

A VESTED INTEREST:

**BSP EXPERIENCES
WITH DEVELOPING
AND MANAGING
GRANT PORTFOLIOS**

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BSP's Analysis and Adaptive Management Program

BIODIVERSITY
SUPPORT PROGRAM

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OVERVIEW

For more than a decade, the Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) has worked worldwide to conserve biological diversity in developing countries and countries in transition by supporting innovative, on-the-ground projects integrating conservation and development, applied research and analysis, and information outreach and exchange. BSP is a consortium of three non-governmental organizations (NGOs): the World Wildlife Fund-U.S. (WWF), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the World Resources Institute (WRI), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). BSP's support for field activities has been provided through regional programs in Africa and Madagascar; Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; Eastern Europe, the Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN), which also operated in the Asia and Pacific region; and the Conservation Impact Grants Program, which funded projects in all these regions. As an intermediary organization transmitting USAID funds, BSP has provided large and small grants using a variety of grantgiving approaches, all ultimately linked to biodiversity conservation. Many of BSP's conservation efforts have been accomplished through grants given to local, national and international institutions as well as to individual researchers. In giving grants to help achieve conservation-oriented objectives, BSP staff has also accumulated a great deal of practical experience and lessons learned about developing and managing grants and grant portfolios.

Summarizing Lessons Learned

We include the following summary to provide you with a quick reference of the general observations we made and the lessons we learned in this study.

Observations

- Clarity of selection criteria is requisite.
- Communication is key.
- Site visits are essential.
- Mentoring is a must.
- Networking is necessary.

Lessons Learned on Effective Conservation Grant Management

Seeking Appropriate Grantees

- Become familiar with local conditions where the grant program is to take place.
- Use nontraditional media outlets and outreach methods to connect with potential grantees.
- Take risks on nascent NGOs and early-career researchers.

Proposal/Concept Paper Preparation

- Encourage short concept papers before or instead of a full-length proposal.
- Provide guidance in thinking through linkages between objectives, outcomes, and methods.
- Have the home office provide the signature on letters announcing final funding decisions.

Grantee Capacity Strengthening and Grantee/Grantor Interchange

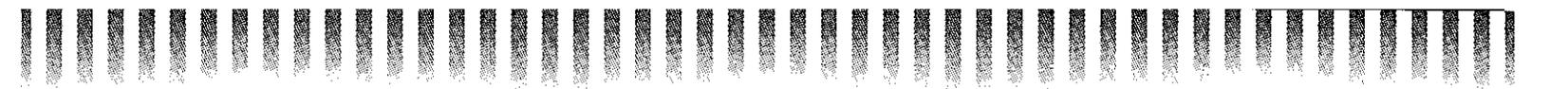
- Establish a field presence to the extent feasible, and ask probing questions.
- Be flexible with timelines and sensitive to time constraints.
- Promote partnership arrangements between grantor and grantees.
- Provide training and workshops based on grantee needs.
- Facilitate the involvement of national and international grantees involvement with local participants.

Grantee Networking and Presentation of Results

- Facilitate creation of grantee networks within the program portfolio.
- Facilitate grantee opportunities to showcase and disseminate results.
- Direct grantees to relevant publishing venues and provide communications training.
- Recruit volunteer mentors and established local NGOs to provide technical assistance.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Introduce monitoring and evaluation into the project planning process.
- Provide guidelines, assistance, and rationale for baseline data collection.
- Facilitate grantee selection of simple, measurable, and useful indicators.



WHAT WE WANT TO SHARE



Like most busy administrators, BSP grant managers often have not systematically recorded the practical managerial lessons that have come from managing their grant programs. Typically, managers and grantees make a mental note of what went well and what did not go quite right, then try to duplicate or avoid those experiences next time around. This report is intended to share BSP grant manager and grantee experiences and lessons with others who distribute or receive grants for local, national, and regional conservation efforts.

After background interviews with BSP staff, we narrowed our focus to five representative BSP grantgiving programs—two national, two regional, and one global (see Table 1). We reviewed BSP publications and internal documents on these programs. We engaged about 75 present and former BSP grant managers and grantees in an e-mail forum about grantmaking, posing questions on various grant-management related themes. In response they offered their views about what functioned well or poorly, what management strategies suit which conditions, and what the most significant qualities of effective grantors and grant programs are.

This report distills our findings from our document review, interviews, and e-mail forum. Our principal focus is on reporting about grant portfolio development and management practices in each of these programs, not on detailing the actual grant-funded activities and conservation outcomes. Our research objective was not to determine whether one type of program is innately better than another, but to provide a reflection of how grant management was carried out within each BSP program, and how to help you think about which combination of grantgiving strategies and management practices may work best for your situation. We hope BSP's anecdotes, words from the wise, and lessons learned on effective conservation grant management indicate some potential opportunities and pitfalls in whatever grantgiving endeavors you choose to undertake.

Table 1: Five BSP Grantgiving Programs

Type of Grants (Approach)	Grantgiving Program Name and Dates of Activity	Regions or Countries of Grant Activities	Funding Eligibility	Award Amounts	Number of Grants Administered over Life of Program	Time Allotted for Grant Completion
Applied Research	CIG— Conservation Impact Grants Program 1991-1999	Awarded: Latin America and Caribbean (77) Africa and Madagascar (42) Asia/Pacific (32) E. Europe (1)	Researchers in countries with an in-country USAID mission	Up to \$15,000 per grant	152	Up to 3 years
	Ukraine Conservation Initiatives Grants Program 1996-1998	Ukraine	Researchers, conservation practitioners, and NGOs in Ukraine	Up to \$5,000 per grant	25	1 year
Directed Grantgiving in Strategic Natural Resource Management Programs	CARPE-SOS— Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment Strategic Objectives Support Fund 1996-2001	Congo Basin countries of Central Africa and Congo Basin-related research in the United States, Europe, and Asia	Researchers and NGOs from or working on Congo Basin countries of Central Africa	Local Initiative CARPE-SOS grants: up to \$10,000 per grant Other CARPE-SOS grants: no set limit	As of July 2000: Local Initiative CARPE-SOS grants: 36 Other CARPE-SOS grants: 96	No set limit: most grants allotted between one month and two years for completion
	KEMALA— Community Natural Resource Managers' Program 1996-2001	Indonesia	Indonesian NGOs and NGO networks with track records of supporting community based natural resource management	*Partners receive between \$30,000 and \$400,000 over the course of two to five years; most partners receive between \$25,000 and \$70,000 per year	As of May 2000: 58 assigned, 19 planned. Grants go to 30 individual NGO partners and network partners.	Partnerships of up to five years: one- to three-year grants, virtually always followed by a one- to three-year renewal
Hypothesis Testing for Conservation/ Enterprise Project Support	Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN) 1992-1999	Asia/Pacific	Not-for-profit partnerships of international organizations and Asia/Pacific local and indigenous communities	Planning Grants: up to \$50,000; most between \$40,000 and \$45,000 Implementation Grants: up to \$900,000; most awards between \$450,000 and \$500,000	Planning Grants: 35 Implementation Grants: 20	Planning Grants: up to one year Implementation Grants: three to four years (including up to one year of no-cost follow-on)

*Some BSP programs, including CARPE, KEMALA, and BCN, address grant recipients as program partners.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report focuses on grant management in five BSP grantgiving programs. Our study of each yielded practical lessons regarding grantee selection criteria and processes, individual and institutional capacity building, mentoring, field presence, networking, and monitoring and evaluation. This report groups these BSP grantgiving programs into three sections: two programs that awarded individual applied research grants (CIG and Ukrainian grants program), two that use directed grantgiving as a component of more comprehensive strategic conservation programs (CARPE-SOS and KEMALA), and one that carried out conservation-oriented hypothesis testing through its grant portfolio (BCN). In practice these categories are not rigid. For example, BCN's hypothesis-testing grants supported applied research, as do many of the CARPE-SOS and KEMALA grants. The Ukrainian grants program, while supporting individual projects, also worked to strengthen Ukraine's conservation community as a whole. Also, as these profiles reflect, there are at least as many differences as similarities between the CIG and Ukrainian programs or the CARPE and KEMALA programs.

The BSP grant managers we interviewed for this study had many insights into developing and managing successful grants programs. We asked these project managers, "If you could tell our readers the five most important lessons that you learned as a grant manager, what would they be?" Their responses to this question—in their own words—are included throughout the document and entitled, "Words from the Wise." In fact, many BSP grant managers felt that they had so much they wanted to share that we could not limit them to just their five top lessons-learned!

The descriptive portion of this study is divided into three main sections:

Section One: Applied Research Grants

Both the worldwide **Conservation Impact Grants (CIG)** program and the **Ukraine Conservation Initiatives Grants Program** competitively awarded small grants to individuals and institutions involved in research and conservation-oriented activities. CIG invested in improving research capacity in developing countries, supporting applied field-based research relevant to biodiversity conservation. The Ukrainian grants program facilitated application of earlier scientific research results to projects aimed towards specific action for biodiversity conservation impact.

Section Two: Directed Grantgiving in Strategic Natural Resource Management Programs

The **Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)** gives grants through BSP/CARPE's **CARPE-SOS (Strategic Objective Support)** fund to support partners in information gathering and dissemination and in conservation-oriented activities directly addressing CARPE's programmatic objectives. These relate to CARPE's overall strategic objective of long-term conservation and sustainable use of the Congo Basin's natural resources. These grants also promote capacity strengthening and development of African individuals and institutions and strengthening of linkages between U.S.-based and African partners, and they fill gaps in USAID funding allocations to other CARPE endeavors.

Through **KEMALA**, the "**Community Natural Resource Managers' Program**," BSP's Asia/Pacific program provides ongoing funding, as well as technical and networking support to link individuals and organizations concerned with traditional community-based natural resource management across Indonesia, to help build coalitions that are well informed, technically competent, creative, and politically active. KEMALA supports the strengthening of local and national NGOs that can contribute to improved biological resource management and conservation "best practices" and nurtures the growth of decentralized democratic structures within which groups can participate in decision making now and in future decades. KEMALA partners are groups with effective track records related to these attributes and objectives.

Section Three: Grantgiving for Hypothesis Testing in Conservation

Also in the Asia/Pacific region, the **Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN)** funded planning and implementation grants in a hypothesis-testing program designed to support enterprise-oriented approaches to biodiversity conservation and to evaluate their effectiveness. BCN supported community-based enterprises directly dependent on biodiversity conservation to test the BCN hypothesis that if local communities received sufficient benefits from a biodiversity-linked enterprise, they would act to conserve the resources on which it depends.

APPLIED RESEARCH GRANTS

Applied research grantgiving programs support individual projects relating to conservation-oriented research. Such grants may support research or support conservation-oriented applications of already-completed research. Most applied research grantgiving programs use an open competition process, attracting qualified grantees via widely broadcast calls for proposals detailing grant program goals and objectives, eligibility criteria, types of grants available, award amounts, and deadlines for applications. Most employ selection processes combining peer review and decision making by the grant managers. Traditionally such research grant programs do not involve much ongoing contact with grantees. Yet even with limited program budgets and staffing, there still are many ways managers of applied research grants can facilitate ongoing guidance and capacity strengthening for grantees, as these BSP programs illustrate.



Dr. Gopal Sharma

Conservation Impact Grants Program (CIG)

One component of BSP, as originally conceived, was a Research Grants Program designed to support conservation-oriented research in developing countries worldwide. Funded by the USAID Global Bureau, this evolved into the Conservation Impacts Grant (CIG) Program. BSP staff member Meg Symington originally ran the program alone, then she was joined by Ilana Locker, who eventually took over its management; both juggled program management with their many other BSP responsibilities.

The Zoology Department of Patna University, Patna, India, received a CIG grant to study "The Ganges River Dolphin: a tool for baseline assessment of biological diversity in the River Ganges, India." The grant enabled researchers and conservationists at the Zoology Department to mount a mass awareness campaign, particularly in fishing villages on the banks of the River Ganges, to educate fishermen on saving the Ganges River dolphin. The project's director was Prof. Dr. R.K. Sinha.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS

Be more explicit about what is expected in the methodology section of a proposal.

Include with the Request for Proposal (RFP) "advice" on how to write a methodology section—or whatever section is deemed most important for your program's reviewers. We found that applicants (even well-respected researchers) did not necessarily know how to write a proposal in a format that our U.S.-based reviewers found acceptable.

When we were more explicit about what was expected (both within the actual RFP and with an attached "How to" page), the proposals we received were more likely to make those links more clearly.

CIG was designed to support the development of improved capacity for site-specific, conservation-oriented, applied research, which aims to get those already interested in conservation to pay more attention to the scientific underpinnings of conservation activities. CIG funded research by individuals and institutions in many academic fields, including biology, ecology, economics, anthropology, sociology, and public health.

CIG held grant competitions in 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1996. Proposals, submitted in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, were evaluated by peer reviewers, and about 1 in 10 were funded. Overall, the program awarded research grants of up to U.S. \$15,000 each to 152 projects in 43 countries with USAID in-country missions in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Madagascar, and Asia and the Pacific. During one year the competition was also open to post-Soviet countries, and one grant was awarded in Hungary.

Ukraine Conservation Initiatives Grants Program

One of BSP's most recent grantmaking endeavors was the Ukraine Conservation Initiatives Grants Program, quickly conceived in October 1996 when another program (not based on grantgiving) proved infeasible. Given its inherited budgetary and time constraints, the Ukrainian program, funded by USAID's Kyiv mission, had to be completed within two years. The program was co-managed by Eastern Europe division Director Bruce Leighty, a biologist, and

The NGO "Ecological Club Karpaty" is composed of scientists from the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve. Their project was funded by the BSP Ukrainian grant program. The project's overall goal was to promote solutions to conservation problems by optimizing the existing network of protected territories in the mountainous trans-Carpathian region. The shorter-term objective of the project itself was to assess the present conservation status of the nature conservation units in the region.

The group produced the publication, "Natural Protected Territories of the Trans-Carpathian Region," for a general audience. During August 1997, this project was one of those involved in the Ukrainian "caravan" consultation carried out by BSP program officer Dr. Tatiana Zaharchenko and Prof. Vasily I. Komendar of the grant program's Ukrainian Advisory Panel.



Ecological Club Karpaty



Independent Ecological Laboratory of the Youth Ecological Center "Sunshchyna"

This BSP Ukrainian grant project, evocatively entitled, "Zkaznik: Myth and Reality," was carried out by the Independent Ecological Laboratory of the Youth Ecological Center, "Sunshchyna," between February 1997 and November 1997. The project focused on restoration of the original biodiversity of the Vorozhbyansky and Zhuravlyny Reserves, by means of restoring some lost landscape characteristics and reintroducing selected animal and plant species. For example, project participants removed dams that were clogging waterflow.

Tatiana Zaharchenko, a Ukrainian environmental lawyer experienced in democratization processes, both based in Washington, D.C. A BSP contact person in Kyiv provided ongoing local administrative support. Leighty provided program and technical guidance, sharing decision making with Zaharchenko, who carried out most of BSP's hands-on involvement. Zaharchenko has maintained her working ties in the region and used her "insider" understanding in the complicated process of running a U.S.-based grant program in Ukraine. From the outset, she consulted with Ukraine's scientific, government, and NGO communities about ongoing conservation-related activities and their expectations for and reservations about this program.

BSP wanted to ensure that the program's design addressed certain key scientific and socio-political realities in Ukraine, a post-Soviet country in transition. Ukraine historically has not been accustomed to openness in any system's implementation, including project funding and administration. Even so, Ukraine's longstanding research tradition had yielded results, providing an extensive national base of natural science—especially botanical—knowledge. Building on that tradition is a challenge, since Ukraine's many capable researchers have virtually no funding sources for either basic or applied research. To address these realities head-on, BSP determined two principal program objectives. It would spur specific activities with conservation impacts by allowing

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS *(continued)*

Link professional researchers and project managers. Although results of research conducted by conservation NGOs are not always scientifically rigorous, pure university-based research does not always result in action. We observed in our grant program that university professors or students who were also active in an NGO were able to apply their findings to current or future projects. This type of relationship allowed for the more academic research to be translated into conservation action.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Review proposals in a transparent manner. Both applicants whose proposals are accepted and those whose are rejected generally appreciate transparency in proposal selection. We always sent back at least minimal comments with all the decision letters we sent out. If a proposal was rejected for non-compatibility with our program, this was stated in our letters (e.g., the proposal was solely agricultural in focus). If the proposal went through the peer-review process, then comments by the reviewers were sent back to the applicants.



James Gitundu Kairo/Mangrove Rehabilitation Project, Botany Department, University of Nairobi, Kenya

CIG funded the Mangrove Rehabilitation Project in the Gazi community in Kenya. Between 1975 and 1983 the extensive swamps of the southern coast of Kenya were heavily exploited for their valuable industrial fuelwood, with resulting fuelwood and building-pole shortages for coastal dwellers. With CIG funding, project leader James Gitundu Kairo (standing) assisted community members in replanting their mangroves.

Ukrainian scientists (including students), NGOs, and other institutions to take research results and apply them to raising awareness of biodiversity issues, thus capitalizing on their country's scientific knowledge base. It would do this by conspicuously enacting an open, transparent, grantmaking process. To help meet these objectives, BSP also determined that the close involvement of a Ukrainian expert advisory panel would be integral to all stages of program design and implementation, and, it was hoped, to post-program follow-up.

