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GUIDANCE NOTE

OPERATIONALIZING THE PRINCIPLES FOR LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION

USAID Climate Adaptation Support Activity

Locally led adaptation (LLA) refers to an approach where local actors and communities lead decisions over how, when, and where to adapt to climate change impacts.¹ By recognizing the value of local knowledge and expertise, leveraging the strengths of existing local systems, and addressing historical power imbalances, LLA can contribute to more effective and equitable climate adaptation and also advance locally led development across sectors.

Launched at the 2021 Climate Adaptation Summit, the eight **Principles for Locally Led Adaptation** are intended to guide funding, programming, and practices to support local actors in leading adaptation design, processes, and outcomes. The principles were co-developed under the Global Commission on Adaptation, following years of research and consultation with more than 50 stakeholder organizations from across the climate action landscape. Over 100 entities have endorsed the principles, including USAID and 16 other government institutions. USAID announced its endorsement at COP 26 in November 2021.

The principles are a key resource that USAID can reference to assist in mainstreaming LLA across its programming portfolio. They will help the Agency to further its commitment to climate action and locally led development, while aligning with other key policies and priorities including the USAID Climate Strategy.

PRINCIPLES FOR LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION

1. Devolving decision-making to the lowest appropriate level
2. Addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, disabled and displaced people, Indigenous Peoples, and marginalized ethnic groups
3. Providing patient and predictable funding that can be accessed more easily
4. Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy
5. Building a robust understanding of climate risk and uncertainty
6. Flexible programming and learning
7. Ensuring transparency and accountability
8. Collaborative action and investment

This document was prepared by the **USAID Climate Adaptation Support Activity (CASA)**, which provides strategic support to USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Operating Units to advance effective adaptation mainstreaming and programming and to scale meaningful change. The content of this document does not necessarily reflect the view of USAID or the United States Government.

¹ World Resources Institute (WRI), n.d. "[Locally Led Adaptation](#)."

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This document offers guidance for USAID and its implementing partners on operationalizing the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation. It identifies how each principle aligns with relevant USAID policies and Agency guidance and illustrates opportunities for implementing LLA across the USAID program cycle, including during:

- 1 Strategic Planning**
How can practicing the principles for LLA help inform the best strategic approaches for adaptation and resilience strengthening in each country or region?
- 2 Design and Implementation of Projects and Activities**
What are strategies for empowering local actors to lead adaptation action, guided by local priorities and knowledge?
- 3 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)**
How can USAID enable local entities to design and help monitor adaptation outcomes, assess impact, and learn from and champion results?

While this document is organized to highlight each principle, the principles are interconnected and interdependent. Efforts to advance one LLA principle will often contribute to progress toward another.

This guide is designed to accompany the [Locally Led Adaptation Primer](#) that provides an overview of LLA in the context of USAID's commitment to sustainable and locally led development, and equitable and inclusive climate action.

The principles for LLA align with USAID's existing policy frameworks, including:

- ▶ Climate Strategy Foundational Principles and Strategic Objectives
- ▶ Local Capacity Strengthening Policy
- ▶ Program Cycle Operational Policy
- ▶ Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- ▶ Local Systems Framework
- ▶ Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy
- ▶ Acquisition and Assistance Strategy
- ▶ New Partnerships Initiative

PRINCIPLE 1 – DEVOLVING DECISION-MAKING TO THE LOWEST APPROPRIATE LEVEL

Giving local actors more direct access to finance and decision-making power over how adaptation actions are defined, prioritized, designed, and implemented; how progress is monitored; and how success is evaluated.

Local actors—including individuals and subnational and national entities—are at the forefront of responding to and preparing for climate shocks and stressors. However, they often do not have equitable access to the financing that supports adaptation efforts, leading to dependency on externally funded adaptation activities and, often, exclusion from financial decision-making and planning. A recent review of adaptation programs and projects found that local actors are still predominantly recipients of adaptation interventions rather than leaders in decision-making around the finance, design, and implementation of the adaptation activities that will affect them.²

To apply this principle, USAID and implementing partners should, when possible, leverage existing decentralized government systems and civil society-led efforts to include locally defined adaptation needs and preferences into

In alignment with LLA Principle 1, USAID's localization goals aim for local leadership of 50 percent of all USAID programming by 2030.

programming and create opportunities for local participation in adaptation decision-making. As detailed in USAID's Localization Agenda and [Acquisition and Assistance Strategy](#), the Agency is committed to shifting more leadership and decision-making to local actors in setting priorities, designing and implementing projects, and measuring results. The [USAID Climate Strategy](#) prioritizes partnering with local communities to lead climate action, seeking to co-create solutions and strengthen local capacity and leadership, in alignment with the 2022 USAID [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#).

