

Learns is Learning

Quarterly Review of Progress

USAID Learns

Monitoring, Evaluation,
Collaborating, Learning
& Adapting

October -
December
2020

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Photo: Learns hosts a day of learning for monitoring, evaluation & learning officers from USAID/Vietnam's implementing partners (IPs).
December 2020/Hanoi

Our Why.

About USAID Learns



We exist to help USAID/Vietnam achieve better development results.

To effectively implement the USAID/Vietnam Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) for 2020-2025, the Mission has contracted an institutional support mechanism (Learns) to act as a force multiplier for the Mission and over 40 activities. Learns staff and consultants provide ongoing technical assistance in Program Cycle processes: strategy, project design, and implementation; activity design and implementation; monitoring; research and evaluation; collaborating, learning & adapting (CLA); and building the capacity of USAID and partners in said processes.

The ultimate 'why' of Learns is to contribute to more sustainable and locally-owned development results in USAID's programming. Our team does this by:



Advancing evidence-informed decision-making



Strengthening collaboration between USAID, IPs, and local stakeholders



Improving staff knowledge and skills in monitoring, research, and evaluation, and CLA



**ADDITIONAL
RESOURCE**

For more information on Learns' services and who to contact if you need support, please [click here](#).

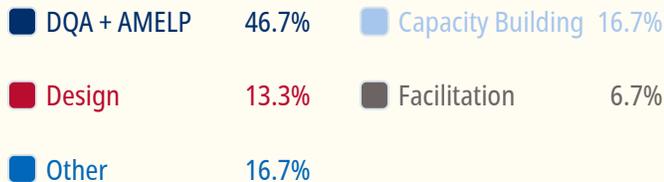
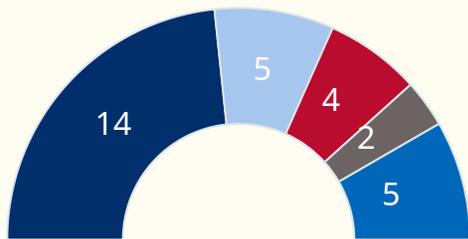
Our Key Accomplishments by the Data

30 Program Cycle services

completed on behalf of USAID in the first quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2021

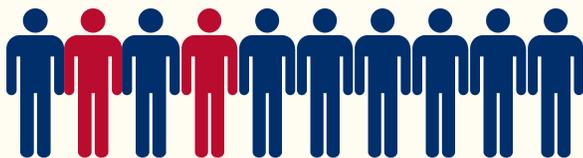
Program Cycle services completed this past quarter ranged from support on data quality assessments (DQAs) and activity monitoring, evaluation & learning plans (AMELPs) to capacity building sessions, activity design support, and the completion of one study. Other services included in the chart below include: Performance Management Plan (PMP) development and supporting USAID partner meetings.

Types of services Learns has provided in the first quarter of FY21

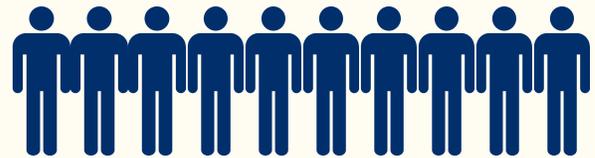


Word cloud: 10 survey respondents tell Learns three words that best describe their recent experience with the contract. The larger words are the most frequent.

Learns surveyed USAID and IP staff on the quality of services provided. Results include:



8 out of 10 respondents said they would highly recommend Learns to a colleague



10 out of 10 respondents said that Learns' support was helpful to the completion of the task



85% of participants reported they experienced **effective collaboration** as a result of Learns' support (82/96)



92% of trainees reported **increased confidence** to apply what they have learned (44/48: AMELP, Development Information Solution, and Most Significant Change [MSC] training)

