ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF USAID'S YOUTH IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July 2018

BACKGROUND

USAID'S YOUTH IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

In October 2012, USAID launched its first-ever Youth in Development Policy ("the Youth Policy") with the goal to "improve the capacities and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to and benefit from more stable democracies and prosperous communities and nations." The Youth Policy is intended to cover all USAID sectors and regions and aims to achieve the following two objectives: "to strengthen youth programming, participation and partnership in support of Agency development objectives [DOs]"; and "to mainstream and integrate youth issues and engage young people across Agency initiatives and operations." The Youth Policy articulated several core requirements, such as the appointment of an Agency Youth Coordinator and Washington, D.C. bureau and office youth portfolio leads. Other key actions were strongly encouraged, including the appointment of mission youth portfolio leads, and the development of technical support products, training, and youth engagement mechanisms.

PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT

USAID's Office of Policy within the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL/P) strongly suggests conducting policy implementation assessments five years after the publication of each policy and strategy. This assessment of the Youth Policy was a collaborative process between PPL/P and an external team assembled through the Learning and Knowledge Management Mechanism (LEARN). The goals of the assessment were to identify progress, successes, challenges, and lessons learned during the first five years of policy implementation; to identify and recommend actions the Agency could take to improve implementation; and to generate knowledge about policy implementation more broadly.

This assessment examines programming that is both youth-focused (targeting youth as primary beneficiaries) and youth-inclusive (targeting a wider population but including youth in select components or as a cross-cutting issue). The assessment seeks to answer three main research questions:

1. To what extent have youth programming, participation, and partnerships been strengthened since the launch of the Youth Policy?
2. To what extent have youth issues been mainstreamed and integrated across Agency initiatives and processes since the launch of the Youth Policy?
3. What have been the leadership, organizational, and technical support structures for policy implementation, and how effective have these efforts been?

METHODS

A mixed-methods approach was used for the assessment including: key informant interviews and group discussions; review and scoring of USAID planning documents; examination of technical documents and reporting data; and site visits to USAID missions. The assessment team conducted interviews or facilitated group discussions (FGDs) with: 161 USAID staff members in Washington, D.C., and at missions; 104 implementing partner staff members in Washington, D.C., and in-country; and 82 young people. The assessment team reviewed 112 USAID planning documents including Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCSs), Project Appraisal Documents (PADs), and solicitations, as well as technical documents such as guidance and toolkits. Finally, the assessment team conducted site visits to the El Salvador, Honduras, Kenya, and Uganda Missions to understand more fully how these missions have programmed with and for youth.

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

CHANGES IN YOUTH PROGRAMMING, PARTICIPATION, AND PARTNERSHIPS

➤ **Awareness of and Attitudes about the Youth Policy:** The majority of key informants, both inside and outside USAID, felt that USAID has increased its focus on and prioritization of youth programming since the Youth Policy was issued. The Youth Policy signaled to USAID missions, implementing partners, developing country stakeholders, and other donors that engaging with youth, and the issues of importance to them, is critical to achieving development outcomes.

➤ **Quantity and Range of Youth Programming:** While there has been a growing understanding of the importance of investing in youth since the launch of the Youth Policy, some missions are deeply invested, while others have little or no focus on youth. Forty percent of missions included substantive youth programming in their CDCSs. Expenditure on youth programming spans all technical sectors, with greatest emphasis on democracy and governance, education, and employment.

➤ **Adoption of the Youth Policy Principles:** The seven Youth Policy principles provide a framework for understanding youth in development that had previously been absent or inconsistent in Agency youth programming. Most felt that the quality of youth programming was improving, and that USAID and its implementing partners increasingly understand the nuances of youth development. Part of this shift could be attributed to the launch of the YouthPower Project, which facilitates high quality implementation and evaluation. Although there is a widening sense of the importance of youth participation/engagement, both USAID and implementing partners still struggle to implement this principle.

➤ **Monitoring and Evaluation of Youth Programming:** Youth is a relatively new field in international development and there is consensus that much more (and better quality) research and evaluation are needed to continue to drive the field and establish best practices. Agency monitoring of youth programming has been challenging because reporting against the youth key issue is optional and not consistent over time, and the newly introduced standard indicators are relatively narrow.

