



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

GUIDANCE NOTE: PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Locally Led Approaches to Evaluation



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Locally led development involves local stakeholders taking the lead in all aspects of the development process, including determining visions of success, measuring progress, learning and adapting, and evaluating results. The [USAID Evaluation Policy](#) highlights that by respectfully engaging partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders, evaluations can promote local ownership while leveraging and building local evaluation capacity. One way to practice locally led development in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) is through **participatory evaluation**: applied social research where evaluators partner with local stakeholders to shape and contribute to the research process.¹

This document offers practical guidance to help USAID Missions plan, commission, and carry out evaluations in more participatory, locally led ways. All evaluations - be they performance or impact, quantitative or qualitative, developmental or formative evaluations - can be made more participatory. Participatory evaluation is about more than *who* is hired to lead the evaluation (though hiring a local evaluator or evaluation firm can be a strong starting point!). It instead focuses on *how* the evaluation is carried out, integrating local stakeholders and decision-making at any stage of the evaluation process, including:

- Planning an Evaluation
 - [Decision to Evaluate](#)
 - [Evaluation Purpose and Questions](#)
- Managing an Evaluation
 - [Data Collection](#)
 - [Data Analysis](#)
- Sharing, Using, and Learning from an Evaluation
 - [Evaluation Dissemination and Utilization](#)

LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

describes the extent to which local actors are empowered in decision-making throughout priority-setting, design, management, measurement, and other processes through which development assistance contributes toward improving local development systems and outcomes.

ABOVE: Mandela Washington Fellows participating in USAID-funded professional development opportunities filmed one another's most significant change stories as part of a participatory impact assessment.

“Participation involves sharing power – so decisions need to be made about how power over different aspects of evaluation processes will be shared and between whom.”

- Leslie Groves and Irene Guijt, [Positioning participation on the power spectrum](#)

This guidance is meant for USAID staff considering, commissioning, and utilizing evaluations. It includes practical tips and ideas for what could be included in an evaluation Request for Proposals, considered when reviewing proposals, and discussed in collaboration with the evaluator during the evaluation design and implementation processes. While some steps are carried out by USAID, and others carried out by an evaluator, all steps of the evaluation process can meaningfully promote local ownership through participatory approaches.

Like all locally led approaches to development programming, participatory evaluation approaches must be intentional and resourced to ensure we move beyond tokenistic use of participatory techniques to promote genuine, deep participation and ownership of results. This document draws on examples across a range of sectors, from USAID and other development actors’ work internationally, to locally led, domestic evaluation approaches.

What is Participatory Evaluation and Why Does It Matter?

There are two main approaches to participatory evaluation. Both approaches can support locally led development by promoting local ownership of the evaluation process, results, and utilization of findings. When intentionally pursued, they both can also result in or contribute to accountability (both top-down and bottom-up), capacity development, sustainability, and enhanced learning among all stakeholders:

