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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

CBLD-9: Percent of USG-assisted Organizations with Improved Performance

Updated September 2023

FAQ OVERVIEW

This FAQ is intended to serve as a resource to USAID staff and implementing partners on the use of the standard foreign assistance indicator CBLD-9. The questions are organized by topic below, so that you may select them and more quickly review the answers to questions of interest to you.

Indicator Definition and Applicability

1. **What is the CBLD-9 indicator?**

   CBLD-9 is a standard foreign assistance indicator defined as the percentage of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance. The Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS) and additional resources for CBLD-9 can be found on the Local

[Capacity Strengthening (LCS) Policy resource webpage](). USAID staff and implementing partners are encouraged to carefully read and become familiar with the PIRS.

2. **How is organization defined? Can further clarification be provided on what should be counted as a unique organization?**

   CBLD-9 defines organizations as "a group of people who work together in an organized way for a shared purpose." This definition includes both formal and informal organizations. For the purposes of CBLD-9, an organization may be counted when the activity's theory of change or other documentation establishes that an intentional investment in performance improvement for the organization has been made and that the organization has its own performance improvement plan and metrics. (Refer to Question 3 for additional considerations regarding subunits of complex organizations.)

3. **Can subunits of a complex organization (e.g., departments within a government ministry) be counted as a unique organization ? If so, must the activity directly engage those subunits?**

   Subunits of a complex organization may be counted as unique organizations for the purpose of CBLD-9 if 1) the definition of "organization" applies to these subunits (refer to Question 2 above) and 2) the subunits meet or will meet all of the conditions outlined in the PIRS.

   - *Example:* Decentralized units within a system, such as district health offices, can be counted as unique organizations if they have fulfilled all of the conditions outlined in the PIRS, including having collaborated in processes to jointly define desired performance improvement priorities and in identifying a performance improvement metric. In other words, subunits should not be counted if performance improvement priorities were imposed from the top-down without meaningful engagement of, and mutual agreement by, the decentralized units.

   - *Example:* Decentralized or subunits whose performance have been improved as an unintended or secondary effect of support to higher-level organizations (e.g., headquarters, main office, corporate center, etc.) should not be counted as unique organizations. For example, if an activity provides direct support only to regional offices of a national Ministry, do not count district offices as unique organizations–even if the activity theory of change hypothesizes secondary or cascaded performance improvement at the district level. Support for decentralized or subunits for whom only secondary effects are envisioned is unlikely to meet the criteria outlined in the PIRS. Instead, the activity team may consider using a custom indicator to measure secondary effects.

   - *Example:* Subunits of an organization, such as departments within a national ministry, may be counted if they meet the criteria in the PIRS. In cases where priorities are defined by a higher level of an organization but support is delivered at the subunit level, subunits may be counted as organizations if they demonstrate buy-in to the performance improvement priorities (for example, by having participated in action planning and shaped their own performance improvement solutions). In contrast, subunits should not be counted if performance improvement priorities were imposed from the top-down without meaningful engagement of, and mutual agreement by, the subunits.

4. **What is the relationship between organizational capacity strengthening and local systems strengthening?**

The Local Capacity Strengthening Policy refers to three social levels for which capacity strengthening support may be provided to local actors and local partners: i.) individual, ii.) organizational, and iii) network. The term "system" often is used to refer to the interactions among these levels.

● A *system* is an interconnected set of actors (individuals and/or organizations) and the institutions that structure their interactions. "Local system" refers to the interconnected set of actors that jointly produce a particular development outcome. The "local" in a local system refers to the relevant actors in a partner country regardless of their country of origin. (Refer to the USAID Local Systems Framework.)

Organizations that receive capacity strengthening assistance from USAID are always part of a local system. CBLD-9 provides one way for USAID to report how assistance contributes to the capacity strengthening of *organizations* in the context of their local system. However, it is not the only social level at which support may be provided. In fact, the Local Capacity Strengthening Policy states that, "USAID programming must consider and should prioritize opportunities to support collective impact through network strengthening."

5. **Is CBLD-9 applicable only for local organizations who have a funding relationship with USAID?**

No. CBLD-9 is applicable when organizational capacity strengthening support is provided to either local organizations that work with USAID (as direct contractors/recipients or as sub-awardees) or local organizations that do not have a funding relationship with USAID.

