Piloting Positive Disruption and Catalyzing Localization

**USAID'S
PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR**
ANNUAL REPORT: FY 2023

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FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

When I am asked about the role of the Partnerships Incubator and our relationship with USAID, I have started responding with a new answer: "We are piloting positive disruption and catalyzing localization on behalf of the Agency." Although this description has defined our approach and activities since our project launched in 2019, it has never been more true than in Year 4. The key words in this statement, for me, are "piloting" and "catalyzing"—words that reflect our innovative and flexible approach to problem-solving as well as our desire to embed scalability into our game-changing solutions.

Year 4 has represented the fullest expression so far of the services the Incubator provides for USAID. Our activities increased exponentially during this fast-paced year.

- We supported *Missions* to understand and engage their partner ecosystems.
- We delivered impactful guidance to *individual partners* to turn around life-saving projects, as in Kenya and the Dominican Republic.
- We convened *small cohorts* of partners to learn and grow together, many of which have gone on to win funding from USAID or other donors, as in El Salvador.
- We delivered capacity-strengthening support to *larger cohorts* through our acclaimed Spanish-language CAPTALO! e-learning platform.
- And, of course, we continued to support the *broader partner landscape* through enhancements to the groundbreaking WorkwithUSAID.org platform, such as the new Sub-Opportunities portal, which was described as "hacking the [partnership] system."

During Year 4, we provided direct capacity-strengthening support to 44 partners, twice as many as we supported in Year 3. In addition, the WorkwithUSAID.org platform became more established as a trusted resource among the partner community, with more than 345,000 new users accessing the website since its launch.

> ## We are piloting positive disruption and catalyzing localization on behalf of the Agency.
>
> ~DONNA VINCENT ROA, PROJECT DIRECTOR

FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

To support the increased demand for Incubator services in Year 4, our full-time staff and consultant slate grew dramatically (see page 43). Our team was operating on all cylinders, facilitated by a lean pod structure we put in place in Year 3 to enable our work to scale up according to client needs. The pod structure has allowed our team to replicate our work and learn from similar engagements. As any manager knows, growing pains can accompany such rapid expansion. However, the Incubator team remained remarkably dedicated to our mission and resilient to uncertainty and ambiguity, especially regarding the possibility of extending our work into a fifth year. I am delighted this extension was provided, and the high level of interest in buy-ins for Year 5 support reflects the Agency's keen interest in our team's services.

Recognition of the Incubator's service provision has been widespread in Year 4, as documented throughout this report. As our Contracting Officer's Representative put it last November: "The Incubator does excellent work.… [It] is constantly adding value, which is remarkable." Our reputation as a thought leader was solidified in April 2023, when we were asked to present a four-part webinar series for USAID Headquarters and Mission staff to explore some key lessons from our project and how they might influence their future work with partners.

USAID's trust in the Partnerships Incubator as a service provider is an honor we do not take lightly. We believe the results of our surveys, shown on pages 7 and 8, illustrate the positive influence we are having on USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Operating Units, as well as the partners we serve at the direction and discretion of USAID. Going into Year 5, we take these outstanding results as a challenge—a challenge to not just continue our acclaimed services but also truly catalyze something new through a chain reaction that levels the playing field for new, local, and nontraditional USAID partners. That is what I envision when I use the phrase "piloting positive disruption and catalyzing localization," and we are excited to continue to be at the forefront of this important work for the Agency in Year 5.

Donna Vincent Roa, PhD, CDPM®
Project Director
USAID's Partnerships Incubator

INCUBATOR INFLUENCE AROUND THE WORLD

TIMEFRAME
- ● Past
- ● Continuing
- ● Planned

TYPE
- 👤 Direct Partner
- 🔍 PLA*
- 🖥 Webinar/Training
- 🧍 Co-creation Workshop/Conference
- 🔄 Exchange Program
- ⭐ Top 10 User**

United Kingdom
⭐

Iraq
👤 👤 👤

Middle East
(Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco)
🧍 🔍

United States
👤 👤 👤 👤 🖥 🖥 🧍 ⭐
👤 👤 👤 👤 🧍 🧍 🔄
🖥 🖥 🖥 🖥

Dominican Republic
👤 👤 👤 👤

Guatemala
🖥 🔍

El Salvador
👤 👤 👤 👤 👤 🖥
👤 👤 👤 👤 👤

Honduras
👤 👤

Colombia
⭐ 🧍

Eastern and Southern Caribbean Region
(Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname)
👤 👤 👤 👤 👤 👤

Peru
👤 👤 👤

Burkina Faso
🧍

Sierra Leone
🔍 🔍

Liberia
🔍

Ghana
👤

Nigeria
⭐

Cameroon
👤 👤 👤

Central African Republic
🔍

Democratic Republic of the Congo
👤 👤 👤 👤

South Africa
⭐

Pakistan
⭐

Nepal
⭐

India
🔍

Uganda
⭐

Kenya
🔍 🧍 ⭐

Rwanda
🔍

Burundi
🔍

Madagascar
🔍

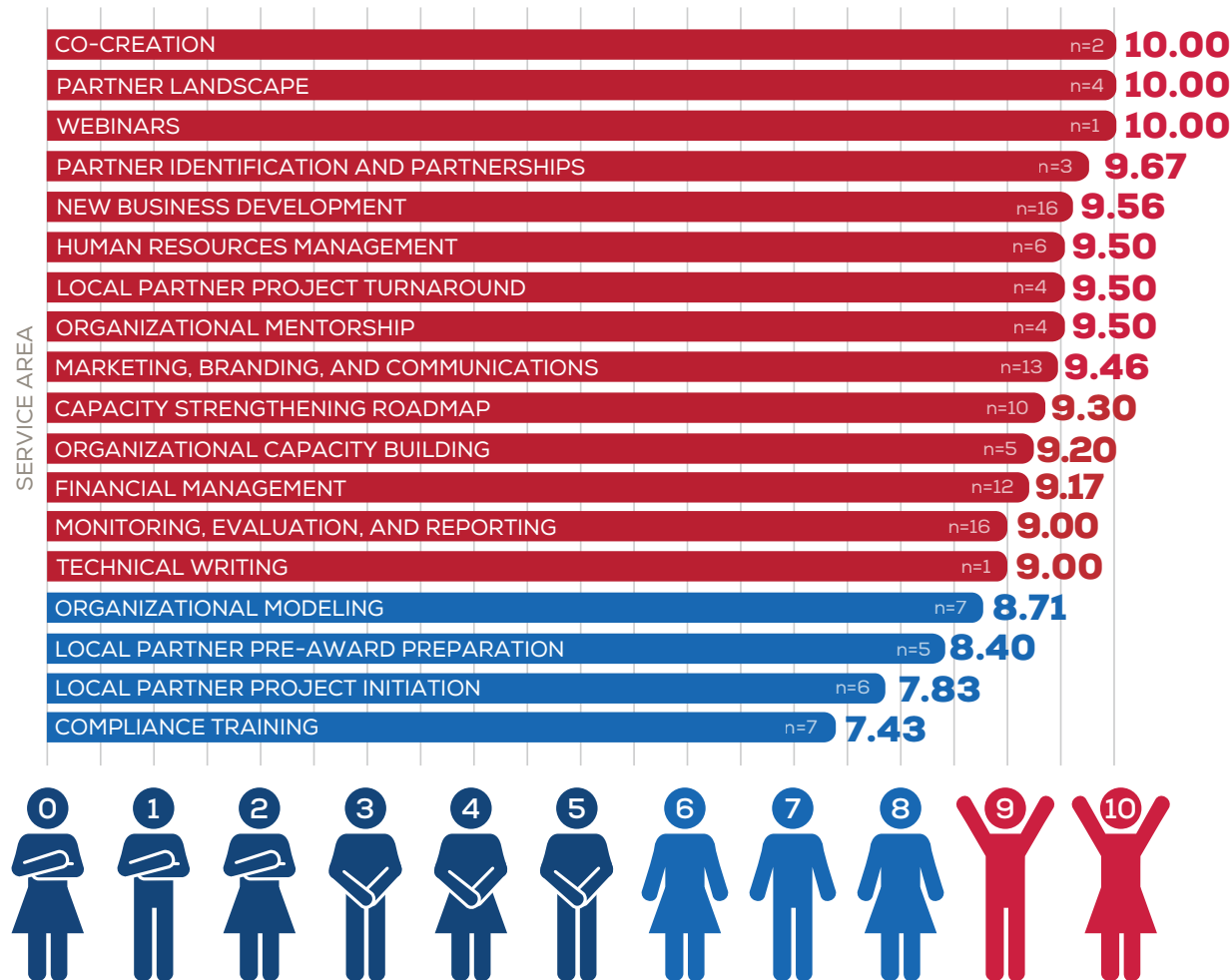**Malawi**
👤 👤 👤

Zimbabwe
👤 👤 👤 👤 👤

*Partner Landscape Assessment
**Top 10 locations of users accessing WorkwithUSAID.org

AVERAGE PROMOTER SCORE BY SERVICE AREA

Likelihood a Stakeholder Would Recommend the Incubator's Services, by Service Area
(1 = would not recommend, 10 = would highly recommend)

Service Area	n	Score
CO-CREATION	n=2	10.00
PARTNER LANDSCAPE	n=4	10.00
WEBINARS	n=1	10.00
PARTNER IDENTIFICATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	n=3	9.67
NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT	n=16	9.56
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	n=6	9.50
LOCAL PARTNER PROJECT TURNAROUND	n=4	9.50
ORGANIZATIONAL MENTORSHIP	n=4	9.50
MARKETING, BRANDING, AND COMMUNICATIONS	n=13	9.46
CAPACITY STRENGTHENING ROADMAP	n=10	9.30
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING	n=5	9.20
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	n=12	9.17
MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING	n=16	9.00
TECHNICAL WRITING	n=1	9.00
ORGANIZATIONAL MODELING	n=7	8.71
LOCAL PARTNER PRE-AWARD PREPARATION	n=5	8.40
LOCAL PARTNER PROJECT INITIATION	n=6	7.83
COMPLIANCE TRAINING	n=7	7.43