MAINSTREAMING YOUTH IN SECTOR STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

➤ **Sectoral Priorities on Youth:** The degree of uptake of youth issues in USAID programming is diverse across technical sectors. Some sectors, such as workforce development and sexual and reproductive health (SRH), are strongly focused on youth. Another group of sectors, such as democracy, human rights and governance (DRG), countering violent extremism (CVE), and agriculture, frequently include youth as beneficiaries under broader DOs. There have been few instances of USAID technical guidance focused on integration of youth into sector priorities — with the notable exceptions of health and agriculture.

➤ **Regional Priorities on Youth:** In alignment with regional foreign policy efforts, some regional bureaus have prioritized youth both as an issue area and as a beneficiary group. The specific focus of the programming has varied across regions. For example, in Central America, youth programming has focused on crime and gang prevention as well as on stemming migration; while in Africa, youth programming has focused on youth education and employment/livelihoods. Regional bureaus have integrated youth programming into Agency initiatives such as Feed the Future (FTF) or President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR); however, they have not developed comprehensive regional youth strategies.

➤ **Cross-sectoral Youth Programming:** Holistic youth programming requires cross-sectoral collaboration. There have been significant advances in this respect, in spite of continued stove-piping of funds and organizational restructuring at USAID. Half of the youth solicitations reviewed for this assessment were cross-sectoral. This success is partly due to YouthPower, an Agency mechanism sponsored and funded by three bureaus that facilitates cross-sectoral work. There is a sense that staff are becoming more adept at cross-sectoral programming in spite of the extra work involved.

➤ **Age-disaggregation and Inclusive Development:** Our review of youth-focused solicitations revealed that roughly half called for age-disaggregation of data. However, age-disaggregation is rare outside youth-focused programming. Challenges to age-disaggregation include a poor understanding of what the data would be used for, age-bands that don't match the partner country's standards, and lack of birth records for vulnerable populations. Some missions have sought to work with inclusive development as an umbrella to integrate many population-based categories of special interest to USAID, including: youth; gender; lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI); disability; and indigenous peoples—though the degree to which these efforts are successful remains unclear.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE POLICY

➤ **Leadership and Personnel:** Some of the organizational and institutional supports called for in the Youth Policy have been implemented. A Youth Coordinator has been appointed and there is universal support for the position as a focal point for the Agency youth agenda. Many suspect, however, that the current location of this position limits the potential impact of the coordinator. Nearly all missions have an informally designated youth point of contact (YPOC), yet there is no uniform model for how missions should appoint and empower them. A minority of Washington, D.C. bureaus and offices have formally designated a YPOC.

➤ **Organizational Structures:** The Youth Corps — a dynamic, voluntary working group of Washington, D.C.-based specialists led by the Youth Coordinator — meets regularly in support of the Agency youth agenda, which includes organizing training, offering technical support to missions, and building external partnerships. Senior youth champions can be important advocates, but they have not yet congealed into a coherent group with a clear strategy or mandate. With few exceptions, bureaus are not systematically tracking youth programming and evaluations in their technical areas or regions.

➤ **Capacity to Implement the Policy**: Most informants feel that the Youth Policy remains current and timely, but that USAID must do more to fulfill the Youth Policy's vision. There is a consensus that more focused strategies and guidance on key technical areas should be developed and that the human capacity of the Agency to effectively implement and evaluate youth programming must be strengthened. Agency-led youth development training has been an effective way to socialize the Youth Policy and current best practices in youth development, but relatively few USAID staff have had the opportunity to participate. YouthPower, a $627 million USAID mechanism, has been enormously useful for the implementation of the Youth Policy. Missions have eagerly bought into the mechanism for implementation support and the Washington, D.C.-funded task orders manage large communities of practice and have produced many useful technical guides.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MISSION SITE VISITS

Highlights of promising practices at the four Mission site visits in El Salvador, Honduras, Kenya and Uganda include:

INTEGRATION AT THE STRATEGY LEVEL

➤ Uganda's CDCS not only emphasized the interrelated challenges of development through the horizontal and vertical integration of DOs and intermediate results (IRs), but also framed its solution to sustainable development through social inclusion, applying a gendered and youth-focused lens to its guiding principles and operational goals. Humanizing a country's development challenges through a clear, data-informed portrait—that of a 14-year-old girl—can be a powerful way to galvanize and ground a development agenda.

