Systems Practice at USAID

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SPRING Webinar
March 29, 2018
Achieving and sustaining any development outcome depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors.
Policy Commitment

[W]here sustainability is the ultimate objective, USAID is committed to employing all of our development resources to strengthen and use local systems.
“The sustainability and long-term success of development assistance ultimately requires local ownership and the strengthening of local systems to produce development outcomes.”

Integrating Systems into the Program Cycle
Current Vision

I believe each of our programs should look forward to the day when it can end. Around the world, we should measure our work by how far each investment moves us closer to that day.

-- Administrator Mark Green, August 7, 2017
1. Select the appropriate scale of the problem and bound the local system “as it is”
2. Seek out multiple perspectives
3. Develop an understanding of the system’s dynamics
4. Identify leverage points
1. Design a project in terms of promoting change in a single local system
   - Determine what needs to change
   - Select appropriate interventions, especially those that activate leverage points

2. Initiate interventions
1. Develop a monitoring plan attuned to systems change

2. Use multiple methods to capture the effects of interventions on the system

3. Learn more about the system through engagement
1. Alter interventions (or desired results) based on discoveries
2. Adjust engagement and discovery approaches as needed
Inspiration: Guides to Systems Practice

INTRODUCTION
USAID’s Program Cycle Operational Policy (ADS 201) provides guidance to missions and other operating units on how to implement the Program Cycle. A key principle of the Program Cycle is to “Promote Sustainability through Local Ownership.” The purpose of the Technical Note is to describe the “SRA Framework,” a practical methodology for supporting sustainability and local ownership in projects and activities through ongoing attention to local actors and local systems.

This Note is based on USAID’s 2014 Local Systems Framework, which establishes that achieving sustained improvement in development results depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected local actors. That document also states that USAID needs to improve its systems practice if it is to engage local actors and strengthen local systems more effectively and thus realize sustained results more consistently. The SRA Framework, also introduced in the Local Systems Framework, is intended as a simple and practical tool to promote good systems practice. The SRA Framework highlights five key dimensions of systems: Results, Roles, Relationships, Rules and Resources. Collectively these SRA can serve as a lens for assessing local systems and a guide for identifying and monitoring interventions designed to strengthen them.

This Technical Note is divided in two parts. The first part provides an introduction to the SRA Framework and the systems practice from which it emerges. The second part demonstrates how systems practice can be embedded in the Program Cycle by continuously applying the SRA, especially to the design, implementation, and monitoring of USAID projects and their accompanying activities.
Understanding the project context

Actual Context

Analysis

Synthesis
- Systems thinking
- Mapping

Understanding of the Context
- Underlying dynamics
- Leverage points
Developing a Systems Practice

Current challenges

- Better guidance on engaging systems
  - Where to intervene to make a difference
  - How to manage system change
    - System stewardship
    - Collective impact
- Socialize guidance on listening, discovering and adapting
Thank you.

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