SERVICE AREA

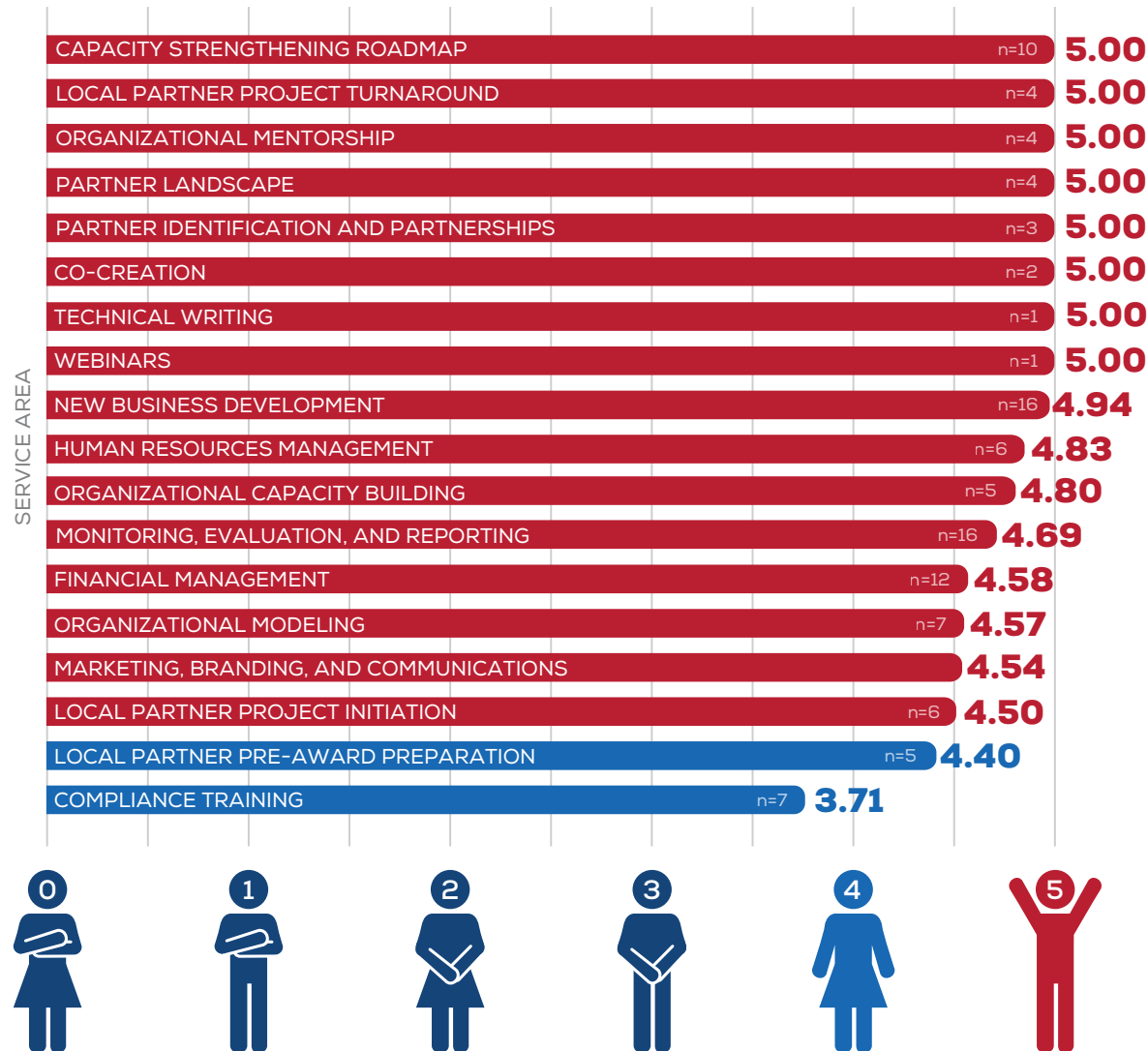0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

n = number of survey respondents
Source: Post-service surveys

AVERAGE SATISFACTION BY SERVICE AREA

Satisfaction with Incubator Support, by Service Area
(1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied)

SERVICE AREA		Value
CAPACITY STRENGTHENING ROADMAP	n=10	**5.00**
LOCAL PARTNER PROJECT TURNAROUND	n=4	**5.00**
ORGANIZATIONAL MENTORSHIP	n=4	**5.00**
PARTNER LANDSCAPE	n=4	**5.00**
PARTNER IDENTIFICATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	n=3	**5.00**
CO-CREATION	n=2	**5.00**
TECHNICAL WRITING	n=1	**5.00**
WEBINARS	n=1	**5.00**
NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT	n=16	**4.94**
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	n=6	**4.83**
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING	n=5	**4.80**
MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING	n=16	**4.69**
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	n=12	**4.58**
ORGANIZATIONAL MODELING	n=7	**4.57**
MARKETING, BRANDING, AND COMMUNICATIONS		**4.54**
LOCAL PARTNER PROJECT INITIATION	n=6	**4.50**
LOCAL PARTNER PRE-AWARD PREPARATION	n=5	**4.40**
COMPLIANCE TRAINING	n=7	**3.71**

0 1 2 3 4 5

n = number of survey respondents
Source: Post-service surveys

OBJECTIVE 1

Amplify USAID's external communication efforts to help diversify and strengthen its partner base

The story of USAID partnerships is an awe-inspiring one. Whether with new and local organizations or long-standing primes, the abundance of these relationships represents diversity in thought partners, solutions, and sustainability efforts. In Year 4, the Partnerships Incubator was dedicated to telling this story to stimulate and strengthen the thousands of organizations hoping to work with USAID.

To amplify USAID's mission and values through partnerships, the Incubator worked diligently to capture the partnership story—through success stories on WorkwithUSAID.org, local partner videos on the Work with USAID social media channels, Agency webinars and events, and translated training resources. As we reflect on a monumental year, we delight in the messages shared with and for partners around the world. They inspire the Incubator to carry that momentum into Year 5 as we seek to further expand and enhance USAID's partner base.

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIP THROUGH WORKWITHUSAID.ORG

Following a successful and energizing first year operating WorkwithUSAID.org, the Partnerships Incubator turned its efforts toward heightening attention on the platform and enhancing it with high-value functionalities. This digital endeavor has enabled USAID to network with potential partners around the world, identify their most critical needs, and support them to overcome partnership barriers.

WorkwithUSAID.org has received more than 3 million pageviews from more than 330,000 users. Due to the culmination of messaging about the platform, users are interacting with the website at a much higher rate than in Year 3, the first year of the site's operation. User activity includes more than 120,000 link clicks and nearly 25,000 file downloads—more than triple the activity from its first year. Beyond providing more than 200 multi-language and varying partner resources, the Incubator revised the website's navigation bar, refreshed the look and feel of the homepage, offered more comprehensive explanations about the Agency, deployed an in-site emailing feature for partner-to-partner networking, launched the Sub-Opportunities portal, and improved the functionality of the Events page. We are seeking to do much more in the coming year. This site is changing how development partnerships are forged and opening doors for partners that previously were not included, such as many local and nontraditional organizations.

> WorkwithUSAID.org, an online platform launched by the Agency in late 2021, seeks to demystify the process of partnering with USAID through an easy-to-navigate website that provides clear and accessible information about opportunities with USAID, with key documents translated into multiple languages. The website also provides new networking opportunities by featuring a detailed Partner Directory, as well as a Sub-Opportunities page, where organizations seeking subrecipients and subcontractors and organizations interested in serving as subs can connect.
>
> ~"MOVING TOWARD A MODEL OF LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT: FY 2022 LOCALIZATION PROGRESS REPORT"

WHAT USERS ARE SAYING ABOUT
WorkwithUSAID.org

"
I feel the Pre-Engagement Assessment is a good way for an organization such as mine to plan and re-structure its affairs properly.

~NELSON AMOAH, JR.
(LINKEDIN USER)

"
Local partner blogs promote sharing and learning new skills through peers while positively impacting many lives of vulnerable communities.

~PAUL NANYUMBA
(LINKEDIN USER)

"
I am grateful for the insights shared by Azul Originario in El Salvador as an invaluable partner of USAID! The power of collaboration and partnerships cannot be exaggerated. Excited for more perspectives in this blog series!

~GNANADINAKARAN NEIL
(LINKEDIN USER)

"
The WorkwithUSAID.org website has been a welcome tool for learning about various aspects of partnering, easily identifying relevant online learning opportunities, and connecting with other organizations. We encourage USAID to continue to use this platform, including making more resources available in other languages.

~PARTNER EXPERIENCE SURVEY

"
I came across your International Women's Day blog while researching gender-based discrimination. I must admit your resource page is great!

~WEBSITE USER

"
WorkwithUSAID.org has provided opportunities to connect with partners and create more visibility for small businesses.

~U.S. SMALL BUSINESS

"
Creation of the Work with USAID website and increased transparency to communications have been helpful.

~U.S.-BASED NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO)

"
The Pre-Engagement Assessment is an eye-opener! A kind of self-organizational capacity assessment.

~TEMPLE CHUKWUEMEKA ORAEKI
(LINKEDIN USER)

DRIVING USER TRAFFIC THROUGH ENGAGING CONTENT

The Partnerships Incubator's content team views the Work with USAID News & Insights blog not only as a treasure trove of valuable and enduring partner-focused content but also as a dynamic feature that attracts users to explore the site overall. Since the launch of WorkwithUSAID.org, the Incubator has published approximately 170 content pieces to the News & Insights blog to serve the needs of our diverse partner community, including interviews with Agency experts, announcements, success stories, current funding opportunities, and "how to" tips and guidance for new partners. In Year 4, the content team published about 75 blog articles, with approximately 30 of these authored by the Incubator. Each blog contains a call to action that directs readers to next steps they can take to advance their understanding and readiness for USAID partnership.

During the second year of the website's operation, the Incubator has fielded a growing number of pitches for articles from within USAID and other contributors throughout the development landscape, attesting to the rising importance of the platform for outreach to the partner community. The News & Insights blog has become a steady entrypoint for users visiting the site, with nearly 200,000 pageviews on the blog and its subpages in Year 4, compared with approximately 85,000 during the first year of operation (Year 3). WorkwithUSAID.org audiences in Year 4 showed an interest in practical tips and guidance, such as the "How to Write a USAID Proposal" blog series, which performed well throughout the year. Other key areas of interest among blog readers are USAID's localization agenda, the SAM.gov registration process, and details on specific terminology, such as Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) and USAID geographic codes.

Beyond blog content, the Incubator team also created a variety of other content to engage audiences with Work with USAID messaging. These included an animated video for the WorkwithUSAID.org home page, 11 "Voices of Local Partners" videos from Zimbabwe and El Salvador (including four in Spanish and two in English with Spanish subtitles), and 10 Facebook images and corresponding posts.

TOP TEN BLOG POSTS, BY TOTAL PAGEVIEWS
October 2022–September 2023

1 "Preparing to Write a USAID Proposal"

2 "Writing Your USAID Proposal"

3 "Show Off Pictures of USAID Partnerships around the World"

4 "Seven Things You Need to Know about USAID Geographic Codes (Assistance)"

5 "Navigating the SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier Process"

6 "USAID's Commitment to Advancing Localization"

7 "Partnering with USAID? You Need to Know about NICRA"

8 "Developing Your Cost Proposal"

9 "Pictures of USAID Partnerships Around the World: Winners Announcement"

10 "June Funding Opportunities: Mark Your Calendars"

Seizing Social Media Opportunities

After observing a high volume of traffic from Facebook to the WorkwithUSAID.org website (nearly 77,000 pageviews came from Facebook in Year 3, the first year of the website's operation), as well as noting the frequent use of Facebook among NGOs for communications and network building in partner countries, the Incubator team offered to support the Bureau for Management, Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA) to enhance the Work with USAID Facebook page. To diversify content and reach a broader audience, the Incubator devised a Facebook strategy and created images and posts in English and Spanish, with three more languages (Arabic, French, and Nepali) planned. The objective was to create a seamless user experience for our partner audience, especially organizations in partner countries that frequently use the Facebook platform to build in-country networks, identify resources, and receive Agency-related updates.

OBJECTIVE 1

SPOTLIGHTING VOICES OF LOCAL PARTNERS

The "Voices of Local Partners" video series emerged in alignment with USAID's mission to champion the needs and on-the-ground realities of local organizations around the world and to provide these very accomplished entities with a platform to share their insights with counterparts who may be new to USAID partnership. The Partnerships Incubator traveled to El Salvador and Zimbabwe, where partners offered tips and lessons learned from their experiences navigating challenges, finding solutions, and striving for sustainability.

In Zimbabwe, the Mwenezi Development Training Centre (MDTC) had an opportunity to immediately apply key concepts learned during four months of Partnerships Incubator technical assistance and an in-person workshop focused on effective messaging. The interviews allowed MDTC staff to put their skills into practice and reflect on the ideas and resources that can help other organizations reach their goals as well. The interviews in El Salvador, which yielded videos as well as blogs, also outlined valuable guidance for local organizations catalyzing change in their communities. Giving local partners a platform to tell these stories through the "Voices of Local Partners" series has driven knowledge exchange, benefitting both new and potential partners as well as USAID.

