DRG-LER I AND LER II RESEARCH PRODUCT UTILIZATION MEASUREMENT ANALYSIS

FINAL REPORT

April 2022

Tasking N053

Prepared under Contract No.: GS-10F-0033M / 7200AA18M000

DRG LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH ACTIVITY II (DRG-LER II)

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Submitted to:
USAID DRG Center

Submitted by:
NORC at the University of Chicago
Matthew Parry, Program Manager
Bethesda, MD 20814
Tel: 301- 634-9489; E-mail: parry-matthew@norc.org

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ACRONYMS

AL	Activity Lead
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
DRG	Democracy, Rights, and Governance
E&L	Evidence and Learning
FCR	Findings, Conclusions, and Results
LER	Learning, Evaluation, and Research
NORC	National Opinion Research Center
OU	Operating Unit
SI	Social Impact, Inc.
SoW	Scope of Work
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to measure the utilization of findings and recommendations from research taskings commissioned by USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center) under its Learning, Evaluation, and Research (LER) contract mechanisms. Because the DRG Center has only just begun to track this information, this study measures utilization retrospectively for research taskings ending in 2019, 2020, or early 2021. This study also provides a template that the DRG Center may use to measure utilization in the future.

Four evaluation questions guide this study:

1. How extensive was the dissemination of findings from LER I and LER II taskings to key stakeholders?
2. To what extent did the findings of LER I and LER II research influence decision-making among key stakeholders?
3. In cases where LER I and LER II research findings were not used to inform decision-making, what were the primary barriers to greater uptake and use of findings?
4. In cases where LER I and LER II research were used to inform decision-making, what factors contributed to the successful use of findings?

To answer these questions, the study draws on data from 31 research taskings. For each tasking, the Activity Lead (AL) or Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) completed a brief, self-administered survey about i) the dissemination of the tasking's findings, and ii) the degree to which the findings influenced USAID strategy or activity design, and iii) the degree to which the recommendations were duly implemented. For 25 of these 31 taskings, a virtual follow-up interview was conducted to explore the barriers to greater utilization and conversely, the factors contributing to successful utilization (when applicable).

Findings from the survey indicate that most research taskings successfully communicated the findings and recommendations to core project stakeholders: 68 percent of respondents indicated that an initial out-brief with core project stakeholders was held, and 84 percent said that dissemination events were successful at reaching key project audiences. However, dissemination efforts seldom targeted broader audiences, such as USAID officials not involved in the research tasking, government counterparts, or study participants themselves. These findings were corroborated by data from the semi-structured interviews, which highlighted the need for wider dissemination, infographics and policy briefs targeted towards a non-technical audience, and materials published in local languages.

Most research taskings had at least a moderate impact on USAID learning, activity design, or implementation, according to the survey. The strongest area of influence was on USAID general learning, with 65 percent of survey respondents reporting a "Moderate" or "Major" influence. 52 percent of respondents indicated that the research tasking had a major or moderate influence on activity implementation, and roughly half (48 percent) said the research tasking had a major or moderate influence on USAID strategy. Results on the degree to which tasking recommendations were duly implemented were more mixed: 36 percent of respondents reported that at least some recommendations were fully implemented, and 42 percent reported that at least some of the recommendations were partially implemented.

The semi-structured follow-up interviews revealed several key barriers to greater influence, uptake, and utilization of findings and/or recommendations. These include a lack of genuine support for evidence-based policymaking within Missions, a high rate of staff turnover leading to fragmented implementation and knowledge loss, a misalignment between study findings and Mission strategy (which often evolves during a study), and a lack of readily available funding for scaling up programs that are found to be effective.

The semi-structured interviews also identified several factors that contribute to successful utilization. In nearly all cases of successful utilization, key stakeholders joined the evaluation early in the process and remained involved throughout, illustrating the importance of collaboration, shared ownership, and buy-in. In addition, recommendations that were actionable, achievable, and timely were more likely to be implemented. Lastly, Missions that had access to supplemental or discretionary funding were more likely to have the ability to act on recommendations.

Based on these findings, the evaluation team offers several recommendations. To improve dissemination, USAID should: i) incorporate robust dissemination plans into SoWs and Contractual Agreements, ii) prioritize infographics and two-page summaries tailored to key audiences, and iii) encourage the translation of dissemination materials into local languages. To increase utilization, USAID and/or contractors should: i) promote a culture of evaluation and learning within USAID Missions, ii) build and sustain buy-in from key stakeholders throughout the research lifecycle, and iii) anticipate the need for supplemental funding to support evidence-informed programming. To better track and measure utilization moving forward, USAID should i) measure utilization at regular intervals starting from the end of the tasking's period of performance and continuing for up to a year or more, ii) measure utilization using a short, close-ended survey that managers can complete quickly and easily, and iii) complement the standardized measures from the survey with a smaller number of purposively selected KIIs. The evaluation team provides more specific details on these recommendations in the main report.

II. INTRODUCTION

Prior to this study, the Evidence and Learning (E&L) Team within USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center) did not systematically measure the utilization of the studies it commissions or track the implementation of their policy recommendations. The purpose of this study is to address this gap by retrospectively assessing levels of utilization for recently completed taskings. In addition, the study develops measurement tools that may serve as a template for how the E&L Team might track utilization moving forward. Moving beyond measurement, this study also seeks to understand the barriers to greater uptake of findings, as well as the enabling factors that contribute to cases of successful utilization.

This study used two measurement tools that were administered to the activity lead (AL) or contracting officer's representative (COR) for each tasking selected for inclusion in this study. The first tool is a self-administered survey designed to measure the utilization of findings and recommendations in a manner consistent with the E&L Team's draft Data and Utilization Codebook and the E&L Team's Draft Guidance to Learning Partners on Dissemination and Utilization. The second instrument is a semi-structured interview protocol designed to explore the factors contributing to low utilization versus high utilization of study findings. The E&L Team will use the findings from these interviews to strengthen the utilization of its research products moving forward.

This study provides findings, conclusions, and recommendations on the use and non-use of these learning products, including the factors that led to successful use as well as the barriers to greater uptake and use of learning products. Additionally, the measurement tools developed for this assessment offer insights into how a more permanent, institutionalized approach to measuring utilization of the DRG Center's research projects might be designed.

III. EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Our study is guided by the following questions:

1. How extensive was the dissemination of findings from LER I and LER II taskings to key stakeholders?
2. To what extent did the findings of LER I and LER II research influence decision-making among key stakeholders?
3. In cases where LER I and LER II research findings were not used to inform decision-making, what were the primary barriers to greater uptake and use of findings?
4. In cases where LER I and LER II research were used to inform decision-making, what factors contributed to the successful use of findings?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame for this study consisted of LER I and LER II taskings with a period of performance end date between January 1, 2019 and March 31, 2021 (six months prior to the start of data collection). This period ensures that the sampled taskings were sufficiently recent that the AL/COR can still recall the required information while allowing time for the taskings' recommendations to be implemented.

The research team selected taskings from this sampling frame for inclusion in this study starting with the most recent, working backwards in time towards an initial target sample size of 40.[1] When an AL/COR for a particular tasking was not responsive to repeated requests to participate, they were omitted from the sample and replaced with the next-most-recent, unsampled tasking. Ultimately, we attempted to contact Als/CORs for 46 taskings—all the taskings that fit our sampling criteria—but we were only successful in reaching 31 of the 46 sampled taskings (67 percent) with the pre-interview survey and 25 of the 46 taskings for the follow-up virtual interview (54 percent). The difference in response rates between these two activities is accounted for by six individuals who participated in the pre-interview survey but did not have the time or bandwidth to participate in the longer, virtual interview.

Notably, response rates were much higher for taskings that ended in 2020 or early 2021, as compared to taskings that ended in 2019. For 2020 and 2021, the tasking response rate was 85 percent for the pre-interview survey and 60 percent for the virtual interview; for 2019 taskings, these figures were 52 percent and 37 percent, respectively. This difference reflects the fact that for older taskings, considerable staff turnover, whether in the form of staff transferring to another division within USAID or staff leaving the Agency, made it very difficult to track down AL/CORs.

[1] We note that Cloudburst expects to conduct 20 interviews for their part of the tasking, for a total sample size of about 60.

We discuss the potential implications of the considerable non-response rate for our study findings in the Limitations section below.

