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Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS) Local Capacity Strengthening (LCS) Policy Implementation Guidance

Peacebuilding and Local Capacity Strengthening

Alignment with Conflict Prevention and Stability Sector Priorities:

Peace and security are important in their own right, but they are also fundamental conditions for human development. They both depend on local capacity to build and sustain them - or destroy them, as local actors can be connectors for peace or dividers fanning conflict. Peace cannot be sustainably imposed from the outside, it requires local will, leadership, and capacity.

As part of the Agency-wide effort to increase localization and local capacity, this CPS Bureau [Local Capacity Strengthening \(LCS\)](#) Policy Implementation Guidance highlights particular areas for CPS/LCS collaboration for mutual advancement, and is intended to assist USAID Missions and other USAID staff in implementing the LCS Policy within the peacebuilding sector. It should be seen as a helpful resource providing guidance on CPS' efforts towards local capacity strengthening, highlighting why and how local capacity strengthening and peacebuilding are central to one another, examining gaps and challenges, and laying out an action plan with recommendations for measuring success.

Opportunities to Advance LCS Through CPS Programming:

- **Leveraging LCS social capacity building to bolster peace efforts:** Peacebuilding is an intrinsically local set of activities, so there is strong affinity between the two sectors and strong incentive for both to integrate greater aspects of the other. Success and sustainability relies on local organizations, individuals, and governance entities (be they formal or informal) in order to ground the work in local needs, priorities, and goals. Peace can neither be imposed from outside, nor carried forwards sustainably by outside agents. The strength and capacity of those organizations, individuals, and networks have their own intrinsic value within fragile and conflict-affected societies, in addition serving to strengthen and maintain networks of resilience and social cohesion. These in turn further the goals of stable peace.
- **Conflict sensitivity:** CPS has a strong understanding of power and political economy within society and politics, and the ways in which changes to local capacity alter the balances of power in any given area. Those changes have the potential to bring about negative and unintended consequences if misunderstood or incautiously supported, but they are also critical for the advancement and protection of disadvantaged and at-risk local populations. Conflict sensitivity - understanding the role of USAID programming within the contexts in which it operates, and the risks as well as

opportunities with regard to conflict dynamics - is critical for all sectors of USAID's work. Local organizations and individuals have critical knowledge and understanding of their own context, including awareness of the informal systems and rules, political economy, social capital, and political constraints and skills that are fundamental to achieving the right results sustainably.

- **Integrating LCS with other Agency and global development priorities:** The CPS Bureau LCS Implementation Guidance coincides with a global rise in conflict, democratic backsliding, authoritarian governance, climate disaster, food insecurity, and falling development indicators. The United States Government (USG) has responded with multiple efforts (such as the Global Fragility Act [GFA] and Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability [SPCPS] and, within USAID, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace [HDP] Task Team) in order to help align the full spectrum of US development and humanitarian activities towards a common goal of reducing the drivers and causes of instability and conflict. One of the first casualties of conflict and social division is local capacity, making this a critical nexus for development sustainability across the board.
- As with CPS' own work, LCS is inherently cross-cutting as well as being its own distinct sector. In order to function, peacebuilding, conflict sensitive programming, and LCS must create or strengthen new linkages and relationships within and across other sectors in order to foster programming that matches the lived experience and expressed objectives of local actors.
- **Complexity and integration:** Neither peace nor capacity growth proceeds in a linear upward fashion, and will not proceed upward at all without intentionality and resources. It emerges in dynamic and complex ways as organizations, individuals, and the system as a whole evolve. Changes in one area can foster or undermine capacity in other areas. Programming by LCS and peacebuilding implementing partners (as well as others, such as Democracy Rights and Governance [DRG] and Resilience, Environment, and Food Security [REFS]) will impact each other to create a meshed series of effects. Communication and coordination among the various implementing actors and USAID strategies is a critical part of navigating this complexity, as is the necessity of flexible, adaptable activities.

Sectoral Goals:

- **Improve integration practices for more peaceful outcomes by:**
 - Improving the level of conflict sensitivity in LCS programming and the level of local capacity strengthening in conflict-specific programming;
 - Emphasizing the importance of communication, coordination, and collaboration across the spectrum of LCS and CPS programming;
 - Building greater flexibility into programming from design onwards, and enabling greater adaptive management throughout the project lifecycle to be able to adapt to evolving operating environments and capacity priorities;
 - Ensuring LCS activities include a conflict and peace lens review and CPS activities determine if LCS is a good investment and would improve outcomes in that system; and
 - Applying [conflict analysis](#) to LCS program and activity design.