KEY POINT: Providing a platform for local partners to share their stories, guidance, and tips elevates their expertise.
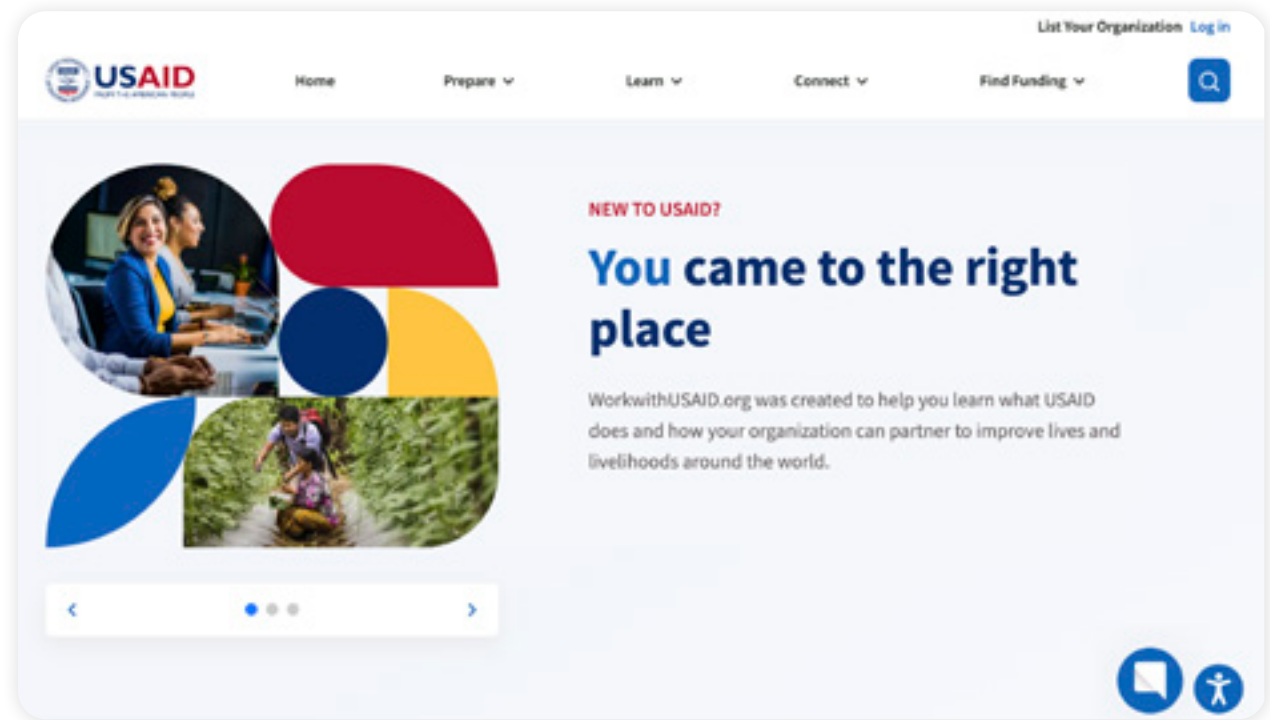
OBJECTIVE 1

ENHANCING THE WORKWITHUSAID.ORG USER EXPERIENCE

Central to the objectives of WorkwithUSAID.org is a positive user experience that encourages audience members to return for learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities. The site's clean, modern layout and plain-language text aim to make complex topics accessible to all users. However, after extensive research, user experience testing, and discussion with sub-partner Miew at our annual web retreat in November 2022, the team discovered a pressing issue—users did not understand what USAID is at a baseline level. Through user-experience testing, AskZara email inquiries, and website experience surveys, users reported they believed USAID is a charity or humanitarian organization. It was common to see organizations and individuals asking for immediate assistance or funding for a project of their own. This feedback positioned the Incubator and M/OAA to pause and reflect on the site's messaging to increase awareness and improve the user experience.

Along with the Agency and Miew, the web team successfully launched a robust design system to ensure consistency and continuity, making the user experience as smooth as possible. This foundational enhancement fed into refining the homepage with a carousel to spotlight fresh content and calls to action, a welcome animation video that explains USAID and the website's purpose, and reduced text to lighten the burden on readers through simple language. For example, the Incubator simplified a once-wordy navigation bar to one that is action-focused, guiding users to select "Prepare," "Learn," "Connect," and "Find Funding." Streamlining information also occurred through revisions to the AskZara chatbot, with a refined response flow, clearer messaging, and links to FAQs, blogs, and resources. By learning from our analytics, the team is better able to deliver content that will serve the needs of WorkwithUSAID.org users going forward.

OBJECTIVE 2

Expand USAID's capacity for partnerships

The Partnerships Incubator supports Missions, Bureaus, and Operating Units (M/B/OUs) with a broad range of services designed to expand the Agency's ability to reach a greater pool of new, local, and nontraditional partners. Although we have refined the core set of services offered since the Incubator began operations in 2019, each engagement is unique and begins with a robust co-creation process with the M/B/OUs to ensure alignment and enable the best outcome from each activity. This process not only allows M/B/OUs to shape and refine the engagement, it also allows the Incubator the flexibility to pivot and adjust as requests are made before and during project implementation. Thanks to this approach, during the past year, the Incubator was able to support M/B/OUs with new ways to identify, engage, and support nontraditional and local partners.

OBJECTIVE 2

BRINGING PARTNERS TOGETHER FOR LISTENING AND LEARNING

During Year 4, the Partnerships Incubator had the opportunity to convene partner organizations at two in-person events: one co-creation workshop in Bogotá, Colombia, comprising 65 participants from 11 countries; and one capacity-strengthening workshop in Tunis, Tunisia, comprising 14 participants from five countries. These events provided an opportunity to foster regional networks and strengthen partnership readiness.

In September 2022, USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights (USAID/DRG) engaged the Incubator to support the Powered by the People (PxP) initiative, a landmark set of policy and foreign assistance initiatives that were built upon the U.S. Government's ongoing work to bolster democracy and defend human rights globally. The Incubator worked with USAID/DRG to plan and facilitate a four-day co-creation workshop for an upcoming award aimed at supporting activists, researchers, and citizen-led movements to build diverse coalitions to advance rights and pro-democratic reforms. The workshop allowed local, regional, and international participants to co-create the theory of change (ToC), critical objectives, interventions, and desired results for the PxP award. More importantly, the workshop provided space for listening and alignment. Upon completion of the workshop, the Incubator compiled a final report with major recommendations and takeaways to facilitate the development of the final PxP proposal by a consortium led by USAID/DRG's selected implementer.

The "Building Resilient Communities" workshop, held in Tunisia in June, convened a smaller group of organizations working to support religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East and North Africa region. The four-day workshop, delivered in conjunction with Management Systems International, A Tetra Tech Company, enabled participants to create or strengthen positive relationships between local actors on the ground, leading to peer-to-peer mentoring and a sustainable network of local actors. The Incubator tapped our internal expertise to develop a series of workshop sessions on storytelling, video communications, branding, monitoring and evaluation, and collaborating, learning, and adapting. The team also held an introductory session on working in the development industry and understanding the Non-U.S. Organization Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS) process. In addition, time was set aside for attendees to discuss their own work and network with one another. The Incubator hired a communications firm to run a storytelling booth in which attendees were interviewed for success stories that could be adapted into marketing documents. A bonus feature included executive coaching services for one randomly selected organization.

Sharing Lessons to Guide the Agency

In April 2023, the Partnerships Incubator was honored to deliver a series of four internal webinars for USAID staff on lessons learned from our activities during the past four years. Drawing on the Incubator's vast experience in lowering barriers to partnership with USAID—through its collaboration with more than 28 M/B/OUs and its creation of the WorkwithUSAID.org website—the series was a unique opportunity for USAID staff to learn Incubator best practices on institutional transformation, including responsive service provision, flexible management, and adaptive project implementation. Individual sessions focused on the following:

- Embedding Flexibility in Project Design
- Cultivating an Innovative Culture
- Embracing the Local Landscape
- Revitalizing Our Purpose

Sessions were offered twice to accommodate time zone differences. The series drew an average of 300 participants at the morning session and an average of 50 participants at the evening session.

OBJECTIVE 2

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS WITH TRANSLATION

The Agency's updated Acquisition and Assistance (A&A) Strategy highlighted the prevalence of English-only materials as a barrier to partnership. In Year 4, the Incubator put in place the workflow and staffing to support a M/OAA buy-in to translate high-priority documents. The team utilized Datagain as a vendor for first-level translations, along with a team of proofreaders to validate the translations. Additional resources were later added to the list, totaling 53 files for translation. The translation team published 15 translated files in August and September and intends to complete this activity at the beginning of Year 5.

During Year 4, the Incubator also continued to work with Boostlingo to provide simultaneous interpretation, streamlining our interface with partners. The use of simultaneous interpretation continued to improve our relationships with partners, leveling the playing field by providing partners the comfort and ease of communicating in their native languages. Boostlingo also provided in-person interpretation support at the June 2023 PxP workshop, helping to navigate translation issues for 65 audience members, most of whom were Spanish speakers.

ADVANCING USAID'S DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY EFFORTS

The Partnerships Incubator is an advocate for greater diversity within USAID partnerships. Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) in the United States are well positioned to partner with the Agency. The Incubator worked with USAID's Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (USAID/DEIA) to strengthen the Agency's engagement with MSIs, starting with an open competition that identified four institutions to receive tailored technical assistance. After individual rapid needs assessments, the Incubator delivered a suite of 13 capacity-strengthening services, ranging from award implementation support to cohort workshops on business development. When asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend the service provider(s) to other colleagues?" the score, averaged across the four partners, was 9.39 for all services provided.

The Partnerships Incubator also hosted a webinar series to reach a wider audience of MSIs, following a series of USAID-hosted MSI conferences. The webinar series introduced MSIs to USAID partnership in three sessions: "USAID 101," "Pre-Award Planning," and "Post-Award Management." After each session, the Incubator shared a resource list of related materials and links to more information building on the webinar content. When asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how helpful was the webinar's content for your understanding of USAID partnership?" the average response was 8.56 across the three sessions. The webinar series was attended by 240 participants representing universities located across the United States.

The success of the Partnerships Incubator's technical assistance and webinar delivery to MSIs in Year 4 led to a second round of services to a new cohort of four institutions chosen by USAID/DEIA at the start of Year 5. The Incubator plans to work further with USAID/DEIA to convene a student exchange program with a trusted partner organization and host on-demand webinars and live sessions linked to other DEIA programming. The Incubator and USAID/DEIA are also exploring opportunities to continue supporting the MSIs that participated in the first round of support.

> [The Incubator's service providers] were knowledgeable, practical, and accommodating. They provided an excellent, detailed report that we can use for a long time to improve our institutional visibility. We enjoyed working with the team.
>
> ~EDWARD O. MANYIBE, CAPACITY-BUILDING DIRECTOR, LANGSTON UNIVERSITY REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER ON RESEARCH AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR MINORITY ENTITIES

OBJECTIVE 3

Help partner organizations work with USAID

USAID's partners are the engine that drives the Agency's development investments forward, and local and nontraditional partners play a unique and growing role in this process. USAID values the insights these partner organizations bring, and the Agency's leadership has called for increasing these partnerships, with 25 percent of funding going to local partners by 2025. The Partnerships Incubator envisions a future in which USAID's work is stronger and more relevant as a result of the new partnerships it forms. But partnership is not a switch that can be simply turned on. Suitable development partners must be identified and nurtured to participate viably in the competitive process that results in USAID awards—a key objective of the Incubator from its inception.

In Year 4, the Incubator worked with individual organizations, selected by Missions, to elevate their business capabilities so they would be more likely to survive and thrive. In addition, the Incubator delivered focused procurement outreach support to Missions to aid in targeting local stakeholders and put in place the necessary foundations to better prepare all interested organizations— everywhere in the world—to compete for awards.

