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Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCS) Development and Approval Process

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 201

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I. Overview

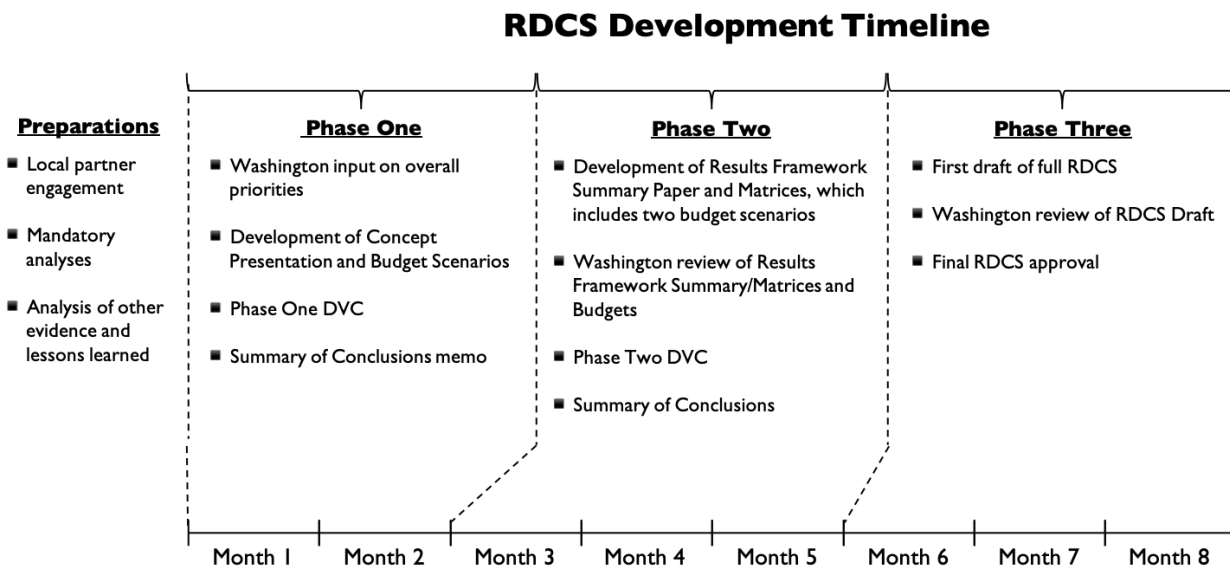
This Mandatory Reference to [ADS 201.3.2](#) describes the process for preparing, developing, and approving a Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCS). This process is designed to facilitate an iterative dialogue between each Regional Mission and USAID/Washington that results in clear decisions and Agency endorsement of a Regional Mission’s RDCS within a total time frame of eight months. To achieve this timeline, this process includes a series of time-bound milestones for Regional Missions, as well as time-bound review periods for USAID/Washington. It also emphasizes early collaboration and proactive dialogue so that when a Regional Mission submits each deliverable for review, the substantive issues are limited to those around which interested parties have not been able to reach agreement.

The RDCS process consists of three phases:

- Phase One – Initial Consultations and Parameter Setting (see **Section III**);
- Phase Two – Results Framework Development (see **Section IV**); and
- Phase Three – RDCS Preparation and Approval (see **Section V**).

In addition, Regional Missions should initiate preparations prior to launching Phase One (see **Section II** for additional guidance).

The graphic below illustrates the major milestones and timeframes associated with each phase of the RDCS process:



Regional Missions, as defined in this Mandatory Reference, are field-based platforms

that manage cross-border or multi-country programming and provide a range of regional functions based on the context and demands of Bilateral Missions in their area of responsibility. Regional Missions may also manage bilateral programming in non- or limited-presence countries under their purview.

As described in [ADS 201.3.2.3](#), this guidance articulates principles and requirements that can generally be customized to all regional contexts, including those with factors that contribute to a non-permissive environment. However, certain variations are appropriate since Regional Missions range widely in both function and operation.

II. Preparation for the RDCS Process

As described in **Section I**, the official RDCS process follows a prescribed timeline that should last no more than eight months. To maximize this compact process, Regional Missions should initiate preparations prior to its official launch. Ideally, Regional Missions should start preparing for the RDCS process after they conduct the mid-course stocktaking and/or the last portfolio review under their current RDCS.

During the preparation phase, which is sometimes called “Phase Zero,” a Regional Mission should do the following:

A. Internal Engagement with USAID Stakeholders

Regional Missions must consult relevant stakeholders, which, at a minimum, must include relevant Bilateral Missions, the Regional Bureau, PPL, and any relevant Pillar Bureaus. Consultations between the Regional Mission and relevant Bilateral Missions are particularly important to ensure that the proposed regional strategy both reinforces and is in coordination with relevant bilateral strategies.

B. External Engagement with Local Actors and Regional Partners

A core tenet of the self-reliance vision is building the commitment and capacity of local partners to chart their own development paths and implement and fund their own development solutions. To this end, Regional Missions should meaningfully collaborate with local stakeholders, including multilateral organizations, regional institutions, and other cross-border actors, in preparation for, and throughout, the RDCS process to develop a shared vision of self-reliance and create an RDCS that reflects a shared commitment to change. This engagement should include dialogue with relevant partner country governments, the private sector, civil society, faith-based organizations, multilateral organizations, regional institutions, and others. As part of this engagement process, Regional Missions should also look beyond their traditional group of local partners to new collaborators, especially those with deep roots in the communities that they support and who are committed to fostering self-reliance.

During this process, Regional Missions should also assess the potential for a regional multi-governmental organization to serve as the counterpart for a Regional Development Objective Agreement (Regional DOAG) during the life of the RDCS. A shared strategic vision embodied in the RDCS serves as the substantive basis and justification for a Regional DOAG.

