

# Participation at USAID

Stories, Lessons, and Challenges



An anthology of discussions, case studies, and resources  
drawn from experience  
by the U.S. Agency for International Development,  
compiled by Diane E. La Voy.

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The documents reprinted or excerpted here have been published previously electronically and in hard copy as *Participation Forum* summaries, *Participatory Practice* case studies, *The 1993 Statement of Principles on Participatory Development*, and a 1998 conference paper, *Engaging Customer Participation*, by USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination. They—as well as other resources for the development practitioner—are available on the Agency's web site at <[www.usaid.gov/about/part\\_devel](http://www.usaid.gov/about/part_devel)>.

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## Foreword

Development means change. It means people in a community or a country working together in new ways to solve problems and improve their lives. Development organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) can advise, bring people together, and assist by developing the capacity to solve problems at the local level. Lasting results—improvements in the ability of communities or whole societies to solve tomorrow's problems—depend on the active engagement of local people in setting priorities and sharing experience and values.

Reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS infections in Africa, for example, depends on engaging the ideas and commitment of village women, elders, local government officials, and businesses. Peace in Bosnia can be built only with the full engagement of Bosnian journalists, local leaders, teachers, and farmers.

Six years ago, USAID placed a renewed emphasis on using participatory approaches—methods that actively engage the views and commitment of the people with whom we have formed partnerships. Through seminars, e-mail discussion groups, and written case studies, staff and partners looked closely at cases in which USAID and other development organizations had done particularly well in promoting participation. In addition to assessing the benefits, staff also explored the most effective means of overcoming the difficulties that were unique to each case being evaluated. These included bureaucratic structures and procedures and lack of time or other resources. Insights brought forward in these candid sessions contributed to Agency reforms that drew from ideas first developed in the private sector and then promoted by the U.S. Government-wide “reinvention” effort.

In this anthology you will find a selection of the ideas, experiences, and concerns about participatory development that USAID staff and partners have brought forward in recent years. We remain committed to the reform values reflected in these examples: innovation and risk taking, genuine partnerships, holding ourselves and our partners accountable for results, and throughout all our work, listening well to the people whose lives we are trying to improve.

J. Brady Anderson  
Administrator, USAID  
September 1999

## Overview

Assembled in this anthology are insights, dilemmas, and approaches from the practice of development assistance. They were originally set forth by USAID staff and colleagues in a series of “Participation Forums”—noon-time seminars held from early 1994 through 1997— and illustrated in brief cases studies—“Participatory Practices: Learning from Experience”—begun in 1996. In contexts ranging from economic reform and environmental planning to conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance, they all explore the practical meanings of “participation.”

USAID views participation as both an essential feature of effective development work and as a purpose of development itself. The Agency’s directives define participation as a means: “to actively engage partners and customers in sharing ideas, committing time and resources, making decisions, and taking actions to bring about a desired development objective.” The second concept—participation as an end in itself—is expressed in USAID’s Strategic Plan: “broad-based *participation* and democratic processes are integral elements of sustainable development” and in the Agency’s Mission Statement: “(USAID supports) the people of developing and transitional countries in *their* efforts to achieve enduring economic and social progress and to *participate* more fully in resolving the problems of their countries and the world.”

In Part One, “Participation as an End,” excerpts from selected *Forums* and *Participatory Practices* consider ways in which development assistance can broaden people’s access to economic opportunity and to their society’s decision-making processes. The discussions also draw out implications for program design and implementation and suggest limits and dilemmas inherent in managing development assistance.

The materials in Part Two, “Participation as a Means,” describe some participatory approaches used in development programs. With concrete examples drawn from Bangladesh to Bosnia, they single out two key features of “doing business” in a participatory way: listening more broadly and forming genuine partnerships. They also discuss how Agency procedures and practices can help or hinder participation.

In Part Three, the focus is on issues and insights about “fixing the system” to facilitate the fuller engagement of development partners and greater flexibility, transparency, and responsiveness to the end-user. The excerpts from the *Forums* and a *Participatory Practice* reflect some of the innovations, issues, and candidly-expressed concerns that have marked the Agency’s reforms. Included is the *Statement of Principles on Participatory Development* with which former Administrator J. Brian Atwood in 1993 launched the Agency’s renewed emphasis on values of participation, partnership, and customer orientation. Finally, a conference paper prepared by USAID staff in late 1998 outlines the Agency’s organizational change process so far and distills seven lessons learned enroute.

