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DEVELOPMENT ISSUES DISCUSSION PAPERS

No. 6

October 1994

THE USAID/DOMINICAN REPUBLIC NGO EXPERIENCE:
A STUDY OF THE DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVES AND PRIVATE
INITIATIVES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION PROJECTS

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U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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INITIATIVES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION PROJECTS

by

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The Development Issues Discussion Papers series of the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean provides to economists and non-economists within USAID relatively non-technical expositions of important current policy issues. We have dispensed with footnotes and bibliographies (with occasional limited exceptions) to help make these papers easy to read. Most of the papers in this series will be relatively short (fewer than 10 pages), although some may be as long as 20-25 pages. The longer papers will include a brief executive summary.

The opinions expressed in these internal discussion papers are those of the authors and should not be regarded as reflecting the position of the U.S. Agency for International Development or any other part of the U.S. government.

The author of this sixth paper in the DIDP series wishes to thank all those in the Dominican Republic and in Washington who helped make this paper a reality.

We welcome your comments.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper summarizes the experience of two projects supported by USAID/Dominican Republic (USAID/DR) and implemented by Dominican Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). One of the projects promotes democratic development; the other, educational reform. Both illustrate how a USAID Mission can effectively carry out **participatory project design and implementation**.

After a short Introduction, Part II briefly describes the social context in which the two projects were developed, highlighting the growing consensus among the Dominican public on the need for major social reforms to overcome the effects of the country's history of *caudillismo* and inadequate government commitment to the social sectors. USAID/DR has sought to catalyze the groundswell for reform by strengthening local NGOs that seek to mobilize grassroots pressures in a participatory fashion and channel them into constructive reform activities.

The **Democratic Initiatives** project was begun by selecting a diverse group of 40 Dominicans firmly committed to democratic development and asking them to design a 10-year project with an emphasis on process rather than defined results. This group produced a flexible, "rolling" design that is revised through Annual Working Plans. The project provides sub-grants to NGOs for activities such as education for democracy, consensus-forming, and concerted citizen action.

Three different entities play a role in implementing the project: a Consultative Council, an Operational Unit, and a Selection Committee. The **Consultative Council** consists of 21 members with diverse political opinions and representing a variety of sectors. It advises on goals, standards and policies; acts on the recommendations of the Selection Committee; and approves the annual working plans submitted by the Operational Unit. The **Operational Unit**, directly responsible for project administration, is located within the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM). The **Selection Committee**, composed of the Director of the Operational Unit and three other members chosen by PUCMM with approval of the Consultative Council and USAID, evaluates all sub-grant proposals and makes recommendations to the Consultative Council for approval.

By August 1994, 13 projects had been approved, of which 11 were under way. Another 50 or so proposals were at various stages of consideration.

Project implementation is cost-effective. USAID/DR provides only a project officer on a part-time basis. The Consultative Council members serve voluntarily, and the Selection Committee members receive only a symbolic fee. The Operational Unit has only six employees, all working at Dominican salary levels. Dominican firms are used for research and survey work.

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The high level of Dominican participation should enhance the chances that the project will be sustainable after it ends in 2002. But even if the activity does not continue beyond that date, its effects will be felt for a long time to come. NGOs will have been strengthened by having to submit proposals for a rigorous review process. And the effects of education in participation and consensus building will not disappear.

The second project reviewed in this paper is **Private Initiatives in Primary Education (PIPE)**. The origins of PIPE go back to 1990, when a Dominican NGO, *Acción para la Educación Básica (EDUCA)*, asked USAID/DR to support a project to improve private basic education in Santo Domingo. EDUCUA is now the driving force in educational reform in the country.

Phase I of PIPE, beginning in 1990, emphasized the institutional strengthening of EDUCUA through the assistance of the Academy for Educational Development (AED). Under Phase II, which began in 1992 EDUCUA received grant funds directly from USAID/DR and the AED's role was reduced.

EDUCA has played a key role in helping to create a national consensus on educational reform, especially by promoting the Plan Decenal, a ten-year plan of educational reform. EDUCUA mobilized 50,000 people to work on the Plan, which was passed by the Dominican Congress with widespread political and public support in December 1992. Through PIPE, EDUCUA supports teacher training programs, achievement testing, and development of new curricula and educational materials. A massive publicity campaign is helping to make education a national obsession. Relationships between public and private education have improved, largely because EDUCUA's director has also been Minister of Education since 1991.

To keep costs low, EDUCUA's staff is small and relies on local staff and resources to the extent possible. EDUCUA's own contributions to the PIPE project are gradually increasing, and AED is helping it to seek additional sources of local financing so that its operations can become self-sustaining.

Both the Democratic Initiatives and PIPE projects took a long time to get fully under way, but this is to be expected with participatory projects. Strong participation does not guarantee sustainability—and the paper identifies the weaknesses of the two projects as well as their strengths—but it does make it more likely.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1990 a young Dominican Republic Non-Governmental Organization approached the USAID/DR Mission with a "relatively small project" aimed at the improvement of basic private education in urban Santo Domingo. The Mission responded with Private Initiatives in Primary Education (PIPE), a project aimed at improving the administrative capacity of the group in order to ultimately improve the efficiency and quality of the entire Dominican Republic's primary education system. That fledgling organization, Acción para la Educación Básica or EDUCA, is now the driving force of educational reform in the Dominican Republic.