- **Improve integrated measurement and learning by:**
 - Increasing qualitative and quantitative data collection and use, applicable to both LCS and CPS programming;
 - Examining joint LCS/CPS indicator sets for areas of mutual learning;
 - Sharing learning questions, generated evidence, and best practices; and
 - Collaborating on learning initiatives.
- **Increase participatory practices by:**
 - Integrating participatory approaches into peacebuilding or conflict-related programming across the [Program Cycle](#), such as those associated with USAID's locally led programs indicator.¹

Lessons Learned:

USAID's peacebuilding programming and conflict-related work is entirely consistent with LCS Policy principles.

- Strengthening civil society networks fosters greater collaboration and improves performance of peacebuilding efforts - truly effective peacebuilding requires not only local leadership, but bottom-up and top-down approaches simultaneously.² In areas where tension between government and communities is part of the conflict issues, local communities need capacity such that a bottom-up process can meet or offset the top-down pressure. Ensuring sufficient space to put that capacity into practice in challenging areas ideally requires the combined viewpoints of LCS and CPS.
- The power of USAID's peacebuilding efforts are greatly magnified by increasing the level of conflict sensitivity integration in other sectors of USAID's work, as opposed to relying on peace-specific funding and activities that can fluctuate greatly from year to year. Leveraging integrated partnerships such as this is critical for advancing global peace interests.
- All peace is local - externally-driven efforts are less successful and sustainable than locally designed and led efforts. This makes a natural partnership between LCS and peacebuilding and conflict-related programming - the local systems bolstered by LCS efforts are often the same ones necessary for successful peace-related programming.
- One of the biggest barriers to locally led peacebuilding efforts has been onerous donor procurement and reporting mechanisms, which local actors often struggle to navigate. LCS is a crucial part of strengthening the capacity of local organizations to successfully interface with USAID and other donors, and for USAID to become more flexible and equitable partners.
- Policies and initiatives by the international community may run counter to local needs and desires by supporting national governments responsible for human rights violations, shuttering civil space, or fomenting tension within and among ethnic or other identity groups. Greater local capacity is crucial to offset this issue and protect the needs and rights of local populations, utilizing conflict sensitive peacebuilding methodology to ensure it's done safely.

¹ <https://www.usaid.gov/localization/measurement>

² <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5db70e83f0a966cf4cc42ea/t/629fa9d1a3d9af59ea738cda/1654630898153/FINAL+DESIGN+AfP+Policy+Brief+LLPB+6.7.22.pdf>

Current State of LCS in CPS:

There is an innate affinity between one of CPS's objectives - peacebuilding - and LCS, but localization efforts lag somewhat within global peacebuilding efforts more broadly. There are several high-level efforts to address this, including the [Grand Bargain](#) and [Sustainable Development Goals](#), but these are typically phrased as increasing local leadership within the humanitarian and development/peace efforts, respectively, while saying less about how to strengthen the capacity of local organizations and entities in order to help accomplish sustainable and inclusive peaceful outcomes.

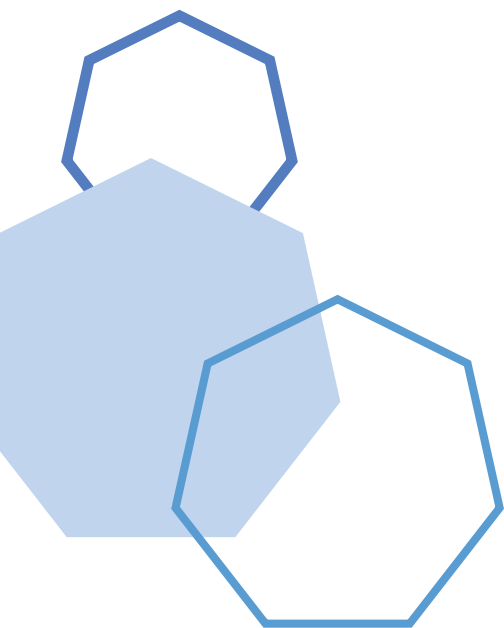
Gaps and Challenges:

The worldwide increase in conflict, fragility, displacement, and autocratic governance has degraded development indicators overall. Where there is conflict and fragility, human and institutional capital is more likely to dissipate or disperse.

Despite strong improvements in cross-sectoral integration, structurally, most of USAID's work remains extremely sectoral, largely due to staffing structures, and prescribed funding and reporting requirements. There is a growing connection among pillar Bureaus in USAID Washington, DC, and increasing numbers of Missions with integrated Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS), and workstreams spanning the Program Cycle, but both at the Mission and especially the regional level, collaboration and integration remain dependent on personalities and relationships, which are subject to regular change.

