Clearly communicate the needs of the user to the research team so that recommendations can be properly tailored.** As in the recommendations for findings, with a wide variety of learning products, recommendations must fit the intended use. Recommendations must also take into account the donor landscape and the intended scope of the use. It may be better to recommend continuing an activity as-is rather than recommending an impractical or impossible activity, given the context.
- **Consider USAID's role in the evaluation.** This, too, depends on the specific learning product; however, Mission or other USAID staff have an important role in the design, implementation, and dissemination of research. This may include E&L methodological expertise in writing the scope and design, user collaboration in the research methodology, participation in fieldwork, or championing dissemination and utilization. View additional guidance on USAID's role in external evaluations.
- **Select the timing of the research carefully.** The E&L team should help Missions or other commissioners to understand the timeframe of a research project and assess whether the proposed approach can meet their needs in the allotted time. This will also help to ensure that the research is done at an appropriate time, given utilization goals.

RQ 5: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS TO USING EVALUATION FINDINGS OR ACTING ON EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS? DID THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT SUPPORT ITS USE?

Respondents identified a variety of factors that present barriers to using or acting upon evaluation recommendations. Most barriers can generally be categorized as either external factors, such as the broader political context in a country, or internal factors, such as a lack of bandwidth within USAID to act upon or document the use of recommendations. Some barriers, however, straddle this divide and are applicable both externally to and internally within USAID. The agency's foreign assistance activities do not occur in a vacuum, and an array of circumstances need to be aligned for an evaluation to lead to impactful recommendations that can be acted upon. Among other things, the political and economic context within the country must be conducive to reform efforts, there must be sufficient buy-in both from stakeholders and within USAID itself, the report must provide realistic and actionable recommendations, and there must be sufficient bandwidth and funding within USAID to support follow-up activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Encourage closer collaboration between the technical team commissioning the evaluation and the evaluation team (ET)**, such as collaboration on the design to ensure that the research provides analysis that achieves USAID's goals.

- **Build buy-in from implementing partners (IPs) by adequately preparing them for evaluations**, such as by crafting evaluation guidelines that emphasize the benefits of a collaborative process and that frame the evaluation as a learning opportunity and a constructive process. In addition, commissioner of the research should provide clear communication to the IP on the purpose of the research or evaluation, with support from the ET, where necessary.
- **Provide specific parameters to the ET that aid them in crafting actionable recommendations;** e.g., rapid-response vs. long-term, directed toward specific partners, the general level of funding anticipated for follow-on activities, relevant political context, known obstacles to implementation, etc. View additional guidance on developing an effective evaluation SOW.
- **Realistically consider the viability of evaluation use before an evaluation is conducted.** Do the timing, resources, and political context provide space and opportunity for an evaluation to be impactful?

RQ 6: HOW COULD EVALUATIONS BE MADE MORE USEFUL? HOW COULD USAID AND IPS USE EVALUATION FINDINGS MORE?

Many of the suggestions for improving evaluations focused on dissemination—pushing research out to more stakeholders and in more easily accessible formats. As has been discussed throughout the preceding RQs, ensuring that the research scope and design fit the needs of the Mission or commissioning body is the most important way to ensure that the findings and recommendations are useful. One interviewee pointed out that evaluators often feel pressure to provide recommendations when sometimes the best recommendation is to continue successful activities.

Further requests are to ensure the creation of a research team with the correct combination of knowledge and experience and also to consider the role of USAID staff in research scoping and design, fieldwork, and dissemination. In addition, the presentation of the findings and recommendations is key. Interviewees expressed a desire for more visual representations, summaries and briefs, and interactive workshops and presentations. Finally, research can be difficult to access and is often not synthesized in a way that would make it useful to a broader audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Determine the correct level of engagement of USAID with the research team.** While highly dependent on the context of the learning product, there is an important role for USAID staff in the learning product. This may include contributing research expertise to the scope, collaborating on the research design and workplan, participating in fieldwork where appropriate, and championing the research.
- **Make research more accessible.** The Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) does not currently contribute to disseminating research more widely. A more useful repository of research would make reports and summaries easier to find. Organizing reports by subsector and providing a synthesis of reports to suggest useful best practices would enable greater utilization.
- **Engage in research synthesis activities.** These activities serve to build on existing research to improve and grow a larger body of knowledge of lessons learned and best practices, but they also serve to stimulate engagement with and interest in research.

1.0 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The UMA is intended to provide the E&L team at the USAID Center for Excellence in DRG with a systematic review of uptake and use of its learning products. The UMA explores how learning products from 22 taskings under LER II have been used and disseminated and provides recommendations for improving the presentation of findings, encouraging utilization, and expanding dissemination efforts.

Since the release of USAID's *Evaluation Policy* in 2011, reviews and meta-analyses[1] have shown an increase in both the number of evaluations and the quality of evaluations commissioned by USAID; however, more and better evaluations do not ensure evaluation use. As Fowle et al. (2020) demonstrated, utilization is a key mechanism to understanding the link between research products and improvements in development programming and policy.[2] According to one 2016 study of USAID evaluations, they are used in project design and implementation and strategy and policy formation. The most common effects attributed to evaluations are refocusing ongoing activities such as revised workplans, extended timelines, or expanded geographic reach.[3] However, without a regular, systematic process to examine utilization, there remains unmeasured potential for improving the utilization of both evaluations and other learning products.

Previous analyses of evaluation utilization, including USAID's 2016 report[4] and a World Bank review,[5] found key themes in highly utilized learning products. Learning activities should be conducted when there is a clear question and application for the research, which requires careful timing, design, and presentation. To achieve this, previous analyses recommend engaging stakeholders, including beneficiaries and other key informants, throughout the research process to improve buy-in and uptake of recommendations. This type of engagement can improve receptivity, which has also been identified as key to utilization. In addition, findings and guidance on best practices should be shared widely in a format that is easily understood and clearly applicable to policy and practice. Producing accessible products, such as infographics or summaries, can also help to disseminate the findings. Tools, like trackers, that link evaluation recommendations to specific actions make the uptake of recommendations easier for the intended audience. Finally, the findings of individual evaluations can be capitalized upon by synthesizing findings across multiple evaluations.

Using a structured set of follow-up interviews with stakeholders of 20 E&L-commissioned taskings completed under the LER II task order, the UMA provides insight to the team on what aspects of these learning products are and are not utilized by end-users. Building on the Program and Policy Change Framework, the findings explore to what extent the findings of learning products are implemented and what barriers exist to disseminating and utilizing findings.

---

[1] USAID. (2013). "Meta-Evaluation of Quality and Coverage of USAID Evaluations." https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Meta-Evaluation%20of%20Quality%20and%20Coverage%20of%20USAID%20Evaluations%202009-2012.pdf

[2] Fowle, K., B. Wells, M. Day, A. Kumar, C. Bess, B. Bingham, and A. Wayman. 2020. "The Program and Policy Change Framework: A new tool to measure research use in low- and middle-income countries." Research Evaluation, 1–14, doi: 10.1093/reseval/rvaa017.

[3] USAID. (2011). "Evaluation: Learning from Experience." *USAID Evaluation Policy*. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2151/USAIDEvaluationPolicy.pdf

[4] USAID. (2016). "Evaluation Utilization at USAID." https://data.usaid.gov/api/views/gp7w-vu6q/files/7a656d92-bc16-406f-b468-c67c9fa20d9f.

[5] World Bank. (2004). "Influential Evaluations: Evaluations that Improved Performance and Impacts of Development Programs." https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/609091468329361924/pdf/328790ENGLISH01tial1evaluations1ecd.pdf

1.2 RQS

1. How were the findings and/or report shared and disseminated? To whom and for what purpose? Were there derivative communication or dissemination products produced? If so, how were they used?
2. Were there findings from the learning product/report that were particularly important? For example, are there findings that people still refer to months after the evaluation?
3. Was there any formal process of deciding what to do with the findings or results (e.g., a workshop or meeting)? Was a PEAP produced? Was it updated?
4. Were there any recommendations from the report that were acted upon? What recommendations and what was done? How did the evaluation influence USAID strategy, program design, activity implementation, and understanding?
5. What are some of the barriers to using evaluation findings or acting on evaluation recommendations? Did the structure of the report support its use?
6. How could evaluations be made more useful? How could USAID and IPs use the evaluation findings more?

2.0 EVALUATION METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

2.1. METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed-methods approach to collect data on the RQs, including conducting key informant interviews (KIIs), performing a desk review, and compiling data on the selected taskings to complete a tracker on selected indicators.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The main source of data for the UMA came from interviews with the main points of contact (POCs) for 21 taskings conducted by Cloudburst between 2018 and 2021. A total of 22 taskings were selected for inclusion in the UMA. Table 1 below shows the types of learning products produced under the 22 selected taskings. These taskings were all those conducted between 2018 and 2021, excluding those products that were so unique in nature as to not be comparable (such as conferences). The taskings ranged from closing two months prior to the interview to closing 34 months prior, measured by the date on the final deliverable. The mean period elapsed was 14 months and the median was 10 months.

TABLE 1

TYPE	FREQUENCY
Evaluation	9 (41%)
Assessment	7 (32%)
Evidence review	3 (14%)
Framework/guide	2 (9%)
Other	1(4%)

At least one POC was interviewed for each tasking and multiple POCs were interviewed for some of the taskings. A full list of KIIs is included in Annex 1. The interview guide (included in Annex 1) was coordinated with the NORC/SI team, which conducted a similar UMA to generate comparable data.

The research team contacted a total of 39 individuals regarding 22 taskings. Twenty interviews were successfully conducted with 25 individuals. All but one tasking is represented with at least one interview in this findings report. However, 14 individuals could not be interviewed, most of whom were contacted at least three times.