In 1992 the Mission again struck gold, this time looking to create a democracy project that could make an impact in a country where working with the government was akin to digging through solid rock. Reaching out to Dominicans in every strata of society, the Mission brought together citizens dedicated to democratic reform. With naught but the question of "what do you feel needs to be done?", the participants formed a consultative group, created an administrative structure for the Project, and developed the Democratic Initiatives Project Paper with guidelines for the administration of grants to qualified NGOs.

This paper provides a summary of the EDUCA and Democratic Initiatives projects and identifies some of the successes, failures, and lessons learned from the USAID/DR experience with these exemplary projects. It hopes to offer another example, and perhaps some advice, to agents of development looking for alternative ways to pursue participatory project design and implementation.

To complete this task, I consulted the Project Papers and Cooperative Agreements for both projects; the FY1995-FY1996 Action Plan and the 1993 Semi-Annual Report for USAID/DR; assorted information provided by the Mission and the Academy for Educational Development (AED); project officers at the Mission, EDUCA, and AED; and a handful of other USAID/DR employees who have worked with NGOs and/or the Dominican Republic. It is worth noting that CDIE has recently completed an assessment of "Achieving Development Objectives

through NGOs and PVOs" that should prove valuable to anyone interested in how USAID works with these groups.

The balance of this paper is organized as follows. Part II provides a description of the social situation to which the USAID/DR Mission responds. Part III describes the background, administration, activities, cost effectiveness, sustainability, and lessons learned of the Democratic Initiatives project. Part IV presents a description of EDUCA; the development and outcomes of the PIPE project; PIPE's administration and cost effectiveness; EDUCA's role in increasing participation and its relationship with the public sector; and the advantages and disadvantages of the PIPE strategy. Part V concludes the paper with a comparison of the two projects.

II. SOCIAL BACKDROP

The implementation of new social and democratic initiatives in the Dominican Republic must be viewed in the context of the country's social and institutional structure. This section briefly discusses two major obstacles to policy reform, caudillismo and inadequate government commitment to the social sectors. It then describes how both Dominican society and USAID responded to the challenges to initiate the reform process.

A. Caudillismo

Although the Dominican Republic has officially been a democracy for more than 30 years, an authoritarian attitude dating from well before Trujillo's time remains entrenched in the national psyche. Its roots cutting deeply into the country's social-political-economic structure, *caudillismo* has generated a familiar, if Dominicanized, vicious cycle of bad governance, flawed policy, poverty, and social injustice. The presidency is the paramount institution, with near dictatorial power. With the exception of elections every four years, participation in the democratic process has been minimal. The *altagraciano* model--that higher authority will arrange everything for better or worse--is the standard paradigm, in both public and private organizations.

In accordance with this view of "democracy," about 97% of the national budget is controlled by the central government.

B. Inadequate Government Commitment to Social Sectors

Faced with an inflationary economic disaster and lacking the means or the will to raise more revenue from those with wealth, the Government in 1990 chose to make draconian cuts in real social expenditure. That year the GODR spent only 1.25% of GNP, or 10% of its national budget, on education--a 60% decline from the 1980 level. Reflecting the resulting deterioration in educational quality, labor productivity is falling--a situation that if not rectified will have serious repercussions on broad economic performance.

These very low levels of social spending persist today, and are among the lowest in the Hemisphere. A lack of resources accounts for only part of the problem. Tax reform and greater government responsiveness are necessary if the government's social programs are to reach the people. Too much of the budget allocated to the social sector is spent on buildings and structures and not enough on operations.

C. Public Perception and Response

Although a broad consensus exists on the need for reforms (some 73% of the population is calling for "big change"), it does not yet include certain key political forces or agreement on concrete goals. Since 1980, and especially in the last ten years, consensus on the need for an institutional reform of the State and for a strengthening of democracy has been accompanied by a general awareness in broad sectors of society that these reforms have to be put into effect as soon as possible.

As a result, several discussion fora have emerged to debate reform proposals in a spirit of broad pluralism and participation. At the end of the eighties, the ineffective response of the government to the most important and most diverse social demands opened up considerable space for the political leadership of grassroots organizations.

D. USAID Response

Given the nature of the problems and the severe limitations on its own resources, USAID/DR has only been able to play a catalytic role in a limited number of areas. Metamorphosing its shape to the demands of the Dominican reality, the USAID/DR program has evolved in ways presaging the current global USAID emphasis on citizen participation and collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The weakness of the governmental structure, its lack of commitment, and the absence of popular involvement in and support for governmental programs have resulted in some 85% of the USAID/DR program being implemented through NGOs that have come to serve as vehicles of participatory democracy.