INTEGRATION AT THE PROJECT AND ACTIVITY LEVELS

➤ In El Salvador, attention to youth is embedded in the highest-level economic and security challenges; as a result, solutions are understood to be integrated and cross-sectoral. USAID/El Salvador takes a place-based approach that focuses on citizen security, rule of law, and economic growth, concentrating in "high crime locations with the potential to ensure synergies between crime prevention and economic growth objectives." USAID's interventions have contributed to reductions in violence, increased transparency, and the creation of over 22,000 new jobs.

INVESTING IN SUSTAINABLE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

➤ Listening to youth, engaging them, and supporting an inclusive platform for youth to lead development efforts is an excellent way to begin work. This sustainable platform can become an on-going network and resource for future USAID programming no matter the sector. In Kenya, the Yes Youth Can (YYC) Activity supported the creation of 23,000 village-level youth groups ("*bunges*") registered with the Kenyan government in 33 counties throughout the country, engaging over one million youth, making it one of the largest youth movements in the world. The *bunges* continue to operate after the end of the activity, and network representatives and leaders consider themselves partners in development with USAID and other donors.

IMPROVING YOUTH ECOSYSTEMS

➤ USAID/Honduras has created an innovative program, Proponte Más, that works with youth in a family-centered approach and recognizes that complex risk factors affecting youth and their families should be part of public policy debate and should be backed by reliable data. This activity built on the earlier Alianza Joven Honduras (AJH; Honduran Youth Alliance) Activity, which created "outreach centers" to provide youth-friendly spaces in 64 high-risk communities in Honduras. The centers enhanced the social and vocational skills of youth to improve their employability, while partnering with community members to foster civic cohesion.

INSTITUTIONALIZING MISSION LEADERSHIP ON YOUTH ISSUES

➤ An ambitious youth agenda requires the ability to hire sufficient youth advisors, and staffing structures to enable them to work across sectors. In USAID/Kenya, the senior youth and workforce development advisor, who also serves as the Mission's YPOC, is supported by a dedicated youth team, and is supplemented by a mission-wide youth working group, with staff representation across technical offices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the scale of issues affecting young people and its effect on development outcomes across all sectors, USAID should ensure a level of commitment and structure that is commensurate with these challenges and opportunities. Looking ahead, the Youth Policy remains in line with and relevant to Agency strategic development priorities for building sustainable, self-reliant countries. A set of recommendations is outlined below with high priority recommendations bolded and italicized.

1. **STRENGTHEN LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

   ➤ *Elevate the organizational profile and support structure for the Agency Youth Coordinator.*
   ➤ *Formalize and raise the profiles of YPOCs in bureaus and missions.*
   ➤ Provide progressive professional development experiences to enable staff to gain a set of specialized skills in youth development.

2. **ENHANCE TECHNICAL CAPACITY-BUILDING AND EXPERTISE**

   ➤ *Accelerate the rollout of Agency-led youth development training across regions and within select missions.*
   ➤ *Develop a series of detailed, focused technical guidance notes on youth in each of the main USAID development sectors relevant to youth.*
   ➤ USAID as a development agency should build technical expertise and increase its global leadership on urgent youth issues in partnership with host countries, the private sector, multilaterals, and other bilateral donors.

3. **PRIORITIZE MISSION NEEDS AND SUPPORT**

   ➤ *Provide input and oversight to missions as they develop their CDCSs to ensure meaningful and strategic consideration of youth and youth issues.*
   ➤ *Develop a Youth Corps strategic plan that prioritizes mission needs and digs deeper rather than wider on youth.*
   ➤ Develop and share with missions benchmarks for quality standards, differentiated by higher or lower levels of investment.
   ➤ Conduct a user analysis and improve mission access to youth-related technical resources.

4. **PROVIDE TARGETED ASSISTANCE FOR ENHANCING IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND NUANCED TARGETING**

   ➤ *Prioritize youth engagement in capacity-building efforts.*
   ➤ Deepen mechanisms for inclusive development, especially around gender and youth.

5. **ENHANCE MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING**

   ➤ *Coordinate and utilize more robust global tracking of youth programming for analysis and learning.*
   ➤ Mainstream age-disaggregated data collection and analysis.
   ➤ Designate and reward "champion missions" within a strengthened network of global sharing.