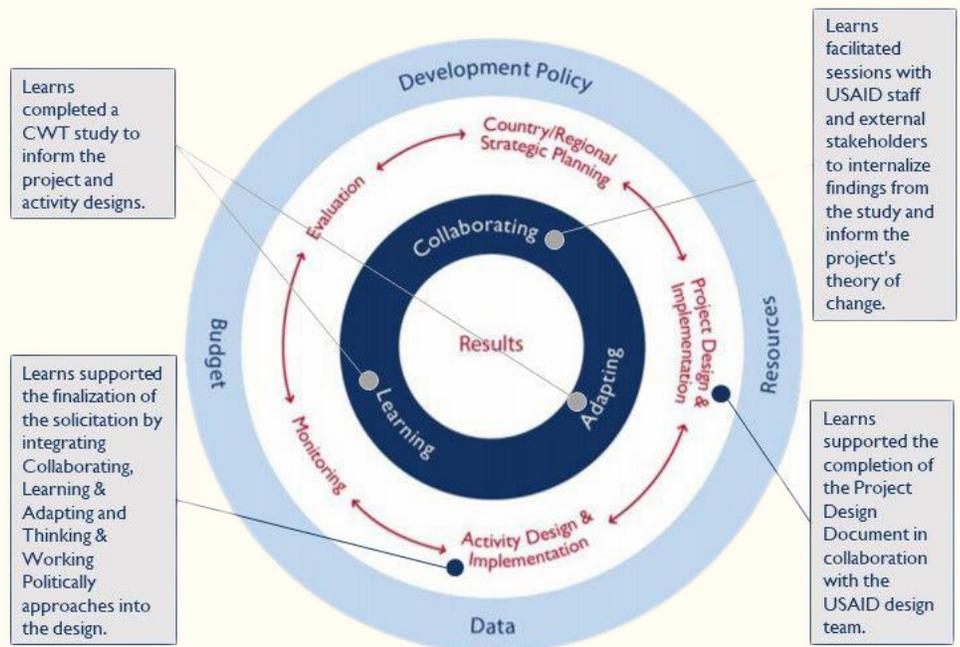
Our Key Accomplishments by the Stories

Beyond the numbers, Learns has identified several accomplishments that demonstrate our value as a contract. One story, in particular, brings together aspects of our support: research, facilitation, project design, and activity design:

Countering Wildlife Trafficking (CWT)

USAID's Office of Environment & Energy (OEE) engaged Learns as a strategic partner to move from initial assessment phases to project design, and eventually, activity design. Learns' support culminated in the finalization of a strong solicitation this quarter. Learns support, in particular, helped integrate a thinking and working politically (TWP) and CLA approach into the solicitation.

Learns support to USAID on CWT



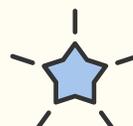
This will hopefully enable USAID to select an adaptable partner that can continuously learn from and improve implementation for better results.

During the After Action Review (AAR) with Learns, USAID staff highlighted the usefulness of the validation workshop for the CWT study: "That's where all the recommendations, threads, really came to life...[it] was a critical element of the study."



NEXT STEPS

Next quarter, Learns will support the CWT team's co-creation with potential implementing partners.



APPRECIATION

Learns appreciates USAID/Vietnam staff Thang Nguyen and Christine Gandomi for their collaboration on CWT.

Our Key Accomplishments by the Stories

Additional examples of Learns' support and value-add include:

1



Setting USAID/Vietnam up for learning and adapting at the strategy level

Learns supported the Mission in completing its PMP that addresses how the Mission will monitor, evaluate, and learn from implementation across the CDCS.

The PMP support included: facilitating sessions with the Program Office to identify the main elements of the PMP, facilitating sessions with the technical teams to identify monitoring and evaluation priorities, writing the PMP, and supporting internal communication within the Mission through the PuMP It Up Times.

The PMP has been used by USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning & Learning as an example of a PMP that is learning- and adapting-oriented. The PMP structure has also influenced other missions, including USAID/Madagascar.



NEXT STEPS

Next quarter, Learns will support the continued operationalization of the PMP, including the Most Significant Change pilot and providing job aids to USAID staff and IPs with indicator information.



APPRECIATION

Learns appreciates ALL USAID/Vietnam staff for their collaboration on the PMP, and especially Giang Tong Le, Aaron Brownell, and Cris Fentross for Program Office leadership on the effort.

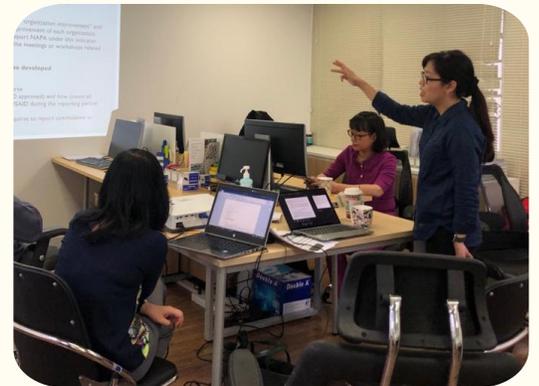
2



Increasing ownership among USAID and IP staff for DQAs

DQAs help USAID ensure that monitoring data reported to USAID/Vietnam and external stakeholders are accurate and useful in supporting effective management. This past quarter, Learns completed eight DQAs with two IPs.

During this period, Learns used its learning from previous DQAs to simplify its tools and engage Agreement/Contracting Officer's Representatives (A/CORs) "just in time"; rather than formal trainings, Learns provides A/CORs with quick orientations and coaching sessions on carrying out the DQA. When at the IP's office, Learns leads the review of the first few indicators and then has the A/COR take over the review of the following indicators. This change in approach has increased A/COR engagement in DQAs and demonstrates the importance of the DQA to IPs.