Realizing that improvement of the political and social situation should not be limited to government bodies but should touch the intermediary institutions that channel the expressions and participation of civil society, USAID/DR has fostered NGO involvement not only in the governance process, but also in democratic organization and participation within and among the NGOs. Accordingly, USAID/DR projects undergo a participatory design process that makes maximum use of local talent and ideas. The prototype of this strategy, Democratic Initiatives, has already achieved a high level of success.

Other projects so designed, and now under way, include: PVO Co-financing, Economic Policy and Practices, Development Training, and Trade Practices and Productivity Improvement. All subsequent projects, including the proposed Administration of Justice project, will follow this same design approach.

With the approach adopted for these programs, USAID seeks a change in the *mind-set* of the country. It will prove to be a long, slow process, but the Mission believes that modernization of the state requires that a participatory, democratic approach be built into the fabric of the country's civil and governmental institutions.

Two projects stand out in the Mission's strategy to aid Dominican society: Private Initiatives in Public Education, which has created a

national consensus on the need and direction of educational reform, and Democratic Initiatives, which through purely Dominican initiatives promises to strengthen many times over the voices crying out for change. One is an example of institutional strengthening and capacity building, making it possible for a young Dominican NGO to better do its job and gain a national consensus and momentum in support of educational reform. The other sprung from USAID/DR's nurturing womb and has since become a very Dominican process that the participants control and call their own.

The two projects are intertwined, seeking to affect all levels of society while continuing to push for the reforms and involvement at the national level that are essential for long-term progress in the social sectors. Perhaps most importantly, through their own organization and the support that they give to smaller institutions, these groups themselves are promoting participation and evolving a change in the currents of Dominican thought.

III. DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVES (517-0265)

"This democracy project is, by far, the best model to come out of USAID. Participation is not just token."

*--David Scott Luther,
Consultative Group Member*

A. Background

Within the USAID/DR Mission a realization exists that deep-seated reform, touching the most profound roots of the Dominican social-economic-political structure, is needed to effect lasting change. In this light, the Democratic Initiatives project was designed to promote efforts to strengthen the Dominican democratic system from its deepest grassroots to its highest branches, increasing participation and improving the efficiency and impartiality of the State.

In its first attempt to let the Dominicans design their own project, USAID/DR pulled together a group of forty firmly-committed Dominicans possessing vast experience with initiatives aimed at supporting national

democracy. USAID explained that it wanted to support a project to improve Dominican democracy that would address Dominican concerns and then asked the group what it thought could be done. The Mission was asking for approval of a 10-year project with no defined results--just a process to determine the results. Upon USAID's invitation, these persons agreed to form a consultative group and, for several months, prepared the design of the Project and wrote the Project Paper. This group then recommended to USAID a list of Dominican experts considered most apt to perform the preliminary analyses required for the design of such a project. It also unanimously recommended the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) as the most appropriate Dominican institution to administer the Democratic Initiatives project.

Conceived as a facilitator able to respond to the changing needs and expectations of different social sectors regarding the strengthening of a democratic government system, and of life in Dominican society in general, this flexible project has a "rolling" design determined by Annual Working Plans that take into account the goals and objectives of the Project as well as changing political and social circumstances.

Democratic Initiatives acts in an umbrella-financing capacity, providing sub-grants of varying amounts through a detailed selection process. Some of the areas in which activities may be financed are: education of democracy at all levels; consensus-forming and/or facilitation of concerted citizen action for democracy; and development of a more participatory democratic system in which civil society and its intermediary institutions would play a more effective role.

B. Desired Project Outcomes

The main objective of the Democratic Initiatives Support project is to create a national awareness that would lead to increased citizen participation in decision-making and to the eventual reform and modernization of the Dominican State. According to the Project Paper, by the end of this ten-year project the following will have been achieved:

- a broad acceptance of basic democratic values and attitudes;
- a higher percentage of citizens well-informed about the political system, with more confidence in their own role within the system and actively participating in it;
- an honest and effectively operating civil service;
- improved public services at both national and local levels;
- a more open, more responsive government;
- effective operating mechanisms that offer to the different intermediary groups in society opportunities to influence the process of political decision-making; and
- more participation by women in the political process.

C. Administration of Democratic Initiatives

1. Overview

Formulating a design somewhat analogous to the three branches of democratic government, the group recommended that the project consist of a Consultative Council, an Operational Unit, and a Selection Committee. The Consultative Council, composed of members with diverse political opinions and representing a variety of sectors, advises on the policies, goals, and standards of the project; examines the recommendations of the Selection Committee; and approves the annual working plans submitted by the Operational Unit. The Operational Unit is directly responsible for the administration of the project. The Selection Committee examines and evaluates all proposals for sub-grants to carry out the project and submits its findings and recommendations to the Consultative Council for approval. Final approval throughout the project's ten-year life-span rests with USAID.

2.. Consultative Council

The Consultative Council, likely the cornerstone of the project, was established in order to guarantee the broadest possible project support at all times and to keep permanent touch with the social-political reality of

Dominican society. The Council functions as the legislative arm of the "microcosm of democracy" that is Democratic Initiatives: designing the project, setting down project guidelines, establishing the annual objectives of the project, and approving activities to be funded.