For each tasking, we identified the relevant AL or COR (whomever is most knowledgeable about the tasking). In most cases, this was the AL, as they were more deeply involved in the project. SI made this decision in coordination with the project lead at NORC/SI and the E&L Team.

Measurement

This study involves two measurement tools: a self-administered "pre-interview" survey deployed through Google Forms, and a virtual, semi-structured interview with members of the research team. The self-administered pre-interview survey consists of closed-ended questions about dissemination activities, utilization of findings, and implementation of study recommendations. Responses to these questions are used to construct indicators summarizing levels of dissemination, utilization of findings, and implementation of recommendations, as presented in Section III, below. The pre-interview survey and associated indicators are provided in the annex. The research team developed the wording and response options for the survey questions collaboratively with Cloudburst's CB035 Tasking Team to ensure the data would be comparable across taskings.

The pre-interview survey provided two additional advantages beyond allowing for the measurement of key utilization indicators. First, the questions in the survey required the respondent to refresh their memories of the particularities of the tasking ahead of the more in-depth virtual interview, which probed more deeply into the themes covered in the pre-interview survey. Second, the answers to the pre-interview survey helped SI's qualitative researchers prepare for the semi-structured interview, making them more familiar with the project's dissemination activities and informing their line of inquiry.

To maximize response rates to the pre-interview survey, we sent up to three personalized follow-ups to the respondent associated with each tasking. When required, we enlisted support from the E&L team to send personalized participation requests.

The interview design intended to add substance to the responses in the closed-ended survey, as well as to probe more deeply into the barriers to greater utilization (for projects with relatively low utilization) or the factors contributing to high utilization (for projects with relatively high utilization). Experienced SI staff conducted the semi-structured interviews.

Analysis

We employed a mixed-methods analysis approach. We use quantitative indicators from the pre-interview survey to provide descriptive statistics on average levels of dissemination, utilization, and uptake of study recommendations. We complement the descriptive analysis of the quantitative indicators with an in-depth, qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interview transcripts. Our qualitative analysis focused on identifying key factors that contribute to low vs. high utilization of findings and low vs. high implementation of recommendations. We used qualitative coding techniques, including a tally sheet and findings, conclusions, and recommendations matrix, to substantiate the conclusions of this study.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Of the 46 taskings sampled for this study, we were unable to successfully contact the AL, COR, or other associated USAID staff member for 21 of the taskings. As a result, the sample size for the pre-interview survey was 31 taskings. The most common reason was due to staff turnover, with members of the project management team either rotating to a new Mission or Operating Unit or leaving USAID altogether. Of the 31 respondents to the pre-interview survey, 25 successfully the completed the longer, semi-structured interview. The main issue contributing to the drop-off of six individuals between the pre-interview survey and semi-structured interview was the limited bandwidth of certain USAID staff, which left them limited time to participate the semi-structured interview.

For both the pre-interview survey and the semi-structured interview, we attempted to maximize participation by minimizing the length of the survey and conducting multiple rounds of escalating follow-ups for those who did not respond to our initial requests, culminating with a personalized email sent from counterparts on the E&L Team. However, despite these strategies, we were ultimately only successful in reaching 31 of the 46 taskings selected for this study for inclusion in the pre-interview survey and 25 of the 46 taskings for participation in the semi-structured interview.

Of the 31 taskings included in the pre-interview survey, 29 percent (9/31) were impact evaluations, 39 percent (12/31) were performance evaluations, and 32 percent (10/31) were assessments.

It is important to note that the 31 taskings included in this study are similar to the 21 taskings that were excluded in terms of their period of performance end date, region, and distribution of study types (e.g., impact evaluations, performance evaluations, and assessments). This suggests that our final sample is not substantively different from our original sampling frame and target population, and that the bias associated with selective attrition is not likely to be severe. That said, we cannot decisively rule out the possibility that taskings that were better organized and managed (and thus had more robust dissemination and action plans) were more likely to have an activity lead participate in our study. Similarly, we cannot rule out the possibility that Als/CORs that took utilization seriously were more likely to participate in this study. If either of these scenarios is true, then the findings reported here could be biased upwards (i.e., they could overstate the true levels of utilization and uptake).

Another important limitation to this research is social desirability bias, which occurs when respondents provide answers that they believe will be viewed favorably by the research team and USAID, potentially overstating the influence of their studies. Although we cannot rule out this form of bias, we can say that respondents were remarkably frank and forthcoming in identifying barriers to utilization and other areas for improvement (as we proceed to outline), suggesting that they felt comfortable answering truthfully.

IV. FINDINGS

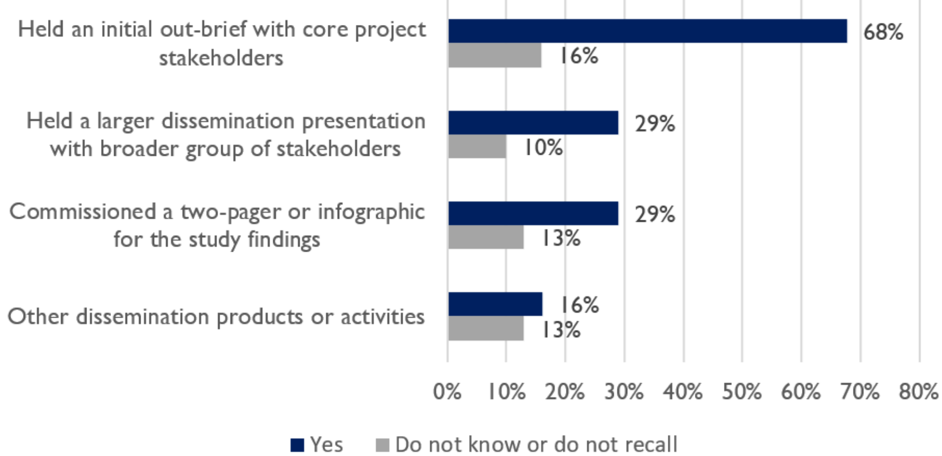
DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS FROM LER I AND LER II TASKINGS

Findings from the Pre-Interview Survey

Dissemination efforts reach core project stakeholders, but seldom target broader audiences

The majority of taskings (68 percent) in our sample held an initial out-brief with core project stakeholders (see FIGURE 1), with an average attendance of 14 people. The most reported out-brief attendees include implementing partners and USAID staff, with a smaller number of taskings reporting that foreign government partners, embassy officials, or study participants attended. Meanwhile, just 29 percent of taskings held a larger dissemination presentation with a broader group of stakeholders. Among taskings that did hold a larger presentation, an average of 70 people attended, including implementing partners, USAID staff, foreign government partners, academics, and foundations. Similarly, a minority of taskings (29 percent) commissioned a two-pager or infographic of the study findings, and only 16 percent noted other dissemination products or activities. Examples of other dissemination products/activities included presentations at USAID's Annual Learning Forum and DRG Officer's Conference, providing short summary documents to partners in the host country, and providing a link to the evaluation's findings that was shared widely with stakeholders. Interestingly, between 10 percent and 16 percent of all respondents indicated that they did not know or could not recall the dissemination products and activities that were associated with the tasking.

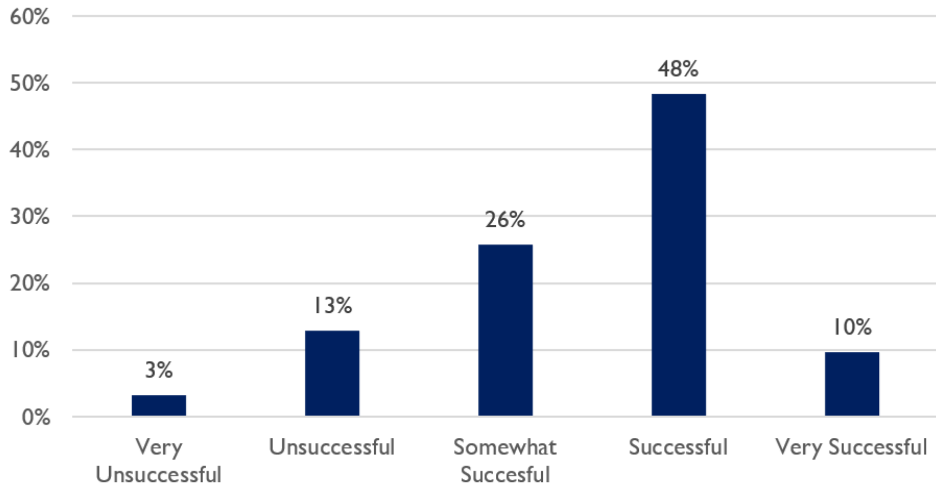
FIGURE 1: DISSEMINATION PRODUCTS AND ACTIVITIES



Most activity managers described dissemination events as "successful" or "very successful"

When asked about the content of these dissemination activities, 58 percent of respondents reported that they were 'successful' or 'very successful' in clearly, concisely, and accessibly communicating the study's key findings to the intended audience (FIGURE 2). Notably, just 16 percent of respondents indicated that the dissemination activities were 'unsuccessful' or 'very unsuccessful' in communicating study findings.