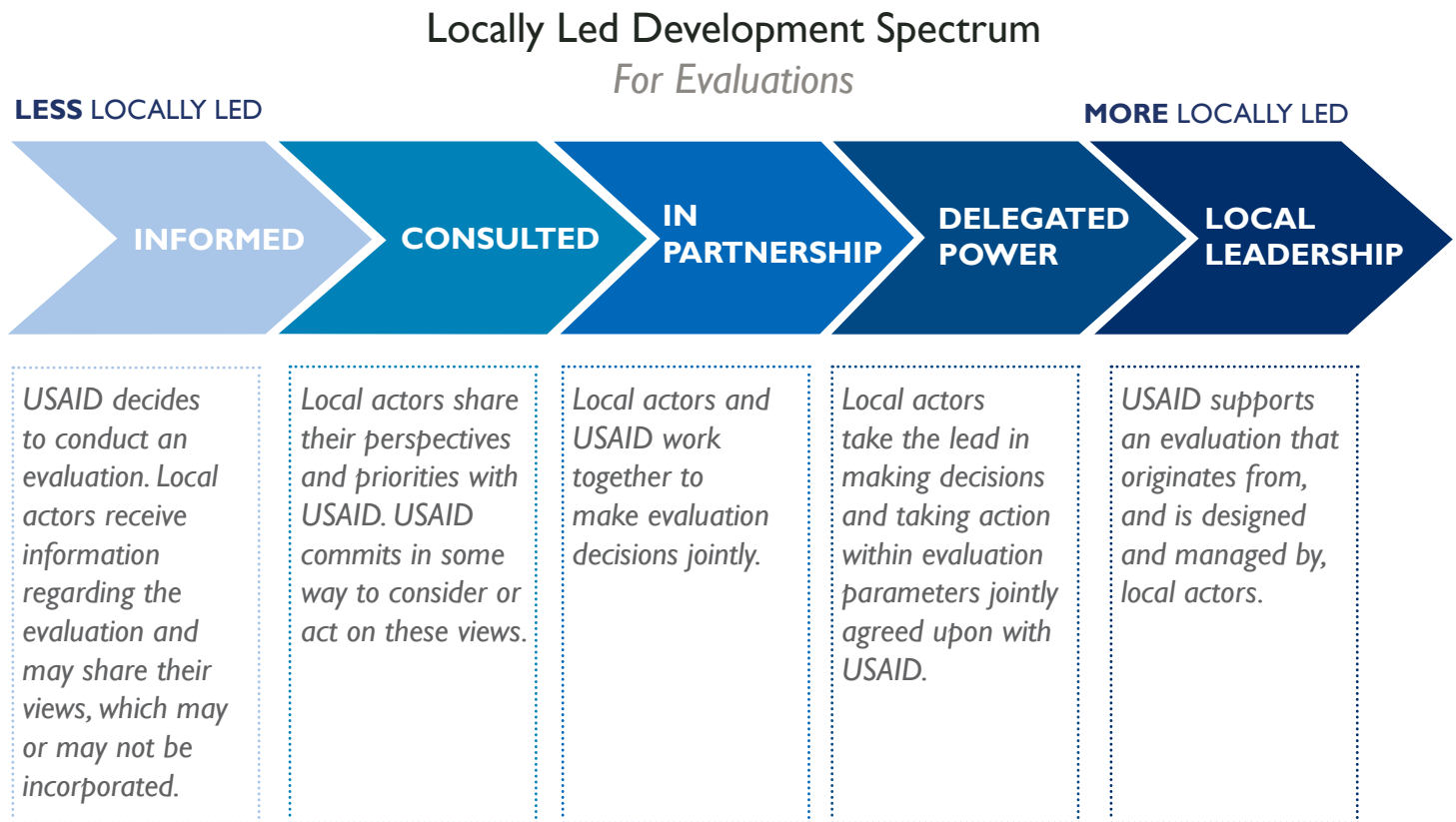
- **Practical** participatory evaluation focuses on utilisation: by bringing participants, stakeholders, and/or managers from the program being evaluated into the process, these individuals are more likely to actively learn from research and use findings to take action promoting the development process.² Local ownership of findings and results is expected to enhance local ownership of the development process overall.
- **Transformative** participatory evaluation seeks to actively empower participants, develop capacity, and promote community development and social justice through the research process.³ In situations where shifting power to local actors is part of the project’s goal, approaching the evaluation from the same perspective can help achieve this goal.

Over the past 50+ years, a range of participatory frameworks—including Arnsteins’ ladder of civic participation and participatory rural appraisals’ levels of participatory learning—have sought to categorize aspects of participatory evaluation as more or less participatory.⁴ These frameworks capture questions such as “Who has control of technical decision making?” “How are stakeholders selected?” and “To what extent does engagement simply consult actors, versus

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engaging them in a meaningful way?”⁵

The **Locally Led Development Spectrum** builds on these frameworks and can be used to understand how each part of the evaluation process can be made more locally led and participatory:



JUMPTO:

[Decision to Evaluate](#) | [Evaluation Purpose and Questions](#) | [Data Collection](#) | [Data Analysis](#) | [Evaluation Dissemination and Utilization](#)



PLANNING AN EVALUATION: DECISION TO EVALUATE

Increasing local participation in the ‘Deciding to evaluate’ stage lays a strong foundation for integrating local voices later on. In most cases, those involved in decision-making throughout the evaluation are those most likely to use the findings,⁶ and that begins with the initial decision to evaluate. Involving local actors who have **interest** or **influence** in improving program effectiveness and sustaining results is an important way to cultivate a sense of ownership of the evaluation and ensure that evaluation findings are relevant to these users.