The Council is the offspring of the informal consultative group put together by USAID for the design of the project. Intended to gain the widest possible participation of national institutions and sectors and to contribute a better image of the project within Dominican society, this group was selected on the basis of several months of contacts and informal meetings with many Dominican men and women from diverse backgrounds interested in and committed to the development of their country's democracy. The initial contacts with these individuals were made by the Director, Deputy Director, and other Mission members in 1990 and 1991. In early 1992 the 21 members of the Democratic Initiatives project's first Consultative Council were chosen by USAID and the Catholic University (PUCMM) from among the membership of the informal consultative group that designed the project. A large majority of the Council had ties to the USAID Mission based on previous activities. However, for some of them the Democratic Initiatives project was their first contact with USAID.

Chosen not as official representatives of any institution, but in their personal capacities, the Democratic Initiatives project's Consultative Council members serve completely voluntary one-year terms. To ensure maximum participation, members are limited to three consecutive terms and a full one-third of the council is replaced each year at the recommendation of a yearly Council session reviewing membership and lessons learned. In selecting the Council each year, both USAID and the Catholic University make sure that the Consultative Council as a group fairly represents a broad spectrum of Dominican society. Included in the Council are men as well as women, persons close to the top leadership of all major democratic political parties, academics, NGO/PVO leaders, members of community organizations and groups, business leaders, and labor representatives.

The Consultative Council developed its own terms of reference and internal regulations. These documents, duly approved by USAID/DR, are now legal instruments of the Democratic Initiatives project. (The Council as such has no independent legal status in the Dominican Republic.) Notably, the Consultative Council, without suggestion from USAID, discussed and approved a Code of Ethics that protects against internal conflicts of interest.

The Consultative Council reviews and approves the project proposals subsequently approved by USAID. The Council also identifies the priority areas of action under each project's Annual Work Plan, which is then ratified by USAID. Finally, at least once a year the Council evaluates the work done by the project and assesses its impact.

Reaching decisions by consensus is considered essential in these capacities. However, decisions are submitted to a majority vote when needed. If the vote is very close, additional review of the proposal is encouraged so that consensus may be reached.

Two years after its inception, the Council consists of representatives from all groups of society. Its membership includes seven women, several persons from Santiago to supplement the primarily Santo Domingo-based representation, and members of all political parties, including the director of the leading party's school of political formation. The dedicated leaders who make up the Consultative Council are the same people who are pushing for democracy and for electoral reform in their other incarnations.

3. PUCMM/Operational Unit

Through the Operational Unit established specifically for Democratic Initiatives, the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) takes care of the project's day-to-day administration. PUCMM directs all aspects of the project, advertises and promotes it, administers its funds, and conducts its financial supervision. The Operational Unit also coordinates the technical review of the proposals submitted to obtain sub-grants.

4. Selection Committee

The Selection Committee is composed of the Director of the Operational Unit and three other members chosen by PUCMM with approval of the Consultative Council and USAID. As noted above, the USAID project officer participates as an observer in the deliberations of the Selection Committee, which is responsible for the evaluation of "definitive proposals" submitted by the Operational Unit. Among the things the Committee looks for are: suitability of the proposed activity to the project purpose and strategy, technical and financial feasibility of the activity, and administrative capacity and financial viability of the institution submitting the proposal. After completing its evaluation, the Selection Committee submits the proposals, with its opinion, to the Consultative Council for its review and decision.

5. USAID/DR

Through the Cooperative Agreement mechanism, USAID/DR is able to maintain control of the project's key decisions while delegating management to PUCMM's Operational Unit. Most significantly, USAID gives final approval to Consultative Council-approved Annual Work Plans and Final Proposals. USAID/DR also receives quarterly reports, contracts for external evaluations, and gives its concurrence in the selection of the Operational Unit staff, Council members, Selection Committee members, and on any criteria or guidelines prepared. The Democratic Initiatives project officer also provides a guiding hand by observing all Selection Committee sessions and attending Consultative Council meetings.

6. Process of Proposal Selection

Private Dominican institutions submit their proposals in a two-stage sequence. In the first phase, they present two-page, standardized "proposal profiles" to the Operational Unit for comments, amendments, and orientation. The Operational Unit supplies feedback to the institution with suggestions for change or with a letter of non-acceptance. During the second phase, the

Operational Unit works jointly with the applicant to develop a "definitive proposal" that complies with the requirements of the Project. When the Director of the Operational Unit considers that a "definitive proposal" meets with the requirements, he or she presents it to the Selection Committee for review and recommendation. This stage takes between two and three months depending on the number of changes that need to be made. To ensure accountability and fairness, an executive summary of any proposals that are rejected by the Operational Unit is submitted to both USAID and the Consultative Council.

After review by the Selection Committee, "definitive proposals" with favorable technical recommendations are sent by the Committee to the Consultative Council for approval. Executive summaries of those receiving favorable recommendations by both the Selection Committee and the Consultative Council then go to USAID for final approval or objection within fifteen days.

