

REPORT OF
A PVC CONSULTATION ON NEW DIRECTIONS
FOR THE FUTURE
JUNE 7-8, 2001

OFFICE OF PRIVATE AND VOLUNTARY COOPERATION
UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL
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I. INTRODUCTION

Two days of spirited discussion took place on June 7th and 8th when 58 senior-level representatives from 37 US PVOs, 8 CDOs, 5 Southern NGOs and 8 other stakeholders met with the full PVC staff in a participatory consultation to provide input to the office's next five-year strategic plan. This was the latest in a year-long effort by PVC to seek input from inside and outside the Agency.

Discussions focused on best practices in a variety of PVO/NGO interest areas: emerging trends of importance to development and their implications for PVC and PVOs; the *New Directions* paper (based on the work of a PVC task force and which outlined some options for future PVC programming); a future PVC mission statement; and even a contest to re-name PVC.

Sessions were designed to maximize participation, with those attending seated at round tables of eight, organized so that representatives of all stakeholder groups would be present at each table. Each topic taken up was first discussed at the tables, subsequently shared with the full group, discussed briefly in plenary and then synthesized. Results were then posted on the walls.

II. MAJOR CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONSULTATION

The rich discussions during the two-day meeting generated many important conclusions. The conclusions are listed below in priority order based on the amount of emphasis given them by participants.

- **Consultation.** PVOs¹ valued the opportunity to provide input to PVC's strategic planning process as well as the chance to discuss the whole range of PVC/PVO/NGO interaction. They want this sort of consultation to continue through further meetings, feedback mechanisms, and an interactive PVC webpage. Such a webpage was already under development at the time of the consultation and was launched by PVC two weeks later.

Participants also want PVC to promote the work of PVOs and NGOs within USAID and to build alliances with other bureaus to leverage funds for programs in which PVOs have demonstrated expertise and have generated best practices.

- **Simplification.** Participants expressed a clear, widespread desire for PVC to simplify its grantmaking procedures and shorten the process. Suggestions included dividing the Matching Grant money into separate pots. This could be done by tailoring grant requirements more precisely for specific programs, e.g. PVO/corporate partnerships, or according to category of PVO: one pot for established PVOs; one for "new guys" with innovative ideas; and one for new, small PVOs. Other suggestions were to streamline the RFA process, to reduce the number of objectives included in one grant,

¹ In this paper, the term 'PVOs' includes Cooperative Development Organizations (CDOs).

and to explore the use of block grants for long-time grantees as has been done by the European Union. Some participants suggested that monitoring should focus more on impact and less on quantification of what grantees have done. Lastly, PVOs were pleased that missions can now 'buy in' to PVC programs and hope that more will do so in the future.

- Shift in Roles. Grantees are committed to shifting their roles from being providers of direct services to becoming facilitators of operational work carried out by local NGOs. PVOs also see the need to get more involved in policy dialogue. Meeting participants used phrases such as 'brokers of organizational development and capacity building' as ways to describe their emerging roles. This is a sign that PVOs are moving away from direct grassroots involvement to focus more energy on strengthening the intermediate level, that is local NGOs as the primary non-profit service providers.
- Financial Sustainability. While grantees expressed hope that PVO/corporate partnerships and multi-stakeholder relationships would provide sources of new funding for their programs, they were also interested in having PVC continue to make financial sustainability a programming emphasis. Participants still look to PVC to continue to help them to diversify their funding base, to operate in a more business-like way, and to create cost recovery mechanisms. Grantees also recommended that business models be used in local NGO development and that more opportunities be developed for local NGOs to access funding from USAID missions.

Participants also commented on the need for changes in legal and regulatory structures in developing and transition countries to support the growth and viability of the independent sector. These changes would best be promoted by NGO networks in specific countries. While there is little PVC can do in this regard, it can encourage USAID missions to support these efforts.

- US PVO – Southern NGO Partnerships. Grantees are now fully committed to creating and developing partnerships with Southern NGOs. They recognize that they do not know as much as they need to about creating successful partnerships and understand that their organizational structures, policies, and procedures, as well as USAID requirements, create constraints that must be dealt with to ensure mutually beneficial, egalitarian relationships.
- Civil Society Growth and Capacity Building. Participants recognized the tremendous growth in civil society around the world and the important need to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs and other civil society organizations even in places where government is not supportive of such efforts. Decentralization, democratization and local development are important and challenging areas of activity for civil society and require capacity building, not only of PVOs and NGOs but of governments and donors as well. Grantees continue to want PVC capacity building assistance to go to them for their own needs and through them to strengthen local NGOs. Participants

also noted the increase in South to South development collaboration and the need for PVC to promote these efforts.