The program's December 1996 Call for Proposals brought in 72 applications. One month later, 22 competitively awarded grants of between U.S. \$275 and U.S. \$4,800 went to individual scientists and NGO activists. Twenty projects were completed, and three of the most successful ones received follow-on grants to enhance their long-term conservation impact.

Grantee Selection

For grantgiving programs intended to benefit the development and output of a particular research community, no matter how narrowly or widely that community is defined, open competition can be a logical choice. Everybody in that research community may compete as peers, and usually be judged by peers, a process that reflected the scientific ideal of uniform standards and equal access.

Open Competition

CIG sought to benefit a widely defined and dispersed "community" of conservation-oriented researchers in developing countries across the world. To ensure a truly open competition and attract a high volume of responses, BSP circulated the competition's Request for

Proposals (RFP) through as many communication outlets as possible: in journals, newsletters, e-mail listservs; through individual contacts among BSP consortium members; with university professors and career offices; at other conservation and development organizations; and at all of USAID's mission offices. The effort paid off. Applications came in each time from NGOs that had not been heard from previously. Later CIG competitions particularly emphasized disseminating the RFP as broadly as possible in Africa and Asia, since Latin America, with a longer history of NGO and research program activity (and fewer language barriers), consistently garnered about 50 percent of grants each competition.

For BSP's Ukrainian program, running an open competition meant explicitly promoting the merits of a democratically based funding philosophy, in counterpoint to the patronage-based funding Ukrainian researchers had long known from their own government. With open competition, BSP affirmed the recognition that all interested researchers, based in universities, NGOs, remote nature reserves, or elsewhere, are members of one Ukrainian research community, with equal rights to compete through one process rewarding scientific merit and project feasibility.

With research funds so scarce in Ukraine, the program had to cope with a crucial decision about just how wide open this open competition really could be. Several prospective advisory panel members said they would not join the board if doing so would disqualify them from competition. As practicing researchers, they could not afford to set aside this rare possibility for project funding. Zaharchenko, particularly concerned about transparency issues, sought input from other grantgivers in Washington, D.C. and then resolved this dilemma by developing clear procedural rules for funding review. Panel members competing for grants would not participate in the initial written evaluation of their own proposals and would leave the room when their proposals were reviewed during an advisory panel meeting. Panelists could not weigh in on their own proposal's fate, nobody's integrity would be compromised, fair and equitable decision making would prevail, and the open competition would remain wide open to the entire Ukrainian research community.

Selection Criteria and Guidelines

CIG proposals had to demonstrate a project's scientific merit, feasibility, and potential conservation and policy impact. Since CIG was designed to support the development of improved capacity for site-specific, conservation-oriented applied research, the program would only fund research topics related to: 1) utilization, management, and monitoring of biological resources; 2) cultural and societal influences on biodiversity conservation; and/or 3) economic and other incentives for biodiversity conservation. To save everyone's time, later RFPs also specified types of proposals CIG would not fund, a practice the Ukrainian program also adopted.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Keep communicating with grantees after their funding expires.

It pays to keep in touch with grantees after their funding has ended. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, you may not know what the conservation impact of a grant will be until years later. Try to maintain one contact person at the donor organization throughout the life of the grants program so that grantees can communicate delayed results.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Allow for more time than you think will be necessary for all phases of the RFP/ project implementation process. Do not underestimate the amount of time that it takes for the RFP to get to researchers in the field, for proposals to be mailed in, for adequate review time, for contracts to be drawn up, and for money to be disbursed. In addition, projects often take much longer to complete than researchers initially envision. It is important, therefore, for grants programs to remain flexible throughout the program's duration.

The CIG managers soon found that the most prevalent failing among proposals was researchers' failure to articulate the linkages between their projects' objectives and methods. Because clear objectives and appropriate methods are fundamental to successful research, in the last two competitions CIG added a list of suggestions to its RFP that would help applicants clarify research objectives, explicitly relate them to research methods, and clearly express both in their proposals. They also added a "Summary Sheet" checklist of information that applicants had to include in their executive summary.

The Ukrainian grants program was designed to help researchers employ their findings in activities that raised biodiversity awareness and affected conservation. Therefore, its Call for Proposals specified that applicant projects must be action-oriented (not research-oriented), and aimed at producing solutions to specific biodiversity conservation challenges in existing or potential "specially protected" areas in Ukraine. As with CIG, funded activities had to concern protected area resources management and utilization, cultural and social influences, and/or conservation incentives.

The Ukrainian-language Call for Proposals was carefully worded to reflect Ukrainian conservation realities. Its message was clear: applicants could not claim a project was conservation-related just because it would take place in an existing or potential specially protected area. Ukraine has many kinds of "specially protected" areas, from strictly protected Nature Reserves to other designations that are really "paper parks" wholly lacking protection. If the area in question was really a paper park or only a potential protected area, applicants were instructed to be forthright about those realities and focus their application on the steps they planned to take to effect its transformation into a true conservation area within Ukraine's new economic and political context. Such steps might include promoting a change in the area's legal status and exploring its ecotourism potential.

Viktor A. Onishchenko



The goal of this BSP Ukrainian grant-funded project was to improve the protection regime for the Medobory Nature Reserve. During April 1997-December 1997, grantees worked toward this goal by selecting the objects of highest protection priority for each reserve unit, proposing specific protection modes and regimes for various parts of the reserve, drawing a map showing differentiation of protection regimes, and writing up and submitting the relevant recommendations.

Deadlines

Both the Ukrainian and CIG programs employed fixed proposal deadlines, which allowed BSP and peer reviewers to judge the merit of each proposal in light of all others in a given competition. With a fixed deadline program, managers had to marshal their resources and institute certain administrative efficiencies to process a stack of proposals—more than 300 in each CIG competition—within several weeks, through screening, peer review, funding decisions, and applicant notification. Because they were running a worldwide program, CIG grant managers sometimes adjusted deadlines for applicants in countries with sluggish or unreliable mail and e-mail systems, while still respecting the overall review schedule. Operating in only one country, the Ukrainian program had prospective grantees submit applications directly to the program's contact person in Kyiv. Even then, the logistics of getting applications from remote locations to the capital city on time sometimes proved daunting.

Proposal Review

For both programs, proposal review started with screening by program managers to eliminate proposals failing to meet basic program requirements. Most such CIG proposals addressed inappropriate topics or earmarked too much money for U.S.-based researchers, with insufficient involvement of host-country organizations or principal investigators. The Ukrainian competition screened out two proposals, one from a government entity and another seeking several times the specified maximum.

Next, both programs implemented peer review processes. The CIG program managers roughly grouped that competition's eligible proposals by language and research topic, and then selected a review committee that could provide matching expertise. CIG peer review committees got bigger as competition applications increased in number. Each committee included at least one person from each BSP consortium partner and one from USAID, primarily supplemented by others in Washington, D.C.'s conservation NGO community. CIG reviewers were not paid for pre-meeting preparation, but they received an honorarium for the review meeting itself.

About three weeks before the review meeting, each CIG primary reviewer received 20 proposals, each of which s/he was to classify as 1) must fund, 2) fundable, 3) uncertain, or 4) reject. In addition, s/he was to provide question-driven "reviewer comments" on a form the CIG managers supplied. During the program's last two competitions, each review panel member also acted as a secondary reviewer, reading another batch of about 20 proposals to classify them and, if time permitted, provide comments.

During the one- to three-day meeting, principal reviewers briefly presented each "must fund" proposal, and secondary reviewers added comments. The committee then quickly skimmed the proposal's

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Provide mentoring where appropriate and possible. A good mentoring system can be a very effective method of reviewing technical reports and, at its best, of building capacity in grantees. Volunteer "mentors" (members of the conservation and/or academic community) who agree to review technical reports and provide timely feedback encourage interaction that benefits both grantees and mentors.

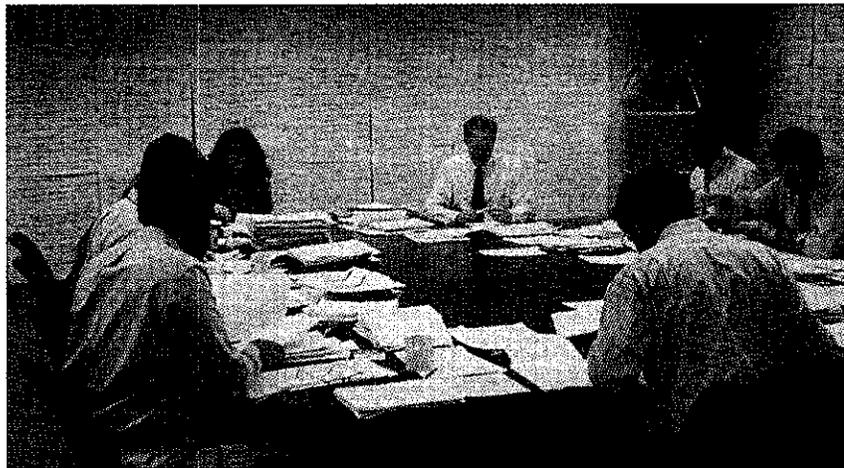
WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS

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Establish mechanisms to see the grants through to completion.

Establishing a payment schedule that allows for donor requirements but does not hamper the Principal Investigator (PI) encourages grantees to fulfill their reporting requirements. It is a good idea to withhold a final payment of some percentage of the grant, to be paid only upon receipt of the final deliverables. Withholding too much money as a final payment, however, may mean that the researcher cannot do his/her work. The withheld amount should be enough to make a difference to the grantee, so that s/he will send in the reports. Grant managers need to find a balance.



Kathy Saxon

After roughly grouping eligible proposals by language and research topic, the CIG managers would select a peer review committee providing matching expertise. Each committee included at least one person from each BSP consortium partner organization and one from USAID, along with others from Washington, D.C.'s conservation NGO community and beyond. In later years, as more applications were received, the committee grew proportionately.

executive summary, confirming or challenging the reviewer's funding decision, possibly drawing on personal experience with the state of research on a given topic in a particular country, or with the applicant or institution. Most proposals required only a 15-minute discussion before the committee confirmed its final funding decision. Proposals rated below must-fund by principal reviewers rarely made it to committee discussion.

CIG STAFF ADVICE FOR EFFICIENT PROPOSAL REVIEW MEETINGS

1. Provide all review committee participants with a complete set of proposal executive summaries.
2. Select a review committee that complements proposal content. Seek reviewers with multiple qualifications, such as a Portuguese-speaking marine biologist with African experience.
3. Send out reviewers' assigned proposals at least three weeks before the committee meeting. Include a memorandum detailing the considerations they should address and a standard "reviewer comments" form that later can be sent to the applicant (this form could be e-mailed, too, for easier transmittal).
4. During review meeting evaluation of top tier proposals, track proposal acceptance decisions as you go along to ensure adequate regional, gender, and thematic distribution. Track funding commitments for accepted proposals to stay within the overall budget.
5. As proposals are eliminated, attach a note detailing why. When writing rejection letters later, you can give applicants useful feedback without rereading proposals.
6. Hold a social hour to thank reviewers and give them a chance to network.

In the Ukrainian program, Zaharchenko and Leighty made the final funding decisions after the advisory panel met to provide its input. Having BSP, the outsider, take the responsibility as the final funding arbiter shielded the Ukrainian advisors from possible adverse reactions by disappointed colleagues. This made sense in a country where money is scarce and where both panelists and applicants are members of one research community—a situation that will remain the same long after BSP has left the scene. Still, the Ukrainian program was designed to rely heavily on the advisory panel, modeling a transparently deliberative decision-making process among professionals from different sectors and disciplines.

Lawyer Zaharchenko was intent on assembling an advisory panel of experts whose science skills complemented her own specialty in democratic procedures. At BSP's invitation, several Ukrainian professionals joined the panel, as did two government-nominated members, one put forward by Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers, and one by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Nuclear Safety. Reflecting the high proportion of botany-related applications, Zaharchenko made sure several botanists were among the panel members. Except for honoraria provided for proposal and final report reviews, all advisory panel members served without pay. The government representatives had no special powers or privileges.



"Primrose-97 Crimea," was a project organized in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in Ukraine, during January-April 1997. Supported by a BSP Ukrainian program grant, the Nature Protection Team of Zaporizhzhya State University aimed to bring together NGOs, official state bodies, and scientists to work for the protection of Crimea's endangered early spring flowering plants. To support this aim, the project worked to identify habitats of rare species of early spring flowers, carried out a public information campaign involving mass media, educational institutions, and ecological NGOs, and cultivated contacts with administrators of protected territories, especially those where violations of protected regimes had been observed.

Nature Protection Team of Zaporizhzhya State University/Movement of Nature Protection Teams

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSERVATION IMPACT GRANTS (CIG) PROGRAM GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Find creative ways to visit grantees.

Limited program funds do not have to impede visits to grantee projects. Use trips for other purposes to a grantee's region as a way to visit grantees. We encouraged other BSP staff members to visit grantees if they were traveling in the same area as our grantees were working.



Society of Young Ornithologists of Ukraine

With a BSP Ukrainian program grant, the Society of Young Ornithologists worked to ensure the viability of rare bird species within natural protected areas in Ukraine by improving their living conditions. During the project they made field expeditions to survey rare species habitats, and protected and restored nests as well as building artificial nesting places.

Four panelists assessed each submission, responding to several questions and following a rather complex rating system. If proposals on topics outside all advisors' expertise received only low ratings, BSP took the precaution of having a non-panelist Ukrainian expert do an additional review, but no outside reviewer ever recommended for funding. With hindsight, Zaharchenko notes that a much simpler rating system still would have weeded out applications below a 50 percent rating. The form's reviewer comments section, later conveyed to applicants, was an unqualified success.

Subsequently the entire advisory panel met for two 10-hour sessions to discuss all the applications meeting the 50 percent cutoff, about half of the original 72. If anyone had special reasons to discuss a proposal that fell below the cutoff, they could introduce it, but nobody used this option. Zaharchenko ran the meeting as a neutral facilitator, sometimes raising queries to help the panelists consider the full range of pertinent issues. During a coffee break, one reviewer demonstrated how unprecedented the approach was for Ukraine, telling Zaharchenko that this was all very interesting, but asking, "When will you tell us who we should select?" She had to persuade panelists that BSP really did seek their independent guidance, not a rubber stamp on its decisions. That reviewer said afterwards that serving on the panel "had been the best lesson in democratic procedures I've ever experienced."

During the discussions BSP took notes on the panel's funding recommendations. These were based on their individual and collective judgments about the relevance, merit, and feasibility of each proposal. BSP later prepared a table detailing the overall recommendations and the individual advisor commentaries. Although it turned down one popular proposal that did not fit the program's aims, BSP funded virtually all the projects unanimously recommended by the advisory panel and selected none that no one had recommended. Sometimes the advisory panel submitted a split recommendation to BSP, nearly always reflecting the panelists' own professional affiliations: NGO representatives leaned toward the more activist proposals; and academic scientists were more inclined toward the more research-oriented ones. In these cases, Zaharchenko and Leighty discussed each side's views at length, weighing the pros and cons before making their final decision. The accord between BSP's decisions and the panelists' recommendations demonstrated both BSP trust in the panel's capacity to steer the program's course within Ukraine and the general accord between BSP and the Ukrainians on its objectives.

Applicant Notification and Follow-up

Both the CIG and Ukrainian programs provided all applicants with written feedback from reviewers. The CIG staff sent unsuccessful applicants a form letter listing other potential funders and encouraging them to rework their proposal. They also sent specific reviewer comments and review session notes detailing why a proposal was not funded. In some cases, rejected applicants who revised their proposals did get CIG funding in a later competition.

In order to make sure the Ukrainian program would not be mislabeled as a foreign-imposed patronage program just as it was entering the mainstream of Ukrainian scientific and conservation activity, BSP went to great lengths to explain to all applicants and the community at large exactly how the transparent, rule-based procedures functioned, and to demonstrate its Ukrainian gestation. In a four-page memo sent to all applicants, the press, and all leading foundations and NGOs in Ukraine, Zaharchenko detailed who was on the advisory panel, the exact steps in the grant selection process, and examples of awarded grants. Rejected applicants also received individual letters conveying their rankings and summarizing panelists' written comments. When successful applicants signed their contracts in Kyiv, they discussed with Zaharchenko the details of advisors' recommendations for project implementation or modifications. Subsequently, a list of all awardees was published in the Conservation News in *Ukraine Bulletin*. BSP received extensive Ukrainian feedback expressing appreciation of the extra effort to provide a clear view into the grantmaking world and into transparent democratic processes.

Grantee Capacity Strengthening

Although grantee capacity strengthening often holds little prominence in programs giving small grants to researchers, it was a very important component of the CIG and Ukrainian grants programs. The CIG program had no field staff and little administrative overhead, and it could not offer on-site Technical Assistance (TA), but CIG managers still regularly exceeded their program's minimal obligations, interacting whenever they could. Such efforts were well appreciated. As one CIG grantee recalled, "I felt very comfortable calling BSP when I had problems. I can honestly say this was the first time I felt there was genuine interest in assisting me." TA was a feature of the Ukrainian grants program, particularly through the advisory panel, but also through BSP staff. One Ukrainian grantee, Tatiana Kotenko, recalled, "If I experienced difficulty in a particular area of my grant, I always approached BSP for guidance; BSP approached me with assistance as well. This ready interchange resulted in my better understanding of BSP demands, needs, and tasks and the better outcome of my project."