6. **Our activity doesn't have an intentional capacity strengthening process that meets all the criteria in the PIRS, or our process is not documented. Is this indicator applicable?**

No. As indicated in the PIRS, this indicator is only applicable when an organization undergoes an intentional performance improvement process that meets all the criteria outlined in the PIRS. Regarding documentation, there is broad consensus that reflection, which occurs when documenting a process and its outcomes, is critical for organizational learning and growth. Documentation may be as simple as taking meeting notes that capture discussions, key decisions, and actions decided jointly with the local organization or capturing brief notes in the optional CBLD-9 worksheet (found on the LCS Policy webpage). Activities that aim to improve organizational performance and do not currently meet the criteria in the PIRS are strongly encouraged to consider undergoing and documenting an intentional performance improvement process as outlined in the PIRS, which reflects USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy principles.

Selecting Meaningful Performance Metrics

7. We partner with a diverse range of organizations to strengthen their capacities. Each has unique aspirations, goals and needs that require unique interventions. How can we monitor performance for all types of organizations using a single indicator?

Due to differences among organizations and the contexts in which they work, even if the same inputs are applied to support capacity strengthening with different organizations, USAID does not expect that these same inputs will translate to the same performance change for all organizations. The purpose of this indicator is to monitor whether organizations receiving USG-assistance are improving their own performance in a way that aligns with their aspirations, goals, and needs and context. It is not intended to compare the progress of one organization against another. Rather, this indicator makes possible the use of best-fit tools and approaches, while allowing USAID to aggregate performance improvement across diverse organization types.

As such, CBLD-9 requires identifying and using a performance improvement metric (or metrics) that the organization will use to monitor and measure changes in performance (see criterion (b)(iv) in the PIRS). In this sense, it requires an "indicator within an indicator." Different organizations may use different performance metrics. Whenever possible, performance metrics and approaches already being used by the local organization should be used in place of creating new metrics for the sole purpose of reporting to USAID. For examples of how performance metrics can be tailored to an organization's own aspirations, goals, and needs, refer to the CBLD-9 Measurement Guide (found on the LCS Policy webpage).

8. Many organizations require time to realize the benefits gained from capacity strengthening support. How should an activity set targets to make this indicator useful on an annual and multi-year basis?

Like any outcome level indicator, improvements often are not seen in the first few years of activity implementation. Therefore, targets and results at the beginning or even midway through implementation may be modest or low. If organizations will require more than one year to show performance improvement, then this should be reflected in the overall activity MEL plan (i.e., years one and two may have a target of zero or no change, while years three, four, and five may have a target reflecting incremental positive change from each previous year).

Activities should consider how an organization might achieve incremental performance improvement from year to year and may count these incremental improvements–provided they are improvements in performance, not latent capacity–for the purpose of CBLD-9. Activities may also consider supplementing CBLD-9 with other qualitative data (e.g., local stakeholder feedback on the usefulness of the capacity strengthening support) or output level indicators (such as CBLD-11), especially at the beginning of activity implementation.

Further, capacity strengthening progress is not always linear, and context matters. Moving backward in organizational performance during a period of growth, especially rapid growth, is common. A temporary decline in performance metrics can reflect a transitional stage that is followed by improved performance as new ways of working are adopted. For example, a well run start-up may encounter significant organizational performance challenges as it

transitions to a small and then a medium-sized enterprise. Indicator narratives should be used to explain any relevant contextual factors that affect whether an activity is on track to achieve its targets.

- *Example*: An organization wishes to improve its average customer satisfaction score. At baseline, this score is 5 on a 10-point scale (as measured by customer feedback surveys). As the organization works to improve customer service, it restructures its processes and staff training curriculum, which causes the customer satisfaction score to decline to 4 in Year 2. As such, the organization would be counted in the denominator of CBLD-9 for Year 2, but not in the numerator. In Year 3, the organization achieves a customer service score of 6. Even though this is not its final target, the organization can be counted in the numerator of CBLD-9 for Year 3 because it has demonstrated incremental performance improvement.