C. Initiation of the Three Mandatory Analyses

Regional Missions should begin to conduct the following mandatory analyses before the launch of the RDCS process to ensure that they are completed as early in the process as possible, but no later than during Phase Two.

- **Gender Analysis:** Regional Missions must conduct a strategy-level gender analysis per [ADS 205](#) that provides insights about gender gaps and identifies possible entry points or opportunities to address gender equality and female empowerment in their RDCS. Regional Missions should tailor their analysis to look specifically at regional issues; *i.e.*, the regional gender analysis should not be a compilation of bilateral gender analyses. This analysis should also focus on the sectors in which the Regional Mission plans or proposes to work. Missions must use the findings in their gender analysis to inform strategic decision-making during RDCS development (*e.g.*, big-picture gender issues within the region as well as issues about which the Regional Mission needs to be mindful as it moves forward in Program Cycle implementation). Regional Missions are encouraged to use original analysis, supplemented by third-party sources where necessary.

Regional Missions must later build upon the strategy-level analysis during subsequent project and/or activity design processes (see [ADS 201sam](#) and [ADS 201.3.4.4](#) regarding gender analysis during the project and activity design, respectively. For additional guidance on the strategy-level (and other Program Cycle gender analyses), see [ADS 205, Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle](#) and the [Women's Economic Empowerment Act](#)).

- **Tropical Forests and Biodiversity Analysis:** Per [Foreign Assistance Act \(FAA\) Sections 118 and 119](#), Regional Missions must assess: 1) the actions necessary at the regional level to achieve conservation and sustainable management of tropical forests and biodiversity, and 2) the extent to which the actions proposed in their RDCS meet the needs that were identified. Regional analyses should be high-level analyses that look at relevant transboundary and regional biodiversity and forestry issues. The analysis must include all countries covered by the Regional Mission, including non-presence countries (NPCs). In addition, the analysis should not be a compilation of bilateral 118/119 analyses; however, the analysis may include

country-specific annexes if the Regional Mission and the Regional Bureau feel that it is necessary.

For additional guidance on the Tropical Forest and Biodiversity analysis, see [ADS 201mav, Foreign Assistance Act Sections 118 and 119 Tropical Forests and Biodiversity Analysis](#) and [Foreign Assistance Act Sections 118/119 Tropical Forests and Biodiversity Analysis Best Practices Guide](#).

- **Climate Change:** Per [Executive Order 13677](#), Regional Missions must assess climate-related risks and vulnerabilities in all strategies and related funding decisions, and address them as appropriate. Regional Missions must screen for mitigation opportunities for greenhouse gasses (GHGs) as well as climate risk at either the Regional Development Objective (RDO) or Intermediate Result (IR) level.

Regional Missions should have at least an initial draft of the climate change analysis completed by the beginning of Phase Two so that it informs the Results Framework. This analysis must include the Regional Mission's entire portfolio, including its work in, for example, NPCs. As with bilateral strategies, Regional Missions must integrate findings from their climate change analysis into their final RDCS and include the full analysis in an annex to the RDCS.

Regional Missions must later build on or update the strategy-level screening, as appropriate, in subsequent project and/or activity design processes (see [ADS 201sam](#) and [ADS 201.3.4.4](#) regarding climate risk assessments during project and activity design, respectively. For additional guidance on the strategy-level analysis, see [ADS 201mat, Climate Change in USAID Country/Regional Strategies](#)).

D. Assessing Evidence and Lessons Learned

Analyses ensure that RDCSs are evidence-based and that Regional Missions make strategic choices. Regional Missions should be strategic when planning analyses and set a clear analytic agenda for completing the mandatory analyses and other critical assessments to inform decision-making during the RDCS process. Because of the compact timeline associated with RDCS development and approval, Regional Missions should identify and use available analyses and evaluations in lieu of new analyses wherever feasible. However, if Regional Missions must conduct new analyses, they should identify the critical questions and gaps in information required to develop their RDCS. This agenda should include the following:

- Undertaking work to consolidate and synthesize evidence and lessons learned from: a) the implementation of prior RDCSs (or other strategic plans, such as Integrated Country Strategies (ICS) and interagency strategic plans);

- b) available analyses and evaluations, including those commissioned by other donors or organizations; and c) past portfolio reviews, RDCS stocktaking exercises, and the monitoring and evaluation of existing projects and activities.
- Reviewing the latest reports from the U.S. Department of State on [Fiscal Transparency](#), [Trafficking in Persons \(TIP\)](#), [International Religious Freedom](#) and the [Annual Report](#) of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to determine their relevance for the new strategy. Regional Missions that operate bilaterally in countries listed on the Tier 2 Watchlist or Tier 3 in the [Trafficking in Persons Report](#) must address trafficking in persons in their Bilateral Programming annexes.
 - Reviewing the Department of State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan (JSP); Administration-approved Regional and Sectoral Strategies; relevant Integrated Country Strategies; the Private Sector Engagement Policy, and Risk Appetite Statement (see [ADS 201.3.2.6](#) on Agency and inter-Agency strategies).
 - Reviewing USAID's [Acquisition and Assistance Strategy](#) to plan how to use co-creation and innovative procurement vehicles and engage with local systems and new and underutilized partners, to advance sustainability under the RDCS.
 - If considering the use of direct assistance to a partner government or regional institution (G2G), conducting "Phase One" of the G2G risk assessment process, during which eligibility is confirmed and guiding parameters for the partnership are established (see [ADS 220, Strengthening the Capacity of Partner Governments through G2G Assistance](#) for additional guidance).

