

Lessons Learned and Recommendations¹

Global Health, USAID/Peru

I. Strategy and Design

1. Build flexibility into project design to adapt to evolving contexts and evidence.

A flexible, evidence-based approach allows for timely adjustments in response to new scientific findings, data generated during implementation, and shifts in the broader context. For example, under the Amazon Malaria Initiative, project strategies were revised to reflect antimalarial drug efficacy studies and the emergence of parasite strains that rendered certain rapid diagnostic tests ineffective. Similarly, during the COVID-19 response, flexibility enabled the rapid incorporation of vaccines into programming.

2. Prioritize strategic communications and information management to counter misinformation.

Effective communication, tailored to the cultural context, responsive to circulating disinformation, and delivered through trusted messengers, is critical. During the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing vaccine hesitancy required timely, accurate, and appropriately targeted information campaigns.

3. Take a systems-thinking approach, even when working at a single level.

Health system strengthening requires an understanding of interdependencies across national, subnational, and local levels. For instance, improving local management of antimalarial supplies is only effective if aligned with national supply chain systems and policies.

4. Long-term, low-cost investments are more effective than short-term, high-cost interventions.

Sustainable systems change takes time. It took six years of continuous engagement for all Amazon countries to adopt artemisinin-based combination therapy for *P. falciparum* malaria, followed by efforts to monitor its effectiveness.

5. Policy development alone is not enough.

Support for implementation is essential to achieving lasting impact.

¹ This document was prepared by former members of the USAID/Peru technical teams as a reflection of their professional experience. The views expressed in this text belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of USAID or the United States Government.

II. Stakeholder engagement and management

1. Promote country ownership by aligning with country-led plans across all levels.

To ensure relevance and sustainability, engage stakeholders at national, subnational, and local levels from the outset. Joint planning helps align project activities with country priorities—and vice versa—strengthening both ownership and impact.

2. Strengthen coordination with other development partners to amplify impact.

Strategic coordination with multilateral and bilateral agencies, as well as technical partners, enhances resource efficiency and avoids duplication. Sharing designs, workplans, and outputs contributes to a more coherent and impactful development response.

3. Foster structured, collaborative relationships with country stakeholders.

Maintaining consistent, organized engagement with a wide range of local actors—from government officials to community members—helps ensure that interventions are context-appropriate and widely supported.

4. Enhance portfolio performance through collegial management and coordination among implementers.

Creating spaces for collaboration among implementing partners improves coherence and synergy. In the Amazon Malaria Initiative, a permanent Steering Committee, composed of implementing partners and beneficiary representatives, guided planning, implementation, and monitoring. This helped avoid overlap, facilitated joint activity execution, and improved efficiency.

5. Use technical advisory committees to address specific needs.

When technical input is required, temporary Advisory Committees composed of subject-matter experts can be convened. Selecting members based on technical relevance ensures targeted, high-quality guidance.

III. Implementation and Delivery

I. Maintain flexibility and responsiveness, grounded in evidence.

Staying attuned to new scientific findings, tools, and changes in epidemiological conditions is essential to adapt and respond effectively.

- In malaria programming, this meant adjusting to the introduction of artemisinin-based

combination therapies (ACTs), rapid and molecular diagnostic tests, insecticide-treated nets, and the detection of HRP2/HRP3 gene deletions and drug resistance markers.

- In the COVID-19 response, flexibility allowed for adaptation to emerging knowledge about airborne transmission and the rollout of vaccines.

2. Use research and innovation to accelerate results.

Operational research and innovation inform evidence-based decisions and improve program outcomes.

- Under the Amazon Malaria Initiative (AMI), research helped guide the transition to appropriate ACTs by assessing their efficacy in each country. Studies also addressed HRP2/HRP3 gene deletions to guide diagnostic test selection and examined knowledge, attitudes, and practices among gold miners in Suriname.
- In Peru, applied research filled knowledge gaps to support better implementation, such as evaluating malaria control strategies, identifying alternatives for antiretroviral therapy delivery, and estimating the number of Venezuelan migrants living with HIV.

3. Program leadership must combine technical expertise with strong management skills.

Effective coordination requires that program managers stay current with key technical domains and demonstrate strong administrative and leadership capabilities.

- For example, a malaria program manager should understand epidemiology, diagnostics, vector control, supply chain systems, and immunology—and also ensure smooth implementation by managing contracts, finances, and logistics.

4. Build and maintain trust among partners, stakeholders, and beneficiaries.

Trust is essential for collaboration.

- A lack of trust can hinder relationships with implementing partners, government counterparts, and communities. Key to building trust are transparency, clear communication, and demonstrating that the manager is committed to shared goals—not a personal agenda.

5. Prioritize strategic communication and effective information management.

Every program needs a communications strategy that is audience-specific, proactive, and responsive to misinformation.

- For example, national malaria programs developed strategies to maintain political support and funding during periods of low transmission—different from typical behavior change communication.
- In the COVID-19 response, culturally adapted messaging and trusted messengers (e.g., local health workers, community leaders) were used to counter misinformation about vaccines and promote service uptake.

6. Apply a territorial approach and integrate microplanning.

Programs must reflect the organization of the territory and local ecosystem characteristics.

- Especially for activities with supply chain components, detailed microplanning at the district or community level improves results. Planning must consider factors such as population dispersion, language, transportation access, presence of health services, and local communication channels. In some contexts, geographic divisions beyond political boundaries (e.g., watershed or basin-level planning) may be more appropriate.

7. Ensure cultural relevance in all aspects of programming.

Programs must be tailored to the cultural contexts of implementing partners, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders.

- In AMI, this meant recognizing and adapting to the diverse cultural norms of national health authorities, health workers, and community members—ranging from urban populations to indigenous groups and artisanal gold miners.

IV. Sustainability and Exit Strategy

I. Focus on sustainability of systems and processes, not isolated tools.

Sustainability efforts should target systemic or overarching elements.

- For example, rather than ensuring continued use of a specific communications channel, efforts should aim to institutionalize evidence-based processes for designing and implementing communication strategies—such as those promoting immunization.

2. Strengthen resilience by working within and reinforcing national health systems.

Building on existing national systems and strategies enhances both sustainability and local ownership. No parallel systems should be created when national structures can be supported and improved.

3. Design and implement stepwise, ensuring each step adds standalone value.

Each component of a program should be designed to be independently useful, while contributing to broader goals.

- Under the Amazon Malaria Initiative, the adoption of artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT) for uncomplicated *P. falciparum* malaria was a multi-step process. It included studies assessing the efficacy and side effects of antimalarials. Each step generated valuable results that informed decision-making, beyond serving the final objective.

4. Leverage coordination with other partners to improve efficiency and scale.

Strategic coordination with multilateral and bilateral agencies and other technical partners enhances impact and resource use.

- Exchanging plans, designs, and outputs—and maintaining structured engagement with host country institutions—strengthens both alignment and sustainability.

5. Prioritize effective dissemination of information to target audiences.

Sustainability includes sharing project knowledge in accessible, actionable formats.

- Reports, evaluations, lessons learned, and recommendations should be disseminated using media and formats suited to each audience—whether government officials, health professionals, community members, or development partners.