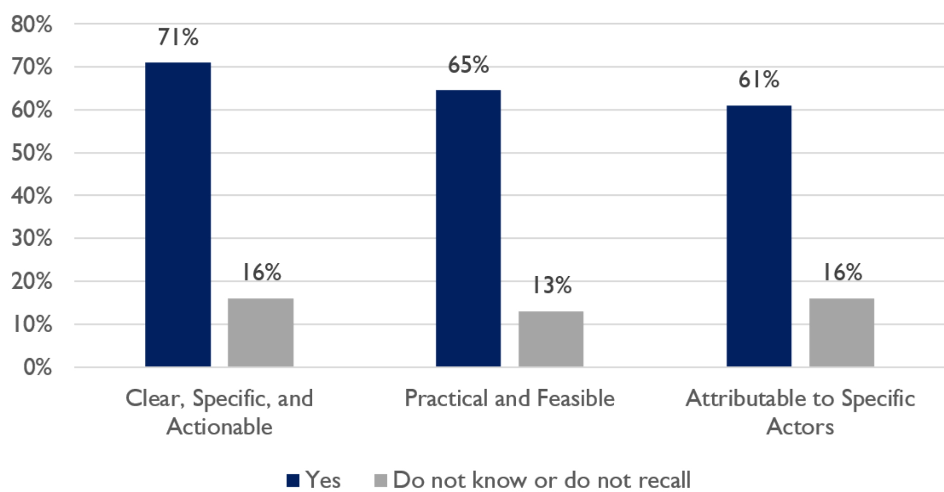
FIGURE 2: COMMUNICATION OF STUDY FINDINGS



Most recommendations were clear, actionable, and directed towards specific actors

71 percent of respondents indicated that the study's recommendations were clear, specific, and actionable, while 65 percent suggested that some or all recommendations were practical and feasible (FIGURE 3). When asked about the attributability of study recommendations to specific actors, 61 percent of respondents said that the study clearly defined who was responsible for implementing some or all recommended actions. Across the three survey questions displayed in FIGURE 3, between 13 percent and 16 percent of respondents indicated that they did not know or could not recall these details about the study's recommendations.

FIGURE 3: UTILITY OF STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS



Summary of quantitative findings on dissemination

Taken as a whole, these findings lead us to conclude that most LER I and LER II taskings were successful at communicating key study findings to core project stakeholders, and that most study recommendations were viewed as clear, actionable, and attributable to specific actors. However, our results also suggest that most taskings were not successful in sharing findings beyond the inner-circle of core project stakeholders, and that supporting materials like 2-pagers and infographics were seldom produced. These latter findings have potentially important implications for the actual implementation of study recommendations, as we explore in the subsequent sections.

Findings from the Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews largely confirmed the results presented above, while also providing additional details that add nuance and context to the pre-interview survey responses. For example, most interview respondents validated that the dissemination activities were successful in clearly communicating the study's recommendations to the relevant audiences and provided several examples for how these efforts could be improved. Whereas just 29 percent of taskings commissioned a two-pager or infographic, three interview respondents said that they would emphasize the use of more data visualizations, infographics, and one/two-page documents on future dissemination activities. Similarly, when asked what they would do differently on future taskings, four respondents emphasized that they would ensure that recommendations are clear and actionable, while two suggested that they would encourage the researchers to use less technical language in their presentation to stakeholders as the audience often does not have the same level of technical expertise as the research team. One respondent suggests "bringing in additional technical expertise or the folks that were involved in the impact evaluation to help respond to questions" during these dissemination events that Mission staff may not feel equipped to properly answer (KI 28).

Respondents also had suggestions for how to expand the reach of dissemination activities. Three suggested that future taskings should produce a report in the relevant local language(s) to ensure the study's findings and recommendations are accessible to a wider group of stakeholders. One of these respondents said they would like to prioritize "…a discussion on language and how we can make our products more accessible to the populations where we work" (KII 5).

Other respondents felt that dissemination activities should be more robust. Echoing the lack of dissemination activities beyond an initial out-brief reported in FIGURE 1, one respondent indicated that future taskings would benefit from incorporating a robust dissemination plan into the scope of work or contractual agreement. This respondent stated that USAID "…should never engage in [research] activities like this without a clear plan and requirement for dissemination. It can't just be dropped on the mission without a clear plan, there's too much turnover and it becomes easy not to follow up" (KII 22).

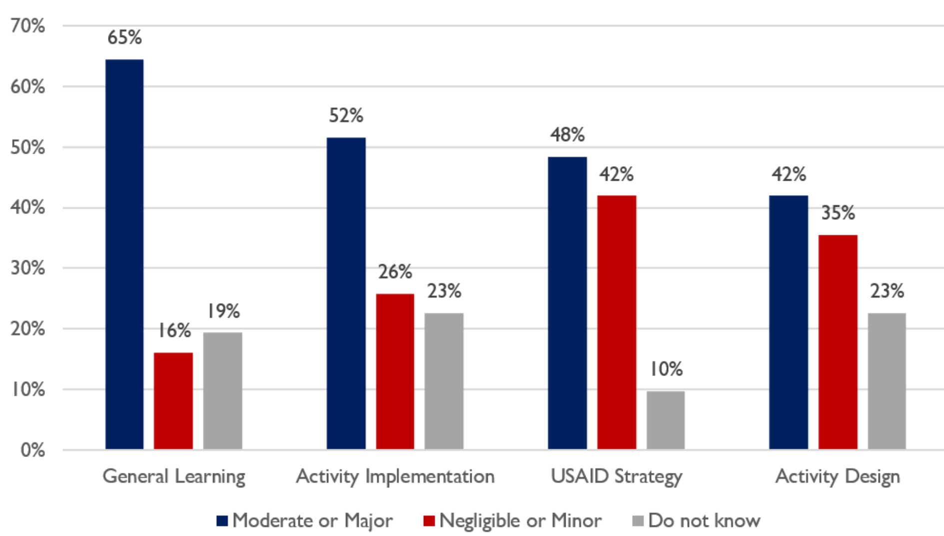
UTILIZATION OF STUDY FINDINGS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the Pre-Interview Survey

Research had the greatest influence on general learning and activity implementation

The pre-interview survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which their tasking influenced USAID strategy, activity design, activity implementation, and general learning. Taskings had the largest influence on general learning at USAID, with 65 percent of respondents indicating that the study in question made a 'moderate' or 'major' contribution and just 16 percent indicating 'negligible or no contribution' or a 'minor' contribution (FIGURE 4). 52 percent of respondents suggested that the study made a moderate or major contribution to activity implementation, while 26 percent indicated a negligible or minor contribution. Similarly, respondents described roughly half (48 percent) of taskings as making a moderate or major contribution to USAID strategy, although 42 percent were categorized as making a negligible or minor contribution. Taskings' influence appeared to be similarly mixed in terms of activity design, with just 42 percent of taskings classified as making a moderate or major contribution, and 35 percent described as making a negligible or minor contribution.[2]