Although some applicants complain about the intensity and length of the selection process, in the end they usually agree that it is beneficial and teaches valuable skills that build institutional capacity.

D. Project Activities

Much of project's first year (March 1992 to May 1993) was spent setting up and strengthening the Operational Unit and making administrative adjustments such as simplifying the procedures for awarding small sub-grants.

The Operational Unit and Consultative Council then promoted the project among NGOs and the larger society through interviews held with individual PVOs; sectoral meetings with women organizations, labor unions, grassroots organizations from Santiago and Santo Domingo; and press releases. The Operational Unit also contracted for a TV and radio campaign to promote the project and to disseminate educational messages on electoral participation as a means to strengthen democracy.

The project awarded its first three sub-grants in late September 1993. With a grant for "Education for Democracy," Siglo XXI, a Dominican NGO,

organized discussion sessions between the various political parties, labor unions, and community groups to explore possibilities for reaching a consensus on governmental reform. The largest grant supported the Centro de Investigación para la Acción Feminina's updating of the agenda of the status of women as participants in the country's democratic process, and helped finance various educational activities and multi-media campaigns in favor of greater participation of women in the 1994 election. The third grant went to the Asociación Pro-Desarrollo de Santiago to finance the promotion of democratically-oriented community development through leadership training and training in organizing community projects in the rural altiplano area and in Santiago province.

By August 1994, ten more projects had been approved and a total of eleven were up and running. Some fifty proposals stood at various points in the pipeline.

E. Cost Effectiveness

For several reasons, the Democratic Initiatives implementation strategy is a cost-effective one. USAID/DR provides only a project officer, who is also responsible for two other Democracy projects. The Consultative Council members are strictly voluntary, and only a symbolic fee is paid to the Selection Committee. The Operational Unit, the only full-time entity, has only a director, administrative assistant, project officer, sub-grant administrator, and two secretaries. All are Dominicans working at Dominican salary levels, which are only a third of U.S. levels. Dominican firms are used for research and surveys that benefit from the local know-how they possess. These activities thus promote the strengthening of local institutions while entailing a relatively low cost to the project.

F. Project Sustainability

Many efforts have been made to ensure the sustainability of the project, such as promoting a high level of Dominican participation, encouraging a sense

of ownership among the Consultative Council members, and keeping costs low. Still, it is difficult to determine what will become of the Democratic Initiatives project in 2002 when USAID funding is to end. The development of democracy in the Dominican Republic is critical to its future. Ideally, the project would be unnecessary come the anticipated end date. But with the current political crisis overshadowing all democratic initiatives, there is no guarantee for success and no guarantee for longevity. The Mission continues to want to help the forces trying to make Dominican society more participatory and will need to adapt its support as the political environment in the country changes.

Even if the project itself does not continue beyond the year 2002, its effects will be felt for a long time to come. The lessons of greater participation and of consensus building learned throughout the life of the project will not disappear, no matter what the national political situation. NGOs submitting proposals to the rigorous review process will benefit from their increased institutional capabilities long after their contact with the project is over. And the effects of the educational efforts financed through project grants cannot be erased. Despite there being no guarantees, the Democratic Initiatives project is a risk well worth taking.

G. Lessons Learned

1. Successes/Benefits

- One of the major obstacles to the functioning of the Dominican political system is the absence of a spirit of cooperation among the different political forces of the nation. Because the consultative group had to reach all decisions by consensus, the project design itself became a lesson in democratic process. Demonstrating initiative, commitment, and ownership, the three ingredients that make any development endeavor sustainable, the Dominicans made the project a success before it even got out of the design stage. This approach to project design should help ensure sustainability.

- Democratic Initiatives is well received as a Dominican project run by Dominicans, designed by Dominicans, and guided by Dominicans. In that sense the cold war is over in the Dominican Republic and USAID is not a bad name anymore.

- The processes and projects of Democratic Initiatives are helping to democratize NGOs affected by the same *caudillismo* that plagues the Dominican Government.

- The application process helps develop institutional capacity.

- The Consultative Council enjoys a fair degree of independence from USAID and is very flexible in its design.

- The project has extended to other fields: groups previously active in social or economic areas are now applying for democratic projects.

- The Project enjoys wide participation in proposal submission from regions across the country and various social groups.

2. Disadvantages/Setbacks

- As with democratic systems, the process, especially project development, is slower than less-participatory methods because so many people provide input.

- Majority rule, or even decision by consensus, does not necessarily find the best solution.

- A possible conflict of interest arises when proposals of institutions with which participants of the selection process are affiliated come up for review. (By requiring that members of the Selection Committee refrain from participating in deliberations when groups with which they are associated present proposals, the Code of Ethics tries to prevent such conflicts of interest.)

3. Observations

- Keeping the Dominican Government informed during the design process and including a member of the ruling party on the Consultative Council were

actions considered critical to the successful development of the project, and would in all likelihood be a critical factor in other countries as well.