Readers are invited to [www.info.usaid.gov/about/part\\_devel](http://www.info.usaid.gov/about/part_devel), USAID’s Participation web site to read the unabridged summaries of the *Participation Forum* sessions. Each typically

summarizes the presentations and discussion and includes excerpts from all the e-mail messages responding to the topic, many of which came from USAID Missions overseas. (This anthology includes only selected parts of the *Forum* summaries, omitting many interesting presentations, discussions, and e-mails.)

In addition to the *Forums* and all the *Participatory Practices* produced to date, the web site includes useful summaries of workshops on rapid appraisal and participatory evaluation and links to resources on other web sites. It provides instructions for participating in USAID's electronic discussion group, *Global Participation Forum (GP-NET)*, which since 1994 has enabled hundreds of development practitioners from USAID and other development organizations around the world to exchange information, share ideas, and discuss issues related to participatory development.

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September 1999

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## *Part One*

# **Participation as an End**

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Making space for citizen participation is the theme of the selections in this part. *One Participatory Practice* tells how USAID's approach to developing democratic institutions enabled the views of a previously voiceless majority—Malawian women—to be considered in the design of a national constitution. Two lively *Participation Forum* sessions focus on challenges of policy reform in contexts of limited freedom. An effort to promote the conservation of tropical forests, a USAID official observes, “was not a project about trees, but about the distribution of political and economic power.” Another *Forum* deals with joint efforts by large donor agencies to ensure that the people of Madagascar—not the donors—manage the country's environmental planning.

Selections on work in Niger, Haiti, and Tunisia describe how local communities gain greater control over the way critical problems are addressed: mitigating disastrous droughts and famines, overcoming decades of hopelessness and fear, and reducing the spread of disease in peri-urban neighborhoods. In each case, innovative partnerships between community groups and local government contribute to community empowerment and to building civil society.

Examples from many parts of the world are cited in the three *Forum* sessions that conclude Part One. Thoughtful presentations, discussions and e-mail messages explore how people's differences and affinities—gender and culture—can play out in development and post-conflict settings.





# 1. Voice and Engagement in National Policy

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## **Participation in Policy Reform: Malawi**

Participation Forum 3: April 21, 1994

Policy reform is an area of USAID work that used to be viewed as beyond the reach of participation. Speakers at this session of the Participation Forum made a strong case that participation can and should be brought into the policy design and implementation process, even in undemocratic settings. Carol Peasley, Deputy Assistant Administrator in the Bureau for Africa, described and reflected upon the agricultural sector reform process in Malawi where she was, until recently, Mission Director. Roberta Mahoney, who served in Malawi as Program Officer and is now Senior Agricultural Policy Advisor in PPC, drew additional lessons from the Malawi case. Larry Cooley, President of Management Systems International and Director of the Implementing Policy Change project, set the Malawi experience in a broader framework. The session was introduced by USAID Administrator J. Brian Atwood.

### **Participation: An Iterative Process**

*Brian Atwood*

The topic of policy reform is not new to USAID. Agency staff are constantly engaged in diplomatic discussions with representatives of other governments. Those discussions are at least as delicate, if not more so, than the discussions of our State Department colleagues on matters of national interest, because we are trying to encourage a government to take steps to improve itself or to develop its own economy or political system. This is indeed delicate. When outsiders, even outsiders with money to offer, get into policy discussions, they are often viewed with skepticism as claiming to know better than the people of the country.

In fact, it is impossible to be absolutely certain of the right course even in our own country. The United States is in the midst of a tremendous debate over health care, and many political leaders think they have all the right answers. But as the debate evolves, their views change as they hear from the people. In the same manner, we here at USAID may have some ideas with respect to policy reform, but we have to make sure that we help a government to

communicate with and listen to its own people in the policy-making process.

USAID's work in policy reform should be an iterative process with the country concerned. After initial discussions with host country officials and political leaders, we ought to go back to the drawing board and see what impact those discussions have on our thinking. Then we should encourage officials and political leaders to talk to the people who will be affected by the particular policy reform. These talks will reveal whether or not the policy proposal needs to be revised. Indigenous NGOs should be engaged in these talks as well.

Last fall, I put out a statement of principles on participation. It is obviously easier to put out a statement of principles than it is to make these principles work. We think we should practice what we preach in terms of participation, and as we proceed here at USAID in our own iterative process of developing ideas about how to make participation work, let me say that I really think this is the right approach. We're getting there; I'm confident that it can be done.