FIGURE 4: INFLUENCE OF TASKINGS



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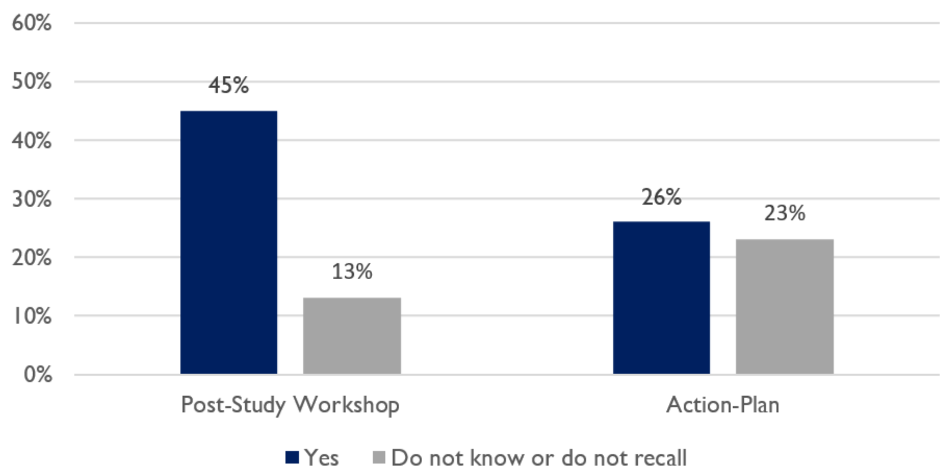
[2] Across all four categories, there was a relatively high percentage of "Don't know" responses (the same is also true for some of the results reported later in this section). As was the case for survey non-response, the likelihood of "Don't know" response was higher for taskings ending in 2019, as compared to taskings ending in 2020 and 2021. Our semi-structured interviews indicate that common explanations for "Don't know" responses for 2019 taskings include: i) the respondent managed the project, but was transferred to a new division shortly after the project ended, and therefore can only comment on utilization up to the point of their departure, or ii) responsibility for implementation was delegated to another person in the Mission, and the respondent simply does not have all the latest details on implementation. For 2020 and 2021 taskings, the most common explanation for "Don't know" responses was that implementation of findings and recommendations was still underway, with additional time needed to answer definitively on project influence.

Most studies did not host a post study workshop or produce an action plan

When asked about the implementation of study findings, 45 percent of respondents indicated that there was a post-study workshop or meeting to discuss which recommendations to accept, amend, or reject (see FIGURE 5). Yet only 26 percent of respondents said that an action plan was created defining what actions should be taken, by whom, and when. Importantly, 23 percent of respondents did not know or could not recall whether an action plan was created.

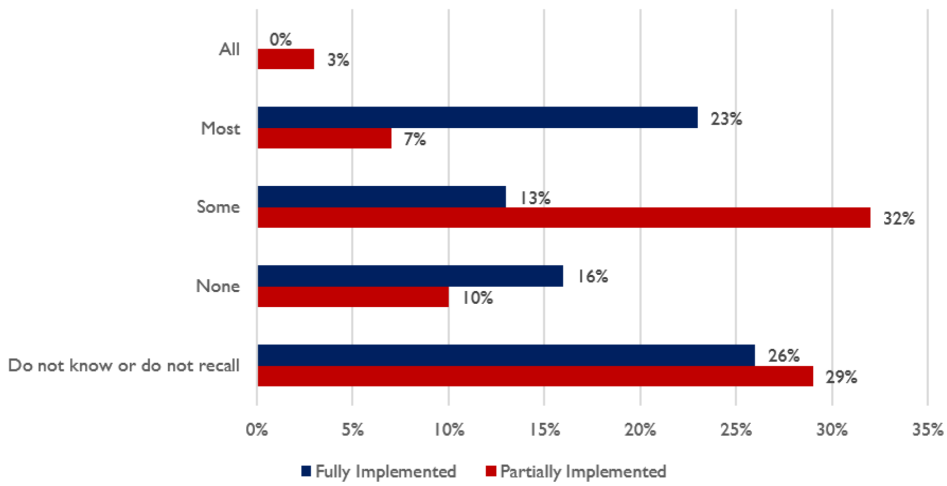
FIGURE 5: POST-STUDY WORKSHOP AND ACTION-PLANNING



Only a minority of study recommendations were ultimately implemented

Finally, our pre-interview survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which study recommendations were partially and fully implemented at the time of the survey (FIGURE 6). Zero respondents indicated that 'all' study recommendations were fully implemented at the time of the survey, however 23 percent answered that 'most' study recommendations were fully implemented. 29 percent of taskings appeared to have fully implemented 'some' (13 percent) or 'none' (16 percent) of the study recommendations at the time of the survey. Just 3 percent of respondents indicated that 'all' recommendations were partially implemented, while 7 percent responded that 'most' recommendations were partially implemented. Approximately 42 percent of taskings indicated that 'some' (32 percent) or 'none' (10 percent) of recommendations were partially implemented. Importantly, more than a quarter of all respondents indicated that they did not know or could not recall how many recommendations were fully (26 percent) or partially (29 percent) implemented at the time of the survey.

FIGURE 6: IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS



Summary of quantitative findings on utilization and implementation

The above findings show that most taskings had a moderate to major influence on general learning and activity implementation. Taskings were somewhat less influential in informing USAID strategy or Activity design, but even for these categories, upwards of 40 percent of tasking managers reported a moderate or major influence. Overall, these findings provide encouraging evidence about the efficacy of taskings at informing policy and practice, particularly when considering that Mission Leadership must also weigh a wide variety of factors and considerations beyond evidence when making decisions about strategy, activity design, and activity implementation.

Implementation of study recommendations was more mixed, with 36 percent of taskings reporting that at least some recommendations were fully implemented, and 42 percent reporting that at least some were *partially* implemented. Although the lack of post-study workshops and action plans may have contributed to these mixed findings, it is also important to keep in mind that those charged with implementing study recommendations also must consider a wide variety of factors. As one respondent opined, "when recommendations aren't utilized, it doesn't mean the research wasn't valued and considered" (KI 12). The respondent went on to highlight factors outside the control of the Agency that bears on its ability to implement study recommendations: funding, evolving USAID policy objectives, the activities of other USG donors and partners the avoidance of duplicated efforts, the priorities of national government counterparts, and changes to the operating environment brought about by political change, natural disasters, and pandemics.

In the subsequent sections, we document these and other challenges to utilization in greater detail, drawing on the notes and transcripts from the qualitative interviews. We also analyze cases of successful utilization to identify strategies that may support utilization.

What does successful utilization look like? Findings from the semi-structured interviews

Asked to elaborate on their responses to the pre-interview survey, respondents highlighted three main areas where studies had concrete impacts: Mission strategy, program design and implementation, and Mission learning. In terms of influence on Mission strategy, multiple respondents noted that study findings encouraged them to adopt a "depth over breadth" strategy for Mission programming (KI 1, KI 13). As one respondent described, "the evaluation team recommended making a shift from breadth to depth a priority. From that point on, when we decided on new strategies and a new APS to launch, we decided to go deep and do smaller projects with more partners and shorter projects as well, more like pilot testing. For example, a 3-year project with a budget between 1-3 million, rather than 20 million. This particular recommendation was very influential for the future of project strategy for us."

In another example, a respondent described their study's influence on the development of a Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), recounting that "the evaluation showed there wasn't such a need to improve capacity broadly but instead a need to focus on smaller aspects of progress." As a result, Mission stakeholders "decided to go with less broad support in civil-society related projects and focus instead on smaller things such as constituent engagement" in developing the CDCS (KI 13). Studies also influenced Missions' strategies regarding their portfolio of projects and how to prioritize across competing objectives. As one respondent described, the study's positive findings regarding a pilot activity "led to a follow-on activity which brought more project awareness, increase budget, increased awareness, and increased participating countries" (KI 16). Overall "the study had a major influence on Mission strategy and activities," and provided insights into how to prioritize competing objectives within the project's portfolio: "the evaluation gave an indication about where to prioritize objectives for follow-on activities, it gave indications of impact, and it told us where we didn't need to work as hard and instead where we should concentrate our energy." Ultimately, the study told us that "we needed to focus more on policy rather than on the end user".

In another example of strategic influence, a respondent recounted that a particular evaluation product was key to maintaining momentum on their initiatives after a change in local administration: "… with my arrival came a brand-new Presidential Administration here, so I had brand new counterparts and then a new wave of people at the embassy … when people are like, 'why did we chose to engage in these areas?' I'm like, 'Oh, we just did this analysis a year and a half ago and it's brand new, it's great, and it follows the strategic vision ... I don't think it was like, a one-shot deal disseminating it when it first came out, it's something that we keep referring to." The respondent cited specifically that the recommendations of the evaluation product were useful due to its consideration of the strategic and material context of the Mission, making them more likely to be implemented under the new Administration: "One of the first recommendations was to work with political processes, the national electoral council … we did that and it was just in time, because they had some pretty contentious elections this past year and our assistance was positioned in a very targeted way, so it/we really made an impact" (KII 49).