APPRECIATION

A special thanks to A/CORs Thuy Nguyen and Chau Nguyen for being the first to test Learns' simplified DQA tools and to Strengthening Provincial Capacity (SPC) and Vietnam Leads for their collaboration on DQAs this quarter.

“ In a short amount of time, the DQA team was very professional, quick in findings data-quality related issues and very supportive in helping [us] identify solutions... - Vietnam Leads ”

Our Key Accomplishments by the Stories

Additional examples of Learns' support and value-add include:

3



Learns held the first quarterly MELO gathering for IPs

Learns held two, day-long sessions in December for Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Officers (MELOs) from USAID's IPs. The session was the first of its kind for Learns and the Mission overall. It was an opportunity to share Learns' learning on common obstacles from recent DQAs. MELOs shared their challenges and possible solutions for improving upon their data quality for the ultimate purpose of data use. The session also enabled MELOs to network and get to know each other. Learns plans to hold quarterly sessions for the life of the contract.

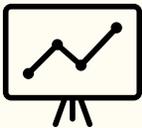
“ The way the content was provided [at the MELOs gathering] was so creative. The sharing of participants' [experience] is so helpful. ”
- MELO attendee



APPRECIATION

Learns appreciates ALL the MELOs who joined our first quarterly gathering. Thanks also to program directors, chiefs of party, and A/CORs for encouraging their participation.

4



USAID partners ready to apply the MSC methodology to better understand qualitative impacts of programming

Learns held two sessions for eight IPs on the MSC methodology. MSC is a qualitative approach to monitoring and evaluation. USAID/Vietnam introduced it as a way to learn from implementation and capture impact data on hard-to-measure outcomes, such as governance, gender, quality of life, etc.

Partners left the day-long session ready to apply the methodology in their programs. Learns also provided translations of MSC tools in Vietnamese and offered regular support throughout the pilot period.

Partners will now collect and submit at least two MSC stories by April of 2021 for Learns to analyze and facilitate a reflection session in May.

“ We are trained to have a new approach to look at the project impacts through the lens of beneficiaries/stakeholders. I like the flow of the materials presented and the process designed. ”
- MSC trainee



APPRECIATION

A special thanks to Chau Nguyen, Huong Le, and Thao Nguyen for encouraging their IPs to join the pilot. And special thanks to the IPs who are taking the lead on MSC: VNAH, VietHealth, ACDC, HAVN, ASU, FUV, SPC/Chemonics, and INVEST/DAI.

Our Lessons Learned

In the spirit of continuous learning and improvement, Learns has reflected on the following key lessons and their implications for our work.



- ▶ "Just in time" support more effective than formal training.

Learns recognized this past quarter that attempts at formal training on carrying out DQAs did not match A/CORs needs. The team adjusted to provide "just in time" support right before a DQA, during the session with partners, and during the out brief.



- ▶ Prioritize the most important feedback for partners.

Learns also recognized that in reviewing AMELPs from partners, it would identify all the possible points that needed adjustment. Over time, the team realized this approach actually backfired. The amount of feedback overwhelmed partners. Instead, Learns focuses on highlighting the most critical feedback and recognizing what partners are doing well with their AMELPs.



- ▶ Research coordination should not be outsourced, and power relations within the Government of Vietnam can affect our ability to carry out research quickly.

Learns experienced serious delays on one study; as a result, the team realized that it relied too heavily on the consultant team lead to coordinate with government counterparts. At the same time, there was no clear government counterpart that could open doors to get the research team access to government facilities. As a result, Learns is clarifying government counterparts during research scoping and will ensure the coordination function is carried out by long-term staff to avoid unnecessary delays.



- ▶ Partners interested in applying the MSC approach.

Learns was pleasantly surprised to see the interest from USAID and IP staff in the MSC methodology. There was so much interest that Learns had to host two different sessions to accommodate eight partners. As the process has unfolded, partners have contacted Learns for guidance and other partners have asked to be trained. This bodes well for the pilot effort and scale-up of MSC across the Mission's portfolio.



Our Plans for Next Quarter

The following table is an illustrative list of upcoming tasks for Learns during the second quarter of FY21.



	Research & Evaluation	Facilitation & Design	Monitoring	Governance Integration
Mission-wide	Complete Government of Vietnam project approval study	Reflection on local capacity development	PMP operationalization; updated monitoring tools; MELO event; training	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) integration plan; MSC pilot
Economic Competitiveness		Private sector engagement facilitation (tentative)	AMELP and DQA support	Sustainability planning with Provincial Competitiveness Index
Infectious Diseases	TB private sector landscape analysis			
Environmental Security	Desk reviews, Vietnam Forests & Deltas (VFD) activity review	CWT co-creation; VFD pause & reflect	AMELP and DQA support	Collective impact stakeholder analysis
Agent Orange (AO) & War Legacies	Disabilities baseline, AO research	Annual stakeholder meeting for disabilities	INCLUSION indicator support	