

## AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

### *What* This Book Contributes?

This is a workshop in a book. It offers practitioner's *gems of wisdom* for managing USAID assistance awards that can be measured in their weight in gold. It is an on demand tool for gleaning insights about how to manage USAID awards that can be read at one's own pace on topics of interests, which are color-coded by chapter for handy reference.

Be forewarned: This book doesn't offer checklists; it offers a deeper understanding what is being checked off and why?

The topics covered are at the heart of USAID award management. Like a diamond, the *gems* shared also have five angles: **What, Why, How, Who,** and **When?** Being able to ask and answer these five questions throughout the project life cycle is the key to unlocking the mystery of good project management. The "right" answers to these questions, it's emphasized, lie within applicable regulations and terms and conditions of awards, as well as in the space created by unique situations and the responses to them in working in challenging and complex developing country environments.

Within this framework it's underscored that just as in the case of mining a diamond, some gems lie deeper in the mine than others. In reflecting on decades of development experience, the author and contributors dug down deep to mine the *gems* of their experience in order to direct the gaze of readers toward strategically asking and answering key questions. In borrowing from the principle of refraction in physics, the *gems* that are presented are intended to *change the direction of a light* to illuminate key questions and some of the ways that practitioners address them in effectively managing USAID assistance awards.

In taking this approach, two facets of *gems* for management are crystal clear:

- The genius of management rests on how well it articulates and facilitates the interconnections of one function to another, with the understanding that a brilliantly designed thing unto itself has no meaning; it's only when it interacts with other systems that its true merits, brilliance, and viability can be determined.
- Almost any management problem or challenge can be solved by strategically asking and answering the five strategic questions at the right time. The trick is knowing when to pose these questions, how to answer them, and being able to implement the answers in a timely fashion.

The challenge is that in the context of international development the question and answer frame is dynamic; there are always many shades and hues of questions and answers depending on the context. Hence, gleaning perspective is important. This book offers that: Seasoned practitioner's perspectives. It does not profess to provide "the answers" because typically there are no one size fits all answers. Each situation is unique and therefore the questions and answers that pertain to it must be uniquely calibrated by implementers. A key contribution of this book is therefore to provide useful insights for such organization-specific calibrations.

As the primary goal of this book to lend perspective and share anecdotal practitioner experiences rather than to serve as a desk reference of regulations, readers are advised to refer to their awards; to USAID Automated Directives System (ADSs); to USAID's Mandatory Standard Provisions; to host country regulations; to the OMB Uniform Guidance; and to other pertinent guidance and rule setting documents as definitive sources of information. Readers are also encouraged to consult with lawyers, accountants, finance and contracts specialists, and with other subject matter experts to delve more deeply into matters merely touched upon in this book.