

# JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE

*USAID is currently in the process of reorienting their relationships with partner countries, with the goal of ultimately adjusting programming to center around the “Journey to Self-Reliance.” USAID has defined self-reliance as a country’s ability to plan, finance, and implement solutions to solve its own development challenges.*

*USAID’s first step in this assessment of partner countries is the development of Country Roadmaps for all low- and middle-income countries around the world. Launched in October 2018, Country Roadmaps track countries along 17 metrics to assess the country’s capacity and commitment to self-reliance and to understand how their capacity and commitment track to other low- and middle-income countries. USAID is also currently assessing what it means to be self-reliant within a development sector and how self-reliance in one area of development can influence the overall country’s self-reliance.<sup>264</sup>*

## THROUGH THE JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE, USAID WORKS TO:

- Establish clear and objective metrics that will allow USAID to track host-country progress and inform development strategies;
- Strengthen USAID’s private sector engagement and innovative financing approaches to achieve greater results in the field;
- Partner with governments to develop effective, transparent, and accountable systems to better mobilize domestic resources that allow them to finance self-reliance;
- Ensure our country relationships are firmly rooted around advancing self-reliance; and
- Develop a thoughtful and purposeful approach for transitioning to new partnership models when countries achieve advanced levels of self-reliance.

**The idea of country or program transition is not new.** The NGO community has often had to transition programs and resources out of communities or countries.

InterAction compiled the lessons learned from our members during these transitions in a paper called “Lessons from Civil Society and Operational NGOs on Strategic Country Transitions for U.S. Development Assistance.”<sup>265</sup>

**The primary lesson found was that effective transitions take time and must be coordinated inclusively well in advance.** Through experience and practice, NGOs have learned to manage transitions by working within communities, planning for challenges, building capacity, and implementing programs across sectors in ways that institutionalize

positive social change. Another common thread is the need for development programs to consistently improve the social contract between citizens and their governments, with the goal of creating conditions where foreign assistance is no longer necessary.

In contrast, transitions not executed strategically are detrimental to U.S. interests and investments and devastating to local developmental progress. Quick dismantling of assistance can leave people and regions worse off than before, dilute trust between local partners and government actors, and leave communities vulnerable to shocks. Regardless of any pressures to reduce foreign assistance, country transitions are only strategic when they uphold the primary principles of good development practices.

## OVERVIEW OF OPERATIONAL LESSONS LEARNED

- Community mobilization and government capacity building requires effort from the start.
- Within the continuum of U.S. government foreign assistance, development actors and U.S. agencies should play to their strengths.
- Development gains should be institutionalized in local systems and across sectors to foster lasting impact.
- Development actors should support host communities in generating political will and know when and how to “let go before they go.”
- Focused solutions for regional inequality and vulnerable populations are necessary to advance countrywide successes.
- Clearly articulated financing strategies focused on building local capacity and next steps are essential to protect programmatic investments and development progress.
- Transition plans should both ensure that governments can provide basic services to their people and build local resilience to protect vulnerable citizens from shocks.
- In the event of political crises and violence in middle-income states, avoid knee-jerk impulses to withdraw development assistance.
- Celebrations of progress cultivate further successes and motivate local advocates.
- Continuous learning must support transitions, with ex-post evaluations built in from the start.

## Resources for Congressional Staff

- **Lessons From Civil Society and Operational NGOs on Strategic Country Transitions for U.S. Development Assistance.** *InterAction, December 2017.* Ten operational lessons learned by NGOs on how to effectively and strategically transition assistance out of countries.<sup>266</sup>
- **Strategic Transition Principles.** *Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network.* Key principles to guide country transitions from aid to partnerships; endorsed by more than 100 organizations and individuals.<sup>267</sup>
- **USAID Transition Case Studies: Panama and Costa Rica.** *Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, 2018.* Country case studies outlining the process and set of circumstances that led Panama and Costa Rica to successfully transition from aid.<sup>268</sup>