The second category of impacts that respondents noted were direct influences on program design and implementation. "The [name withheld] study was one of the first documents used during project design" reported one respondent (KI 25). The findings "gave the Mission an idea of the specific activities that need to be included in future programming" and "directly influenced program design for the next iteration of C-TIP programming." Another respondent described how the research team met with the implementing partner during the early stages of a new award "to discuss the research findings and how they could inform geographically targeted interventions to address trafficking in persons in areas of high prevalence and where there had been high vulnerability to trafficking" (KI 12). The research team followed-up with "detailed maps on what the vulnerabilities to trafficking in persons around [location withheld] looked like … and so USAID [country withheld] Mission is taking that information and planning a potential follow-on."

An additional pathway through which LER I and LER II studies affected the implementation of USAID activities was through leveraging studies' findings to obtain supplemental funding for scale-ups of promising activities. As one respondent reported, "when we applied for additional funding on elections and political processes, this report helped shape the argument and provide the data to substantiate our request" (KI 19). Furthermore, "as a result of being successful in getting these funds, we got to develop programs. And those programs or activities directly relate to the recommendations that came out of this study." Another recounted how the findings came at a critical point for the Mission, when they were deciding whether to continue funding a particular initiative and associated five-year agreement with an implementing partner. "The findings pushed us towards "Yes" for both questions," and the substantiating evidence "led to increased and sustained funding and an additional $5 Million in COVID-19 funding—so huge additional resources and [tech programming] expansion" (KI 43).

The final category through which respondents recounted examples of successful utilization relates to Mission learning. More specifically, respondents noted several instances in which the process of collaborating with researchers led to learning that subsequently informed their own monitoring and evaluation efforts. In one evaluation, the research team's approach to measuring key outcomes was subsequently adopted by the Mission in its own M&E processes. Reflecting on the value of the instruments developed by the research team, the respondent stated, "those tools had a major impact and are still used to assess results and make budget allocations … [the value of these tools] is difficult to overstate in terms of importance to the project and USAID" (KI 43). Another study revealed that a risk-screen used to target programming towards at-risk youth was inaccurate. The researchers went on to develop a revised tool, which has subsequently been adopted by the Mission (KI 7). And lastly, one respondent noted that the process of collaborating with researchers helped the Mission think critically and rigorously about the concepts of impact, measurement, and utilization (KI 13). Even though they "already knew the answers provided by the research," the Mission appreciated that the researchers provided "high quality answers." Reflecting on the study's legacy, the respondent noted that "the study was successful at building a culture within the Mission to go the extra mile, learn more, and really understand the aim to develop both generic and complex conclusions."

BARRIERS TO GREATER INFLUENCE, UPTAKE, AND USE OF FINDINGS

Our semi-structured interviews focused not only on verifying and explicating examples of successful utilization, as reported above and in the next section, but also on discussing the barriers to greater utilization based on lessons learned during the research study. This section reports some of the main themes and takeaways from the discussion on barriers to greater influence.

Lack of Support for Evidence-Based Policy Making

Among the most prominent themes to emerge from the semi-structured interviews was that there is often a lack of genuine support for evidence-based policymaking within Missions. Numerous respondents cited "check-box" performance evaluations conducted simply to meet requirements. "We checked the box; we completed the requirement. The post-action plan and learning disseminations are extras, but if they aren't required, we just don't have time" noted one respondent (KI 1). Another respondent stated that the findings were not used because "…it's not a requirement to report on usage of findings. It is very unlikely that [findings and recommendations] are used unless the findings are a breakthrough and answers were being sought after, but this was a required evaluation" (KI 2).

Another noted the disconnect between interest in generating evidence and interest in using evidence: "incentives are very positive for staff to invest in and commit to evaluations, but the incentives drop off when it comes to actually following up and implementing those recommendations and responding to those findings" (KI 22).

Reflecting on the check-box mentality, one respondent stated, "a lot of people simply aren't passionate about making sure that evidence is generated from programming and then goes back into programming" (KI 4). Another lamented the lack of support from Mission leadership for evidence-based programming, specifically the lack of credit attributed to staff for managing quality research and using it to inform policy: "I've never been awarded for engaging in an evaluation process, it's just considered to be a part of your work. Doing it well should be rewarded and used as examples for others. There aren't any given standards that we are held to for doing the evaluation well and using the learnings" (KI 10).

In a similar vein, respondents emphasized that USAID staff and implementing partners often view evaluations as an audit on their performance, rather than a learning opportunity. An illustrative respondent captured the general sentiment, saying that their tasking was seen as "more of an audit exercise than a learning exercise. This establishes a different mood, where everyone is nervous. Especially for the AOR within the Mission, who feels that the evaluation is a reflection on their performance" (KI 1). Another respondent suggested that study recommendations would be more easily accepted and acted upon if USAID and implementing partners had "…leadership that does not view [evaluation] as a performative exercise and sees it rather as a feedback loop to learn and adapt programming" (KI 16).

In terms of what can be done to create a stronger evidence-to-policy culture, numerous respondents pointed to the need for additional training in technical research topics. As one put it, "there needs to be more technical skill-building encouraged within USAID so that individuals appreciate the results of evaluations and understand how they could be integrated into programming" (KI 22). Echoing this sentiment, a respondent noted that "it took us a long time to understand what Impact Evaluation is. But after I attended the workshop at the DRG Clinic, I was very excited about the evidence-based way to do evaluation" (KI 5). Others noted that additional training and stronger evaluation capacity within Missions would promote buy-in (KI 13), build appreciation for the value of research (KI 19), and help to "ensure that staff themselves are substantially integrated/invested in what happens with that information resulting from evaluations" (KI 22).

Respondents also pointed to the importance of Mission leadership. "It starts with the culture at the Mission. Officers need to set the tone that learning and failure are part of the process" (KI 23). Mission leadership needs to "set the expectation that designing new activities draws upon evidence based on local context …. Incorporating research and valuing it needs to continue to be expressed as a priority, so that it becomes part of the DNA on how things are done. Any time senior leadership can comment on why research is important will help" (KI 12).

Staff Turnover and Limited Bandwidth

Another commonly cited barrier to utilization was high staff turnover, which creates knowledge management challenges that are difficult to overcome. As one respondent explained "…there was a change from the first COR to the second COR, and then me – the third COR. I came onto this at the very end of the activity and wondered, 'can I really change anything within a year?'" (KI 24). Another respondent stated that "when the evaluation results came out, I was transitioning to another post, and a number of other people had left as well, so there was not much historical memory for the follow-on program" (KI 10). The respondent went on to express uncertainty (and some skepticism) about whether incoming staff acted on the findings.

A related barrier that was frequently mentioned was that staff do not have the bandwidth needed to think critically about applying evidence to future programming. One respondent summarized this by stating that "…everyone is completely overwhelmed with work and faces a fire hose of information coming their way. It is difficult to pause and take it in, especially when it's not directly relevant to their technical sector" (KI 10). Another respondent shared that to "allow the programming to adapt based on evidence is often more time consuming and it goes back to the question of bandwidth and resources as well as [the number of] staff [needed] to make those changes and program improvements" (KI 28). Sometimes findings aren't used "not for lack of will, but simply just because of bandwidth" and the time it would take to re-organize programming and reconfigure budgets (KI 12).

Misalignment between Study Findings and Current Mission Strategy

The lack of alignment between recommendations and existing Mission strategy was frequently mentioned as a key factor that limited their successful use and implementation. In many cases, respondents indicated that recommendations—even those that were clear and valid—were often not actionable because they fell outside of the Mission's existing programs and strategy. One respondent summarized this point, stating "one barrier is alignment between the Mission's objectives and the evaluation's findings. Evaluation findings are usually evidence based, but they do not always align with our objectives" (KI 5). Another respondent brought forth the issue of evaluations not being responsive to changes in strategy and programming, stating that "the program needed to change due to a changing strategy, and therefore the findings of the evaluation weren't as relevant anymore because the program changed so much" (KI 11).

Furthermore, respondents frequently emphasized that studies failed to produce new information, or recommended things that the Mission was already working to address. One respondent summarized this point by saying that the study "…included recommendations that had already been addressed or were in the process of being addressed before the recommendations were even published, meaning that the team already knew of these issues and were working on strategies to address them" (KI 35).