² WRI and the Global Commission on Adaptation, 2021. "Locally Led Climate Adaptation: What is Needed to Accelerate Action and Support?"

Entry points for implementing Principle 1 include:

Incorporate locally defined adaptation aspirations, goals, and needs in strategic planning processes, including Regional and Country Development Cooperation Strategies (R/CDCSs) and Project Development Documents (PDDs). Work with local actors and engage communities in scenario planning and listening sessions to elevate and amplify adaptation priorities originating from the countries and communities directly experiencing climate risks. This can include the priorities outlined in city, regional, or national adaptation plans. USAID should utilize knowledge-sharing platforms that recognize the value of both local and external technical knowledge and aim to exchange expertise and experiences between subnational and national or international entities. Understanding that needs change over time, USAID can adjust plans for programming across sectors to accommodate evolving priorities of local actors and shifts in climate risks and vulnerabilities.

Involve local actors in consultation and decision-making processes during design and implementation of adaptation activities to integrate local aspirations, goals, and needs better to proposed outcomes. For example, during activity design and startup, USAID and partners can involve local actors in procurement committees or advisory groups to guide the process, which would facilitate communication of local priorities directly from local actors and contribute to trust-building between partners. In addition, USAID should enable local access to scientific and local climate risk information to inform decision-making by local actors (through developing insights, hosting dashboards, sharing via communities of practice,

etc.) Throughout this process, USAID can leverage existing listening and consultation processes (e.g., meetings associated with local government, working committees, civil society, and/or more informal groups) to reduce the burden of consultation and reach the lowest appropriate level.

Use self-determined adaptation priorities to inform and guide M&E and CLA processes. In alignment with the guidance under USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy Principle 3, plan for and measure performance improvement (in adaptation) in collaboration with local partners. Enable local actors to decide what is monitored, defining contextually appropriate targets, success metrics, and means of verification. Use consultations and listening sessions, instead of lengthy surveys that may contribute to local assessment fatigue, during activity and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) design. These methods can help teams understand how local adaptation priorities, needs, and capacities are changing as a result of parallel programming and/or shifts in climate risks. Ensure that feedback and consultation processes are inclusive of the voices of people in marginalized groups at the local level by reducing barriers to participation (see Principle 2).

Support inclusive adaptation knowledge sharing and learning. Leverage and strengthen existing systems for knowledge sharing and learning and facilitate access for critical populations. Disseminate information in local languages, when possible, and use multiple methods to share and validate information and results both within project teams and with local actors. Encourage transparency of learning processes, open data sharing, mutual data sensemaking, and accessible and inclusive materials.

LLA HIGHLIGHT: UTILIZING A LOCALLY LED MEL FRAMEWORK

The Decentralised Climate Finance Consortium, funded by UKAid and the United Nations Capital Development Fund Local Climate Adaptive Living program, is a research action and advocacy project supporting local people through access to locally controlled adaptation funds in three districts in Northern Tanzania. While not a USAID-supported mechanism, this provides a valuable case study of local actors driving a MEL process for adaptation investment. Community members in the three districts were directly involved in identifying adaptation goals and priorities and defining the metrics for success—often distinct from those typically identified by the international donor partners. In this case, the most important predictor variables for self-reported resilience were the primary livelihood of the household, membership in a livelihood group, and gender of the head of household. Including locally defined metrics of success allowed for customized and flexible planning for adaptation to meet the needs of the local community and also a link to national and international funding and budgeting processes.³

³ For further information on the Decentralised Climate Finance Consortium in Tanzania and its parent funding mechanism, see: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), 2019, "[The Devolved Climate Finance](#)

[Mechanisms: Principles, Implementation, and Lessons](#)"; and Beauchamp et al. 2021, "[Aligning Resilience and Wellbeing Outcomes for Locally Led Adaptation in Tanzania](#)."

PRINCIPLE 2 – ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES FACED BY WOMEN, YOUTH, CHILDREN, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, PEOPLE WHO ARE DISPLACED, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, AND MARGINALIZED ETHNIC GROUPS

Integrating the consideration of inequalities based on gender and other socioeconomic positions that are root causes of vulnerability into the core of adaptation action and encouraging vulnerable and marginalized individuals to participate meaningfully in and lead adaptation decisions.

Even when adaptation action is led by local actors, it is not inherently equitable. Adaptation actions that lack intentional efforts to be inclusive can inadvertently reinforce power imbalances, exclusion, maladaptation, and vulnerability.

