



TOWARDS COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT TO GLOBAL EDUCATION:

A REVIEW OF THE U.S. PLEDGE TO THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION



DISCUSSION PAPER 3 OF 3:

USAID FORWARD

RESULTS
the power to end poverty



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RESULTS EDUCATIONAL FUND

RESULTS Educational Fund (REF) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit citizen's advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. that is committed to educating the public, the media, and government leaders about issues related to poverty and hunger in the United States and abroad. It organizes public forums, trains citizens in being active participants in democracy, holds media conference calls to share the latest information, and conducts oversight research to determine the effectiveness of programs meant to address poverty and inequity. REF combines its advocacy efforts with its sister organization, RESULTS, Inc. (a 501(c)4 organization), and international affiliates in Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, and the United Kingdom for greater impact worldwide.

Developed and written by Tony Baker and John Middleton.

Cover photos:

Top: Global Partnership for Education 2011 Pledging Conference in Copenhagen: Networking Consultants Center

Center: Students in the USAID School WASH and Quality Education Project in Zambia: Development Aid from People to People in Zambia

Bottom: Students in the USAID Accelerated Learning Program Plus in Liberia: Creative Associates International

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SUMMARY

In November 2011, the United States made a pledge to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the world's only multilateral institution exclusively devoted to ensuring that all children everywhere receive a quality basic education. The United States pledged to:

- *Contribute \$20 million to the GPE Fund in 2012.*
- *Improve the reading skills of 100 million children and increase equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments for 15 million learners by 2015.*
- *Improve its aid effectiveness through the USAID Forward initiative, which aims to reform and revitalize USAID's strategic policy, planning and evaluation capabilities, and how it engages with partner countries.*

A year later, RESULTS conducted country visits to Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia to explore the status of the U.S. pledge. The following paper reflects on what RESULTS learned about USAID Forward — one of the aspects of the United States' 2011 pledge to GPE — and concludes that USAID should :

- **Foster partners, not just implementers**, *by soliciting participation from host country governments and local organizations to establish priorities and develop them as institutions in their own right.*
- **Build host country government capacity** *where assessments reveal national systems too weak for direct partnership.*
- **Coach local NGO communities**, *by offering organizational feedback and routine guidance on USAID procedures to local communities of practice.*
- **Strengthen government systems through increased partnership with the Global Partnership for Education**, *whose systems approach to education development builds the very environment needed by USAID to achieve the government-to-government assistance targets of USAID Forward and meet its objective of sustainable development.*
- **Support and take advantage of GPE's efforts to strengthen civil society**, *which is helping create the landscape needed for USAID to directly partner with local civil society organizations.*

To learn more about the other components of the 2011 U.S. pledge to GPE, see "Discussion Paper 1 of 3: The U.S. Commitment to the GPE Fund" and "Discussion Paper 2 of 3: The USAID Education Strategy."

INTRODUCTION

The Global Partnership for Education

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is the world's premiere multilateral partnership for basic education. Originally established as the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) in 2002, GPE brings together donor country governments, developing country governments, multilateral agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and private foundations to combine their financial and technical assistance to support education development in 58 countries.

Since 2002, GPE has allocated \$3.1 billion in financial aid to education through the Global Partnership for Education Fund, which manages partners' pooled contributions (GPE, 2013). GPE channels the Fund through a country-led systems approach to education development. At the national level, Local Education Groups (LEGs), consisting of the government of the developing country partner, donors, multilateral agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations (CSOs), coordinate around the development, endorsement, and implementation of a national education plan.

Within each LEG, a member is designated as the Coordinating Agency, which acts as the primary communication link between the developing country government, other members of the LEG, and the GPE secretariat. One multilateral agency or donor in the LEG also takes the role of the Supervising Entity, which acts as the fund manager at the national level. The Supervising Entity receives grant funds from the GPE secretariat and transfers them to the government to implement activities called for by the national education plan.

The U.S. government has been part of GPE for over 10 years. The United States — represented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) — has been on the GPE Board of Directors since its beginnings as the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative, helped relaunch it as the Global Partnership for Education, and remains on the Board today.

The 2011 U.S. Pledge to GPE

In 2011, GPE embarked on a three-year replenishment campaign to secure resources for 2011-2014. The campaign kicked off with a pledging conference held in Copenhagen, Denmark on November 8th, 2011. Representatives from 52 countries came together and committed \$1.5 billion to the Global Partnership for Education Fund.

At the 2011 GPE pledging conference, the United States made a series of commitments — some financial, others programmatic:

The United States of America pledged a contribution of \$20 million to the Global Partnership Fund, following a grant of \$2 million to support monitoring

GPE vision:
A good quality education for all children, everywhere, so they fulfill their potential and contribute to their societies.

GPE mission:
To galvanize and coordinate a global effort to deliver a good quality education to all girls and boys, prioritizing the poorest and most vulnerable.

and evaluation by the Global Partnership Secretariat. The United States also pledged to improve its aid effectiveness through the USAID Forward Initiative, which aims to reform and revitalise USAID's strategic policy, planning and evaluation capabilities and to redefine how USAID will engage with partner countries. These reforms are key to implementing the aid effectiveness principles while ensuring more effective programming and closer collaboration with local actors in education and other sectors. The United States pledged to focus particular support for early learning outcomes and education in fragile states. In the first case, the United States pledged to improve reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades by 2015 and in the second case the United States will increase education access for 15 million learners in conflict-affected and fragile states by 2015 by strengthening crisis prevention efforts, supporting learning opportunities for youth and developing partner country institutional capacity to provide education services. (GPE, 2012)

Not all of these commitments were new. Reading skills, access to education in conflict-affected and fragile states, and aid effectiveness are objective areas set out in the USAID Education Strategy and USAID Forward, plans which predated the November 2011 GPE pledging conference. In addition to reaffirming these previous commitments, the United States pledged to contribute \$20 million to the GPE Fund in 2012.

RESULTS' Country Visits

With an interest in these commitments, RESULTS set out to explore the status of the 2011 U.S. pledge to GPE one year later. In October and November of 2012, RESULTS visited Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia in an attempt to gain local insights and snapshots pertaining to the implementation of the U.S. pledge.

Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia were selected on the basis that they (1) are in sub-Saharan Africa, the regional investment focus of USAID's Education Strategy, (2) have large, active USAID basic education program portfolios, (3) are GPE developing country partners, and (4) consist in part of conflict-affected or fragile states (Liberia and South Sudan).

Speaking with USAID missions, USAID implementing partners, donors, governments, international NGOs, local NGOs, CSOs, and GPE Coordinating Agencies, RESULTS met with a total of 49 representatives from across a range of development actors to discuss their views on USAID's Education Strategy, USAID Forward, and USAID's involvement with Local Education Groups.