Budget Constraints

Nine respondents suggested that budget constraints are a factor that limits the uptake and use of study findings. Additionally, several respondents emphasized that they needed to pick a few critical recommendations to implement and set the others aside. When asked about this, a respondent said "costs are the main factor in my experience…the ability to continue programming is based on making funding available. I think there needs to be greater funding especially for follow up programs where we can really focus on the findings and implement accordingly" (KI 7). In discussing the recommendations of another tasking, another respondent also highlighted the impact of budget constraints on implementation, stating one of the key recommendations "…could only be partially accepted as it was budget-dependent" (KI 14). Another respondent emphasized the fact that the study was essentially rendered useless after budget cuts made it impossible to follow up with any form of implementation, saying "there were budget cuts to the [regional area] so there is no funding for this type of project work, which has negatively impacted the ability for [the Mission] to support program activities" (KI 23).

Another respondent further emphasized the link between utilization and resource constraints: "…if recommendations aren't utilized it doesn't mean the research wasn't valued. We have to be aware of congressional budgets, availability of funds, and consider what other USG donors and partners are doing so that we're not duplicating efforts and being wasteful of limited resources" (KI 12).

Timing

Respondents also mentioned inopportune timing as a barrier to using findings and recommendations, with the chief issue being that evaluations often take place too late to be useful. One respondent shared that their tasking "…had a very late midterm…so there wasn't much potential to use the recommendations. The last three to four months were spent wrapping up the evaluation, so there were really only 6-8 months that could have been influenced by it" (KI 10). Accounting for the lack of utilization on their project, a respondent stated "it goes back to the fact that the results came when the program was about a year away from being finished. And as I said, taking away the three-to-four-month period when they're really focused on closeout, there are only eight months for them to make changes."

Even when research is used to inform future designs, delays can be a problem: "the evaluation was being used to confirm things in a new design, but I would rather it have been less delayed…a timely final product would've been substantially better. The dissemination could also have been shared more broadly and examined by the community of practice" to inform broader programming (KI 16).

Another respondent emphasized this point, noting that the amount of time spent initializing evaluations serves as a major barrier to their usefulness: "…so many people got involved and it took so much time to draft the scope and evaluation questions that it became irrelevant in the end. Both the initial questions and the evaluation were delayed for so long that it wasn't useful anymore" (KI 11). This respondent went on to provide some suggestions for improving this in the future: "…we need some way to quickly decide what we want to evaluate and find faster ways to get it done. Sometimes it takes nine months to get [the evaluation] going, and we already didn't start until the program was already halfway through. I think that we need a nimbler way to initiate evaluations" (KI 11).

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESSFUL USE OF FINDINGS

In the semi-structured interviews, respondents naturally tended to focus on what went wrong and what could have been improved with the benefit of hindsight rather than on what went well. This was true even for studies with comparably high levels of utilization. Whereas discussions on the barriers to utilization were extensive, insights into enabling factors were more limited. Nevertheless, several key themes about enabling factors emerged from our interviews. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these enabling factors tended to be the converse of the barriers identified above.

Collaboration, ownership, and buy-in

If there was one thing that nearly all successful utilization cases had in common, it was that key stakeholders were brought in to the evaluation long before the researchers released their findings. The key, as one respondent described, is to "collaborate with stakeholders early in the process and home-in on what information from the study will be most useful" (KI 45). Such collaboration should continue throughout the life of the study: "Instead of one or two presentations and a final report, talk about how findings can be useful at the start of the activity and check in at each phase to pivot/adapt the research as needed to maximize its utility" (KI 45).

In the case of performance or impact evaluations of implementing partners' programs, activity managers overseeing successful utilization recognized that "generating buy-in not only from the [USAID] team you're working with that's going to be continuing to work in this sector, but also from the implementing partners who are carrying out the program that's being evaluated" is key (KI 19). The best way to incentive utilization is "to make sure all parties, within and outside of USAID, including the implementing partner, are bought in to the evaluation" (KI 19).[3] Collaborating with implementing partners "early and often" also helps ensure "a better working relationship, more buy-in, and less pressure to give an answer USAID wants to hear" (KI 23).

In addition to ownership from core stakeholders, successful utilization cases typically featured ownership and/or genuine interest from leadership within USAID. As one respondent noted flatly, "If the Mission/Deputy Director are interested in implementing recommendations, few will resist and there will be cooperation to implement" (KI 41).

It was also noted that building buy-in across a range of stakeholders within USAID helps guard against setbacks stemming from high staff turnover, as projects that do so no longer depend so squarely on the interest and enthusiasm of any one individual.

Actionable and Achievable Recommendations

Respondents for eight of the taskings that successfully used study findings and recommendations noted that the research team presented clear recommendations that were actionable and achievable, providing USAID Missions and implementing partners a pathway for use and implementation. Similarly, 10 respondents suggested that the research tasking helped the Mission understand how to better design future programs.

One respondent provided a success story in terms of actionable recommendations that were put into practice: "one of the most impactful findings from the evaluation team's recommendations was the aim to pursue depth over breadth as a Mission. From that point on, when we decided on new strategies, we decided to go deep and do smaller projects with more partners and shorter projects as well…For example a 3-year project with a budget between $1-3 million, rather than one project for $20 million. This particular recommendation was very influential for the future of project strategy for us" (KI 1). Resource considerations can also help evaluations be targeted and therefore more effective: a respondent stated

[3] This is often easier said than done, and not all tasking were successful. As one respondent reflected on his impression of USAID performance evaluations in general, "USAID needs to be better at working together with other entities and obtaining buy-in with the implementer so that they are more willing to accept the results. This is especially an issue if they think the results will impact the amount of money they receive or their reputation" (KI 23).

that the evaluation was able to have a major influence on program strategy and implementation because the evaluation was targeted and limited in scope (KI 49),

Another respondent described how the study closely aligned with the Mission's strategy, making recommendations more actionable: "the study closely coincided with respect to the country strategy and local governance. USAID needed more sufficient data and this evaluation provided additional details. For example, it informed certain aspects like deciding to go with less broad support in civil-society projects and focus instead on smaller things such as constituent engagement" (KI 13).

Timing

Respondents frequently mentioned that studies were more likely to be used when their findings and recommendations were presented early enough to incorporate them into critical decisions. Five respondents indicated that they were able to use study findings in real time to improve activity implementation. One example of this was shared by a respondent who said that the research team "communicated important findings about implementation that were relevant to the implementer. [The activity] had a year left to continue their work, and it was helpful for them to understand the program's gaps and strengths during implementation" (KI 16). Another respondent shared that their research tasking "…helped shape activity implementation as the programming was being implemented" (KI 28).

Access to Incremental Funding

Another common success story is that evaluations occasionally led to increased funding for related activities, providing Missions with the resources needed to act upon the study's findings and recommendations. One respondent shared that their tasking "lead to increased and sustained funding…so huge additional resources and expansion. We are also in the process of expanding a three-year cost extension. [The study provided] good justifications for expanding funding and duration" (KI 43).

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Dissemination efforts reach core project stakeholders, but seldom target broader audiences

Our findings demonstrate that most taskings successfully communicated the study's key findings to core project stakeholders and that most study recommendations were seen as clear, actionable, and attributable to specific actors. Yet our results also suggest that most taskings did not share findings beyond a small group of core stakeholders and that supporting materials like two-pagers and infographics accessible to laypersons were seldom produced. Based on these results, we conclude that more could be done to disseminate findings beyond core project stakeholders.

The semi-structured interviews provided additional details that contextualized and validated this conclusion. Whereas only a minority of taskings commissioned a two-pager or infographic, interview respondents emphasized a strong desire for more of them to be produced. Similarly, respondents noted that producing reports in local languages would help ensure that the dissemination efforts are accessible to a wider group of stakeholders. Lastly, respondents suggested that future taskings would benefit from incorporating dissemination plans into the scope of work or contractual agreement for the study team.

Most studies had at least a moderate impact on USAID learning, activity design, or implementation

Results from our pre-interview survey suggest that most taskings had a moderate or major influence on learning and activity implementation, and that a large minority of taskings influenced USAID strategy (48 percent) or Activity Design (42 percent). Implementation of study findings was more limited, with 36 percent of taskings reporting that at least some recommendations were fully implemented, and 42 percent reporting that at least some were partially implemented. These findings paint a cautiously optimistic picture of the potential for research taskings to meaningfully influence and inform program and activity design, particularly when coupled with action plans, post-study workshops, and concerted efforts to build and sustain buy-in from key stakeholders throughout the life of the project. As with all survey-based findings, these conclusions should be tempered by potential reporting biases. While we attempted to make our questions as specific as possible, thereby leaving less room for subjective interpretation, we cannot rule out all forms of bias, as was discussed in our Limitations section.