Field Presence

Limited funding ruled out field visits for the CIG staff. Mexican grantee Patricia Negreros-Castillo, an assistant professor of forestry at Iowa State University, commented, "I would have loved to have had someone from the program visit the site [in Mexico], but I understand that logistically, it was almost impossible." Locker recalls, "At times grantees felt frustrated that we did not have the budget to visit their projects in person, but we tried to compensate for that in a number of ways." CIG managers encouraged other BSP staff members to meet with grantees and discuss their projects when traveling nearby. It was hard for other BSP staff already facing full agendas to add the task of meeting with CIG grantees, but grantees did appreciate the attention when that was possible.

The Ukrainian grants program intentionally did not establish a formal BSP field office in Ukraine because BSP wanted the Ukrainian advisory panel to provide most of the on-site expertise. Zaharchenko did make some field visits to Ukraine during 1997, mostly in August, while reviewing grantee intermediate reports. She met with as many grantees as possible in Kyiv to

CARAVANNING IN UKRAINE

While traveling to visit grantees with advisory panel member Professor Vasily I. Komendar, Ukrainian grants manager Dr. Tatiana Zaharchenko chanced upon a novel way to impart greater value to a project site trip—the caravan approach.

"When we began our field visits, we spent half of the first day with grantees from a young local NGO. Komendar quizzed the NGO on various aspects of their research until Yaroslav Dovganich, the leader of that grantee group, the NGO Ecoclub Karpaty, commented that the grantees had not thought that BSP would take their work so seriously, but now he realized that we did. As we prepared to leave them to visit the next site, these grantees asked if they could join us to 'make sure you are as hard on the next bunch as you were on us.' They did come along, and we actually ended up bringing representatives from each site we subsequently visited along to the next site, forming a caravan. It was a great opportunity for them to learn from and network with each other, especially when the members of the young NGO got to talk to those in a more experienced NGO about all sorts of topics—outreach, report writing, relationship building with local communities, and securing funding."

respond to their questions, verify that projects were running smoothly, and encourage them to do further outreach and awareness-building about their work among local government and communities.

At that time Zaharchenko, accompanied by advisory panel member Professor Vasily I. Komendar, a respected Ukrainian botanist, conservationist, and Carpathian specialist, also worked in a few brief visits to grantees in the Carpathian Mountains who could not get to Kyiv. The two together provided grantees with complementary input, Zaharchenko particularly about democracy issues, and Komendar on scientific and activist concerns. Zaharchenko encouraged grantees to disseminate project results via local media outlets to heighten community awareness. Komendar shared his knowledge of other studies in the region, emphasizing the importance of building upon instead of duplicating earlier efforts, and his many provocative questions helped grantees evaluate their own progress.

Mentoring

BSP's applied grant programs also assisted grantees by facilitating mentoring relationships with qualified individuals. By the third CIG grant cycle, CIG managers Symington and Locker found it impossible to review and provide adequate feedback on every grantee's interim and final report, and many research topics exceeded the managers' own professional expertise. They therefore initiated a volunteer mentoring program, drawing on staff from BSP's regional programs and consortium institutions and other professionals, usually ones familiar with conditions in the grantee's locale. Mentors reviewed grantee technical reports and provided written comments, sometimes anonymously. Often the mentor relationship only went this far, but sometimes mentors also advised grantees by telephone or visited research sites when traveling nearby.



First Day Cover, "Corals of Sri Lanka." CIG grantee Dr. Suki Ekaratne, in collaboration with the Sri Lankan Philatelic Bureau, arranged for the creation of four stamps depicting the diversity of Sri Lanka's corals. The stamps were issued on March 18, 2000.

Assigning mentors lessened the CIG staff's administrative burden and provided grantees with appropriately specialized feedback, though, unfortunately, this feedback was not always timely or sufficiently detailed. Still, given its constraints, the system actually did function fairly well, particularly after BSP gently prodded mentors. CIG staff also learned it was best to have mentors send their comments first to BSP so that they could tone down or sharpen up commentary that was either especially severe or too ambiguous.

In Ukraine, the advisory panel was conceived as a source of in-country mentors for BSP grantees and was regularly encouraged to fulfill this role, just as BSP encouraged grantees to call on the panelists for guidance. The two-way encouragement was necessary because developing this kind of ready access for young researchers, particularly to panel members who held high government positions, was an innovation in Ukraine. The encouragement worked. In program evaluations, many grantees specifically expressed their appreciation for the significant help individual advisors had given them, particularly during on-site visits. Most often cited were the energetic input of "caravanning" by Professor Vasily I. Komendar, Dr. Tetyana L. Andrienko, biologist and chairwoman of the government-academic Interagency Laboratory of Scientific Bases of Nature Conservation, and Vira P. Davydok, from the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Nuclear Safety. As BSP had intended, this capacity building definitely went both ways, with advisory panel members learning to view themselves as in-country contacts, mentors, and problem solvers for grantees.

MENTORING'S MULTIPLE PAYOFFS

The mentoring process associated with BSP's CIG program has repeatedly produced gratifying rewards for grantees, mentors, science, and conservation policy, even in the face of adverse circumstances. Mentor Dr. Richard B. Aronson, of Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Alabama, reflects these multiple payoffs in his review of the final technical report of Sri Lankan grantee Dr. Suki Ekaratne, a professor at the University of Colombo. Dr. Aronson wrote, "At a time when many of us in coral reef science are paralyzed by the cynical belief that all is lost and our opinions count for nothing, this [grantee] report is the most uplifting thing I have read in a long time. The study has produced information of scientific value, and, perhaps more important, has raised awareness of marine conservation issues to the point of influencing policy. A small investment on the part of BSP has already had an enormous payoff, and the impact of this project has reached far beyond the mere generating of ecological data. Dr. Ekaratne is influencing public opinion and government policy."

Dr. Ekaratne's project was to test a hypothesis that removal of predatory fishes for the aquarium trade leads to greater coral predation by invertebrates, particularly the crown-of-thorns starfish, *Acanthaster planci*, and increased cover of undesirable reef components such as seaweeds. Even though civil unrest and intense military activity in Sri Lanka prevented Dr. Ekaratne from testing the hypothesis on a large ecological scale, his research data did document 1998 coral bleaching, part of an unprecedented worldwide bleaching event associated with human-induced climate change. He also showed that the calcareous green seaweed *Halimeda* is not a blight, but a vital refuge for juvenile reef organisms. Dr. Aronson concluded his review by urging that Dr. Ekaratne prepare his results for publication in the mainstream literature on coral reefs and offering his assistance with statistical analysis and other matters as needed. About Dr. Aronson's mentoring, Dr. Ekaratne said, "his input and his positive encouraging attitude have provided a great impetus to my work, and his comments helped me to focus on specific objectives." The two scientists have stayed in touch by e-mail and in October 2000 conferred about work matters during the International Coral Reef Symposium in Bali.

Long Distance Contacts

BSP's applied grant managers also maintained frequent and timely communications with grantees via fax, e-mails, and phone calls. While the CIG program always held back some small percentage of a grantee's payment until final reports were filed, as CIG manager Locker has reflected, it was the ongoing long-distance interaction that really helped increase grantee commitment to their projects. "If I could not answer technical questions, I tried to get the information from someone else, sometimes the mentors. I think grantees knew I would help them to the extent possible to obtain publications, journals, and supplies they might not have access to in their countries." Grantee Negreros-Castillo remembers the long-distance tutorial on technical report writing BSP gave her after she filed her first report. After that, she recalls, "I actually enjoyed preparing other ones. The first financial report was not as difficult for me. Still, when I sent it to BSP, they reviewed it carefully and contacted me for clarification on some points. This helped me become clearer in my subsequent financial reports."

Applied research grants usually do not have a formal monitoring and evaluation component, but post-grant CIG contact with grantees has provided updates on significant conservation impacts. For example, a 1992 CIG grant allowed botanist Hector Hernandez of Mexico's National Autonomous University to map the distribution of endangered cactus in the Chihuahuan Desert. Two years later, CIG learned, a local NGO used his research results in lobbying against a toxic waste dump. Although the dump project was not cancelled, numerous environmental mitigations were secured, and the Mexican government subsequently supported several cactus conservation initiatives.

Networking

The CIG and Ukrainian grants managers also encouraged communication and networking among their grantees and facilitated dissemination of their work. CIG sometimes circulated grantee technical reports or journal articles among grantees working on similar issues. To facilitate networking, it sponsored grantee symposia at international conferences and occasionally provided follow-on funding for grantees to present at relevant in-country conferences. About all these efforts Locker recalls, "The report exchange among grantees fostered a network of people working on similar issues, as part of a larger whole. The Society for Conservation Biology symposia we organized also fostered this feeling." During the last round of CIG grants, the staff sent all actual and former grantees a list of publications that might accept submitted articles about their research results and forwarded a list of alternative funding sources to any grantees who inquired about ongoing project funding.

One of the best networking opportunities the CIG program provided to grantees was at symposia CIG organized at meetings of the Society for Conservation Biology.

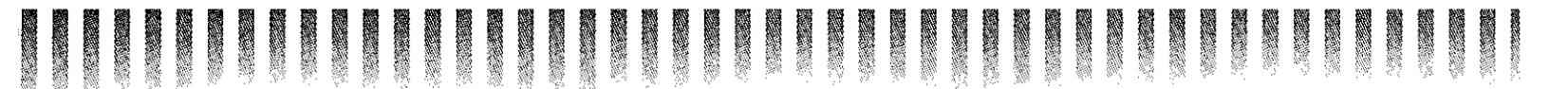
Pictured here are CIG grantees and BSP staff members, including CIG program managers Ilana Locker and Meg Symington.



WWF-US

One grantee described the networking role of the Ukrainian grants program this way: “Thanks to regular BSP encouragement of cross-sectoral contacts and collaboration, we had an opportunity to develop a network of contacts and new working relations among different participating NGOs and government officials.” The key, this grantee felt, was the striking difference BSP’s grant management style made: “BSP’s role was truly neutral, with an unusual emphasis on equal representation of the interests of different sectors of society.” Along with the ongoing networking efforts, the Ukrainian grants program held a closing symposium, or round table discussion for grantees and advisors. The symposium provided an unprecedented open forum for these researchers and conservation practitioners to share their project experiences and outcomes, and for advisors to provide evaluations and feedback. The participants, familiar only with the others’ names, actually met and shared their experiences. This unique occurrence enabled grantees and advisors to share lessons learned and discuss future plans for the projects.

The lasting impact of the interaction among advisors and grantees developed through this program is reflected in the production in summer 2000 of a special issue of the Ukrainian scientific journal, *Conservation in Ukraine (Zatovidma Strava Ukraini)*, a periodical publication of the Kyiv University and the Kaniv Nature Reserve, a severely underfunded government entity. At the closing symposium, grantees and advisory board members together presented BSP with the idea of a special issue featuring articles on the grants projects. BSP recognized the merits of this concept and managed to find the money to provide for the issue’s production, which is being solely managed by these former grantees and advisors.



DIRECTED GRANTGIVING IN STRATEGIC NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

BSP has sometimes developed grantgiving components within more comprehensive regional conservation programs. Grantgiving has been directed at the programs' strategic objectives, helping to strengthen local recipients' capacity to work towards these objectives long after the relationship with BSP ends. Two BSP programs are profiled here. Regional presence and extensive field office administration of grantgiving are integral to both. Capacity strengthening and TA are integral throughout these programs, starting at partner selection. Through quite different processes, both programs employ proactive selection methods strategically oriented towards developing long-term relationships focused on partner implementation of program goals in their respective regions.

CARPE: An Example From Africa

The **Central African Regional Program for the Environment** seeks to identify and promote the conditions and practices necessary for long-term conservation and sustainable use of the Congo Basin's forests and other biological resources. The forests of Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon together form one of the world's greatest expanses of closed canopy habitat. The Congo Basin is increasingly subject to pressure from population growth, unsustainable resource use, poor management, and other problems related to poverty and political instability. CARPE aims to help reduce deforestation rates and encourage sustainable economic growth in ways that address local, national, regional and international concerns. Funded by USAID and conceived as a twenty-year program, CARPE is collaboratively operated by several U.S. government agencies and international environmental NGOs, including BSP. These are considered CARPE's core partners. CARPE also has an Advisory Group, three of whose five members are Africans.

CARPE's first phase (1995–2000) has focused mainly on gathering and synthesizing information about the state of the forests and threats to their biodiversity. During this time, some of the core partners involved with CARPE's operation have also tried out promising tools and methods to

WORDS FROM THE WISE

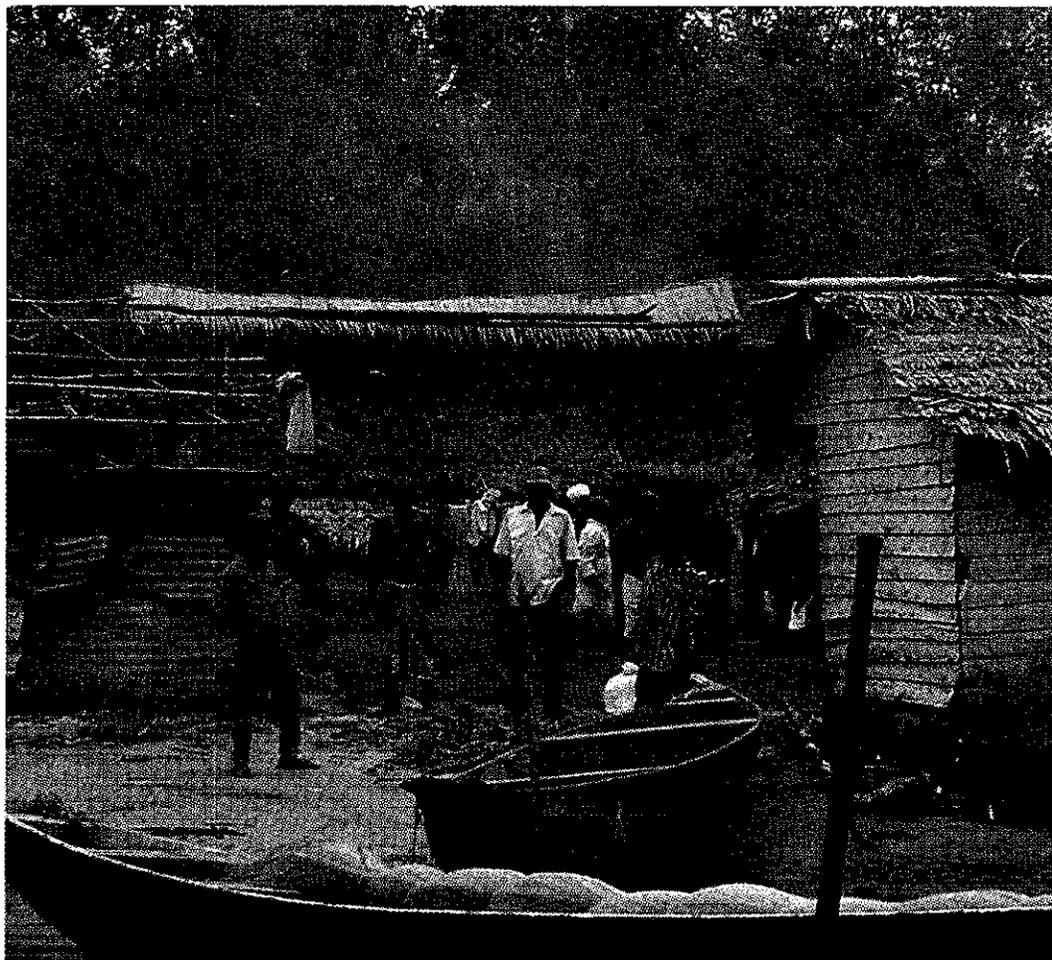
LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

The following lessons were developed from CARPE's small grants program in Central Africa.

Pre-Approval Stage: Proposal Development and Selection

Develop clear proposal selection criteria and proposal writing guidelines. Clear proposal selection criteria help ensure that the proposals submitted are relevant to the objectives of the grants program. Proposal writing guidelines also help ensure that the proposals are complete and include all the key elements of a proposal: objectives, calendar of activities, and budget. The more explicit we were about what information we required in the proposal, the less time we spent going back and forth with a potential grantee.

Rob Solem



Grantee Dieudonne Mbog, of the Association for the Protection of Cameroon's Mangrove Ecosystems, is conducting a biological survey of the Douala Mangroves to determine the amount and rate of deforestation. CARPE generally funds grants that focus on terrestrial forests. This grant is one of the very few awarded to an activity in a coastal area.

implement conservation-oriented activities. BSP has done this through its administration and management of the CARPE Strategic Objective Support (SOS) grant fund. BSP established the CARPE-SOS fund in 1996 with USAID monies allocated for this purpose. The fund is a flexible "pipeline" whose mechanism allows BSP to determine at all times how much money to allocate to what, without a yearly maximum or minimum. While this flexibility facilitates program development, it sometimes proves tricky in terms of balancing the grant program with other needed BSP/CARPE project outlays, including salaries, equipment, and information dissemination. While all grant funding is at BSP's discretion, BSP chooses to solicit core partner input regarding CARPE-SOS allocation.