The following sections examine the U.S. financial commitment to GPE and what RESULTS learned in light of its country visits. For findings and recommendations in regards to the United States' financial commitment to GPE and the USAID Education Strategy, see "Discussion Paper 1 of 3: The U.S. Commitment to the GPE Fund" and "Discussion Paper 2 of 3: The USAID Education Strategy." For in-depth country profiles of Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia, see the Annex, available online.

MAP 1: RESULTS' COUNTRY VISITS

LIBERIA

Population:	4.2 million
GDP per capita:	\$422
Primary school net enrollment rate:	41% (female: 40%, male: 42%)
Out-of-school children of primary school age:	385,726 (50% female, 50% male)
Primary school pupil-teacher ratio:	27:1
Percent of teachers trained:	56%
Textbook-pupil ratio:	3:1
Primary school completion rate:	66% (female: 60%, male: 72%)
Youth literacy rate:	77% (female: 82%, male: 71%)

SOUTH SUDAN

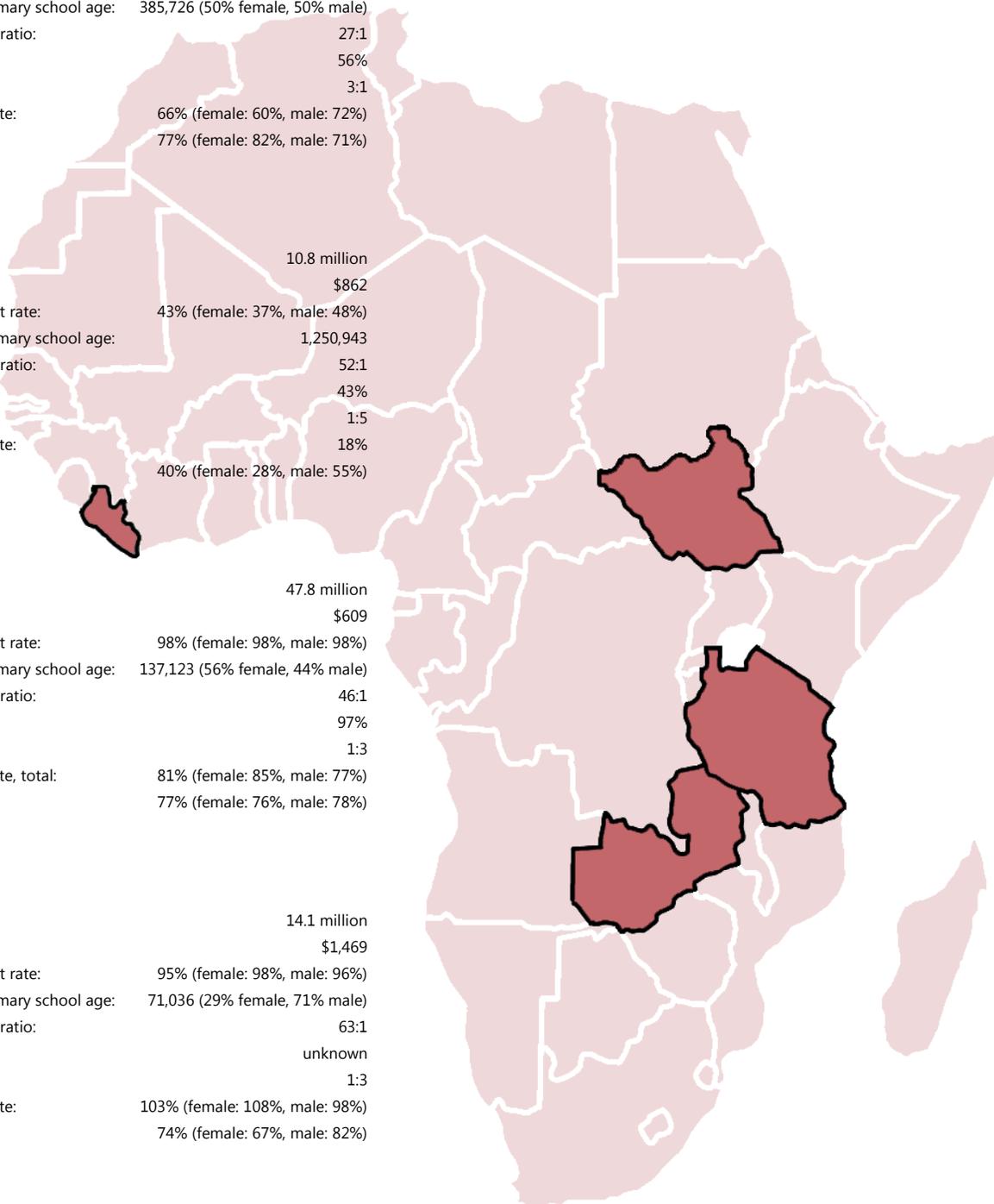
Population:	10.8 million
GDP per capita:	\$862
Primary school net enrollment rate:	43% (female: 37%, male: 48%)
Out-of-school children of primary school age:	1,250,943
Primary school pupil-teacher ratio:	52:1
Percent of teachers trained:	43%
Textbook-pupil ratio:	1:5
Primary school completion rate:	18%
Youth literacy rate:	40% (female: 28%, male: 55%)

TANZANIA

Population:	47.8 million
GDP per capita:	\$609
Primary school net enrollment rate:	98% (female: 98%, male: 98%)
Out-of-school children of primary school age:	137,123 (56% female, 44% male)
Primary school pupil-teacher ratio:	46:1
Percent of teachers trained:	97%
Textbook-pupil ratio:	1:3
Primary school completion rate, total:	81% (female: 85%, male: 77%)
Youth literacy rate:	77% (female: 76%, male: 78%)

ZAMBIA

Population:	14.1 million
GDP per capita:	\$1,469
Primary school net enrollment rate:	95% (female: 98%, male: 96%)
Out-of-school children of primary school age:	71,036 (29% female, 71% male)
Primary school pupil-teacher ratio:	63:1
Percent of teachers trained:	unknown
Textbook-pupil ratio:	1:3
Primary school completion rate:	103% (female: 108%, male: 98%)
Youth literacy rate:	74% (female: 67%, male: 82%)



Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013; World Bank, 2013; Republic of South Sudan Ministry of General Education and Instruction, 2012

USAID FORWARD

The United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, is the United States federal government agency that has managed U.S. foreign assistance programs around the world since 1961. USAID and the U.S. Department of State have a shared mission, which is to “shape and sustain a peaceful, prosperous, just, and democratic world and foster conditions for stability and progress for the benefit of the American people and people everywhere” (U.S. Department of State & USAID, 2012). Working in sectors such as education, health, agriculture, and environment, USAID has a field presence in nearly 80 countries worldwide (USAID, 2011d).

