



# Participatory Practices: Learning From Experience

## 11

### **Procurement Alternative for Collaboration: *USAID/Bolivia's Chaco Initiative***

#### **THE CHALLENGE**

The Chaco in Bolivia is a region of dry tropical forests rich in biological diversity. In 1993 the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Izoceño indigenous peoples organization (the Capitanía del Alto y Bajo Izozog, CABI) began working in the area to develop a new National Chaco Park to prevent forest and biodiversity degradation. The Government of Bolivia (with funding from the Swiss and the World Bank/GEF) supported the development of the park. USAID/Bolivia recognized that effective resource management involved social factors as much as biological ones. The conservation goals for the park could be met only if there were also a complementary wildlife management program built on the indigenous needs and capabilities of the Izoceño Guarani Indians who had lived in the area for generations.

Although USAID's experience with biodiversity conservation worldwide suggested that local user involvement results in more effective programs, dealing directly with the Izoceño organization (CABI) posed a problem for the Mission. CABI did not have the institutional capacity needed to meet USAID's requirements for prospective grantees. How could the Mission support a group that did not have the systems and procedures required by USAID regulations?

Side-stepping the onerous requirements for a grant, USAID initiated a formal relationship with CABI through a simple purchase order. USAID would buy from CABI a comprehensive and participatory outline for a resource management and conservation plan for the area. This was followed by other measures to ensure that the Izoceño people might play a lead role in shaping development in the Bolivian Chaco.

*USAID Participatory Practices: Learning From Experience* is a case study series of participatory approaches in USAID programs. The case studies are intended to help staff consider similar approaches and share experiences. USAID's Participation Forum and GP-NET, an electronic conversation group, enable development practitioners worldwide to discuss problems and successes in the use of participation. For more information please email Diane LaVoy <dlavoy@usaid.gov> or Chanya Charles <ccharles@aed.org>. Chanya Charles drafted *Participatory Practice #11* after extensive consultation with Mike Yates (USAID/Bolivia), Wendy Kapustin (formerly USAID/PPC), and Kitty O'Hara (USAID/M/OP), and a thorough review of available documentation. December 1997.

## **PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE: Purchase orders to facilitate collaboration**

Through in-depth conversations between leaders of the Izoceño Federation (CABI) and USAID Mission staff over roughly one year, USAID/Bolivia staff learned much from the Izoceños. First, the Izoceños had a long tradition of conservation awareness and action, and had used their traditional social organization effectively to control their hunting and fishing in the Izozog Wetlands. They explained that their traditional healers also played a key role in teaching respect for the environment.

Second, Izoceño leaders acted more as intermediaries for their communities than as decision-makers. Thus, leaders emphasized the need to share the emerging ideas for a collaborative wildlife management program with all 21 Izoceño communities before the program design went any further. Finally, the Izoceños argued persuasively that they should be in charge of the proposed National Park and of the possible wildlife management program in the area. They did not want donors to work through another independent organization, but rather to have direct contact with the Izoceños themselves, or with partners that they identified. In the past, resources were typically channeled through intermediaries picked by the donors, and never quite addressed the priorities of the Izoceño people.

While the Mission staff respected the strengths and capabilities of the Izoceños, and while CABI was already managing more than \$300,000 in Bolivian public funds, there was still the problem of meeting USAID's requirements for financial and technical accountability. Logistically, it would be much easier for USAID/Bolivia to run the activity through a respected NGO with prior USAID experience, rather than deal directly with the Izoceños. An alternative was needed. The idea of using purchase orders was developed by USAID staff during a trip to the Chaco.

The purchase orders offered several advantages. First, because purchase orders are generally issued on a fixed price basis, the requirements of demonstrated institutional capability are much less onerous. Although the technical office, in this case the environment SO Team, needed to make sure that the recipient had met all requirements, the Controller's office did not need to certify the recipient's financial capability as it would for a grant. Second, USAID's purchase of a proposal demonstrated to the Izoceños its serious intent to work with them to design an activity based on their priorities and capabilities, and not only on those of USAID. Third, purchase orders allow for payment in installments, and in this case could provide the Izoceños with the resources they needed to carry out their ambitious consultation process with the 21 communities and then prepare a document that reflected broad public participation and support. Fourth, starting with a relatively simple purchase order could give the Izoceños some of the institutional experience they lacked with respect to working with donor agencies, making it easier for them to work directly with USAID (and other donors) in the future. This would also give both CABI and USAID an opportunity to identify key areas for institutional strengthening through a future cooperative agreement or grant.

Although the Izoceños had a good understanding of the habits of wildlife, they did not have the experience needed, such as assessing population health and nutritional requirements for wildlife, to develop sound wildlife management plans. The Mission took the Izoceños up on their suggestion for a purchase order to be granted to their US NGO partner, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The terms of reference for the second purchase order specified that WCS "should coordinate closely with CABI at all stages of analysis and report preparation, and USAID will actively seek CABI's input in reviewing the outline, draft, and final reports." The Mission returned to the Izoceños to obtain their approval of these terms of reference, and then proceeded to contact WCS. The NGO, which had worked with the Izoceños since 1991, was enthusiastic to expand its existing ties to CABI and to issues of wildlife management in the Chaco. WCS agreed that they would prepare a parallel assessment and provide technical assistance as needed. It was also established that nothing would be done by WCS without the concurrence of the Izoceños.

