



ASSESSING AND INFORMING TELEWORKING PRACTICES FOR USAID/KENYA AND EAST AFRICA

In March 2020, at the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the USAID/Kenya and East Africa (KEA) Mission transitioned rapidly from a full-time presence in the office to full-time remote telework. This transition was in line with the COVID-19 protocols and guidelines issued by the U.S. Embassy and the Government of Kenya Ministry of Health. In response to the new telework guidance, the USAID/KEA Mission commissioned an assessment to draw lessons learned from the past year of telework and develop strategies to ensure and increase Mission-wide efficiency and accountability. The assessment lasted from October 2021 - April 2022.

*“The last 2 years has shown that the workforce is capable of delivering despite working remotely even for an extended duration. There is a shift in the way things have traditionally been done in the workspace.”
USAID/KEA respondent.*

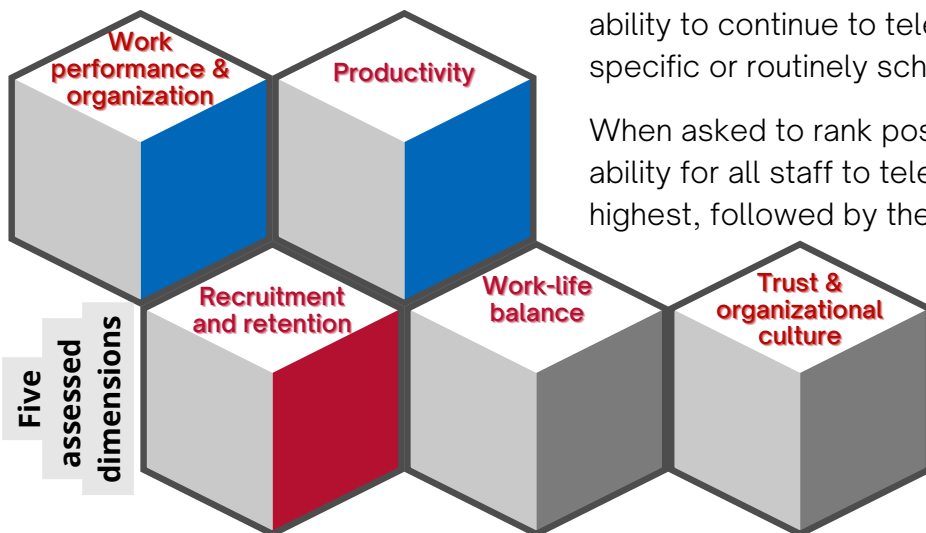
Findings

Overall, USAID/KEA staff have been able to successfully implement their Mission mandate throughout the telework period. With some exceptions, staff have successfully adopted new technologies for collaboration, managers have learned new techniques for outcome-based management, and staff have increased their sense of empowerment at work. While measuring accountability continues to be a concern among supervisors, lessons from other USAID Missions where telework has been

successful show that trust, flexibility, and empathy are the most important tools for promoting an effective telework culture.

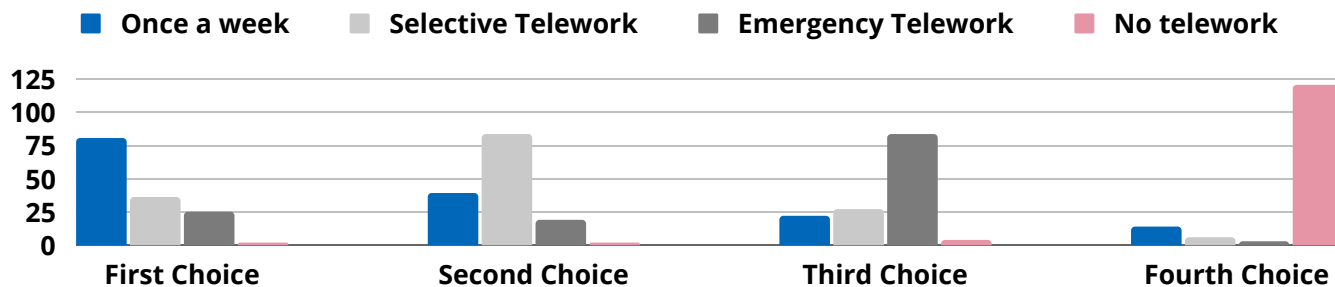
The assessment found evidence of increased productivity and high quality work performance while teleworking, as well as some evidence of positive impacts on future recruitment and retention. Evidence of telework’s impact on work-life balance, trust, and organizational culture was mixed.