INCREASING VISIBILITY OF NEW AND LOCAL PARTNERS

The Partnerships Incubator champions the shift of development decision-making, solutions, and funding into the hands of local development organizations. In its second year of operation, WorkwithUSAID.org has spotlighted more than 5,000 current, new, and potential partner organizations. More than 3,000 of these are locally led organizations, representing more than 64 percent of directory listings, while more than 480 are U.S.-owned small businesses. Of the total approved profiles in the Partner Directory, nearly 80 percent self-identify as "new partners," or organizations that have not worked with USAID in the past. The Incubator discovered, of these new partners, more than 1,300 identify as minority-owned or -serving institutions, nearly 500 identify as Indigenous-led, and more than 200 identify as veteran-owned or service-disabled veteran-owned businesses.

Through data collection, the Incubator team found nearly 600 organizations self-identify as current or past subcontractors or sub-awardees, while nearly 400 identify as current or past prime partners. The Partner Directory is working to elevate this variety of new and local partners and connect them to viable partnership opportunities.

WORKWITHUSAID.ORG PARTNER DIRECTORY CHARACTERISTICS
November 2021–September 2023

5,200 approved partners

79% New partners

10% Sub-partners

9% U.S.-owned small businesses

11% Indigenous-led organizations

64% Local partners

7% Prime partners

30% Minority-owned or minority-serving institutions

5% Veteran-owned or service-disabled veteran-owned businesses
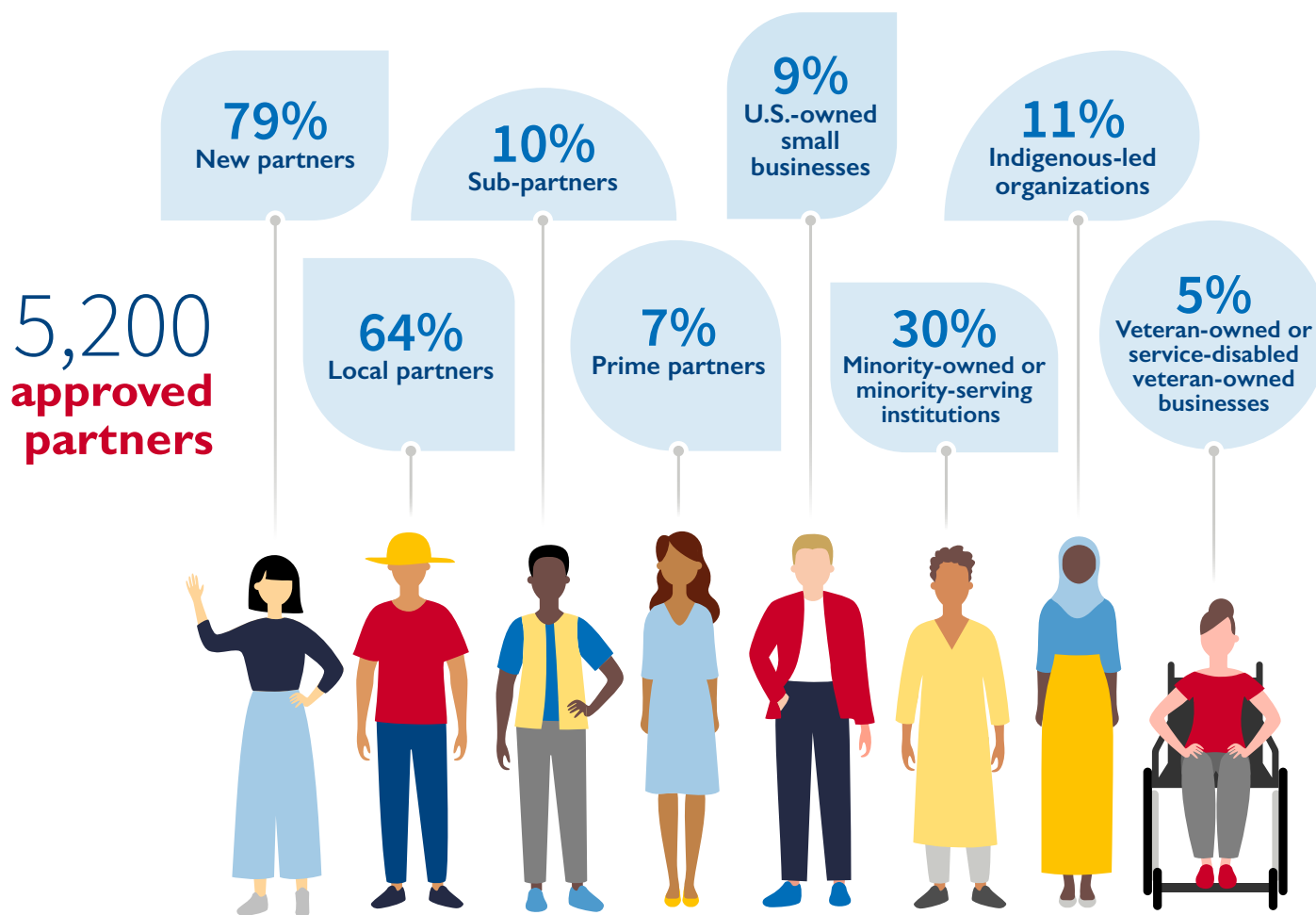
OBJECTIVE 3

## LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD THROUGH SUB-OPPORTUNITIES

The Partnerships Incubator identified that nearly 80 percent of organizations in the WorkwithUSAID.org Partner Directory were new partners that had never worked with USAID before and may be seeking to build their capacity for prime awards. For these organizations, prime partnership could present a steep learning curve. A common way to bridge this gap in knowledge and experience is for these organizations to work under a current prime partner, gaining expertise while learning about the nuances of Agency partnership. Locating sub-opportunities proved to be an onerous task for potential partners, however, as they had to search dozens of individual company websites for relevant solicitations. To alleviate this burden, the Incubator, along with M/OAA, developed the Sub-Opportunities portal, a page on WorkwithUSAID.org where USAID's prime partners can share sub-opportunities from around the world.

The page has provided new partners with visibility into opportunities to support prime partners through subawards and subcontracts, thereby enabling these organizations to learn about USAID partnership without the responsibilities that accompany prime partnership. The page has also facilitated prime partners in receiving a stronger pool of applications for these subawards, including more partners with direct and local expertise. Since its launch in March 2023, more than 140 opportunities have been shared. These opportunities are searchable by location, engagement type, organization type, and language. The new portal has been called a "game changer for how partners operate," and one partner noted that launching the portal felt like "hacking the system."

KEY POINT: Funding opportunities are a key area of interest for WorkwithUSAID.org users. Launching the Sub-Opportunities portal provided a way to give new, local, and nontraditional partners greater visibility into potential funding via USAID prime partners. It also has allowed prime partners to expand their access to nontraditional and local organizations not in their networks.

Focus on Results

The Sub-Opportunities portal is helping USAID prime partners reach new pools of talent globally, supporting the Agency's overall localization objectives. One prime partner stated, "We received some interesting Africa-based firms that weren't the usual suspects and were well qualified for the work."
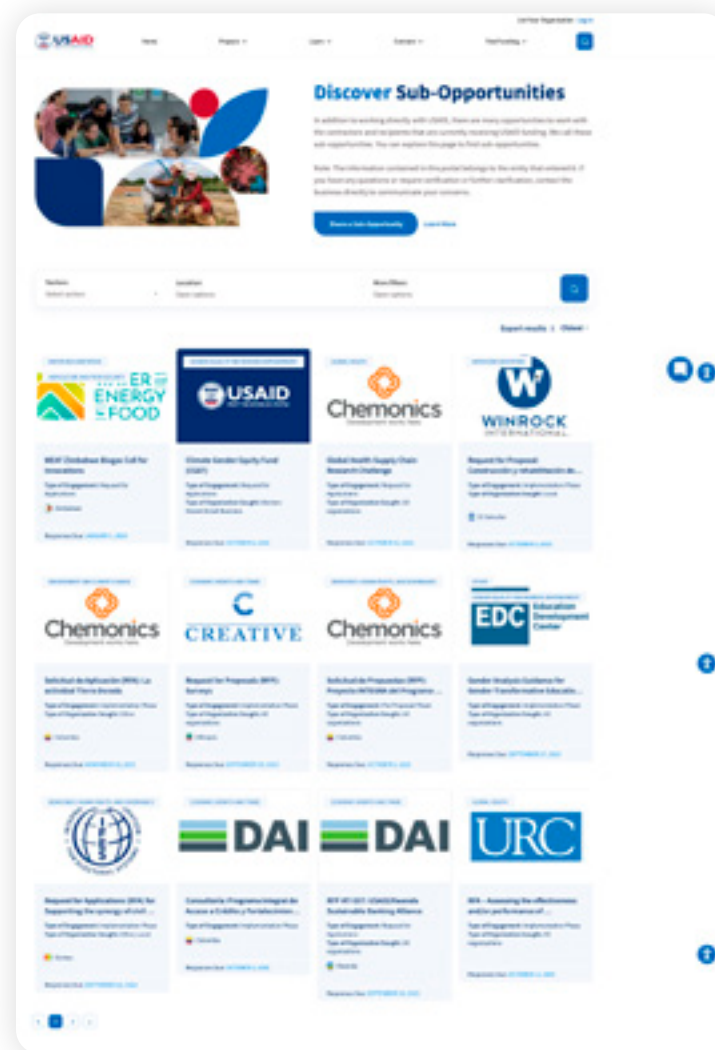
OPTIMIZING FOR PARTNER KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND NETWORKING

Through Google Analytics, the Incubator regularly captures metrics about WorkwithUSAID.org. Since the launch of the website, more than 10,000 users accessed the Resource Library, with more than 4,000 users specifically accessing the "How to Work with USAID" training modules. In Year 4, nearly 200,000 users visited WorkwithUSAID.org, more than 50,000 additional users from the previous period in Year 3. Since the launch of the website in November 2021, 35 percent of all organizations in the Partner Directory have completed the Pre-Engagement Assessment, and 45 percent of assessments were completed by new partners in the Partner Directory. Tools such as the Resource Library and Pre-Engagement Assessment assist organizations in understanding USAID partnerships from the basics to project closeout and sustainability.

As the Incubator added more than 500 pages of static content—blogs, resources, and FAQs—and more than 5,000 pages of dynamic content—assessments, Partner Directory profiles, events, and sub-opportunities—the web team faced a setback in terms of search engine optimization (SEO). At the start of this year, the team's goal was to increase SEO results position from 17[1]; however, the site moved down to an average of 21. With such a high number of pages, it becomes difficult to optimize every page and compete with canonical content on the internet for each topic and organization.

Although the team will look for ways to address this issue in Year 5, it is important to acknowledge the robust progress in metrics in comparison to Year 3. In Year 4, the site garnered nearly 31,000 link clicks and nearly 1 million impressions from users searching through Google, both exponential increases from the previous year, which yielded only 4,000 link clicks and 124,000 impressions.

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1   Search engine results position ranking is an attempt to show approximately where on the search results page a given link was seen, relative to other results on the page.

WORKWITHUSAID.ORG BY THE NUMBERS
November 2021–September 2023

170 Blog Posts

3,972 Completed Pre-Engagement Assessments

141 Sub-Opportunities

232 Library Resources

137 Events

24,891 Resources Downloaded

345,743 Total (New) Users

3.1 million Pageviews

120,368 Link Clicks

CHAMPIONING THE .GOV TRANSITION

At the start of 2023, USAID moved forward with its plan to adopt WorkwithUSAID.org as a government-owned and -operated website under a .gov domain by the end of the year. This is a welcomed activity, as it signifies the Agency's recognition of the site as an enduring resource requiring ongoing support. Government websites typically have extensive security measures in place to protect sensitive data and ensure the privacy of users. The Incubator has worked closely with the office of the USAID Chief Information Officer (CIO) to enhance the existing architecture, document its systems and cloud hosting, and support the rebuild within AIDNet.