All CARPE-SOS grantees are considered extended partners of CARPE if they are not from core partner institutions. BSP/CARPE's SOS grant fund objectives are to support extended and core partners

(including BSP itself) in information gathering and dissemination and in implementing conservation-oriented activities that directly address CARPE's central programmatic objectives related to protected areas, environmental governance, forestry and forest exploitation, and household level interventions such as collection of non-timber forest products, and CARPE's overall objective of long-term conservation and sustainable use of the Congo Basin's natural resources. The SOS grant fund also has the objectives of encouraging and facilitating African participation in and ownership of CARPE and promoting development of African individuals and institutions, strengthening linkages between U.S.-based and African partners, and funding activities defined during the ongoing re-engineering of the overall CARPE project not currently funded under existing USAID cooperative agreements with core partners.

CARPE-SOS grants are awarded from two categories, best described as Local Initiative Fund grants and other CARPE-SOS fund grants. Local Initiative grants are discretionary funds awarded directly by the BSP/CARPE project field office in Libreville, Gabon. Local Initiative awards range from a few hundred dollars up to \$10,000, with an average grant size of about \$6,000. By mid-2000, the Local Initiative grant program had disbursed close to \$265,000 in 36 grants.

The other CARPE-SOS grants are awarded either by BSP/CARPE's grant manager in Washington, D.C., or by the field office, in either case after a peer-review process that involves CARPE's other core partners. These awards range from a few hundred dollars to about \$300,000, with most in the \$10,000 to \$90,000 range. By mid-2000, 96 non-Local Initiative CARPE-SOS grants, totaling about \$2.3 million had been allocated. Both grant funds cover a similar range of regional and country-specific project activities, all consonant with CARPE goals. All Local Initiative grants and some of the other CARPE-SOS grants advance activities and capacity building among local, national and regional NGOs and individuals from the Congo Basin.

More Local Initiative CARPE-SOS grants have been awarded in Cameroon than in any other country, because Cameroon is fairly stable politically, and its in-country NGOs are more numerous, professional, and dynamic than elsewhere in Central Africa. Cameroon was also the first country assigned a BSP/CARPE "focal point," an in-country BSP/CARPE representative. Significant Local Initiative SOS funds have also been disbursed in Gabon, Central African Republic, and other countries where local NGOs are only beginning to develop in earnest. DRC has only recently been included in CARPE, where BSP has now awarded a small number of grants.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Visit prior field activities of potential grantees whenever feasible. We have learned that, if at all possible, it is a good idea to visit potential grantees' earlier field activities. This enables us to better evaluate their capacity and effectiveness and to become familiar with their working environment so that we are aware of the opportunities and constraints they face.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Discuss all proposals with potential grantees before funding. All proposals should be discussed with potential grantees before funding. One reason for this is that potential grantees occasionally hire outsiders to write their proposals and do not really know their full content. Face-to-face discussions with potential grantees help us ensure that they know exactly what they want to do and how they plan to do it.

It is just as important to discuss budgets and calendars of activities with all grantees. We have found that most potential grantees in Central Africa have limited experience preparing budgets and tend to either overbudget or underbudget their activities. This is also true for the calendar of activities. Almost all of our grantees have underestimated how long it would take them to complete their activities.



APE—Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement

Evelyne Samu (CARPE DRC Focal Point) and Nicodeme Tchamou visited field activities of the Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement, a local NGO in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as part of the process of assessing possibilities for a CARPE grant. This NGO is based in Kinshasa. Its field activities include agroforestry and erosion control.

Strategic Partner Selection

CARPE operates in countries where the NGO community is generally small, underdeveloped, and inexperienced. Consequently local NGOs are likely to be poorly funded and sometimes actively discouraged by those in possession of greater political power. The original conception of CARPE-SOS was to fund local NGOs to gather the technical information CARPE needed. An early consultant assessment of regional NGO capacity, combined with the first crop of local NGO proposals, most of which outlined activities peripheral to CARPE's programmatic objectives, quickly convinced BSP/CARPE that it needed other means to fill these gaps. Therefore BSP/CARPE expanded the grantgiving program to fund core partners, academics, and other established researchers inside and outside the region. At the same time, BSP/CARPE recognized that its local grantgiving had to be reoriented, so the Local Initiative grants were conceived to promote development of capable local organizations by forging relationships between experienced researchers and nascent Central African NGOs, supporting capacity building through local grantgiving.

Non-Local Initiative CARPE-SOS grants are awarded for studies addressing CARPE's main programmatic objectives, as travel grants or similar small-scale funding for core partners, or, since 1999, as result dissemination grants to fund write-up and presentation of completed CARPE-associated projects. Core partners have received the largest such grants, usually to plug gaps in their direct USAID funding, providing for a workshop or other key activity that this funding had not covered. The CARPE-SOS guidelines specify that field-based funding applications should be routed through the field office, and others should go through BSP/CARPE's Washington, D.C., office. All these applications are sent on for comments to selected core CARPE partners, Advisory Group members, and to other peer

reviewers with pertinent technical expertise. On the basis of these comments and on the applicability of these proposals to the programmatic criteria, the BSP/CARPE manager or the BSP/CARPE field office then decides whether to fund and what conditions to impose.

As Robert Solem, BSP/CARPE regional coordinator explains, Local Initiative grants have regularly funded local projects “even if not closely linked to CARPE objectives, if we felt the organization had the potential to undertake more closely related activities in the future. Our approach has enabled us to get more local partners involved, build up good relations with a lot of partners, get them familiar with the program’s core objectives, and, very importantly, build their capacity.” Local Initiative grants are awarded from a discretionary fund administered solely by the BSP/CARPE field office and focal points. Applicants seeking Local Initiative funds apply directly to these offices, which evaluate the application and work with the applicant to modify it, if necessary. Although the field office approves these grants without being obliged to consult with BSP/Washington staff or any other core CARPE partner, BSP/CARPE field personnel often will seek technical advice and expertise from core partners in the course of evaluating an application.



Kate Christian

For several years, Limbé Botanical Garden in Cameroon has been conducting research on eru (*Gnetum africanum*), a non-timber forest product and popular food plant found in Cameroon’s forests. CARPE grant money has enabled the Botanical Garden to disseminate their research findings, and to work with local farmers on a project to domesticate eru. The project produced written training materials for local farmers, and provided a two-week workshop to train interested farmers and staff from the local office of the Agriculture ministry in the skills needed to grow eru. Then it helped them establish eru farms and is now working with the farmers to monitor eru survival rates. The farmer in the foreground is known to her fellow participants as ‘Mama Eru.’ While she had already been growing eru, the project brought greater knowledge about the most effective cultivation techniques.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Send technical proposals for an outside review. If a proposed activity is highly technical or exceeds the experience of the grantmaking organization, it is best to seek outside review. This review can provide important technical feedback for the potential grantee and lead to a better proposal. In addition, the outside reviewer can also be called upon to review and provide feedback on grantees’ technical reports, and in some cases, outside review may lead to the development of a mentoring relationship whereby the more experienced NGO provides technical support for the less experienced local NGO.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Coordinate with other donors.

Contact other donors operating in the region to see if they may already be funding the same proposal or to see if they have any information about the potential grantee. In some cases, because potential grantees submit the same proposal to a variety of donors, it is not uncommon for a potential grantee to receive duplicate funding for the same activity. Even when this is not the case, another donor might be able to provide some valuable information about the strengths or weaknesses of the potential grantee based upon past experiences.

Local Initiative and other CARPE-SOS funds are publicized through a combination of BSP personnel and CARPE core partners informing potential grantees of the opportunity, giving them the application guidelines, or asking them to contact the field office directly. Present and former grantees also advertise the program, what BSP/CARPE's Washington, D.C., manager Laurent Some calls "beating the drum." Developing fundable local projects is an iterative process between applicants and BSP/CARPE staff, for very few of these applications are ready for funding as first submitted. The CARPE focal point is key to this development, and a focal point recommendation to fund factors heavily into the ultimate funding decision, as does the endorsement of a CARPE core partner.

After reviewing an application, the focal point gets back to the applicant, preferably in person, to go over both format and content. A visit to the applicant organization may reveal that an NGO has proposed an activity it just does not have the infrastructure—office space, telephone, fax, office manager—needed to carry it out. Being a "briefcase NGO" does not necessarily disqualify an applicant for funding, but it may require reconfiguring the project. If a required section is missing, if activities do not match the objective, or if the dates or scope of proposed activities are unrealistic, BSP/CARPE and the applicant will discuss both the problem and measures needed to rectify it. For example, BSP/CARPE Cameroon focal point Nicodeme Tchamou recalls one applicant who proposed to interview 12 households per day in a survey of non-timber forest products consumption. Tchamou directed the applicant to cut back to five interviews per day, reminding him that he was overestimating his own stamina and forgetting to allow extra time for the customary formalities essential before a stranger might be permitted the impertinence of inquiring into a household's economic operations.

Even in Cameroon the NGO and research communities are still quite small, so a grant manager's personal familiarity with the details of research activities, projects, and donors functioning in the area can be real assets. Tchamou, a Cameroonian, brings years of in-country experience as a scientific researcher and extension officer to his post. He assesses every grant application in terms of what else is under way or being funded (by anyone) in the region, to help ensure that SOS-funded projects complement, without duplicating, other initiatives in the region or represent needed new initiatives. Tchamou also notes that someone higher up in the organization should always be the one to reject inadequate proposals, so that everyone in-country can save face and continue working together.

Tchamou's background gives him the needed context to evaluate proposals and ask the right heads-up questions. Once he received a proposal "with a very familiar format." With a few discreet inquiries, he was not surprised to discover another donor had funded that proposal a year before. When challenged, the applicant claimed he

wanted to make an experimental replication to study a trend, but Tchamou knew it would be too soon for that to have statistical significance. "He never came back with a revised application, confirming my hunch that he only wanted money and would have submitted the same results to me as he had given the other donor." Tchamou has experienced other incidents like this, and warns other grantgivers to be alert to people "mainly in it for the money. Writing a proposal is difficult, and if one is accepted by a donor, those people know it's a good proposal and they may try to use it again."

Grantee Capacity Strengthening

Capacity strengthening in BSP/CARPE's programs focuses on local grant recipients.

Local Grants as Capacity Strengthening Endeavors

Funded at up to \$10,000, CARPE-SOS Local Initiative grants are "start-up grants," designed to give grantees an opportunity to improve their administrative and technical capacity and put themselves on the funding map, improving their eligibility to be evaluated for a larger grant, whether from CARPE-SOS or another donor. By effectively completing a relatively modest project with a modest sum

of grant money, submitting financial and technical reports along the way, NGOs in Central Africa develop a funding track record while simultaneously building their facility with reporting and record keeping. BSP/CARPE staff review grantee reports and guide grantees in making revisions.

Like many grant agreements, the CARPE-SOS agreement contains a plethora of donor-mandated standard provisions.

Stella Asaha and Tonye Mahop are field project interns working on the "State of Knowledge Project," gathering information about certain non-timber forest product species. The project, which CARPE grants support, is based at Limbé Botanical Garden, Cameroon. Commenting on her experiences with this project, Asaha has noted that not only has she gained valuable scientific knowledge through her work, but she has also learned a great deal about administrative activities, including preparing and administering a budget and financial reports.



Kate Christian

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Check references of potential grantees.

Whenever possible, it is important to check the references of potential grantees to see how they are viewed by others. In addition to references provided by the potential grantee, it is important to look for other individuals or organizations that may also know the potential grantees and may be able to comment objectively on their work.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Conduct pre-award audits of the potential grantees.

To determine whether the potential grantee has the financial capacity to manage the level of funding requested, it is essential to conduct a pre-award audit (or financial review). This can be a formal audit for organizations requesting substantial amounts of funding or an informal review by the grant manager for organizations requesting smaller amounts of funding. A pre-award audit also enables the grant manager to identify weaknesses in the potential grantee's financial and administrative management so that he can develop a training program to improve the potential grantee's capacities. If it is determined that potential grantees have no prior track record for managing funds, provide no more than a minimal level of funding until their financial management capacity is proven.

REFADD



This group photo was taken at the close of a workshop organized by REFADD, the African Women's Sustainable Development Action Network, held between November 30 and December 2, 1999. The workshop, funded through a CARPE grant, focused on discussion and planning of operational strategies for encouraging participation by women in natural resources management in Central Africa. The workshop was organized after this network was unable to meet at the Kinshasa CEFDHAC meeting in 1999, due to lack of travel funds for many network members. This workshop is part of CARPE's work to strengthen institutional capacity of NGOs in Central Africa.

Grantees from the region often find this obligatory information confusing or irrelevant to their project. Along with translating the official grant agreement into French, the BSP/CARPE field office has also worked up a brief summary of key elements of the USAID guidelines, including schedules and formats for grantee reports and financial accounting, records and documentation grantees must keep and submit, procedures for alterations or adjustments, and consequences of grantee non-compliance. BSP's CARPE-SOS Local

RENFORCEMENT DE CAPACITÉ

If you're visiting a CARPE-SOS grant manager in French-speaking Central Africa, you're likely to hear the term "Renforcement de Capacité," or "capacity reinforcement." This useful phrase reminds grantgivers that they're never starting from scratch: all grantees approach a project with certain important abilities and knowledge in place. The grantor's role is to reinforce that knowledge and capacity by helping the grantee build up complementary capacities. For example, in countries where NGOs are relatively new, training in fundraising and accounting practices will complement NGO personnel's existing capacity to assess cultural impacts of habitat destruction and to network locally. This combination of grantee capacity and grantor capacity reinforcement leads to a more effective conservation-oriented organization.

Initiative managers always review a new contract orally, in a face-to-face meeting with grantees, to ensure their familiarity with all obligations, particularly as signing a written contract may not carry as much weight in the customs of a CARPE-SOS grantee country as it does in the donor country.

BSP/CARPE also promotes local capacity building by facilitating core CARPE partners to work with and mentor local organizations and employ local field staff in their CARPE-SOS funded projects. Rob Solem explains, "We identify regional organizations that might interest our CARPE partners in the United States. We believe it is a better approach for them to work through in-country NGOs. The idea in the development world is to work yourself out of a job; we hope this idea takes hold strongly in the conservation world, too." Any core partner organization seeking funding must state in its proposal precisely what part local NGOs will play in the project's implementation. Since requiring core partners to work with local NGOs will necessarily increase their transaction costs, BSP/CARPE often embeds into core partner grants the funds needed for training and TA for local participants. That way, the core partner has the necessary funds to help raise local capacity to carry out research and reporting on a level meeting the core partner's (and USAID's) own technical standards. For example, Global Forest Watch (GFW), a program of World Resources Institute (WRI), a core partner and a CARPE-SOS grantee, works with a network of local NGOs to gather information on forest development activities. In its CARPE-SOS grant GFW received extra

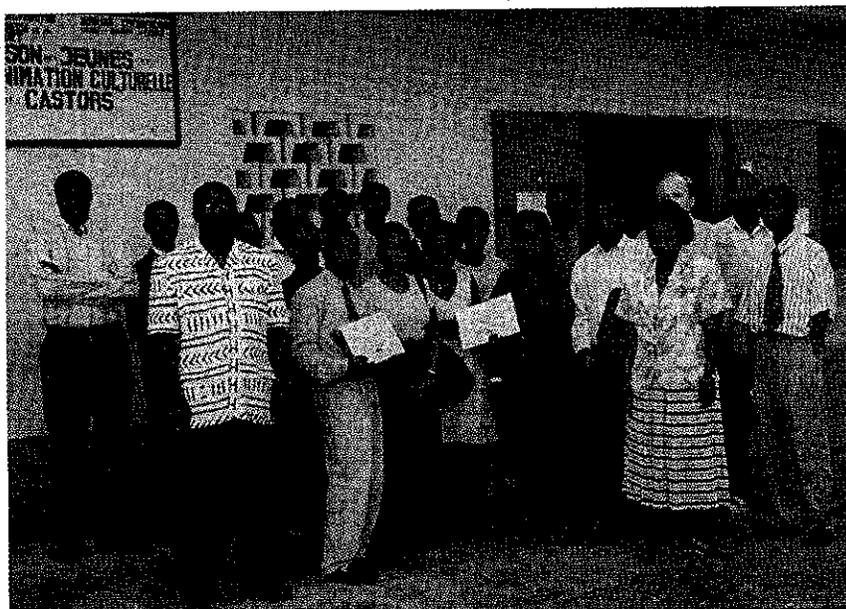
WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Explain the approval process to potential grantees and keep them apprised of the progress. Where grants are approved by an outside body (not directly by the grant manager), it is important that the grant manager explain the approval process to the potential grantee. This helps avoid any misunderstandings between the grant manager and potential grantee and helps develop a good relationship based upon communication and trust. The potential grantee should also be periodically apprised of the progress of the proposal through the approval process.

Association Donaval



Workshop participants from a market survey methodology workshop in February 1998, on non-timber forest products in the Central African Republic (CAR), financed with CARPE grant money given to Association Donaval to organize the workshop—CARPE Cameroon focal point Nicodeme Tchamou and CARPE Regional Coordinator Rob Solem were the trainers.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Post Approval Stage: Contracting

Make contracts clear and simple and discuss them point by point with grantees. Our grant agreements were so complex that most of our grantees probably did not thoroughly read them, which frequently led them to neglect their contractual obligations. Consequently, we adopted the practice of reviewing the grant agreements one-on-one with our grantees to ensure that they understood the major provisions. Although this action helped improve compliance with the grant agreements, a preferable action would be to reduce the length of contracts to three to five pages, written in the local language, that focus on the key responsibilities of each party.