First announced in July 2010, USAID Forward is an agency-wide reform initiative that aims to “change the way the agency does business — with new partnerships, an emphasis on innovation, and a relentless focus on results” (USAID, 2010b). USAID Forward has been called the agency’s “change management agenda” (Schiegg, 2010) and consists of the seven key reform areas, several of which have already produced results:

Rebuilding policy capacity: To perform policy analysis and strategic planning, USAID created a new Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning in June 2010 that leads the agency’s policy planning efforts, shapes overall strategic and program planning, ensures progress through learning and evaluation, oversees donor engagement, and institutionalizes science and technology in its work.

Supporting capabilities in science and technology: To pioneer scientific, technological, and research-motivated approaches to traditional development challenges, USAID established the Office of Science and Technology within the Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning.

Restoring budget management: To ensure budget decisions are more explicitly tied to policy priorities, strategic plans, and evidence-based results, USAID created the Office of Budget and Resource Management in September 2010.

Leading on innovation: To find and support breakthrough solutions to development challenges, USAID launched Development Innovation Ventures in October 2010, which awards grants to private sector and academic innovators, supporting them to test, pilot, and scale up new development solutions.

Strengthening monitoring and evaluation: To more systematically monitor program performance and evaluate impact, USAID developed a new Evaluation Policy in January 2011.

Attracting and retaining talent: To increase administrative efficiency, USAID will improve and streamline its processes to recruit and retain through better hiring, training tools, and incentives.

Building local capacity: To bring about development that is more sustainable, USAID will undergo a process of Implementation and Procurement Reform to increase partnership with host country governments, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), and small businesses. (USAID, 2011d)

USAID Forward set out to drive a series of full-spectrum reforms that would address everything from logistics of internal staff management to USAID's very theory of development.

Implementation and Procurement Reform

Progress has been made on many of USAID Forward's objectives — bureaus have been established, offices have been created, initiatives have been launched, and policies have been written. However, the status of one reform agenda item in particular is more questionable. Sometimes referred to as Building Local Capacity or Local Solutions, this component is still most popularly identified by its original name — Implementation and Procurement Reform, or IPR.

IPR has been equally met with criticism and praise. Since its inception, language around it has changed, targets have been modified, and policy papers have been written — some welcoming the move towards greater aid effectiveness, others warning against the risks. Debate continues today on everything from the tenets of its underlying theory of development to how its progress should be tracked.

What is IPR? As above, IPR seeks to increase partnership with host country governments, local NGOs and CSOs, and small businesses. In USAID's own words, IPR aims towards:

- Strengthening partner country, local civil society, and private sector capacity in order to improve results and reduce the need for aid over time.
- Increasing competition and broadening our partner base by increasing our investments in U.S.-based small and disadvantaged businesses and small NGOs.
- Maximizing the effectiveness of taxpayer funds by cutting red tape and refining some processes to strengthen results. This includes increasing the number of fixed-price contracts when appropriate, decreasing the use of risky procurement approaches, and harmonizing our efforts with other U.S. government agencies working in the same issue areas.
- Improving collaboration and partnership with other donors and organizations to increase efficiency, avoid duplication, and strengthen results. (USAID, 2012)

In short, IPR endeavors to expand USAID's partner base, streamline procurement procedures, and improve donor coordination. By providing direct assistance to governments of developing countries and the non-governmental and civil society organizations within them, USAID would build the functioning environments required for nations to deliver public services and reduce their dependency on aid. By procuring goods and services from businesses in developing countries, USAID would cut down its own costs, drive more wealth into local communities, and create in-country jobs.

As stated in USAID's initial IPR plan,

Our goal at USAID is to create the conditions whereby, one day, aid will no longer be necessary in the countries where we work. That goal can only be realized if the assistance we deliver strengthens the local actors and institutions that are ultimately responsible for transforming their countries. (USAID, 2010a)

From operational agency to contracting firm

How has this direction become so controversial? To many, working with host country governments, local organizations and businesses within those countries, and other development agents like small U.S. businesses and NGOs may sound like the very nature of development. However, this was not how USAID had been doing business.

Following heavy cuts to its operating budget in the mid-1990s resulting in reduced size of staff, then steep increases in the foreign aid budget after September 11th, USAID in recent years has become more dependent on the services of large development firms. As summarized by a 2003 report from the Government Accountability Office:

But I think it's fair to say that USAID, our premier aid agency, has been decimated. You know, it has half the staff it used to have. It's turned into more of a contracting agency than an operational agency with the ability to deliver.

— Hillary Clinton,
Senate Confirmation Hearing as
Nominee for Secretary of State,
January 13th, 2009

USAID has evolved from an agency consisting primarily of U.S. direct-hire foreign service officers who directly implemented development projects to one in which foreign service officers manage and oversee development programs and projects carried out by institutional contractors and grantees. Since 1992, the number of U.S. direct-hire staff has decreased by 37 percent, but the number of countries with USAID programs has almost doubled. In addition, USAID program funding increased 57 percent in fiscal years 2002 and 2003. As a result, USAID has increasingly relied on contractor staff — primarily personal services contractors — to manage its day-to-day activities overseas.

USAID has left the retail game and become a wholesaler. In fact, it's become a wholesaler to wholesalers. It takes you far from what's happening on the ground.

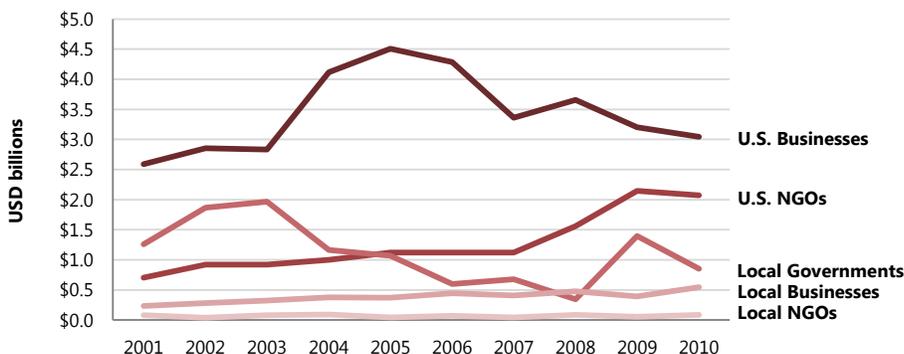
— Carol Lancaster,
Dean of the School of Foreign
Service and Professor of Politics
at Georgetown University,
Deputy Administrator of USAID
1993-1996

USAID went from a staff of nearly 3,500 managing a total of about \$5 billion annually in 1990 to 2,200 personnel overseeing more than \$8 billion annually in 2008 (American Academy of Diplomacy & Henry L. Stimson Center, 2008). Annual contract spending rose from about \$479 million in 2000 to approximately \$2 billion in 2009 (USAID Office of Inspector General, n.d.).