All interviews were conducted remotely and included at least one interviewer and one note-taker. The research team conducted interviews in which the interviewer had been involved in the research itself and where the interviewer was completely new to the tasking. Although the research team was concerned that interviewees would be hesitant to be critical of products when the interviewer had helped to produce the research or that the interviewer's own views would bias the interview, that did not appear to be the case—interviewees and interviewers alike were aware of and able to discuss challenges during the research process. There was value in an interviewer who was familiar with the research done, remembered the process, and had a relationship with the POC; this was true even in cases where the interviewee was not entirely happy with the result. However, there was also a benefit in having an interviewer whose perspective was uncolored by any previous experience. It is helpful, where possible, to have an interview team that includes one person already familiar with the tasking and one fresh to the research.

Using notes and interview transcripts, the research team used inductive analysis to answer the RQs. All interviews were coded for keywords and emerging themes, which were noted and compiled for writing the findings report. Where possible, these themes were triangulated with documentation and the research team's own knowledge of the tasking.

DESK REVIEW AND SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

The ET reviewed project documents from Cloudburst files to provide the indicators included in the tracker. The desk review informed the development of the research design and the interview tool. In addition, the ET used project documents to prompt interviewee recall and encourage further discussion. Finally, the ET used documents to validate findings where indicated by interviewees; for example, referencing a Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) where findings were cited.

The tracker completed in conjunction with this report includes basic indicators such as the number of outbriefs held and PEAPs created. These indicators were also used to inform findings throughout the UMA and are cited in this report. Due to the diverse nature of the learning products included in this study, not all indicators are appropriate for all taskings. For example, a guide or framework may not have an outbrief or PEAP but may have other dissemination events.

The original research methodology included two to three case studies, which were intended to include a deeper examination of selected case studies, based on documentation and additional interviews. Taskings were selected for potential case studies to reflect diversity in utility (both positive and negative). Seven individuals were contacted at least three times each, but only one agreed to an interview. In most cases, additional documentation was either not available or not sharable. As a result, rather than case studies, the report includes topics for additional focus, where additional information or analysis was possible.

2.2. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Section 2.1 references many of the challenges and limitations of this report. The timing proved to be particularly problematic, both in terms of respondents' memories of the relevant activities fading, and also concerning a lack of institutional knowledge as relevant staff moved to new positions over time. These factors may have impacted the quality of the KII data underpinning the research team's analysis.

Some caution must be taken with the interviewees' responses. Interviewees who were unsure of an answer or who had a positive bias due to their own role in the evaluation may have elected not to answer a question or overestimated the utility of the learning product, resulting in inflated findings. Overall, interviewees' willingness to criticize suggests this is not a huge concern; nevertheless, it must be taken into account.

As noted in Section 2.1, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this report are based on a fairly small sample size of only 20 interviews with 25 individuals. While this does represent 22 of the 23 identified taskings, the research team was unable to conduct interviews with 15 individuals, who may have added different perspectives and information to the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Additionally, in the 22 taskings included in the sample, there are at least four different types of research products covered. Findings are, therefore, drawn from a relatively small number of interviews. For example, a finding could represent the views of all respondents who commissioned an evidence review, which would be three taskings. The ET has focused findings on evaluations and assessments (which are the bulk of the taskings covered), identified themes that carry across learning product types, and noted the number of interviews on which findings are based.

Finally, as the original implementer of these taskings, there is the risk that Cloudburst's analysis of their impact is not completely objective due to a potential positive bias. There is also a risk that interviewees, having been heavily involved in the original research product, are also positively biased. Where possible, the ET reviewed additional documentation to verify results; however, that was possible in only a few cases. To mitigate this risk, the ET probed interviewees for specific examples and recommendations for improvement.

3.0 RQ 1: HOW WERE THE FINDINGS AND/OR REPORT SHARED AND DISSEMINATED? TO WHOM AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE? WERE THERE DERIVATIVE COMMUNICATION OR DISSEMINATION PRODUCTS PRODUCED? IF SO, HOW WERE THEY USED?

3.1 FINDINGS

Dissemination activities across the 22 taskings evaluated varied significantly. Thirteen held an outbrief event to present preliminary findings to key stakeholders (out of 15 evaluations and assessments that would be expected to have an outbrief). The audience for these events most often included Mission and project staff, although, in select instances, the relevant Mission chose to present findings to a wider audience (such as government counterparts or other donors). The number of people in attendance at these outbrief presentations generally varied between 5 and 25 people. Five additional taskings held a findings workshop or presentation specifically designed to provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to critique and discuss the prioritization of recommendations. These were more recent taskings that incorporated discussions of recommendations as part of USAID's push to encourage research utilization. Additionally, learning products from three interconnected taskings informed a thematic launch event that was externally facing. Audience members of this event included staff from the DRG Center and Mission staff and stakeholders working outside of USAID.

Only one tasking did not hold a primary interactive dissemination activity; however, this tasking is ongoing and designed around the iterative dissemination of DRG learning digests, videos, and infographics. Aside from this tasking, three other taskings used infographics as a dissemination tool, and four distributed two-pagers. Only one tasking used both infographics and two-pagers to share findings. In general, stakeholders agreed that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the successful dissemination of learning products. As one respondent summarized, "In general, successful dissemination activities are those that are specific and relevant to respondents."

TABLE 2: COUNT OF TASKINGS WITH DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	NUMBER OF TASKINGS
Findings report	Provide a detailed account of a study with findings, conclusions, and recommendations	21[6]
Two-pager	Summarize findings and recommendations	6
Infographic	Summarize findings and recommendations	4
Outbrief	Present preliminary findings	13
Workshop	Provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss findings and recommendations	5
Launch event	Initiate the utilization of a new learning product	2
Final presentation	Present final findings and recommendations	8

As discussed above, interviewees reported utilizing a variety of dissemination tools, including outbriefs, workshops, reports, two-pagers, infographics, and other events. Across LER II taskings, outbrief presentations were used most frequently. Interviewees were split on their opinions of outbriefs, with four noting the outbriefs' effectiveness at efficiently conveying findings to a targeted audience, three finding the outbriefs beneficial for other purposes, and two expressing the likelihood that audience members would find them redundant or forgettable. When presented with the question "What made this outbrief successful or not successful?" one respondent tellingly replied, "To be frank, I don't really remember this one, but because nothing jumps out [in my mind], it was probably fine." That said, interviewees generally indicated that the more interactive an outbrief presentation, the better. The same interviewee who could

[6] LER II tasking CB002 "DRG Learning Dissemination Products" was designed to produce products for dissemination to USAID and non-USAID audiences that summarize and communicate research and evaluation findings, DRG learning priorities, and other messages. Therefore, this tasking has produced two-pagers, infographics, videos, and other dissemination products, but does not have a findings report.

not recall the details of the outbrief also said, "We usually provide guidance that the presentation shouldn't be too long and that there should be time to ask questions." Interviewees from two other taskings specifically credited the utility of oubriefs to the opportunity to ask questions, while six interviewees in total listed "interactive" or some variation thereof as an attribute of a successful outbrief presentation.

While these interviewees spoke specifically to interactive components of specific dissemination events, three other interviewees advocated generally for the use of presentations to disseminate findings rather than written materials because of the opportunity to include interactive elements such as Q&A segments, pause-and-reflect sessions, and guided discussions. One of these individuals summarized, "As long as the engagement is not static, anywhere there is two-way communication, it will have a different effect."

In keeping with the interviewees' general preference for interactive presentations, several interviewees spoke to the utility of workshops. Indeed, all interviewees who participated in workshops agreed that the exercise was useful. One interviewee shared that they used Jamboards, interactive digital whiteboards developed by Google, to facilitate participation during a recommendations workshop on improving the use of impact evaluations across USAID activities. The tool allowed workshop participants to provide written feedback on recommendations and vote on the prioritization of recommendations. The technique not only encouraged participation among attendees but also ended up being useful after the workshop because the team could point to a record of widespread consensus on recommendations. Another interviewee discussed using various performance and evidence reviews on Global Labor for a co-creation workshop to design the new Global Labor New Frontiers project. This workshop not only effectively disseminated the learning products to a wider audience but also ensured that the findings were directly utilized in the new activity.

Despite the positive feedback regarding workshops and other presentations, when asked how the dissemination of learning products could have been improved, several interviewees unsurprisingly discussed written materials supplementary to a report that could provide practitioners and key stakeholders with an overview of the findings and/or relevant recommendations. Ideas included two-pagers, executive summaries, infographics, and comics. The advantage of these types of summative materials is that their brevity and non-technical nature make findings more accessible to some field staff and other non-DRG personnel who may find the learning product useful but would otherwise not engage with it. One interviewee, who worked on programming in the Dominican Republic, specifically affirmed that, in hindsight, they would have done more dissemination in a non-technical, approachable format.

Among the interviewees who spoke to these types of supplementary materials, six stated that, though the discussed learning product did not have a two-pager, they think it would have aided dissemination; five interviewees said the same for infographics. A majority of these individuals felt that most practitioners do not have the time to read long reports, but would take the time to review findings in this distilled format. One interviewee explained, "If we were to share anything with the Mission or more broadly, I think that a two-pager would have been more useful. Especially for stakeholders that support us financially—we could have used it to advocate for budgets."

Interestingly, among taskings that did have either infographics or two-pagers, none of the interviewees explicitly mentioned the utility of these summary products, suggesting that individuals who have not used two-pagers or infographics as a dissemination tool may be overconfident in their utility. One interviewee felt that two-pagers were not helpful because they believed that anyone interested in the topic would want to read the whole report to understand the findings and recommendations. Though rare, this sentiment suggests that two-pagers are not inherently useful and should be written for and disseminated to an appropriate audience.

Other interviewees corroborated this finding by expressing that one-off dissemination methods are often not as effective as they could be if they were deployed within a holistic approach like a dissemination tracker. An interviewee from one tasking designed to communicate general research and evaluation findings to USAID and nonUSAID staff explained that it is unlikely that a single dissemination activity such as a training, presentation, newsletter, or two-pager would reach everyone who might find the learning product useful, but that multiple dissemination activities at different times would reach a wider audience. Other interviewees concurred with this sentiment, relating that timing plays an important role in the overall success of dissemination activities. When speaking about the positive reception of a presentation, one interviewee said, "it wasn't like the content was for the future—it was something they could use tomorrow." Another interviewee who worked on a Sustainable Landscapes guide for DRG staff agreed that timing aided their dissemination efforts because "ultimately, [they] launched at a time when the interest and reception was a lot greater and more positive [than previously]."