Going into this transition period, the Incubator will continue to support the CIO team in establishing sustainability and planning for future enhancements to WorkwithUSAID.org. A key part of the Incubator's support for the transition has been the provision of documentation around technical elements of the site as well as in-depth training sessions and discussions covering the site's development, security, and operations.

THE POWER OF A ROADMAP

In Year 4, at the request of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) Cameroon team, the Incubator launched an organizational capacity assessment activity with three Cameroonian partners the team engages through its prime partner, the World Food Programme (WFP). This activity, funded by BHA's Office of Global Policy, Partnerships, Programs, and Communications (G3PC), provided the three local partners with roadmaps for self-guided performance improvement in identified gap areas with an emphasis on effective prime-sub relationships. The three partners completed a collaboration styles survey that helped identify the most effective means of collaboration with members of the leadership team and then took part in a two-step needs assessment process, beginning with a self-assessment survey followed by a series of in-depth, in-person interviews. The partner organizations were enthusiastic participants; one of the organizations commented that the self-assessment provided so much actionable insight that it would have been valuable even in the absence of a roadmap.

The Incubator developed roadmaps each partner could use to strengthen identified gaps and implement self-paced recommendations to prepare for future partnership opportunities. The roadmaps empowered organizations to take action once the Incubator was no longer engaged to provide technical assistance support. One of the partners, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Foundation (LUKMEF), has used the roadmap to support the implementation of a civil society-strengthening activity intended to enhance Cameroon's NGO ecosystem.

KEY POINT: USAID's decision to support the capacity development of local NGOs—including those not currently operating as prime partners—demonstrates the Agency's commitment to advancing localization and empowering local stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE 3

TRANSFORMING COMMUNICATION TO SHARE ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

The USAID/BHA/Malawi team engaged the Partnerships Incubator to provide technical assistance to build the organizational capacity of three strategic local partners in Malawi, including Find Your Feet (FYF). After analyzing each organization's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities through surveys, co-creation sessions, and in-depth interviews, technical assistance packages approved by USAID/BHA/Malawi were delivered to each partner from May to June 2023. Throughout delivery of the technical assistance package, FYF focused on four key areas: compliance, new business development, communications and marketing, and workforce and talent management. Thanks to Incubator support, FYF established a robust communications strategy, allocated a budget, and assembled a dedicated team. During the Incubator's technical assistance, FYF collaborated with a communications intern who skillfully completed her assignment and subsequently transferred responsibilities to the organization's monitoring and evaluation officer.

Inspired by this success, FYF is now recruiting a communications officer to implement marketing and communications initiatives aimed at elevating the organization's visibility and promoting work in Malawi. Also, the Incubator played a pivotal role in communicating FYF's success by assisting in the development of a comprehensive media relations plan. This plan equips FYF to effectively pitch stories with clear top-line and key messages, enhancing donor awareness and support. These messages are now integral to the FYF brand, passionately managed and promoted by staff. Furthermore, FYF's Facebook presence has surged, reflecting more frequent updates and meaningful interactions with followers. Significantly, FYF's website has experienced remarkable growth, with hits soaring from zero in April to an impressive 91 in June 2023. This achievement aligns with USAID social media guidance and demonstrates impactful storytelling on digital platforms can drive forward an organization's mission. This transformation positions FYF to make an even more profound impact on the lives of those it serves.

Since the orientation, we have been able to publish at least four or five stories, and we have received positive feedback. Followers have increased from 140 to 848 (a 500-percent jump)! Beyond developing the stories, we are profiling our work in the wider society. FYF is also in the process of rebranding the website.

~ANTHONY CHINGALA, PROJECT OFFICER, FYF

ACHIEVING RESULTS THROUGH ACCELERATED TRAINING

The Partnerships Incubator conducted an in-depth technical assessment with four Zimbabwean partners, leading to tailored needs reports for three partners—Bulawayo Projects Centre (BPC), Nutrition Action Zimbabwe (NAZ), and Linkages for the Economic Advancement of the Disadvantaged (LEAD)—that serve as strategic roadmaps for empowerment and growth in core capacity areas. For the fourth partner, MDTC, the Incubator customized a training plan and hired a group of five consultants specializing in business model viability, business development, partnership cultivation, marketing and communications, and finance and budget to provide virtual and in-person training. During a period of four months, the Incubator team implemented a blended-learning approach, leading MDTC to complete several assignments and discuss them during in-person and virtual meetings.

In late May, the Incubator deployed a team of international and local consultants and internal staff to Zimbabwe to conduct a field visit and four-day workshop to reinforce all of the training areas. This training provided the opportunity for MDTC to revamp its vision, purpose, and value proposition; develop strategic priorities; and map revenue processes. The Incubator trained MDTC staff on a client-centric approach and unlocked the organization's value to traditional implementing partners. With support from the Incubator team, MDTC developed new business development tools (e.g., a pipeline tracker), mapped the partner landscape, and prioritized key partners. The Incubator strengthened MDTC's capabilities on finance, marketing, and communications by customizing a training on financial principles and developing a roadmap to secure a NICRA, in addition to creating a new logo and best practices on branding.

Focus on Results

MDTC, a Zimbabwean NGO focused on poverty reduction, received a new award from USAID/BHA following the Incubator's capacity-strengthening support in business development and partnerships.

> We have taken this process seriously and will put it to good use. NAZ will never be the same after undergoing this process.
>
> ~CALVINE MATSINDE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NAZ

REVAMPING ORGANIZATIONS FOR SUCCESS IN IRAQ

The Partnerships Incubator conducted an in-depth technical assistance assessment with three partners in Iraq: Dak, Hariwan, and RUSAZ. The team identified their capacity needs and co-created an impactful, customized training. The Incubator then provided virtual cohort and individual training—in business model viability, business development, partnership cultivation, marketing and communications, and finance and budget—amplifying partners' overall capacities and achieving tangible results among the organizations.

From March to June, the Incubator's experts collaborated with partners to create five-year strategic plans, update their mission and vision statements, provide business development training, identify funding opportunities, and implement QuickBooks for improved finance management. Partners also learned marketing best practices and branding guidelines.

KEY POINT: The Incubator does not limit its support to the partners' ability to work with USAID but more broadly empowers them as sustainable organizations in the development space. The Incubator team promotes organizational development by instilling good business practices, visioning, executive coaching, and more.
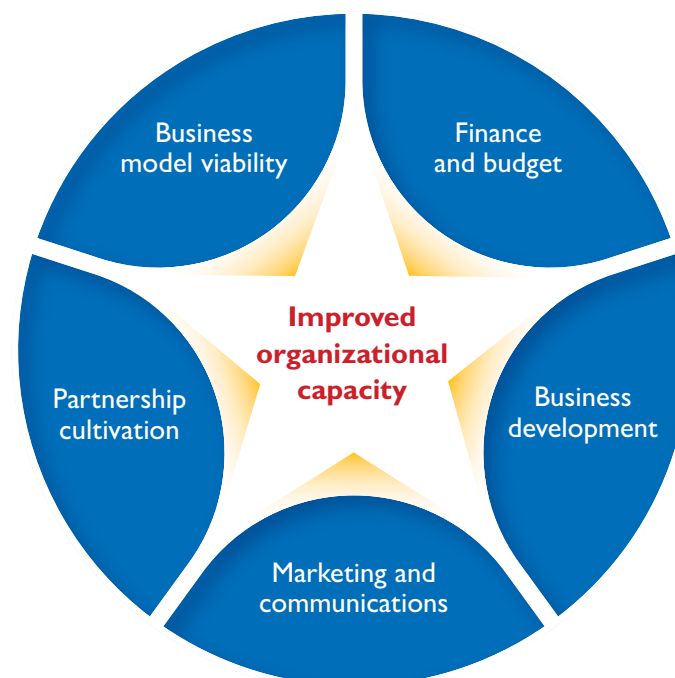
Focus on Results

Hariwan, an Iraqi NGO focused on human rights in Kurdistan and across Iraq, applied with great success all concepts learned from the technical assistance training provided by the Incubator and secured a $70,000 award from Cordaid.

> The work you do is admirable and has been very helpful to organizations in need. We were amazed to hear you wanted to make us part of your training program. The whole process has been a breathtaking journey.
>
> ~SARWAR SAHIL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HARIWAN

SERVICE DELIVERY

- Business model viability
- Finance and budget
- Partnership cultivation
- Business development
- Marketing and communications

Improved organizational capacity

OBJECTIVE 3

INCUBATING A LOCAL "PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR"

The local partnerships the Partnerships Incubator helps nurture can take on lives of their own. This was the case in the Dominican Republic, where the Incubator deployed an assistance model leveraging the skills and experience of a local partner to benefit other local partners, maximizing localization.

The Incubator, in preparation for launching technical assistance services to a cohort of four local partners, turned to contacts made earlier during its work on a Partner Landscape Assessment (PLA). One of the stronger local partners identified by the PLA, a firm called Entrena, was competitively selected to serve as the Incubator's subcontractor to deliver the technical assistance. Entrena provided support in finance and budget, workforce and talent management, technical report writing, and business development. What set Entrena's approach apart was shared experience in the local context: The firm's members could speak to their experience navigating government ministries; understood the cohort members' challenges, which Entrena had overcome in the early years of its partnership with the local USAID Mission; and tapped into the market to engage private-sector actors, for example, in the tourism sector.

The Incubator shared a satisfaction survey with the four local recipient organizations to assess the quality of services each received. When asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 their likelihood of recommending Entrena's services to colleagues, the cohort averaged a 9.6 response. The Partnerships Incubator mentored Entrena through its service delivery and has since engaged the organization on another project in El Salvador, providing Entrena with an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to work regionally, not just domestically. Entrena has also contributed to the Incubator's technical assistance activities for a range of USAID offices. As an outcome of the Incubator's technical assistance program, Entrena brought one of the local partners into its consortium as a subawardee for a USAID activity.

KEY POINT: Technical assistance is often most effective when it is delivered by a local organization that knows the context on the ground and benefits from close connections within the community. Such organizations also often have a vested interest in developing a stronger local partner ecosystem. The Partnerships Incubator has prepared a "Consortium Roadmap" that outlines how strong local partners can serve as mentors and motivators for other civil society organizations in the Dominican Republic.

"

As a local Dominican development organization with four decades of experience, [we found that] working with the Partnerships Incubator revealed the potential that locally led development has for the long-term impact and sustainability of USAID investments. Our efforts to institutionally strengthen [local organizations and American universities] in key areas (new business development, financial management, report writing, human resources, and communications) made us analyze and rethink our own strengths and weaknesses and how we can become better.

~JOHN SEIBEL, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER, ENTRENA

STRENGTHENING 12 LOCAL PARTNERS IN EL SALVADOR

As a Mission deeply committed to localization, USAID/El Salvador contracted the Partnerships Incubator to provide technical assistance and capacity-strengthening support to 12 local partners in El Salvador. The Incubator's technical support targeted six critical business areas: finance and budget management; workforce and talent management; monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL); business model viability; new business development; and executive coaching. Leveraging a team of ten expert consultants, the Incubator delivered support in these six areas during nine months through targeted training, workshops, and hands-on assistance to address practical challenges facing the organizations.

Throughout this work, the Incubator team championed the value of knowledge sharing, mentorship, and networking among the 12 organizations. By creating a unified cohort of partners, rather than managing 12 individual organizations, the Incubator was able to provide a more sustainable approach to support and magnify the potential for impact in the future. With this in mind, the Incubator hosted a number of cohort-based training sessions, most notably a two-day summit in which all 12 organizations participated.

The fruits of this effort are already apparent: There are numerous instances of organizations collaborating and working together on new ideas, budding mentor-mentee relationships, and partners becoming subawardees to others in the cohort. In one case, the more experienced executive director of a larger organization has become a mentor to another partner's executive director.