Several key barriers limit the use of findings and uptake of recommendations

The most frequently cited barriers to greater use of findings included the lack of genuine buy-in from Mission leadership and staff for evidence-based policy; insufficient time, training, and recognition for staff to apply evidence to programming; budgeting and contractual constraints; and the misalignment of study recommendations with Missions' evolving strategies and priorities.

High staff turnover within USAID Missions was also often emphasized as a critical barrier to utilization, particularly in terms of knowledge management for evaluation results. Several respondents emphasized that key staff left USAID or transitioned to another post during the evaluation or soon after, leaving their replacement with limited knowledge of the findings and recommendations, or an unwillingness to act on them due evolving priorities.

Missions too often viewed evaluation as a "check-box" requirement, with limited buy-in and ownership over the study and its eventual utilization. Because evidence-based policy is poorly integrated into Mission culture, evaluations are frequently viewed not as a learning opportunity, but as a performance audit.

Lastly, we found that evaluations occur too late in a project's lifecycle to be useful. Exacerbated by delays to the research timeline, particularly at start-up, research findings often arrive only after critical decisions have already been made.

Timing, funding, and alignment with Mission strategy support successful utilization

Studies with actionable and achievable recommendations that aligned with Mission strategy were most likely to be implemented. This suggests that utilization is closely related to staff bandwidth and the availability of resources. Given that staff have limited time to translate vague or unrealistic recommendations into actionable ones, taskings are more likely to lead to utilization when research teams provide clear and actionable recommendations from the outset. And because Mission resources are limited, recommendations that align with Mission strategy are likely to be prioritized over those that fall outside the Mission's priority areas.

The timing of research taskings also plays a critical role in their utilization. Studies with successful utilization provided findings and recommendations during the project's lifecycle, allowing USAID and implementing partners to better understand strengths and weaknesses and adapt in real time. By contrast, studies produced at the end of a project's lifecycle had much weaker influence on programming, as prior research is seldom consulted when designing new programming, according to those we spoke with.

Beyond timing and alignment with Mission strategy, the availability funding was critical to successful utilization. This finding suggests that when Mission staff are equipped with adequate funding and the discretion to allocate those resources flexibly towards evidence-based programming, they become much more likely to implement studies' recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We organize our recommendations into three categories: disseminating research findings; maximizing the utilization of research findings; and measuring and tracking utilization moving forward. We offer these recommendations based on the findings and conclusions reported above, including respondents' reflections on key barriers and what changes could be made to improve utilization. For recommendations in the "Disseminating Research Findings" and "Maximizing the Utilization of Study Findings" sections below, each recommendation is supported by testimony from multiple respondents (Recommendations in the third category "Measuring Research Utilization" do not pertain to respondents' experiences and instead follow from the research team's experience measuring utilization in this study). However, although informed by respondents' own experiences, suggestions, and recommendations, the final formulation and articulation of all recommendations should be attributed to the research team alone.

Disseminating Research Findings

Incorporate Robust Dissemination Plans into SOWs and Contractual Agreements

To increase the dissemination of future research taskings, USAID should consider including robust dissemination plans into the scope of work or contractual agreement for research teams. This would provide several benefits that have the potential to increase learning for USAID staff and relevant stakeholders, as well as ensure that the findings and recommendations from research activities are preserved considering limited staff bandwidth and high turnover. First, the inclusion of a robust dissemination plan into research taskings' design would allow USAID staff and research teams to include these activities in their budget projections and timelines, ensuring that such efforts are not overlooked or seen as an optional add-on. Second, the inclusion of dissemination efforts into the scope of work has the potential to shift the responsibility of their planning, preparation, and execution from USAID staff to research teams, limiting the additional burden to USAID staff that may lack the bandwidth to follow through. Third, this will allow USAID staff to tailor dissemination efforts to the intended audience. For example, if Mission staff know that key stakeholders require short, non-technical documents, they have the flexibility of including a brief presentation or infographic that can be shared widely.

Prioritize Infographics and Two-Pagers

Given our findings on the extent of current dissemination efforts and the need for improved knowledge management, USAID should prioritize the creation of short and accessible documents that capture the study's main findings and recommendations. Respondents highlighted infographics and two-page documents as a key improvement for future taskings to ensure that results are shared outside of a small group of core stakeholders, Additionally, some responses indicated lengthy and technical research reports were a barrier to learning and utilization for USAID staff and outside stakeholders, given limited technical knowledge and bandwidth. Commissioning infographics and two-pagers will also encourage research teams to strike a balance between documenting their technical approach in the final report and producing non-technical summaries that can be easily shared and digested. Two-pagers should not merely be a reformulation of the Executive Summary; they should be tailored specifically to the target audience and supported by infographics and easy-to-understand tables and charts.

Encourage the Translation of Dissemination Materials into Local Languages

In cases where there are key project stakeholders that lack English proficiency, USAID Missions should encourage research teams to produce dissemination materials, such as infographics or two-pagers, into local languages. This can be achieved by including the desired dissemination documents in both English and the local language in the research team's scope of work, allowing for adequate planning and budgeting for this effort.

Maximizing the Utilization of Research Findings

Promote a Culture of Evaluation and Learning Within USAID Missions

Rather than an opportunity to learn and adapt, there is a common perception that program evaluation is a "check-box" requirement, an audit of program activities, or a judgment on the implementing partner's performance. Mission staff have few incentives to apply evidence to programming and are seldom acknowledged when they do, according to our interviews. When new programs are designed, findings from prior research studies seldom contribute to the process.

USAID should work aggressively to increase appreciation for research and evidence within the Agency. There is no silver bullet to changing organizational culture, but our interviews highlight two specific actions may be helpful:

- Consider providing (and incentivizing) additional training on research methods to Mission-based staff. Understanding research is a prerequisite to appreciating its importance and how it should be applied to programming and policy, but too few Mission staff possess a sound understanding of research methods. Providing staff with the time, space, and incentive to participate in online courses may be one avenue through which to achieve this objective at scale. This training could be either on the technical aspects of research design, or on the process of applying evidence to policy.
- Institutionalize post-study workshops and action plans. To help make evidence use the expectation rather than the exception, USAID should consider institutionalizing post-study action plans that specify which actions will be taken and when. USAID Activity Managers should be held accountable for tracking progress towards these plans and rewarded when evidence influences policy or programming.

Build and sustain buy-in from key stakeholders throughout the study's lifecycle

People are much more likely to value and act on research findings if they participated in its creation, according to our interviews. We therefore recommend that concerted efforts be taken to build and sustain buy-in throughout a study's lifecycle, not only within USAID but also among key external stakeholders. In addition to making stakeholders aware of the study and its progress, stakeholders should be invited to participate in its design and given space to communicate how study activities could service their own ancillary research questions.

Anticipate the need for funding to support evidence-informed programming

Respondents frequently lamented that utilization was limited primarily by a lack of funding for any follow-on activities, limiting their ability to translate valuable findings and recommendations into tangible programs. We therefore recommend that Activity Managers carefully consider at the outset whether funding for follow-on activities that show promise in evaluations is likely to be available. If such funding is uncertain, then the research must be justified based on informing the broader evidence base, with utilization likely coming from outside the setting in which the study was conducted.

Measuring Research Utilization

Measure utilization early, often, and quickly

The implementation of research findings is a process that unfolds over the course several months or even years. To ensure the incremental dynamics of implementation are duly captured, and to prevent loss of information due to turnover or recall bias, we recommend measuring utilization at regular intervals starting from the end of the tasking's period of performance and continuing for up to a year or more.[4] To

[4] Measuring utilization "early and often" will also help address the challenge of staff turnover when measuring utilization, because there will be less time for turnover to occur. And when it does occur, there will be a direct link to the new replacement.

minimize the burden of additional reporting requirements, the measurement tool should be short and streamlined. Simultaneously, the questions in the tool should be specific, inquiring about specific recommendations from the study or post-evaluation action plan, to minimize room for subjective interpretation and ensure accurate responses.

Adopt a mixed-methods approach

Measuring and tracking research utilization over time requires developing a standard set of measures that can be applied to a diverse portfolio of research studies. However, standardized metrics may not capture important nuances regarding the use of study findings, including study-specific barriers and challenges. KIIs with USAID Activity Managers can help uncover these nuances, but they are time-consuming and costly to administer, and they are not conducive to making comparisons across a large number of studies.