III. Phase One: Initial Consultations and Parameter Setting

A. Overview of Phase One

Phase One marks the official start of the RDCS process. Responsible Regional Missions and Regional Bureaus should therefore initiate this process approximately eight months before they expect RDCS approval. The objective of Phase One is to enable a formal dialogue between Regional Missions, relevant Bureaus and Independent Offices in Washington (B/IOs), and interagency stakeholders as relevant, that results in clear parameters for the RDCS process in Phase Two and Phase Three.

The guiding questions of this parameter setting phase are the following: 1) What does the Regional Mission need to know to most judiciously invest its time in

preparing the RDCS? and 2) What do Washington OUs need to know to support RDCS development? Phase One should take approximately two months.

Phase One has five major milestones:

- 1) Washington input on overall priorities (see **Section III.B**);
- 2) Development of a Concept Presentation, which includes two budget scenarios (see **Section III.C** on the Concept Presentation and **Section III.D** on the budget scenarios);
- 3) Washington review of the Concept Presentation (see **Section III.E**);
- 4) Delivery of the Concept Presentation via Digital Video Conference (hereinafter referred to as the Phase One DVC) (see **Section III.F**); and
- 5) A Summary of Conclusions (SOC) memo (see **Section III.G**).

During Phase One, the Regional Mission—through the responsible Regional Bureau—should collaborate with designated Points of Contact (POCs) from all Pillar Bureaus, the Bureau for Management, the Office of Budget and Resource Management (BRM) and other relevant B/IOs, in addition to the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL). POCs are responsible for coordinating input or feedback within their B/IO and ensuring that feedback submitted to the Regional Bureau reflects the B/IO's corporate position and not that of individual perspectives. PPL is responsible for maintaining the POC email list.

Phase One culminates in agreement between USAID/Washington and the Regional Mission on resource parameters, priorities, and sectoral focus for the RDCS, and the Regional Mission's plan for developing the RDCS, including expectations for Washington support. USAID/Washington's active engagement in Phase One is an essential part of the RDCS process. In particular, it is important to note the following:

- Phase One presents the primary opportunity for Washington OUs, interagency stakeholders as relevant, and the Regional Mission to engage and make decisions on issues of mutual interest.
- Concurrence reached in Phase One represents Agency endorsement of the Regional Mission's parameters for the RDCS. The Regional Bureau documents this agreement in the Phase One SOC memo.
- While there will be an opportunity for further refinement during Phase Two, discussion of new sectors or priorities may not be contemplated absent significant changes in regional context, policy, or funding levels.

B. Washington Input on Overall Priorities

Phase One officially begins when the responsible Regional Bureau issues a [mandatory questionnaire](#) to relevant B/IOs (via the POC email list described in **Section III.A**) to solicit their priorities for RDCS development. B/IOs must respond to the questionnaire within five business days. The launch date of the eight month RDCS process is the date the Regional Bureau issues the questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather input on USAID/Washington's priorities and expectations for Regional Missions to consider throughout RDCS development. In some cases, the Regional Bureau may also meet with the Regional Mission and relevant B/IOs to further discuss priorities. The Regional Bureau must schedule the Phase One DVC within two months after issuing the questionnaire.

C. Development of the Concept Presentation

Based on the Regional Mission's assessment of its Regional Landscape Analysis, supplemental data and analyses, evidence and learning from implementation, input from the partner government and local stakeholders about priorities, and USAID/Washington's input on overall priorities, Regional Missions must prepare a Concept Presentation slide deck. In addition, Regional Missions must prepare two budget scenarios (see **Section D**) and a [Regional Operations Map](#) that outlines its current footprint in the region. Regional Missions must submit the slide deck, operations map, and budget scenarios to the responsible Regional Bureau 10 business days in advance of the Phase One presentation.

The Concept Presentation slide deck must cover the following:

- A description of the most salient regional context features that informed the Regional Mission's strategic choices, including a donor snapshot (see PPL's [Development Cooperation Landscape Tool](#)), Clear Choice implications, an assessment of self-reliance, and other features critical to understanding the strategic operating environment;
- Priority choices or focus areas for the new strategy and how they will advance self-reliance;
- An overview of the Regional Mission's footprint (e.g., geographic area of responsibility, technical sectors covered, support services provided, etc.) for the purpose of outlining the Regional Mission's structure and operations (and informing decision-making in the process to follow);
- The Regional Mission's preliminary strategic vision and approach, as well as discussion of how these strategic choices align with the Mission's resource allocations;

- A description of how the vision and priorities for the new strategy will advance overall foreign policy, economic, and development priorities of the USG, particularly the Journey to Self-Reliance;
- A description of what is different about the new RDCS versus the current RDCS;
- A description of key lessons learned from implementation of the current RDCS (*e.g.*, from evaluations, stocktakings, learning exercises, etc.) and how this evidence helped inform the Regional Mission's vision for the new strategy;
- The two budget scenarios (see **Section D** below), in addition to staffing considerations for the strategy;
- A short narrative regarding the two budget scenarios annexed to the presentation;
- Input from USAID/Washington and the Regional Mission's response;
- Any requests for support from USAID/Washington;
- The Regional Mission's timeline for preparing the RDCS; and
- The status of the mandatory analyses and plans for any supplementary analyses.

See this required [Phase One slide deck template](#) for additional guidance on the presentation. Also see **Section D** below for additional guidance on the two budget scenarios and associated narrative.

D. Development of Budget Scenarios

As described in **Section C**, Regional Missions must develop two budget scenarios and an associated narrative for the Phase One Concept Presentation. Regional Missions must develop these scenarios in alignment with Administration priorities and the Agency's goals, based on parameters provided by BRM. (Note: The collaboration among Regional Missions, Regional Bureaus, and BRM on budget issues begins in this phase and continues throughout the RDCS process as budgetary issues or questions arise.)