Year	Customer Satisfaction Score	Count Organization in Denominator for this year?	Count Organization in Numerator for this year?
1 (Baseline)	5	No	No
2	4	Yes	No
3	6	Yes	Yes

9. **It seems that CBLD-9 only reports a simple percentage of improvement without detail on the magnitude of improvement or the domains of improvement. How can reporting on CBLD-9 be enhanced or complemented to be more meaningful and tell a compelling story?**

CBLD-9 is intended to provide a global snapshot of support for organizational capacity strengthening at the aggregate level. Like most standard indicators, the CBLD-9 numerator and denominator data, on their own, do not provide insight on the details of the performance improvement process. However, activities can and should supplement their quantitative data for this indicator with qualitative data that provides detail about the activity context and about how the criteria outlined in the PIRS were met, including which specific performance improvement metrics were used.

To provide this qualitative data, implementing partners are strongly encouraged to use and upload into DIS the CBLD-9 worksheet (found on the LCS Policy webpage), which provides a template for collecting and reporting this data. Use of this standard template helps indicator owners in Washington more easily analyze the data for evidence-based learning. Such knowledge provides USAID with the confidence to assert how our local capacity strengthening investments contribute to sustainable development results across sectors and legitimize the role of USAID in promoting local ownership, sustainability, and democratic values abroad.

Lastly, activities may consider complementing CBLD-9 data with other qualitative data or information (e.g., local stakeholder feedback on the usefulness of the capacity strengthening

support) or other sector-specific standard or custom indicators to provide additional information on the activity results.

10. Must we use a quantitative performance metric(s)?

No. Activities may use any metric, including a qualitative metric, that is a valid measure of an organization's performance in accordance with the local organization's priorities.

- *Example:* A local NGO aims to raise awareness of dangerous mercury levels in food as a result of mining in the area and has concerns that their communications products–mostly policy briefs–have not effectively raised awareness about this issue among local indigenous communities. In response, an implementing partner strengthens the capacity of the local NGO to tailor their communications products for these communities. This support ultimately leads to the production of animated videos that provide clear information on the types of food most likely to have high mercury levels and recommendations on safe alternatives. The implementing partner also provides coaching support to the NGO to strengthen their partnerships with the sub-national government in order to share the videos at municipal meetings and incorporate them into school curricula. In this example, the implementing partner might monitor performance using a qualitative binary yes/no metric, such as video use in public fora, and qualitative observation to determine whether the videos were screened at community meetings or incorporated into school curricula, like the NGO planned. Later on in the activity, the implementing partner might also conduct qualitative interviews with community members or students to ask whether they saw the videos, what they learned, and whether their food consumption patterns changed as a result of the video. These measures could serve as qualitative performance metrics that the local NGO's communications and partnership capacities have improved.

11. Must our activity use the Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA), Organizational Performance Index (OPI), or other index tool to *identify* an organization's desired performance improvement priorities?

No. The use of an index tool, such as the OCA or OPI, is not required. While index tools may be helpful to facilitate a process through which local organizations identify their own performance improvement priorities, they are not the only option for capacity action planning. Activities may also consider a variety of workshop formats to uncover priorities and catalyze action, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercise, and even informal conversations with organizations about what they want to work on (ensuring you document what comes out of those discussions). You can also build on past assessments (conducted by USAID or otherwise) if the supported organization feels those assessments exposed priorities of interest to them.

12. Must our activity use the Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA), Organizational Performance Index (OPI), or other index tool to *measure* an organization's performance improvement?

No. While index tools, such as the OCA or OPI, are helpful for capacity action planning, they are not necessarily well suited for measuring an organization's desired performance improvement progress. Activities should identify and use metrics tailored to monitor and measure changes in the specific areas of performance improvement that are a priority for

the local organization. Whenever possible, performance metrics and approaches already being used by the local organization should be used in place of creating or adopting new metrics for the sole purpose of reporting to USAID. Refer to the CBLD-9 Measurement Guide (found on the [LCS Policy webpage](#)) for examples of how performance metrics can be tailored to an organization's own aspirations, goals, and needs.

However, if an index tool, such as the OCA or OPI, is used for capacity action planning, then it may be helpful as a starting point for selecting metrics that an organization prioritizes as relevant for achieving its performance improvement objectives.