KEY POINT: Supporting organizations as a group enables participants to see each other as resources and collaborators rather than competitors.

Focus on Results

Wendy Caishpal, Executive Director of Red de Sobrevivientes, an organization that supports people with disabilities in El Salvador, was among the organizational leaders the Incubator supported. Determining that coaching would help Caishpal establish herself in her new leadership role, the Incubator team paired her with an executive coach. Within a month or two, the change in Caishpal's demeanor was dramatically evident. She led future engagements with the Incubator team and demonstrated strong, outspoken confidence in her leadership and ability to articulate her goals and priorities for the organization. In September 2023, at the conclusion of our leadership development engagement with Caishpal, she was selected as one of 100 top women in Latin America by the Cámara De Comercio De Mujeres—awarded to women who transform the world with their talent and leadership and give voice to the development of their nation. "I would not have achieved this without the support I have had from the USAID Partnerships Incubator team," said Caishpal.

EL SALVADOR SUPPORT AREAS

| Organization Name	Business Model Viability	Executive Coaching	Financial Management	HR	MEL	New Business Development
Azul Originario	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Fundacíon Calleja		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fundacíon Gloria de Kriete	✓				✓	✓
Fundación Rafael Meza Ayau	✓	✓			✓	
FUNDASAL	✓				✓	
FUSAL		✓	✓			✓
FUSALMO					✓	✓
FUNSALPRODESE					✓	✓
La Factoría Ciudadana					✓	✓
Red de Sobrevivientes		✓			✓	✓
Servicio Social Pasionista			✓		✓	
Sus Hijos		✓		✓	✓	✓

OBJECTIVE 3

SCALABLE SUPPORT FOR ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

The Partnerships Incubator places a strong emphasis on providing steadfast support, harnessing the power of technology to augment our capacity-building approach. In Year 5, the Incubator assembled a team of seasoned experts to conceptualize, launch, and pilot an innovative virtual learning course. This course revolutionizes the introduction of our local partners to the realm of international development and working with USAID. Comprising nine meticulously crafted online modules, the course is delivered entirely in Spanish and covers crucial topics such as introduction to international cooperation, ToC, logical framework, MEL, financial management and management of cooperation funds, comprehensive approaches for positive impact, partnerships and agreements, proposal development, and agreements management.

The CAPTALO! "Curso de Capacitación para el Avance y la Creación de Alianzas para Organizaciones Locales" ("Course for Capacity Building and Partnership Development for Local Organizations") was developed with a focus on empowering local and nontraditional organizations with limited exposure to USAID and the broader international development landscape. The participants in the pilot run of the course comprised 90 individuals representing 32 organizations.

KEY POINT: A virtual asynchronous training platform such as CAPTALO!, taught in the participants' native Spanish, can empower local organizations with the confidence and key tools to engage donors, successfully apply for and potentially receive funding, and increase capacity to manage funds.
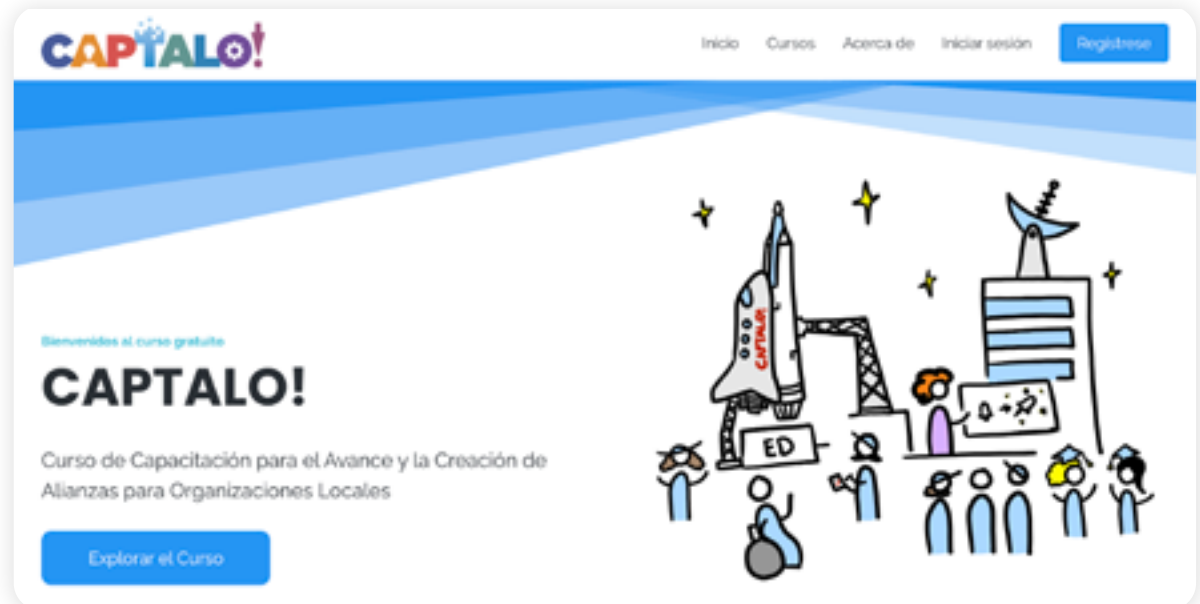
FROM STRUGGLING PARTNER TO CONFIDENT IMPLEMENTER

When relationships among stakeholders are strained due to poor communication, inadequate procedures, and mistrust, technical assistance and capacity strengthening cannot be effective. This was the situation facing the USAID Boresha Jamii (UBJ) project after a year and a half. The prime—a new local partner, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST)—received an award to carry out life-saving work to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health; nutrition; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); and HIV/AIDS care and treatment for key populations in western Kenya.

Although the USAID/Kenya and East Africa (USAID/KEA) team showed a deep commitment to localization through its extensive support for JOOUST, the Mission's bandwidth was limited. The Mission requested Partnerships Incubator support to diagnose the challenges facing the project and offer solutions to turn it around.

The Incubator team conducted comprehensive interviews with stakeholders to understand the key issues, which included processes and procedures, communication, roles and responsibilities, leadership, project morale, and training. The Incubator introduced and trained the project team on a responsibility assignment (RACI) tool (see sidebar), engaged an executive coach, and provided benchmarking research to help JOOUST understand how other Kenyan universities structure projects such as UBJ. The Incubator supported JOOUST to create mutually agreed-upon solutions for the stakeholders to work on together. As a result, communication has improved between USAID and the partner and between the project staff and the prime to the extent that JOOUST did not require additional support under the Mission's new capacity-strengthening mechanism.

KEY POINT: Projects and partners can struggle for a variety of reasons. Having a team diagnose the challenges and then work with the partner to address those issues can save impactful projects. A third party such as the Incubator provides a safe space for partners to ask questions while saving the Mission time, effort, and resources and can facilitate communication between all parties as a neutral stakeholder.

> The Incubator's work has given me the energy and courage to see the work through despite the challenges we faced.
>
> ~DR. SOLOMON ORERO, CHIEF OF PARTY, UBJ

Implementing RACI

The Incubator determined delineating roles and responsibilities among the UBJ team would alleviate the leadership burden and reduce tensions by empowering mid-level staff to take responsibility within their areas. The Incubator team sought to find a balance between the project's needs for clear decision-making and stakeholders' needs for information sharing. To do this, the Incubator team adopted a tool known as a RACI, or responsible-accountable-consulted-informed, matrix. This tool is used in corporate boardrooms around the world to help organizations determine roles and responsibilities. The Incubator provided several in-person orientations on the tool and sat down with project leadership to determine the highest-level tasks. Incubator-delivered training helped individual units in the project carry out RACI exercises, so the tool would flow down to all levels of tasks. The UBJ project team and JOOUST leadership expressed appreciation for the RACI process and eagerness to continue to use it to determine "ownership" of decision-making and accountability for individual tasks. The impact of this work is expected to grow through time as more tasks are clarified, which should further alleviate stresses among project leadership and staff.

OBJECTIVE 3

ASSESSING THE PARTNER LANDSCAPE IN SIERRA LEONE

To support its localization efforts, USAID/Sierra Leone requested Partnerships Incubator support in preparing two PLAs to identify local partners with which the Mission could collaborate in the democracy and governance (D&G) and health sectors. The Incubator recruited three consultants (two international and one local, based in Freetown) to serve on each PLA. The two teams collaborated to launch a joint campaign to identify more than 400 local organizations through an outreach survey. The Incubator team reviewed the survey responses and invited selected organizations to take an in-depth survey to gain clarity on their technical focus and institutional capacity. A total of 121 organizations responded, of which the Incubator invited 33 for interviews conducted over video conference.

Based on the results of the surveys and interviews, the Incubator delivered PLA reports to the Health and D&G teams at the Sierra Leone Mission, highlighting the most promising organizations working in each sector. The Incubator team presented its findings at a series of Mission outbriefs in the spring and summer of 2023. The two PLAs demonstrated the depth and diversity of local NGOs operating in Sierra Leone while identifying some of the more common challenges they face. Additionally, the Incubator reported on local NGOs' priorities, concerns, aspirations, and plans. These inputs will inform Mission planning and account for locally voiced priorities; identify local organizations best positioned for partnership; and target local organizations' most pressing needs to achieve readiness for partnership.

EXPANDING INDIGENOUS-LED PARTNERSHIPS IN GUATEMALA

The Partnerships Incubator helps Missions reach and engage underserved communities through sustainable learning initiatives. For example, the Incubator conducted a PLA to help USAID/Guatemala increase its engagement with and funding to local partners, with a focus on Indigenous-led organizations. Nearly half of Guatemala's population self-identifies as Indigenous Peoples across a diverse range of ethno-linguistic groups. Yet, Indigenous Peoples experience unequal access to health care, educational opportunities, nutritious food, and jobs. To address these challenges, USAID/Guatemala put in place the Agency's first country-specific Indigenous People's Engagement Strategy.

To support this ground-breaking initiative, the Incubator identified organizations with the operational capacity to manage Agency funds and drive development impact in the Mission's priority areas, such as reducing irregular migration and engaging Indigenous Peoples. Using a holistic view of USAID readiness based on organizational sustainability beyond donor-funded programming, the Incubator narrowed a wide partner ecosystem of nearly 500 organizations to focus on 30 organizations as an illustrative partner landscape.

The Incubator hosted a webinar in Spanish to address gaps identified in the assessment and share best practices on how to work with USAID. The Incubator's panelists presented content on pre-award planning, complemented by a presentation from El Refugio de la Niñez, a Guatemalan nonprofit organization that shared its inspiring story about partnering with the Agency.

> "
> [The Mission has] questions, curiosity, and interest in using the [PLA] data for improving engagement with organizations, expanding our reach, and [learning] how to strengthen capacity at multiple levels. You have given us the framework, data, and tools. We are really grateful and want to say thank you.
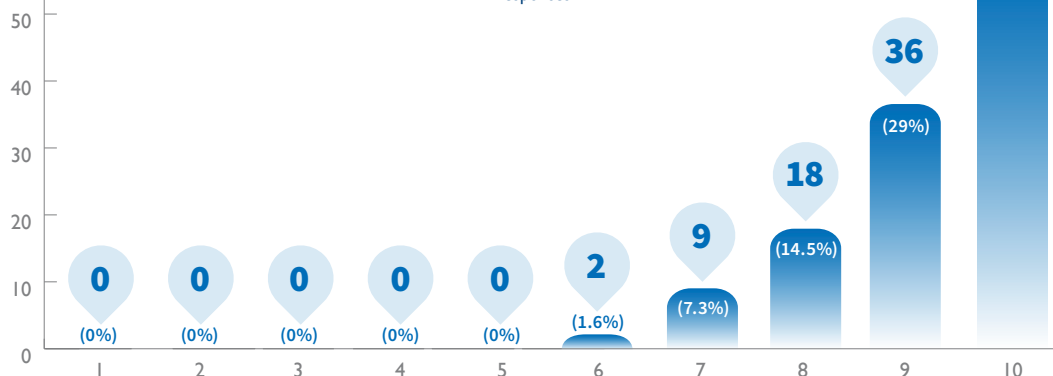>
> ~KOVIA GRATZON-ERSKINE, SENIOR ADVISOR, USAID/ GUATEMALA

GUATEMALA WEBINAR

On a scale of 1-10, how helpful was the webinar content in helping you understand how to work with USAID?

