

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE
TO REVIEW THE MISSION AND PERFORMANCE OF THE
CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND EVALUATION (CDIE)
IN THE
BUREAU FOR POLICY AND PROGRAM COORDINATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Task Force* was asked to review the performance, structure and related program and management functions of the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) in the Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination.

The Task Force met in four plenary sessions between October 20 and November 3, 1994. It also interviewed 18 senior USAID managers and users of CDIE services, various representatives from the evaluation units of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the OECD and reviewed extensive written materials relating to CDIE.

The Task Force reached agreement on a number of recommendations relating to the three principal components of CDIE: the Program and Operations Assessment Division (POA); the Performance Measurement and Evaluation Division (PME); and the Development Experience Information Division (DI). In addition to outlining these recommendations, this report also identifies several areas where the Task Force believes additional review, either by CDIE, PPC or senior USAID management, is warranted.

The recommendations relating to all three divisions reflect the interest of the Administrator, the AA/PPC and the Director of CDIE that the Task Force should review both the mission and performance of CDIE in order to improve its overall efficiency and effectiveness.

As a general matter, the Task Force concluded that USAID's ability to learn from experience and manage for results will be enhanced if all three divisions of CDIE are better integrated into PPC's general policy and budget formulation processes.

The recommendations relating to the POA Division (Strategic Evaluations) are based on the Task Force's conclusion that USAID should maintain a capacity to undertake serious and independent program evaluations relevant to the needs of Agency managers and policy makers.

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TASK FORCE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. CDIE/POA - Program and Operations Assessment (Strategic Evaluation)

Background: POA has thirteen full-time equivalent positions (FTEs), five full-time contractors and a large number of short-term consultants who work on specific evaluation studies. It had an FY 94 program budget of \$2 million. POA is responsible for conducting objective strategic evaluations of program and operational issues.

Discussion: The Task Force was asked, inter alia, to determine whether CDIE's performance meets the expectations of its primary customers, especially senior USAID managers. In regard to the POA Division, informed outside observers (e.g., the evaluation units of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the OECD) rate CDIE's strategic evaluations as uniformly excellent. In fact, CDIE is viewed as being on the "cutting edge" of evaluation methodology, clearly a leader in the development community on this subject.

Inside USAID, the view is uneven. A number of USAID officials interviewed who have previous or current line management responsibility found specific evaluations (e.g. export promotion, democracy and governance) to be of great utility. But many senior managers, as well as other officials, question whether the Agency's strategic evaluations are relevant to Agency program priorities.

The Task Force recognizes that the capacity for substantive and independent longer-term strategic evaluations is essential to enhancing program effectiveness, but it also believes steps can be taken, without jeopardizing POA's integrity, to make strategic evaluations more timely, relevant and useful to the entire Agency.

It is also important for senior management to recognize that this capacity is not suited for quick response policy studies or for preparation of public relations material. Other parts of PPC or the Agency's Public Affairs staff should draw, as appropriate, on evaluations to strengthen their work for these other objectives.

Recommendations:

1. POA's agenda-setting process for evaluations should be continuous, interactive and demand-driven. POA should actively solicit information about client needs (timeframe, content, and user-friendly format). When demand dictates, and a satisfactory quality of finding is feasible, POA should depart more often than in the recent past from the more time consuming and highly rigorous model. For example:
 - The CDIE Director (with the AA/PPC) should make presentations and engage in dialogue about the evaluation office's agenda at senior management meetings at least once every six months.
 - A representative from the evaluation office should attend regular meetings of PPC's Senior Policy Advisors and G's Center Directors.
 - USAID professional staff should be encouraged to notify CDIE whenever they foresee the need for strategic evaluations in particular areas.
2. POA should specifically reintroduce a number of shorter-term project impact evaluations as a complement to longer term studies. In this process, POA should follow the "Bennet" model of using senior agency staff drawn from outside the region and CDIE to participate in the reviews, which should take 3-6 weeks at most, and culminate in a presentation of findings directly to the Administrator.
3. Evaluations should be prepared in two formats: (a) a full version for technical personnel and program managers, and (b) a shorter, more polished version for senior managers and people outside USAID, highlighting lessons learned in an easy-to-read and attractive style and format.
4. CDIE should review every step in the evaluation process with the objective of reducing the average two year period from start to finish. For example, reductions may be achieved by: (a) examining the cost and length of the editing process; (b) a more rapid peer review process; and (c) by conducting simultaneous rather than sequential case study evaluations.
5. USAID should maintain a high proportion of foreign service personnel in the evaluation office (at least 50 percent) to strengthen the relevance and credibility of evaluations, and the evaluation skills of Agency staff. To encourage this, Agency management should ensure that CDIE assignments are rewarded (e.g. through onward assignments and other appropriate means), making it a mainstream office for career advancement.

6. CDIE and the Regional Bureaus should provide more opportunities for POA staff to interact with field managers. (For example, an evaluator may be temporarily assigned to the field to develop the evaluation component of a project.)
7. The Administrator should take a direct interest in the findings of major evaluations (including targeted impact evaluations) as a way to encourage USAID's attention to the lessons of the evaluations and the value of the system.

II. CDIE - PME Performance Measurement and Evaluation

Background: PME has nine FTEs and 15 full-time contractors (MSI, Inc.). It had an FY 94 program budget of \$2.2 million. PME is responsible for developing, analyzing and reporting on PRISM and providing technical assistance on Agency evaluations generally.

Discussion: The Task Force found that PME's role in developing and helping to implement the PRISM system, and in providing technical assistance and guidance for evaluations generally, is viewed positively within the Agency, especially among those with PRISM-related field experience.