BRM Parameters for Budget Scenarios: The Regional Mission must contact BRM to request resource parameters for its two required budget scenarios. BRM must then provide historical funding levels for the Regional Mission that include topline and sector allocations. BRM must base these historical numbers on a rolling average of

budgets for three years calculated in one of two ways: 1) Regional Mission levels in the three most recent reports required by Section 653(a) of the [Foreign Assistance Act, as amended](#); or 2) Regional Mission levels in the two most recent reports under Section 653(a) and the most recent Congressional Budget Justification (CBJ). The second method is typically appropriate where the most recent CBJ significantly increased or decreased a Regional Mission's allocation. Once BRM, the Regional Mission, and the responsible Regional Bureau reach agreement on which method to use, BRM must send the parameters to the Regional Mission, with a copy to the Regional Bureau.

Budget Scenario One: Using the BRM-provided budget parameters, the Regional Mission must then construct a "Scenario One" budget. This scenario should be consistent with BRM-provided historical levels and reflect Congressional directives. In exceptional cases in which a Regional Mission expects an extreme shift in budget resources during the lifetime of the RDCS, the Regional Mission should work with BRM, PPL, and the responsible Regional Bureau to establish a budget scenario appropriate to its context.

Budget Scenario Two: Unlike the first scenario, the Regional Mission should not base its second scenario on the historical topline amount. It should instead show where the Regional Mission proposes to increase or decrease funding—compared to Scenario One—to address self-reliance in countries across the region. If the Regional Mission plans to transition out of one or more sectors, the Regional Mission must reflect the resources associated with this transition in its second budget scenario. This budget must embody the principles of a Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB) approach and therefore be irrespective of budget history, previous directives, mortgages, and pipelines. This scenario does not need to reflect anticipated Congressional directives, as required for Scenario One.

Associated Budget Narrative: In addition to the two budget tables, the Regional Mission must also develop a one-to-two paragraph budget narrative that describes the differences between the two scenarios, how each scenario reflects the Regional Mission's objectives, and the trade-offs made in each. Regional Missions must include this narrative as an annex to the Concept Presentation.

E. Washington Review of Concept Presentation

The responsible Regional Bureau must share the Regional Mission's draft Concept Presentation, its two budget scenarios, and the [Regional Operations Map](#), along with an Issues Matrix/feedback tracker, to all relevant B/IO POCs via the R/CDCS Working Group email listserv, an email list maintained by PPL. The Regional Bureau must ensure that the Concept Presentation complies with Phase One requirements prior to sending this email. These POCs should then distribute these documents within their B/IOs and gather/consolidate internal responses. Feedback from Washington B/IOs should reflect the B/IO's corporate position and not that of

individual perspectives. Washington B/IOs must provide input within five business days and provide no more than five comments total that represent the most critical feedback. If a B/IO does not provide feedback within five business days, it is presumed to have no comments.

The Regional Bureau must then collate and prioritize feedback on the Concept Presentation and, if necessary, coordinate discussions with relevant B/IOs to resolve any outstanding questions or issues. The Regional Bureau must share B/IO feedback on the Concept Presentation with the Regional Mission at least three business days prior to the DVC.

Wherever possible, the Regional Mission should discuss and/or resolve any comments submitted by B/IOs prior to the DVC. In the event that a Regional Mission is unable to address or resolve a comment with the relevant B/IO during this period, the Regional Mission should seek resolution during the DVC.

F. Phase One DVC

The objective of the Phase One DVC is to achieve agreement on the parameters for the RDCS discussed during the Phase One process. The Regional Mission Director (or designee) and the Assistant Administrator (AA) (or designee) for the responsible Regional Bureau must co-chair the DVC. The Regional Bureau must invite POCs from relevant B/IOs, as well as other stakeholders as relevant (which may include stakeholders from the U.S. Embassy or the U.S. Department of State).

During the DVC, the Regional Mission must address required content described in **Section III.C**, which includes a summary of comments raised during consultations with B/IOs and the Regional Mission's initial response. If the Regional Mission was unable to resolve any comments prior to the DVC, it should seek resolution during the DVC.

G. Phase One Summary of Conclusions Memo

The final step of Phase One is the drafting, dissemination, and approval of the SOC memo. The cleared SOC represents Agency endorsement of the parameters that will govern the RDCS process. Final approval should occur no more than 10 business days following the Phase One DVC.

The Regional Bureau must draft the SOC and obtain input from the Regional Mission before it circulates the memo to B/IO stakeholders for clearance. The memo must discuss key decisions made during Phase One, including during the DVC. The SOC should be approximately three pages, excluding annexes, and should not be a transcript of the meeting, but reflect key decisions and follow-up actions. Specifically, the memo must address the following:

- Regional Context and Journey to Self-Reliance Assessment: A brief description of the most salient features in the regional context and the Regional Mission's assessment of the Landscape Analysis, including implications for the new strategy.
- Regional Operations: Any key takeaways from the Regional Mission's presentation of its current footprint (e.g., geographic areas of responsibility, regional programming, technical support, pooled support services, regional convening, etc.).
- Regional Mission's Vision and Strategic Priorities/Choices: Agreement on the Regional Mission's vision for the strategy, including the strategic choices/priorities to advance self-reliance, as agreed to during the Phase One DVC.
- Washington Priorities and Feedback: Agreement on Washington priorities from the questionnaire, review of the Concept Presentation, and Phase One DVC conversation.
- Budget Scenarios: A summary of the Regional Mission's two budget scenarios, including any discussions about strategic resource shifts.
- Strategic Alignment and Policy/Strategy Considerations: A brief description of how the Regional Mission's strategic vision and priorities will advance the USG's overall foreign policy, economic, and development priorities.
- Timeline and Duration of Strategy: Agreement on the duration of the strategy and preliminary timeline for completing each phase of the RDCS process.
- Support from USAID/Washington: Agreement on critical support that B/IOs have pledged to provide to the Regional Mission, including with regards to analyses/assessments and development of the Results Framework (RF).