One way to engage local stakeholders in the decision to evaluate is through a simulation of use. This is a process in which the evaluation planning team brainstorms potential evaluation findings, then holds a guided discussion with primary intended users to discuss what decisions or actions these findings might trigger. Weighing the probable use of the evaluation with the projected costs, the group then makes a decision on whether to conduct the evaluation.⁷

While involving local stakeholders in this first evaluation stage can help boost local ownership of the evaluation findings, it is important to consider the evaluation goals to determine whether involving local actors in this decision is appropriate. If generating learning for organizational or activity adaptation and improvement are primary goals, then engaging local stakeholders in the decision to evaluate can help ensure it meets their own learning needs. In other cases, decisions to evaluate may be driven by USAID policy directives (which require evaluation for certain types of programming), or by a need to demonstrate results to Mission or Washington-based stakeholders. In these scenarios, in lieu of engaging local actors in deciding whether to evaluate, seek out their priorities in terms of the evaluation timeline, ensure clear communication as we inform them of the needs for the evaluation from USAID’s perspective, and proactively identify opportunities for participation at later stages.



Not sure who the relevant stakeholders are? Check out [Stakeholder Mapping resources](#).



For resources and tools on conducting evaluability assessments in participatory ways, check out the [Evaluability Assessment Toolkit](#).

THINK AHEAD!

Regardless of the level of local participation in the decision to evaluate, lay the groundwork early for ensuring evaluation findings are useful for local actors. Don’t wait until the evaluation report is written to begin an [evaluation dissemination plan](#). This step can help frame your thinking about how local stakeholders can benefit from the evaluation.



DECISION TO EVALUATE: IN PARTNERSHIP

In partnership with UK-based INGO INTRAC, the Malawian NGO CABUNGO decided to conduct an evaluation of its capacity building services. Like many local organizations, CABUNGO faced challenges in finding the time and resources for MEL activities. In conversations with INTRAC, with whom CABUNGO had worked for ten years, the idea emerged that INTRAC could support CABUNGO to conduct an internal evaluation. CABUNGO developed an evaluation objective: “to enhance CABUNGO’s learning and therefore improve our performance.” Then, the two organizations moved forward to jointly design the evaluation methodology.

Enabler of local participation: Since an evaluation was not required by a donor, CABUNGO had decision-making power in determining whether an evaluation would be useful. As the report states, “The aim was to catalyse a creative and reflective link between evaluation and organisational learning rather than fulfil the requirements of external stakeholders.” Additionally, INTRAC and CABUNGO had a long-standing, well-established relationship, which provided a foundation of trust in which to work collaboratively.⁸

DECISION TO EVALUATE: IN PARTNERSHIP

In 2012, the Government of Uganda (GoU) launched an effort to achieve universal coverage of Long-Lasting Insecticidal Nets (LLINs). It partnered with several multilateral and bilateral donors, including USAID, who worked with government task forces and village health teams to conduct the mass distribution campaign. As this was the first time a country had attempted to roll out LLINs at such a scale, there was interest from both the development community and the GoU to assess activity outcomes for the purpose of planning future distributions. The Mission’s MEL platform facilitated a consultative process with the GoU (including the Ministry of Health and other offices concerned with monitoring government programs and developing programs) as well as partner donors, in which stakeholders jointly determined the need for an evaluation. As a USAID/Uganda team member stated, “Key stakeholders were involved at every stage of the evaluation process, starting with assessing the need for an evaluation.... though the involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation process caused some delays, we found it useful to promote a demand - rather than supply - driven evaluation.”

Enabler of local participation: As the LLIN distribution campaign was initiated by the host government and implemented in coordination with local structures (district and sub-county task forces and village health teams), USAID played a partnership role (rather than a traditional “donor” role) with the GoU from the start. This relationship created a foundation upon which donors and the GoU could discuss the potential value of an evaluation for all actors - rather than it being perceived as an exercise primarily serving USAID accountability structures. Additionally, the USAID AoR was a Foreign Service National (FSN) who championed engagement with local stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. Her commitment to participatory methods pushed the evaluators to engage stakeholders at every stage, even when it caused delays.⁹



PLANNING AN EVALUATION: EVALUATION PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

This stage, in which you decide what questions and issues your evaluation will investigate, is crucial to ensuring the study produces information of value to local stakeholders. In some cases, many of the questions of interest to USAID for program management and learning purposes will also be relevant to local implementers or other partners, who likely share USAID's interest in program objectives. At the same time, there are likely differences in the issues prioritized by USAID, local implementers, other local stakeholders, and program participants. Realistically, evaluations can not answer every potential learning question, and questions will need to be prioritized. Taking the time to consult local stakeholders is essential for identifying the most pressing questions to guide USAID's programmatic and strategic planning.