DISSEMINATION AUDIENCE

In addition to speaking to the importance of disseminating learning products at times that are advantageous to promoting utilization, several interviewees indicated the type of audience they believed was most appropriate for the dissemination tool they deployed. For disseminating general findings, interviewees generally agreed that it is important to target a broad and diverse audience. One interviewee felt that research teams should make a habit of doing more presentations with diverse groups of stakeholders, while another indicated that, in hindsight, they would have done a presentation for beneficiaries as well as project and Mission staff. A third interviewee who had experience with presentations done for USAID/Zimbabwe said that simply inviting more people at the Mission to presentations improves the utilization of learning products while a fourth felt that it is important to invite any USAID or project staff who may find the topic relevant, even if they work outside the DRG sector. One interviewee also noted the value of engaging the local development community in the dissemination in addition to project beneficiaries.

One of the benefits of inviting a variety of stakeholders to participate in dissemination events is the ability to amplify diverse voices. One interviewee professed that incorporating voices from countries wherein the activity took place had a significant positive impact: "The launch event was a really great event with voices from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Cambodia. Staff that were cited in the guide gave presentations on what worked and what was challenging and I think that had a way of bringing the subject to life—if we just had Washington staff, it wouldn't have worked as well." This insight also validates the above finding that more interactive and engaging presentations are more successful at disseminating learning.

In contrast to inviting a wide variety of people to dissemination events aimed at presenting findings, as noted above, interviewees found that it was more appropriate to adopt a highly targeted dissemination approach for sharing recommendations. This finding confirms the conventional wisdom shared by one interviewee that only people who need recommendations will use them. For example, two different interviewees explained how their team had reached out to individual Missions that they thought might be in a good position to use the learning product, which in their opinion had a higher success rate of promoting the implementation of recommendations than larger presentations to DRG USAID staff. These same interviewees also incorporated an elections-related learning product into core elections trainings for USAID staff and the Automated Directives System respectively, therein ensuring that recommendations had a direct impact. Two additional interviewees advocated incorporating recommendations into a targeted training curriculum. Used strategically, this finding could help streamline the transfer of knowledge from research teams developing the learning products to practitioners who can implement recommendations.

3.2 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, interviewees generally acknowledged that they could have done more dissemination for learning products. However, it is also clear that **simply increasing dissemination is unlikely to increase utilization** without first developing a holistic plan for effective dissemination that addresses the three key issues of timing, audience, and communication style. For further discussion of an example of a dissemination strategy, see the Focus On: Global Labor Review.

Interviewees found that timing can either facilitate or be a barrier to successful dissemination. One interviewee noted that findings and recommendations do not always have an immediate use case, making dissemination and utilization challenging. Therefore, **a holistic dissemination approach can help practitioners take advantage of auspicious timing for sharing recommendations and findings**. Moreover, planning for iterative dissemination activities increases the likelihood that more people will be aware of and capable of utilizing findings and recommendations.

A synthesis of interviewee comments made evident that **a holistic dissemination strategy not only requires multiple types of dissemination but also necessitates matching each dissemination tool with the appropriate audience; doing so ensures that dissemination activities are a part of a continuous rather than compartmentalized approach**. Because the dissemination plan is highly specific to the learning product, the intended audience and purpose for dissemination should be elucidated in the SOW. For example, nearly one-third of interviewees thought that using two-pagers or infographics as dissemination tools would have been useful to the activity, while interviewees who did use two-pagers did not feel compelled to comment on their utility. The finding suggests that it is possible that supplementary summary materials such as two-pagers may not have been targeted to the right audiences, or may have been overshadowed by other products. Often, two-pagers are brief distillations of executive summaries (already 3–5 pages, generally) and may not add significant value. It may be more effective to target the two-pager to the intended audience and focus on the findings or recommendations most useful to that audience. Additionally, it is plausible that two-pagers and infographics might have little effect at promoting utilization on their own, but that there could be synergies to disseminating two-pagers and infographics in conjunction with other events and presentations.

The table below identifies audience types that might be the best fit for each type of dissemination tool. The audiences listed below are general and should be adapted to each specific learning product. Most content is produced in English; therefore, the audience for a findings report in many cases is likely to be an international IP. It may be more practical to engage non-English speaking IPs in presentations and events and translate executive summaries.

TABLE 3: POTENTIAL AUDIENCES FOR DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	POTENTIAL AUDIENCE
Findings report	Provide a detailed account of a study with findings, conclusions, and recommendations	• USAID technical staff • International IPs (and local where appropriate)
Two-pager	Summarize findings and recommendations	• Broad USAID audience • Local government counterparts • Beneficiaries
Infographic	Summarize findings and recommendations	• Broad USAID audience • Local government counterparts • Beneficiaries • Broad public release
Outbrief	Present preliminary findings	• USAID Mission staff/research commissioners • IPs
Workshop	Provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss findings and recommendations	• USAID Mission staff/research commissioners
Launch event	Initiate the utilization of a new learning product	• Broad USAID audience • IPs • International and local civil society • U.S. foreign policy decision-makers (e.g., congressional committees) • International donor community • Academia
Final presentation	Present final findings and recommendations	• Interested USAID staff • IPs • International and local civil society • Local government counterparts • International donor community

Finally, communication style is unsurprisingly an important factor in the relative success of dissemination activities. **Most practitioners do not have the spare time to review large amounts of information, making it important for written materials to be concise and easily digestible and presentations to be relevant and engaging.** The general consensus of interviewees regarding the importance of audience engagement during presentations indicates that workshops where there is a brief presentation and significant time for discussion may be generally more useful than outbrief presentations with little time for Q&A. More targeted dissemination will likely increase engagement with learning products and the uptake of utilization and recommendations.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Require dissemination plans at the concept note stage, with clear expectations in the SOW.** This better ensures a holistic dissemination plan and checks that the planned deliverables meet the dissemination goals for the research. Plans should outline events and include a defined purpose, audience, and tool(s) for each activity.

- Scopes and designs should consider the audience and purpose of dissemination activities to **tailor dissemination products to the intended audience.** While some audiences read and benefit from a full findings report, many do not. Depending on the audience, summaries, abstracts, presentations, infographics, and other visuals may be a more effective means of communication.
- In considering the purpose and intended audience for the dissemination plan, **leverage digital tools to encourage participation in presentations, workshops, and other events.** More interactive activities are more likely to engage audiences and effectively deliver information. Particularly in an age of "Zoom fatigue," it is important to deliver presentations engagingly.

4.0 RQ 2: WERE THERE FINDINGS FROM THE LEARNING PRODUCT/REPORT THAT WERE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT? FOR EXAMPLE, ARE THERE FINDINGS THAT PEOPLE STILL REFER TO MONTHS AFTER THE EVALUATION?

4.1 FINDINGS

Few interviewees reported specific findings that were important, although many referenced using findings collectively.[7] For a majority of interviewees, one issue may have been that too much time had elapsed to remember specific findings and, as discussed in RQ3, two mentioned a written record of what was done with the findings for reference. However, interviewees reported minor to moderate influence on program design, activity implementation, USAID strategy, and general learning or understanding (discussed further in RQ4).

While interviewees rarely recalled a specific finding that was very influential, they often spoke to a specific application of the findings. For example, the findings were used heavily in the design of a follow-on program, they were used to justify a new program in a sector in which Mission had not been working, or they were used in writing the CDCS.

CHALLENGES WITH COLLECTING DATA ON FINDINGS UTILIZATION

Overall, interviewees struggled to recall specific findings and how and why they were used or not used. The recall period for interviewees ranged from two months to over two years. Moreover, up to two years after a learning product was produced, the most knowledgeable person on that tasking may have moved to a new position or left USAID. In at least three cases, the interviewee expressed that they were not the best person to address the interview questions. There were also issues with shorter recall periods. An interviewee stated that even a one-year follow-up may not be sufficient for the Global Elections Framework because globally, only a few elections happen per year.

All interviewees were asked how they would prefer to engage with follow-up on utilization and dissemination. Four preferred a call, three preferred a follow-up in writing, and three did not have a preference between the two. In total, ten interviewees did express support for some sort of follow-up

[7] RQ2 and RQ4 address findings and recommendations, respectively. The research team found that interviewees did not regard findings and recommendations separately and spoke about the two in an interrelated way. As a result, while the research team has sought to respond to RQ2 and RQ4 thoroughly, there is overlap between the two and the distinction between findings and recommendations is somewhat imposed.

contact. While the remaining interviewees did not have a direct response to this question, no interviewee rejected the utility of a follow-up.

HOW FINDINGS ARE USED

Interviewees reported using findings from learning products in several ways. As noted above, learning products are frequently used for activity design—two interviewees specifically cited the learning product's use for design. For instance, in the case of a midterm review of gender-based violdence programming, findings were used to tweak the design to take a more comprehensive view of sexual and gender-based violence and engage more stakeholders, despite the fact that a follow-on activity had already been designed. An additional interviewee also used findings to improve a project's functioning for the remaining months of an existing agreement.

Findings were also used to argue for an increase in funding, continuing a certain type of programming, or starting a program in a new sector. One interviewee used findings to support the design and launch of a rapid response mechanism. The same interviewee also used findings to start a rule of law program where the Mission had not had any rule of law programming for years. Another interviewee discussed using findings as a general argument for continuing a funding mechanism that the findings showed was working well.

The importance of learning products providing objective, external expert assessments was noted by four interviewees. These interviewees felt that having an outside view of a program can help to confirm the existing view of what is happening and provide backup for making an argument for maintaining activities under threat or undertaking controversial changes. One example of this was a program where the technical officer wanted to eliminate a small grants program that was not working. With support from the findings of the evaluation, all parties agreed to eliminate the program and received no push-back. In another example, an interviewee referenced the benefit of objective findings in terms of delivering controversial decisions to counterparts or IPs. Another interviewee stated, "We wouldn't be good at our jobs if we didn't have hunches about what is going well or wrong in our projects after managing them for a few years. But having an objective assessment that gets at these same areas, that observes issues in a stark way, not based on perspectives—that can be really helpful." Another interviewee agreed, noting that it was reassuring to continue activities when a midterm performance evaluation provided evidence that the activity was successful to date.

