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USAID/EL SALVADOR'S TRAINING STRATEGY

The following Mission Training Strategy was produced by the Office of Education and Training of USAID/El Salvador, drawing on the results of previous activities carried out under the HERNS research

MISSION TRAINING STRATEGY

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I The Problem

Even though change is the focus of almost all development efforts, and training is the major means of effecting change, traditional USAID-sponsored training has failed to reach its potential This conclusion is based on substantial evidence from USAID studies over the past 40 years and from the recent USAID El Salvador analysis of its training programs

The following strategy represents a practical means of *improving the effectiveness* of training activities The strategy borrows heavily from the CLASP model, but is also unique to the special requirements that traditional training was originally intended to fill Recommendations from the "El Salvador Participant Training Study" (constituting Parts One and Two of the present report) call for a new Mission training strategy focusing on the creation of *change agents*, a much more *participatory approach* which incorporates all stakeholders, and on *extensive contractor implementation responsibilities* The strategy will be tested and revised in El Salvador during FY95

II The Change Agent Concept Training Focuses on *People*

Development is a *people process* *People* play the key role in fostering institutional and project success Financial and material contributions, though often essential, seldom tip the scales toward success Sustainable development is derived from fundamental changes in the attitudes of all individuals participating in an activity — the implementors, the beneficiaries, and all other interested parties

Characteristics of Salvadorans who can most successfully lead modern development initiatives have been identified The term "**change agent**" is used to describe individuals with these characteristics

DEFINITION - Change Agents have the technical skills and motivation to initiate change themselves, or effectively support change initiated by their colleagues, agencies, or government. Whenever practical, the training experience should not just create better technicians, but well-rounded leaders of change who have a wide variety of new skills, attitudes, and commitments, and who are willing to take risks. Training should develop sensitivity to areas of USAID interest such as democratic processes, health, education, sustainable economic development, participation, equality of opportunities for men and women, and environmental issues.

A proven model for the formation and support of change agents includes two key elements:

- (1) **relevant academic/technical training** that suits the abilities of the trainee and the needs of the project, and
- (2) **change agent empowerment**, a powerful and flexible training concept, designed to enhance an individual's self-confidence in effecting change, and awareness of important USAID development issues.

In the majority of cases, "formal" change agent empowerment is composed of training in the following areas, among others:

- leadership
- communications
- group dynamics
- creativity
- the training of trainers
- strategic planning
- management/supervision

For very senior level officials unable to attend formal training sessions, or as an initial approach to very resistant individuals, "informal" change agent empowerment may be more appropriate. The "informal" approach may consist of special attention such as managed exposure to positive Mission or project activities, meetings with key project-related individuals or high USAID/US Government officials, or limited participation in project training.

DEFINITION - Change Agent Empowerment is the process of instilling in individuals the importance of change, and providing them with the tools to bring it about.

Imagine what is likely to happen when a large number of change agents, each one ready to tackle a difficult societal or institutional problem, are brought together? Working collaboratively, they can constitute a critical mass of dynamic doers that can initiate quick, appropriate, and sustainable change.

III Participation The *Right* Way to Do Training

*Strong emphasis on the **participatory** process is key to the new strategy
It is mandatory that all stakeholders actively participate in all phases of the process*

Training weaknesses have been identified and reiterated for years. Nonetheless, USAID-sponsored training has continually repeated errors in design and implementation. The CLASP program is one of the few exceptions, successfully avoiding many of the old pitfalls by incorporating sound development principles. The present training strategy, while incorporating much of the CLASP model, adds other concepts that increase its flexibility and participatory nature.

The flexibility of the strategy lies in its concentration on training on an individual or small group basis, on its inclusion of third country and in-country training resources, and on the broad range and independence from technical training of its change agent orientation.

Strong emphasis on the **participatory** process is key to the new strategy. It is mandatory that individuals and institutions actively participate in all phases of the process, from conceptualization of the problem through needs assessment, project design, management, monitoring, evaluation and "follow-through." An important initial step in a participatory process is the identification of appropriate **stakeholders**.