The Agency's existing performance measurement system (PRISM) is expected to evolve with reengineering. Some elements of PRISM will undoubtedly be retained at the field level, and a new system of Agency-wide goals and performance measurement indicators will be superimposed on the existing system.

The Task Force understands that PPC will take the lead role (coordinating with M, G, BHR and the regional Bureaus) in developing common goals and performance indicators required under reengineering.

In regard to PME's non-PRISM functions, the Task Force believes further analysis is warranted into the role CDIE plays in supporting Mission-level project evaluations. While this was not an area officially within the purview of the Task Force, anecdotal reports during the interview process left the Task Force less than confident that the energy and resources devoted to such evaluations produce commensurate results.

Recommendations:

1. PPC should utilize PME's PRISM-based experience in developing Agency-wide performance indicators required by reengineering.
2. PPC should identify ways in which PME can thereafter play a more interactive role, within PPC, in applying the results of the new performance measurement system in PPC's policy formulation role.
3. PPC should also utilize PME to help identify ways to make the new performance measurement system serve the Agency at all levels.
4. As part of its ongoing responsibility to help implement the Administrator's May 1994 decision that all Missions and Bureaus "develop clearly defined objectives and performance indicators and use performance information to manage for results", PPC should explore how PME can play a more

proactive and qualitative role in ensuring that individual systems contain objectively verifiable and measurable indicators with related baseline data and targets for measuring progress toward identified strategic objectives.

5. PPC should review non-CDIE evaluation activities and establish standards to ensure the consistency and quality of evaluations Agency-wide.
6. These functions should be carried out within PME's current FTE and contractor personnel ceilings.

III. CDIE/DI - Development Experience Information Division

Background: DI has four FTEs and over 100 full-time contractors (under three contracts - Academy for Educational Development; LTS, Inc., and Development Technologies, Inc.). Its FY 94 program core budget was \$2.5 million, plus an additional \$4.5-\$5 million from fees and buy-ins from missions and bureaus.

DI's function is to serve as the Agency's "institutional memory" of development experience information in electronic and other data bases. It preserves and disseminates knowledge of the Agency's performance and experience (and the experience of others) in planning, implementing, and evaluating development projects. It implements its functions by providing short-term analysis and reference services to USAID and the development community.

Discussion: In general, the Task Force found broad satisfaction with the services provided by DI. During the interview process, however, other issues surfaced that raise substantial questions that the Task Force believes require further study by AA/PPC and senior management.

For example, the primary issue posed to the Task Force for the DI Division was whether DI should remain organizationally as part of CDIE. The Task Force concluded, however, that the key issue is not necessarily the location of DI, but whether Agency-wide information services are effectively coordinated and managed.

In this regard, the Task Force is concerned about the apparent high level of resources -- both financial and personnel -- USAID devotes to the collection and dissemination of development/technical information throughout the Agency and the possibility of duplication and overlapping responsibilities as well as a lack of coordination among the units involved.

The Task Force is also concerned with the use of DI contracts to obtain personnel resources for other Bureaus through buy-ins to DI contracts. The Task Force suggests a review (by desk audit or other appropriate on-site methods) be conducted to assure such personnel are performing relevant DI functions, i.e., facilitating responses to information requests.

The Task Force also believes it would be appropriate for PPC to analyze whether the value added by the analytic work of DI justifies the expense of this service.

Finally, information and communication technologies are exploding, increasing the availability of data bases and "off-the-shelf" analysis to USAID staff. At the same time, the DI function (in terms of staff and Agency resources expended) is larger today than it was in 1981. The Task Force believes the Agency should examine whether today's technologies would justify

any alteration in the resources devoted to the DI function.

Recommendations:

1. Retain DI within CDIE.¹
2. Create within CDIE a formal mechanism for receipt and assignment of information requests, particularly from missions and bureaus, which would enable an independent judgement to be made as to the most appropriate response point, e.g., Global Centers or DI for missions or other bureaus.
3. Establish a notification system between DI and G of questions received from missions and bureaus and the response provided. Encourage, whenever practical, substantive review by G technical staff of analytic responses prepared by DI.
4. CDIE should define DI client priorities (i.e. which needs should be serviced first). As part of this effort, there should be a review of DI resource expenditures for each client group and each type of service (e.g. missions, bureaus, other donors, private citizens).
5. PPC should review all USAID-funded information centers (approximately 70 Agency contracts - mostly in G - contain requirements for providing information on a variety of subjects) to avoid or minimize duplication of effort.
6. DI, in collaboration with M/IRM, should assess available new technologies and information sources which could potentially be effectively and efficiently used and directly accessed by Bureaus and field staff, thereby reducing reliance on DI as an intermediary, saving money even as benefits and speed of access are increased.

¹ Organizationally, a case can be made for retaining DI in PPC or moving it to the Global Bureau (given G's responsibility to provide expert advice to USAID staff on many of the same issues as those addressed by DI). However, the Task Force believes the best option is to leave DI in CDIE. We also note that after USAID moves to a single building, two years hence, the DI library may be co-located with other Agency information dissemination units such as the public affairs office, the business information center, the contractor information services, etc. This may or may not require a change in organizational alignment. It should, however, further strengthen the independent and objective features of DI and provide more flexibility for it to serve a wide range of clients both within and outside USAID.

7. A review (by desk audit or other appropriate on-site methods) should be conducted to assure that personnel provided to other Bureaus through buy-ins are performing relevant DI functions, i.e. facilitating responses to information requests.
8. PPC should commission a full, expert review of DI's expenditures to ensure DI is meeting agency information needs in the most cost-effective way. The review should include a consideration of whether the value added by DI analytic work justifies the expenditure on this service.

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