Finally, there were also less concrete, but nonetheless important, uses. One interviewee stated that the learning product had "helped everyone to see the same thing" when they were trying to share information across diverse groups at USAID, and another found findings useful in getting stakeholders on the same page. Similarly, a third interviewee found findings beneficial for relationship-building with counterparts. Yet another interviewee used broad findings to suggest a fresh approach with a government counterpart. The Electoral Management Bodies Assessment was useful for helping USAID to strengthen its relationship with the local government's electoral body. Used strategically, these interviewees felt that findings can provide a common basis for discussion, objective view, and useful reference.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

A majority of interviewees highlighted the need for easily digestible information. Interviews repeatedly raised the fact that few people read a full findings report. They are often too long and may use academic language that is difficult to understand and uninteresting. Useful findings may be buried in long reports and complex language, which becomes less useful and applicable. One interviewee suggested that an approach to break up long, technical products (such as guides or toolkits) and make them more usable is to use modules. Users can then select modules that are pertinent to their work in a shorter format. The Election Assessment Framework took this approach, as did the Media Assessment Tool.

Other suggestions for addressing this issue, which are discussed more in RQ1 on dissemination, were varied. Many interviewees raised infographics and two-page summaries as useful tools; however, two-page summaries may even be too long in some cases. One interviewee suggested including abstracts in reports rather than two-pagers or longer executive summaries, which has been required for some taskings in the past.

Interviewees also suggested focusing on infographics and visuals—even illustrations—that are more eye-catching and informative. One interviewee gave an example of presenting findings in a comic format, noting that while non-traditional, it was highly effective in communicating key information in contexts where language barriers made traditional reports and summaries unapproachable. There are certainly tradeoffs with taking a more creative approach to presenting findings in terms of time and budget, but doing so has the potential to create a much greater impact.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

A majority of interviewees struggled to remember specifics of the research or how findings were used, including those whose learning product was produced six months previously. In addition, up to two years after a learning product was produced, the most knowledgeable person on that tasking may have moved to a new position or left USAID. However, shorter recall periods also have drawbacks in that interviewees may not have sufficient time to implement findings or be able to take a higher-level assessment of process and utilization. One option is to **adjust the follow-up period to the specific tasking**, which threatens to become cumbersome and overly complicated. A second option is to conduct multiple follow-ups at regular intervals over time, as one unit at the World Bank does. Project managers are contacted monthly for very brief feedback on how research is being used. However, this approach has a downside in the time and resource investment in conducting follow-ups, as well as the risk of annoying respondents. In addition, while the information gained from the follow-up itself may be more or less useful, the contact itself can spur revisiting a product and encouraging use, as is discussed further in Section 5. Whatever the means of follow-up, **communicating clear expectations between the E&L team and the commissioner of the research during the scoping phase may help to ensure responsiveness. In addition, the timing for the follow-up can be determined and incorporated into the PEAP.**

Regarding the means of follow-up, there was no clear preference among interviewees between written and verbal discussion. The means of follow-up may not be as important as keeping the interaction brief. It is also possible that if POCs are aware in advance that follow-up will occur, they will be more likely to respond to these requests.

Additionally, **users are more focused on how they applied findings, rather than the specific findings that they applied**. As a result, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions about what makes a finding particularly impactful.

It is useful to note the less concrete applications of findings that interviewees found important. While the effect on activity design or implementation is more common, **findings were also considered valuable**

in relationship- and consensus-building or as a perceived objective view on a controversial topic. Program and technical officers can take the results of evaluations and assessments to counterparts and stakeholders for relationship-building, strengthening a shared understanding of an issue, and providing support for controversial decisions. Options for additional use categories could include relationship- and consensus-building or institutional knowledge, for example, documenting how changes in the political or policy context shaped project outcomes.

Useful findings are tailored to the needs of the evaluation. For example, four interviewees found broad and high-level findings useful and informative, while that was a specific complaint for three, who found specific and targeted findings to be most useful. This is a concern that can and should be discussed in planning phases as the Mission or other user explains how the learning product will be used.

This contradiction points to the need to very carefully consider the end-user of the evaluation. In some cases (for instance, where the learning product is informing a follow-on design), the users may need very specific information that they are lacking. Those that are using the learning product for design and implementation need practical findings with an eye toward implementation, taking into account, for example, financial and material limitations. However, other uses will be better served with more general findings, which may be useful for shaping thinking, strategy consideration, reference, and relationship-building.

Finally, the presentation of findings is key to utility. Interviewees largely agree that a long report, written in academic language, is unlikely to be used widely. While two interviewees wanted this type of product for reference, they also stated that it would need to be combined with shorter and more visual products for a wider audience. One example given was to use abstracts. Abstracts deliver key information in as little as a half-page. This could help to both convey the findings and enhance comparability across evaluations and assessments. However, significant information is lost in distilling findings to such a short format and the highlights from the report may be different depending on the audience. Where targeted dissemination is important, the abstract could be tailored to the interests of the intended audience and may be useful in more taskings than currently used. Other examples included comics or infographics. To implement this, USAID would need to adjust the timelines and budgets for taskings that do want additional dissemination products.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Determine the intervals for utilization follow-up between the E&L team and the commissioner of the research and incorporate it into the PEAP.** The correct timing for follow-up is likely to vary from one tasking to another; one will not use findings for the first year, while another will have forgotten findings after a year. Regular follow-up is resource-intensive and risks being annoying to the user, but best ensures the collection of accurate information and encourages utilization.
- **Consider the use of findings outside of activity design or implementation.** When looking at the utility of a report, there are many uses outside of activity design and implementation that are still worthwhile. These may include relationship-building and providing an objective or outsider opinion. The way that findings are presented can be tailored to better suit those uses—for example, targeted two-pagers or summaries can be used for meeting with counterparts and communicating findings.
- **Incorporate visually appealing and brief presentations of the findings in tasking scopes, where appropriate.** Interviewees indicated that the audience for a findings report is

limited; infographics, brief summaries, and visual presentations are more useful for a broad audience. The tasking timeline and budget need to account for these products.

5.0 RQ3: WAS THERE ANY FORMAL PROCESS OF DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH THE FINDINGS OR RESULTS (E.G., A WORKSHOP OR MEETING)? WAS A PEAP PRODUCED? WAS IT UPDATED?

5.1 FINDINGS

In general, two taskings mentioned updated PEAPs or other formal processes to decide what to do with the findings or results.nt, effective October 2020, requires that Missions develop a PEAP to guide discussion of evaluation findings and recommendations and determine which will be adopted, by whom, and when.[8] Among 17 Cloudburst LER II taskings that had recommendations (some learning products were guides and toolkits that would not have had actionable recommendations comparable to an evaluation or assessment), PEAPs began to be included in evaluation scopes beginning with tasking 15; not all taskings after 15 were evaluations, where a PEAP would have been appropriate. Five taskings had action plans required in the scope and received them after completion of the findings report. Of those five, one tasking had updated a PEAP template to add what recommendations had been implemented. An additional six taskings had validation or recommendation workshops to formally discuss recommendations.

TABLE 4: NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TASKINGS BY RECOMMENDATION PROCESS TYPE

FORMAL PROCESS FOR CONSIDERING RECOMMENDATIONS	PEAP	UPDATED PEAP
6 (35 percent)	5 (29 percent)	1 (6 percent)

Other interviewees that did not have recommendation workshops did mention returning to the recommendations. For example, in Ukraine, the program office provided the technical officer with a written plan to implement recommendations. The technical officer was then able to return to the written plan over time and found it very helpful. Another activity manager stated they had no formal plan to implement recommendations, but the team discussed a plan informally. This interviewee did not find the recommendations themselves useful but did use the informal process of discussing those recommendations to make sure the team was on the same page and to discuss best practices. In yet another example, an interviewee explained that while they did not have a formal process for discussing recommendations, they were used: "Specific recommendations were shared with individual activities and IPs for their awareness and capacity-building. They were discussed with them individually by respective project managers."

Another approach mentioned was to have an event to share findings and discuss recommendations. One example given was an evidence and synthesis week, during which the Mission had presentations on the evidence collected and time for discussion of the recommendations. While this type of event could be

[8] USAID. (2021). "Post-Evaluation Action Plans: Guidance and Templates." Available at: https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/et_post_evaluation_action_plans_final2021.pdf

more focused on the dissemination of findings, it could also be structured to allow for the pertinent stakeholders to understand the findings and then discuss implementation.