DEFINITION - Stakeholders are people and groups who will, at any time, in any way, be involved in or affected in a significant way by the project. They are the people who have something to win or lose.

With **stakeholder participation** as a fundamental concept in this training strategy, project designers and managers can be ensured, by consulting with the organizations which will be involved in accepting the project's goals, that their efforts reflect the "priorities and values of those who will have to sustain the effort after the donor has left."

Maximum results can be obtained when participation forms the basis of the following four stage process:

- 1) **Training Needs Assessment**
- 2) **Design**
- 3) **Monitoring and Evaluation**
- 4) **Adjustment**

A comprehensive **Training Needs Assessment** is the cornerstone of a results-oriented training program. The *training* needs assessment is preferably conducted as part of the larger *project* needs assessment, but may be conducted at a later date for projects in progress.

DEFINITION - A Training Needs Assessment is, by definition, a participatory process. It identifies the stakeholders, then determines with them the development needs, prioritizes them, clarifies project outputs, specifies appropriate training, and estimates participant levels and group make-up. It also assesses the level of organizational development of the primary institution(s) and recommends organizational interventions that may be needed in order for training to be effective.

Although a training needs assessment is a requirement, it can be managed in a number of ways. It can be carried out by an outside contractor, by national resources, or by a combination of the two. In the case of multiple projects supporting a central objective and involving similar stakeholders, it could be possible to support one overall assessment. As stated previously, it can also be accomplished during the life of the project.

The **design** phase is the most complex stage of the process. During this phase four key concepts should be kept in mind: **1) outputs** as the guiding principle, **2) institutional strengthening** as a supporting structure, **3) the creation of a critical mass or core group** of change agents as the driving force, and **4) a modular design** as the framework that links the various training components.

- 1) The incorporation of well defined project **outputs** into training design is basic. Every training event should stem from a specific project output that is in turn based on the solution of a development problem. Once it is known what is to be accomplished, it must be asked what type of training is necessary and who should be trained. If these issues are not adequately addressed, there is no justification for training.
- 2) **Institutional strengthening** is a common theme running through most USAID projects, but one which is not usually given the attention it deserves. For its success, a well executed institutional analysis, as part of the training needs assessment, is crucial. Again, the institutional analysis should adopt a participatory methodology for maximum effectiveness.

If institutional strengthening is not given priority early in project, then change agents will be hard pressed to reach their potential. Problems related to the larger career environment, such as low salaries, inequitable selection/promotion/reward systems, poor facilities, and lack of equipment or supplies, cannot normally be directly and immediately resolved by training. In the long term however, with the combined power of change agents and the process of institutional strengthening, an organization can be primed to recognize and resolve these types of problems in the future.

- 3) The concept of a project's **change agent critical mass** is an important one to consider in design. It is the straightest and shortest road to **sustainable** institutional change.

DEFINITION - Change agent critical mass is a group of individual change agents, representing various administrative and technical levels within an institution, which is sufficiently large and united in purpose to enjoy the phenomenon of synergism. The power of many individuals working in coordination and harmony is greater than that of those same individuals working independently.

4) High impact training design should be **modular**, including the five essential components listed below. ***No one component is less important or less crucial to effective training than another - the modular design is a seamless process that begins well before, and ends a long time after, the actual training portion.*** Optimally, training is designed as an integral part of overall project design, however, if this is not possible, the same steps can be followed at a later date. Modular training design, also referred to as the **comprehensive learning experience**, should be considered a simple but efficient machine which runs best when its component parts function as designed.

1 **A selection process** in which individuals are chosen for the right reasons. Training is not a gift or a reward.

2 **A commitment stage**, during a pre-training orientation. In this stage,

- OET brings participants, their institutions, and other stakeholders into the process of defining what to expect from training, and
- OET, the institution, and the participants design a *training compact* by which the participants and institutions make a commitment to achieve specific project outputs upon completion of the study phase.

It is during this stage that the concept and basic components of an *action plan* are described to the participants. The action plan becomes the vehicle by which the participants, their supervisors or institutional sponsors, and the Mission consider concrete application. Before training, participants outline their own action plan for later refinement.

