

# LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT: LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE



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# Presentation overview and agenda

- Brief introduction to USAID and its environmental procedures
- Key findings from Agency-wide Review of USAID's Environmental Procedures
- Lessons for the future
  - Making impact assessment more meaningful
  - Engaging leadership in a transformative way
  - Aligning resources to risk

USAID is currently reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of Agency policies, processes, capacities, and implementation to identify and avoid adverse environmental impacts.

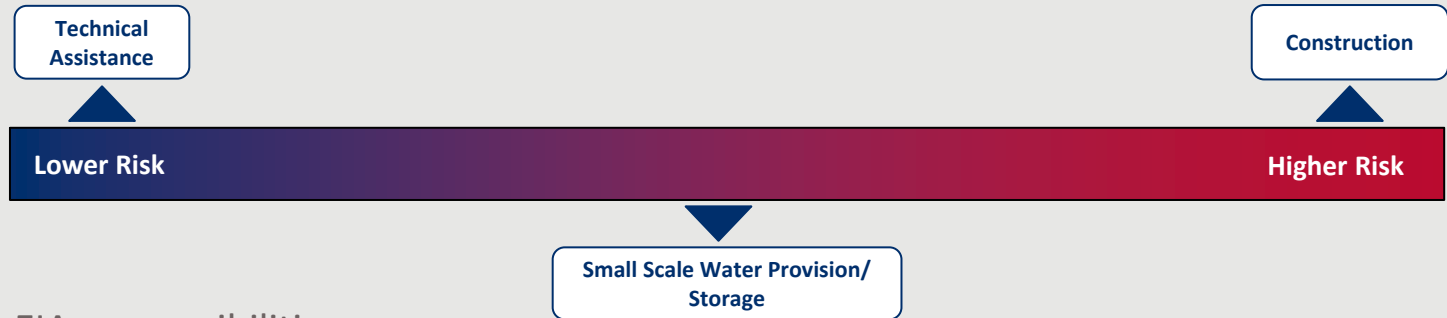
This represents the first comprehensive assessment of USAID's environmental procedures as required by U.S. federal regulations.

# Background on USAID programming

- Projects implemented through over 90 **bilateral and regional Missions** worldwide
- **Wide range of partners**, including multilateral international organizations, NGOs/CSOs, host country government, private firms, and others
- Using an **array of award instruments** that enable more-to-less control over environmental safeguarding
- **Technical focus areas** include:
  - Agriculture and Food Security
  - Anti-Corruption
  - Conflict Prevention and Stabilization
  - Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
  - Economic Growth and Trade
  - Education
  - Environment, Energy, and Infrastructure
  - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
  - Global Health
  - Humanitarian Assistance
  - Innovation, Technology, and Research
  - Nutrition
  - Water and Sanitation

# USAID Environmental Procedures

- Before funds are obligated, all USAID projects must:
  - Undergo initial screening and examination of potential environmental impacts
  - Determine mitigation measures for identified impacts
- Level detail in an EIA is tailored to the significance of potential environmental impact



- Key EIA responsibilities:
  - Project staff conduct the EIA
  - EIA experts provide support and advice
  - USAID leadership (i.e., Head of Mission) clears the EIA

# Agency-wide Review of USAID Environmental Procedures

- In 2022, an independent contractor began the first comprehensive assessment of the adequacy, suitability, and effectiveness of environmental procedures across all USAID operating units and programming
- Significant preliminary conclusions:
  - Look for opportunities to improve organizational processes and signals leading to improved environmental outcomes
  - Need to improve clarity and understanding within USAID on certain key areas of the regulations and operational policy
- **This presentation focuses primarily on the first conclusion**

**100**

## Interviewees

- Project staff
- Leadership
- EIA experts/officers
- Implementing partners

## Survey Respondents

- Project staff
- EIA experts/officers
- Procurement/contracting staff

**194**

**72**

## EIAs Reviewed

# Major findings of the Agency-wide Review

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overall, Agency is compliant with environmental procedures</li><li>• Required environmental reviews are prepared</li><li>• EIAs for higher-risk projects are comprehensive</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Capacity and resource constraints hinder oversight</li><li>• Inconsistent understanding of appropriate detail in EIA</li><li>• Limited follow-up during implementation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong procedural focus and lack of follow-up means that consequences of not taking safeguarding seriously are not felt</li><li>• “Check the box” perception</li></ul>
<b>Opportunities for USAID → Lessons for Other Organizations</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making EIA more meaningful through tools, training, and resources</li><li>• Shifting from a procedural approach to one anchored in risk management and results</li><li>• Engaging leadership in transformative ways</li></ul>		

# Making EIA more meaningful in practice

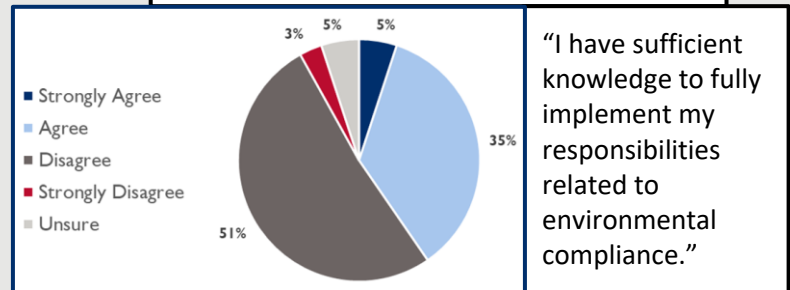
Through organizational change

Challenges	Opportunities
Project staff are often not EIA experts and have competing demands	Increase and improve training on EIA - so project staff better understand the relationship between EIA and development goals
	Include key EIA responsibilities in job descriptions
	Define key standards and responsibilities for each phase of EIA process
	Assign an EIA expert to higher risk project teams from design through close-out

"It is not logical to require non-environmental staff to be or pretend to be environmental watchdogs. A general practitioner physician is not a heart surgeon."