The Regional Bureau must circulate the SOC to PPL, BRM, and relevant B/IO stakeholders for clearance. The Regional Bureau, in consultation with PPL, should determine which B/IOs should also clear the memo. All stakeholder B/IOs should receive an informational copy.

Clearing B/IOs must provide their clearance or offer any substantive comments within three business days. If a B/IO does not respond within three business days, the B/IO is presumed to have provided clearance by default. Once cleared, a Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA) in the Regional Bureau or his or her designee must provide final approval of the SOC and send it to the Regional Mission.

IV. Phase Two: Results Framework Development

A. Overview of Phase Two

The objective of Phase Two is to gain Agency agreement on the approaches the Regional Mission will use to advance the Journey to Self-Reliance within its partner countries given the parameters identified during Phase One. During Phase Two, the Regional Mission finalizes its mandatory analyses, reviews other types of evidence and information, including from monitoring and evaluation, establishes its initial development hypotheses, prepares its RF Summary Paper and Matrices based on these hypotheses, finalizes the budget scenarios, and outlines the next steps to prepare the full RDCS. During this phase, Regional Missions also engage with stakeholders to discuss strategic choices and priorities to ensure that the RDCS reflects alignment with local priorities.

This phase includes four milestones:

- 1) Development of the RF Summary Paper and Matrices (see **Section IV.B**);
- 2) Washington review of the RF Summary Paper and Matrices (see **Section IV.C**);
- 3) The Phase Two DVC (see **Section IV.D**); and
- 4) The SOC memo (see **Section IV.E**).

During Phase Two, the Regional Mission and responsible Regional Bureau should collaborate with relevant stakeholder B/IO POCs that have critical equities in the subject RDCS (in addition to PPL). The Regional Mission should also consult with BRM and relevant B/IOs after drafting its RF to discuss any budgetary questions or concerns regarding the budget parameters identified in the SOC from Phase One.

During this phase, there should be no additional questions about the main priorities or sectors of focus in which the Regional Mission is expected to work, as these decisions were approved in the Phase One SOC.

B. Development of the Results Framework Summary Paper and Matrices

The Regional Mission must develop an RF Summary Paper and a set of RF Matrices (about 10 to 15 pages total). The Regional Mission must submit these documents to the responsible Regional Bureau for circulation within two months after the approval of the Phase One SOC.

The RF Summary Paper and associated Matrices define the Regional Mission's highest-order Goal and Regional Development Objectives (RDOs) that it, in collaboration with its development partners, will work to address during the strategy

period. They also outline the Regional Mission's initial development hypotheses regarding how and why, and under what conditions, it believes—based on the given parameters and best available information—that it will be successful in advancing each of its RDOs. The RF Summary Paper and Matrices are the basis for the final draft of the RDCS. They also provide the organizing framework for the Regional Mission-wide Performance Management Plan (PMP) that the Regional Mission must develop following the RDCS process (see [ADS 201.3.2.15](#) on the PMP), as well as learning and adapting that occurs throughout RDCS implementation.

The RF Summary Paper must include the following:

- Articulation of the highest-order RDCS Goal;
- A high-level summary of the regional context, including an assessment of how the priorities of the government, civil society, faith-based organizations, multilateral organizations, regional institutions, and the private sector in the partner country align with, or diverge from, the Regional Mission's self-reliance approach;
- The rationale for selected RDOs and Intermediate Results (IRs), including how each RDO links to the RDCS Goal and will increase self-reliance, how the RDOs differ from the previous RDCS, why the problems underpinning each RDO should be addressed at the regional level, and other factors as relevant that influenced their selection;
- An update to the Phase One schedule for completing planned analyses and evaluations; and
- An RF diagram that follows the guidance in [ADS 201.3.2.12](#).

The RF Matrices are RDO-specific tables that include the following:

- Results statements;
- Development hypothesis statements and narratives;
- Illustrative indicators for IRs and Sub-IRs;
- Linkages between results (e.g., among IRs and between the IRs and the RDO);
- Relationships to the Journey to Self-Reliance Landscape Analysis;
- Evidence sources, including evidence from implementation;

- Identification of strategic partners, including local actors that are critical to helping USAID achieve the stated results, or that advance or impede the Journey to Self-Reliance;
- Identification of donors and other development actors;
- A preliminary learning agenda with notional questions that arise from knowledge and evidence gaps in the development hypotheses;
- Critical assumptions and risk factors;
- An annex that includes a draft Goal-Mission Objective structure for inclusion in the relevant U.S. Embassy's ICS, as described in [ADS 201.3.2.6](#); and
- An annex with a preliminary [Index of Existing and Planned Projects](#). Missions should only include this annex if they anticipate developing projects during CDCS implementation (see [ADS 201.3.2.14](#)).

See the [RF Summary and Matrix Template](#) for additional guidance on both of these documents.

C. Washington Review of Results Framework Paper and Matrices

The Regional Mission must submit its RF Summary Paper and Matrices to the responsible Regional Bureau for review at least one month before the Phase Two DVC. The Regional Bureau must review these documents to ensure compliance with Phase Two requirements. The Regional Bureau must then circulate these documents, along with an Issues Matrix, to B/IO POCs for feedback via the CDCS Working Group listserv.