- Standards. PVOs are eager to develop standards and accreditation processes for both partnerships and capacity building in order to ensure a rigorous approach to developing successful relationships and strengthening their own and partner organizations. ‘Results’ and ‘accountability’ have entered fully into the lexicon of the community. Grantees would welcome PVC involvement in the standards development process.
- Advocacy and Networks. Participants recognize that they need to work together with local NGOs to influence national and sectoral policies in poor countries. They also appreciate the role of PVO/NGO networks in promoting and enabling the growth of the NGO sector and in increasing the scale of PVO/NGO outreach and impact on poverty eradication and social justice. Participants want PVC to include capacity building for negotiation and policy dialogue in PVO projects and were pleased with PVC’s intention to strengthen these activities through PVO/NGO networks.
- PVO – Corporate Partnerships. Grantees are keenly interested in creating more PVO/corporate partnerships to generate more funding for their programs and to expand development outreach and impact. Much has been learned over the past 10 years about how to approach these relationships. Nevertheless, PVOs look to PVC for assistance in targeted funding for these efforts and collection of best practices. Participants also thought PVC might be able to leverage these relationships or provide incentives for them as its British bilateral counterpart, DFID, has done through its challenge fund.
- Information Technology. Grantees are uniformly interested in learning more about information technology and incorporating more IT applications into their work. Participants recognized that few in the PVO community know enough about the full range of information technology uses and applications. Participants look to PVC to provide opportunities for grantees to learn more through the collection of best practices, more policy dialogue, and exploration of a clearinghouse of information that could possibly be arranged through InterAction.
- Conflict – Relief – Development. Participants appreciate USAID’s expanded interest in incorporating conflict prevention and response strategies into development programs, given the widespread incidence of crises around the globe. PVOs appreciate what PVC has already done to incorporate disaster-related planning and response in its grant programs and welcomed PVC’s intention to improve grantee capacity to respond in crisis situations and to strengthen the linkages between relief and development.
- Multi-Stakeholder Alliances. As with PVO/corporate relationships, PVOs expressed interest in multi-stakeholder arrangements and, in particular, the Global Development Alliance and PVC’s potential brokering efforts. Given that this is relatively new

territory for both PVOs and USAID, some participants were skeptical about potential interest by foundations and corporations. Multi-stakeholder operational arrangements are complicated endeavors and require very careful planning, negotiation, and clear agreements as to roles and responsibilities. PVC's earlier work in this area was recognized as important in laying the groundwork for success in these ventures.

III. THE NEW DIRECTIONS PAPER

Participants generally liked PVC's *New Directions* paper and the six possible future programming options described therein. They especially liked PVC's plans to work closely with USAID missions to strengthen the capacity of Southern NGOs through the Capable Partners initiative. They welcomed the possibility of mission buy-ins to PVC grants. They also endorsed PVC's plans to enhance the role of civil society in developing countries through efforts to strengthen policy dialogue, especially through networks and alliances.

Participants noted that some of the proposed initiatives in the *New Directions* paper could be integrated into existing programs and cautioned that new activities related to these priorities should not be done at the expense of current programs. They encouraged PVC to prioritize the options and state those for which funding would be available.

IV. PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout the two days, a good deal of time was devoted to the topic of partnerships. Three kinds of partnerships were discussed: those between US PVOs and Southern NGOs; those between US PVOs and corporations; and those involving PVOs in multi-stakeholder relationships or alliances. Participants had most to say about partnerships between PVOs and Southern NGOs.

US PVO – Southern NGO Partnerships

As noted earlier, the US PVO community is now fully committed to creating and developing partnerships with Southern NGOs that strengthen their leadership capacity, legitimacy, organizational viability and help to ensure their survival. After several years of focused work on this topic, PVOs understand the value of such relationships and the trust, transparency, joint decision making and mutuality necessary in undertaking them. Participants indicated that they have found the use of formal agreements such as memoranda of understanding to be important ways to explore and negotiate key aspects of the relationship. They recognize that partnerships extend beyond a single project and need to involve the two organizations more fully. In fact, they acknowledge that much more work is necessary to identify the ways PVOs operate that create barriers to good partnerships and what is needed to eliminate these barriers in areas such as program development methodologies, policies and procedures. They also noted that many local NGOs have problems when PVOs pass along to the local NGO USAID financial and accountability requirements.

Although there have been numerous workshops, conferences and papers written about how to develop relationships over the last decade, successful partnerships are still relatively rare. Participants indicated that PVOs look to PVC for assistance in improving their partnerships with local NGOs. Some expressed the desire for standards as one way to provide guidelines for developing these partnerships. These would help them to make appropriate organizational and programmatic adaptations and to sort through difficult topics such as finances, rights to data, mediation and dispute resolution procedures. This is especially so in partnerships created using USAID money where the Agency's requirements add complications to the relationship. Some participants also suggested that perhaps an accreditation process be put in place as a way to certify good partnerships.

US PVO – Corporate Partnerships

Participants discussed two orientations toward PVO/corporate partnerships. The first is engagement by a PVO with a corporation for operational purposes, i.e. to carry out a development program together in a particular locality. The second is engagement by a PVO with a corporation for fundraising purposes. In this arrangement, a PVO and corporation make an agreement through which a corporation or corporate foundation grants money to the PVO or engages in a fundraising effort with a PVO.

In terms of the first type of PVO/corporate partnership, two major approaches to corporations were viewed as best practices.