DEFINITION - An Action Plan represents the application of the skills and knowledge learned during training to the problems and/or objectives identified during the needs assessment or over the life of the project.

3 **Training**, which is composed of **Technical/Academic training** — what we've traditionally referred to as "training" — and/or **Change Agent Empowerment**. These may be combined or given separately to

individuals or groups, in-country or out. For some training, it will be possible to give the participants the opportunity to further elaborate their action plans as part of the course of study.

4 **Follow-through**, during which the trainees and institutions carry out the commitment made to use the training. During this phase there is continued contractor contact with trainees to support implementation. Some continuing education to reinforce newly learned skills may be included. As one of the first follow-through activities, participants will develop a final action plan.

This training model is a flexible one. It can be adapted for new projects or for those in process, for ministries or for NGOs, for small or large groups. There is really only one rule — the more conscientiously the above concepts of the **comprehensive learning experience** are applied, the more powerful the training results will be.

The third phase in results oriented training is **monitoring and evaluation**. Regular monitoring and periodic evaluation enable the project manager to know, and know in a timely fashion, whether or not training is achieving the results or project outputs it was designed to accomplish.

To ensure the participatory approach is fully achieved, a **stakeholder committee** should work closely with the contractor in both monitoring and evaluation, and as much as possible assume direct responsibility for the process. Stakeholder presence in this phase is key for two basic reasons — (1) stakeholders will bring a variety of viewpoints to the process, and (2) they will insure that misdirections will be quickly discovered and corrected.

An important *short-term* evaluation method of training effectiveness will be the measurement of participants' immediate post-training reaction. For example, such issues should be assessed as

- the relevancy of the training to work responsibilities,
- the applicability of the training to the national technological and cultural realities, and
- training quality and design.

Similar evaluation efforts can be made *mid-term*, attempting to determine

- the level of institutional support provided to graduates, and
- the ability to use the training in the work place.

On a *long-term* basis, at least six months after training, participants can be questioned about

- the availability, quality, and applicability of continued follow-on activities,
- multiplier efforts by the participant,
- special initiatives by the participant related to the training, and
- any changes in the level of institutional acceptance and support.

The fourth and last phase, **adjustment**, follows naturally from excellent, **participatory** monitoring and evaluation. Significant stakeholder participation in training redesign is key to the effectiveness of this phase. This is the phase in which not only bad and

mediocre elements of a project can be corrected, but good and even outstanding aspects can become even better

IV Coordinating with Contractors for Training Triumphs

One major outcome of the Mission review of the "El Salvador Participant Training Study" was the concern of Mission staff that their responsibilities would increase dramatically under a new strategy. Project managers emphasized present work loads and the recent world-wide USAID personnel reductions as significant barriers to involving themselves with a new training approach.

This strategy ensures that project managers will not be required to implement this model, nor be crushed under more bureaucracy. The project managers' role will be to communicate the model to contractors at the needs assessment stage, at the design stage, and during monitoring and evaluation, as well as ultimately ensure compliance with training regulations. In essence, project managers will be in the control tower, but the contractor will be flying the plane.

Generally, the contractor's responsibilities are as follows:

- Designing, in consultation with USAID and other stakeholders, specific training programs,
- Administrative and technical support in selection and evaluation of candidates,
- Organization and implementation of orientation and travel arrangements when needed,
- Coordination with and monitoring of sub-contracted training institutions,
- Development and operation of all training modules, including follow-through,
- Monitoring and evaluation, with stakeholder participation, of training and trainee accomplishments,
- Adjustment, as necessary, with stakeholder participation, of original training plan,
- Reporting of trainee accomplishments to USAID, and
- Advice and assistance as needed to enhance implementation of the project.

Within the Mission, the Office of Education and Training will support implementation of the new strategy in the following areas:

- Providing input on training elements of scopes of work,
- Providing assistance to project managers in the design and process of the training needs assessment,
- Support of follow-through activities, and
- Organizing general quarterly meetings between technical offices and contractors to guide and reinforce the implementation of the new strategy.