These B/IOs must then gather internal feedback and submit comments (cleared at the B/IO level) to the Regional Bureau via the Issues Matrix. B/IOs must conduct this review within seven business days. If a B/IO does not provide comments within seven business days, the B/IO is presumed to have provided concurrence by default. The Regional Mission should also consult with BRM to revalidate the budget scenarios. The Regional Bureau may wish to convene a meeting to review comments or to ensure that submitted comments represent the B/IO's corporate position.

Key questions Washington B/IOs should consider in their review include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Does the RDCS Goal align with national priorities and support the USG's policy interests, and will it advance or contribute to the partner countries' overall Journey to Self-Reliance?

- Does the overall RDCS development hypothesis present a plausible and feasible approach for advancing the RDCS Goal? Is the development hypothesis and associated narrative based on development theory, practice, literature, and experience? Does the development hypothesis narrative explain why and how the proposed investments from USAID and others will collectively contribute to, or lead to, achieving the RDOs?
- Has the Regional Mission provided a rationale and management plan for any proposed integrated or cross-sectoral RDOs?
- Do the IRs and sub-IRs logically contribute to the achievement of the RDOs? Are the IRs focused, feasible, and measurable?
- Does the budget scenario reflect the RDCS' strategic vision and priorities?
- Is the RF based on evidence and best practice?
- Do the learning questions reflect key knowledge and/or evidence gaps in the development hypotheses that underpin each RDO?
- Do the identified assumptions and/or risks reflect factors that may affect the success of the hypotheses that underpin each RDO?

All reviewing B/IOs are required to classify their feedback as a “significant issue,” a “concern,” or a “general comment”:

- 1) “Significant issues” are issues a Regional Mission must address for the Agency to approve the strategy (e.g., a serious concern regarding the logic or feasibility of a proposed strategic or technical approach, the alignment of the proposed approach with an Administration or Agency policy or strategy, or compliance with the guidance herein). Significant issues must include a recommended resolution and proposed support that Washington B/IOs can offer, if appropriate, to address the issue.
- 2) “Concerns” reflect suggestions that would improve the clarity of the strategy (e.g., an important technical clarification).
- 3) “General comments” reflect positive feedback to commend Regional Missions.

B/IOs may provide no more than five comments total, including general comments. Regional Bureaus, in consultation with PPL, may also choose to reclassify their feedback if the content does not align with the definitions above. The Regional

Bureau must inform reviewing B/IOs of any reclassification. PPL will mediate any disagreements.

The Regional Bureau should consolidate and review comments from Washington B/IO stakeholders within three business days and flag any concerns regarding the issues that were raised or the classification of issues as necessary. If needed, the Regional Bureau may have an extra 10 business days to facilitate further consultations between the Regional Mission and relevant B/IOs. The Regional Bureau should work with the Mission to document responses to Washington B/IO feedback in the Issues Matrix in advance of the DVC. This best practice enables all parties to focus the Phase Two DVC on unresolved issues.

Occasionally, disagreements between the Regional Bureau and other B/IOs may persist at the working level over a particular significant issue. In these cases, the B/IO that submitted the issue may re-submit it after obtaining the endorsement of the responsible DAA (or Director, if an Independent Office), who must affirm that the issue represents a significant priority of the B/IO. If, after this, agreement is still not possible, the Regional Bureau should add the issue to the agenda for the Phase Two DVC. Review of the RF Summary and Matrices, the consolidation of Washington inputs, and resolution of issues should therefore take up to 20 business days (*i.e.*, seven days for review, three days to consolidate comments, and 10 days to resolve outstanding issues, if necessary).

D. Phase Two DVC

The objective of the Phase Two DVC is to achieve agreement on the approaches that the Regional Mission will use to advance its highest-order Goal and the Journeys to Self-Reliance of its partner countries. The Regional Mission Director (or designee) and the AA (or designee) for the responsible Regional Bureau must co-chair the DVC. The Regional Bureau must invite B/IO POCs identified in the SOC from Phase One, in addition to PPL, BRM, and other stakeholders as relevant (which may include stakeholders from the U.S. Embassy and/or the U.S. Department of State). As resources permit, Regional Mission leadership may opt to travel to Washington for the Phase Two DVC.

During the DVC, the Regional Mission must present high-level information from their RF Summary Paper and Matrices, including the following:

- A summary of the parameters identified in Phase One that informed the Regional Mission's approach;
- The RDCS Goal and how it aligns with national priorities and supports USG policy interests, and is informed by Landscape Analysis sub-dimensions or metrics;

- The overall RF, including what is new in terms of focus, partners, approaches and/or responses to changes in context;
- RDO-specific presentations that include the development hypothesis for each RDO, how the selected approach will contribute to and advance the partner countries' Journeys to Self-Reliance, how other stakeholders will contribute to this RDO, and critical assumptions and risks;
- USAID/Washington's significant issues and the Regional Mission's response; and
- The planned completion date for the RDCS, next steps, and any additional support needed to complete the RDCS in a timely manner.

See the required [Phase Two slide deck template](#) for additional guidance.

The Regional Mission and B/IOs should endeavor to resolve outstanding issues following the DVC. The Regional Bureau must submit issues that cannot be resolved through discussions with the Regional Mission, the Regional Bureau, and B/IO stakeholders within 10 business days following the DVC to the formal Issues Resolution process described in **Section VIII** of this reference.

E. Phase Two Summary of Conclusions Memo

The Regional Bureau must prepare the SOC for Phase Two within 10 business days from the date of the DVC. The cleared SOC represents Agency endorsement of the Regional Mission's focus and chosen strategic approach and authorizes the Regional Mission to proceed with developing the final RDCS. The SOC should be approximately four pages, excluding annexes, and should not be a transcript of the meeting, but reflect key decisions and follow-up actions.