The vast majority of these contracts have been awarded not to agencies and organizations in developing countries but to U.S.-based for-profit and nonprofit firms. Chart 1 on the next page illustrates the history of USAID disbursements by implementing partner type and shows how more than half of USAID's funds were going to U.S. firms and NGOs at the time USAID Forward was announced in 2010. With this, it is not surprising that all of the top 25 USAID contractors in 2010 were based in the United States, as in Table 1.

USAID's professional staff is a shadow of what it once was. We routinely hear that the reason USAID has become a check writing agency for a handful of big Washington contractors and NGOs is because you don't have the staff to manage a larger number of smaller contracts and grants. Sometimes these big contractors do a good job, although they charge an arm and a leg to do it. Other times they waste piles of money and accomplish next to nothing, although they are masters at writing glowing reports about what a good job they did. Meanwhile, the small not-for-profit organizations are shut out of the process. This is bad not only for U.S. taxpayers but also for the countries that need our help.

— Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT),
State, Foreign Operations Subcommittee Hearing on Fiscal Year 2009 USAID Budget Request



Source: USAID, 2013d

CHART 1:

**USAID
DISBURSEMENTS BY
IMPLEMENTING
PARTNER TYPE,
2001-2010**

Contractors	Location	Type	Amount Obligated
1. Creative Associates International, Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$1,632,792,888.51
2. Chemonics	U.S.	For-profit	\$526,830,377.83
3. Partnership For Supply Chain Management	U.S.	Nonprofit	\$432,468,295.00
4. John Snow, Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$422,188,711.39
5. Development Alternatives, Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$382,491,550.13
6. Research Triangle Institute	U.S.	Nonprofit	\$227,984,605.74
7. Louis Berger Group, Inc./Black & Veatch Joint Venture	U.S.	For-profit	\$143,789,832.92
8. Louis Berger Group, Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$134,398,163.00
9. Associates In Rural Development	U.S.	For-profit	\$126,800,765.00
10. Abt Associates, Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$123,639,964.91
11. Deloitte & Touche	U.S.	For-profit	\$107,283,662.91
12. DAI Washington	U.S.	For-profit	\$105,800,051.00
13. International Resources Group (IRG)	U.S.	For-profit	\$100,879,122.04
14. Management Sciences For Health, Inc. (MSH)	U.S.	Nonprofit	\$97,634,441.00
15. International Relief And Development, Inc.	U.S.	Nonprofit	\$89,435,911.05
16. RTI	U.S.	Nonprofit	\$87,007,070.00
17. Computer Sciences Corporation	U.S.	For-profit	\$86,718,458.75
18. Education Development Center, Inc.	U.S.	Nonprofit	\$80,667,173.00
19. BearingPoint	U.S.	For-profit	\$72,495,533.09
20. DAI/Nathan Group	U.S.	For-profit	\$65,095,629.72
21. Planning & Development International	U.S.	For-profit	\$55,856,573.77
22. AECOM International Development, Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$55,090,902.00
23. University Research Corporation	U.S.	For-profit	\$48,991,699.00
24. Parsons Global Services Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$48,131,183.00
25. PA Government Services, Inc.	U.S.	For-profit	\$45,524,625.00
Total			\$5,299,997,189.76

Source: USAID, 2011c

TABLE 1:

**TOP 25 USAID
CONTRACTORS IN
FY2010**

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reported that from fiscal year 1996 to fiscal year 2005, the share of funds awarded to for-profit contractors rose from 33 percent to 58 percent.

— Rachel McCleary in
*Global Compassion: Private
Voluntary Organizations and
U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1939*

This agency is no longer satisfied with writing big checks to big contractors and calling it development.

— Dr. Rajiv Shah,
USAID Administrator,
Remarks at the
Center for Global Development,
January 19th, 2011

It was with this backdrop that USAID created the following goal for IPR:

By 2015, our goal for building local sustainability and partnerships — known as implementation and procurement reform — is to invest approximately 30 percent of our global funds in local governments, businesses, and NGOs. (USAID, 2012)

The objectives of IPR reappear in the 2011 U.S. commitment to GPE when the pledge speaks of “aid effectiveness through the USAID Forward Initiative,” redefining “how USAID will engage with partner countries,” and “closer collaboration with local actors.”

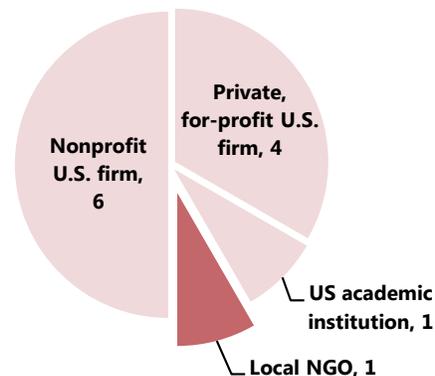
IPR IN AFRICA EDUCATION PROJECTS: LITTLE PROGRESS BUT HIGH DEMAND

Of Education Projects Reviewed, Only One Local Prime Implementing Partner

RESULTS’ country visits to Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia afforded an overview of 12 active USAID basic education projects. While most projects are successfully engaging local institutions as subcontractors, only one of the 12 awarded education projects reviewed as part of this four-country visit has a local entity as the prime implementing partner. This is the School, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Education (WASH) and Quality Education Project led by Development Aid from People to People in Zambia. Eleven of the 12 projects have U.S. organizations or institutions as primes, of which six are nonprofit, four are for-profit, and one is academic (see Chart 2 below). In these 12 projects, a total of \$290 million has been invested, with only three percent being channeled directly to local institutions as primary implementing partners (see Chart 3 on the next page).

CHART 2:

**PRIMARY
IMPLEMENTING
PARTNER TYPES OF
THE 12 BASIC
EDUCATION PROJECTS
SURVEYED**



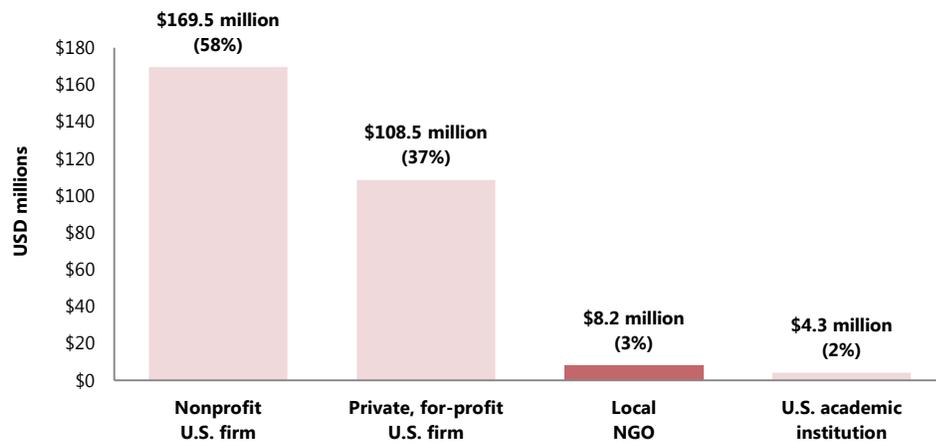


CHART 3:

**USAID INVESTMENTS
IN 12 BASIC
EDUCATION PROJECTS
SURVEYED, BY
IMPLEMENTING
PARTNER TYPE**

This is not to suggest that these are the only local institutions directly engaged by USAID missions in these countries in the course of implementing education projects. Other USAID education expenditures have reached local vendors and contractors. For example, \$724,618 was obligated to DataVision International, a Tanzanian ICT consulting company, for an impact evaluation of the Tanzania 21st Century Basic Education Program (TZ21) (USAID, 2013b; SmartProcure, 2013).