CARPE-SOS funding to help raise the research and reporting capacity of these NGOs to meet WRI publication standards.

Field Presence and Technical Assistance

The CARPE-SOS grant program is often called “the local face of CARPE.” Of all programs run by CARPE’s core partners, BSP/CARPE’s grant funds are the ones most likely to be familiar to Congo Basin individuals and institutions. CARPE-SOS facilitates most of the CARPE-funded local initiatives and local capacity development aligned with CARPE’s promotion of long-term conservation and sustainable use of Congo Basin biological resources. The effort does not go unappreciated. CARPE-SOS Local Initiative grantee Roger Ngoufo praises BSP/CARPE’s innovation in choosing “to support and empower local NGOs in contrast to other organizations which merely state that there are no ‘credible’ NGOs in the country.”

Dedicated field presence is essential to this regional high profile. BSP/CARPE’s project field office in Libreville, Gabon, is home base for Local Initiative fund management, with extensive support from BSP/CARPE “focal point” personnel in Cameroon and DRC and support and oversight from the BSP/CARPE staff in Washington, D.C. For the other CARPE-SOS fund grants, the Libreville office and BSP headquarters in Washington, D.C., are both involved in

Nicodeme Tchamou



A certificate ceremony after a CARPE-sponsored regional training for botanists in field techniques in botanical inventory, at Limbé Botanical Garden. The nearly 30 participants, from all the countries CARPE is involved in, received certificates of completion at the end of this course.

management, with a long-term intention to move all CARPE grant management into the field. The focal point offices were not originally envisioned as part of the BSP/CARPE structure, but their contributions have proven invaluable. Even so, one frequent grantee criticism of CARPE-SOS is that the staff is so overtaxed with responsibilities that it slows down evaluation of applications.

Once it became evident that local capacity strengthening was needed to make local involvement in CARPE really work, virtually all of BSP/CARPE's field personnel, from focal points to communications managers and accountants, have become involved in the process, serving ad-hoc as grantee trainers in their areas of expertise. For example, BSP/CARPE's Gabon-based accountant gives one-on-one training to CARPE-SOS grantees in how to prepare the required CARPE-SOS financial reports. Financial management training may be one of the most important things grantees gain in the course of a CARPE-SOS grant. Along with coaching in writing applications and reports, BSP/CARPE focal points pay visits, sometimes planned, sometimes unannounced, to both project sites and in-town offices to evaluate grantee progress on their projects, and help them revise plans if they need to adjust their project timetables. In Gabon, especially, many CARPE-SOS grantees use the CARPE field office as their in-town office, borrowing the fax, the telephone, and the copying machine, and doing project business there with other grantees and contacts. In Cameroon, the BSP/CARPE focal point office has established a resource room where grantees may peruse conservation reports and journals.

BSP/CARPE's field presence benefits many core partners. For example, as J.G. Collomb, Global Forest Watch's Central Africa project manager explains, "Logistically, BSP/CARPE has been essential for the development of Global Forest Watch in Central Africa. GFW staff is based in the United States. We needed to develop a set of local partners, and to do so we relied very heavily on the focal



Innovative Resources Management: Louis Zapfack

A BSP/CARPE grant funded a project on participatory inventory work regarding timber and non-timber resources in the Djoum, Mokoko, and Tikar areas of Cameroon.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Grantee bank account information should be triple-checked to avoid problems in transferring funds. We found that grantees have frequently given us incorrect bank account information, which led to funds either being sent to the wrong account or getting returned to us. This has resulted in delays of a month or more in getting funds to the grantees. This, in turn, caused delays in completing the activity, which eventually required a grant amendment to extend the length of the grant.

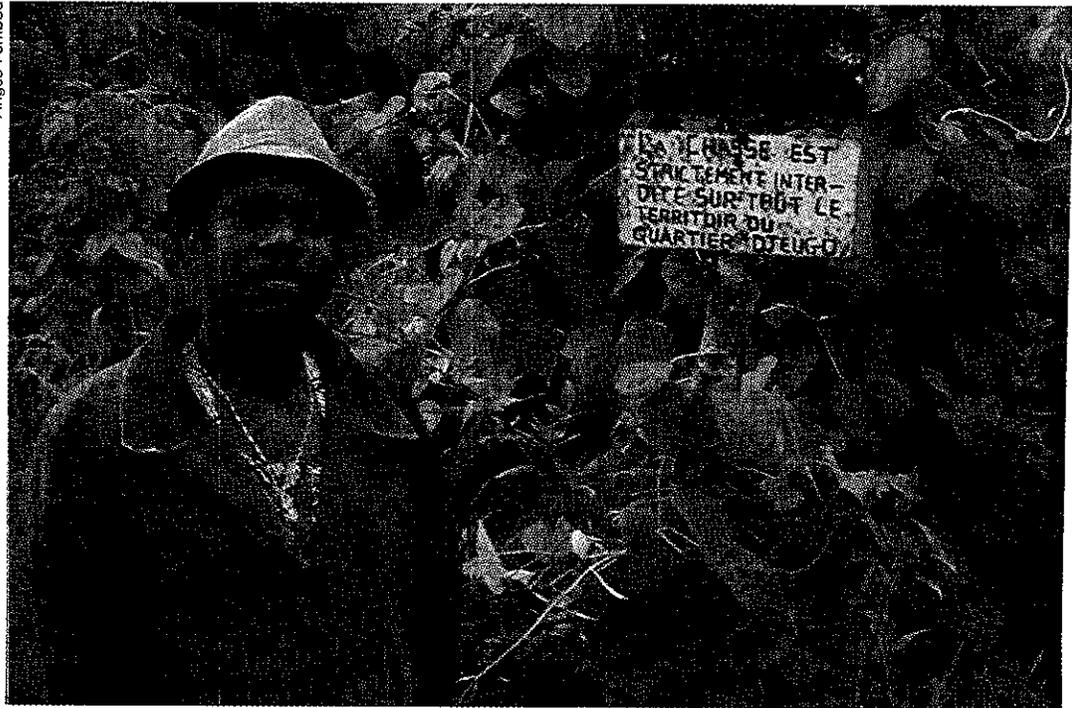
WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

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Inform grantees when grant funds are disbursed. Wiring funds to other countries in Central Africa can take anywhere from one week to more than a month. In addition, many banks will not inform their clients when funds have been received, or they incorrectly inform them that the funds have not been received when, in fact, they have. Consequently, it is important to inform grantees when funds are sent and then to fax them a copy of the bank transfer order so that they have a document they can use to pressure their banks into disbursing their funds as soon as they are received.

Anges Pambo



A village chief in a Sacred Forest in the West Province of Cameroon. A CARPE grant is funding a local NGO, CIPCRE, for its research on management of sacred forests. Local protection of sacred forests derives in part from the belief that ancestors live in the forests. CIPRE is particularly interested in exploring how well this kind of forest protection technique can be transferred elsewhere.

points in Cameroon and Gabon, who talked to the NGOs and the government, arranged our meeting schedule in advance, and gave us detailed information on local conditions. We also use their offices to hold meetings or simply plug in a computer. Otherwise we would be in the country totally cold; we would have to make all our phone calls from the hotel, with no place to convene.” Today the GFW and BSP/CARPE relationship is even closer. GFW’s new Cameroon coordinator, Henriette Bikie, shares an office with CARPE. Collomb reports, “She has benefited from being in touch with environmental issues beyond those of GFW’s immediate concern. The close affiliation helps create a network of environmentalists in Cameroon.”

Training Sessions and Networking

BSP/CARPE has facilitated capacity strengthening for the local NGO community in Central Africa through diverse training sessions. Sometimes it funds grants for workshops held by local NGOs or a core CARPE partner, such as a 1999 workshop in Cameroon, organized by one environmental NGO to help develop the advocacy capacities of environmental NGOs in the country.

On other occasions, BSP/CARPE itself holds workshops for all interested grantees. For example, in October 1998, BSP/CARPE conducted a training session in managerial capacity strengthening for environmental NGOs. The Kinshasa NGO, Bleu-Blanc, produces

environmental conservation cartoon booklets for children. At BSP/CARPE's one-day workshop on grant management principles and practices, held in 2000, Bleu-Blanc's director and accountant said what they had learned in the 1999 workshop led them to overhaul their entire accounting system and to send even more staff members to this year's workshop.

Workshops are also networking events for local grantees. In Cameroon, Tchamou holds occasional workshops where local grantees formally present their projects and findings and network informally, a practice BSP/CARPE means to extend to other countries. Roger Ngoufo of Cameroon Environmental Watch said this event "allowed us to hear evaluations from people of diverse backgrounds about the relevance of our work." In 1999 BSP/CARPE sponsored a forum about local forest resource management systems, one of the central CARPE programmatic topics. This meeting allowed the several local NGO and research institution grantees working on this subject to compare findings from their various study sites and to practice presenting these findings in as accessible a manner as possible.

For several years now, BSP/CARPE has also provided grant funding to support NGO representation at the biennial Congo Basin-wide conference of CEFDHAC (Conference on Dense and Humid Forest Ecosystems of Central Africa) attended by stakeholders that included timber companies, NGOs, and representatives of environment ministers from throughout Central Africa. Since NGOs are CARPE's primary clients, CARPE has tried to promote their involvement and make them real partners in CEFDHAC, earmarking funds to support NGO networking. Without this support, it is likely that the opportunity for NGO representatives to be present and interact at CEFDHAC with private sector and government delegates would be greatly impaired. BSP/CARPE also supports regional networking through its support of the IUCN Sustainable Use Specialist Group for Central Africa and its support of AFAN, the African Forest Action Network; the Sangha River Network in Central African Republic, Cameroon, and Congo; and the African Women for Sustainable Development network.

Monitoring and Results Dissemination

Both the Local Initiative grants and the other CARPE-SOS grants have served knowledge building in CARPE's first phase, playing a significant role in identifying gaps in knowledge and practice that can be addressed in later CARPE phases. As Solem notes: "The grant funding practices we have adopted have allowed us to amass information on all sorts of issues, accumulating a broad range of knowledge about the Central African forest." If the CARPE-SOS grant program continues, even Local Initiative grantgiving is likely to focus more on funding only CARPE priority activities that address these gaps.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Post-Approval Stage: Grant Monitoring

Ensure sufficient technical oversight by making frequent site visits as well as frequent visits to grantee headquarters. To the extent possible, it is important to visit grantees' activities in the field to see how things are going and assist them technically if they should need help. In addition, it is important to visit grantees' headquarters to monitor the financial management of the grants (primarily the accounting) in order to correct any problems while they are still small. Although this may sound a bit heavy handed, all of our grantees viewed our visits as capacity building and greatly appreciated the support.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM CARPE GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Communicate frequently with grantees to preclude any problems. While some grantees diligently maintain communication with us, most do not. Consequently, we find it helpful to send them reminders when reports are due (or if they are overdue) to encourage them to submit reports in a more timely fashion while showing our interest in the grant activity. If the grant manager is uncommunicative, it shows a lack of interest and oversight, which can lead to sloppy grant management (e.g., lack of respect for deadlines, less rigorous financial management) on the part of the grantee.

Applications ask prospective grantees to discuss expected project outcomes in terms of conservation impact, but baseline monitoring and ongoing evaluations of the conservation impact of projects are not required components of CARPE-SOS grants. This is partly because of the short time period in which most of the grants are conducted, and partly because the greater emphasis is on monitoring and evaluating the NGO's own development, as a necessary preliminary step in developing local conservation capacity.

This approach is already paying off. Some grantees have identified monitoring and evaluation as something they would like to learn to do better, as Jean Marie Mindja, organizer of the African Women for Sustainable Development network, says, "Since we are involved in an environmental project, we would like to become familiar with environmental impact assessment so that we could conduct monitoring efficiently." A few grantee NGOs are already developing new projects with significant environmental monitoring components. For example, Cameroon Environmental Watch, a local GFW partner, having completed a Local Initiative-funded project, has now submitted a project proposal to CARPE-SOS for a larger grant to focus on mapping, monitoring, and ground-truthing reported logging activities within and around the Dja Forest Reserve in south-central Cameroon.

Funding the dissemination of the knowledge gained through the grant program is an increasingly important part of BSP/CARPE's grantgiving activity. All interim and final technical reports filed at BSP/CARPE are available for consultation at focal point libraries and are to be compiled on a CD-ROM. Some are being written up (in both French and English) for dissemination as short "briefing sheets." Grantees are being funded to give "brown bag" and other presentations of results in both Central Africa and overseas. Some BSP/CARPE workshops are specifically organized to disseminate grantee results, such as the July 2000 NTFP workshop that met to present results from all of BSP/CARPE's NTFP-related grants.

KEMALA: An Example From Indonesia

Kelompok Masyarakat Pengelola Sumberdaya Alam (KEMALA), the Community Natural Resource Managers Program (in the national Indonesian language, the acronym spells the name of a jade-like magic stone), focuses on achieving sustainable expansion in the use of biological resource management and conservation "best practices" by rural communities in Indonesia. KEMALA seeks to link individuals and organizations concerned with traditional community-based natural resource management across Indonesia to build coalitions that are well informed, technically competent, creative, and politically active. KEMALA supports the strengthening of local and national NGOs that can contribute to improved biological resource management and conservation and nurtures the growth of decentralized democratic



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Dayak villager gathering rattan together for transport to markets, from the village forests where it was collected. Active planting and management of rattan within forests has been critical element of local economies in Kalimantan, Indonesia. NGOs are now working with producers and traders to ensure fair trade and reasonable prices for this sustainably harvested non-timber forest product.

structures within which groups can participate in decision making now and in the future. KEMALA partners are NGOs and NGO networks with effective track records related to these attributes and objectives. Partners get grants supporting ongoing fieldwork pertaining to local and national policy initiatives in various geographic focus areas and resource sectors. Within the five-year, \$10.5 million KEMALA program, the grants given, accounting for \$4 million, are used to build partnerships for change.

KEMALA builds on the momentum generated in a small-grants program BSP has run in Indonesia since 1994, through PeFoR, the Peoples, Forests, and Reefs program. This grantgiving activity, which began with a broadcast request for proposals (RFP), gradually gave BSP an in-depth understanding of Indonesia's environmental NGOs and their respective track records. In 1996, lawyer Nonette Royo, then PeFoR's Indonesia small grants coordinator, assessed Indonesia's NGOs for USAID/Indonesia's Natural Resources Management (NRM2) program, to consider further work supporting decentralized natural resources management.

Royo integrated her PeFoR knowl-

edge with background research about the big picture of Indonesia's NGO movement and traditional community-based natural resource management, soliciting recommendations during regional field visits. BSP's Indonesia and Washington, D.C.-based staff argued convincingly that for a new USAID-funded program to promote effective policy changes, it should facilitate long-term coalition-building to develop a network linking the on-the-ground programs of outer island local NGOs with policy-oriented national NGOs in Jakarta.

KEMALA today includes 30 partners. About a third are themselves networks of organizations. Locally based partners undertake fieldwork with communities and work on policy with local governments. National partners provide legal and policy analysis and TA to field-based partners. All partners receive three kinds of support from

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM KEMALA GRANT MANAGERS

Select grantees using clear selection criteria that are guided by the program objectives. Before requesting grant applications, we conduct field visits to identify likely grantees, based on selection criteria determined during the design of the program. Potential grantees are then asked to submit short, concise, concept papers, detailing what they want to achieve and how they plan to achieve it. Only after we have assessed what concepts fit with the program's objectives do we invite grantees to submit proposals for further planning or detailed proposals, and these are facilitated by BSP staff or consultants.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM KEMALA GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Create a diverse network of grantees that encompasses a broad spectrum of experience. Grantees were selected on a portfolio basis, to represent categories of field-based activities in selected geographic regions, policy sectors, and legal support. Other grantees were added to supply specific technical support as requested by existing partners. This approach resulted in building a core group of 30 active Indonesian grantees who were able to produce tangible results (as indicated by monitoring indicators), and who have now created their own umbrella organization to maintain the initiatives of the KEMALA program.

KEMALA: grants, TA, and networking facilitation. A key networking opportunity is the yearly KEMALA Partners' Forum, which convenes all partners, BSP, and USAID staff to conduct strategic planning according to a forum agenda determined by the partners.

Strategic Partner Selection

KEMALA's partner selection process was instituted at the program's outset. It draws on the detailed understanding of the Indonesian NGO situation that KEMALA's BSP designers continually update with their ongoing field presence. In KEMALA's program design, each partner contributes to the whole. Existing partners have recommended new partners based on their analysis of what the KEMALA partner network needs to grow stronger, serve existing partners' needs, further their program aims, and complement their strengths.

The partner selection process begins with a rapid assessment of whether a prospective partner organization or network fits KEMALA's screening criteria. They are invited for preliminary discussions with one or two KEMALA senior program staff or a staff member and a consultant. KEMALA seeks organizations whose visions, plans, capacities, and linkages with other groups offer the highest potential for contributing to improving community-based natural resource management. The principal screening criterion is that qualifying partners have track records of advocating traditional natural resource management rights and for strengthening responsibilities and capacity at the local community level.