Recognizing the strengths and limitations of both approaches, we recommend that USAID consider a mix-methods approach moving forward, using a short and streamlined closed-ended survey to measure utilization at regular intervals after the project ends, and complementing this survey with a smaller number of purposively selected KIIs.

ANNEX: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

QUANTITATIVE PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY

Thank you for your participation in this 5–7-minute survey about the use and dissemination of the findings from the learning activity/research activity that you were recently involved in. This survey will be used to inform an assessment of the utilization of learning recent products produced under the LER II task order. This assessment is being led by Social Impact, a research company based in Washington D.C., and was commissioned by the Evidence & Learning Team within the Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center) at USAID.

Within a week of your completion of this survey, a representative from Social Impact will contact you to schedule a 30-minute virtual follow-up interview about the utilization of this learning product. Your interviewer will have access to the responses you provide today. In addition, the information you share today will be shared with the Evidence and Learning team at the DRG Center. However, the survey only inquires about the learning activity/research activity; it does not solicit any personal information.

In our final report, no one will be identified by name, and it will be impossible to attribute any findings or comments to you.

Click “Next” to start the survey

Please select for which DRG-LER Tasking you are responding:

1. [Selected Tasking I]
2. [Selected Tasking 2]

   …

41. Other

Please specify the relevant activity: [Short answer text]

Project Out-Briefs

Did you have an out-brief presentation with core project stakeholders (e.g., USAID or implementing partner staff to share the findings from the study?

- ○ Yes (Continue to next section)
- ○ No (Go to Section 6, Dissemination)
- ○ Do not know/do not recall (Go to Section 6, Dissemination)
- ○ Not applicable (Go to Section 6, Dissemination)

Approximately how many individuals attended this out-brief presentation? (Please provide your answer as a whole number)

[Short answer text, integer]

Who attended?

- IP(s)
- Foreign government partners
- USAID staff
- Academics
- Media
- Public
- Study participants
- Do not know/do not recall
- Other… [Specification field]

Dissemination Details

Did you hold a larger dissemination presentation to share the findings from this study with a broader group of stakeholders?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

Who attended?

- IP(s)
- Foreign government partners
- USAID staff
- Academics
- Media
- Public

- Study participants
- Do not know/do not recall
- Other… [Specification field]

Other Dissemination

Did you commission a two-pager or infographic for the study findings?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

Apart from what you have already reported, were there any other dissemination activities or products?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

What were these other dissemination activities or products?

[Long answer text]

Dissemination Judgement

Overall, to what extent were these dissemination activities successful in clearly, concisely, and accessibly communicating the key study findings to the intended audience?

- Very unsuccessful
- Unsuccessful
- Somewhat successful
- Successful
- Very successful

Dissemination Utility

In your view, were the recommendations from this study clear, specific, and actionable?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

In your view, were the recommendations from this study practical and feasible?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

In your view, did the recommendations from this study clearly define who should be responsible for implementing the recommended actions?

- Yes, all of them
- Yes, some of them
- No, none of them
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

In your view, to what extent did this evaluation/learning activity influence USAID's STRATEGY on the topic(s) covered in the study?

- Negligible or no influence
- Minor influence
- Moderate influence
- Major influence
- Do not know

In your view, to what extent did this evaluation/learning activity influence USAID's PROJECT DESIGN/ACTIVITY DESIGN for the topic(s) covered in the study?

- Negligible or no influence

- Minor influence
- Moderate influence
- Major influence
- Do not know

In your view, to what extent did this evaluation/learning activity influence USAID's ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION for the topic(s) covered in the study?

- Negligible or no influence
- Minor influence
- Moderate influence
- Major influence
- Do not know

In your view, to what extent did this evaluation/learning activity contribute to general learning within USAID on the topic(s) covered in the study?

- Negligible or no influence
- Minor influence
- Moderate influence
- Major influence
- Do not know

Implementation of Study Recommendations

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?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

Was an action-plan created that defined what actions should be taken, by whom, and by what deadline?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

Of the recommendations that were accepted, approximately how many have been FULLY implemented as of today?

- None
- Some
- Most
- All
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

Of the recommendations that were accepted, approximately how many have been PARTIALLY implemented as of today?

- None
- Some
- Most
- All
- Do not know / do not recall
- Not applicable

Thank you for your feedback today.

Our team is looking forward to your virtual interview to discuss these topics in greater detail. You can expect to hear from us in the coming days to schedule a time for that interview.

In the meantime, if you have any other comments you wish to share with us, please do so now. Otherwise, click "Submit".

[Long answer text]

SEMI-STRUCUTRED INTERVIEW

Introduction and Consent

Introduction: Thank you for your participation in this 30 to 40 minute interview about the use and dissemination of [the evaluation/learning product]. Our discussion today will be used to inform an assessment of the utilization of learning recent products produced under the LER II task order. This assessment is being led by Social Impact, a research company based in Washington D.C., and was commissioned by the Evidence & Learning Team within the Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center) at USAID. However, your responses today will not be shared with anyone outside the research team at Social Impact. In our final report, no one will be identified by name, and it will be impossible to attribute any findings or comments to you.

Consent: Prior to this conversation, you should have received a written consent form that outlines the background of this study, the potential risks and benefits to participation, the confidentiality of responses, and that participation in this study is voluntary.

Question	Response
Did you read this statement in its entirety prior to this call?	Yes / No **[If no, ask the respondent to read the statement now]**
Do you have any questions about this statement?	Yes / No **[If yes, answer their questions to the best of your ability. Refer to the language in the consent statement wherever possible.]**
Are you willing to participate in this interview?	Yes / No **[If no, do not proceed with the interview]**
Do you consent to this interview being recorded?	Yes / No **[If no, do not record the interview]**

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Dissemination Products and Activities

[If there was an outbrief]: Approximately how many stakeholders attended the outbrief presentation?

[If there was not an outbribe]: You reported in the pre-interview survey that there was not an outbrief presentation for this evaluation/learning activity, can you explain why not?

[If there was a second outbrief]: You also named a second outbrief with a larger group of stakeholders. Approximately how many individuals attended this larger presentation? Who was represented among the attendees?

(Probe for: implementing partners, USAID staff, foreign government partners, others?)

[If no second outbrief]: You said that there was not an outbrief presentation to a larger number of stakeholders for this project, can you explain why not? In retrospect, do you feel a second outbrief would have been useful? Why/why not?

Overall, to what extent do you think the dissemination activities were successful in clearly, concisely, and accessibly communicating the key study findings to the intended audience?

(Probe: why or why not?)

Do you feel that any of the dissemination activities we have discussed were particularly successful?

(Probe: Which one/s? What about them made them successful?)

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?

Utility of Study Findings and Recommendations

You mentioned this project had a [negligible / minor / moderate / major] influence on USAID strategy. Why do you say this? What about the findings made them [useful / not useful] for informing strategy? Please provide specific examples.

You mentioned this project [negligible / minor / moderate / major] influence on project/activity design. Why you say this? What about the findings made them [useful / not useful] for informing project/activity design? Please provide specific examples.

You mentioned this project had a [negligible / minor / moderate / major] influence on activity implementation. Why do you say this? What about the findings made them [useful / not useful] useful for informing activity implementation? Please provide specific examples.

You mentioned this project had a [negligible / minor / moderate / major] influence on general learning at USAID. Why do you say this? What about the findings made them [useful / not useful] for informing general learning? Please provide specific examples.

If you were to do this evaluation again, is there anything you would change about how the findings/recommendations are presented? How could the presentation of 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?)

Implementation of Study Recommendations

Other than the post-study workshop or meeting and the action plan, were there any other post-study action planning activities? What were they?

You said that [none / some / most / all] of the study recommendations were implemented. Which ones were implemented, and which were not? Why do you think some were implemented and others not?

Were there certain recommendations that were rejected or not acted upon? Why were they not acted upon? (Probe for: timing, clarity, specificity, feasibility. If some recommendations were not useful, why were they not useful?)

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)?

Wrap-Up

What are some of the barriers to using evaluation findings or acting on evaluation recommendations?

How could USAID incentivize and encourage greater use of evaluation findings?

What changes could be made to evaluations or other learning activities to make them more useful?

[Note to interviewers: use this space to take notes on any additional questions or discussions that arise (and do not fit neatly into the above questions)]