Not allowing telework to continue in the future may cost the Mission gains in productivity and employee well-being, and harm recruitment and retention efforts. USAID/KEA staff overwhelmingly desire the ability to continue to telework in some capacity, be it task-specific or routinely scheduled.



When asked to rank possible telework policy outcomes, the ability for all staff to telework one day a week was ranked highest, followed by the ability to telework for specific tasks or on a case-by-case basis.

Employees are conscious of the need to balance equity and accountability when implementing a new telework policy.



Policy Implications

If telework is to become commonplace at USAID, there may be benefits to increasing the amount of data available to supervisors and USAID leadership about employee’s activities. Due to USAID privacy and technological restrictions, the assessment team was not able to access certain quantitative data, including timesheet data, calendar information, or data from remote monitoring software. Enabling this type of data to be collected and mined could provide decision-makers with some quantitative measures of productivity to help decide when and how to use telework.

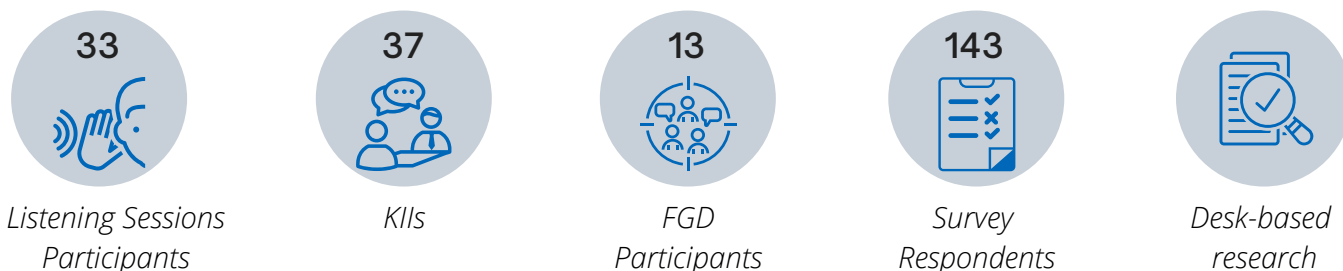
A flexible approach to telework going forward will allow USAID/KEA to take advantage of the gains in productivity, work performance, work-life balance, office culture, recruitment, and retention that telework brings. It is worth noting that a single Embassy-wide telework policy will not serve the best interest of USAID/KEA. The differences in the mandates of the State Department and USAID, and the difference in the cadre of their employees, mean that an equitable policy, not an equal policy, would best serve USAID/KEA as they implement their mission.

“Moving to Pre-COVID policies would be retrogressive. Telework has served the mission well.” USAID/KEA respondent.

Assessment Methodology

The assessment, implemented by [LINC](#) and its partner, [The Cloudburst Group](#), utilized a mixed-methods design. Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with staff from each of USAID/KEA’s 12 teams, a cross-section of Foreign Service Nationals and Foreign Service Officers, Mission leadership, and representatives from the Mission’s Gender group, and representatives from USAID/Washington, USAID/Uganda, and USAID/South Africa. Other sources included USAID ADS policy, policy briefs, media articles, and academic papers.

The assessment team also interviewed other implementing partners in Kenya to gather additional perspective, and engaged a Kenyan law firm to provide guidance on legal elements of telework.



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