One interviewee noted that following up on the use of the PEAP was itself a good way to encourage updating it. In general, requesting a conversation about the use of the PEAP may remind the pertinent stakeholders to return to the document and add updates. Without some encouragement, it is unlikely that learning product users will update a PEAP.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

A formal process for discussing and deciding what to do with findings and recommendations was very rare among interviewees, both before and after PEAPs were required. **The subset of taskings produced after PEAPs were required is small, but the addition of that requirement does not seem to have significantly changed formal processes for considering recommendations.** While these findings are not surprising, they do call for more creativity in how to support learning product users in implementing findings and recommendations.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

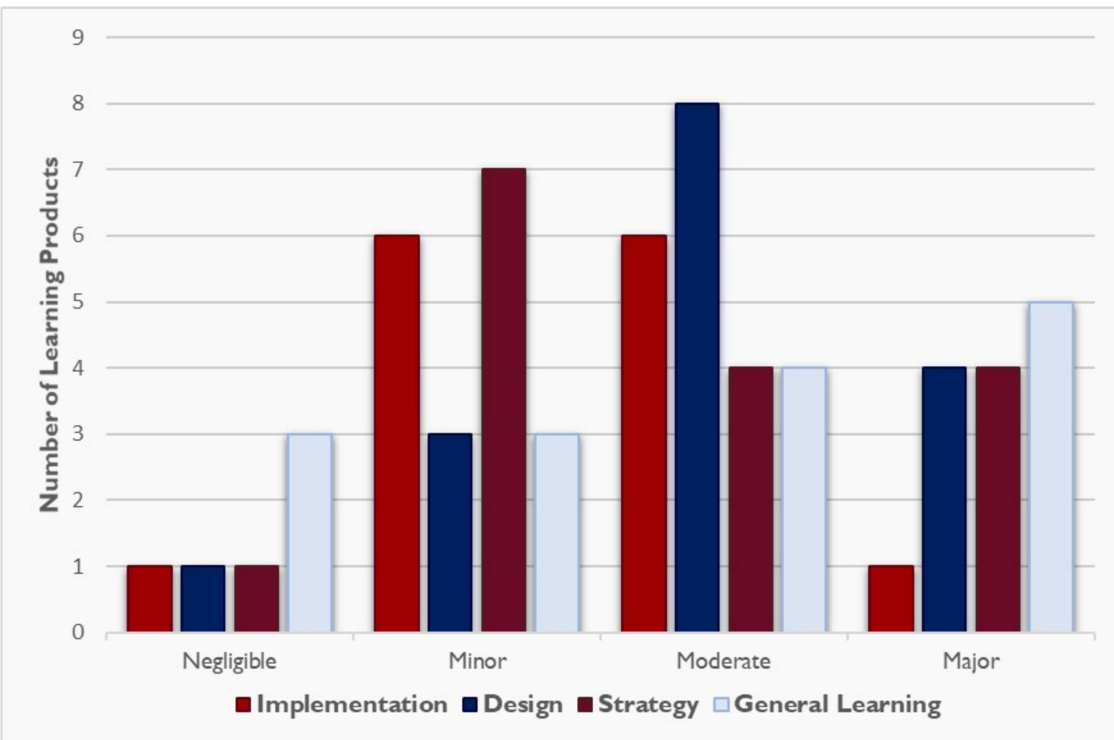
- **Consider ways to encourage the use of the PEAP.** PEAPs are now consistently being produced for applicable research products. These can be a tool to help Missions discuss and decide how to use recommendations; however, they do not appear to be well used, even within taskings with recommendations workshops. Following up to ask about the PEAP may help to encourage its use in some cases and additional education for Missions or others using evaluations would help users understand the purpose of the PEAP, what to do with it, and how it can benefit them.
- Support users with other processes for determining recommendation implementation. In some cases, the PEAP may not be the most effective way for a Missions or other users may have alternative processes that they use to decide how to implement recommendations. Interviewees mentioned other written plans for implementation in other formats, or “roadmaps,” and various forms of meetings and discussions to determine implementation. In these instances, users could be guided on adapting the PEAP to their process to make it most effective for tracking utilization. As with other recommendations, this process should be tailored to the user’s needs and specific learning product and may include learning events or other workshops.

6.0 RQ 4: WERE THERE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REPORT THAT WERE ACTED UPON? WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS AND WHAT WAS DONE? HOW DID THE EVALUATION INFLUENCE USAID STRATEGY, PROGRAM DESIGN, ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION, AND UNDERSTANDING?

6.1 FINDINGS

As shown in figure 1 below, interviewees rated most learning products as having a moderate to major effect on activity implementation (n=8, 53 percent), activity design (n=12, 75 percent), strategy (n=8, 50 percent), and general learning (n=9, 60 percent). Activity design had the most interviewees who considered their learning product to be moderately or majorly influential. This likely reflects the purpose of most of the evaluations and assessments, which was to inform program design. Five respondents struggled to name very specific examples of recommendations that were particularly important, either because they used the report more holistically for background information, because not enough time had elapsed for implementation, or because they simply could not recall individual recommendations. Six interviewees were able to name specific recommendations, the lessons from which are discussed below.

Figure 1: Level of effect on implementation, design, strategy, and general learning rated by interviewees



EFFECT ON IMPLEMENTATION, DESIGN, STRATEGY, AND GENERAL LEARNING

The ET asked interviewees to rate the efficacy of learning product recommendations on a scale from one (no effect) to four (major effect) separately for activity implementation, activity design, strategy, and general learning. Interviewees rated 15 learning products (some were multiple products within a single tasking) on usefulness to **implementation** with an average score of 2.67—or a minor to moderate effect. The average score among DC-based staff (2.17) was slightly lower than among Mission-based staff (3).

Those who did not respond to this question either were not involved in the design, did not remember how the recommendations were used, or were involved with a learning product that did not have recommendations (such as a guide or handbook).

Few of the interviewees who rated the effect on implementation as moderate to major further elaborated why they did so. In part, this was because it was difficult for interviewees to differentiate design from implementation. One interviewee considered the effect on implementation to be major because the Mission had used the assessment recommendations in designing a new project, which was currently being implemented. Multiple respondents felt that having the recommendations confirm what they already thought was helpful. In addition, having an objective evaluator present recommendations, even if those recommendations were merely confirmatory, helped to support the direction that implementation may have already been taking.

The same question was asked regarding program **design**. Interviewees rated 16 learning products and gave an average score of 3, or a moderate effect. This was slightly higher among Mission-based staff (3.28) than among DC-based staff (2.75). While this suggests greater utility to design than to implementation, it is probably more accurately a reflection of the intent of the learning products. Missions may have been more interested in using assessments and evaluations for the design of follow-on or new projects than for ongoing projects.

Two interviewees noted highly targeted and specific recommendations that helped them design a follow-on program. One example from a media assessment in Zimbabwe is a recommendation to include capacity-building for women in the media and investigative journalism to support diversity and pluralism of media voices. This was cited as a highly targeted recommendation that the Mission was then able to use.

When asked to rate the effect of learning products on **strategy**, interviewees also rated 16 learning products. The average score was 2.69, or minor to moderate effect (2.29 among DC-based staff, 3 among Mission-based staff). Two interviewees understood this question to refer specifically to the CDCS and found the recommendations to be useful for background information and general understanding. Other interviewees understood the question to refer to a sectoral strategy, such as climate change, or for the Mission's approach to a specific topic, such as gender-based violence.

Regarding strategy, interviewees who found recommendations useful largely cited it as background information that informed their understanding of an issue. For example, the governance and civil society and media evidence reviews produced for the Armenia Mission under LER II CB003 were both cited in the Armenia CDCS. In this and other examples, the learning product was useful for strategy development in combination with other research and sources.

Finally, interviewees rated 15 learning products on their utility for **general learning**. The average score was 2.8, or minor to moderate. As above, DC-based staff gave a slightly lower score of 2.42, while Mission-based staff gave a slightly higher score of 3.06. A moderate or major effect on general learning often came from higher-level recommendations that informed the background understanding of an issue. One interviewee found comparative recommendations to other countries to be particularly useful in gaining a nuanced understanding of the topics studied; a second interviewee found the lack of comparison to other donors to be a shortcoming of an evidence review. One interviewee stated that they were able to take the recommendations from one global evaluation of a funding mechanism and apply it to other, similar funding mechanisms.

Overall, there may be some inflation of these scores for two reasons. First, interviewees who were unsure or doubtful of the utility of recommendations may have elected not to answer the question or provide a rating. For implementation, design, and strategy, no interviewee stated that the learning product had a negligible effect. However, for general learning, two interviewees did give a score of negligible effect, which suggests that interviewees may not have been hesitant to answer honestly. Second, interviewees were heavily involved in managing the evaluations. While they frequently voiced criticism of the products, they may still have been more likely to see their utility than someone with more distance from the research.

NATURE OF THE RECOMMENDATION

In discussing why recommendations were utilized or not utilized, interviewees praised both broad, high-level recommendations and specific, highly targeted recommendations. Two interviewees (one in a Mission and one in DC) stated that having broad recommendations that informed thinking was a strength of their learning product. One interviewee felt that having those broad recommendations was useful for engaging a maximum number of people, but that having specific recommendations would be more useful for implementation. Another interviewee found high-level recommendations useful to help inform background for a CDCS but acknowledged that those higher-level recommendations were off-putting to some technical officers who wanted more applicable recommendations. In addition, one interviewee felt that high-level recommendations were useful in that they provided a reference product to which the interviewee could return.

Four interviewees expressed that recommendations that were highly specific and targeted for follow-on design and ongoing implementation were most useful. For example, one interviewee felt that actionable, technical recommendations were most effective. Another interviewee concurred that highly targeted recommendations were useful and helped the team to strengthen their program design. In another case that involved a program review of work on global elections and political transition, the interviewee felt that more input from the field would strengthen recommendations and better ensure that they are actionable in that context. In addition, interviewees felt that these recommendations should take into account the goals of the users and the limitations in what they could implement. Even highly specific recommendations are not useful if they are impossible to implement. As one interviewee working on a civil society and media activity in sub-Saharan Africa explained, "There were some recommendations around social movements that didn't quite make it in the [new] activity in the way that I would have liked. The language [of the recommendation] was around in-kind support since they don't have the structure to support large cash awards. But it was hard to translate that into actual programming."

EVALUATION DESIGN

A common theme among interviewees was that evaluations and their recommendations need to be carefully designed to serve the needs of the Mission or other users. Five interviewees felt that this had significantly contributed to the learning product's success, while three felt doing so would have resulted in a better product. These three interviewees raised this idea—they felt that spending time at the beginning of the tasking to ensure that the design fit their needs and communicating this to the research team resulted in an improved result. One interviewee felt that they had to spend significant time communicating to the ET what they wanted to know, particularly that they were interested in what the data showed, even if that recommendation was controversial. However, that interviewee was then very pleased with the product, suggesting that in that case, the additional time was worthwhile.

A related common perception was that close collaboration between the research team and Mission or other user was beneficial. One interviewee discussed the intense collaboration process between the Mission and the ET in revising the evaluation questions and writing the workplan. There were numerous rounds of iteration between the two to ensure that the Mission got the information that they needed to achieve their objectives. The interviewee stated that this "looked like a struggle at first," but resulted in a more useful report. Four additional interviewees raised collaboration between the research team and the Mission or other end users as being key to ensuring that the learning product met their needs. However, this kind of collaboration can also be frustrating to participants and have timeline implications.