Also, a considerable amount of USAID project funding reaches local institutions through sub-contracts and sub-grants; however, the target of IPR concerns only direct partnerships. In fact, at the time of developing its original operational plan for IPR, USAID did not have the systems in place to track sub-contracts and sub-grants (USAID, 2010a). For these reasons, RESULTS' inquiry focused on USAID education projects with local institutions as the primary implementing partners.

While casual inspections of the type of primary implementing partners of basic education projects in the countries visited by RESULTS may suggest a large shortfall from IPR's 2015 goal of 30 percent, such spending at the country or sector level need not reach the 30 percent target in order for IPR to be successfully achieved. Progress towards IPR's 30 percent goal is being measured in terms of total obligations/awards agency-wide, meaning investment in local institutions may vary radically country-to-country and sector-to-sector. As long as 30 percent of total USAID funds are channeled through local institutions by 2015, IPR's target will be met.

The low level of implementation of IPR in the basic education projects surveyed in Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia is consistent with the *2013 USAID Forward Progress Report* and subsequent data released by USAID. Together, they indicate the levels of implementation of IPR by sector, region, and country.

In 2012, 14.3 percent of all mission program funds were implemented through host country governments and local institutions. Worldwide, 21 percent of education funds were channeled through local systems, but in Africa, only ten percent of total agency funds (all sectors) were invested locally (see Charts 3 and 4 on the next page).

CHART 4:
PROPORTION OF MISSION FUNDING AWARDED TO LOCAL INSTITUTIONS BY SECTOR, 2012

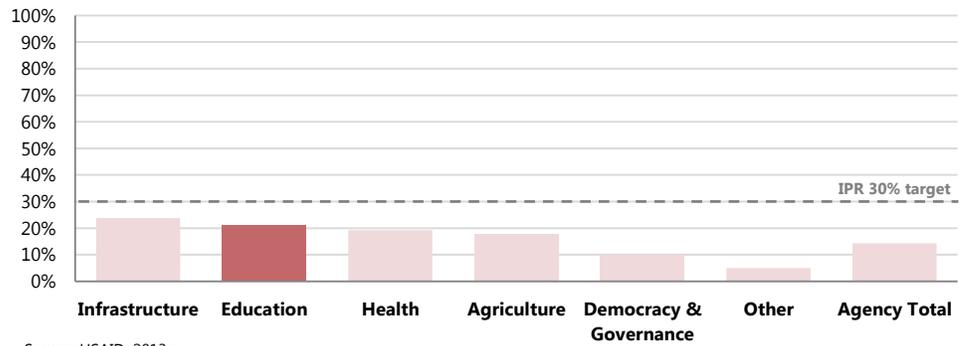
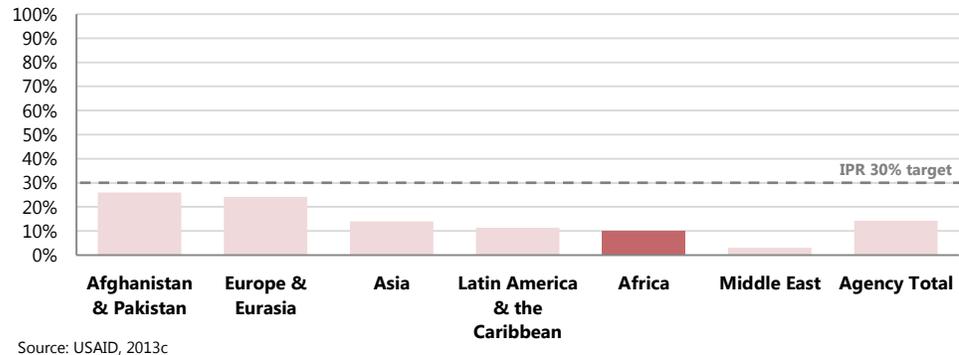


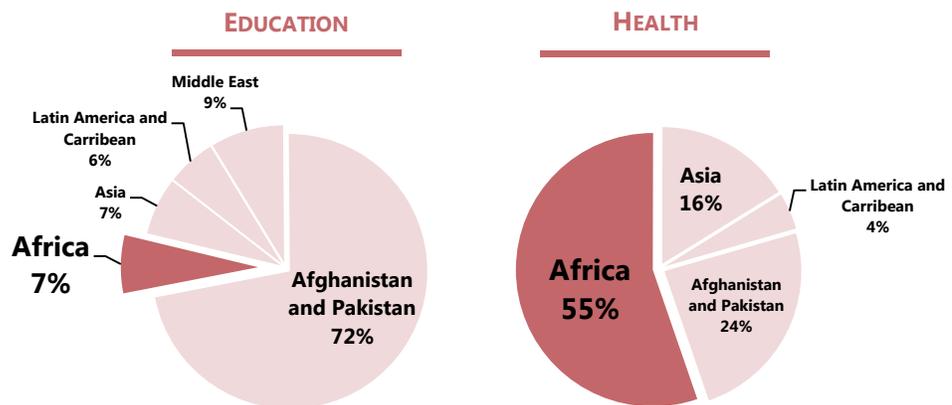
CHART 5:
PROPORTION OF MISSION FUNDING AWARDED TO LOCAL INSTITUTIONS BY REGION, 2012



When the level of USAID education investment in local institutions in Africa specifically is further explored, a very different picture emerges, especially when compared across sectors. Current data suggests that only about four percent of USAID education funds in Africa were obligated to partner country governments or local organizations in 2012. This stands in stark contrast with, for example, the health sector, which saw 19 percent of USAID health funds invested in local institutions in Africa in 2012, even though the health sector had a global level of local investment similar to that of education, as in Chart 4 above (USAID, 2013b; U.S. Department of State, 2013).