If a prospective partner fits the criteria, a KEMALA staff team led by the original assessors facilitates partner development of a fundable program. Prospective partners do not prepare written grant applications. They produce the equivalent of a "concept paper" in an oral planning process carried out with KEMALA staff. KEMALA sometimes funds short-term (three-month) planning grants, most often when the prospective KEMALA partner is a network. These fund planning workshops where all network partners can participate in the program development process. The planning work focuses on the partner's selection of—and comprehensive understanding of—a set of critical issues for their work program. It also focuses on determining the particular roles that a partner organization or network can most effectively take to produce desired results in policy-making and field settings. The partner organization or network then plans out a program of activities for at least two years, almost always more comprehensive than KEMALA funding would cover. The partner selects some key components of this planned program for KEMALA funding and seeks other sources of funding for the rest of the program. With KEMALA staff facilitation, partners complete a project proposal for an implementation grant focused on these key components, detailing projected budget and work products for one or two years.

Each KEMALA implementation grant agreement details what is expected of the partner and what the partner can expect from the program; it also specifies the monitoring evaluation outputs and reporting deliverables the partner will produce. KEMALA staff facilitate detailed work planning, an effective tool to help partners manage their own time and resources. Partners carefully assess their approved program, particularly its time constraints, their capacities and priorities, and possible changes from external dynamics. They finalize a budget and an activities timeframe, determining, for each activity, who is responsible, what methods, outputs, or expected results are anticipated; what outside parties are involved; and what additional support is required.

Flexibility and renewed partner funding are essential in this kind of grantgiving. KEMALA staff and partners keep project activities flexible through grant amendments, usually making at least one amendment within a two-year grant period. Indonesia has experienced tremendous government restructuring and decentralization over the past few years, and partners have refocused their activities to fit these changes. Flexibility has enabled partners to reap the windfall value of their grants after the Indonesian rupiah crashed. Some grants were extended to two years, and some partners extended support to other network members. Within KEMALA, virtually all partners continue on to “follow-on” grant agreements. KEMALA staff and partners carry out regular reviews and audits of activities and progress, using this information and that derived from monitoring and evaluation outcomes to refine partner objectives and approaches, select new activities, and negotiate a new grant agreement.

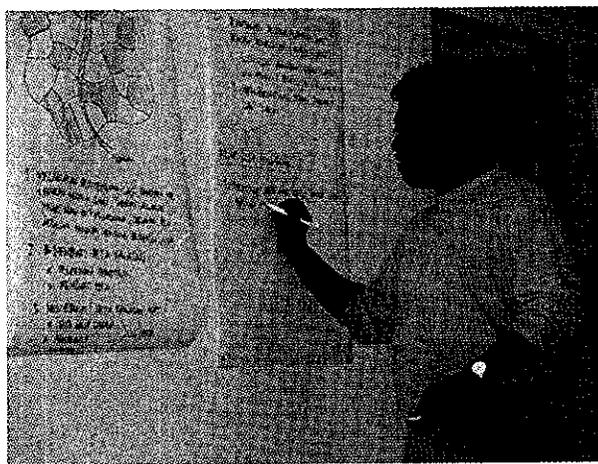
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LESSONS LEARNED FROM KEMALA GRANT MANAGERS

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Take a “partnership” approach to maintain support with grantees. Because grant programs and grantees often are trying to achieve long-term, difficult goals, they need support that matches those needs. This support can best be delivered by a “partnership” approach consisting of these essential elements: shared vision of what is trying to be achieved; clearly written program objectives and indicators to measure success; commitment to support each grantee’s activities over the life of the program if adequate progress is achieved (as measured by monitoring indicators and deliverables); shared work planning, and periodic reviews of progress; and an annual forum where partners meet to review progress and problems. Because the ratio of BSP staff to grantees is high—one staff member for every five or six grantees—staff are able to spend adequate time facilitating and understanding partners’ activities. Flexibility in agreed-upon outputs is provided by six-month reviews and grant agreement amendments if necessary. Similarly, reviews of BSP service provision to partners have been done each year at the Forum meeting.

Arief Wicaksono, a member of KEMALA’s staff, works on a scoping exercise in Wamena, Papua (Province), Indonesia, in March, 2000, with KEMALA partner organization YBAW (Yayasan Bina Adat Waleasi). Arief is facilitating a scoping exercise with WBAW staff to determine a methodology for developing and implementing a monitoring plan for YBAW’s activities. Here, they are discussing ways to monitor current land use practices.



James Christopher Miller/BSP

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM KEMALA GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Award an initial short-term grant to assess grantee capacity and maximize accountability. Initial grants are given for a period of one to two years. After the initial grant period, a new grant agreement is negotiated if the partner has achieved satisfactory progress, as measured by the USAID results indicators. Experience to date shows that this system works fairly well, improving accountability, but still maintaining flexibility. For example, yearly audits of some partners have disclosed management issues that had to be resolved before any further grant advance payments could be made.

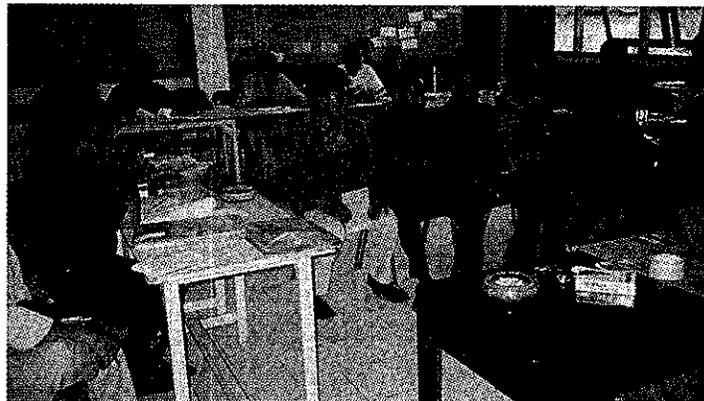
Grantee Capacity Strengthening

KEMALA devotes extensive staff time and resources to TA and capacity strengthening for partners through all phases of program design, implementation, and outcome monitoring. KEMALA senior program officers are assigned primary responsibility for no more than five partners so that they may spend enough time with each one. Administrative staff members monitor partner deliverables and handle similar tasks so that program officers can focus solely on content. In addition to providing technical assistance from program officers, KEMALA also spends one dollar on contracted TA to assist grantees for every four dollars KEMALA provides in direct grant funding.

Facilitating Program Development

KEMALA employs several program management tools to help partners identify key roles and an achievable program of outcome-oriented activities. These include extensive oral discussion in a process called a "strategic scoping tool" (SST, or "scoping"), used to determine a partner's overall role and the priority activities to achieve change on a specific issue. KEMALA consultant David Richards has explained that scoping "is used to determine the 20 percent of activities which will produce 80 percent of the results." Sometimes participants also employ "spatial scoping," a graphic presentation of the information elicited. On separate map overlays they indicate the distribution of threats and ecosystem constraints facing particular communities and natural resources.

From scoping, partners develop a "desired change scenario," focusing on a realistic, measurable and timely ideal or goal and determining the partner's optimal role in bringing about change on that key issue. Having identified the desired change and their key role, the partners come up with new ideas and innovative, catalytic programs for specific activities that would realize the desired changes. These programs often require local coalitions to achieve shared goals. The partners then identify the most realistic and urgent activities as their strategic objectives. In an iterative process they then reassess which activities and outcomes fit their mission and capacities. From all this work, the partners draw up a "project tree" or "project map," linking project



In the exercise pictured, members of YLBHI, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia) are role playing to demonstrate what occurs in the aftermath of a conflict, when testimony must be given in court. Pictured "testifying" are four "victims" of conflict.

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goals, objectives, and activities that illustrate the flow of activities and outcomes leading to each strategic objective. This "project tree" becomes the initial project description and the basis for monitoring project progress. Scoping is used later to revise and review project activities based on monitored changes.

Ongoing Technical Assistance

All partners receive TA packages designed to meet specific institutional strengthening needs for organizational and program management. During the annual KEMALA forum, partners decide what TA is needed across the network, and KEMALA then usually provides for this. KEMALA facilitates TA for community organizing, policy work, mapping, gender work, and conflict resolution. KEMALA also supports regional autonomy training, financial management training,

communications planning, and media and public outreach. Partner outreach focuses on conveying messages and lessons to other NGOs and critical target audiences that include government and local communities. Partners learn methods for systematic assessment of their organization's development and management via the "institutional development framework." This framework guides partners through institutional self-scoring on five organizational components: vision, management resources, human resources, financial resources, and external resources.

KEMALA staff regularly facilitate TA by consultants, including partners strategically selected for the kinds of technical support they offer.

Consultants sometimes come from international NGOs. For example, the Washington, D.C.-based Center for International Environmental

Law (CIEL), provided TA and mentoring in legal research and analysis from 1998 to 2001 to KEMALA partner ELSAM, a policy research and advocacy NGO and to other public interest lawyers. More often, Indonesian consultants and NGOs provide capacity strengthening and technical support. For example, Chandra Kirana has provided assistance to partners developing outreach strategy and work plans, and Ichsan Malik assisted the scoping process in North Sulawesi, facilitated numerous institutional development framework assessments, and co-facilitated several priority training workshops in conflict management.

Networking

Once a year the KEMALA Partners' Forum convenes all KEMALA partners, along with BSP staff and USAID representatives. Partners collaboratively determine the Forum's agenda and format, where strategic decisions about KEMALA objectives and overall direction are made. They select priorities for TA, outreach, and analytical

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM KEMALA GRANT MANAGERS

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Technical assistance support should meet partners' self-assessed needs and include substantial investments in program management tools. We have developed a tool kit to facilitate partners' creation of more focused and effective work programs. These strategic planning tools include strategic scoping, spatial scoping, desired change scenario-building, and such program planning tools as participatory program planning and project mapping, identification of key outcomes and indicators to measure these, annual and quarterly work planning, and outreach strategies based on project maps. The institutional development framework has been introduced to help partners assess their own organizational management strengths and weaknesses, and it is used as a basis to identify and prioritize their own training and development needs. Several partners, especially those based in the field, have indicated that this support has been the most useful part of our program.

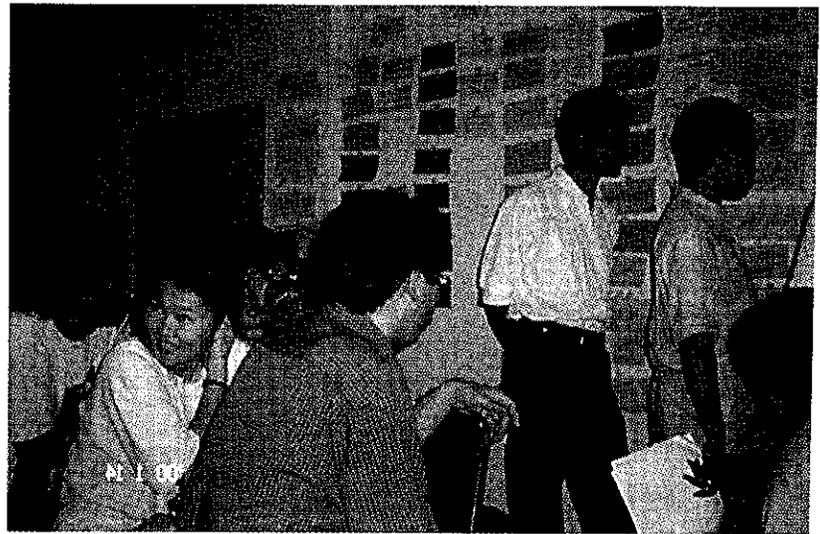
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LESSONS LEARNED FROM KEMALA GRANT MANAGERS

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Actively facilitate networking to share resources, skills, and learning. The BSP-KEMALA portfolio includes several national and regional networks supplying legal aid and analysis, participatory mapping training and information, coastal and marine issues, forest monitoring, community forestry, conflict resolution, and community organizing. Through these networks, more than 100 additional NGOs have received assistance from KEMALA partners. These networks meet at least once a year to discuss issues and action plans. Additionally, several "learning networks" have been developed that a number of NGOs facing similar challenges can convene regularly to share experiences and lessons. These meetings involve "homework" in the field between meetings. Networking through apprenticeships also promotes the sharing of mapping skills. Several members of an NGO spend up to two months working with an experienced team in another location. Grants are given to both trainer and trainee NGOs. Approximately 25 percent of all grant monies are spent on travel for these meetings and skills sharing. In addition, all KEMALA partners meet once a year to review progress and discuss future directions.

Members of 14 local branches of the YLBHI, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia) participating in an exercise that demonstrates visually how their own programs can only be successful if they connect with other branches, networking throughout the Indonesian archipelago.



WWF-US

and policy work. They discuss methods and policy issues and form thematic or regional collaborative groups to share information and coordinate activities. Partners also network about funding opportunities and have often been quite successful in obtaining funds from donors other than USAID.

KEMALA benefits from having a central theme and objective, so that partners are all working on very closely related activities, and sharing of experiences and resources comes naturally. In KEMALA, networking is about sharing skills through trainings and apprenticeships and about sharing resources through subgrants to field partners. BSP recognizes that all information is actually the NGO's or the community's own property. As these networks develop, they often institute formal protocols, and written by-laws, regarding transmitting information across the network.

Most networks that are KEMALA partners now get together on their own at least once a year for meetings, joint trainings, and joint strategic planning sessions. In the past, network members were able to convene about once every three years, at best. KEMALA funding has allowed these networks to meet regularly face-to-face, and to incorporate partners from further afield in the vast Indonesian archipelago. Several new national networks have developed in association with KEMALA, and many forums have emerged where NGOs share experiences, resources, and skills with others, whether they are KEMALA partners or not. "Partners are bringing new NGOs within this fold all the time," notes KEMALA senior program officer Nonette Royo.

THE 2000 KEMALA PARTNER FORUM AND LIFE AFTER BSP

At the 2000 Forum, KEMALA partners held regional-based discussions to identify threats, problems facing local communities and their responses, services NGOs needed to supply, agendas for needed actions over the next year, and support needed from BSP/KEMALA. KEMALA partners recognize that there is a growing movement of community-based managers, and that the organization of this movement needs continued support beyond BSP's 2001 end date. Because some partners definitely feel the need for ongoing financial and technical support from outside donors, partners decided they should continue to work together to secure future funding and assistance for partners and others sharing common goals. They agreed on what was effective in the existing "partnership" with BSP/KEMALA:

- Membership within the movement is becoming increasingly comprehensive, bringing in partners with diverse skills from throughout Indonesia.
- Grants supply sufficient funds to achieve results, more than that is generally available from other donor sources.
- The grant agreement mechanism works effectively.
- Senior BSP/KEMALA staff work closely with partners, leading to flexibility in the support and ensuring that partners influence the program's policies.
- BSP/KEMALA is not a direct implementer. As a support system to the partner implementers it is "demand driven" by the partners.

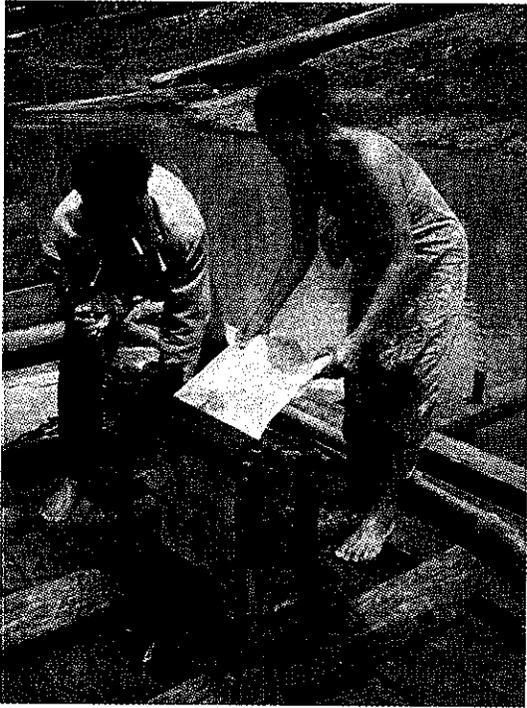
Partners agreed that an ideal replacement institution for BSP would be one purposely constructed to suit partner needs. In July 2000, partners formally established such an organization, named *Yayasan Kemala*. This will be an umbrella, non-implementing, non-profit organization that facilitates NGOs to promote the movement for democratic natural resources governance. Main activities will include: facilitating efforts to change paradigms, policies, laws, and strengthen local institutions; supporting research, development, and education; developing networks and media communications; obtaining a funding base; and developing a "peoples' economy" based on natural resources.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM KEMALA GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Use locally available technical assistance as a means of supporting capacity building. NGO partners often provide technical assistance for legal analysis, forestry policy analysis, gender awareness training, conflict resolution, community organizing, and community participatory mapping. In each case, the partners have developed training modules and manuals based on their own experiences of what does and does not work. Often, a manual's contents are decided in a week-long workshop of numerous practitioners; then a small team writes it up. The draft manual is circulated widely, field-tested with trainings in the regions, and revised accordingly. The manual-writing and training are done by members of NGOs with relevant experience, and overseen by one NGO that receives a grant to complete the work. In several cases, specific technical guidance (for example, forestry policy, legal analysis, or participatory mapping) is provided to the NGO by a consultant Technical Advisor. This approach is designed to meet needs as assessed directly by the NGO activists themselves. Because assessments of the trainings are still ongoing, no definite statement can be made as to how effective this approach has been in producing real outcomes.



MMF-US

Dayak villagers rolling out latex sheets produced from tapping rubber trees. The Dayak have a traditional agroforestry system which relies upon several species of wild rubber trees, and these areas are major land use types within West Kalimantan. NGOs are trying to ensure that these village forests, which include the managed rubber trees, are protected from clear-felling and conversion to plantations.