- This arrangement could face potential problems in other settings if the prospective members of such a council or group are not well known to USAID; or have little familiarity with USAID principles, objectives, and procedures; or have not yet demonstrated a long-standing and sincere commitment to the same democratic values and objectives that guide USAID's democracy strategy. It should be kept in mind that this Mission made a significant investment of staff time in identifying persons with whom they could work, and in following their initiatives, commitment, and ownership of activities to strengthen Dominican democracy. Mission staff called their approach "medio paso atrás," or a half a step behind the Dominican lead. But while it took an increased up-front investment of time, that investment has paid high returns.

IV. PRIVATE INITIATIVES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION (PIPE; 517-0251)

A. EDUCA

"People were desperate. No one believed in education, including the Government for whom education was not a priority."

-Jacqueline Malagón,
Minister of Education and
Director of EDUCA

EDUCA's roots stem from 1964. In that year, leading Dominican business people concerned with the scarcity of well-trained employees created Acción Pro-Educación y Cultura (APEC) to address the nation's need for higher education and technical training. Twenty-five years after its founding, APEC began to realize the essential role of primary education in economic development.

Turning its attention to the critical condition of basic education, APEC encountered schools in very poor condition and classrooms equipped with no teaching materials and no chairs. Working for salaries that were below the national minimum wage, teachers had to hold down two or three jobs to make a

living. Close to 350,000 children of school age were out of school. Despite an apparent rise in enrollment rates, only half of the students entering at the primary level passed the first grade and only one in seven completed the eighth grade. A mere 2% of GDP went to education (compared to the 3-4% recommended for a developing country), and only 16% of government spending was devoted to education (compared to a desired level of more than 20%).

After investigating the condition of public education for more than four months, APEC decided that an institution to work on improving basic education, especially in the public sector but also in the private sector, should be created. Thus, on July 31, 1989 Acción para la Educación Básica (EDUCA) came into existence.

Threaded into EDUCA's wish to improve the quality of basic education, and its belief that education is the responsibility of all societal members, is its desire to affect policy and to increase government funding of education. EDUCA's members and directors represent something of this diverse responsibility and include prominent local businessmen and women, professionals, educators, and other citizens concerned with basic education. Working for in-service teacher training, adequate teacher salaries, better working conditions and retirement plans, and the improvement of teaching facilities has brought parents, the private business sector, and the public sector together in a common cause.

B. Development of PIPE

1. Stages in Project Design

EDUCA approached USAID/DR in 1990 with a relatively small project to reform education in Santo Domingo barrios. With a Life-of-Project USAID commitment of US\$5.5 million, Private Initiatives in Primary Education (PIPE) was implemented that same year with the objective of strengthening EDUCA's managerial and technical skills. Project designers hoped that by focusing EDUCA's efforts in urban Santo Domingo, the positive effects of the project would spin off and improve education throughout the country.

To better strengthen EDUCA the Mission broke the PIPE project into two stages, hiring the Academy for Educational Development (AED), a U.S. NGO, to administer the project until EDUCA was deemed capable of receiving funds directly in Phase II. The first phase of PIPE was devoted to the institutional strengthening of EDUCA and to the implementation of initial project activities. In those first twenty-six months AED aided EDUCA in establishing linkages with organizations concerned with primary education (including the Ministry of Education [SEEBAC], private school associations, institutions of higher learning, and the private sector); conducting a census of schools within Metropolitan Santo Domingo; revising existing textbooks and contracting for the development of new textbooks and instructional materials; and establishing a Management Information System within EDUCA. After EDUCA and the AED successfully completed Phase I in June 1992, EDUCA received the Phase II grant directly from USAID and AED's role was reduced.

Due in large part to the success of PIPE, EDUCA has gained respect and recognition in both national and international circles and has consequently gained the financial support of both the World Bank and the IDB.

2. Specific Activities of EDUCA

The project plays a key role in creating a national consensus, as demonstrated best by EDUCA's efforts to design and build national support for the Plan Decenal, a ten-year plan for reforming education. Although its essential role in the Plan Decenal is EDUCA's most visible accomplishment, the institution has also been active in teacher training programs, the development and administration of achievement testing, and the development of new curricula and educational materials. Through a massive publicity campaign, funded in large part by private sector donations, EDUCA is literally helping to make education a *national obsession* with its organization and support of the "Educar es enseñar vivir mejor" (Education is Teaching How to Live Better) campaign. The group is also responsible for a number of pilot programs, such as its "Apadrinamiento de Escuelas" or "Adopt a School" program that is widely

supported by community involvement. Such programs are expanding and showing the way to other schools and community groups.

3. The Plan Decenal

Returning from the Jometien, Thailand, Conference on Education for All, Dominican representatives realized that the Dominican Republic had no educational future and no plan to work from to direct their steps. Acting on this need, EDUCA gathered 50,000 people to work on the Plan Decenal.

More important than just sheer numbers of people, the plan's formation involved all sectors of society: representatives from primary schools, universities, NGOs, the public sector, and the private sector joined forces to give direction to the nation's failed educational system. All political parties, including the opposition, gave their consent for the Plan Decenal to be the sole educational plan in the Dominican Republic over the next ten years. Passed by the Dominican Congress in December 1992, the Plan Decenal reflects broad support of teachers, parents, children, and the media, giving much hope for an escape from the educational crisis and for the achievement of a much better educational system.