- Example: An activity uses the Organizational Performance Index (OPI) tool to help an agricultural extension office understand and prioritize areas for improvement. The organization decides to prioritize the "relevance" dimension, which it defines as farmers in the region viewing the office as a valuable service provider. Therefore, they measure performance improvement in line with the extension office's specific goals, choosing two metrics, "Number of farmer consultations requested weekly," and "Satisfaction of farmers with service provided" (measured on a 1-5 scale via anonymous phone survey after consultations).

Refer also to Question 13 regarding differentiating tools for capacity action planning and performance measurement.

13. **Should I use the same tool to identify areas for performance improvement and to measure performance improvement?**

No. Different tools have different purposes. Three primary categories of tools exist:

- ***Capacity Action PlanningTools*** facilitate a process through which local actors identify their own priorities for performance improvement and become motivated to own and manage their own progress. These tools can also help USAID and international partners learn about existing local strengths and the type of capacity strengthening support desired and needed by local actors.

- ***Performance Measurement Tools or Indicators*** monitor and measure the extent of performance change. These tools, however, must be distinguished from tools to catalyze the process of capacity action planning and from those to identify and manage risk.

- ***Risk Mitigation Tools*** are primarily designed to assess and help develop plans to mitigate risks to USAID or other donors when partnering with an organization. While these tools may identify existing strengths of local actors, they should not be used as a substitute for catalyzing the process of local capacity strengthening or for measuring performance improvement. Examples include the Non-US Organization Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS), entity eligibility checklists, etc.

To be effective, local capacity strengthening activities must align with local priorities. By utilizing processes that support local actors to identify their strengths and determine their priorities for performance improvement, capacity action planning tools help motivate an actor to commit to change and foster local ownership. However, because capacity action planning tools rely on subjective preferences and priorities for improvement (as is appropriate to enable an organization to select its own priorities), they do not objectively assess

performance. In contrast, the primary purpose of performance measurement tools is to provide an objective assessment of change that has occurred. As such, using a capacity action planning tool–one that prioritizes self-identification of strengths and opportunities–for the latter purpose may pose limitations related to data quality standards. For additional detail on this point, please reference the Guide To Distinguishing Tools Used for Local Capacity Strengthening.

In very select cases when passing an assessment is itself an organizational goal, it may be appropriate to use the same assessment to guide capacity action planning and to measure improved performance. Examples include GlobalG.A.P. (certification of good agricultural practices), or higher education institution accreditation (with an assessment tool created by a regional accreditation body). When performance improvement activities focus primarily on equipping organizations to pass such assessments because such a certification or accreditation would help the organization advance its own goals (not USAID's goals), it may be appropriate to use the assessment at multiple points in time to both catalyze action and to assess performance improvement.

14. Can we use performance metrics that monitor change at the level of the individuals that organizations serve? For example, could we assess student achievement to measure performance improvement of schools or assess employment status to measure improvement of a job training center?

It depends. The outcomes of change at the level of individuals (e.g. students, job seekers, patients, etc.) often are influenced by many factors beyond the direct services that any one organization provides. As such, you should consider the extent to which performance metrics related to change at the level of individuals is within the direct manageable control of the organization. For example, employment rates of job seekers are not only impacted by the performance of the job training center, but also by other labor market and economic factors. So while a job training center may receive support to improve its services for job seekers, who also may acquire new skills, the organization ultimately has very little control over whether overall employment rates improve. In scenarios like this, you may wish to consider performance metrics over which the supported organization has a higher level of influence. For example, in the case of the job training center, rather than measuring employment rates, you might choose a metric related to improved training quality or to the new or improved knowledge or skills of job seekers.

15. Can sampling of organizations be conducted to provide an estimate for reporting on CBLD-9?

No. CBLD-9 requires an intentional and participatory performance improvement process that is tailored to support each organization's unique aspirations, goals, and needs. Activities providing capacity strengthening to such a large number of organizations that sampling would be necessary are unlikely to meet the intentionality criterion for each of these organizations.

16. Do we need to establish a baseline?

A baseline is necessary to assess changes in organizational performance over time. For some metrics, the baseline may be zero.

For example, if an organization wishes to engage a new group of clients, or establish partnerships with private sector firms, then the baseline would be zero for a metric that counts those clients or firms. Alternatively, consider an organization with a goal of better serving their customers by introducing a new service. In this example, the introduction of the new service could serve as the performance metric, and the binary data ("yes" they introduced the new service, or "no" they did not introduce the new service) could serve as evidence of whether performance improvement occurred. Because the new service does not yet exist, the baseline would be zero.