Monitoring and Results Dissemination

KEMALA team leader Kath Shurcliff emphasizes, “The most critical capacity strengthening work KEMALA can accomplish is instilling within partners the ability and commitment to monitor activity outcomes.” Because finding out whether activities are really achieving their intended outcomes is so important, training in outcome monitoring and evaluation begins at the outset of a prospective partner’s KEMALA association. Also key is the issue of improving accountability between an NGO and its client communities.

Monitoring has many components. Among the most important for guaranteeing compliance is that all concerned grasp the utility of the information being gathered. During one KEMALA Forum, some partners reflected that at first they had not fully understood the purpose of USAID indicators, and that sometimes it takes at least one year of reporting and using these indicators to fully understand why monitoring matters. Some partners are already highly motivated to carry out monitoring. Others benefit from staff reinforcement stressing the values of this element.

Project tree exercises help KEMALA partners think logically about producing results and about

identifying their own information and monitoring needs. From the project tree, KEMALA and partners identify key outcomes and indicators and use these to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan. Partners identify who will be affected by the successes or failures of their key activities and outputs, such as the local community, the NGO itself, the donor, or policy makers. Together, KEMALA and the partner then ask some critical questions, to which indicators provide the objective answers. The questions include:

- How will we know if we have reached this outcome?
- Who should know this outcome information?
- What is the proof that an action has been taken or has had an effect?
- Does enough reliable knowledge indicate that the proposed course of action is necessary and sufficient? If not, what additional knowledge would be useful, and how can the grant program facilitate it?

KEMALA also facilitates workshops in on-site data analysis so that partners experience how monitoring data directly figures into decision making. Understanding how information improves management and enhances results also helps local organizations see why some information they do not think immediately useful still is needed by BSP and USAID. Another message of these

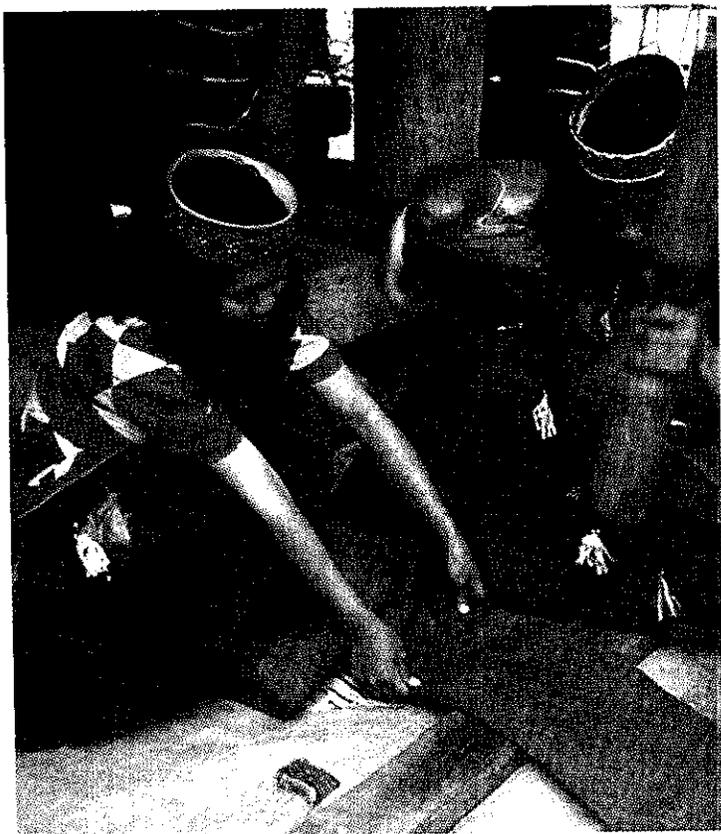
workshops is that there is a constant need to monitor utility of information collected and refine data collection and reporting requirements.

Sharing of the lessons learned from the partners' activities is facilitated through regular workshops organized by the partners themselves. They have even established "learning networks" around specific topics such as community organizing and conflict resolution as well as the more formal networks for community mapping, community forestry, and coastal/marine issues. BSP/KEMALA supplies the funds for these workshops and provides technical assistance so that partners integrate outreach into their programs' objectives and regular work plans.

A monthly series of "media tips" has been produced to help partners use the local mass media more effectively in reaching out to their local constituents. To spread information and lessons more rapidly within the fast growing NGO network, partners are using the Internet and electronic mail services. Grants help fund the costs of the computers, modems, and telephone connections. Several NGOs have their own Web sites, and BSP/KEMALA maintains a Web site giving details of partners' projects and a photo gallery of activities. Various management and training tools used by staff can be downloaded from this Web site.

GRANTGIVING FOR HYPOTHESIS TESTING IN CONSERVATION

Practicing hypothesis-testing grantgiving means funding a portfolio of projects that deliberately addresses a stated hypothesis and gathering project data via structured monitoring and evaluation. A grant program that does hypothesis testing needs a narrowly focused profile, and this can be accomplished by streamlining what problems grantees are seeking to resolve, the approaches they take to address those problems, and the range of eligible grantees themselves. The complete portfolio of grant-supported projects constitutes a hypothesis-testing experiment, yielding analytical results that may be applied systematically to improve the design and implementation of subsequent programs and projects. At the same time each grant given also benefits the individual grantees and implementation sites.



Richard Margolis

Fully realizing a hypothesis-testing program takes a great deal of ongoing involvement. A learning approach to compiling and administering a grant portfolio requires a significant amount of time, preferably devoted by full-time managers, to develop the framework, refine funding and research criteria, collect and analyze data, periodically revise the approach in accordance with new knowledge, and disseminate results. Capacity building is often another requisite. Awarding the grants, implementing the research, carrying out capacity building, monitoring, and completing the analysis require donors who look beyond the usual two-, three-, or even five-year grantmaking program horizons

Women making bark cloth for commercial sale in Central Sulawesi, South side of Lore Lindu National Park. BCN worked with organizations to develop economic enterprises involving local communities.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM BCN GRANT MANAGERS

A hypothesis-testing program takes time. The BCN program was originally planned to be five years long. It ended up being seven years long and could have been longer. That said, one of the best things about BCN was that it had a fixed end point. This meant that it could focus on completing its goal of testing an enterprise-based approach to conservation.

to focus on long-term learning and other benefits. All the extra time, money, and effort can pay off in learning that extends well beyond the portfolio's own existence.



Richard Margolis

BCN: A Donor and A Partner

The Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN) was established in September 1992 and ended exactly seven years later. In 1999, when the program closed its doors, it was very different from what had been originally envisioned. To understand, therefore, how BCN functioned as a grant maker and how it interacted with its grant recipients, it is useful to do a straightforward “before and after” comparison of the program—because it is from those differences and changes that the most important lessons can be drawn.

Collected rattan is processed into consumer products, including furniture and handbags. In West Kalimantan, BCN worked with several partner organizations, including Yayasan Dian Tama, in a project to produce high-quality rattan handbags, briefcases, and business accessories. The project partners found that the export market was much more profitable and stable than the domestic market for these products.

In the following paragraphs we will give a brief history of how the BCN was conceived, and we will describe the program's institutional and programmatic structure, its grantmaking process (the core of this

analysis), and its interactions with grant recipients at the beginning and end of the program. We will conclude with a section that highlights the changes BCN went through as a grant maker and, the major lessons it learned along the way.

A Very Brief History of How BCN Was Conceived

In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a good deal of discussion in the development and conservation communities about how small-scale, community-based enterprises could create financial incentives to protect important terrestrial and marine habitats. The successful marketing of the Brazil nut in various Ben and Jerry's products, with the help of Cultural Survival, was one prototype suggested for the idea. The argument was that because local communities were earning income harvesting and selling the Brazil nut, and because the quality of the Brazil nut was directly linked to a healthy forest (Brazil nut trees require an intact canopy), local communities had an inherent and direct incentive to protect their revenue source and the ecosystem it relied on. Similar arguments were being made about "ecotourism," biological prospecting for pharmaceutical compounds, and even timber cutting as potentially lucrative businesses that could create incentives for sustainable use and conservation. This enthusiasm for the idea was matched by a good deal of skepticism about the limits of such an approach, but no one had done a systematic analysis. It sounded good in theory, but did it work in practice?



Richard Margolis

That is, in short, how the concept behind the BCN—a systematic look at enterprise-based approaches to conservation—got its start. At about this same time, USAID was creating a 10-year, \$120 million program called the United States-Asia Environmental Partnership (US-AEP). US-AEP was focused on developing trade in and training for environmental technologies. USAID decided that the enterprise-based approach to conservation was conceptually compatible enough with US-AEP's overall goals to commit substantial funds to it.

Displaying handicrafts in Central Sulawesi, south side of Lore Lindu National Park. BCN worked with organizations to develop economic enterprises involving local communities.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM BCN GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

This kind of program requires a large staff who can interact regularly with grantees. BCN hired far more staff members than originally anticipated. These staff members were placed in field offices where they could interact with project teams on a regular basis to provide technical assistance and work with them to collect data necessary for testing the BCN core hypothesis.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM BCN GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

A multi-stage grants review process is necessary. BCN staff had to spend a great deal of time working with potential grantees in order to develop workable proposals. This work was made easier by requesting initial concept papers and then providing Planning Grants before requesting full Implementation Grant proposals. The challenge in this process was not to create unwarranted expectations.

The BCN Institutional and Programmatic Structure

In the Beginning (1992)

In September 1992, BSP and USAID signed a cooperative agreement to launch BCN. The agreement was for \$20 million over a five-year period. Key features of the institutional and programmatic structure of BCN included the following:

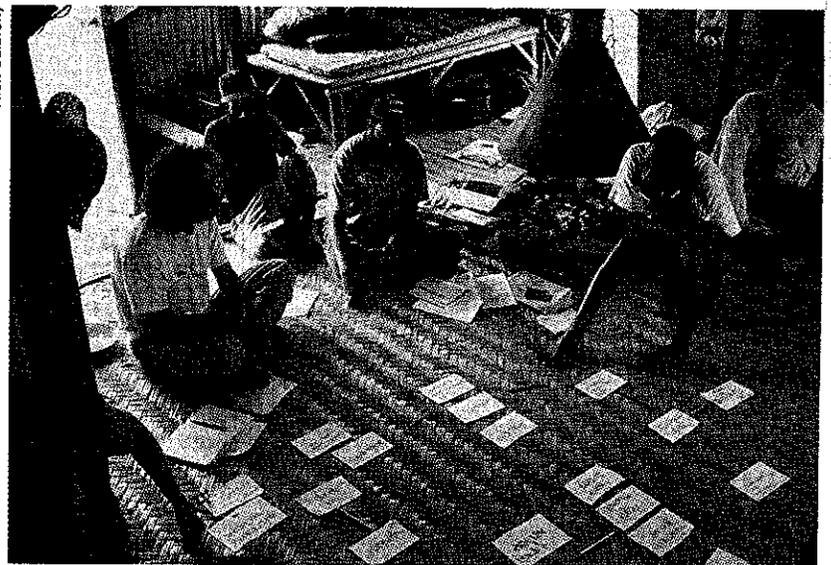
- BCN was designed to have a headquarters office in Washington, D.C. (where the majority of staff would be located), and a single regional office. The designers felt that putting staff in a regional office would reduce costs and enable staff to be managed so that they would not interfere with projects.
- When the BCN cooperative agreement was signed in September 1992, there was no BCN staff. By mid-1993, BCN was actively reviewing proposals and making grants, even though there was just one permanent BCN staff member and two additional people with temporary status. BCN scaled up fast, but even after one year there were just five permanent staff members.

At the End (1999)

By 1999, BCN was still an integral part of BSP and still had its headquarters office at WWF, a regional office, and a separate cooperative agreement with USAID. But much else had changed:

- BCN had been given two no-cost extensions that extended its life by two years, making it a seven-year, \$20 million program.
- BCN had a small regional office in Manila, Philippines, but it also established "satellite" offices run by just one or two program officers in India, Indonesia, and Fiji, thus decentralizing the

Nick Salafsky



RCF (Arlyne Johnson and John Ericho) in Papua New Guinea, doing a conceptual model, 1994. This BCN-affiliated project focused on eco-tourism in the rain forests of Crater Mountain, Papua New Guinea.

operation far more than anticipated and putting more staff in the four field offices than were located in Washington, D.C.

- At its peak BCN had about 15 staff members, including interns and contractors in Washington, D.C., and the field.

The Proposal Review and Grantmaking Process

In the Beginning (1992)

BCN was designed with two goals in mind: 1) to support terrestrial and marine conservation at specific sites noted for their biological diversity; and 2) to learn whether or not enterprises can, in fact, create financial incentives for conservation. This meant that BCN would have two distinct functions, occurring in more or less sequential phases. In the first phase, BCN was to function as an intermediary donor—receiving and reviewing proposals, making grants, and monitoring finances to achieve conservation goals. In the second phase, BCN was to function as a research organization—compiling and analyzing data coming in from the various grantees through technical reports and site visits to promote learning. That was the overall vision.

To reach these two goals of conservation and learning, BCN's original plan for grantmaking had several key features:

- BCN was an open grants competition, meaning that anyone who read the widely distributed and vaguely written English-language Request for Proposals could apply for funding.
- BCN staff members were discouraged from actively soliciting proposals and, thus, jeopardizing the program's objectivity.
- BCN could make one of two types of grants: a Planning Grant of up to \$50,000 for one year, or an Implementation Grant of up to \$900,000 for three years. Organizations could apply directly for either one—they did not need to go through a planning phase.
- All proposals were expected to incorporate a sound plan for three core elements: 1) a thorough business and marketing plan in support of a "linked" enterprise,¹ 2) a socioeconomic monitoring

¹ A linked enterprise is one that has a direct dependence on the biodiversity of a given project site. To test for linkage in any project proposal, BCN staff used a theoretically straightforward test: If the biodiversity of the project site—whether forest or coral reef—is destroyed, would the business continue to thrive? If the answer to that question is "yes" (as with, say, an enterprise that involves planting coffee in a buffer zone) then BCN could not support it. If the answer was "no" (as with, say, a dive-tourism enterprise in which tourists visit a coral reef), then we could. Of course, this question of what is or is not "linked" became quite murky. How it was interpreted in many ways defined just how narrow BCN's grantmaking would be. A complete discussion of the concept of linkage can be found in N. Salafsky and E. Wollenberg, 2000. Linking livelihoods and conservation: A conceptual framework and scale for assessing the integration of human needs and biodiversity. *World Development*, 28(8), pp. 1421-1438.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM BCN GRANT MANAGERS

(continued)

Hypothesis-testing programs can create improved partnerships. This kind of program can break down the traditional hierarchy that separates donor or program management and project staff. Instead of an unequal donor-grantee relationship, there is now a transaction between equal partners involving funding in return for information. Instead of managers primarily serving as paper-pushing bureaucrats, they become "scientists" involved in research. This shift in perspective makes everyone's jobs much more enjoyable and interesting.

plan, and 3) a biological monitoring plan. Implementation Grant proposals that did not have these three core elements were to be denied funding.

- Although it was trying to work with enterprises, owing to USAID regulations, BCN could only make grants—no loans of any kind were allowed. Furthermore, BCN could not make grants to for-profit firms.
- BCN would review all incoming proposals internally then, for those Implementation Grant proposals that appeared promising, a Peer Review Group would be convened on a periodic basis to review and recommend which Implementation Grant requests should be supported.
- All grants were supposed to be made by May 1994 so that data collection and analysis could begin.

At the End (1999)

After receiving and reviewing dozens of proposals that did not meet the BCN criteria, it was clear that the review process would have to go through incremental but fundamental changes. While many of those changes were in place by mid-1994, it was not until 1998 (the year BCN formalized its “Small Grants” review process) that BCN stopped working on the grantmaking process altogether. The following are the most important and substantive changes BCN made relative to the original grants review process:

- BCN staff wrote an entirely new version of our Request for Proposals that was clear, straightforward and almost prescriptive, on the assumption that BCN should err more on the side of transparency and clarity than to try to be open and inclusive of all possibilities. BCN also translated the revised Request for Proposals into Indonesian because English was a serious obstacle to local groups in that country. Writing this revised version was difficult because USAID requirements constrained us to maintain elements of the format and structure of the first version.
- BCN staff members were encouraged to solicit proposals to fill gaps in our portfolio of projects and to develop proactive relationships with potential grantees. For example, when BCN realized that it did not have sufficient representation from India, BCN staff did a traveling road show in India to solicit proposals. In like manner, BCN also actively encouraged the development of marine proposals.
- Organizations were actively discouraged from applying for an Implementation Grant without first applying for and completing a Planning Grant. BCN also ended up making more Planning Grants than Implementation Grants. Although this selectivity made a stronger portfolio, it also created some false expectations. Groups that received a Planning Grant but

Nick Salafsky



Village members, a WWF representative, and King Mahendra Trust staff mapping buffer zone plantations, 1993.

did not get an Implementation Grant for their projects were understandably unhappy. This screening process took significant amounts of staff time and also created some ill will.