The Phase Two SOC must succinctly address the following decision points:

- Goal, Strategic Priorities, and Regional Development Objectives: Agreement on the RDCS Goal, RDOs, and strategic priorities.
- Shifts in Strategic Approach/Programming: Agreement on major shifts in strategic approaches and programming, including transitioning in or out of sectors, if applicable.
- Significant Issues and Resolution: A summary of the Regional Mission's responses to, and agreement on, any significant issues raised during Phase Two (including during the DVC).

- Budget Parameters: A summary of the budget parameters, including discussions regarding relief from Congressional directives, if applicable.
- Timeline: Agreement on updates to the schedule of tasks for completion of the RDCS agreed upon in the DVC.
- USAID/Washington Clearance in Subsequent Phases: Agreement on which B/IOs will clear products during Phase Three.

The Regional Bureau must obtain input from the Regional Mission before circulating the draft SOC to B/IO stakeholders for clearance. After receiving and incorporating feedback from the Regional Mission, the Regional Bureau must send the SOC for clearance to PPL, BRM, and relevant B/IOs that raised significant issues during the Phase Two review. The Regional Bureau, in consultation with PPL, should determine if any other B/IOs should also clear the memo. The Regional Bureau must also share the cleared SOC with the R/CDCS Working Group listserv for information purposes.

Clearing B/IOs must provide clearance or offer any substantive comments within three business days. If a B/IO or designee does not provide clearance or offer substantive comments within three business days, the B/IO is presumed to have provided clearance by default. Once cleared, the Regional Bureau DAA provides final approval of the SOC and sends it to the Regional Mission. Generally, final approval should occur no more than 10 business days following the Phase Two DVC absent an Issues Resolution process per **Section VIII**.

Barring significant changes in the regional context between Phases Two and Three, Phase Two is USAID/Washington's last opportunity to raise significant issues. Significant issues that were not raised during Phase Two may not be considered during Phase Three, except for any significant issues that arise related to compliance with Phase Three requirements.

V. Phase Three: RDCS Preparation and Approval

A. Overview of Phase Three

The objective of Phase Three is to prepare and approve the full RDCS, which represents Agency endorsement of the Regional Mission's focus and chosen strategic approach. During Phase Three, the Regional Mission applies findings from additional analyses and consultations, further refines its overall development hypothesis and associated Results Framework and submits the full RDCS to the Regional Bureau under Chief of Mission authority. Phase Three culminates in the final approval of a Regional Mission's RDCS by the responsible Regional Bureau AA and PPL's Assistant to the Administrator (AtA), and subsequent dissemination of the

RDCS. Phase Three should begin approximately three months prior to expected RDCS approval.

Phase Three includes the following milestones:

- 1) Development of the first draft of the full RDCS (see **Section V.B**);
- 2) Washington review of the draft RDCS (see **Section V.C**);
- 3) Submission of the final RDCS (see **Section V.D**); and
- 4) Final approval of the RDCS (see **Section V.E**).

During Phase Three, the Regional Mission and responsible Regional Bureau should collaborate with POCs from B/IOs that raised significant issues during Phase Two, in addition to PPL. The Regional Mission should also work with BRM to discuss any remaining budgetary questions or concerns and review the draft RDCS budget.

During this phase, the review is focused on ensuring that the Regional Mission has adequately addressed any significant issues raised during Phase Two. No new significant issues may be raised, except those related to compliance with Phase Three requirements.

B. Development of the First Draft of the Full RDCS

The Regional Mission must develop a first draft of the full RDCS that further refines and expands upon the RF Summary Paper and Matrices. This draft must include all content of the RDCS as described in the [RDCS Outline Template](#), including all required annexes and any optional annexes. The full RDCS should be approximately 20 to 25 pages, excluding annexes. If a Regional Mission wishes to include topics in the RDCS that are not already covered in the outline, the Regional Mission must communicate this with PPL and the corresponding Regional Bureau as early as possible. The Regional Mission must submit the full draft to the responsible Regional Bureau at least six weeks before RDCS approval is expected.

C. Washington Review of the RDCS Draft

Once the Regional Mission has submitted its first draft of the full RDCS, the Regional Bureau must review it to ensure compliance with Phase Three requirements. The Mission must then circulate the draft, along with the Phase Two Issues Matrix, to the R/CDCS Working Group listserv. However, only PPL, BRM, and those B/IOs that raised significant issues during Phase Two may clear the final RDCS. B/IOs must then gather internal responses and submit feedback to the Regional Bureau within five business days of receiving the draft RDCS. During this time, B/IOs should review the full RDCS to ensure that the Regional Mission has

adequately addressed any significant issues that were previously raised during the RDCS process.

No new significant issues may be raised at this time unless they are related to compliance with the guidance for Phase Three described herein. For example, if the draft is missing required content in the RDCS Outline, PPL or the Regional Bureau may flag the omission as a new significant issue. If a B/IO does not provide feedback within five business days, the B/IO is presumed to have no comments.

The Regional Bureau must consolidate and review comments from B/IO stakeholders, flag any concerns regarding the issues that were raised, and facilitate further consultations between the Regional Mission and B/IOs as necessary. Occasionally, disagreements between the Regional Bureau and other B/IOs may persist at the working level over a particular significant issue. In these cases, the B/IO that submitted the issue may re-submit the significant issue after obtaining the endorsement of the responsible DAA (or Director, if an Independent Office) or designee, who must affirm that the issue represents a significant priority of the B/IO. If, after this, agreement still is not possible within five business days of the Regional Bureau receiving the Issues Matrix, then the Regional Bureau must submit the issue for resolution through the Issues Resolution process per **Section VIII** of this reference.