Climate change affects distinct populations differently. People with historically marginalized identities or living in vulnerable situations often experience impacts more acutely and have heightened barriers to access the necessary finance and resources to adapt. However, these people's lived experiences provide valuable and unique perspectives on adaptation needs that can help advance more equitable and effective solutions.

Centering actions toward equity and inclusion is a foundational principle of the USAID Climate Strategy. Strategic Objective 1 seeks to accelerate and scale direct climate action that engages and enables the leadership of local communities, Indigenous populations, youth, women, and other marginalized groups. Strategic Objective 2 focuses on the systems transformation needed to pursue net-zero and climate-resilient pathways through meaningful partnerships and support of transparent governance and strong citizen engagement. Meanwhile, the Special Objective commits USAID to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in its own climate change operations and procurement, in alignment with USAID policies on [Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(PRO-IP\)](#) and [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#), among others. Taken together, these climate objectives highlight how USAID and implementing partners can address the root causes of vulnerabilities and place

critical populations at the center of adaptation decision-making at every stage of the program cycle to create more effective adaptation efforts.

Entry points for implementing Principle 2 include:

Fill gaps in understanding of differential vulnerability to climate change to inform strategic planning processes.

USAID and partners can review existing risk and vulnerability assessments and identify gaps in their understanding of how climate change impacts different local actors. USAID's [Climate Risk Screening and Management Tools](#) are valuable resources for identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge of localized risks. Actively involve local organizations and community members from across critical populations to identify key questions and sources of information on vulnerability and existing inequalities and design, and conduct any additional vulnerability assessments as needed.

USAID's Climate Strategy is guided by a foundational principle focused on equity and inclusion in climate action.

LLA HIGHLIGHT: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FUND OF KENYA

While not a USAID-funded effort, the Community Resilience Fund of Kenya provides a case study of a successful approach to inclusive LLA. The fund enables all-women grassroots groups to lead the grant-making process for resilience building. Funded by the Huairou Commission and implemented in partnership with Shibuye Community Health Workers, the program's focus on women as adaptation leaders recognizes the value of local knowledge systems to financial decision-making. An independent committee of grassroots women reviews and approves all grant applications for microfinancing adaptation and resilience-building activities. By placing financial decision-making in the hands of women, the Community Resilience Fund ensures climate investments align with the goals and priorities of local actors, illustrating LLA Principles 1 and 2 in action.⁴

⁴ For more information, see the Huairou Commission, 2021. "[Community Resilience Funds](#)."

Promote inclusive and equitable procurement, recruitment, and participation in climate adaptation programming. This can include ensuring equity and inclusion considerations are a part of hiring processes, procurement language, and due diligence as well as actively seeking to partner with formal and informal groups led by women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and other critical populations. On the ground, this means partnering with groups who may be in vulnerable situations and/or historically excluded—like women and Indigenous populations—both to identify barriers to inclusion jointly and address those barriers actively, through means suggested by those groups. External experts do not always have the necessary knowledge of local contexts to recognize and address barriers to inclusion effectively without the guidance of local actors.

USAID’s [New Partnerships Initiative](#) seeks to lower the barriers faced by nontraditional partners in working with USAID and provides examples of ways to identify and work with a diverse set of local actors. The [USAID Agency Equity Action Plan](#) and the [Work with USAID](#) platform provide tools and resources for USAID to identify, recruit, and procure partners equitably who promote gender equality and social inclusion internally and in their operations. USAID can share these resources and encourage partners to post opportunities to Work with USAID.

Address root causes of unequal climate vulnerability and adaptive capacities in project and activity design to avoid reinforcing exclusion and maladaptation in implementation. Seek to design projects and activities and select adaptation options that address practical and social barriers

PRINCIPLE 3 – PROVIDING PATIENT AND PREDICTABLE FUNDING THAT CAN BE ACCESSED MORE EASILY

Simplified access to climate finance and long-term and predictable funding can strengthen local governance processes, capacity, and institutions to ensure that communities can effectively implement adaptation actions.

Most climate finance mobilized for adaptation is channeled via multilateral or national development finance institutions and does not regularly flow to the subnational level. **From 2003 to 2016, less than 10 percent of global climate finance was approved for locally led programming**, with just over half of that dedicated to adaptation.⁵ Though national governments and banks are often connected to multilateral or bilateral donor institutions, local actors at all levels—from national to subnational and provincial—face barriers to accessing international climate finance. Barriers include burdensome fiduciary management and reporting procedures, complex

faced by critical populations to participate in adaptation activities, such as limited mobility, unpaid caring responsibilities, limited literacy, digital gaps, gender-based violence risks, and social and gender norms that restrict who can speak, act, or decide on behalf of households and communities. USAID’s [Working with Marginal Populations](#) annex to the Climate-Resilient Development Framework provides examples and strategies for inclusive adaptation programming.