Policy reform is a process that includes analysis, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and redesign. It is not simply the preparation of USAID documents. Nor is implementation of policy reform limited to the period after the obligation of funds. Implementation begins during the design and negotiation of the program.

**How the Policy Agenda Was Originally**

**Defined.** Malawi was known through most of the 1980s as a good economic performer. The World Bank referred to it as a "star performer," as President Dr. Hastings Kumuzu Banda frequently reminded listeners. President Banda traveled throughout the country telling his people that he and his government had brought them three necessities: food, clothing, and roofs that didn't leak. He also created a relatively repressive regime.

Perceptions of Malawi as a star performer slowly began to change in the mid-1980s, in part because of donor-funded research and analyses, some of which was done by Malawians. By late 1988, the country's poverty was beginning to be discussed more openly by donors and Malawian technocrats. Nonetheless, the president and the political establishment still crisscrossed the country talking about Malawi as a star performer. There was no consensus within the country on either development problems or strategies. And given the high degree of political repression, dialogue was seldom free and open, and opposing views were not tolerated. Few mechanisms existed for consensus building.

USAID Malawi presented its new five-year country program strategy to Washington in December of 1989. This included strategic objectives on agricultural productivity and off-farm employment. The strategy focused on

Malawi's serious land constraint and proposed new programs to increase smallholder access to land and to improve the use of estate land to generate incomes and jobs. These preliminary program ideas followed closely on reform efforts initiated by the World Bank in 1989 under its Agriculture Sector Adjustment Credit (ASAC).

The initial agenda for USAID's agricultural sector reform program was defined through sector analyses and discussions with other donors and Malawian technocrats. As presented in our country strategy paper, the agenda was based heavily on the ASAC, which included several highly controversial reforms, for example, to restrict the conversion of customary (smallholder) land to the estate sector; to increase taxes on estate land; and to permit smallholders to produce burley tobacco, Malawi's highest value cash crop, by issuing production quotas to them. These Bank reforms were controversial, and there was a feeling that they had been imposed as "conditions." The Bank program was not owned by the Malawians. Because some of USAID's strategy was based on the ASAC, which had not been a participatory process, and because of our own limited dialogue with Malawians, on a participation scale of one to ten, we probably would have earned about a two at this point.

**How the Program Evolved as a Result of**

**Participation.** In early 1990, USAID/Malawi began to define the technical analyses that would be needed to support the program. We received substantial early support from REDSO Nairobi, particularly from social scientist Pat Fleuret. Pat, along with his REDSO and mission colleagues, traveled widely in the country to consult with smallholder farmers. They found a large number of illegal burley tobacco growers in the

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<sup>1</sup>At the time of this *Forum*, USAID/Malawi's agricultural program aimed to increase small holders' freedom to participate in that country's production of burley tobacco. Recognizing the health burden that the use of tobacco products places on developing country populations, USAID adopted a policy in 1999 that precludes USAID support to tobacco production and agribusiness activities that contribute to tobacco use. Where tobacco is an important source of income for low-income farmers, USAID may help identify and introduce alternative crops.

smallholder sector and thus met firsthand the growing grassroots demand for this new income-earning opportunity. Smallholders wanted access to burley production quotas; they did not want the estate sector to retain its monopoly.

Realizing that no one in USAID, the government, or other donor organizations understood the estate or leasehold sector (even though the World Bank's ag sector program included some very fundamental reforms of that sector), we sponsored a detailed survey of the estate sector, to be carried out by the University of Malawi's Bunda College of Agriculture, with support from the Institute of Development Anthropology in New York. All USAID staff working on design of the program went out with the survey teams at various times to interview farmers.

The results of the survey, which became available in September 1990, began to redefine how people viewed Malawi's ag sector. We were startled to find that the huge increase in estate land registration was in fact an increase in very small "estates." They were not large commercial estate enterprises, but graduated smallholders seeking access to burley tobacco quotas and land tenure security. The dualistic agricultural sector was obviously in the process of breaking down.

Donors, technocrats, and Malawian academicians clamored for copies of the report. Recognizing the strong interest, USAID urged the Ministry of Agriculture to host a number of meetings and debriefings by the researchers. These provoked some first-time dialogue on key ag policy issues.

The survey and consultation caused us to shift our basic policy agenda towards production and marketing reforms. These changes were reflected in the initial design document submitted to Washington in January of 1991. Again on a scale of one to ten, I would give us a four on participation in preparing this document. The Africa Bureau approved the document but urged us to look at smallholder choice in production and marketing as key elements of sectoral reform and to define with the Malawians a long-term vision for the ag sector.