Activities that may be useful in bringing local stakeholders into evaluation scoping include:

- Inviting - and incorporating - feedback from a local implementing partner on a draft evaluation scope;
- Holding workshops to discuss and brainstorm evaluation goals and/or prioritize evaluation questions with local implementers, partner government bodies, or other local NGOs, CSOs, or businesses relevant to the sector or issue of interest;
- Establishing a local stakeholder Advisory Council to serve as a sounding board for monitoring and evaluation plans, findings, and adaptations/course-corrections throughout the planning and implementation stage;
- Conducting consultations or listening sessions with program participants to understand which elements of the theory of change and program objectives resonate with them. This may include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, development of dramas or stories, and many other approaches.

When prioritizing evaluation questions, remember to review existing data from performance monitoring and other sources that may be able to fill knowledge gaps. This exercise helps ensure that resource-intensive primary data collection is not redundant, and may help focus your evaluation on unexplored areas that are of interest to local stakeholders.

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For an example of how to build a local stakeholder Advisory Council into solicitations, see [USAID/Kosovo's RFP](#).



EVALUATION PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS: CONSULTED

Though researchers and practitioners acknowledge that land management and conservation goals can only be achieved with local participation, these issues are often tracked through indicators that are not meaningful or accessible to local pastoralists. In Botswana, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with local pastoralists to elicit potential environmental sustainability indicators, then empirically tested these through ecological and soil-based methods. They found that most indicators suggested by the pastoralists were validated by the empirical analysis, though some were not sufficiently objective or reliable. The authors concluded that combining local knowledge with empirical methods generated “more accurate and relevant indicators than either approach could achieve alone.”

Enabler of local participation: The researchers went beyond simply translating concepts to find language that was meaningful to local pastoralists. For example, they found that the concept of “sustainability” was not well understood in this context. Instead, they spoke about land degradation to elicit indicators from pastoralists, then reversed these to capture sustainability. Applying such an approach as part of an evaluation can help identify how local stakeholders define or understand what “success” of a particular activity looks like. The evaluation team can then adjust questions so that they probe activity performance or impact according to those definitions. (In contrast, when evaluation questions are based solely on USAID’s understanding of activity objectives, the evaluation may fail to capture important activity results.)¹⁰

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS: IN PARTNERSHIP

In an evaluation of a Long-Lasting Insecticidal Net (LLIN) distribution campaign in Uganda (see ‘Deciding to Evaluate’ section example), the Mission’s MEL platform facilitated meetings in which key stakeholders worked together to develop the evaluation scope of work and questions. These stakeholders included the UK Department for International Development, the Government of Uganda (the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Prime Minister, among others), implementing partners, the Uganda Evaluation Association, and, importantly, program beneficiaries including district officials and LLIN recipients. All stakeholders were invited to suggest their preferred topics of inquiry, generating a long list of evaluation topics that was then subjected to a participatory prioritization process. The Mission reported that it took several sessions to come to an agreement on the most important areas of inquiry. However, the process created broad buy-in for the evaluation process. That buy-in paid off during data collection, as it allowed the evaluation team to access district officials and LLIN recipients for interviews - something that would have otherwise been quite difficult.¹¹



MANAGING AN EVALUATION: DATA COLLECTION

Choices surrounding data collection methods and sources have enormous consequences for the quality of data - and, in turn, for the validity and depth of evaluation findings. Involving local stakeholders in these decisions can help illuminate which methods and processes may be most appropriate depending on the context, target informant group, and issue.

Data collection planning requires consideration of how results in your theory of change are defined, and whether those definitions are meaningful across stakeholder groups. For example, concepts surrounding empowerment, economic independence, trust among different groups, and a myriad of other development concepts mean different things to different people. During initial activity design and MEL planning, USAID should work with the implementer to ensure intended activity objectives - and the way “results” are defined - are meaningful locally. In evaluation planning, USAID should ensure the evaluator builds on a locally-informed understanding of results when designing data collection. Methods and instruments (i.e. survey and interview guides) should capture outcomes validly - that is, results should reflect the concepts they are meant to reflect in the specific activity and country context. While creation of data collection instruments is a step generally carried out by the evaluator, USAID teams should encourage consultation with both the implementer and local stakeholders during instrument design.