Track gender equality and social inclusion goals in adaptation programming. In addition to including local actors in design of results management frameworks (as described under Principle 1), Operating Units (OUs) can develop custom indicators to augment the standard indicators to track progress toward inclusive and equitable locally led action. This may include identifying indicators to monitor potential risks of poor execution of LLA, such as extractive knowledge sharing, disempowerment, and reinforcement of structural inequalities. USAID’s PRO-IP contains guidance on utilizing disaggregated data and context-specific indicators to help USAID OUs measure progress toward inclusion during activity implementation.

Apply a gender equality and social inclusion lens when sharing learning from adaptation programming. Collect and share different forms of knowledge and lived experiences of climate adaptation. Establish collective learning and knowledge-sharing platforms to co-create knowledge. Use diverse messages, languages, formats, and channels for dissemination to reach marginalized groups, identifying what materials are most accessible.

In alignment with LLA Principle 3, USAID’s Climate Strategy Intermediate Result 1.3 aims to increase the flow of and equitable access to finance to support adaptation and mitigation.

accreditation processes, and credit rating or tax status requirements. Effective LLA solutions at scale require funding that is both “patient” (i.e., provides adequate time for donor recipients to deliver results and for learning and adaptive management) and “predictable” (i.e., accessible, continuous, and

⁵ IIED, 2017. “[Delivering Real Change: Getting International Climate Finance to the Local Level.](#)”

sustained over the long term). Flexible funding that meets criteria of being both patient and predictable allows for quick and direct distribution at the local level. Patient and predictable funding is critical for national and subnational governments and institutions to be able both to respond to acute climate shocks and disasters and address needs related to chronic climate stresses.

Applying this LLA principle can advance progress toward the USAID Climate Strategy target of mobilizing \$150 billion in public and private finance for climate by 2030. Donors like USAID should explore opportunities that provide access to patient, predictable funding, such as issuing direct awards to local partners and using more flexible funding mechanisms that recognize the urgency of climate finance needs. For example, funding mechanisms that extend eligibility to different scales and types of organizations (including smaller or more informal entities), allow for on-granting, or are not limited to use in particular sectors can be more flexible or adaptive to local needs. In addition, responsive and locally defined metrics that measure the need for and impact of adaptation finance can inform financial decision-making in a manner that reflects priorities identified by local actors. USAID also can help improve local organizations' awareness of and access to existing sources of funding. For example, USAID facilitates local access to public funds such as the Green Climate Fund by helping partners address procedural barriers, strengthen technical capacity, and navigate accreditation processes.

Entry points for implementing Principle 3 include:

Leverage existing USAID and United States Government (USG) initiatives to fund local partners working on adaptation. USAID can help organizations working on adaptation implementation at the local level like conservation trusts, resilience funds, community organizations, food security networks, and climate planning entities to navigate USAID procurement processes and requirements. USAID can partner with international climate finance donors that also work with national governments to channel financing through local partners such as banks, savings groups, and foundations.

Support new models of adaptation financing by adopting flexible and innovative approaches to fiduciary standards. This can enable USAID to work with organizations that are structured differently from "traditional" partners, such as informal collectives, working groups, and community organizations. Utilize USAID and USG capacity and initiatives to catalyze and leverage private sector funding for adaptation,

including through, for example, technical assistance and guarantees that de-risk long-term and sustained private investment in adaptation.

Simplify and leverage more flexible models of procurement for adaptation activities. Multi-year Annual Program Statements, direct contracting opportunities, and USAID's unsolicited proposals and grant applications program can improve access through longer or open-ended response windows. Objective 3 of USAID's Acquisition and Assistance Strategy provides guidance on lowering barriers to entry for new and nontraditional partners via flexible and adaptable approaches such as the use of a phased application process, streamlined templates and requirements, and development of translated versions of procurement documents.

Leverage and strengthen existing subnational or provincial government and community-based funding structures to support adaptation. Support improvements in the enabling environment and institutional readiness for climate adaptation investment via direct work with government and community-based entities to address policy and regulatory barriers to adaptation financing. During these processes, support activities that address inequalities within grassroots- or government-managed funds, community savings groups, and cooperatives to enable more equitable access to finance and financial decision-making (see Principle 2 for further guidance) and help institutions set up funding mechanisms to remain flexible to contextual needs like local agricultural harvest cycles where feasible.