Finally, interviewees discussed timing as very important to the utility of the final product. One interviewee stated that it was important to perform the evaluation with sufficient lead time to implement recommendations. Similarly, another stated that the utility to implementation was limited because the program had only a few months remaining. Other interviewees mentioned that the process of performing an evaluation took longer than they had anticipated and they received recommendations after they were useful. There is a critical need for DRG Center staff to educate Missions on realistic timelines for research to ensure that the scope achieves the users' goals. Given the recommendation included here that there be additional time for design development, that could be a longer timeline than currently assumed.

One interviewee suggested in the future doing a preliminary recommendations presentation that would allow them to begin using recommendations before the full report was available, which has been done in some other Cloudburst taskings. A more robust outbrief presentation may require slightly more preparation time after the completion of fieldwork, although it is a matter of days rather than weeks. It requires an understanding between USAID and the research team that, while unlikely, recommendations could change between the outbrief and the findings report.

As discussed in RQ1, an outbrief that includes initial findings can help to bridge the gap between the completion of fieldwork and a finalized report. The conclusions that can be drawn in an outbrief, however, are limited and should not be overly emphasized, as they could change upon further analysis.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, interviewees had a positive view of the learning products and their utility to USAID program design, implementation, strategy, and general learning. Interviewees on average rated learning products as having a minor to moderate influence on the various phases of program planning and implementation. As one interviewee stated, "All the recommendations were useful and informative; whether we used them or not was a different matter. Sometimes resources limit how well we can act on a recommendation." However, four interviewees were able to give specific examples of recommendations that were useful to them, suggesting that the positive perception may have been somewhat inflated or that the time between the report and follow-up was too long.

The examples of effective recommendations that were given **highlighted the importance of careful evaluation design** to ensure the results actually serve the needs of the Mission or other commissioning party. Interviewees suggested **taking additional time at the outset of an evaluation or assessment** to ensure that the design matched the needs of the Mission or other commissioner of the research. While this process can be frustrating and time-consuming and may not be possible or necessary in all cases, interviewees felt it better ensured they got the information they needed. This may go hand-in-hand with the involvement of USAID with the research team; the nature of that involvement will likely vary from one tasking to another but can help to ensure buy-in within USAID and guide the research in the desired direction. Finally, **the timing of research is key**. For some taskings, taking extended time to collaborate on research design paid off; for others, USAID did not commission the research with enough time to use the results.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Clearly communicate the needs of the user to the research team so that recommendations can be properly tailored.** As in the recommendations for findings, with a wide variety of learning products, recommendations must fit the intended use. Recommendations must also take into account the donor landscape and the intended scope of the use. It may be better to recommend continuing an activity as-is rather than recommending an impractical or impossible activity, given the context.
- **Consider USAID's role in the evaluation.** This, too, depends on the specific learning product; however, Mission or other USAID staff have an important role in the design, implementation, and dissemination of research. This may include E&L methodological expertise in writing the scope and design, user collaboration in the research methodology, participation in fieldwork, or championing dissemination and utilization. View additional guidance on USAID's role in external evaluations.
- **Select the timing of the research carefully.** The E&L team should help Missions or other commissioners to understand the timeframe of a research project and assess whether the proposed approach can meet their needs in the allotted time. This will also help to ensure that the research is done at an appropriate time, given utilization goals.

7.0 RQ 5: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS TO USING EVALUATION FINDINGS OR ACTING ON EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS? DID THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT SUPPORT ITS USE?

7.1 FINDINGS

Respondents identified a variety of factors that present barriers to using or acting upon evaluation recommendations. Most barriers can generally be categorized as either external factors, such as the broader political context in a country, or internal factors, such as a lack of bandwidth within USAID to act upon recommendations. Some barriers, however, straddle this divide and are applicable both externally to and internally within USAID.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

External factors generally consist of those outside USAID's control. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the overall reform environment within a country (i.e., the political, economic, and social conditions that either facilitate or, in many instances, present, obstacles to reform). Several respondents referenced the difficult political landscape within a country—such as a new and inexperienced government or poor relations between the U.S. and host-country governments—as obstacles to acting upon evaluation recommendations. In some cases, given the constantly shifting sands of the international environment, these types of changing conditions can even occur during an evaluation or research activity. Naturally, economic conditions within a country can affect its reform priorities and willingness to engage with USAID on evaluation recommendations. Notably, several respondents referenced the challenging political and economic landscape caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which understandably focused countries' attention on more immediate health and economic concerns. Additionally, factors such as closing space for reform or a rapidly changing reform environment can make it challenging to follow up on evaluation recommendations in a timely and opportune manner.

In addition to the general political context, a more specific barrier identified by respondents is a lack of buy-in by relevant stakeholders. In some instances, evaluation findings may threaten the interests of particular stakeholders who are content with the status quo. In others, this lack of buy-in can, in part, stem from a lack of collaboration during the evaluation process. Stakeholders that are more involved in the evaluation process are, naturally, more likely to buy into evaluation recommendations due to both a sense of ownership and their concerns, perspectives, and ideas being reflected in the report. One respondent observed that "...ownership among the technical team would have helped—we tried to do that but it backfired, they did not feel ownership. It's all well and good to talk about being open to recommendations, but when it regards a specific sector that so many jobs are reliant on and the recommendations are threatening to the work, it just won't go over well."

Finally, an additional external factor that impedes the implementation of evaluation findings is time. Not just the inability to act upon recommendations promptly or while the window for reform is still open, but simply in terms of whether individuals see the report as being worth their time and effort. One respondent noted that:

> *The chief constraint in all of these things is time; people don't have enough of it, so for every incremental improvement in the quality, it takes time…every incremental improvement takes someone's time and they get annoyed. So we can't engage someone without taking their time, so we have to make it useful for people. Because, for a lot of people, it doesn't always feel that the incremental improvement that takes 50 percent more time produces 50 percent utility.*

While this barrier is equally true within USAID, for external stakeholders there is the additional challenge of engaging them with a report when there is a multitude of sources and information vying for their attention.

INTERNAL FACTORS

Internal factors that represent barriers to the implementation of evaluation recommendations are those either specific to USAID or within its control. For example, while a lack of buy-in was previously raised as an external factor, lack of buy-in within USAID can also be a significant obstacle to the implementation of recommendations. In some instances, this may arise from technical teams that have preconceived ideas regarding the evaluation process, and recommendations that differ from those preexisting perspectives can find difficulty finding acceptance. As with a lack of buy-in from external stakeholders, USAID teams that are more involved with the evaluation process are more likely to accept and act upon evaluation recommendations. Interestingly, one respondent observed that not only is participation by the USAID team important for building ownership of the evaluation and its results; having the right team involved can be just as important. In one instance, when asked if anything about the tasking should have been changed, one respondent replied, "I would have put the DRG team in the lead; I think they felt that because the program office was leading, it diminished the buy-in of the work." Finally, two respondents noted that, separate from the lack of buy-in from specific teams, a lack of buy-in from USAID leadership in evaluation results also makes acting upon recommendations challenging.

Another internal factor that is specific to USAID is the lack of opportunity to act upon evaluation recommendations. This can stem from many causes, such as a lack of bandwidth or a lack of institutional knowledge from turnover at the USAID Mission. Political and funding priorities may change and, as a result, the will and funding to follow up on evaluation recommendations may fail to materialize. Similarly, one respondent noted that internal politics also plays a role in whether evaluation recommendations are implemented. USAID is an understandably large, complicated, and bureaucratic organization with various interests competing for a finite amount of resources in terms of political will, funding, and staffing. USAID is simply unable to follow up on every evaluation, let alone every recommendation. As strategic priorities and interests are weighed, some evaluations and recommendations will simply be deemed less important than others.

A discrete set of factors that can raise barriers to the implementation of evaluation recommendations is the structure and format of the evaluation report and the recommendations. As noted in RQ2, respondents observed that the evaluation reports can be overly academic and fail to communicate key points in a succinct and easily digestible format. For example, one respondent observed, "I do feel that a lot of these efforts are academic or have an academic bent, which for certain audiences is great, but if you're working in a context where that isn't approachable to your partners, that's not useful." Academia provides extremely useful perspectives, expertise, and research that can help inform and guide international development. The challenge is that academics frequently do not speak the same language as the international development community or approach research and analysis the same way. When engaging academic perspectives, the ET needs to frame and even translate their inputs in a way that speaks to the intended USAID audience.

Additionally, several respondents simply found the reports to be too lengthy, which relates to the prior barrier regarding a lack of time and bandwidth to fully engage with the report. This can stem from a variety of factors, including a broad scope of work that requires a large number of KIIs, numerous and complicated issues and evaluation questions for analysis, or the need to extensively support and document findings and recommendations before they will be accepted. The audience for the report, whether external stakeholders or internal USAID staff, must continually prioritize their information sources. Regrettably, reports that simply require too much time to digest are less likely to be acted upon.

Several respondents noted that, on occasion, some evaluation findings and recommendations may not be crafted to be as realistic or as actionable as they could be. In some cases, recommendations are too vague or academic in nature; in other instances, they can be too specific and difficult to implement. Recommendations may not consider the realities of implementation, such as the specific political context within a country, buy-in by relevant stakeholders, logistics, funding, or similar work being done by other implementers or donors. While these considerations can be difficult for an ET to weigh or even be fully informed of, such as internal USAID priorities and funding restrictions, the lack of synergy between the recommendations and their audience can nevertheless be a barrier.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, **respondents identified a range of internal and external factors that provide barriers to the implementation of evaluation recommendations, most of which are outside the direct**

control of the technical team leading the evaluation. USAID's foreign assistance activities do not occur in a vacuum, and a somewhat remarkable array of circumstances need to be nearly perfectly aligned for an evaluation to lead to impactful recommendations that can be acted upon. The political and economic context within the country must be conducive to reform efforts; there must be sufficient buy-in both from stakeholders and within USAID itself; the report must provide realistic, actionable recommendations; and there must be sufficient bandwidth and funding within USAID to support follow-up activities.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Encourage closer collaboration between the technical team commissioning the evaluation and the evaluation team (ET)**, such as collaboration on the design to ensure that the research provides analysis that achieves USAID's goals.
- **Build buy-in from implementing partners (IPs) by adequately preparing them for evaluations**, such as by crafting evaluation guidelines that emphasize the benefits of a collaborative process and that frame the evaluation as a learning opportunity and a constructive process. In addition, commissioner of the research should provide clear communication to the IP on the purpose of the research or evaluation, with support from the ET, where necessary.
- **Provide specific parameters to the ET that aid them in crafting actionable recommendations;** e.g., rapid-response vs. long-term, directed toward specific partners, the general level of funding anticipated for follow-on activities, relevant political context, known obstacles to implementation, etc. View additional guidance on developing an effective evaluation SOW.
- **Realistically consider the viability of evaluation use before an evaluation is conducted.** Do the timing, resources, and political context provide space and opportunity for an evaluation to be impactful?