By spring and summer of 1991, we had begun a series of new studies, many of them at

the farm level, as well as political risk analysis. We also brought in a British consultant who had grown up in Malawi, worked in the tobacco industry, and knew just about everyone. He traveled throughout the country talking with smallholders and the largest estate owners and managers. During his first visit working on the program design and subsequent visits during program implementation, he helped us better understand the sector, and served as a bridge between the development types and industry, farmers, and government.

**Opening Up the Dialogue.** Throughout this period, implementation of the Bank's ASAC program became more contentious. Opposing groups began to approach the USAID mission directly, asking us to explain the newly initiated pilot smallholder burley program agreed to by the government under the Bank program. Recognizing that we should not be an intermediary, the mission tried to open up the dialogue. We encouraged the various parties to debate issues in the same room at the same time. Debriefings on the design studies and analyses created excellent opportunities for such dialogue. For the first time, representatives from government ministries, the tobacco trade association, individual estates, and donors met together and discussed issues. This group ultimately became the project implementation committee.

This type of participation, including mission staff field trips in which farmers clearly articulated their desires, continued to influence the design. By the time we went into the final negotiations with the government, our vision was a simple one-choice: that smallholders could grow any crop they wanted, buy inputs from whomever they wanted, and sell their output to whomever they wanted.

Our efforts to broaden dialogue had a major impact on the content of the program, but we were still concerned that the Malawians did not really have the capacity to develop a consensus on their own ag policy agenda. This caused three further changes in the program design. First, we added a component to develop an agricultural policy research center at Bunda

College, a center which could do research, sponsor open debate on the issues, and play a lead role in defining Malawi's agricultural policies. Second, we shortened the program from the original five years to three years, as we thought there was enough consensus on the initial reforms that it could become more of a Malawian, as opposed to a donor-imposed, program. Third, we added a studies component, primarily through Bunda College, to allow the Malawians to take the lead in defining the policy agenda for phase two of the program.

By the time we got to the final design stage, we had reached up to five or six on the participation scale. We had made significant changes in the content and phasing of the program to expand Malawian ownership.

**Negotiating a Shared Vision.** Formal negotiations took place during July-August 1991. The normal pattern in Malawi was to negotiate with the Ministry of Finance alone. Given the controversy about the Bank's project, we decided it was important to have as many actors as possible in the room at the same time for the negotiations. We therefore suggested that the government negotiating team be composed of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Principal Secretary of Agriculture, and the Principal Secretary of the Department of Economic Planning and Development, as well as their staffs.

I would like to add, because it is probably fairly unique, that on USAID's side it was an all-female negotiating team. We initiated the negotiations by seeking a consensus on a long-term vision for the ag sector, a vision of choice and freedom as a key to poverty alleviation. We tried to develop that consensus first rather than going immediately to the conditionality package, which is what the Malawi government initially wanted to discuss. More generally, we tried to avoid use of the term "conditionality" and to focus on the steps needed to achieve the shared vision.

**Participation during Early Implementation.** We tried to do a number of things to increase participation.

- Mission staff took lots of field trips to talk to the farmers about their problems and successes. (This facilitated our dialogue with government on issues and enabled us to give them positive feedback.)
- The mission supported a number of surveys to assess the impact of the program, some done by our Malawian staff, some done by Bunda College. (These surveys expanded contact with potential beneficiaries.)
- A number of consultants who had been involved with the program from the outset continued to foster participation. (The British consultant I mentioned earlier was particularly effective as an intermediary and consensus-builder between different interest groups.)
- The Ministry of Agriculture was heavily involved with monitoring and evaluation, especially at the regional level where some of the Ministry's strongest supporters for the program were. (This enhanced their commitment and stature and strengthened government of Malawi ownership.)
- The studies component of the program was implemented by the Malawians, not USAID staff. This included writing the scopes of work for those studies. (The Malawians said, "No donor has ever asked us to do a scope of work. You guys have always done them for us." It took a little extra time, but helped to build Malawian ownership.)
- During the mid-term evaluation in February of 1993, as political change was underway in Malawi, the evaluation team met with representatives from one of the major opposition parties, many of whom were burley estate owners. The idea was to explore their views on the smallholder burley program and to educate them on

its poverty-alleviation potential.

