

Promoting Equitable Outcomes
in International Development:
An Open Letter to Our Colleagues

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Introduction

The 2020 racial justice movement started in the U.S. and caused global shock waves. It underscored issues the international development community has long grappled with, such as locally led development and equity, and highlighted the importance of decolonization and anti-racism in international development. Industries and governments began engaging in deep introspection and publicly committed to promote equity – justice and fairness in all social outcomes.

In Jan. 2021, newly-inaugurated U.S. President Joe Biden announced an [Executive Order on Racial Equity](#) in his [Racial Equity Policy speech](#) enjoining all U.S. government agencies to establish policies and practices to promote racial equity. In Nov. 2021, USAID Administrator Samantha Power outlined a [new aid orientation for the agency](#): Make aid more accessible, equitable, and responsive. While Administrator Power’s announcement and plans were admirable, they are the first of many steps to be taken by a broad group of actors.

Palladium’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Roadmap articulates our commitment to building and maintaining an inclusive culture that aims to achieve equity through: An inclusive working environment and a diverse workforce at all levels; a diverse business ecosystem and supply chain that is aligned to D&I principles; and D&I considerations embedded into all aspects of project design and delivery.



Through our global reach, we have the opportunity and responsibility to advance equity.”

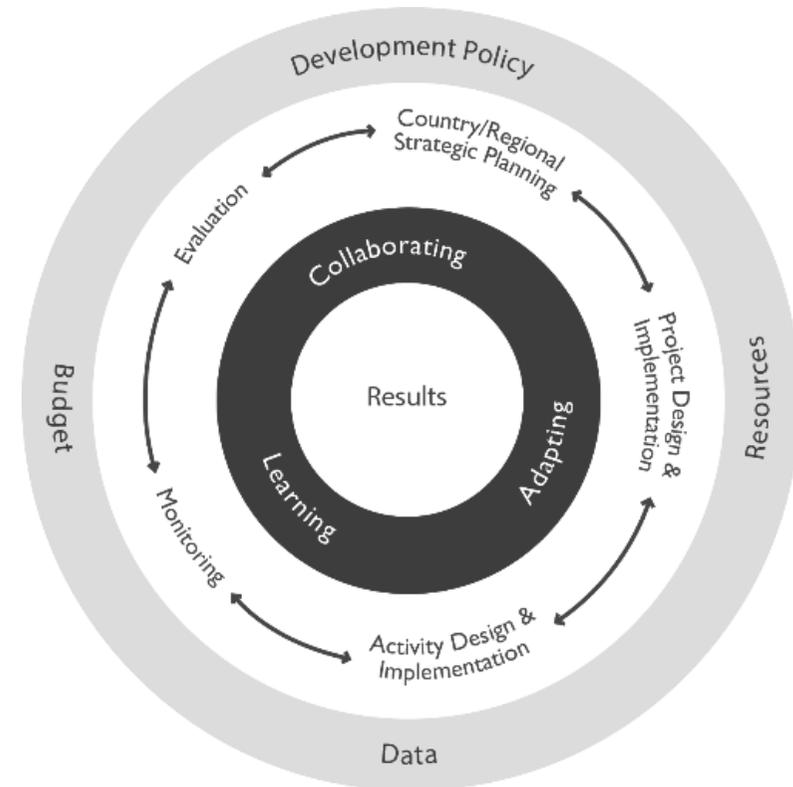
Through our global reach – over 300 projects reaching over 26 million individuals in 90 countries in 2020 alone – we have the opportunity and responsibility to advance equity by supporting segments of the population who continue to experience inequitable social outcomes based on socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, locality (rural, urban), indigenous status, ethnic background, religious background, (dis)ability, and other aspects of identity.

As monitoring, evaluation, and learning professionals, we propose the following ways to systematically apply equity approaches across all phases of the USAID project lifecycle.

Activity design and implementation

Palladium has opportunities to include equity considerations during proposal development, project start-up, and workplan development through:

- Inclusive, evidence-based problem identification and root cause analysis (RCA) with gender, social inclusion, and geospatial lenses to identify and design activities to mitigate structural inequities and improve social outcomes in the communities with whom we partner. Participatory problem identification and RCA can surface and highlight inequities related to the broader development challenge, thus leading to informed project design.
- Co-creation of project theories of change with collaborators, community members, allies, advocacy groups, and other interested parties – with meaningful engagement throughout the project. This mindful interaction ensures key assumptions of program design are adequately identified, considered, and planned for, and ensures the engagement of more and diverse people in reflection and learning exercises. This is a key principle of USAID’s Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach.
- Collecting and analyzing data, for example, through formative evaluation approaches that engage local actors, including program participants to ensure that activities are appropriate and useful to them; implementation studies and other research to better comprehend causes of inequity and to track changes in those conditions; and beneficiary feedback, a recent USAID project requirement. By paying particular attention to communities that face higher structural barriers, we ensure that the project is having a positive impact.



Program Cycle. Credit: USAID

Monitoring

We can design monitoring systems with a view toward equity. Important equity-promoting monitoring activities include:

- Participatory indicator development with communities to ensure that they have a say in what measures of success are identified and captured.
- Regularly engaging with participating communities to discuss program monitoring data to show how the project is progressing and is accountable to them.
- Appropriate disaggregation, including intersectionality, of indicators with ambitious and realistic indicator targets and accompanying actions for groups that are most experiencing inequitable outcomes.



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Evaluation

We can integrate inclusion and equity principles into our evaluations and through learning questions, which are a key part of CLA, by:

- Involving participating communities in evaluation design and interpretation, including being open to non-“Western” epistemological traditions.
- Including local researchers in leadership roles on the evaluation.
- Developing research questions focused on the causes of disparities.
- Developing processes and tools that are considerate and inclusive of diverse groups within the participant community, and easily understood informed consent and improved accessibility to participate in evaluation by considering scheduling, language, and location of meetings, as well as data collection, and interpretation activities.
- Ensuring that the participating communities use the data and analytical findings of the evaluation through regular engagements – meeting them where they are but also trying to increase their data skills when needed.

Conclusion

We appreciate the weighty, complex responsibility of implementing equity-focused development. We are working to sharpen and apply our knowledge and skills to better comprehend the histories, assets, challenges, and opportunities of our partners and participants. We also aim to use a cultural humility lens in all that we do. We hope that this deeper knowledge and human-centered orientation will lead to more inclusive project designs that have a higher likelihood of success – improved, equitable, and sustainable outcomes for all. We do not yet have all of the answers, but we want to collaborate with our Palladium colleagues on project design and implementation to systematically apply these approaches, document our journey, and share our actions and learning with you along the way.



Palladium is a global impact firm, working at the intersection of social impact and commercial growth. For nearly 60 years, we've been helping our clients to see the world as interconnected – by formulating strategies, building partnerships, mobilising capital, and implementing programs that have a lasting social and financial impact. We simply call this “positive impact”.

We work with corporations, governments, investors, communities, and civil society. With a global network operating in over 90 countries, Palladium is in the business of making the world a better place.

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