8.0 RQ 6: HOW COULD EVALUATIONS BE MADE MORE USEFUL? HOW COULD USAID AND IPS USE EVALUATION FINDINGS MORE?

8.1 FINDINGS

Many of the suggestions for improving evaluations focused on dissemination—pushing research out to more stakeholders and in more easily accessible formats—rather than utilization. One interviewee, confirming that they would not have changed the evaluation, stated that if the outcome had not been useful, they would not have been doing their job at the outset.

As has been discussed repeatedly throughout the preceding RQs, ensuring that the scope and design fit the needs of the Mission or commissioning body is the most important way to ensure that the findings and recommendations are useful. The interviewee who earlier noted that some recommendations are not sensitive to local logistical parameters pointed out that evaluators often feel pressure to provide novel recommendations when sometimes the best recommendation is to continue successful activities. Specifically, this interviewee was critical of a recommendation to dedicate resources to activities that were outside the scope of their project. Learning products are diverse in their use and purpose and each may require a slightly different approach. However, other recommendations arose across a variety of taskings.

STAFFING

Having the correct staffing on both the research team and within the USAID team is crucial to evaluation success. A research team with the correct credentials and experience is key. This includes strong technical expertise in the topics of interest, which requires the scope to make clear what those topics are for recruiting purposes, geographic experience, and knowledge of USAID and the specific development context. Without the latter, the recommendations may be impractical or directed toward the incorrect actor. One interviewee found that the mismatch between the research team and the needs of the Mission, in both sectoral expertise and country experience, led to a report that did not meet the objectives of the Mission or give them the information they needed. This led the Mission to conduct rapid assessments internally, which they found more useful.

Interviewees also suggested that the E&L team, as experts in research methodology, could help to ensure that the scope of work was clear and accurately communicated the needs of the Mission or commissioning body. One interviewee expressed discomfort in approving the design of the research without having the background to know if the proposed methodology would achieve their goals. However, this is not desired in all cases; another interviewee expressed skepticism that deeper E&L team involvement would be useful, feeling instead that additional reviewers would delay the process.

In other cases, interviewees felt that the Mission's involvement in the research itself would help ensure success. Two interviewees wanted Mission technical staff to participate in interviews pertinent to their technical area or even in all interviews. In one tasking, the activity manager participated in all interviews, which contributed to Mission buy-in and uptake of the results. USAID staff played a role in the research team on at least four Cloudburst taskings—a strategy that was considered successful. However, it is not feasible or appropriate in all cases and can raise questions of evaluation independence.

PRESENTATION

Four interviewees raised the need for brief summaries, visual representations, and innovative illustrations. As discussed in RQ2, multiple interviewees called for brief summaries that convey major findings and recommendations written with approachable language, as many stakeholders would be unlikely to read full reports. These two-pagers or abstracts could be tailored to the intended audiences, providing them with the information that would be most useful. This includes preparing materials that Mission representatives can have to distribute to stakeholders, such as in the interest of relationship-building.

Eleven interviewees mentioned presentations being more effective than written material. Of those, five also stated that interactive presentations, as opposed to passive, were the best option. Interviewees felt that interaction helped stakeholders to better understand and engage with the material and discussion could lead to more implementation. One interviewee suggested engaging government counterparts and other important stakeholders with presentations of the findings to improve buy-in and another urged presentations as a way to disseminate findings to beneficiaries.

SYNTHESIS AND ACCESS TO RESEARCH

Five interviewees noted that as a clearinghouse for research products, the DEC is very difficult to use. Interviewees struggle to find specific reports, topics, or research methodologies, which would allow for comparison across contexts. Interviewees acknowledged that research often exists, but believe that it is difficult to access. It would be beneficial to have an easily accessible repository of research for disseminating findings within a given context.

In addition, two interviewees took a broader view, expressing a wish for the synthesis of research across contexts by subsector. For example, a technical officer designing a program on anti-corruption may want to access research from other contexts doing similar work. Similarly, if that technical officer was writing a scope for a research project, they could benefit from seeing research using different methodologies on a similar topic. What is more, this type of synthesis could be made even more useful with summaries highlighting key similarities, differences, and lessons learned. This would help to identify activities that work in multiple contexts and shape best practices.

8.2 CONCLUSIONS

Interviewees had limited specific suggestions in terms of improving evaluation reports; most were focused on disseminating findings. That being said, **ensuring the correct expertise on the research team and engaging USAID staff are important to a successful evaluation**. Members of the research team must possess country experience combined with USAID knowledge and technical expertise. As noted throughout the report, USAID engagement may look different on different taskings, but it plays a key role in the evaluation's success. For further discussion on USAID's role, see the Focus On: Role of USAID staff in Research.

As discussed in RQ1, producing an accessible and engaging research product to complement a findings report helps to encourage uptake of the results. **The most recommended approach was presentations, but infographics, visuals, and two-pagers were also frequently referenced.** The strong preference for presentations raises the question of why presentations are not more widely used; from the learning partner point of view, they are frequently offered. For example, in one tasking, a slide deck was requested and created, but never presented. This may reflect "Zoom fatigue" and weariness of planning and participating in more meetings. It may also be because many research products lack a champion who is interested in pushing research out to a wide audience and encouraging its use. A Mission technical officer may use the learning product for a design or implementation and, due to time and budget constraints, in addition to project fatigue, leave it at that. This is, of course, successful utilization, but may not fully capitalize on the information gathered.

Finally, **both access to and synthesis of research play a role in making findings more useful.** A depository of research that allows for easy searching and access would help to spread research more widely. It is widely recognized that the DEC is flawed and difficult to use. The DEC, or another learning repository, could be made more useful with better search functions and filtering tools. In addition, other knowledge repositories, such as the Learning Lab, could play a role in making research products more accessible. One example is organizing links to research in a way that supports its use, such as a list of links and synopses by topic.

Synthesizing research across contexts is a way to build best practices. There is a great deal of information being generated through these learning products that is not synthesized. Synthesis activities should include performance evaluations and other less rigorous research that still has valuable information to contribute to a body of knowledge. Examples of existing work include 3ie's evidence gap maps and their organization of evidence impact summaries.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Determine the correct level of engagement of USAID with the research team.** While highly dependent on the context of the learning product, there is an important role for USAID staff in the learning product. This may include contributing research expertise to the scope, collaborating on the research design and workplan, participating in fieldwork where appropriate, and championing the research.
- **Make research more accessible.** The Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) does not currently contribute to disseminating research more widely. A more useful repository of research would make reports and summaries easier to find. Organizing reports by subsector and providing a synthesis of reports to suggest useful best practices would enable greater utilization.
- **Engage in research synthesis activities.** These activities serve to build on existing research to improve and grow a larger body of knowledge of lessons learned and best practices, but they also serve to stimulate engagement with and interest in research.

9.0 CONCLUSION

The results of the UMA are open to contradictory interpretations. On one hand, it would be easy to focus on the limitations of the various learning products. Even those respondents mostly closely associated with the taskings have difficulty remembering specifics of the learning products or the details of how they were disseminated. Reports and evaluations are often regarded as too academic and lengthy, with recommendations that can be unrealistic, divorced from the relevant political context, and either too vague or too specific. Follow-on activities seem haphazard at best due to a variety of factors largely outside the control of the technical team leading the evaluation or assessment. These range from unfavorable political or economic conditions, lack of buy-in from stakeholders and/or USAID itself, lack of funding, and even the fluid nature of USAID staffing. In many instances, the utilization and impact of the taskings appear limited.

On the other hand, acknowledging the inherent difficulty of conducting effective learning activities in no way undermines their potential utility. While many respondents may have difficulty recalling the specifics of their reports, many also provided examples of how the findings and recommendations helped provide a useful, external perspective that facilitated strategic thinking, discussions, and planning for current and future work, both with stakeholders and within USAID.

The challenge and objective of this exercise is to help identify those factors that can either facilitate or hinder an impactful learning activity. International development and foreign assistance are innately complicated and uncertain fields, and the varied experience and impact of the learning activities reflect this. As represented in the report recommendations, it is possible to draw conclusions to enhance the effectiveness of learning activities and increase their chances of success. This begins with USAID understanding and communicating its objectives for the learning activity in light of the relevant political context, time restrictions, funding limitations, and other factors that should guide not only the learning activity from the outset but also effective dissemination strategies. Recognize that only a small portion of the intended audience will consume a full report, so tailoring a learning activity to its audience with complementary dissemination products and activities is essential. Interviewees often identified closer collaboration between the research and technical teams as a key factor in both building buy-in with the technical team and facilitating the crafting of effective recommendations. These, and other actionable steps, can enhance the efficacy, efficiency, and impact of USAID learning activities.

ANNEX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Assent Statement: Thank you for your participation in this brief questionnaire about the use and dissemination of [the evaluation/learning product]. The questionnaire will be used to inform an assessment of the utilization of learning products produced under the LER II task order. The interviewer you speak with at a later date will have access to the information you provide here and completing the questionnaire will make your later interview more efficient. All data and identifying information will be anonymized in the findings report; it will be impossible to reconstruct your answers. No one will be identified by name and it will be impossible to attribute any findings or comments to you. This interview will take approximately one hour.