**Participation and Political Change.** Malawi began to liberalize politically in late 1992. Today the country is dramatically different from what it was in the late 1980s, when a few brave technocrats were willing to look critically at the failures of the country's development policies. USAID's Agriculture Sector Assistance Program was designed and early implementation took place in that difficult closed political environment. Participation was consequently less than ideal. Nonetheless, it was not impossible. Even in unreceptive environments, USAID can expand participation and host-country ownership through such steps as surveys and studies, selection of consultants who can serve as bridges to the various interest groups, the phasing of programs

to maximize ownership (even if it means shortening programs to cover only those areas for which there's real agreement), incorporating studies and capacity-building during the initial phases of a program, taking advantage of studies and surveys to create fora that bring multiple interest groups together, and making field trips, listening, and being willing to change.

Participation can become much more comprehensive and effective as the political situation matures. USAID Malawi is currently doing some exciting things in designing phase two of the ag sector program. We may have achieved a six on the participation scale in 1991-1992. Because of its extraordinary efforts to increase participation, USAID Malawi will have a far more effective phase two of its ag sector program.

### **Improving Our Vision through Participation**

*Roberta Mahoney*

Malawi's policy reform appeared very simple. What could be more simple? Let farmers grow what they want, how they want, sell it wherever they want--pretty straightforward. Our initial focus on burley tobacco was even more simple and more direct: let them grow burley, let them grow it how they want, let them sell it where they want. In retrospect, it appears to have been a sort of stroke-of-the-pen reform, one that did not seem to require participation. But what appears simple in retrospect can be difficult to see at the outset.

I would like to comment very briefly on five lessons that I learned in reflecting back on my experience in Malawi.

The first lesson is that participation is important at the outset so that the problem can be adequately defined. In Malawi, participation brought all actors into defining the problem and suggesting a remedy.

The second is that participation continues to be important as a program moves along the design-to-implementation continuum. In our case, participation kept us on track and prevented us from getting sidetracked with empty rule changes.

The third is that there are no real secrets to participation, just a whole lot of work. The techniques of participation can be learned. It is important to keep focused on thinking through what is best and what needs to be done, not on what is easiest. For example, we did not use Malawian academics in the first of our studies because they were cheaper or closer. We used them because they knew more about local conditions and issues and because they could speak the local languages. We supplemented their skills as necessary. Contracting with a U.S. consulting firm would have been easier, but the Malawian study team we used did a better job.

The fourth lesson concerns what about the Malawi experience in policy reform is important to its replicability in other places. It is the unflinching commitment to people and to participation that we who were involved in the design felt and that was expressed at all levels. The first level of that commitment was expressed by the U.S. Congress, USAID, and the Bureau for Africa, through the definition, articulation, and enactment of the Development Fund for Africa legislation. We were committed to participation, and our mission director gave that commitment

life. Participation requires time, money, people to do the job, and an abiding respect for our host country colleagues. The mission director has to send the signals that these activities are valued and that those involved in the design have the resources necessary to do the job. The director may also have to keep USAID Washington at arm's length, while the mission is trying to get the job done.

Finally, participation facilitates the ability to measure and to report on results. In our case, the more we talked to people, the more we were able to express our objectives and to measure progress in terms of real impact on real people. In our first year, incomes among small, rural producers increased by over \$4 million. By the end of the second year, more than 20,000 farm

families, over 100,000 people, who were affected by the program saw their cash incomes increase dramatically, up some six- or sevenfold, from admittedly very low levels. We know that smallholders earned more money, and we know that they spent it on school fees, on fertilizer, on seeds, on bicycles, and on food because we spoke to them and they told us.

The future looks even brighter. Each year, the number of people participating in the program has at least doubled. Momentum for the program and for agricultural and political reforms in general is increasing. Soon, all one million farm families will be able to grow what they want, how they want, and sell it as they see fit. Participation has been critical in helping us to realize this dream.

### **Lessons Learned from the IPC Project**

*Larry Cooley*

Introducing participatory approaches to policy selection and implementation needs to be seen in the context of a broader set of governance issues. If a donor is engaged in facilitating a process in which people are coming together and speaking out actively, the government will begin to receive demands from those sources. Thus, participation offers a chance to reinforce positive changes in the way decisions are made and to increase the role of various populations in decision-making.

Real commitment to participatory approaches has fundamental implications not only for what is done but how it is done. As development assistance people, we should be guided by the Hippocratic Oath: above all, do no harm. There are a million opportunities along the way in development assistance to contradict your message with your medium.

**Nuts and Bolts of Participation.** The following practical, hands-on experience gleaned from the experience of the Implementing Policy Change (IPC) project is presented as a checklist or a menu of ideas that have worked successfully in one or more places.