- Although originally BCN wanted to fund only complete projects, it found that most projects were deficient in at least one (and often more) of the key elements. BCN thus had to work closely with project teams during the Planning Grant phase to help them develop these elements of their proposal.
- Although BCN could still not make loans or grants to for-profit firms, it tried to work with groups that were closely linked with for-profit businesses.
- Instead of asking for full proposals from potential grantees, BCN requested two- to three-page concept papers in which the grantee outlined ideas before submitting a full proposal. These concept papers saved an enormous amount of time and effort for both grantees and BCN staff. If the ideas seemed interesting, staff could work with grantees to develop a proposal. If the ideas did not seem like they would fit, BCN could let people know before they expended a great deal of time and effort.
- The selection phase of the grantmaking process took much longer than anticipated—it was not completed until mid-1995.

Interacting with Grantees

In the Beginning (1992)

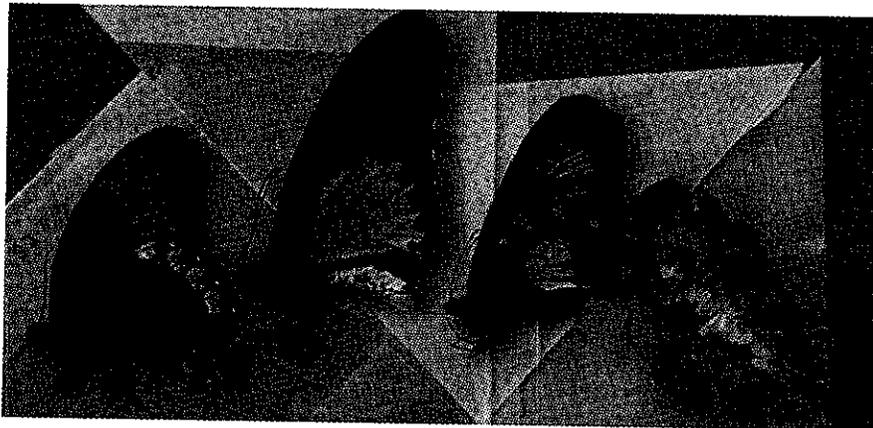
Although it is hard to know exactly what the original designers of the BCN program were thinking, they seemed to have thought that BCN staff would try to avoid becoming involved in or working too closely with projects. They thought that if BCN developed a “research hypothesis,” it would be a simple thing to publish it and wait for potential projects to apply for funding. BCN could pick the best ones, write them checks, conduct occasional field visits, and wait for the reports full of data to roll in. BCN could then analyze the data, write reports, and move onto the next topic. These were the major assumptions behind this approach:

- Project teams had all the capacity necessary to manage their work and project finances.
- Setting up enterprises was a fairly straightforward proposition, given the degree of funding that BCN could provide.
- Project teams had the capacity and time to develop and implement monitoring plans that would collect appropriate data needed to test the BCN hypothesis.

At the End (1999)

Very early on in the program, it became clear that BCN staff would have to work with project partners on a regular basis and that BCN would have to provide extensive technical support. Instead of being hands-off donors, BCN had to get involved in projects:

- Although all projects had developed extensive work plans, a good deal of modification was required. In particular, for many of our national NGO partners, even meeting USAID financial reporting requirements was difficult. BCN had to send its administrative staff to the field to help partners develop their institutional and financial management capacities. For better or worse, BCN staff also played facilitating roles in a number of disputes within organizations or among project partners.
- Establishing workable enterprises is a difficult task. BCN supported numerous consultants and other types of assistance for the projects, but even this was not enough.
- BCN staff spent a great deal of time working with projects to develop their analytical frameworks and to collect data to help test the BCN hypothesis.



John Parks

Butterflies for sale, Arfak Mountains, West Papua, Indonesia, 1998. Ranching butterflies on the perimeter of a nature reserve has become a foundation for local financial self-reliance, and helps conserve endangered butterfly species.

The Changes BCN Made and the Lessons It Learned

When BCN started, it was conceived of as a fairly simple and straightforward proposition. But this process turned out to be incredibly difficult and complex. Setting up and running a hypothesis-testing grants program requires time and energy. It also requires that program and administrative staff simultaneously function as grants program officers, technical resource persons, information pollinators, researchers, and communicators. At times, wearing so many different hats was both confusing and tiring. But it also made the job extremely interesting, and BCN learned a great deal. The main lessons we learned included the following:

- A hypothesis-testing program takes time.
- This kind of program requires a large staff who can interact regularly with grantees.
- A multi-stage grants review process is necessary.
- Hypothesis-testing programs can create improved partnerships.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

By looking at our own portfolio of grantmaking programs, we have arrived at some general observations and specific lessons-learned that we hope will help grant makers manage their programs more effectively.

Observations

BSP's assistance to grantees has sometimes been characterized as "grantmaking with a help button." To varying degrees, BSP program managers have remained involved with grantees throughout their projects, always with the objective of achieving better conservation results. This assistance has taken many shapes, and the degree of staff involvement has varied considerably among BSP projects. Yet across BSP's portfolio of grantmaking initiatives we have found some clear commonalities regarding how these projects should be carried out.

Clarity of selection criteria is requisite. All of BSP's grants programs stressed the importance of developing clear and concise selection criteria that provided additional guidelines so that grantees could put forth the best possible proposal.

Communication is key. Each program emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining regular communication with grantees before awarding grants, during their tenure, and after their completion to learn of delayed conservation impacts.

Site visits are essential. Most grantees appreciated site visits, whether they were conducted by the grant manager, mentors, fellow staff, or other grantees working within the same portfolio. If site visits were not possible, the grantees greatly valued the extra effort to maintain communication.

Mentoring is a must. Mentoring programs provided mutual benefits to BSP grantees, BSP grant managers, and mentors. Mentors were able to provide added technical advice to grantees, monitor individual projects, and report back to BSP managers; and in some cases, they developed long-term professional relationships with grantees.

Networking is necessary. Creating networks among grantees whose research interests were similar, who worked in the same area, or whose skills complemented one another proved to be beneficial in developing lasting conservation partnerships. Many grantees felt that the contact with peers that BSP facilitated promoted both conservation results and professional growth.

Lessons Learned on Effective Conservation Grant Management

One of the main goals of this review was to document some of the lessons that we learned so that we could share them with other conservation and development practitioners around the world. We have organized these lessons roughly in chronological order of grantmaking program design, management, and monitoring.

Seeking Appropriate Grantees

Finding grantees appropriate for a specific program takes hard work. Casting the net wide and hoping for the best catch is not necessarily effective. Below are some strategies BSP has used to identify appropriate grantees.

Become familiar with local conditions where the grant program is to take place. The potential grantee community can provide invaluable input about local conditions and about their own aptitudes and accomplishments. Comprehending the cultural, political, and economic circumstances, and knowing about other grantgiving and projects in the area are integral to understanding the appropriateness of proposed grantee activities and keeping flexible about their needs. Engage potential grantees/partners in preliminary dialogue and work with them to develop projects that meet both their needs and program objectives—and consider modifying program objectives on the basis of grantee input.

Use nontraditional media outlets and outreach methods to connect with potential grantees. After developing clear selection criteria and guidelines, think creatively to get the word out. Especially for open competitions, grantors should publicize the request for proposals in as many ways as possible, through USAID mission or other government offices, journals, e-mail listservs, newspapers; magazines; and with contacts at universities, research institutions, and NGOs. Seek prospective grantees through references from present grantees or program partners or at public presentations introducing the program.

Take risks on nascent NGOs and early-career researchers. Building direct relationships with young local and national NGOs and with researchers early in their careers can empower them. Your contribution to their development can enable them to promote community or regional conservation activism, sometimes with positive results for an entire country.

Proposal/Concept Paper Preparation

BSP grant program managers often received badly prepared proposals for work on funding-worthy topics. Sometimes grantees just need the tools to design more effective projects.

Encourage short concept papers before or instead of a full-length proposal. Lengthy proposals do not convey a grantee's intended project if s/he is not well versed in proposal writing. Concept papers are much less burdensome to review. Capturing the essence of a project, they provide the foundation for a back-and-forth process resulting in an appropriate full-length proposal or alternative funding development mechanism. Sometimes a "concept paper" does not even need to be written—it may be the outcome of a collaborative oral discussion or workshop with the funder.

Provide guidance in thinking through linkages between objectives, outcomes, and methods. BSP often found applicants did not directly link activities and methods to project objectives in written proposals, a clue that the project might not achieve its objectives. Specify in the RFP how

proposals must link objectives and methods, and give examples. Attention to linkages also deserves time in any interactive project development process. For grantees doing monitoring, understanding the links between objectives and outcomes is also crucial.

Have the home office provide the signature on letters announcing final funding decisions. BSP grant managers recommend that in-country field staff and review committees not be the names associated with final funding decisions—for the sake of day-to-day working relations with the potential grantee community.

Grantee Capacity Strengthening and Grantee/Grantor Interchange

Learning and capacity development can happen serendipitously or by design in any grant program, even one operating with strict budgetary limits, if expectations are consistent with the number of staff and the financial resources that can be devoted to the effort.

Establish a field presence to the extent feasible, and ask probing questions. Field contact, especially at project sites, is invaluable for understanding the changing local context and keeping your program flexible. Field staff can provide capacity strengthening and mentoring. They can help with programming activities, monitoring of progress and outcomes, and assessing and redirecting efforts when necessary. Field staff must be technically competent so that they can ask probing questions about the logic and outcomes of projects, as well as about money matters. For some programs, facilitating links with in-country experts may prove the best way to provide field presence. Even occasional staff or mentor visits can provide grantees with thought-provoking questions, motivation, and guidance.

Be flexible with timelines and sensitive to time constraints. Grantees may encounter unforeseen obstacles, including natural disasters or political or economic instability. Be conscious of changing conditions and allow grantees the time needed to produce worthwhile results and deliverables. Grant amendments and no-cost extensions can be useful tools for adapting timelines and budget allocations to changing internal and external conditions. Periodic work plan reviews, monitoring of outcomes, and grantee reports, especially those focused on exceptional achievements and goals not achieved, can give field staff clues about any outstanding issues before they become too big to resolve.

Promote partnership arrangements between grantor and grantees. Especially with longer-term grant programs, partnership can be key to effective grantor/grantee relationships. Sharing a clearly enunciated vision for program objectives and approaches and creating trust are crucial to establishing effective partnerships.

Provide training and workshops based on grantee needs. Analyze grantees' individual and common needs, or facilitate needs self-assessments, then invest in training to address them. Consider hiring contractors or grantee partners with specialized expertise—individual counseling in proposal writing and workshops on project and organizational management are usually sought. Capacity strengthening in financial management is also crucial, since money matters are often grantor/grantee sticking points. Such assistance will benefit the grantee institution well after the grant is completed.

Facilitate the involvement of national and international grantees involvement with local participants. When giving grants to a national or international organization, encourage that organization to bring community members, local grantees, and existing local NGOs into the project whenever appropriate. If possible, embed underwriting for the transaction costs of local capacity development into the grant.

Grantee Networking and Presentation of Results

Many of our grantees said the most useful and lasting assistance BSP provided was the opportunity to network with peers. Grantgivers can facilitate coalitions and alliances that will outlive their programs.

Facilitate creation of grantee networks within the program portfolio. Providing grantees with opportunities to network about related work can promote technical assistance—and inspiration—across the portfolio. Circulating grantee technical reports facilitates project exchange visits. Sponsor the attendance of groups of grantees at program-run or outside conferences, workshops, or symposia. Systematically facilitating more formal networking is also important, especially for longer-term programs. Enable formal sharing of resources by providing subgrants through one umbrella grant. Facilitate portfolio-wide strategic planning forums, or fund “learning networks” focused on a single purpose, such as community organizing.

Facilitate grantee opportunities to showcase and disseminate results. Sharing results at conferences, workshops, symposia, and presentations to local communities allows grantees to gain feedback. Dissemination and feedback also happen during field exercises, shared trainings, site visits, and apprenticeships. These experiences help grantees find how best to articulate their work to an expert or lay audience, both necessary conservation skills.

Direct grantees to relevant publishing venues and provide communications training. Grantees may not be aware of the range of opportunities for publishing results. Distribute a current list of journals and other media outlets appropriate for grantee results publication. If your program has sufficient resources, produce or underwrite a workshop proceedings or other program-based publication. Sponsor writing workshops, training in strategic communications planning, training in using media for advocacy, and packaging information for specific audiences, especially decision makers and local communities.

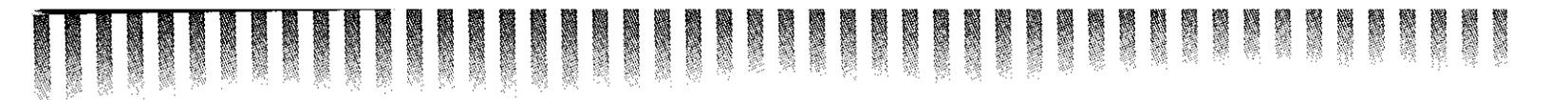
Recruit volunteer mentors and established local NGOs to provide technical assistance. Linking grantees to professionals acting as volunteer mentors can be a cost-effective way to provide specialized technical assistance, and it may lead to lasting relationships. Well-established local NGOs, potentially program grantees, may provide valuable mentoring to younger NGO grantees.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Even if outcome monitoring and evaluation are not part of the grant, monitoring skills will prove useful throughout a conservation career. For programs without monitoring and evaluation, such as our applied research grant programs, keeping in touch with former grantees often provides informal updates about projects’ conservation outcomes.

Introduce monitoring and evaluation into the project planning process. Effective monitoring and evaluation approaches and indicators need to be built into project conception and design so that they suit the program both logically and logistically. Outcome monitoring and evaluation may represent new concepts for a grantee. It can take time to demonstrate why monitoring and evaluation matter for conservation projects. Help grantees identify who will collect data, when it should be collected, and how it should be reported.

Provide guidelines, assistance, and rationale for baseline data collection. Collecting baseline data is crucial—it provides something to compare to later results. Because the initial period of a grant can be a tough time to get monitoring under way, assist grantees in developing indicators and help them collect baseline data. Guidelines and worksheets help with instituting effective monitoring practices.



Facilitate grantee selection of simple, measurable, and useful indicators. For best results with project monitoring, help grantees choose manageable, easily understood indicators. Working with data whose value and relevance they understand, grantees will overcome the dread of monitoring and evaluation and become prepared to introduce new participants to data collection. They will be able to better use the information in promoting project follow-ups and share results and improve their own accountability with client communities.

TO LEARN MORE

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About the Biodiversity Support Program

The Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) is a consortium of World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and World Resources Institute, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). BSP's mission is to promote conservation of the world's biological diversity. We believe that a healthy and secure living resource base is essential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations. BSP began in 1988 and will close down in December 2001.

A Commitment to Learning

Our communications activities are designed to share what we are learning through our field and research activities. To accomplish this, we try to analyze both our successes and our failures. We hope our work will serve conservation practitioners as a catalyst for further discussion, learning, and action so that more biodiversity is conserved. Our communications programs include print publications, Web sites, presentations, and workshops.

BSP Web Sites

We invite you to visit our general and program-specific Web sites even after the program closes down.

- * Biodiversity Support Program...www.BSPonline.org
- * Biodiversity Conservation Network...www.BCNet.org
CARPE: Central African Regional Program for the Environment...<http://carpe.umd.edu>
- * Until the end of 2006, these two sites will be available at the addresses above. WWF-US will be hosting these sites on the WWF site at www.worldwildlife.org. BSP thanks WWF for providing this service.

BSP Publications

Many of our print publications are now also available online at www.BSPonline.org. On our home page, click on **publications**. You can view publications online until the end of 2006. You may contact us by mail, phone, or fax until December 2001.

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Publication Credits

Authors: Catherine A. Christen and Jonnell Allen

Technical Editor: Richard Margoluis

Publication Manager: Stacy L. Springer

Editor: Stacy L. Springer

Copyediting/Production Editing: Kay Killingstad

Design: Ellipse Design

Printing: Balmar Solutions in Print

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Please cite this publication as: Christen, C. and J. Allen. 2001. *A vested interest: BSP experiences with developing and managing grant portfolios*. Washington, D.C.: Biodiversity Support Program.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our appreciation to the many individuals who contributed to the development of this publication; their experiences are the spirit of this report. Special thanks go to the many BSP program staff, past and present, who provided valuable insight into their grantmaking projects through countless interviews, draft reviews, and photo selection: Judy Oglethorpe, Laurent Some, Rob Solem, Nicodeme Tchamou, Kate Newman, David Wilkie, and Rose-Marie Gay, representing BSP Africa; Janis Alcorn, Kath Shurcliff, Nonette Royo, Christy McDonough and the KEMALA field team, from BSP Asia and the Pacific; Tatiana Zaharchenko and Bruce Leighty from BSP Eastern Europe; Ilana Locker and Meg Symington, Conservation Impact Grant managers; John Parks and Ganesan Balachander from BCN; and to all past and present BSP grantees who shared their experiences with us in person and through the E-mail Forum. We would like to especially thank Bernd Cordes and Nick Salafsky for writing the section of this document on the Biodiversity Conservation Network. Thanks to Ruth Norris for her help in laying the foundation for this study. We would also like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to Mary Cox, Janice Davis, Rita Ogilvie, Melissa Songer, and Marisabel Izarry for their logistical support, and to Stacy Springer for her hard work managing the production of this document.

♻️ Printed on recycled paper.

The Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) is a consortium of World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and World Resources Institute, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This publication was made possible through support provided to BSP by the Global Bureau of USAID, under the terms of Cooperative Agreement Number DHR-A-00-88-00044-00. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

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