C. Administration of the PIPE Project

1. USAID/DR's Role

The PIPE project is implemented through a Cooperative Agreement so that USAID may retain a relatively high degree of influence in setting its goal, purpose, and expected outputs. As mandated by the Cooperative Agreement, EDUCA submits quarterly and annual reports and seeks USAID approval of all team members.

USAID/DR works closely with EDUCA in implementing the project, providing technical assistance and monitoring its progress. Aside from guidance in the initial planning of all project activities, USAID also gives guidance on relations between other private sector organizations and the Ministry of Education (SEEBAC).

2. AED's Role

As EDUCA was a relatively new group when the PIPE project was designed, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) was contracted to strengthen the institution so that it would be able to receive and administer the Phase II grant, to give advice, and to control PIPE finances for sub-projects such as the development of educational texts. The AED also provided technical assistance, training, and commodities as required during the first phase of the project. As the project has entered Phase II and EDUCA is administering its own grant, AED's role has diminished but remains important. The AED continues to provide technical assistance to various project components; organizes training opportunities for EDUCA staff and select SEEBAC personnel; provides some procurement services; and offers general management oversight and support for special projects. It is expected that AED's official role will end in the fall of 1994, though a continued advisory relationship and perhaps partnership in some regional projects could unfold.

3. Funding and Sustainability

PIPE was designed to be an investment that would have a noticeable impact on the quality and efficiency of primary education while engendering minimal recurrent costs. To keep costs low, local talent and resources are used as much as possible and EDUCA's staff is kept to a minimum.

U.S. funds still constitute the majority (US\$5.5 million) of PIPE's LOP total costs of \$7,331,600, while the GODR and EDUCA (through private sector contributions) contribute \$850,000 and \$981,000, respectively. As can be expected, the amount of EDUCA's contribution is designed to increase as the project progresses, in order to assure its long-term sustainability. EDUCA is now funding its office space and some salaries. With the AED's guidance it is actively seeking out new sources of funding so that it will ultimately become self-sustaining. So far the group has successfully received assistance from the GODR (with more expected), the World Bank and the IDB, and many private

foundations and businesses. EDUCA is where it should be for this stage in the project and is well on its way to being self-supporting.

D. EDUCA's Relationship with the Public Sector

EDUCA's participation in the improvement of primary education has resulted in a closer relationship between private and public education. SEEBAC has even given some monies to EDUCA and a future endowment is expected. As demonstrated by the Plan Decenal and the "Educar es Enseñar Vivir Mejor" campaign, EDUCA has been able to raise national consciousness on the importance of primary education. As a result of the PIPE project, the Ministry of Education has undertaken some initiatives developed by EDUCA, such as the implementation of a national achievement testing program.

Some may argue that EDUCA's success in the public sector is due to the strong personality of its director, Jacqueline Malagón, who has also been the Minister of Education since 1991. While she plays an undeniably important role, other strong players on the Board of Directors are also influential within Dominican society. Of course, much credit also goes to EDUCA's dedicated staff.

E. Participation

EDUCA and other institutions such as the Catholic University have played a vital role in educational reform in the Dominican Republic. These agents of reform are generating strong supporters of more participatory management styles. As demonstrated by the Plan Decenal and its pilot programs, EDUCA is generating participation among numerous strata of Dominican society. EDUCA also has a fund-raising program in which private business is stimulated to participate in the improvement of education. EDUCA strongly supports placing education at the top of the national agenda and in doing so is highlighting the necessity for all political parties to support the education efforts of not just the government but of the *nation*.

F. Successes/Advantages of the EDUCA/PIPE Strategy

1. Comments of EDUCA's PIPE Project Officer

- PIPE's results have exceeded even EDUCA's expectations. Working on some projects with different institutions such as SEEBAC and APEC has been particularly successful.
- While PIPE's goals were set only in technical fields its impact has extended to infrastructure--some private schools are improving facilities and providing training aids such as computers as a result of PIPE's successes.

2. Comments of AED's PIPE Project Officer

- EDUCA's staff is operational and successfully manages the various project components. EDUCA has a network of subcontractors.
- EDUCA is building institutional capability in the field that can eventually be contracted out.
- EDUCA is an up-and-coming, respected voice in education that is rapidly becoming sustainable. A change in government will affect the staff's work but will not erase their efforts.
- EDUCA serves an underserved community, and its work has leveraged public resources for this segment of the population.

3. Comments of the USAID/DR PIPE Project Officer

- Implementing the project through EDUCA guarantees USAID/DR continuity throughout the life of the project. PIPE also shows how the private sector can play a significant role as an advocate for primary education.

G. Setbacks/Disadvantages of the EDUCA/PIPE Strategy

1. Comments of AED's PIPE Project Officer

- One trouble spot with the PIPE strategy is that to strengthen EDUCA a large quantity of resources for staff development is spent on a small number of staff members. If these people leave EDUCA or are not completely appropriate for its growing needs, institutional capability can be lost. With

human resource development there is always a risk that high turnover might cripple the institution. Within a small project or organization such training programs need to be carefully designed to address this Catch 22 situation.