LLA HIGHLIGHT: READINESS FOR LOCAL ADAPTATION FINANCE IN THE MALDIVES

Via the USAID-funded Climate Adaptation Activity in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, USAID is working with donor partners to complement and assist climate finance readiness activities for adaptation among local private sector organizations. This includes USAID's active support to the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Finance Corporation in the Maldives to become the country's first national accredited entity to access the Green Climate Fund. This supports several of the Principles of Locally Led Adaptation, including Principles 3 and 4.⁶

⁶ USAID, 2022. "USAID Engages the Private Sector in Maldives on Climate Change (press release)."

PRINCIPLE 4 – INVESTING IN LOCAL CAPABILITIES TO LEAVE AN INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY

Strengthening the capabilities of local organizations to understand climate risks and uncertainties, generate solutions, and facilitate and manage adaptation initiatives over the long term without being dependent on project-based donor funding.

Despite being at the forefront of climate adaptation action, formal and informal local organizations are often limited in their human and financial resources, access to key tools or climate data for adaptation decision-making, and capacity to undertake long-term climate adaptation planning or access and oversee climate finance. Strengthening the capacity of local individuals, organizations, and networks to lead adaptation action is key to increased climate resilience. This approach is also critical to USAID’s localization agenda and grounded by the Agency’s Local Capacity Strengthening Policy that sets forth principles for effective programming of and equitable partnerships for local capacity strengthening. Strategic Objective 2 of the USAID Climate Strategy seeks to catalyze transformative shifts by addressing local actor capacity aspirations, goals, and needs, as well as institutional constraints to systems change for adaptation. Intermediate Result 1.4 seeks to equip Indigenous Peoples and local communities with resources, including climate information, to implement their own solutions.

Entry points for implementing Principle 4 include:

Strengthen the capacity of both individuals and local organizations (formal/informal and public/private) to lead and manage adaptation activities, funds, and networks. Work with individuals and local organizations to identify and build on their existing capacity assets and the best strategies to address potential barriers, leveraging local resources and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. In alignment with USAID’s Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, ensure these efforts support local priorities—such as the goals of local or national adaptation plans—and are mutually owned and driven by local partners. USAID can also coordinate with other donor partners on adaptation capacity-strengthening efforts to complement ongoing climate adaptation planning and finance readiness activities.

Throughout this process, USAID can actively address the barriers to equitable participation in adaptation decision-making. For example, capacity strengthening can support the development of leadership skills and skills like navigating complexity and engaging in strategic and political processes,

especially for marginalized groups, so they can meaningfully participate in, influence, and lead adaptation decision-making and implementation. USAID can address practical and social barriers for women and other critical populations to participate in adaptation capacity-strengthening efforts. For instance, be mindful of venue and timing selection of events, use tools and methods adequate for different literacy levels and abilities, organize child-friendly engagements, and consult to determine if participants prefer multiple or single gender groups.

Enable networks and organizations to develop scientific technical expertise while integrating traditional and Indigenous knowledge. For example, USAID can support local providers to design and distribute local climate information services or early warning systems that are not only built on the latest climate science but also include relevant local knowledge that can make climate hazard information more accessible, understandable, and actionable for local actors.

Support local actors leading adaptation efforts to also lead the regional and global exchange of adaptation knowledge, learning, and best fit approaches. Strengthen local networks to identify opportunities to share knowledge. Support local actors to participate in and lead national, regional, and international communities of practice, conferences, peer learning events, and convenings related to adaptation practice. Set up and strengthen institutional partnerships and/or exchange and co-mentorship programs to connect national, regional, or US-based and local researchers and organizations carrying out investigation on climate risks and adaptation.

The USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy’s “Principles for Equitable Partnerships in Local Capacity Strengthening” commit USAID to aligning capacity strengthening with local priorities, appreciating and building on existing capacities, and working together with local partners to implement capacity-strengthening activities.



PRINCIPLE 5 – BUILDING A ROBUST UNDERSTANDING OF CLIMATE RISK AND UNCERTAINTY

Informing adaptation decisions through a combination of local, traditional, Indigenous, generational, and scientific knowledge that can enable resilience under a range of future climate scenarios.

A reliable and comprehensive understanding of climate risk and uncertainty is necessary to inform and enable effective climate adaptation. However, the use of scientific climate data for decision-making at the local level can be limited by data scarcity, access or capacity constraints, and quality issues. There are significant gaps in climate information services and sensory information used to understand risks worldwide. Though there is significant variation between countries and regions, the average national climate change literacy rate in Africa is 37 percent, compared to over 80 percent in Europe and North America—a variation largely due to a difference in access to climate data and information.⁷ On the other hand, the traditional knowledge and lived experiences of local people and communities, which can provide key insights into climate impacts and associated risks and vulnerabilities, are not always recognized, integrated, or valued in programming and decision-making. A robust understanding of climate risk and uncertainty requires accessible and accurate scientific climate information, as well as local, traditional, and Indigenous knowledge.