USAID should also ensure evaluators consider language and literacy barriers and cultural sensitivities around certain issues in planning data collection. Consulting local evaluation team members or enumerators is a great first step, but discussing methods with program staff and program participants can provide deeper insight into which data collection methods will be most engaging and comfortable for respondents. The evaluator should pilot data collection tools with a small sample of respondents to identify questions or processes that fail to elicit valid and reliable data, and adjust instruments and plans accordingly.

While all data collection tools can be made more participatory, some tools lend themselves more readily to letting respondents control the conversation. In contrast to structured interviews or quantitative surveys, in which informants respond only to the pre-identified questions, semi-structured interviews allow for participants and stakeholders to highlight results that they most value, which may or may not have been anticipated in the activity’s theory of change. Evaluation approaches like Most Significant Change (MSC), Outcome Harvesting, Ripple Effects Mapping (REM), and stakeholder mapping*, among many others, create space for respondent leadership in both identifying and interpreting findings.



For an example of how to build this participatory approach into solicitations, see [USAID/Kosovo’s RFP](#).

* Note that choosing MSC, outcome harvesting, REM, or stakeholder mapping as an evaluative approach guides both data collection and analysis.

For example:

- In evaluating a women’s empowerment activity in Sierra Leone, One Village Partners used the MSC approach to guide participant storytelling, followed by participant selection of the most significant stories (which then informed understanding of program impact).¹²
- To investigate the outcomes of a rural community tourism development program in the United States, evaluators employed REM, asking program participants and stakeholders to visually map the chain of events resulting from the program.¹³
- In an evaluation of programming focused on violence against women in East Africa, researchers employed stakeholder mapping, in which participants decided which stakeholders to include in their map and placed them according to their own perceptions of actors’ relative importance in the system.¹⁴

When an evaluation aims to prioritize participatory data collection, it is important to think critically about the extent to which respondents have freedom to direct the conversation. Even non-traditional or “innovative” methods like those described above can become one-way, extractive information gathering processes.

Before asking an evaluator to design participatory data collection methods, it is essential for USAID to determine evaluation priorities. If the priority is to quantitatively evaluate the impact of an activity through a rigorous, experimental design (e.g. for a randomized controlled trial (RCT)), data reliability likely depends on a consistent set of questions and methods for asking them. In these cases, it is likely most appropriate for the evaluator to retain leadership over survey methodology (though it may be possible to train program participants or program staff as enumerators). If the priority is local participation, however, it is often possible to involve local stakeholders in the design and implementation of data collection methods, including methods such as large-scale surveys that are traditionally less participatory (see, for example, in this [case of community-driven enumeration in Ghana](#)).¹⁵

Lastly, consider asking evaluators to hire local M&E firms, researchers, or graduate students for data collection roles, and budget sufficient funds and time to train these actors. You might also ask evaluators to involve program staff or program participants in data collection. Local individuals have in-depth knowledge of the country context and (in the case of program staff and participants) familiarity with the activity, allowing them to dig deeper into respondents’ answers in semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions. While this must be weighed against the value of objectivity offered by an external evaluator, enabling local stakeholders to act as data collectors can improve data quality and depth.

It is important to think critically about the extent to which respondents have freedom to direct the conversation.



Check out the [Bond Principles and Checklist](#) for assessing the quality of evidence, which includes questions to help you consider how your data collection and analysis incorporates diverse stakeholder perspectives.

LESS LOCALLY LED

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DATA COLLECTION: CONSULTED

In planning an evaluation of an after-school program for disadvantaged youth in Chicago, researchers consulted youth in the design of data collection tools. Throughout the tool's piloting process, researchers learned that the questionnaires they planned to use did not generate data that was adequately credible and valid, and that rather, youth-led interviews of one another better supported rigorous, authentic, and culturally competent data collection processes. As a result, researchers chose to conduct qualitative, discussion-based interviews, and involved youth in creating and administering the interview guides.¹⁶

DATA COLLECTION: DELEGATED POWER

The Ugandan organization TASO, which provides medical, counseling, and social support services to HIV-positive and at-risk populations, worked with a World Health Organization consultant to conduct an evaluation of their programming. The evaluation steering committee (which included TASO staff, the WHO consultant, and other community stakeholders) felt that it would be beneficial for TASO HIV counsellors to play a role in data collection, as these counsellors had already established trusting relationships with clients. After a four-day training in interview skills, counsellors conducted interviews and focus group discussions with clients, leading to greater openness and honesty in responses.