- **Better political and institutional analysis.** The IPC project has found two techniques for political and institutional analysis—stakeholder analysis and “political mapping”—to be particularly useful in stimulating and focusing participation in policy reform. There are, however, three levels of participation in the use of such tools. The first, and the lowest level, is for a donor agency to do this kind of analysis to inform its own decision-making—better than nothing but less than we should aspire to. The second way is for a donor agency to conduct studies to help host government leaders make their decisions in a more informed manner. The third level, and the one to be aspired to, is helping host country people conduct these studies themselves so that they themselves reach out to their stakeholders and learn what it means to view policy change in a broader context than the one they're used to.

- **Collaborative design.** Like Roberta and Carol, we have observed that

collaborative design not only provides a forum for fostering consensus but also almost always increases the technical quality of the design. I originally thought that we would trade technical quality for building consensus, but that has not been our observation. It's preferable, but not always possible, for collaborative design to be used, not just to inform a donor program, but to look at a broad range of policies from the country's point of view. However, because of the institutional or the political environment, it may be much more practical to begin with a question like, "What should USAID be supporting in such and such an arena?" There's no question about the legitimacy of USAID promoting a participatory process on that issue.

- **Redesigning the technical content of the reforms to make participation more feasible.** An example from the United States: with block grants or decentralized decision-making rather than categorical programs that are centrally administered, the chance for involving a range of people in implementation goes up by an order of magnitude. We have also observed that there are more opportunities for participation during implementation than during the design stage. So if there is initial resistance to involvement at the design stage, there's a second chance to influence outcomes.
- **Capacity building.** There's been a lot of emphasis within USAID on looking for the "policy champion." However, policy issues are usually so complex that no individual can pull off the remediation of those problems by him or herself. The country also needs to look, and we need

to look with them, at the capacity of institutions at all levels, inside and outside government, to do the jobs related to policy reform: policy analysis, lobbying and advocacy, and sometimes basic institution building. In line with this, donors need to make more use of local monitoring and evaluation, research, and analysis.

- **Implementation as a process, not as an event.** During implementation, all kinds of learning goes on and bumps appear in the road. The notion that implementation can be mapped out with certainty in the beginning is unrealistic. Participation makes it necessary to be responsive to a range of interests that may or may not have been fully understood at the outset. As a practical matter, this suggests the desirability of phased programs, rolling designs, and flexibility.
- **Extensive use of workshops and forums.** We have found there's a particularly effective role for donor agencies in facilitating forums—opportunities for people who don't normally get together to discuss things, or for people whose positions tend to isolate them, to get input from a variety of sources.
- **Structural solutions.** Governments can be helped to establish formal or semi-formal mechanisms for consultation and coordination such as policy implementation units. These units are typically attached either to the state house or sometimes to the cabinet office. Their job is to work in a collaborative way across ministries to promote participation in decision-making within the government, and then to reach outside that arena to get input from other sources.



To conclude, let me list a few lessons the JPC project has learned in applying the ideas discussed above.

- Policy change that is imposed is very unlikely to be implemented or sustained. It is striking how many ways a policy can be disrupted if people are disposed to do so. Their ability to stop changes in policy through subtle means is extraordinary.
- Policy change is inherently threatening to public-sector actors, as are participatory approaches. It's hard to manage, it has uncertain outcomes, and it produces new voices. We should do what we can to reduce the threatening aspects of participation.
- Meaningful participation is demand-driven from civil society as well as supply-led from government channels. Many efforts to increase participation have focused on trying to increase either demand or supply. What works best is to encourage both in tandem. Otherwise, what you have is either the frustration of too much demand and no plausible supply mechanism, or a government that is being asked to institute change for which there seems to be no demand from its citizens.
- It is possible to promote participatory approaches even under authoritarian regimes, if you are sensitive to the implications of what you are doing. The range of options is smaller, however. Participation, handled thoughtfully, can be quietly subversive. Addressing policy implementation and technical issues in a participatory manner provides a model of a different way of operating.
- Skills in planning are required to do participation right, in addition to a lot of hard work. Unfortunately, there are only a few people in developing countries who

have been trained in participatory approaches and process skills.

- There is simply no one-size-fits-all in the participatory approach to policy reform. It *must* be tailored to the circumstances.

### Discussion Session

The following excerpts capture the principal themes raised during the discussion period.