Review of the draft RDCS and consolidation of Washington inputs should take approximately 10 business days.

D. Submission of the Final RDCS

The Regional Mission has three weeks to incorporate final comments, if any, and make necessary revisions to the draft RDCS. It must then submit the final RDCS to the Regional Bureau for approval.

E. Final RDCS Approval

The Regional Bureau must circulate the full RDCS along with an Action Memorandum for clearance by BRM and any other B/IOs that raised significant issues during Phase Two. The Action Memorandum must specify the expiration date of the RDCS, the date by which the final external and internal versions will be posted on USAID websites (see **Section VII**), and the proposed timing of any expected check-ins with USAID/Washington during strategy implementation, including the mid-course stocktaking exercise. Responsible B/IOs must provide clearance or offer any substantive comments within five business days. If a B/IO does not provide clearance within five business days, the B/IO is presumed to have provided clearance by default. After BRM and any responsible B/IOs have cleared the RDCS, the Regional Bureau must submit the package for final approval by the Regional Bureau AA, followed by the PPL AtA.

VII. Post-Approval: Dissemination of the RDCS

A. Process for Posting Internal and External RDCSs to USAID Websites

Within 30 business days of RDCS approval, Regional Missions must prepare and format final internal and external versions of their RDCS for posting on USAID's websites in accordance with the requirements in **Section B** below. In addition, Regional Missions must submit the external version for co-approval by the Regional Bureau AA, followed by the PPL AtA, prior to submitting these versions for posting.

- Internal Version: The internal version is posted on the USAID websites, [ProgramNet](#) and [USAID Pages](#). These websites are only viewable by USAID staff and can host RDCSs that contain Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) information.
- External Version: The external version is posted on the USAID websites, [USAID.gov](#) and the [Development Experience Clearinghouse \(DEC\)](#), in addition to [ProgramNet](#).

In order to post the RDCS on these websites, Regional Missions must submit the final, approved versions to their Regional Bureaus, which must then coordinate with PPL and the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) to post these versions on relevant websites. For additional guidance on the step-by-step process for posting these versions on internal and external USAID websites, see [R/CDCS Resource: Posting Internal and External Versions of the R/CDCS on USAID Websites](#).

B. Formatting Requirements for Internal and External RDCSs

Missions must format the internal and external versions of their final RDCSs in accordance with these requirements:

Category	Internal Version	External Version
Content	The "internal" version is the full RDCS document, with all annexes, that is approved at the end of the RDCS process.	The "external" RDCS is a sanitized version of the internal RDCS that does not include any SBU information. In addition, this version must include the Climate Change Analysis and Regional Operations Map as annexes; all other annexes must be removed.

Category	Internal Version	External Version
		(For additional tips on removing SBU information for the external version, see Annex 1 in R/CDCS Resource: Posting Internal and External Versions of the R/CDCS on USAID Websites.)
Header/Footer	Missions must mark the header and footer on all pages of the internal version as “Sensitive But Unclassified.”	Missions must mark the cover page of the external version as follows: 1) “Unclassified” in the header; and 2) “Approved for Public Release” in the footer.
Section 508 Compliance	Missions must ensure that internal and external versions of their RDCS are compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. § 794d). See Annex III: Tips for Making a CDCS 508 Compliant for additional guidance.	
Cover Page	Missions must use one of the approved Cover Page templates in Annex II: Template Cover Pages .	
Overall Branding, including logo, colors, typeface, and photography	Missions must ensure that the USAID logo, colors, typeface and photography in both versions of their RDCS conform to standards established in the USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide .	
File Name	Missions must use the following naming convention: Internal-SBU-RDCS-Country-Month-Year of Expiration	Missions must use the following naming convention: RDCS-Mission-Month-Year of Expiration

For additional guidance on the requirements for formatting final versions of an RDCS, see [R/CDCS Resource: Posting Internal and External Versions of the R/CDCS on USAID Websites](#).

VIII. Issues Resolution Process

In the event that a Regional Bureau and a B/IO cannot come to agreement on a significant issue within 10 business days during Phase Two or Phase Three according to **Sections IV.D** or **V.C**, the issue owner's AA must escalate the issue as described below:

- If, after 10 business days of negotiation between the DAAs, agreement has not been reached on the significant issue, the AA or designee of the B/IO that has the significant issue must contact the responsible Regional Bureau AA and the regional backstop in PPL to schedule a mediated discussion.
- PPL's regional backstop must then schedule a meeting, mediated by PPL, no more than five business days after the initial request. PPL may request position papers before the meeting.
- During the meeting, the Regional Bureau AA and the AA of the B/IO that has the significant issue must make recommendations on a resolution.
- If concurrence is achieved on a resolution, the PPL regional backstop should document the agreed-upon resolution in an Information Memorandum within five business days. This memo must be cleared by the issue owner's AA, the Regional Bureau AA, and PPL's AtA and become part of the Regional Mission's RDCS file.
- If the Regional Bureau AA or the AA of the B/IO that has a significant issue does not concur on a resolution, they may alternatively draft a Split Memorandum to the Deputy Administrator, as outlined below:
 - The issue owner B/IO and Regional Bureau should each draft their parts of a Split Memorandum within five business days of the mediated discussion.
 - The PPL regional backstop must draft an annex to the Split Memorandum that documents the mediated discussion and recommends a resolution. The PPL AtA must approve this annex.
 - The PPL regional backstop must then submit the Split Memorandum to the Deputy Administrator for final decision. The Deputy Administrator should return a decision to the issue owner B/IO, Regional Bureau, and PPL within seven business days. The Split Memorandum that contains the Deputy Administrator's decision becomes part of the Regional Mission's RDCS file.