This approach did introduce the potential for bias. For example, clients may have related inaccurate information about their sexual behavior for fear of judgment from their counsellor, or counsellors may have asked leading questions to elicit more favorable responses about their services. To mitigate the threat of bias in evaluation findings, the evaluation team supplemented interview data with observational data from counselling sessions (with observation conducted by supervisors from other counselling centers) and content analysis of counselling records.

Enabler of local participation: The initial impetus for the evaluation came from TASO itself, and the evaluation objectives prioritized learning and organizational improvement, rather than upward accountability. Because of this, the evaluation team decided that the benefits of staff participation as interviewers outweighed the potential risk of bias. If a desire to demonstrate results to an external audience had been a larger motivation for the evaluation, this data collection choice may have been less appropriate.¹⁷

LESS LOCALLY LED

MORE LOCALLY LED



DATA COLLECTION: DELEGATED POWER

To assess empowerment in Bangladesh, researchers derived indicators from dramas developed and presented by program participants to represent concepts of empowerment. Researchers asked three groups of women and three groups of men from different geographic locations to create scenes illustrating (1) their life before involvement in a social movement, (2) their current situation, and (3) their objectives for the near future.

Based on the statements captured from the dramas, researchers developed indicators, taking care to preserve the original language. They then presented these statements to other program participants, who reflected on whether these statements resonated with their own experiences. Though researchers sorted indicators into conceptual categories (political empowerment, economic empowerment, etc.), they did not filter them based on their own understanding, as “this would not have reflected on how the members saw their empowerment.” Then, member groups of the social movement conducted self-assessments, assigning ‘happy faces’ and ‘unhappy faces’ to statements such as “The group knows where to get information from the Land Office,” or “The position of women and girls in all the group members’ families is valued.” They discussed the reasons for these ratings and the barriers to change. Researchers captured the ratings for quantitative analysis.

Enabler of local participation: Drama is a familiar medium of expression in Bangladesh, so it was a natural fit. Groups were able to develop three scenes in only an hour, with little instruction. By fitting the method to the cultural context, researchers elicited meaningful statements from participants. In other contexts, methods such as story-telling, picture making, singing, or group discussions could be better choices.¹⁸



MANAGING AN EVALUATION: DATA ANALYSIS

This stage, which includes data cleaning, analysis, and validation, as well as interpreting findings and developing conclusions, offers another key opportunity for local participation. While led by the evaluation team, USAID has opportunities to require or encourage more participatory approaches to data analysis through the Evaluation Scope of Work and approvals processes. In traditional evaluation, professional evaluators lead this stage, based on the perception that it demands a specialized skill set. This mentality has changed over time: increasingly, local actors, program staff, and participants play a key role in this stage of the evaluation. By drafting Scopes of Work with intentionality, ensuring proper budgeting, and closely reviewing the analysis plan during the approval of the evaluation design, USAID CORs can encourage more participatory approaches to data analysis, which can help build relationships and shift ownership of the data and results to local actors. Consider the following opportunities to make data analysis in evaluations more participatory:

When requiring qualitative analysis methodologies in the Scope of Work, or reviewing the evaluation plan. Read the methods and analysis section with an eye to rigor, and consider how participatory approaches can support a rigorous analysis. One example is that data analysis often includes a qualitative coding process, and data coders with external evaluation firms may lack an understanding of the local context. Participatory approaches with local actors can enhance coding accuracy and promote a nuanced understanding of data in the coding process. Local actors can help inform whether they may identify potential codes before the evaluation teams code data (inductive coding); validate and contextualize the coding team's initial codebook (deductive coding); or a combination of both processes. Local actors themselves can conduct data cleaning, coding, and analysis, which may be particularly valuable when the content requires a nuanced understanding of the local context to accurately analyze.

