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MFAN Statement on USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy

November 2, 2022 (WASHINGTON) – *This statement is delivered on behalf of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN) by Co-Chairs Lester Munson, Larry Nowels and Tessie San Martin.*

MFAN, the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, congratulates the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for the public launch of its Local Capacity Strengthening Policy. The policy reflects a high level of consensus within the Agency and across the development community that local entities should drive decisions on the type of U.S. capacity assistance needed to strengthen their organizations and advance long-term development within their communities. The final text reflects substantial revisions based on feedback USAID received after it published a draft version called the Local Capacity Development Policy.

Local actors have long expressed concerns about how international donors and other international organizations understand and support them. They repeatedly highlighted the tremendous local capacity that already exists within their communities and is often overlooked by donors.

In launching the LCS, Deputy Administrator Paloma Adams-Allen acknowledged the existing strengths and contributions of local actors and the need to reset how the Agency partners with them: “What does it say about our partnership if we invest in a program that potentially, inadvertently strips local actors of their agency and ultimately just sounds good in a press release?” She added, “My hope is that this is a policy that makes USAID a more effective, sustainable, and equitable partner through a cultural shift that treats local actors as indispensable partners.”

policy as a key milestone on the road to Administrator Power's bold agenda to advance locally led development (LLD). In her [keynote address](#) on a New Vision for Global Development last November, Administrator Power offered ambitious targets, pledging 25% of USAID funding directly to local actors in the next four years (up from 6% today) and 50% of programming to put local actors in the lead over ten years. The LCS is central to both targets. The 25% goal recognizes that local capacity has been developed but remains under-utilized by USAID. The 50% goal recognizes that USAID and its international implementers must shift their approach in order to prioritize local voices.

MFAN Co-Chair Tessie San Martin noted, "At its core, the LCS Policy seeks a mindset and culture shift at USAID -embracing capacity strengthening to support local actors' ability to deliver and sustain their development priorities – rather than just focusing on local actors' capacity to qualify for and manage USAID awards. These are exactly the changes in USAID's thinking and business practices that MFAN sees as essential for local ownership."

"Successful capacity strengthening must collaborate with local actors to understand their priorities, existing strengths, and performance improvement goals. It has to treat them as true partners instead of beneficiaries. As part of this, we hope USAID also will be looking for opportunities for local-to-local capacity strengthening and supporting south-south collaboration" said MFAN Co-Chair Larry Nowels.

MFAN Co-Chair Les Munson added, "USAID's senior leadership now needs to put its full weight behind the implementation of this policy. They should also lean in to further empower the Agency's Foreign Service National (FSN) staff, whose expertise, knowledge of the agency and networks on the ground should be seen as critical assets for advancing the Administrator's localization and locally led agenda."

MFAN fully agrees with the LCS that, "local leadership and ownership are essential for fostering sustainable results across our development and humanitarian assistance work. Appreciating and building on the strengths of local actors is a fundamental component of USAID programming, and the LCS Policy marks an important milestone in realizing the Agency's localization goals." In its recognition that local capacity exists in partner countries already, USAID should look for opportunities to support the current ways that local

MFAN now looks forward to seeing how USAID proceeds to operationalize the important concepts the policy has outlined, including how the principles are reflected in the Agency's Acquisition and Assistance strategy, policies, and processes. It will also be important to outline clearly how success will be measured in the years ahead.

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About MFAN

MFAN is a diverse coalition composed of international development practitioners, development institutions, think tanks, and the private sector that advocates for more effective U.S. foreign assistance. MFAN was created to build upon the bipartisan consensus that the U.S. should play a global leadership role to support effective U.S. development cooperation in achieving economic growth, more resilient societies, poverty reduction, and promoting locally-led development and democratic approaches, and that the U.S. can play that role more effectively, efficiently, and transparently. To learn more about MFAN, please visit: www.modernizeaid.net.

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