After the purchase orders, which made the USAID-CABI relationship official, CABI and WCS jointly drew up a proposal to develop a strategic plan for the management of the area's biodiversity and to initiate field activities such as baseline inventories of biological diversity. At CABI's request it was agreed that WCS would be the grantee for the purpose of USAID funding, and would be responsible for managing all external expenses. Although WCS would continue to be responsible to USAID for the total grant funds, it would delegate to CABI responsibility for managing all local operating expenses. All activities would be carried out within the framework of a joint CABI/WCS agreement, prepared and signed by both organizations. This arrangement was favored by CABI, because it would have had problems complying with USAID's institutional capability requirements on its own, yet could retain adequate control of the activity.

## **OUTCOME**

The joint (CABI-WCS) project proposal described a combination rolling design and implementation. This approach allowed the activity to evolve on the basis of improved information, and to direct USAID's scarce development assistance resources to only the most promising opportunities. The approach was highly customer-focused and tailored to accommodate the changing needs and capabilities of the Izoceños. In particular, it allowed them to build their technical and administrative capabilities while creating the wildlife plan, and in this way helped ensure their effective participation in all phases of the process. WCS's role was to strengthen CABI's administrative capacity, carry out scientifically sound inventories of biological diversity, teach the Izoceños to monitor the health of that diversity and related conservation activities, and assist teacher training schools for environmental education.

The consultative process conducted by the Izoceños provided information about the ecology and how the Izoceños traditionally used the resource base. All 21 communities collaborated

on a mapping exercise to discover what resources existed, and how both women and men managed them. The process unified the communities around the land and emphasized a need to protect natural resources. The mapping exercise also dealt with issues of territory and land titles, and provided the Izoceños with another tool to defend their territorial rights against non-indigenous groups. Another important activity was carrying out baseline inventories of the Chaco's biological diversity, with WCS scientists and Izoceño "parabiologists". Each kind of specialist learned from the other.

The collaborative process, whose initial steps were facilitated by the use of purchase orders, provided the basis for a joint CABI/WCS proposal for a much larger phase of activities. As part of their proposal development process, they shared the draft with each of the 21 Izoceño communities. This was done to ensure that the final proposal carefully took into account local needs and capabilities, and maintained the Izoceños' strong sense of ownership of this activity. The final proposal included some innovative provisions to insure continued community participation, such as requiring the WCS scientists to present their findings to community leaders every six months for feedback and comment. A grant was awarded in May 1997.

The Izoceños saw a number of positive outcomes from this program. Most importantly, they felt empowered by the confidence that USAID had in them to participate directly in the management of the program, as well as USAID's careful efforts to insure that no activities were undertaken without their full and informed participation and consent. They recognized that USAID helped them establish their own priorities for long-term management of the resource base, and knew that they would play the lead role in shaping the fate of the Bolivian Chaco. Finally, they believed that other donors in the country would respond, thereby enhancing the positions of other indigenous groups in Bolivia. USAID further assisted the Izoceños in this regard by facilitating a series of well-attended donor coordination meetings on the Chaco. In addition, CABI is now providing technical assistance to other indigenous groups in Bolivia, as well as in the neighboring countries of Argentina and Brazil.

In September 1995, the Government of Bolivia formally decreed the Kaa-Iya Chaco National Park, with a total land area roughly the size of Costa Rica. It also ratified CABI's leading role in the Park's administration. This is the first time an indigenous group will manage a park in Bolivia, and offers a powerful model for community-based biodiversity conservation.

Under Bolivia's new Popular Participation Law, CABI is now recognized as the civil, as well as the traditional, authority. They are seeking ways to increase their access to municipal-level decision-making processes, and national revenue-sharing funds to better address their own development priorities.

Finally, a representative of the Izoceños is an active member of USAID's expanded Strategic Objective Team for the Environment. An Izoceño presence on the Team provides valued real customer "ground-truthing" of program and policy activities across the portfolio, and expands

USAID's perspectives with other ideas and visions for sustainable development.

## **DISCUSSION POINTS**

1) The purchase order was a tool used in the context of USAID/Bolivia's reengineered operations. Reengineering allowed for the rolling design and implementation, and encouraged a serious and steady customer focus. In contrast, preparation of a detailed project paper prior to initiation of field activities (as would have been the case before reengineering) would almost certainly have increased the role of WCS (or other players) in the program, and decreased the role of CABI. The Izoceños' strong sense of "ownership" of and commitment to the program is expected to pay high dividends in the years ahead.

Reengineering also allowed for the increased involvement of Strategic Objective Team staff in the design of this activity. For example, three members of the core SOT from different Mission offices visited the Chaco to work with the Izoceños, and two other core SOT members from two additional offices met several times with the Izoceños at USAID headquarters. This high level and early involvement from five different USAID offices represented on the SOT would have been almost unheard of before reengineering.

2) USAID's ability to work with local organizations is still constrained by very demanding requirements for grants. The utility of the purchase order mechanism is limited since additional competition and contract clauses are required for procurements over \$25,000. In this case, the problem is less acute because of the excellent working relations between CABI and WCS, which allowed the Izoceños substantial control even though the grant was given to a U.S. NGO.

## **RESOURCES**

*Izoceno Fish and Wildlife Management in the Bolivian Gran Chaco.* (June 1996). Prepared for USAID by Wildlife Conservation Society and the Capitanía del Alto y Bajo Izozog.