- It is important to view the corporation as a partner with something to be gained from entering into an agreement with a PVO. Understand the corporation's enterprise, its motivation and do not expect it to be interested in a partnership with a PVO for purely altruistic reasons.
- PVO/corporate partnerships work best when both sides use sound business and financial practices and the relationship is based on utilization of each side's comparative advantage.

Some participants also noted that PVOs may be more likely to create successful partnerships with corporations if these are developed at the national or local level rather than through corporate headquarters in the United States. Company representatives resident in developing countries have an understanding of the local context and are more interested in, and can envision the benefits of, partnerships with PVOs or NGOs better than corporate staff based in the US.

Regarding the second type of partnership, focused on fundraising, participants noted that existing corporate partnerships with PVOs include efforts by the corporation to recruit volunteers for development programs, help employees develop volunteer networks and undertake fundraising through corporate customers. Others have exchanged intellectual capital to develop joint ventures and to build NGO capacity.

Some participants recommended that PVC create a separate Matching Grant program to focus on private sector partnerships.

V. CAPACITY BUILDING

Participants articulated what they considered to be the essential elements of effective capacity building.

- Capacity building should be done in a mutually beneficial way and be done with an engaging, inclusive, participatory spirit.
- Standards should be developed to provide rigor in capacity building efforts.
- An assessment mechanism should be put in place to help the organizations determine benchmarks and monitor their progress towards their goals.
- An accreditation process should be developed. (Some participants recommended that organizations eventually ‘graduate.’)
- These principles should be disseminated widely within the development community to foster better capacity building programs.

Participants noted that capacity building should not be done for its own sake but rather as a means towards an end, that is, integrated into results-oriented programming. At the same time, they said that the motivations of Southern partner organizations are key to success and, therefore, capacity building should be driven by the needs and requests of the particular organizations rather than imposed from outside. This highlights the need for PVOs to design their results-led programs together with the local NGOs whose capacity is to be strengthened.

VI. ADVOCACY AND NETWORKS

Participants made clear that they want PVC to give more attention to advocacy in at least three ways:

- Assistance to PVOs to strengthen their abilities in policy dialogue;
- Support to PVO sectoral networks which provide a variety of services, including mobilization of advocacy efforts by their members;
- Assistance through US PVOs to local NGOs to strengthen their capacity to influence host countries regarding sectoral, national and local policies.

At the field level, some PVOs are involved with local NGOs and networks in advocacy for sectoral policy reform in areas such as health, agriculture, etc. as well as national policies related to poverty, human rights, and policies and regulations which directly affect the independent sector.

Some participants in the consultation expressed the hope that PVC would encourage meetings by sector, which could foster the development of new networks. USAID missions could encourage this at the country level as well.

VII. SUMMARY

This participatory consultation by PVC with its grantees and other stakeholders enabled significant input to PVC in terms of PVO thinking and also provided an opportunity for grantees to engage with one another about important trends, practices and needs in their work. Certain themes surfaced repeatedly. Grantees are committed to partnerships with Southern NGOs and some even want to develop standards for these relationships. They acknowledged the importance of accountability mechanisms and a results orientation, but they strongly urged PVC to simplify grantmaking procedures, especially for long-term grantees with proven track records. PVOs are eager to create more partnerships with corporations and to enter into multi-stakeholder relationships as envisioned in the proposed Global Development Alliance.

Participants liked the ideas proposed in the *New Directions* paper, especially PVC's plans to work closely with USAID missions to strengthen the capacity of Southern NGOs and to enhance the role of civil society in developing countries through policy dialogue and support to networks and alliances. PVOs continue to look to PVC for leadership and resources to enable experimentation and innovation which, in the past, have led to successful program approaches, for example, in micro-enterprise and child survival. Lastly, participants want to take greater advantage of the information technology revolution and look to PVC to help facilitate this effort. The PVO community clearly appreciated this consultation with PVC and looks forward to further opportunities to continue the dialogue.

A PVC CONSULTATION ON NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE
June 7-8, 2001
Washington Plaza Hotel

Thursday, June 7, 2001
9:00-5:00

Morning

- ✓ Welcome by Judy Gilmore, Director Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation
- ✓ Agenda Review and Introductions
- ✓ Best Practices Gallery
- ✓ Observations on Best Practices by Plenary
- ✓ Emerging Trends Dialogue

LUNCH 12:30-2:00 (Provided in the hotel dining room)

Afternoon

- ✓ Presentation by Judy Gilmore on New Directions for PVC
- ✓ Questions & Answers
- ✓ Small Group Discussions on New Directions
- ✓ Feedback Dialogue
- ✓ Wrap Up and Close the Day

INFORMAL RECEPTION

Friday, June 8, 2001
9:00-1:00

- ✓ Welcome/Agenda Review
- ✓ **A Vision For PVC's Future Role**
- ✓ **Topic Group Discussions**
- ✓ Report-Out of Key Ideas
- ✓ Closing Remarks

A PVC Consultation
on
New Directions For The Future

June 7-8, 2001
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