Advancing understanding of climate risk is aligned with the USAID Climate Strategy’s foundational principle of evidence and innovation that supports the rigorous research, technology, and development needed to identify and deploy effective climate solutions, including those locally known and developed. Utilizing diverse forms of climate information and knowledge contributes to adaptation agendas and solutions that are more contextually appropriate and based on a comprehensive evidence base. Using diverse information and knowledge is also aligned with USAID’s localization vision and associated guidance on [integrating local knowledge in development practice](#) and is reflected in USAID’s work to address gaps in climate information services and [invest in early warning systems](#) globally to build resilience and advance equitable access to climate data and knowledge.

Entry points for implementing Principle 5 include:

Integrate a range of climate information and knowledge (scientific, local, traditional, Indigenous, and from lived experience) in USAID planning and activity design processes across sectors, including in development of R/CDCs, PDDs, Activity Approval Memoranda, climate risk management (CRM) assessments, and other planning and programmatic documents.

The USAID Climate Strategy prioritizes ensuring widespread availability of reliable and appropriate climate vulnerability data and information, including traditional knowledge.

All USAID programs, regardless of sector, can advance LLA through integration of climate information. Doing this from the beginning can enable adaptation co-benefits and promote systems approaches to sustainable, climate risk-informed development. Use opportunities identified in USAID’s CRM assessments or Climate Risk Profiles to strengthen procurement language and help local implementing partners consider relevant climate risk and adaptation measures and avoid maladaptation during activity implementation. When designing strategy, project, or activity indicators, ensure that local perspectives complement common qualitative and quantitative adaptation metrics that enable global learning.

Elevate and share the valuable knowledge, skills, and lived experiences of local actors. Throughout the program cycle, USAID can gather and champion local climate knowledge using a variety of tools, approaches, and technologies, including storytelling, photo/video journaling, 3D modelling, participatory mapping, games, vignettes, and dialogues (with multiple generations, at the household level, and with traditional leadership). Be mindful that access to and use of information is almost always mediated: power imbalances affect knowledge brokers, knowledge holders, and/or knowledge users differently.

Expand local access to, and use of, scientific climate information. USAID can work with local and regional organizations and experts to collect information and co-design and develop demand-driven climate information services. For example, [SERVIR](#), a collaboration between the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, USAID, international geospatial institutions, and local partners, co-creates solutions for strengthening climate resilience. Through a network of regional hubs, SERVIR addresses gaps in local climate data and external understanding of local contexts to advance better informed and more sustainable solutions. During this process, USAID can work with local partners to translate science-based scenarios and climate risk information into accessible media for local dissemination, supporting Intermediate Result 2.3 of the Climate Strategy.

⁷ Simpson et al. “Climate Change Literacy in Africa.” *Nature Climate Change* (November 2021).

PRINCIPLE 6 – FLEXIBLE PROGRAMMING AND LEARNING

Enabling adaptive management to address the inherent uncertainty in adaptation, especially through robust monitoring and learning systems and flexible finance and programming.

Barriers to flexible programming and learning pose significant challenges to LLA efforts. Rigid institutional structures, bureaucratic processes, and fixed funding cycles among donors often hinder the flexibility needed to address emerging priorities, changing climate conditions, and evolving local needs quickly. In addition, limited knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders can impede uptake of learning and adoption of improved approaches and methods for adaptation.

USAID's Climate Strategy Strategic Objective 2 prioritizes systems-level change for climate resilience as well as an adaptive management approach to operationalizing climate action. As detailed in the Acquisition and Assistance Strategy, USAID is committed to flexible and adaptive approaches mainstreamed to collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders. By adopting flexible programming and learning strategies, USAID and implementing partners can support broader development goals and ensure that adaptation efforts are responsive to the needs of and led by local communities.

Entry points for implementing Principle 6 include:

Build in opportunities for feedback and adaptive management during implementation of adaptation activities. Per USAID Program Cycle Operational Policy ([ADS 201](#)) guidance on integrating feedback plans into activity MEL processes, establish regular opportunities for local actor engagement, reflection, and adjustment of interventions and targets to respond to shifts in community needs, vulnerability, and climate conditions. For example, the climate change hazard impacts examined in the initial CRM process may change over the lifetime of the project. CRM updates and local consultation may be necessary to illustrate how climate hazards are impacting activity outcomes and changing over time. Establishing regular opportunities for local actors to share feedback and learn about implementation updates builds trust with and among community members. It also allows activity implementation leaders to learn and modify implementation regularly to ensure successful achievement of objectives.

