



EVIDENCE NOTE · ASPC-EN-005

Measuring Local Ownership and Sustainability

What evidence is needed before a program can claim local ownership or sustainability?

EVIDENCE-INFORMED ASPC ANALYSIS

Supporting publication to ASPC-SF-001

August 2026 · 6-page edition

Status, question and scope

ASPC RESEARCH SYNTHESIS.

Research question

What evidence is needed before a program can claim local ownership or sustainability?

Scope

Federal oversight distinguishes the location of spending from institutional ownership and durable capacity. Ownership is meaningful when decision authority, accountability and implementation responsibility are aligned.

Evidence cutoff: August 21, 2026. Government findings, agency-reported information and ASPC analysis are distinguished throughout.

ASPC application and limitations

Proposed application

- Record who selected the priority, who can change the design, and who is accountable domestically.
- Measure functional capability against a baseline and test whether it remains after external support.
- Identify recurrent finance, maintenance, staffing and post-completion review before describing benefits as sustainable.

Limitations

- GAO findings reflect particular historical programs and samples. MCC material describes an agency model and is not external proof of impact.

These applications are proposed by ASPC. Citation does not imply endorsement by any source institution.

Documented findings

Funding location is not sufficient evidence

GAO-15-377 found that USAID policies generally reflected federal accountability standards for government-to-government assistance, but implementation weaknesses affected planning, monitoring and assurance. Risk assessments were sometimes completed after planning, agreed mitigation actions were not consistently carried into monitoring plans, and required audits were often late.

GAO also found that reviewed monitoring and evaluation plans rarely included indicators or evaluation questions that directly assessed capacity, ownership or sustainability. The amount of funding delivered through a local institution therefore cannot, by itself, establish that authority or capability has become durable.

Corrective direction

GAO recommended timelier risk assessments, integration of mitigation measures into implementation reporting, better audit timeliness, and guidance for measuring capacity, ownership and sustainability. USAID subsequently took actions that GAO recorded as implemented.

The GAO review covered selected missions and historical activities. It supports measurement discipline, not a universal conclusion about locally led assistance.

Measurement notes

Four dimensions of ownership

- **Priority authority:** who defines the problem and approves material changes.
- **Operational control:** who directs staff, resources, procurement and delivery.
- **Domestic accountability:** which institution answers to affected communities and oversight bodies.
- **Continuation capacity:** whether finance, staffing, maintenance and data systems persist after external support.

Suggested evidence

Claims should be supported by decision records, budget authority, staffing data, control assessments, service or outcome measures, maintenance plans and post-completion observation. Stakeholder perception can illuminate legitimacy but should be triangulated with documentary and performance evidence.

ASPC should avoid a single composite ownership score unless underlying measures remain visible. Strong performance in one dimension cannot automatically compensate for the absence of lawful authority or recurrent finance.



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ASPC RELEVANCE

This research supports constructive American–international partnership and practical cooperation where stronger institutions can advance shared interests with the United States.

GAO-15-377

[Official source →](#)

GAO-14-355

[Official source →](#)

MCC Country Ownership

[Official source →](#)

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