2. Comments of USAID/DR's PIPE Project Officer

- Some activities developed by EDUCA depend on the Ministry of Education's approval. The Project is still susceptible to changes in government policy, and sometimes work plans developed and activities implemented have to be altered due to changes in educational regulations.

H. Comments by AED's Project Officer on Overall Achievement

The organization is still in the process of maturing. For example, the staff needs to become more savvy in getting local contracts for technical work. However, most major programs are functioning and making an extremely positive impact on basic education. Also, the policy dialogue created by the formation of EDUCA and subsequent activities has been unprecedented in transforming basic education in the Dominican Republic. The project has surpassed its original intent.

In 1997, when PIPE is expected to close, the role of EDUCA as an advocate of basic education will stand out. Memorable achievements will include EDUCA's facilitation of the Plan Decenal; materials and textbook development; teacher training/development of teacher's guides; supervisor training; and the clear vision of basic education expectations for the country. EDUCA, with or without PIPE, will continue its role as a catalyst in the promotion and improvement of primary education.

I. Lessons Learned as Reported by:

1. Jacqueline Malagón

- Creating partnerships is vital for success in education. The Government does not have all the answers, and neither does the private sector.

But both the public and private sectors, through a strong partnership with NGOs, do have the answers.

2. AED Project Officer

- The idea of using an NGO vehicle to implement a project is that there remains in the country a strong indigenous voice advocating and working in the field. The emphasis has been on staff development and capacity building to fulfill project objectives. The same results can be achieved by placing Technical Advisors directly in the Ministry. However, the potential disadvantage of working with the civil service is that changes of policies can affect staff and government support for reform. One hopes that working with an NGO avoids some of these pressures.

- It is important for key members of society to be identified and actively solicited in a policy dialogue. A cause such as basic education reform needs to be marketed to key players. The appeal must take into account and then "rise above" political obstacles.

3. Final Report: Evaluation of the EDUCA/PIPE Project

- A relatively small funding level can be used to develop and implement a project with highly leveraged results.

- It is possible to involve the private sector with relatively small project inputs to positively influence and leverage national educational policy.

- A steady series of timely, well-executed professional technical inputs (curricula development; textbook preparation, production, and distribution; achievement testing; director and teacher training; and special studies) can be utilized to quietly influence and change the course of an educational system not meeting the country's needs.

- The project progressed better than anticipated in the early stages because the directors were trained first and the program was able to put a trained cadre in place to network and coordinate the activities of the project

in the targeted low-income neighborhoods. Then the other activities followed into that flexible infrastructure.

- The project developed implementation problems that have become magnified. A more continual and regular formative evaluation and/or process monitoring usually will assist project and Mission managers to resolve any project implementation impediments early on. Such an evaluative activity can be low-cost, with minimal inputs and positive results.

- To develop an almost new institution, even a small one, takes longer than the overly optimistic two years given in the original project design.

- The EDUCA/PIPE experience, under the proper circumstances and with the right players, can be applicable and replicated in other Latin American areas and possibly beyond.

V. CONCLUSION

Although the Mission's heavy reliance on local NGOs may seem like a romantic call to more participation and pluralism in a society plagued by *caudillismo*, it is a direct, pragmatic result of the difficulties in dealing with an unresponsive government not interested in betterment of social conditions or in any type of change. USAID/DR's portfolio is attractive in its innovativeness and in the amount of participation it has cultivated. Each project is unique in that it truly looks to Dominicans for the answers instead of viewing NGOs as simple intermediaries to carry out USAID functions. PIPE has supported initiatives already conceived before USAID added its fingers to the pot, and the key players in Democratic Initiatives were selected for their diversity and asked, with little goading needed, to design their own project.

The two projects described in this paper are success stories that are causing a groundswell of popular participation by nearly every stratum of Dominican society. Remarkable in that respect, they both show how mass participation pays off.

The projects decentralize project administration while USAID maintains its advisory role and ultimate say in key matters, but does not make every little decision. They also put lower demands on USAID staff time and keep the Agency out of any glaring limelight. By supporting Dominican initiatives, each project strengthens Dominicans' abilities to issue their own call to arms. This process lends much desirable sustainability to the projects and institutions that so often fall by the wayside when U.S. funding ends. USAID/DR project officers for both Democratic Initiatives and PIPE have suggested that similar project designs could be successful in other countries.

It needs to be kept in mind that both projects took time to get fully under way: PIPE was twenty-six months in its first phase of institution building, and only after a lengthy selection process and a year spent designing the project did the Consultative Council make its first sub-grant.

Finally, a word of caution: attempts have been made to replicate the design of both PIPE and Democratic Initiatives in the Dominican health sector, but these efforts have failed. The health sector has no strong coordinating body such as EDUCA or the Catholic University and no strong central figure like Jacqueline Malagón. Where there are many PVOs--like so many tiny puzzle pieces--and no coordinating administration, implementation is more difficult than any jigsaw.