Select performance metrics and results indicators that are relevant for monitoring LLA interventions.

Programming teams can tailor quantitative and qualitative

USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy recognizes that an adaptive management approach is necessary to accommodate unpredictable shifts and unfolding needs of local actors.

metrics to understand the success and impact of LLA interventions better. For example, if strengthening adaptive capacity is a priority of the LLA intervention, teams can monitor shifts in the ability of local actors to adjust to unforeseen changes or whether networks are utilizing Indigenous knowledge to inform climate risk understanding and adjust intervention approaches accordingly. Given that time horizons necessary for adaptation results often stretch beyond project timelines and the climate context may change during implementation, teams can also consider how to monitor the activity's success even after formal closure, including during follow-on activities.

LLA HIGHLIGHT: PARTICIPATORY SCENARIO PLANNING

As part of its commitment to community-based adaptation, USAID partner CARE International facilitates Participatory Scenario Planning, a process for collective sharing and interpretation of climate forecasts. Meteorologists, community members, local government departments, and local nongovernmental organizations share knowledge and scientific climate information. Participants consider climate hazards, assess their likely probabilities, and identify associated risks, opportunities, and impacts. They then develop scenarios based on this assessment to inform agricultural planning and other decision-making. They also discuss potential implications of these scenarios on livelihoods (e.g., on agro-pastoral activities and climate-related losses), which form local adaptation plans that respond to and prepare for risks and uncertainty in the longer term.⁸

⁸ CARE International is a USAID implementing partner, but the Participatory Scenario Planning methodology was developed under separate funding. For more information, see: CARE, 2018. "[Practical Guide to Participatory](#)

[Scenario Planning](#)." USAID produced a case study of this initiative in 2016, [available here](#).

PRINCIPLE 7 – ENSURING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Making processes of financing, designing, and delivering programs more transparent and accountable downward to local stakeholders.

Weak institutional frameworks and governance structures, as well as opaque decision-making and funding allocation processes, can lead to mistrust and hinder local engagement and ownership of adaptation action. Limited availability and accessibility to adaptation information can hamper effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of adaptation action, making it difficult to track progress, ensure accountability, and share successful adaptation approaches. Promoting transparency, local ownership, and robust accountability systems can support adaptation efforts that are responsive to the needs and preferences of those affected by climate change.

USAID is committed to transparency and accountability to promote effective use of taxpayer dollars and protect the integrity of USAID-funded programs and activities. Safeguarding and compliance mechanisms help to mitigate harm to people and USAID programs via responsible stewardship and accountability promotion. USAID has an open government approach that includes data sharing, including as part of the International Aid Transparency Initiative. As part of its approach to inclusive development, USAID employs a “do no harm” approach to avoid increasing risk for marginalized and/or underrepresented communities and individuals.

To help partners navigate safeguards and transparency requirements, the [WorkwithUSAID.org](https://www.workwithusaid.org) web platform provides a road map and [training series](#) to navigate becoming a USAID partner, including resources related to USAID’s programming and fiduciary requirements. LLA Principle 7 directly supports USAID’s objective to foster greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and the USAID Climate Strategy’s focus on transparency and accountability as key components to increasing equity and impact in climate finance and action.

Entry points for implementing Principle 7 include:

Identify, prevent, and mitigate risks of maladaptation and harm, especially for critical populations. USAID’s [inclusive development programming guidance](#) outlines approaches to integrate nondiscrimination, conflict resolution and prevention, inclusion, equity, and accessibility in programming. In adaptation activities, implementing strategies such as designating an inclusive development advisor or establishing a working group can help center a “do no harm” approach and identify and avoid potentially harmful impacts of

Intermediate Result 1.3 of the USAID Climate Strategy commits the Agency to advancing strong standards of transparency and accountability in climate programming, including in the selection of award recipients, disbursement of funding, and monitoring of results.

the investment—or maladaptation. USAID should also integrate Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse considerations into all adaptation programming to identify, mitigate, prevent, and address unintended consequences, including exploitation and abuse. This can include establishing inclusive and accessible mechanisms for any incidents to be reported and addressed, using a [survivor-centered approach](#).