#### Authoritarian Regimes—How Feasible Is Participation?

**Brian Atwood:** In the case of Malawi, am I right in saying that the intent was to provide some permanence to the informal institutions that were being created through the participatory process? In addition to the policy reform, the mission was trying to allow those new institutions to put down some roots.

**Carol Peasley:** I strongly agree. As activities to open up an economic system occur, the political system itself is affected. The networks and relationships that are created will continue over time.

**Larry Cooley:** There is a big difference between the way participation is promoted in a transitional state and the way it is done in a recalcitrant one. For example, who's sponsoring a public event or forum is important. That can change as the political structures change. In one situation institutions are being reinforced; in another, new models are being implanted.

**Andy Sisson:** In Malawi one of the most effective things we did in promoting more associational rights, and ultimately creating a better framework for participation, was withholding aid, particularly balance-of-payments support. That is a very powerful statement, I believe.

**Larry Cooley:** USAID can go further than I thought possible with the 'insidious,' or technical approach, as long as it works in avenues not

likely to be viewed as political. The process builds a certain momentum once initiated and manages to clear a number of hurdles. Even if the issue that preoccupies a mission is governance, it should not pick the most political policy area to start in. The activities of the mission are less likely to be seen as threatening if they encourage people to get together and express their interests about an issue that is not an immediate threat to the entrenched powers. There are a whole range of policy issues that one could start with in this regard.

Frequently, by framing the issue a little bit larger and looking for agreement around basic principles there are chances to do things that you couldn't otherwise do. The fora that Carol and Roberta were talking about at Bunda College could have been seen as threatening by the government if they had been perceived in governance terms.

**Carol Peasley:** There are a lot of people, even in a repressive regime, who want to begin to talk about things. USAID can play a facilitative role in giving them a chance.

**Roberta Mahoney:** In Malawi, the government gave us an entree to talk about political issues by stating that, in Malawi, people had enough food to eat and roofs over their heads even though that contrasted completely with one's daily observations. So we in the donor community were able to pose the question, 'Why, if there's enough food, are people hungry?' This opened a forum for us to discuss the divergence between what we were hearing and what we were seeing.

### **Keeping Washington at Arm's Length**

**Joe Stepanek:** Sometimes Washington must be kept at arm's length, certainly in the special sense of allowing time. The two-year money, the no-year money, is an important part of this. Mission directors that are committed can also create the time. But this question of time is interesting. In my experience in Tanzania, for instance, having spent 18 months designing the family-planning program in a highly collegial manner, we found that we had in fact 18 months of implementation

under our belts when we finally signed, without having spent a dime of program money.

**Carol Peasley:** On the question of Washington-based constraints to participation, clearly one of them is the issue of time: you have to obligate the funds by X date. Also, Washington can be too directive in saying, 'This is what you shall negotiate.' A third thing is delegation. Ours was a \$50 million program for five years. We decided to reduce it to three years and \$30 million, but we had the authority to do it. Larry Sagers (DAA/AFR) came out to see what we were doing, concurred with it, and we authorized it in the field. But it didn't get back into a system that chewed it up and ended up being directive. (I'm embarrassed to say this because I've been part of that directive process.)

### **New Cultural Norms for USAID**

**Joe Stepanek:** It takes a mission director's leadership to create a culture in which participation is the norm. All too often mission staff draft their papers, take them over to the Minister of Finance, and basically say, 'Sign it or lose it.' That has never worked very well. Actual participation—I think that is something new. We've done it, but it has not been the rule. It has not been a part of the culture of all our missions.

## E-Mail Communications

**Bob Charlick:** Some issues which I wish had been explored further regarding the use of the Malawi case:

1) What does participation mean in a society where meaningful autonomous civil society organization is virtually impossible, and where there are on-going serious human rights abuses targeted at perceived opponents? It is my understanding that these conditions were substantially present in Banda's Malawi in 1991-92 when this activity commenced.

2) Is a 'participatory' approach, in which the U.S. government promotes consultation and 'participation' through the use of its own agents because Malawian farmers have such limited freedom of association and expression, a sustainable one?

3) Does it make sense to characterize the ag sector policy reform process as one that can be successful in an authoritarian society substantially because it is less political than dealing with governance issues? What can be more political in Malawi than decisions on who gets to grow and market the country's most important export crop, and whether elites controlling estates will be able to continue dominating these processes?

4) If this was truly a politically sensitive issue, why did USAID and the other donors succeed in achieving the desired policy reforms? Was it substantially due to the participatory nature of the exercise, or to the threats of conditionality?