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]	
Question	***Indicator***
Tasking no.	
Region	
Countries	
Title	
Publication year	
DEC link	
Was there a two-pager or other infographic created? [link]	Percent of taskings with a two-pager or other infographic
Were there any other learning products created? [link]	
Was there an outbrief presentation? [link]	Percent of taskings with an outbrief presentation
Number of attendees	Number of attendees at the outbrief

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]		
Attendees: 1. IP staff 2. Foreign government partners 3. USAID staff 4. Academics 5. Media 6. Public 7. Study participants 8. Other	Attendee groups represented at the outbrief	
Was there a dissemination presentation to share the findings from this study with a larger group of stakeholders? [link]	Percent of taskings with a broader dissemination presentation	
Number of attendees	Number of attendees at the broader dissemination presentation	
Attendees: 1. IP staff 2. Foreign government partners 3. USAID staff 4. Academics 5. Media 6. Public 7. Study participants 8. Other	Attendee groups represented at the outbrief	
Was there a post-study workshop or meeting with core project stakeholders to discuss which recommendations to accept, which to amend, and which to reject?	Percent of taskings with a post-study workshop or meeting to discuss recommendations	
Was a PEAP created? [link]	Percent of taskings with a PEAP	
Utility of study findings and recommendations		
Question	***Answer options***	***Indicator***

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]		
In your view, to what extent did the evaluation/learning activity influence USAID's ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION for the topic(s) covered in the study?	1=Negligible or no influence 2=Minor influence 3=Moderate influence 4=Major influence 97=Do not know	Percent of projects with a "minor," "moderate," or "major" influence on USAID activity design
You mentioned this project had a [negligible/minor/moderate/major] influence on activity implementation. [If negligible/minor] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product did not have a greater influence on implementation? [If moderate/major] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product had an influence on implementation? Can you provide any specific examples of how the evaluation/learning activity informed USAID's activity implementation?	Open-ended	
In your view, to what extent did the evaluation/learning product influence USAID's PROJECT/ACTIVITY DESIGN for the topic(s) covered in the study?	1=Negligible or no influence 2=Minor influence 3=Moderate influence 4=Major influence 97=Do not know	Percent of projects with a "minor," "moderate," or "major" influence on USAID project/activity design
You mentioned this project had a [negligible/minor/moderate/major] influence on <u>project/activity design</u>. Why do you say this? [If negligible/minor] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product did not have a greater influence on project/activity design? [if moderate/major] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product had an influence on	Open-ended	

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]		
project/activity design? Can you provide any specific examples of how the evaluation/learning activity informed USAID's project/activity design?		
In your view, to what extent did the evaluation/learning product influence USAID's STRATEGY (e.g., the CDCS or mid-course stocktaking on the topic[s] covered in the study)?	1=Negligible or no influence 2=Minor influence 3=Moderate influence 4=Major influence 97=Do not know	Percent of projects with a "minor," "moderate," or "major" influence on USAID strategy
You mentioned this project had a [negligible/minor/moderate/major] influence on USAID strategy. Why do you say this? [If negligible/minor] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product did not have a greater influence on strategy? [if moderate/major] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product had an influence on strategy? Can you provide any specific examples of how the evaluation/learning activity informed USAID's activity strategy?	Open-ended	
In your view, to what extent did the evaluation/learning product contribute to GENERAL LEARNING within USAID on the topic(s) covered in the study?	1=Negligible or no contribution 2=Minor contribution 3=Moderate contribution 4=Major contribution 97=Do not know	Percent of projects with "minor," "moderate," or "major" contribution to USAID general learning

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]		
You mentioned this project had a [negligible/minor/moderate/major] influence on general learning at USAID. Why do you say this? [If negligible/minor] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product did not have a greater influence on general learning? [if moderate/major] Why do you think the evaluation/learning product had an influence on general learning? Can you provide any specific examples of how the evaluation/learning activity informed USAID's activity general learning?	Open-ended	
If you were to do this evaluation/learning activity again, is there anything you would change about how the findings and recommendations were presented? How could the presentation of the findings and recommendations be changed to make them more useful? (Probes: Were they clear, specific, and actionable? Were they practical and feasible? Did they clearly define who should be responsible for implementation?)	Open-ended	
Implementation of study recommendations		
Question	***Answer options***	***Indicator***
[If a PEAP was created] Has the action plan been updated?	1=Yes 2=No 97=Do not know/do not recall 99=Not applicable	Percent of projects with an action plan
[If the PEAP has been updated] Could you provide us with a soft copy of the updated PEAP (if procurement sensitivities could be sent to the DRG Center directly)?	Open-ended	

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]		
Other than the post-study workshop or meeting and the action plan, were there any other post-study action planning activities? What were they?	Open-ended	
Can you remember any recommendations from the report that were influential? What were they? How were influential recommendations used?	Open-ended	
Can you remember any recommendations from the report that were not useful? What were they? Why weren't they useful?	Open-ended	
Were there recommendations that were rejected? Why were they rejected?	Open-ended	
Were there recommendations that were not acted upon? Why were they not acted upon (timing, clarity, applicability, external factors)?	Open-ended	
Were there recommendations that you wanted to act upon, but were not able to? Why were you not able to (impractical, timing, responsible party, external factors)?	Open-ended	
Dissemination products and activities		
Question	***Answer options***	***Indicator***
[For projects with an outbrief] Was the outbrief useful? In your view, what did the outbrief achieve? What made it successful? What would have made it more successful?	Open-ended	
[If no outbrief]: Why was there not an outbrief for this evaluation/learning activity?	Open-ended	
[If no second outbrief]: Why was there not a dissemination presentation to share the findings with a broader audience? In retrospect, do you feel a second, broader presentation would have been useful? Why/why not?	Open-ended	

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]		
Overall, to what extent were these activities successful in clearly, concisely, and accessibly communicating the key study findings to the intended audience?	1=Very unsuccessful 2=Unsuccessful 3=Somewhat successful 4=Successful 5=Very successful	Percent of projects where USAID POC viewed dissemination activities as "successful" or "very successful" in clearly, concisely, and accessibly communicating the key study findings to the intended audience
Do you feel that any of the dissemination activities we have discussed were particularly successful? Which one(s)? What about them made them successful?	Open-ended	
In hindsight, what (if anything) do you wish you had done differently to disseminate these learnings? Do you see any missed opportunities for broadening/deepening engagement?	Open-ended	
Wrap-up		
Question	***Answer options***	***Indicator***
What are some of the barriers to using evaluation findings or acting on evaluation recommendations? [Probe for potential explanations: quality of the report, actionability of the recommendations, reception by the Mission, reception by the IP, leadership push, learning culture at the Mission, timeliness of the report, cost, activity cycle.]	Open-ended	
How could USAID incentivize and encourage the use of evaluation findings? What changes could be made to evaluations or other learning activities to make them more useful?	Open-ended	
What is the best way for the E&L team to follow up with you to ask about utilization on future taskings (e.g., survey, interview, written follow-up)?	Open-ended	

INFORMATION TO BE PRE-FILLED USING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION[1]		
Do you have any other comments on utilization and implementation that you want to share with us?	Open-ended	

[1] Any missing information will be filled in or verified in interviews where necessary.

ANNEX 2. SUMMARY OF KIIS

GROUP	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES	PERCENT OF INTERVIEWS
USAID/DRG Washington	12	46%
USAID/Mission	12	46%
IP/Other donor	2	8%
Male	9	35%
Female	17	65%
FSN	9	35%
FSO/Other	17	65%

ANNEX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Tasking documents, including scopes of work, workplans, findings reports, infographics, two-pagers, outbrief slide decks, and dissemination presentation slide decks from the following taskings:

- CB002 Dissemination Activities
- CB003 Armenia Rule of Law, Governance, and Civil Society and Media Assessments
- CB004 Zimbabwean Political Parties and the Promotion of Democracy Assessment
- CB005 Global Labor Collective Action Evidence Review
- CB006 Election Assessment Framework
- CB007 DRG Sustainable Landscapes Guide
- CB008 Global Labor Future of Work Evidence Review
- CB009 Global Elections and Political Transitions Performance Review
- CB010 Ukraine Parliamentary Sector Assessment
- CB012 Global Labor Program Performance Review and Related Evidence Review on Selected Topics
- CB013 Sudan DRG Assessment
- CB014 Ukraine New Justice Activity Midterm Performance Evaluation
- CB015 Dominican Republic Family and Gender-Based Violence Literature Review and Human Rights Grants Program
- CB016 Belarus Civil Society Midterm Performance Evaluation
- CB017 Nigeria Electoral Management Bodies Assessment
- CB018 Zimbabwe Media Assessment
- CB019 Zimbabwe Civil Society Assessment
- CB020 Malawi Local Governance Assistance Program Performance Evaluation
- CB021 Ukraine DG East Midterm Performance Evaluation
- CB023 Impact Evaluation Retrospective
- CB024 Human Rights Support Mechanism Rapid Response Mechanism Midterm Performance Evaluation
- CB025 Georgia Good Governance Initiative Evaluation

Fowle, K., B. Wells, M. Day, A. Kumar, C. Bess, B. Bingham, and A. Wayman. (2020). "The Program and Policy Change Framework: A new tool to measure research use in low- and middle-income countries." *Research Evaluation,* 1–14, doi: 10.1093/reseval/rvaa017.

USAID. (2016). Evaluation Utilization at USAID: Findings from an Independent Study, February 2016. Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Evaluation%20Utilization%20Two-Page%20Brief%20Final%20%281%29.pdf

USAID. (2013). Meta-Evaluation of Quality and Coverage of USAID Evaluations: 2009–2012. Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Meta-Evaluation%20of%20Quality%20and%20Coverage%20of%20USAID%20Evaluations%202009-2012.pdf

USAID. (2011). Evaluation: Learning from experience. *USAID Evaluation Policy*. Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2151/USAIDEvaluationPolicy.pdf

World Bank. (2004). Influential Evaluations: Evaluations that improved performance and impacts of development programs. Washington, DC. Available at: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/609091468329361924/pdf/328790ENGLISH01tial1evaluations1ecd.pdf