When looking at where USAID is successfully partnering with local institutions between these two sectors, the difference becomes even more apparent. The vast majority (72 percent) of local investments in the education sector in 2012 were made in just two countries worldwide — Afghanistan and Pakistan — leaving Africa with only seven percent. Africa was the site of 55 percent of health sector local investments on the other hand (USAID, 2013b).

CHART 6:
PROPORTION OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH SECTOR LOCAL OBLIGATIONS BY REGION



Little Awareness but High Approval Rating

While missions were aware of USAID Forward and IPR, the vast majority (80 percent) of other stakeholders consulted (governments, donors, NGOs, and CSOs) had neither heard of USAID Forward nor heard that USAID was seeking to increase its engagement with local governments and NGOs. Most of those who were aware of the initiative were USAID implementing partners, who identified it as common knowledge primarily acquired through informal channels (word of mouth, USAID website, etc.). Meanwhile, donors in Liberia, Tanzania, and Zambia had also learned about USAID Forward and efforts to increase government-to-government assistance and local NGO partnership through donor meetings. Stakeholders in South Sudan were largely unaware of IPR, as it is not a priority agenda there at the moment.¹

On average, the Implementation and Procurement Reform agenda of USAID Forward was seen by stakeholders as something that would help the government, organizations, and their nations as a whole achieve greater development of the education sector. While it was generally agreed that higher levels of investment in local institutions by USAID was desirable in principle and would lead to more sustainable development outcomes if done properly, there is a large gap between how USAID currently does business and a future in which USAID is investing more in host country governments and local NGOs. Conversations with stakeholders as to how to bridge that gap are presented below and reveal more in depth opinions about issues surrounding the implementation of IPR and how to effectively reach its goals.

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL SYSTEMS

When it comes to enhanced partnership with host country governments to the point of direct investment or channeling funds through national systems, it is impossible to ignore where USAID would be starting its journey given its adherence to project-style funding. Throughout RESULTS' visits, there were routine criticisms of USAID (and other donors) planning, designing, and implementing projects outside of genuine government consultation, sometimes to the extent that governments did not even know project costs. Instead of involving ministries of education at the beginning planning stages, USAID was said to offer "prepackaged" projects to the government, "which they of course accept." With this approach, USAID and other donors end up "dictating" to ministries of education their project plans and activities, according to development actors consulted.

Even where it is involved in pooled funds arrangements, USAID is often reluctant to channel funds through them, treating them more as education donor groups than capacity building mechanisms. For example, even though Zambia's Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) has pooled education assistance

USAID does extremely fantastic work on the ground, but at the end of the project, it's done — no government take-up, no continuation.

—Development Partner,
Zambia

¹ USAID Forward and approaches to achieve IPR are to be integrated into Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS). In South Sudan, however, its 2011-2013 Transition Strategy is operational in place of a CDCS. While the Transition Strategy seeks to develop, support, and work with the local government and local institutions, it does not have targets as concretely intentional as those of IPR, and, therefore, such an agenda has not been more broadly rolled out.

for over 10 years, USAID and JICA (Japan) are the only donors still insisting on project funding. This reluctance — which USAID Forward in part seeks to address — undermines the aid effectiveness principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action, and the Busan framework, and it decreases the sustainable impact of USAID’s work towards poverty reduction.

On the other hand, there were complaints of lack of leadership within host country governments, with claims of some ministries of education simply “outsourcing” their service delivery responsibilities to donors. This sentiment was echoed across a range of stakeholders including national and international actors and some government representatives themselves.

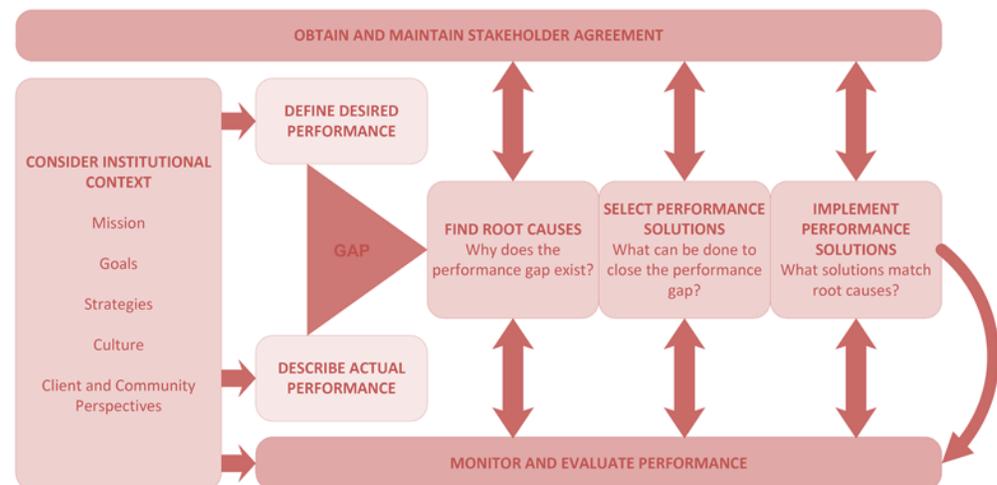
These mutually exacerbating factors drive a cycle of low sustainability and low government capacity. In the end, projects are implemented outside of government systems, and ministries grow no closer to being able to independently provide services to their citizens. Accordingly, USAID’s project-style approach and national government capacities were often spoken as the dual areas of intervention needed to break this cycle if USAID wants to reap the benefits of a goal such as that of IPR.

In Liberia, USAID’s Government and Economic Management Support Project (GEMS) was cited on numerous occasions as a good example of how USAID can build government capacity. GEMS seeks to improve economic governance of Government of Liberia Ministries and Agencies by:

- Developing procedures and processes for policy development;
- Improving financial management;
- Strengthening procurement and management systems; and
- Providing formal training on financial management, procurement, and audits. (IBI International, 2013)

GEMS utilizes USAID’s 2010 Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) Handbook, which provides the following framework for systematically analyzing and improving performance:

ILLUSTRATION 1:
THE HICD PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT MODEL



Source: USAID, 2013c

USAID is implementing similar HICD projects in Rwanda, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Albania.

The HICD model offers a welcomed approach to government capacity building that may prove to be a critical intervention for contexts in which partner country systems are deemed too weak for direct investment as called for by IPR. Despite some fears, IPR will not result in the handing over of U.S. taxpayer dollars to corrupt officials and unaccountable systems. Missions engage partner country systems through USAID's five-stage Public Financial Management Risk Assessment Framework (PFMRAF), which determines if a country's systems — public financial management, procurement, audit, and internal monitoring and evaluation functions—are suitable for USAID-funded assistance. Before project design even begins, government institutions must demonstrate adequate capacities through a Rapid Appraisal (Stage 1) and then, if satisfactory, a Risk Assessment (Stage 2). In 2012, 33 countries completed Stage 1 Rapid Appraisals, of which 30 moved on to Stage 2 Risk Assessments. In total, 70 countries were at some stage of the PFMRAF process in 2012 (USAID, 2013c).