(1 = very dissatisfied, 10 = very satisfied)

124 responses

Score	Count	Percentage
1	0	(0%)
2	0	(0%)
3	0	(0%)
4	0	(0%)
5	0	(0%)
6	2	(1.6%)
7	9	(7.3%)
8	18	(14.5%)
9	36	(29%)
10	59	(47.6%)

The Partnerships Incubator received an average score of 9.12 out of 10 from 124 respondents to a feedback survey.

OBJECTIVE 3

BUILDING STRATEGIC REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN THE CARIBBEAN

In Year 4, the Partnerships Incubator launched support to a partner cohort of six multilateral, regional institutions in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean (ESC) region. Cohort members support regional initiatives such as a common market, regional integration, disaster recovery and resilience, research, and policy development. These organizations included major strategic partners for the USAID Mission, such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission.

After completing a partner needs assessment, the Incubator, Mission, and local organizations co-designed technical assistance packages to outline capacity strengthening in areas such as financial management, marketing, and USAID compliance. The Incubator then paired the organizations with teams of subject matter experts who provided technical assistance during several months. In collaboration with the ESC Regional Mission, the Partnerships Incubator helped strengthen the operational and technical capabilities of major stakeholders supporting integration across the Caribbean region.

“

The introduction of the Incubator program has been instrumental in helping the CIMH [Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology] strengthen its fiduciary processes, which is essential as the institute aims to further build out the products and services it offers to the region through development partner programs.

~DAVID FARRELL, PRINCIPAL, CIMH

OBJECTIVE 3

SUPPORTING CHANGE IN A LARGE REGIONAL ORGANIZATION

The Partnerships Incubator often supports small NGOs that work in local communities. The Incubator has also worked with vast, multilateral organizations with regional mandates, such as with USAID's ESC Regional Mission. The Incubator provided capacity-strengthening support to the administrative body of CARICOM, which has a mandate to improve the lives of the region's citizens across national boundaries and economic and social spheres. This organization is an example of a new type of partner that can benefit from Incubator support. CARICOM's leadership comprises the governments of the 15 member states; operations are managed by a large bureaucracy with multiple levels of authority and decision-making; and it occupies a position of strategic importance for the U.S. Government.

The Incubator provided support to the CARICOM Secretariat across a range of service areas. Project Director Donna Vincent Roa visited CARICOM's headquarters in Guyana to discuss steps the organization could take to standardize usage of its brand. The Incubator's MEL Specialist presented a webinar module on the importance of accountability at an event hosted by the World Bank on monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL). A Technical Report Writing Advisor also visited CARICOM's headquarters to upgrade the Secretariat's internal manuals and guidelines on written communication products across the project life cycle. The Incubator proved that it could deliver outstanding results not only to small-scale NGOs but also in collaboration with large, regional United Nations (UN)–like organizations.

KEY POINT: Although large regional organizations differ in structure from the smaller organizations typically supported by the Incubator, the team's valuable and well-received work with CARICOM shows many of the same partnership lessons can be relevant to larger organizations.

> [This MEAL guidance material will be] an overarching document guiding the MEAL transition across the region as our partners implement results-based management.
>
> ~HIPOLINA JOSEPH, DEPUTY PROGRAM MANAGER, STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT, CARICOM SECRETARIAT

> " This is the most engaging workshop I have ever attended. You have brought us to consider so many dimensions of the CARICOM brand and have guided us through the challenges and issues we face in operationalizing standards and structure.
>
> ~KENDOL MORGAN, PROGRAM MANAGER, COMMUNICATIONS UNIT, CARICOM SECRETARIAT (ON DONNA VINCENT ROA'S BRANDING WORKSHOP IN GEORGETOWN, GUYANA, JULY 25–26, 2023)

OBJECTIVE 3

UNLOCKING NEW POTENTIAL PARTNERS IN BURUNDI

The Partnerships Incubator conducted a PLA to help the USAID/Burundi Mission understand the challenges and opportunities for increasing its engagement with local and nontraditional organizations. Through the design of a two-week outreach campaign in French with a mix of radio, newspaper, and social media platforms, the Incubator reached out to local organizations in Burundi interested in working with USAID. This outreach campaign attracted 784 organizations that responded to a preliminary survey. Following a screening of survey responses, the Incubator narrowed the landscape to 83 organizations to complete a second, more in-depth self-assessment survey. Finally, the Incubator shortlisted the 30 most promising organizations for interviews.

The Incubator assessed these 30 shortlisted organizations through the lens of distinct qualifiers to determine USAID readiness: organization type, staff size, revenue range, business model resilience, value proposition, years of operation range, organization life cycle stage, and standout features. This approach represents a holistic view of USAID readiness that also considers organizational sustainability beyond donor-funded programming.

This categorization revealed interesting insights, such as the importance of raising outside revenue as a critical factor to USAID readiness. The Incubator team found that organizations able to raise diverse revenue beyond donors or funders are more likely to have higher USAID readiness, stronger business model resilience, and more competitive value propositions.

BOOSTING USAID READINESS OF LOCAL HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PARTNERS

USAID partners are often described as new, local, nontraditional, private sector, etc. A distinction made less often, outside of the Agency, is between development and humanitarian partner organizations. Humanitarian organizations are often operating in less-secure environments; awards are implemented across shorter periods of performance (e.g., 12 to 18 months compared to 36 to 60 months); infrastructure can be challenging due to natural disasters; beneficiary needs are acute rather than chronic; and humanitarian reporting requirements are different from reporting requirements for development activities.

Since 2021, the Partnerships Incubator has been providing pre- and post-award support to a BHA partner in Latin America, a local NGO implementing a WASH project. BHA awarded the partner a noncompetitive cooperative agreement and the Incubator provided capacity-strengthening support in three technical areas: monitoring, evaluation, and reporting (MER); organizational policy development; and financial management. During the Incubator's engagement, the partner established itself as a strong, competent organization capable of maintaining USAID compliance responsibilities while delivering WASH services to some of the most vulnerable populations in the target demographics. As a result, in 2022, BHA provided additional funding and extended the organization's period of performance through October 2024. Following the extension, the Incubator continued to support the partner with financial management and MEL through July 2023.

The Incubator also supported USAID/BHA to swiftly boost the organizational capacity of four newly engaged local humanitarian assistance partners in conflict-affected areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Typically, the Incubator conducts a sequential needs assessment before providing technical assistance. However, due to the short award timeline, assistance began simultaneously with the assessment and service delivery. Mindful that effective communication promotes coordination and transparency in humanitarian operations, the Incubator conducted a cohort training in humanitarian information management, communication, and media. The training has since been integrated into the crisis program management planning process across the four partners.

KEY POINT: Humanitarian partners, especially local ones, face different challenges than other partner types. Preparing local humanitarian partners to work with USAID can be critical to the Agency's localization efforts when it comes to this sector. During the previous year, the Incubator engaged 18 potential or current humanitarian partners on behalf of USAID. The team has learned how to provide capacity-strengthening services and technical assistance to these organizations within their unique circumstances.

> "We are grateful for all the work you've done. Jumping into localization is a challenge. I've seen a big difference from when we started; concrete outcomes; appreciate the flexibility to deliver immediate support— never got a sense you weren't willing to be flexible.
>
> ~FRANCESCO PAGANINI, BHA/DRC

INCUBATOR OPERATIONS

The Finance & Operations Unit is responsible for the financial and operational stewardship of the project, including financial reporting, budgeting, payment process, personnel recruitment, task order issuance, and procurement actions. The Finance & Operations team enables the smooth and seamless functioning of the Partnerships Incubator as a whole, providing support for the resourcing and compliance framework of all Incubator activities.

INCUBATOR OPERATIONS

ACCELERATING IMPACT THROUGH OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

Near the end of Quarter 4 in Year 3, the Partnerships Incubator secured additional obligated buy-in funds for Year 4 activities from various sources within USAID. These include USAID's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; the BHA team in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; USAID/Burundi; USAID/DEIA; USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance; USAID/Kenya; and USAID/Sierra Leone. The total amount obligated during Year 3 was ███████, with additional obligations of ███████ received in February and March 2023 that brought the total obligated amount for Year 4 activities to ███████.

In the initial stages of Year 4, the Incubator was actively engaged in groundwork preparation for ongoing and new activities. This period saw a surge in operational tasks—including recruitment, procurement, and travel arrangements—aimed at addressing the requirements of existing and newly acquired projects. As Quarter 2 unfolded, many of the Incubator's projects were in their nascent stages, prompting the team to focus on hiring and travel logistics to ensure readiness for the anticipated expansion of our initiatives in the remainder of the fiscal year.

Collaboratively, the Kaizen Company's headquarters and the Incubator's Finance & Operations Unit diligently crafted multiple budgets to accommodate the projected project growth. As we progressed into the third and fourth quarters of the project implementation year, the Incubator witnessed an accelerated pace in delivering services to USAID/Washington and overseas Missions in alignment with our buy-in commitments. Furthermore, the Finance & Operations team extended invaluable support to a BHA partner in matters of compliance, finance, and budget management throughout Year 4.

In September 2023, during Quarter 4 of Year 4, we received additional obligated buy-in funds from the following entities:

* M/OAA
* Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, Office of Global Policy, Partnerships, Programs, and Communication (BHA/G3PC)
* DEIA
* Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI)
    » Local, Faith, and Transformative Partnerships Hub (DDI/LFT)
    » Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (DDI/GenDev)
    » Private Sector Engagement Hub (DDI/PSE)
* Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security, Inclusive Development Division (REFS/IDD)
* Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG)
* USAID/Rwanda

The total amount obligated in September 2023 was ███████.

INCUBATOR OPERATIONS

Throughout Year 4, the Incubator maintained ongoing contracts with Big Blue Communications and TM Design, both of which provided graphic design and communication services. Additionally, the Incubator continued its partnership with Daniel Goncalves and Miew for website design and development support.

In response to the increased level of activities in January 2023, the team recognized the necessity for a Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) Request for Proposals (RFP) specifically targeting organizational capacity strengthening and cohort training services. This initiative led to the onboarding of eight vendors (DevWorks International, Emerging Consultants Group, Entrena, Humentum, Keylime International, WeSPARK, and Willard Global Strategies) through the BPA process. These new BPA agreements not only streamlined the recruitment process for the Program Management Unit (PMU), but they also ensured high-quality candidates were available from a larger pool of consultants.

Furthermore, the Web & Communications team initiated a Request for Quotations (RFQ) for translation support services and selected Datagain as the chosen provider, with services commencing in Quarter 3 of the year.

In response to the heightened demand for Incubator services, the Finance & Operations team played a pivotal role in spearheading an extensive recruitment campaign to cater to the burgeoning technical support requirements. This effort resulted in the successful addition of five new Long-Term Technical Assistance (LTTA) staff members, comprising two acceleration liaisons, a finance and operations assistant, a web and communications coordinator, and a project writer.