Reviewing evaluator plans to validate data analysis and develop conclusions. Validating data analysis and developing conclusions offers another opportunity for collaboration with local actors. A Scope of Work can require offerers to outline a high-level plan for sharing findings and recommendations with key local stakeholders to solicit their feedback on data interpretation, identify points they disagree with, and correct inaccurate assumptions made by the evaluation team. Holding sense-making workshops with local actors provides an opportunity for collective interpretation of findings and identification of conclusions. Select formats include sharing “data placemats” where evaluators facilitate participants’ engagement with and interpretation of data; collaborating with project staff and local stakeholders to validate and contextualize conclusions from analysis; or co-developing recommendations with local stakeholders based on data analysis.



For more information on what to look for in a qualitative analysis methodology section, see [this overview](#) on the practical application of qualitative rigor.



For an example of how to integrate participatory analysis into a Scope of Work, see pages 21, 23, and 24 of [USAID/Kosovo's RFP](#).



For recommendations on engaging stakeholders in this process, see [this resource on USAID's Learning Lab](#).



DATA ANALYSIS: IN PARTNERSHIP

The Evaluation Center at the University of Colorado - Denver conducted an evaluation of the University's local Teacher Quality Partnership program. Following interviews with program participants, teams of professional evaluators and student teachers (program participants) coded transcripts to identify major themes, sub-themes, and representative and exceptional quotes. They synthesized the data and identified the most prevalent themes and essential quotes to format on "[data placemats](#)" - large sheets that display thematically grouped data in the form of graphs, charts, and quotes.

The evaluation team convened key stakeholders in small groups of four to six and facilitated group sense-making of the data placemats. Stakeholders marked up the placemats with highlighters and notes and discussed trends and findings. They responded to facilitator questions such as "What results confirm we're on track for our intended outcomes?", "What results show a need for improvement, and what is the plan for action?", and "What new questions emerge from these results?" This process increased stakeholders' ownership of the evaluation: the participatory process made it easier to discuss difficult findings, and discussions generated contextually-appropriate recommendations that stakeholders were more likely to apply.

Enabler of local participation: The intended audience of teachers and graduate student teachers possessed a high capacity for reading and analyzing large amounts of text, and found the qualitative stories and quotes meaningful and relatable on a personal level.¹⁹

DATA ANALYSIS: DELEGATED POWER

IRES and InsightShare used participatory video techniques and the Most Significant Change (MSC) method to conduct an impact assessment of the Mandela Washington Fellowship's USAID-sponsored professional development opportunities. The team selected this method to highlight stakeholder values, understand the program's unintended outcomes, and facilitate programmatic learning. Program staff trained Fellow Leaders in the MSC technique, who then filmed their peers as they told their stories in their own words.

Fellow Leaders conducted selection screening of the most significant change stories, and then shared them with voting groups of other Fellows who collectively analyzed the videos and selected which were "most significant." This selection process put decision-making power on which stories were elevated in the hands of program participants, and highlighted which outcomes were most valued by participants themselves.²⁰



EVALUATION DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION

REPORTING | Writing and validating evaluation reports with and by local partners creates opportunities for these stakeholders to frame findings in their own words and create realistic, action-oriented recommendations that consider contextual sensitivities. In approaching reporting, consider who will share the findings with whom, which ways of sharing are audience-appropriate, and whether there are any users who need support to make use of the findings.²¹ Consider developing a version of the report and/or executive summary in local languages as a first step in promoting broad-based understanding, dissemination, and use of findings. Ensure you dedicate time and evaluation funds for translation and drafting into local languages.

Local actors can provide direct feedback on a draft of the report, or publish their own response to the results after the evaluation report is completed. Consider when local actors' feedback will be solicited in the process, and do not reach out unless you are committed to incorporating feedback received, as failing to close a feedback loop will erode trust. When evaluators share drafts for comment, ensure they build in sufficient time for local actors to meaningfully review and contribute to the report.

DISSEMINATION & UTILIZATION | Creative dissemination strategies can ensure the evaluation report reaches local partners, program participants, and other relevant stakeholders in ways that are accessible and action-oriented. At a minimum, you should plan to inform local stakeholders of the findings! When finalizing the budget with the evaluation team, ensure there is explicit and intentional allocation of funds and time towards this step.