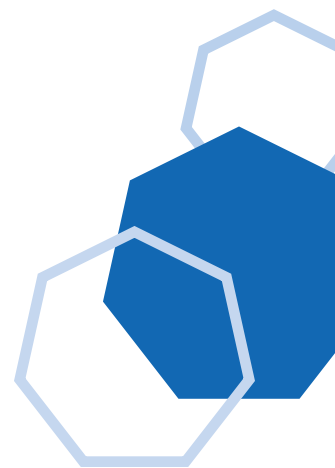
Research on the long-term effectiveness of peacebuilding is not as advanced as it should be, but has improved greatly and will continue to improve with better and more focused research, and a greater range of local researchers.

Research and evidence generation within conflict-affected areas is challenging, although demonstrably feasible. Access is limited, and the level of risk to researchers is obviously higher than the norm. Local capacity strengthening would be a positive benefit here, as local researchers will have a better ability to navigate high-threat areas socially and politically than outside individuals and organizations will.



Action Plan:

- Incorporate greater conflict sensitivity into LCS programming by:
 - Developing at least one LCS-specific training, webinar or other product for global Mission staff and external partners to further socialize integration of peace, conflict sensitivity, and local capacity strengthening. The products should emphasize the importance of requiring LCS Policy compliance and conflict sensitivity in solicitations, in order to maximize the impact of funding.
 - Conducting high-level leadership meeting(s) with Mission Directors to socialize guidance, goals, and action plan to foster support at the leadership level.
 - Identifying regional and thematic Points of Contact (POC) within the Center for Violence Prevention (CVP) and increasing lines of communication from across CPS Bureau for LCS who can be resources for Missions or those designing and managing central mechanisms (POCs could provide in person support through temporary duty station (TDY) assignments as requested by USAID Missions).
 - Delivering of CPS/CVP's Conflict Sensitive Aid (CSAID) training to LCS leadership, staff and key network partners.
 - Increasing CPS participation in LCS annual calendar of events including the annual LCS Policy [Learning and Feedback Forum](#), and vice versa.
- Reinforce good practices in CPS central mechanisms and resources by:
 - Familiarizing LCS staff with CPS funding mechanisms in order to increase uptake and identify areas where LCS design contributions would increase effectiveness of program design.
 - Review and/or update existing CPS technical publications (field guides, assessments, handbooks, and toolkits) to incorporate more explicitly the LCS Policy principles.
- Collaborate with other bureaus/sectors, private sector, external partners, and the LCS Implementation Team by:
 - Engaging with the LCS Implementation Team in the annual Learning and Feedback Forum.
 - Liaising with LCS implementation POCs from other bureaus to share strategies, experiences, and approaches in implementing the LCS Policy.



- Plan to create feedback loops, capture learning and evidence, and make adaptations by:
 - Conducting a baseline assessment in 2024 on selected measures for LCS in selected peacebuilding activities with plans to review progress each year, subject to the availability of funds.
 - Participating in the annual LCS Policy Learning and Feedback Forum virtual learning exchange around LCS topics, capturing key feedback from CPS partners and activities, and highlighting new areas for growth.
 - Creating a working group within CPS to gauge needs and progress on localization and local capacity strengthening.
 - Developing and disseminating webinars or virtual exchanges that provide “quick tips” around distinct LCS principles, LCS tools, and guidance - two tech team presentations and presentation through the Peace and Security Council.

Five-year Measures for Success:

- Effective performance improvement in peacebuilding activities as reported in evaluations to global Operating Units.
- Partners and staff report streamlined indicators/measurement guidance and a corresponding decreased measurement burden related to LCS.
- Increased use of participatory, locally led approaches across the Program Cycle in peacebuilding activities.
- Open-ended feedback collected from Missions and implementing partners involved in capacity strengthening, including at the annual LCS Learning and Feedback Forum, to be shared and to indicate increasing consistency of LCS Policy application and related good practices.
- Increased use of LCS principles in peacebuilding solicitations, measured from a sample of publicly-posted solicitations.

Resources for Change

- Recognizing that funding for new programming is low and unlikely to rise, the critical intent in integrating LCS Policy Principles and CPS methodologies is to do everything possible to ensure the effectiveness of every dollar.
- Funding for possible Temporary Duty (TDY) travel for CPS LCS POCs (including POCs located in Missions).
- CPS Bureau staff time and roles to undertake implementation of the guidance through an LCS Committee or other working group body.
- Resources for support through contract staff for measurement tasks, virtual exchange support, and other mechanisms as opportunities arise.