LOCAL SOLUTIONS LEARNING AGENDA

PPL currently has a learning agenda for Local Solutions that emerged out of Government Accountability Office audit recommendations for improved accountability, rather than self-identified learning needs. The top-down, externally catalyzed learning agenda approach initially shaped the focus of agenda questions. However, Local Solutions staff have developed an internally driven, participatory process for conducting learning activities that has reshaped the initiative to also include many of Local Solution's core values and learning needs.

The learning activities are centered around a synthesis of evaluations that maps evidence (about activity design, implementation, and results) from existing USAID evaluations related to local partnerships, capacity, local ownership, and sustainability. In keeping with its values, Local Solutions and Expanding M&E Capacities reached out to its champions and M&E contacts in the Missions and in Washington to crowdsource much of the evaluation review work. More than 80 stakeholders from across the Agency volunteered to read evaluations. The learning activity also assessed reader engagement and asked volunteers, "How does what you read/learned from this review fit in with your work?" They synthesized answers to capture how USAID staff use learning from evaluations to inform their work. Local Solutions and Expanding M&E Capacities completed the evaluation synthesis in fall 2016 and are producing two types of documents, a report for external stakeholders (e.g., Congress) that addresses the Government Accountability Office accountability questions and short (1-2 pages) summaries of qualitative findings by thematic areas for practical use by internal audiences. Staff suggested that an Agency-wide learning agenda initiative provides an exciting opportunity for USAID to take a proactive stance on learning that shifts the conversation away from compliance toward a focus on gathering and using knowledge about what works well in context to improve sustainable development.

Status	✓ Created learning agenda (completed) ✓ Generating knowledge (ongoing) ✓ Capturing/synthesizing knowledge (ongoing) ❏ Sharing knowledge (planned) ❏ Applying knowledge (unknown) ❏ Updating/ adapting learning (unknown)
Materials	[Report](#)
Key Learning Questions/ Themes	Three learning questions: ● **Design:** How have we designed projects and activities that engage directly with local partners to support local capacity and achieve locally owned, locally sustainable results? ● **Implementation:** What challenges have resulted from working directly with local partners, and how have we and our partners responded to those challenges? ● **Results:** What are the effects of engaging directly with local partners on achieving locally owned, locally sustained development results?
Key Learning Activities	Conduct a review of relevant, existing USAID evaluations; develop and disseminate learning products for diverse stakeholders
Start of Process	2014: Initiated in response to Government Accountability Office audit recommendations Late 2015: Began the formulation process 2016: Report released

Steps in Process	1. Developed learning agenda questions 2. Designed learning activities (synthesis of evaluations) using a participatory process rooted in Local Solutions values and mission 3. Conducted the review of evaluations and evaluation synthesis 4. Create reports for different audiences and uses (e.g., external accountability for Congress, thematic summaries for internal audiences) 5. Disseminate findings to diverse stakeholders 6. Track uptake and use of findings 7. Decide next steps for learning agenda updates
Current Learning Agenda Work	Finalizing analysis and results from the synthesis of evaluations
Next Steps	Develop reports, including external report addressing Government Accountability Office/Congressional accountability questions, and 1-2 page thematic summaries for use by internal audiences
Strengths	● Participatory, locally sourced learning activities are rooted in Local Solutions values and supported organizational change ● Volunteers expressed very positive feedback about participating in the learning activity
Challenges	● Consistency across readers in conducting the evaluation reviews ● Political nature of the learning agenda necessitated a balance between external accountability concerns and internal learning interests.
Promising Practices	Designed learning activities (synthesis) around core values of Local Solutions by crowdsourcing the evaluation with more than 80 USAID staff volunteers in the Missions and USAID/Washington. Focused on reader engagement and application of learning (not just evaluation findings) so the whole evaluation process promoted organizational learning.
Recommendations	1. Recognize that the process of learning agenda development and use is as important as the content. The agenda can be an important tool for organizational change, as well as useful in addressing knowledge gaps. 2. Gaining leadership support is key. Organizational leaders have to see the learning agenda's value for achieving their goals and communicate that it is a priority. 3. Ensure that learning agenda initiatives have adequate resources before beginning. 4. Clarify what the key learning questions are and why they are important. 5. Focus on utilization of the evidence from the beginning. 6. Tap into people's intrinsic motivation (e.g., for mastery, autonomy, and purpose) and values in designing learning activities.
Points of Contact	Danielle Pearl, M&E Specialist, E3/LS (formerly Local Solutions M&E Coordinator, PPL/LER) Jennifer Gauck, Senior M&E Specialist, PPL/LER/Expanding M&E Capacities