While increasing the capacity of weak national systems is the logical starting point for creating environments in which USAID can move effectively toward government-to-government assistance, project aid implemented outside of partner country systems does not preclude genuine collaboration with local governments. While USAID basic education projects are strongly aligned with national education plans (see "Discussion Paper 2 of 3: The USAID Education Strategy"), there is still a call for missions to work more closely with ministries of education during project planning stages. USAID is highly involved in education donor groups in the countries visited, but this participation sometimes devolves into unilateral communications simply of project updates. The increased use of national systems, as targeted by IPR, will require greater government-to-government collaboration, but there appears to be a routine lack of such collaboration even in the opportunities presented by existing modalities.

The lack of collaborative project planning, and subsequently its implementation, diminishes government ownership over the development process and can threaten USAID projects, even when implemented outside of government systems. As described by the Chief of Party of one reading project, under the USAID model there is often the assumption that the government will cover recurrent costs. This has a large implication for literacy projects developing reading materials. In this case, the primary implementing partner had a very low budget for printing. While the project would develop the materials, there were concerns whether the government would indeed print them.

The two issues of increasing government ownership through more collaborative project planning — even of projects that are to be implemented outside of government systems — and carrying out capacity building programs targeting government institutions were repeatedly cited as the necessary interim actions on USAID's path towards reaching its IPR target.

BUILDING THE NGO LANDSCAPE

Similar to the need for government systems strengthening, RESULTS heard a unanimous call for capacity building of local NGOs/CSOs across all stakeholders. While capacity building of governments was largely in terms of public financial management, that of local NGOs touched on all aspects of the project cycle: project planning, proposal writing, institutional support, technical and managerial capacity of staff, project implementation, data collection, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, and auditing, as well as financial management.

Nevertheless, financial management was time and again raised as the core concern surrounding partnerships with local NGOs and CSOs. Lack of financial records, expenditures without receipts, purchase orders without contracts — all were cited as violations of proper financial management often committed by local organizations. These concerns were echoed by USAID mission staff and their primary implementing partners sub-contracting to local organizations, but local NGOs and CSOs were sometimes the most self-critical. As the executive director of one CSO explained, few CSOs have adequate accountability structures in place, and many are “less transparent than the government.”

The local organizations consulted recognized these deficiencies in financial management and did not fault USAID for seeking proper accountability of funds. At the same time, stories unfolded that suggested that USAID’s approach may pose its own set of difficulties. USAID regulations and procedures were often seen as too strict. Local NGOs cited not only financial management regulations but also aspects of the contracting process such as the need to be registered in the United States and seemingly small issues constantly needing to be communicated back to Washington. This was said to be different from other donors and, taken together, resulted in local organizations seeing USAID as failing to effectively partner with them where other bilateral donors were succeeding.

While financial accountability could be maintained even with more flexible regulations, many local NGOs and CSOs instead pointed to the need for USAID to provide sufficient feedback and guidance. Local organizations who had attempted to partner with USAID reported a lack of feedback from audits and assessments, leading to a perception that USAID requirements cannot be met. These organizations would be happy to partner with USAID and strengthen their own policies and procedures to comply to USAID regulations if they knew their shortcomings and how to address them.

On the one hand, certain capacity deficiencies indeed exist in many local organizations. On the other hand, there are strong local NGO landscapes that USAID is failing to advantage of. What is clear is that strict regulations without proactive guidance or feedback on how to meet them will not result in increased partnerships with local organizations.

You give them money, but they divert it. It would be a nightmare.

— Acting Chief of Party of a U.S.-based USAID primary implementing partner on the issue of channeling more funds through local NGOs

The only way to work with USAID is to turn completely to them.

— Local Tanzanian organization

USAID policies are the stumbling block, not the local NGOs.

— Deputy Executive Director of a local NGO sub-contractor on the issue of directly partnering with USAID

Box 1: Learning from Others: Effective Partnerships with Local NGOs in South Sudan's Education Cluster

The South Sudan Education Cluster is a forum comprised of the Ministry of Education, UN agencies, and NGOs established in 2010 to coordinate responses to education in emergencies. Its core areas of work include:

- Coordination of emergency response
- Capacity development
- Advocacy and resource mobilization
- Information management, monitoring, and reporting
- Planning and strategy development
- Action on priority cross-sectoral and cross-cutting issues

The South Sudan Education Cluster operates at both the state and national levels. The National Education Cluster provides strategic leadership, helps develop national policy, and supports state-level clusters. Chaired by the Ministry of Education and co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children, the National Education Cluster consists of over 170 individuals, including government representatives from all ten State Ministries, 29 international NGOs, five national NGOs, six UN agencies, and five donor organizations. This structure is replicated in all ten states of South Sudan, with State Level Education Clusters led by the State Ministry of Education with support from an NGO Focal Point and a UNICEF Focal Point (South Sudan Education Cluster, 2013).

The Education Cluster does not financially support local NGOs but builds their capacity to engage the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). CAP unites organizations to develop joint plans for coordinated responses to emergencies, allowing them to appeal for funds cohesively so as to provide assistance that is timely, predictable, and accountable (UNOCHA, 2013a). The South Sudan Education Cluster supports local NGOs seeking to engage this process through state level trainings and CAP preparation workshops on education in emergencies, program design, proposal writing, data collecting, and reporting as well as abundant tools and resources.

In 2013, the South Sudan CAP portfolio for education consists of 30 projects totaling \$24.4 million. Nearly half of these projects are being directly implemented by local organizations (UNOCHA, 2012 & 2013b).

RESULTS OVER CAPACITY BUILDING: GUARANTEEING DEVELOPMENT OR UNDERMINING IT?

Throughout the conversations RESULTS had during its country visits to Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia, a spectrum of the development “bottom line” emerged with results on the one end and capacity building on the other. While the two are not mutually exclusive, they were often positioned on two different sides of the local investment conversation.

Development efforts should aim to nurture sustainable local institutions, systems, and capacities that enable developing countries to manage their national challenges effectively.

— “Foundation: USAID’s Central Tenets” as in the USAID Policy Framework 2011-2015

On the one hand, USAID is working to eliminate poverty and, in effect, create a future in which its services are no longer needed. As USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah remarked at the launch of the 2013 USAID Progress Report, “Our goal is to work ourselves out of business” (USAID, 2013a). This, and sustainable development as a whole, cannot be achieved without building the capacity of local institutions to effectively and independently manage their own national challenges.

On the other hand, capacity building cannot be done at the cost of lives. Project implementation through national systems and local institutions becomes problematic if such implementation achieves less results — fewer people receiving essential health services, fewer children receiving a quality education that would break the cycle of poverty — than it would have if conducted through other partners.

However, these two goals — results and capacity building — are not mutually exclusive when partnering with local institutions is properly carried out. The procedures USAID has in place around partnering with host country governments and local organizations are essentially safeguards that ensure proper financial management, adequate strength of systems, and accountable results.

The real danger is the results trade-off assumption that leads to a perpetual bias for partnering with large firms. An assumption of doubt of local capacity will result in diminished outreach to these institutions: no contracts will go to local NGOs or governments when there is a highly-capacitated U.S. firm there ready to do the job.

Large, highly-capacitated U.S. firms didn’t appear on the development landscape out of nowhere. Many began similar to the local organizations existing today. Creative Associates, USAID’s largest contractor in 2010 and implementing partner for several of the education projects visited by RESULTS, was started in 1977 in a Washington, D.C. basement by four women who lived off of their savings for the first year until they received their first purchase order of \$9,000 and later began working with USAID. Over the last 35 years, it has grown to become a premiere partner of the agency. While dealing with nascent systems and the added labor of smaller, more numerous contracts are key drawbacks for missions when working with local organizations, each mega-contract to a large U.S. firm represents an opportunity lost to have helped a host country’s own next Creative Associates get its start.

In 1977 in a Washington, D.C. basement, four women with diverse cultural backgrounds and a single passion for educational excellence and opportunity founded the enterprise that would become Creative Associates International.

From its inception, Creative Associates' founders had a knack for overcoming business challenges, including the fact that none of them had a credit history. "Banks did not look at us with great joy," Charito [Kruvant] says wryly. During the first year, they lived off of their savings and were ecstatic when they were awarded their first purchase order with a value of \$9,000.

"After three pounds of paper, eighteen months of walking halls and several rounds of being asked to rewrite the application, we finally succeeded," remembers Charito. "We were the first women-owned firm to be granted 8(a) status. The 8(a) designation helped us win our first government contract, including our first contract with USAID."

— Creative Associates, "History"

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite responding positively upon learning about USAID Forward and the Implementation and Procurement Reform agenda, the majority of development actors consulted throughout RESULTS' visits to Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia were not aware of USAID's intentions to increase direct partnerships with local institutions and host country governments. Only one of the 12 basic education projects surveyed by RESULTS has a local entity as the prime implementing partner, and only one out of every 25 dollars USAID invested in education in Africa in 2012 went to a local institution. If it is to achieve the sustainable development outcomes underlying IPR, USAID must:

- **Foster partners, not just implementers:** From host country governments to local NGOs, RESULTS heard repeated reports of USAID offering "prepackaged" projects and "dictating" national priorities. Combined with the strictness of USAID policies, procedures, and reporting requirements, stakeholders were left expressing sentiments of merely being contractors implementing USAID's agenda rather than partners supported by USAID to carry forward their own development priorities and strategies. USAID Forward's efforts toward local ownership must not merely concentrate on finding local contractors and shifting a percentage of funds over to them. Rather, it must involve soliciting local participation to establish priorities and developing them as institutions in their own right. More effectively placing country ownership as the logical starting point for USAID's education programming, as discussed in "Discussion Paper 2 of 3: The USAID Education Strategy," can likewise help foster local NGOs, civil society, and host country governments as partners rather than merely implementers.
- **Build host country government capacity where needed:** Sustainable development, and the goals of USAID Forward, cannot be achieved without helping partner country governments build their own capacities to deliver services. Where assessments reveal national systems too weak for direct partnership, USAID must prioritize government capacity building projects such as USAID/Liberia's Government and Economic Management Support Project (GEMS), other projects utilizing USAID's Human and

Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) performance improvement model, and additional initiatives designed to support governments in strengthening their financial management systems and service delivery capacity.²

- **Coach local NGO communities:** While capacity building needs to be in terms of local organizations' abilities to design and execute their own development agendas — not just their capacities to be a USAID contractor — USAID missions must at least provide adequate, constructive feedback to local NGOs or streamline its compliance requirements. Some local NGOs which had applied for USAID funding or had been approached by USAID reported not receiving feedback as to why they were not further considered for project implementation or what systems deficiencies they exhibited that prevented them from doing so. Providing such feedback is an essential starting point for building the capacity of local organizations to partner with USAID. In addition to individual consultations, USAID missions would have more success in fostering local NGO landscapes if they were to offer routine guidance on USAID procedures to local communities of practice similar to the approach of South Sudan's Education Cluster. Workshops, tools, and resources specifically aimed toward building local NGO capacity — and missions appropriately staffed to provide such outreach and guidance — will be essential if USAID is to more effectively collaborate with local actors.³
- **Strengthen government systems through increased partnership with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE):** The 2011 U.S. pledge to the Global Partnership for Education, the context of RESULTS' country visits, raises an interesting implication that may not have otherwise been considered under an isolated analysis of USAID Forward — that of USAID Forward and GPE's shared objective of supporting and strengthening national systems. GPE utilizes a systems approach to education development in which plans are developed by local stakeholders and funds are primarily channeled through government structures. As USAID endeavors to head in this direction, it needs to benefit from GPE's comparative advantage in this area and more greatly support GPE's efforts to foster environments that both institutions desire — functioning national systems capable of effective, independent delivery of quality essential services. Discussed at length in "Discussion Paper 1 of 3: The U.S. Commitment to the GPE Fund," the United States is highly involved in GPE structures at the country level but behind in global support to the GPE Fund, pledging only \$20 million to GPE in 2011 while nations with much smaller economies committed between \$100 million and \$400 million. As the work of GPE builds the very environment needed by USAID to achieve the government-to-government assistance targets of USAID Forward and, more importantly, meet its objective of sustainable development, USAID needs to balance its local and global collaboration with GPE with a much larger, multi-year pledge at GPE's replenishment conference in June 2014.
- **Support and take advantage of GPE's efforts to strengthen civil society:** Through a designated fund called the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF), GPE is building the capacity of national civil society education coalitions across 45 countries to more fully engage

² For more on government capacity building, see Oxfam, 2010 and Save the Children, 2010.

³ For more on working with local NGOs, see: Mercy Corps, 2013; Save the Children, n.d.; and Women Thrive Worldwide, n.d.

education sector programs, strengthen the implementation of national education plans, and perform the public oversight roles necessary for ensuring greater government accountability and improved service delivery. These efforts from GPE are helping create the landscape needed for USAID to directly partner with local civil society organizations and successfully achieve the goals of USAID Forward. Greater U.S. support to GPE will facilitate the growth of not only partner country government systems as described above but also the robust civil society organizations that USAID is seeking.

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RESULTS Educational Fund

1101 15th Street NW, Suite 1200

Washington, DC 20005

Tel: (202) 783-4800

Fax: (202) 466-1397

www.results.org