Account for local context in developing transparency and accountability mechanisms. Be mindful that adaptation capacities, preferences, data availability and sharing, and cultural preferences vary across local actors, as do understandings of accountability and transparency. USAID must uphold its own standards in these areas, but there is also an opportunity to include local actors in defining programming accountability measures to identify where local customs or preferences on reporting can complement these standards. USAID’s Local Capacity Strengthening Policy Principle 7 outlines methods to prioritize and practice mutual accountability with local actors during implementation. For example, USAID can work with local partners to develop consensus around commitments and responsibilities as well as mechanisms for holding each other accountable during adaptation activity implementation. Programming teams should allow for adequate time for this consensus building during activity design.

Ensure that feedback mechanisms for adaptation activities are made available regularly, are locally informed, and are accessible to all local actors, including members of marginalized groups. Address barriers related to physical ability, social and physical mobility, literacy, digital access, and restrictive social norms. Co-create transparent metrics and processes with local actors to establish trust and local ownership. Reduce barriers to reporting for individuals and local institutions working and leading adaptation action.

PRINCIPLE 8 – COLLABORATIVE ACTION AND INVESTMENT

Collaborating across sectors, initiatives, and levels to ensure that different initiatives and different sources of funding support each other and that activities avoid duplication to enhance efficiencies and good practices.

Fragmented stakeholder interests; limited coordination and communication across sectors, agencies, and jurisdictions; and competing demands for limited financial resources can hinder collective action and resource pooling for adaptation initiatives. Lack of coordination can result in duplication of efforts or inefficiencies in adaptation activities. Given the urgency of the climate crisis, it is critical to integrate climate adaptation considerations into programming across sectors and into other sustainable development challenges to maximize shared benefits. However, effective multisector, multi-level collaboration is challenging and often requires robust and consistent engagement as well as time and resources. Given the long-term nature of climate adaptation work, setting up mechanisms for collaboration that could become self-reinforcing can facilitate sustained coordination and successful enabling adaptation efforts over time.

Principle 8 is aligned with Strategic Objective 2 of the USAID Climate Strategy that emphasizes the importance of long-term, transformative changes that engage every aspect of society to address the climate crisis fully. This systems approach requires collaboration and coordination across sectors and levels of governance, both in policy and in programming and financing. This underscores the ways that supporting LLA also supports USAID's broader sustainable development goals, as well as the importance of mainstreaming adaptation into development strategy and programming.

Entry points for implementing Principle 8 include:

Adopt a best-fit and systems-based approach to address climate change risks and vulnerabilities, recognizing there are no one-size-fits-all adaptation solutions. Utilize tools like systems mapping to understand how the

CONCLUSION

USAID staff have a key role to play in implementing the Principles of Locally Led Adaptation as the Agency advances locally led development and equitable and inclusive climate action. As a convener at the global, regional, national, and local levels, USAID is a catalyst, helping to shift adaptation programming, funding, and practices that increase local leadership. In addition, across all stages of the program cycle, USAID OUs and implementing partners can enable and amplify adaptation solutions originating from local individuals and organizations directly experiencing climate risks.

These principles reinforce and align with USAID's commitments to localization and targets under the Climate Strategy and

various elements of local systems relevant to climate adaptation behave and influence each other; determine drivers of risk and resilience, and identify and inform new partnerships or collaboration mechanisms for sustained adaptation.

Improve cross-sectoral collaboration on adaptation and mainstream adaptation into development policy and planning. LLA can support and reinforce efforts that do not have climate adaptation as the primary goal. Work with existing mechanisms, such as cross-sectoral working groups and sustainable development frameworks, to address and mainstream adaptation action. Where they do not exist, set up formal and informal cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms and resource-sharing protocols to elevate co-benefits, optimize investment, and avoid maladaptation.

Leverage USAID's convening capacity to facilitate regular sharing by local actors across sectors and between projects working on climate adaptation.

Support local actors to lead learning dissemination and elevate their findings and lessons for broader uptake and replication of the best adaptation practices. See Principles 1 and 4 for further guidance on developing accessible avenues for sustained learning and knowledge sharing on climate adaptation.

“When USAID and international partners serve as facilitators, convenors, and catalyzers and support local actors to lead from the center..., USAID programming can shift agenda-setting and decision-making power to the people directly affected by aid and development programs.” – USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy

President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience initiative. This guidance document provides a set of illustrative entry points for USAID OUs and implementing partners to put these principles into practice. However, this is only a starting point. Strategic planning, activity design, and implementation teams can further mainstream LLA in ways that are aligned with particular country and regional contexts and local people, communities, and networks. By recognizing, supporting, and scaling LLA, USAID and local partners can lead the way toward climate resilient development.

For further information on locally led adaptation, see the [Locally Led Adaptation Primer](#).