



# DRG Annual Learning Forum

Four Sessions:  
March 10, 11, 16, 18

Thank you for participating in the DRG Annual Learning Forum!

The purpose of the DRG Learning Forum was to provide a structured opportunity for USAID staff to learn about and reflect on current evidence and learning on democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) programming, as well as consider methods and tools to improve the use of evidence and learning in future DRG programming. Among other sessions, the 2021 forum discussed findings and implications from previous DRG learning agendas and an Impact Evaluation (IE) Retrospective.

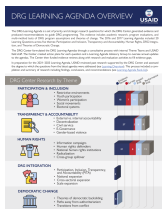
The forum followed two closely related tracks. The Findings track focused on what we have learned from the DRG Learning Agenda with panels on evidence and learning that can inform program design and implementation. The Process track focused on how we learn, including planning for, implementing, and using learning agendas, and DRG's experience conducting impact evaluations.

Please see the infographic summarizing the main findings from the learning agenda. Below the infographics you will find the session summaries along with buttons that link to the session recording and presentation.

## DRG Annual Learning Forum Infographics

Click the images or titles below to view and download infographics as a PDF.

### [DRG Learning Agenda Overview](#)



### [Participation and Inclusion](#)



### [Transparency and Accountability](#)



### [Human Rights](#)



### [DRG Integration](#)



### [Theories of Democratic Change](#)



#### Findings Track Session 1:

##### Advancing Civic Spaces and Protecting Human Rights

Wednesday, March 10, 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. ET

This session will explore how we can protect civic spaces and human rights in challenging environments, from the following learning agenda questions:

- What are the most effective civic engagement/participation strategies for maintaining and creating political space in restrictive environments, including closing spaces and violence-affected societies? What strategies then result in participation becoming habitual?
- What types of support to human rights defenders and institutions most improve human rights outcomes, and what aspects of political regimes, institutions and society condition the likelihood of success or failure?



#### Findings Track Session 2:

##### Achieving Accountability: From Social Movement to Decentralization

Thursday, March 11, 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. ET

This session will focus on two avenues - social movements and decentralization - through which governments can be held accountable by citizens. This session draws on research from the following learning agenda questions:

- In what ways might decentralization affect (i) the nature of citizen participation in political processes; (ii) citizen support for the national government; (iii) policy outcomes; (iv) electoral accountability; and (v) the quality of service delivery?
- What are the effects of various kinds of external DRG support on the success of social movements?
- Under what conditions is such support successful?

We found that alliance building and domestic coalition-building are among the most promising and least risky strategies for supporting human rights and for loosening restrictive environments. Efforts to improve human rights are most impactful when they target domestic groups and movements that frame their struggle as one for human rights, and those domestic groups are most successful when they form coalitions with other groups when goals align. Autocratic regimes, however, can stifle overt efforts for policy change, so groups in closing civic spaces might need to resort to advocating for policy change indirectly. A remaining question is how can USAID best support domestic human rights actors and maintain civic space?

Please join us to hear briefings from the researchers on their findings and a discussion on the implications of this research on USAID's work.

Presenters:

- Presentation 1: Struggles from Below: Literature Review on Human Rights Struggles by Domestic Actors (Erica Chenoweth, Harvard University, and Jonathan Pinkney, USIP)
- Presentation 2: Maintaining Civic Space in Backsliding Regimes (Ximena Velasco Guachalla, University of Essex)
- Presentation 3: Implications for USAID (Mark Goldenbaum, USAID/DDI/DRG)

Presentations

Session Recording



#### Process Track Session 3:

##### Learning from Learning Agendas: Improving the Art of Organizational Learning

*Tuesday, March 16, 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. ET.*

Working on a learning agenda? Want to initiate one now or in the future? This session will explore research conducted as part of the DRG Learning Agenda. The initiative has supported the generation, curation and dissemination of evidence related to areas of interest to the DRG Cadre. This session will focus on the findings from a study commissioned to take stock of the work to date. In this session, Lynette Friedman, lead report author, will present findings from the exercise focused on the process used by the learning agenda effort. A panel of individuals involved in the report and the learning agenda effort will be asked to react to the findings and discuss implications for future learning agenda efforts. The [Overview Report](#) is available on the DEC.

Presenters:

- Lynette Friedman, Independent Consultant

Panelists:

- Laura Adams, Freedom House
- Rachel Pizatella-Haswell, Social Impact
- Nick Higgins, USAID

Presentations

We found that social movements are critical for supporting accountability, good governance, and democracy, but they tend to be relatively spontaneous and decentralized, and therefore present complex dynamics for donors engagement. One remaining question is how donors can best support and leverage social movements without undermining their legitimacy and autonomy.

We also found that political decentralization can improve accountability and reduce corruption, but runs the risk of local-elite capture if local context such as social networks and oversight of public resources is ignored. Outstanding questions concern the conditions under which local accountability mechanisms function and how to tailor those mechanisms to local contexts.

Please join us to hear briefings from the researchers on their findings and a discussion on the implications of this research on USAID's work.

Presenters:

- Presentation 1: Grassroots Reform in the Global South (Patrick Heller, Brown University)
- Presentation 2: Decentralized Governance and Accountability (Erik Wibbels, Duke University)
- Presentation 3: Implications for USAID (Mike Keshishian, USAID/DDI/DRG)

Presentations

Session Recording



#### Process Track Session 4:

##### Lessons Learned from 27 DRG Impact Evaluations

*Thursday, March 18, 10 - 11:30 a.m. ET*

Join us to learn about what we have learned from our experience in using Impact Evaluations in DRG over the past decade.

In response to a 2008 National Academies of Science report, USAID's DRG Center carried out a major push to promote rigorous impact evaluations (IEs) of DRG programming. IEs have substantial support among a core group of stakeholders; however, they have also produced critics frustrated with challenges to implementation and use. In response, the DRG Center's Evidence and Learning team commissioned Cloudburst to conduct a retrospective of the Center's impact evaluations. The study seeks to derive key lessons learned in both IE implementation and use and to provide recommendations for future IE work.

In this session, Mike Findley, retrospective Team Leader, University of Texas at Austin professor, and a member of Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP), will present preliminary findings from the retrospective. We will then hear from representatives of diverse stakeholder groups, including USAID missions, implementing partners, academic researchers and learning partners will be asked to react to the findings and discuss.

**Session Recording**

Presenter:

- Mike Findley, University of Texas, Austin and consultant to the Cloudburst Group

Panelists:

- Eva Matsiko, RTI
- Cyrus Samii, New York University

Concluding Remarks:

- Brandy Witthoft, Evidence and Learning Team Lead

**Presentations**

**Handout**

**Session Recording**

If you just opted in, you're consenting to receive marketing emails from: USAID DRG Center, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20523. You can revoke your consent to receive emails at any time by using the SafeUnsubscribe® link, found at the bottom of every email. [Emails are serviced by Constant Contact](#)