

# **RAISE WARP Task Order**

## **Activity 3D: Regional Integration Conference**

### **Report on Conference Logistics Challenges**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

This report outlines key issues involved in the logistical planning and implementation of the USAID funded West Africa Regional Integration Forum held in Accra, Ghana on October 23-24, 2002. Technical report documentation of the forum and its outcomes has been prepared and distributed by the ADIRA s.a. organization based in Dakar, Senegal.

Before launching into a discussion of challenges, it is useful to review the scope of work for Activity 3D under the RAISE WARP task order. It indicates that a “regional integration seminar (be) organized and conducted in order to gain a clearer understanding of the obstacles inhibiting regional integration, including lack of liberalization, facilitation of cross border trade, continued state ownership, corruption, and lack of decentralization. The location will be determined in conjunction with the West African Enterprise Network (WAEN) and the WARP trade and investment economist. The seminar will be conducted with WAEN and other donor organizations including the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The contractor will work in conjunction with the steering committee, and the WARP trade and investment economist.”

The Regional Integration Seminar was a successful event that brought together over a hundred private enterprise and government officials from the ECOWAS countries. Participants were generally pleased with the seminar itself and the seminar outcomes. Despite hosting a successful event, there were significant challenges encountered in both the planning and implementation phases of the activity. These challenges are described below and recommendations for future conference activities are provided.

#### **CHALLENGES**

- **The conference steering committee was poorly conceived.** Specifically, there were too many members (nearly 20) and the team was almost exclusively focused on the technical aspects of the conference. As a multi-donor event, no one organization was recognized as the conference leader.

The result was confusion in responsibilities, communication, and most importantly accountability. Planning conference calls were unnecessarily long, sometimes unfocused, and yielded few results.

- **The conference mission evolved in unanticipated directions.** The original focus of the regional integration seminar was to bring together ministerial and regional organization officials to gain a clearer understanding of the obstacles inhibiting regional integration. A workable group size of approximately 50 was foreseen. Over the course of several months of planning the seminar became a private sector focused event for a large number of participants (160). It was very difficult to get the steering committee to understand the USAID scope and the importance of inviting and including government officials.
- **The conference was inadequately funded.** USAID's RAISE task order budget allowed for assistance with the many logistics needs of the conference as well as a certain subsidization for government attendees. There were a number of other donors involved in the seminar planning who did not put forward monetary resources, yet made commitments based on inappropriate assumptions of what the budget would cover.
- **The technical coordinating firm hired by Canadian CIDA, ADIRA s.a., was wholly ineffective in its management of the process and resources for the conference.** As the two contractors working on the conference, ADIRA and DAI should have been in more frequent contact from the beginning of the planning process. Those items that had the most negative impact on the seminar were:
  - ADIRA chose a conference location, made commitments to panelists and attendees regarding funding, and negotiated with the local firms who were working on the conference. As ADIRA had no funds to employ or honor the commitments it made, DAI should have been involved in all negotiations.
  - ADIRA failed to share information in a timely fashion which resulted in the loss of hotel space and necessity of booking several different locations for participants. This increased the overall administrative and transportation costs of the conference.
  - ADIRA, responsible for conference planning, did not coordinate with the host government. Meetings with key government officials in Ghana were held just 2 days prior to the beginning of the conference. As a result, there was animosity from the host government who felt they should have played a key role, but were not allowed to do so.
  - ADIRA selected a conference site without adequate consideration of cost and customer service. The hotel's management was wholly unwilling to work with the planning committee, which should have led to the selection of another suitable site. This resulted in significant cost increases for labor of the conference logistician.

- ADIRA invited Individuals to participate as panelists and gave them unreasonable expectations regarding support they would receive. Though ADIRA was told several times that USAID only had funding for government officials and could not fund participants or panelists, they continued along as though they had never been given monetary guidance. The end result was that in order for the conference to be held as envisioned, limited per diem and travel expenses had to be paid for panelists. Many panelists indicated they would no longer attend if the committee didn't pay for them. These kinds of agreements should be clear at the time an invitation is extended, not the week before the conference is to begin.
- Even after a clear agreement of what USAID could fund was put into writing to ADIRA, the management continued to make decisions that elevated conference costs without discussing these decisions with the USAID contractor. Literally everyday the logistician was presented with additional requests for payment that were not within the agreed upon purview for the conference.
- ADIRA changed arrangements negotiated and agreed upon with the participating hotels and with our local logistics firm, Brooks Services without consulting the USAID contractor. This led to confusion and frustration on several levels with both our implementing partners and the service organizations with whom the USAID contractor held fixed price purchase orders. The degree to which this occurred cannot not be underscored strongly enough. The reconciliation of bills took several days instead of several hours as is normal for a conference of a similar size. Fixed price purchase orders had to be renegotiated, verified, and executed by contracting officers due to the complications arising from ADIRA's representative inappropriately instructing the hotels and the local logistics firm on their duties and our expectations. Even after several discussions with ADIRA's representative directing him to cease and desist operating in this manner, USAID's contractor's arrangements were not respected.
- ADIRA added and changed names of participants they wanted USAID to sponsor without prior consultation with USAID's contractor.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Ensure that the conference planning committee is divided into smaller groups for specific actions. There should be a logistics team, a technical team, a host government coordination team, etc. in order to maximize efficiency.
- The effectiveness of multi-donor activities, such as the regional integration seminar, can be improved by a representative from each donor participating actively in the design and implementation of the activity.

- It would be helpful for the donor organizations to determine who will take the lead and clearly identify the roles each donor (or donor's representative) will play.
- Lines of communication must be established early on, tasks assigned, and measures for accountability instituted by the activity steering committee.
- It is important to stay true to activity's mission. Some of the difficulties encountered with respect to the seminar were due to changes made in the seminar's scope.
- Adequate personnel resources must be allocated in realistic measure according to the complexity of task. Conferences requiring per diem distribution are significantly more labor intensive than a standard plan/implement conference. One logistics staff person was not adequate to meet the needs of over 100 participants.
- A reconnaissance trip is essential to the management of conference logistics. The firm responsible for logistics must be the organization to undertake such a planning trip.