During the course of Year 4, the Finance & Operations Unit oversaw the recruitment of 63 Short-Term Technical Assistance (STTA) consultants, each carefully selected to address the increased workload and specific skill demands dictated by the evolving needs of the Incubator's projects.
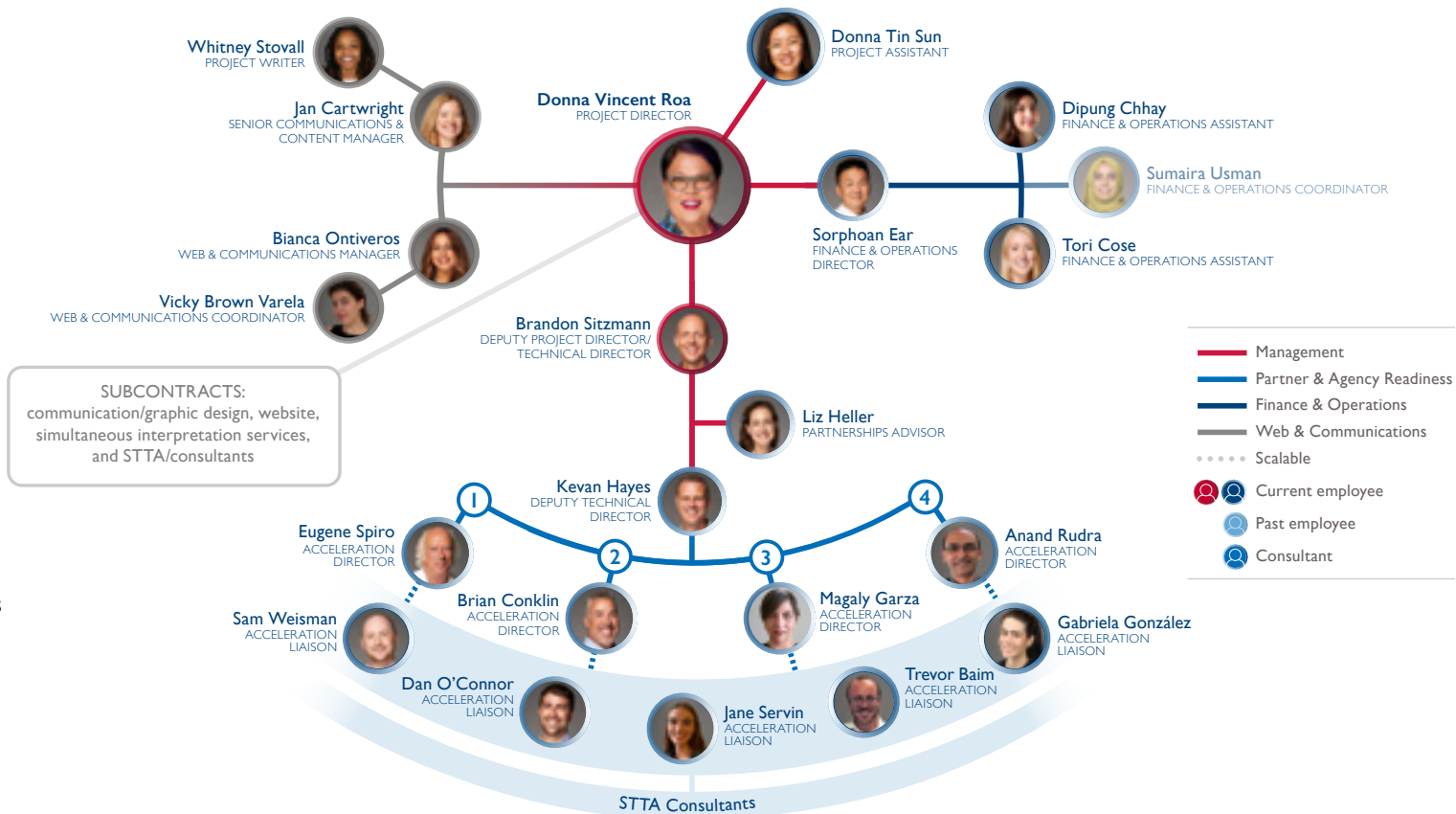
THE TEAM

During Year 4, the Partnerships Incubator team comprised 22 full-time staff members and 94 short-term technical assistance consultants, including locally based experts. Ongoing recruitment efforts are underway for Year 5.

Year 4 witnessed a remarkable expansion of our project's scope, leading to a significant increase in both full-time and short-term hires. In comparison to the 57 consultants engaged in Year 3, the Incubator saw the consultant roster grow to 94 in Year 4.

The Incubator has continued to partner with The Washington Center to provide opportunities for young professionals through our associate program, now in its third year. During Year 4, two associates participated in themed presentations and discussions as Incubator team members. By combining direct work on Incubator projects with opportunities to be mentored, the associates in this program develop critical skills and knowledge that can inform their future careers in the field of international development.

PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR STAFF

Whitney Stovall
PROJECT WRITER

Jan Cartwright
SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS & CONTENT MANAGER

Donna Vincent Roa
PROJECT DIRECTOR

Donna Tin Sun
PROJECT ASSISTANT

Dipung Chhay
FINANCE & OPERATIONS ASSISTANT

Sumaira Usman
FINANCE & OPERATIONS COORDINATOR

Bianca Ontiveros
WEB & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Sorphoan Ear
FINANCE & OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

Tori Cose
FINANCE & OPERATIONS ASSISTANT

Vicky Brown Varela
WEB & COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

Brandon Sitzmann
DEPUTY PROJECT DIRECTOR/ TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

SUBCONTRACTS:
communication/graphic design, website, simultaneous interpretation services, and STTA/consultants

Liz Heller
PARTNERSHIPS ADVISOR

Kevan Hayes
DEPUTY TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Eugene Spiro
ACCELERATION DIRECTOR

Anand Rudra
ACCELERATION DIRECTOR

Sam Weisman
ACCELERATION LIAISON

Brian Conklin
ACCELERATION DIRECTOR

Magaly Garza
ACCELERATION DIRECTOR

Gabriela González
ACCELERATION LIAISON

Dan O'Connor
ACCELERATION LIAISON

Jane Servin
ACCELERATION LIAISON

Trevor Baim
ACCELERATION LIAISON

STTA Consultants

Legend:
- Management
- Partner & Agency Readiness
- Finance & Operations
- Web & Communications
- Scalable
- Current employee
- Past employee
- Consultant

ADMINISTRATION

In Year 4, USAID issued four contract modifications to the Partnerships Incubator project that provided for additional buy-ins and funding for Year 5. The modifications reflect a refined approach to project implementation and address new priorities.

STATUS OF FUNDS

TOTAL CONTRACT CEILING		
OBLIGATED FUNDS		
FUNDS USED AS OF 08/31/2023		
FUNDS AVAILABLE		

INDICATORS

The Partnerships Incubator maintains a robust process for tracking and assessing data to ensure the project delivers outstanding results to USAID. Our set of indicators has been refined during our years of implementation, and these indicators help guide our understanding of what we have accomplished and where we can improve. Intently focused on delivering with excellence, we monitor and evaluate our work through these primary indicators.

PARTNERSHIPS INCUBATOR YEAR 4 INDICATORS

The Partnerships Incubator continues its commitment to empowering new, nontraditional, and local partners by working in collaboration with USAID M/B/OUs, in support of USAID's New Partnerships Initiative. In Year 4, the Incubator maintained the same set of indicators that were updated in Year 3, and the definitions for these indicators remain unchanged.[2] These indicators are designed to assess and report on the project's progress and performance in line with the program management plan, reflecting the key deliverables and services provided to the Agency and its new and nontraditional partners.

In Year 4, the Incubator's achievements in delivering on objectives related to M/B/OU engagement, training resources, and communication strategy and products demonstrated that the team consistently met or exceeded its targets. For three indicators, 2.b. (number of potential new, local, or nontraditional partners identified through landscape or similar analyses upon request by M/B/OUs); 3.c. (percent of users who have completed Pre-Engagement Assessment); and 3.f. (percent of U.S. Government [USG]–assisted organizations with improved performance), the Incubator did fall short of its targets. The smaller number of partners identified was primarily a result of fewer Mission requests for partner landscape analyses and a more targeted focus on known partners whom they wished to engage for capacity-strengthening services. The percent of users completing the Pre-Engagement Assessment is a challenge to influence, although we expect the percentage to improve next year when WorkwithUSAID.org, where the assessment resides, is transitioned to WorkwithUSAID.gov. The higher-profile domain name will hopefully motivate organizations to complete the assessment.

For Indicator 3.f., the Incubator fell short of its target of 90 percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance due in part to the timeline of support and data collection. For many partners the Incubator had less than six months to deliver capacity-strengthening support. The team collected performance data through a Capacity and Performance Impact Survey within a couple of weeks of completing technical assistance with each partner organization. The compressed timeline did not always allow partners to experience the full impact of the support provided. Three out of 31 partners specifically noted that it was too early to see a measurable impact on performance within this short timeframe but that they were optimistic about future performance impact. Two of the partners that did not report performance impact noted that the Incubator's recommendations needed to go through an internal approval process before they could be implemented. Despite the short assessment period, 27 out of 33 partners (82 percent) noted that the Incubator's support had already impacted their organizational performance. We expect overall life-of-project targets for all indicators to be greatly surpassed.

For detailed information on the Incubator's progress against each performance indicator for the period from October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023, please refer to the table on page 47 of this report, which provides a comprehensive overview of the project's Year 4 achievements and performance outcomes.

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2   The Incubator introduced some modifications to some of the indicators for its third year and started data collection in line with modified indicators in the second quarter of 2022.

The table below shows progress against each performance indicator for the period October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023.

INDICATOR	TYPE OF INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE(S)	FREQUENCY	BASELINE OCTOBER 1, 2021	TARGET FOR YEAR 4	PROGRESS FOR YEAR 4[3]
OBJECTIVE 1: Amplify USAID's external communication efforts to help diversify and strengthen its partner base						
1.a. Number of Incubator-produced storytelling and news items posted by the Incubator to public content platforms	Output	Communications Unit products tracking sheet, websites (.gov and .org)	Monthly	0	24	34
OBJECTIVE 2: Expand USAID's capacity for partnerships						
2.a. Number of work products completed for M/B/OUs	Output	Readiness Unit services tracking sheet	Quarterly	0	50	127
2.b. Number of potential new and underutilized partners (NUPs) identified through landscape or similar analyses upon request by M/B/OUs	Output	Readiness Unit services tracking sheet	Annually	0	150	52
OBJECTIVE 3: Help partner organizations work with USAID						
3.a. Number of visitors to all WorkwithUSAID.org sites	Output	Web analytics	Monthly	0	160,000	223,814
3.b. Number of partners with approved profiles on WorkwithUSAID.org	Output	Web analytics, profile validation, and approval log	Quarterly	0	5,000[4]	5,200
3.c. Percent of registered partners that completed the Pre-Engagement Assessment	Output	Completed pre-engagement organizational assessments	Quarterly	0	60%	54%
3.d. Number of users that accessed training modules (on USAID.gov and WorkwithUSAID.org)	Output	Web analytics	Monthly	0	600	13,402[5]
3.e. Number of partners that accessed library (Incubator-curated) resources on WorkwithUSAID.org	Output	Web analytics	Monthly	0	7,000	13,961[6]
3.f. Percent of USG-assisted organizations with improved performance (per M/B/OU request)[7]	Outcome	Survey	Annually	0	90%	81%[8]

3 Metrics on progress cover the period October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023.
4 Cumulative total, including partners that have approved profiles in previous years.
5 The Google analytics data for September is not fully available due to technical issues and will be updated in due course.
6 These are numbers of pageviews (not numbers of partners). We identified this discrepancy in the data reported and the indicator title and definition.
7 Data for this indicator is reported annually after final delivery of technical assistance to organizations. This is an activity custom indicator for NPI and is different from the Agency's standard F indicator CBLD-9 and is informed by a self-reported Capacity and Performance Improvement Survey (CAPIS) to organizations supported by the Partnerships Incubator.
8 A total of 31 partners completed the Incubator's Capacity and Performance Improvement Survey (CAPIS), of which 25 partners reported to have improvement in their organizational performance as a result of Incubator support.

CONTACT: