USTDA continues to improve program performance by applying existing evidence of what works, generating new knowledge, and using experimentation and innovation to test new approaches to program delivery. With over 30 years of quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of project preparation efforts, USTDA supports evidence-based program design for infrastructure development in emerging markets.

Learning Agenda Objective and Uses

The USTDA Program Monitoring and Evaluation Office (M&E Office) works with the Agency's leadership and regional program teams to use monitoring and evaluation data and findings for decisions regarding Agency policies, strategy-setting and planning, program priorities and portfolio balancing, delivery of services and budget formulation processes. This learning agenda outlines USTDA's current evidence-informed approaches to understanding the effectiveness of the Agency's programs for U.S. companies and international partners. It also reflects USTDA's priorities resulting from the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRAMA) and key performance management procedures supporting those priorities. While a learning agenda is a new tool for USTDA, the Agency has a history of proactively using its growing body of evidence to inform program design and decision-making, as illustrated throughout. This tool is designed to minimize the risk of funding ineffective programs and scale up programs successfully achieving USTDA's mission.

USTDA Mission Statement: The U.S. Trade and Development Agency helps companies create U.S. jobs through the export of U.S. goods and services for priority development projects in emerging economies. USTDA links U.S. businesses to export opportunities by funding project planning activities, pilot projects, and reverse trade missions while creating sustainable infrastructure and economic growth in partner countries.

USTDA has proudly evaluated its programming for decades, cultivating a culture of evidence-based decision-making at the Agency. These program evaluations have helped collect information to fill previously identified gaps in the Agency's knowledge and better align evidence-building efforts with the Agency's mission. This work is systematically shared, encouraging Agency-wide adoption of practices to use data effectively to improve programming.

The M&E Office is also positioned to help hold USTDA and its partners accountable and to provide tools that simultaneously strengthen USTDA's impact in the U.S. and in emerging markets. USTDA maintains a

positive and supportive approach toward grant management, oversight and results-tracking, including routinely monitoring all programs and performing systematic compliance reviews to ensure that the Agency's resources are used appropriately. Additionally, the M&E Office fosters communication with Agency staff to help make continuous improvements and ensure more successful outcomes.

Methodology for Developing the Learning Agenda

The M&E Office has developed a learning agenda reflecting existing practices and previously established priority learning objectives based on USTDA stakeholder input from the M&E Office, Regional Teams, the Data Governance Board, and the Executive Team. USTDA reports priority performance metrics annually in the Agency's Performance and Accountability Report. Information contained in this learning agenda has been sourced from USTDA's M&E Policy, USTDA's Data Validation and Verification, and Performance and Accountability Report. OMB, Congress, U.S. Government partners, U.S. companies and suppliers, financiers, and host country project sponsors are external stakeholders actively engaged in USTDA's learning. Since USTDA's evidence and information collection activities rely on direct input from various external stakeholders, the M&E Office actively attempts to identify strategies to facilitate and enhance information collection efforts while aligning with Paperwork Reduction Act obligations.

The M&E Office's learning methodology focuses on both short-term and long-term learning objectives. Short-term typically references up to a one-year period, whereas long-term refers to up to ten years, given the length of time it can take to implement complex, large-scale infrastructure projects in emerging markets. Additionally, the Agency's key performance metric, the export multiplier, consists of an average across ten years of programming.

Learning questions

USTDA Performance and Program Evaluation Results

- Are commercial objectives being met?
    - How many exports have resulted from USTDA's support in the long-term?
        - Total Cumulative Exports: the amount of exports associated with USTDA-funded activities in any given time period
    - How many exports have resulted from USTDA's support in the short-term?
        - New Exports Added: the amount of exports identified and attributed to USTDA-funded activities in the previous fiscal year

- How efficiently are commercial objectives being met?

- Export Multiplier: quantifies the amount of exports generated for every appropriated USTDA dollar programmed and thus is the export return on USTDA investments. It is calculated by dividing the dollar value of U.S. exports USTDA attributes by the dollar value of USTDA's program funding commitments during a ten-year rolling average period (TYRA).

- How effectively does USTDA's programming support global partners' priority development projects?
  - As USTDA-funded activities are completed, evaluators assess the resulting degree of project implementation. Implementation progress is measured against the project objectives determined at the time of funding.
  - Often, financing is required for stakeholders to advance project implementation. USTDA support can help stakeholders obtain financing through work products that financiers use to inform financing decisions or by connecting project developers with interested financiers. USTDA seeks to collect evidence of associated financing leveraged to implement the USTDA supported project.

- How is USTDA improving development in the emerging markets where infrastructure projects are being supported through programming?
  - USTDA has established a set of development impact indicators across five categories to further the Agency's understanding of resulting impacts in emerging markets. These categories include human capacity building, infrastructure development and efficiency gains, promoting effective markets and governance, promoting environmental benefit, and promoting safety and security. Under these five categories, there is a total of 31 development indicators that can be used to capture specific changes resulting from USTDA-funded activities.

- How can USTDA secure additional commitment by stakeholders to minimize the risk of sole-sourced grants?
  - Cost-Sharing: Another Agency requirement used in the context of sole-sourced grants is a demonstration of the U.S. firm's commitment to the work and interest in project implementation following the completion of the USTDA-funded activity. Cost-sharing allows the Agency to combine its limited resources with private sector resources to jointly support infrastructure projects overseas that create U.S. export opportunities.
  - Success Fees: USTDA's authorizing legislation enables the Agency to recoup grant funding in instances where a U.S. firm commercially benefits from a USTDA funded activity through the success fee program. Potential commercial benefits include project investment, return on financing, and revenue generation from the sale of goods and services. The requirement to pay a success fee is triggered if the U.S. company receives commercial benefits related to project implementation.

- How does USTDA support small businesses?
  - USTDA fosters opportunities for U.S. small businesses by exceeding the applicable U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) benchmark for percentage of applicable contracts under the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) awarded to U.S. small businesses.

- How many jobs has USTDA supported?
  - Applying a mathematical formula per Department of Commerce studies, an estimate of the number of jobs supported can be calculated based on the U.S. exports identified in association with USTDA-funded activities.

- How effectively are USTDA funds being used to complete the Terms of Reference/terms of the grant agreement?
  - USTDA assesses final grant deliverables, such as the feasibility study or technical assistance report, to ensure not only that the Agency's funding accomplishes funding goals but also that the work was sufficiently completed in accordance with the terms of the agreements. In addition, compliance audits are conducted, and the M&E Office helps to identify patterns of non-compliance.

Learning activities

USTDA has established processes and practices to support greater learning about the questions identified above and to understand the impact USTDA's programming has on U.S. companies and international partners. As of result of Executive Team engagement, there is strong support across the Agency for active evidence-based learning. The M&E Office manages or facilitates many of these processes in collaboration with other departments within USTDA. Though learning objectives may evolve to reflect changes in administration priorities, new legislative requirements or further explore insights gained from current processes, the following learning activities are actively supported to continue improving institutional evidence-based learning.

Activity Development

Requests for Program Funding Throughout a given fiscal year, Regional Teams research specific project funding opportunities that fall within the priorities determined during the Agency's annual strategic planning process. Each specific activity funding request assesses and estimates potential outcomes and is shaped by the existing body of program evaluation evidence. The proposed funding request also anticipates potential risks and threats to the activity and develops mitigation strategies that may also be informed by lessons-learned and evidence gathered from similar past activities.

Programmatic Monitoring

Project Implementation Assessments USTDA has hundreds of ongoing grant activities at any time. Each activity has its own unique set of opportunities and challenges, and the M&E Office routinely monitors these activities and collects information to help Regional Teams maximize program effectiveness. During funding disbursement, USTDA monitors the activity by conducting project implementation assessments (PIAs), a type of

implementation evaluation, to document whether USTDA's funding is achieving its intended goals. This also allows USTDA to make funding decisions and adjustments as they are identified to improve funding efficacy. To facilitate monitoring practices and document potential outcomes in anticipation of the development project that will result, project implementation assessments are performed annually for all ongoing USTDA grant activities.

Grant Amendments As noted above, USTDA conducts multiple implementation evaluations during each grant's lifecycle to document the intentions of USTDA's funding and progress toward achieving those goals. The Agency and Regional Teams may use monitoring data to course-correct ongoing activities, which can include amending activity agreements. However, if it is determined that a grant activity will not meet USTDA's funding objectives, the Agency may terminate the activity so that funding can be redirected to programs that are more likely to achieve intended outcomes and results.

Final Report Reviews The M&E Office reviews final grant deliverables, such as the feasibility study or technical assistance report, to ensure not only that the Agency's funding accomplishes funding goals but also that the work was sufficiently completed in accordance with the terms of the agreements. As standard practice, 100% of final grant program deliverables are reviewed.

Non-Traditional Closeouts In certain circumstances a grant activity may need to be terminated early for a variety of reasons, including U.S. firm or Grantee request or U.S. government-wide imposed restrictions. While these situations are relatively rare, the M&E Office's active engagement throughout the termination process helps the Agency responsibly manage U.S. taxpayer dollars and capitalize on continual learning opportunities through sharing best practices and lessons learned with program teams.

Program Evaluations

Initial Implementation Assessment   When a grant activity, such as a feasibility study or technical assistance, is completed, an initial impact assessment is conducted to determine any initial results and anticipate future project developments that offer potential export opportunities for U.S. companies.

Independent Contractor Evaluation Reports As the project reaches financial close and construction and implementation phases occur, independent evaluation teams annually conduct qualitative and quantitative assessments to determine project impacts. USTDA uses external contractors - outside evaluation teams (OETs) - to evaluate approximately 350 USTDA activities annually. OETs provide an assessment of project outcomes, in terms of both exports and developmental impact. OETs provide these assessments in individual project reports that present details about such matters as:

- the specific U.S. companies that exported to the project;
- the specific U.S. goods and services supplied to the project;
- how the USTDA-funded work contributed to implementation of the project;
- the source of financing that was used for the project; and
- if the project did not move forward, an assessment of why it did not.

Grant Audit Program

Each year, the M&E Office collects information about grant activities that were completed in the prior year and applies a risk assessment methodology in consultation with an Audit Working Group, which includes Executive Management and Regional Program teams, to identify activities appropriate for audit. The M&E Office documents the outcomes of the audits, which are conducted by an independent third-party, and facilitates any necessary follow-on actions based upon audit findings. Results of the Grant Audit Program are made available in a timely manner to all program teams.

Success Fee Program

USTDA's authorizing legislation enables the Agency to receive a refund of grant funding in instances where the U.S. firm commercially benefits from a USTDA funded activity through the success fee program. The requirement to pay a success fee is triggered if the U.S. company receives commercial benefits related to project implementation. The Success Fee program requires companies to report on program outcomes where they have directly benefited. Information about benefitting companies and the outputs of the success fee program are shared with program staff annually.

Strategic Planning

USTDA has conducted annual strategic planning over the past decade to examine the effectiveness and responsiveness of the Agency's program to U.S. industry, U.S. foreign policy priorities, and emerging market needs. USTDA reviews its past performance by country and sector and examines its export successes and the developmental impacts of its program. Using this information, the Agency adjusts its priorities annually to respond to the U.S. business community and its partners overseas and to better achieve its trade and development missions.

Multi-year Annual Strategic Plans have been developed, consistent with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) and the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, which require the Agency to make available on its public website a Five-Year Strategic Plan, an Annual Performance Plan, and an Annual Performance Report. USTDA's Five-Year Strategic Plan for FY 2019 – 2022, as amended, and its combined Annual Performance Plan (FY 2016 – 2017) and Annual Performance Report (FY 2015) are both available on the Agency's website, ustda.gov.

USTDA Learning Map

USTDA M&E Office – September 2021

USTDA Monitoring & Evaluation Learning Map

USTDA U.S. TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

1 USTDA Activity Development

Technical Review of Proposal: Regional team considers new activities in context of annual strategic planning and portfolio balancing

Evaluation Data Use
Prior evaluations help inform expected outcomes and risk mitigants for the specific activity and approaches to cost shares and success fees

Activity Proposal
The regional team formally requests approval for activity funding, outlining an M&E strategy

2 USTDA Activity Implementation

Activity Tracking
Continuous monitoring for all activities inform likelihood of successful activity completion

Amendments
Changes are made to course correct while activities are ongoing

Project Implementation Assessment: Annual formative evaluations for project preparation activities track risks to activities and anticipated project outcomes

Closeout: Non-Traditional: Activities are unable to be completed as intended and require further engagement

Closeout: Traditional
Activities are completed as designed

Final Deliverable Review
100% of grant deliverables are reviewed for compliance, including cost share and success fee

Immediate Impact Assessment: Upon Final Report submission for project preparation activities, the first summative evaluation is conducted to assess initial outcomes

Audits Select grant activities are audited annually to ensure accountability for the use of taxpayer spending

3 USTDA-Supported Project Implementation

Annual Independent Evaluations
External evaluation teams perform annual program evaluations to capture specific outcomes and their linkages to USTDA's programs

Annual Independent Evaluations
The evaluation process continues annually for as many years as new information on project outcomes is available

Commercial Results
Exports included in the growing body of performance and results evidence

Development Results
Implementation, financing, and development impacts included in the growing body of performance and results evidence

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Evidence-Informed Agency Reporting
Five-Year Strategic Plan, an Annual Performance Plan, and an Annual Performance Report

Evidence-Informed Annual Strategic Planning and Direction Setting: Portfolio balancing by sector, market, activity type, export potential, etc.

Program Evaluation Data
Aggregated for Analysis and Application

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