USAID project staff

USAID project staff survey responses



"I have sufficient knowledge to fully implement my responsibilities related to environmental compliance."

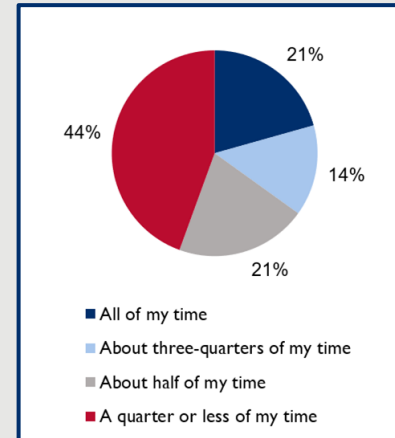
# Making EIA more meaningful in practice

Through organizational change

Challenges	Opportunities
USAID EIA officers have limited bandwidth and resources to support project staff, sometimes because they wear multiple hats	Sit EIA officers in program support/management offices to increase their influence
	Make Mission-level EIA officers full-time, in most cases
	Provide increased resources and opportunities for hands-on guided practice and mentoring

“The process isn’t cumbersome, it’s the sheer workload that is crushing [for EIA staff].”

USAID leadership



USAID EIA officers survey responses

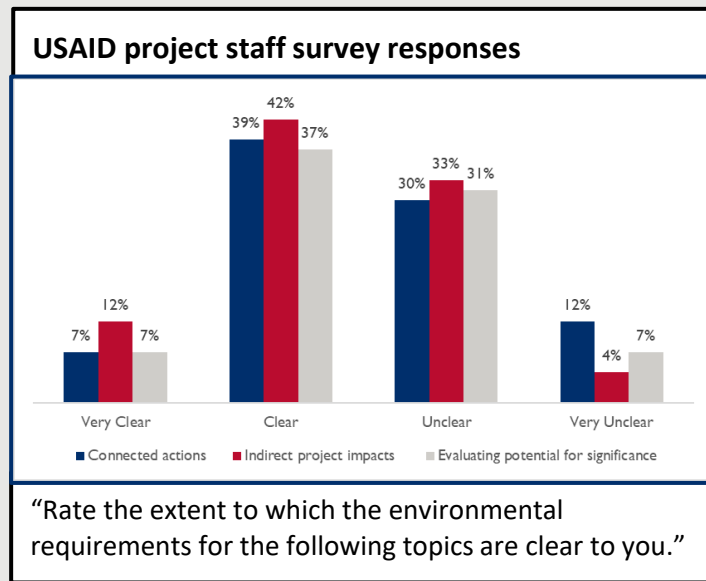
“How much of your time do you spend on your [EIA] responsibilities in a typical week?”



# Making EIA more meaningful in practice

Through more robust and flexible guidance

Challenges	Opportunities
Guidance exists but is inconsistent and, at times, outdated	Develop practitioner's guide for key terms, concepts, and FAQs
	Provide guidance on level of specificity and types of information needed in EIA to determine "significance" of impacts
USAID staff are unaware of or do not engage with existing guidance	Identify champions across USAID to promote and connect staff to resources
	Leverage IT solutions to improve access and experience



# Aligning resources to risk

Through shifting from a procedural approach to one anchored in risk management and results

Challenges	Opportunities
Imbalance in the focus on procedural requirements versus environmental and social outcomes	Adopt a more differentiated approach, to better tailor EIA actions to nature, scale, complexity, and risk of projects:
Process/detail sometimes too much for “tried-and-true” low-risk projects; sometimes too little for higher-risk projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provide training for more effective project risk screening</li><li>- Develop project risk-flag system for systematic follow-up by EIA officers</li><li>- Pursue process streamlining measures, especially when risk is low (e.g., umbrella EIAs and standard mitigation measures for categories of low-risk actions)</li></ul>
No systematic approach to tailor EIA officer involvement to level of risk	

“In the development sector, leadership is looking for flexibility and wants to spend our time and energy [scrutinizing] projects that are higher [environmental] risk, rather than purchasing a sewing machine and worrying about how they will dispose of the old one. [Doing otherwise] upsets people and reinforces this notion that [USAID's EIA procedures are] a burden and not a value.”

“[USAID should] train and promote a culture of risk management.”

**USAID EIA leaders**

# Engaging leadership in transformative ways

Through creating opportunities to present meaningful findings to leadership

Challenges	Opportunities
Limited and often ad hoc reporting to leadership	Create and institutionalize reporting opportunities (e.g., portfolio reviews, senior leadership meetings)
Lack of available data to report on whether environmental impacts are mitigated or avoided	Establish tools to assess achievement of safeguarding results (i.e., Enterprise Risk Management, Operating Unit evaluations of effectiveness)
Lack of messaging from leadership on value of environmental and social safeguarding	Identify champions among leadership to help catalyze a cultural shift in how EIA is perceived

“Way too much of our MEL work on environmental issues boils down to capturing and reporting on processes and not actually programmatic impact on the ground. The demand signal may need to come from [senior leadership] level to actually get to that conversation about the measures that really matter.”

**USAID leadership**

Questions?



# Let's continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments in the IAIA23 app.



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