Close the feedback loop with individuals and organizations who contributed to the evaluation by sharing the final report with them. Consider language and technological barriers and work to mitigate them through translating the report or sharing paper copies. Additionally, consider alternative formats—including briefs, summary documents, presentations, and talking points related to the evaluation—that can be targeted to key local stakeholders and strategically shared. For example, an evaluation of USAID/Uganda's Literacy Achievement Retention Activity used a storytelling approach to develop a series of policy briefs that walk readers through evaluation findings. Explore recording presentations so that they can be accessed by actors in different timezones, or shared and referenced later on. To go beyond simply informing, help local actors identify next steps based on evaluation findings. You might consider:

- Providing suggested recommendations for action by local actors (rather than recommendations targeted only at the funder or implementer).
- Re-sharing actionable recommendations at key moments in project decision-making (e.g., during pause-reflect-pivot opportunities, or ahead of award modifications).

Consider **who** will share the findings with whom, **which** ways of sharing are audience-appropriate, and **whether** there are any users who need support to make use of the findings.



Read one storytelling example from the evaluation of USAID/Uganda's literacy evaluation [here](#).

- Holding Recommendations Workshops in which local program stakeholders participate in facilitated discussions and develop recommendations and action plans based on evaluation findings. Consider inviting other system actors relevant to the programming issue area to share their knowledge and insights. USAID/Senegal found that creating space for stakeholders to propose the best ways to address evaluation findings supported not only high-quality, realistic recommendations, but also enhanced the partnership between USAID and their Government of Senegal partners.
- Supporting - through facilitation, technical assistance, and/or funding - development of a local advisory group to lead implementation of local action plans.



To learn more about USAID/Senegal's Recommendation Workshops approach, see their [CLA Case Study](#).



DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION: CONSULTED

In Bolivia, a research consortium called Innova tested technological innovations to link supply and demand in agriculture. Innova used participatory methods like rapid reconnaissance surveys and technology fairs throughout project implementation, and wrote annual reports quantifying their progress. However, they found these reports were little used, and failed to capture how and why the agricultural technologies had evolved or adapted over time in response to farmer and agronomist feedback.

To create a more informative final report that could address these questions, Innova organized a workshop with grassroots technical experts and project staff, where they facilitated conversations about the critical turning points on the road to change. Researchers scribed throughout the two-day workshop, and reflected results to all participants at the end of the workshop. They then combined their notes to draft the report and shared it with all participants. Participants quickly responded with edits and recommendations, which were then incorporated by researchers before finalizing the report. The researchers noted that some of the feedback highlighted key insights they had missed in their write up, and that integrating them strengthened the overall report.²²

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DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION: INFORMED

Substance abuse coalitions in the Boston area conducted a survey of community members, then shared findings with relevant community groups. They reported that this demonstrated their ability to listen and respond to the community's needs, which in turn sparked greater commitment from community groups. For example, the local school system became open to further evaluative activities, and asked for assistance with analyzing student health data. Thus, the evaluation served not only as a knowledge-generating tool, but also as a tool for enhancing community engagement in substance abuse issues.²⁴

DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION: DELEGATED POWER

When evaluating their government to government (G2G) portfolio, USAID/Senegal adopted a collaborative approach to generating actionable recommendations to guide the next phase of the activity. The evaluators worked closely with the Senegal Ministry of Health and USAID across all aspects of the evaluation, but particularly around disseminating evaluation findings to co-create recommendations and action plans. The Mission hired an independent evaluation team, which refrained from making recommendations themselves. Instead, evaluators conducted a range of dissemination and utilization events so that stakeholders could develop their own actionable recommendations based on findings. These included a data walk with USAID staff; a range of stakeholder briefings on findings to obtain candid feedback on results; and a Recommendations Workshop bringing together local and national government stakeholders and USAID staff.

Throughout the one-day Recommendations Workshop, small groups were assigned sets of findings linked to each evaluation question. Small groups developed lists of recommendations based on the findings; validated recommendations in plenary; and then developed action plans that prioritized recommendations, assigned responsibility for implementation, and outlined timelines for action. These plans both guided adaptations to the partner's activity implementation, and informed USAID's design of the next phase of the activity.²³



ABOUT | This guidance note was developed by the Locally Led Development Initiatives in USAID's *Local, Faith, and Transformative Partnerships (LFT) Hub*. We value your feedback and invite you to share your examples of participatory approaches in evaluation and suggestions for improvement with us at localsustainability@usaid.gov.

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

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