17. Should organizations being assisted in more than one performance improvement area be counted twice?

No. The unit of measurement for CBLD-9 is the organization, not areas for capacity strengthening or individual capacity strengthening interventions (i.e. training). While organizations may benefit from capacity strengthening in multiple areas to achieve their performance improvement goals and may decide to use more than one performance metric, those organizations should only be counted once each year (and only for the years in which they meet the criteria of CBLD-9).

18. Can I report the same organization under more than one disaggregate? If not, how should I choose which disaggregate an organization falls under?

Only one organization type should be selected for each organization pursuing performance improvement with USAID support. If an organization fits within more than one disaggregate category, the Agreement Officer's Representative/Contracting Officer's Representative (A/COR) should be consulted to inform selection of the disaggregate that best represents the organization type. Selection of one disaggregate category is required.

19. Because a longer time frame often is needed to see performance improvement as a result of capacity strengthening, what should be the reporting frequency for CBLD-9?

USAID OUs must report annually during USAID's Performance Plan and Reporting (PPR) process. However, A/CORs and implementing partners may determine during the development and approval of activity monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans (AMELPs) that more frequent reporting is useful, depending on the organizational context, the performance metric(s) selected, and the scope of the capacity strengthening plans. Additionally, if performance improvement is anticipated to take longer to achieve, then A/CORs and implementing partners may delay reporting on CBLD-9 during the first year or two of an activity (though other monitoring methods and methods, such as CBLD-11 and other output-level metrics, should be used to monitor progress in the meantime).

20. How is our reporting on CBLD-9 affected if we have experienced delays in the roll-out of capacity strengthening interventions?

Reporting should begin only when the PIRS denominator criteria are met, including implementation of performance solutions (though these do not need to have been completed) and use of a metric to measure for changes.

21. How do we conduct a data quality assessment for this indicator?

Data quality assessments should examine whether the criteria outlined in the PIRS are met and review the organizational performance metric(s) being used against USAID DQA standards.

22. Is use of the CBLD-9 reporting worksheet mandatory?

Partners are encouraged to use the CBLD-9 worksheet located on the Agency's [LCS Policy webpage](#) and to upload their worksheet on the 'Documents' tab of the CBLD-9 indicator data entry screen in Development Information Solution (DIS). The worksheet provides a structured approach that can guide the process of determining whether an activity or organization meets the criteria outlined in the PIRS definition. It also provides valuable information to indicator owners in Washington about the types of capacity strengthening approaches and performance improvement objectives and metrics that are valued by local organizations.

Organizational Capacity Strengthening Approaches

23. Must the intentional performance improvement process outlined in the CBLD-9 PIRS be interpreted narrowly as "formal training"?

No. The CBLD-9 PIRS does not stipulate any specific approach to assisting organizations in achieving improved performance. USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy encourages OUs and partners to look beyond training. It asserts, "Many kinds of capacity and approaches may be necessary to improve both short- and long-term performance of local actors and systems…Too often, we default to an approach that relies on training for capacity strengthening because it is predictable and visible. However, training frequently models one-size-fits-all ideas about how local actors should look and often prioritizes outside expertise over local knowledge."

24. Our activities include targeted organizational capacity strengthening interventions focused on equipping local organizations to meet USG or USAID rules and regulations and award management requirements. For example, we are offering training on USAID award management that includes orientation to the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and USAID Branding and Marking requirements. Is this indicator applicable?

No. The PIRS refers to an intentional and demand-driven process undertaken by an organization to improve their performance toward achieving locally valued and sustainable development outcomes. If the activities seek only to improve an organization's ability to meet USG or USAID rules and regulations or award management requirements then other indicators are more appropriate.

Support Resources

25. What resources exist for CBLD-9 reporting?

Resources related to CBLD-9 target-setting, metrics, and other topics are available to the public on the [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy resource webpage](#).

If your question is not answered in this FAQ document or the resources linked above, then:

- USAID staff may contact CBLDSupport@usaid.gov* for personalized support, and

- Implementing partners should contact their AOR/COR or other USAID point of contact for support.

Please note: This email address is only for USAID staff. Messages from outside USAID will not be answered.