These questions seem to beg for answers before we conclude that the Malawi case or any other is a 'success story' which we should consider publicizing and perhaps modeling.

**Joe Lombardo:** Participation, if truly implemented, negates the blueprint approach to development programs. To the extent we posit specific sectoral outcomes, we will find ourselves manipulating participation to gain support for *our* program. Once the process for true participation is started, the final outcome (i.e., problem definition and proposed solutions) cannot be specified in advance. The resolution of this dilemma resides in how we define our mission as an agency.

Policy reform programs have generally been couched in terms of specific measures to be achieved. All this presupposes we have not only have the answer and it is reachable; but that achievement of the target somehow solves the problem. However, we all know that the problems never go away. Our own country is still grappling with the issues of health care, fiscal reform, private sector v. public sector issues, governance issues (like term limits, public financing for elections, etc.). The difference is that we believe (rightly or wrongly) that we have the wherewithal to deal with the problems. We believe we can, on our own, debate and define the problem, devise solutions, and implement them. **I posit that we might view our mission in other countries as assisting them to develop the capability to define problems, weigh alternatives, put together viable programs to deal with manageable aspects of the issues, and to implement and evaluate these programs.**

This view of USAID's mission would then be reflected in the kinds of objectives we wish to monitor and report on for assessing the effectiveness of the Agency's program (participation, inclusiveness of the process, openness of the society, development and implementation of viable programs that address real issues, capacity of civil society to identify and articulate problems requiring public sector assistance, etc.).

(continued on next page)

### E-Mail Communications (continued)

Sectoral level achievements would still be accomplished *inter alia* through our financial, technical assistance and training contributions to host country programs. But we would worry less about whether we have standard indicators across all countries for measuring progress; by definition, the participatory process in each country will likely produce different focuses.

In sum, the goal of engaging in a participatory process to develop and implement assistance programs requires a rethinking of the way we conceive of development problems and issues, and the kinds of objectives we wish to focus on as an Agency.

## Participation in Policy Reform: Guatemala

Participation Forum 4: May 19, 1994

This session emphasized a theme that has been implicit in previous Forum sessions: the importance of learning from experience—not only from “best practices” but also from less-than-successful cases. Terry Brown, Assistant to the Administrator for Policy and Program Coordination, and formerly Mission Director, USAID/Guatemala, provided a self-critical look at USAID’s support for the Maya Biosphere Reserve Project in Guatemala. The audience offered ways in which this effort might have been approached more successfully.

### Two Views of Participation

*Terry Brown*

The area known as the Petén in the north of Guatemala is one of the largest repositories of germ plasm in the world. In the last 10 years or so, there’s been about a 10-fold increase in the population in that part of Guatemala, a large outmigration from the highlands. Currently some 250,000 to 300,000 people live in the Petén. The land is extremely stressed, even though much larger numbers of people lived in that region at the height of the Mayan civilization.

The Petén bio-reserve is 1.5 million hectares in size, an area about the size of El Salvador. It’s mostly savannah or tropical forest. The nutrient content of the soil is very poor, better for trees than for anything else. The current rate of deforestation is such that, if it is not checked, within about 30 years, most of the natural forest will disappear. The economy is characterized by slash-and-burn agriculture, which rapidly turns into extensive cattle grazing. The traditional products of the area are chicle; xate (a fern used for floral arrangements); and allspice. There’s also extensive logging, both

legal and illegal, and an extensive illegal trade in archaeological artifacts. In general, the area of the Petén is Guatemala’s wild west. The only real control is through the military; civilian governmental institutions are just beginning to establish themselves.

The program that USAID put forward focused on providing communities with economic alternatives more compatible with the natural forest resource base and with the biosphere reserve status. We approached the project not simply in terms of saving the trees, but in terms of striking a balance between economic activity and preservation of the natural resource.

It was a \$22 million project signed in 1990. USAID’s share was \$10.5 million, the government of Guatemala about \$7.5 million, and U.S. NGOs about \$4 million. The original planning included some very important and experienced U.S. NGOs: the Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and Rodale.

The project intended to work with the

public sector to establish a sustainable management system for the reserve through the National Commission for Protected Areas, called CONAP. Also we would work with communities to develop alternative sources of income and we would support environmental education in the area. From the beginning, it was clear that it was a people project. If we did not change the way in which people lived and dealt with their environment, the project could not succeed.

**Setting the Policy Framework.** In 1989 to 1990, prior to my arrival, the mission attempted to establish a national political commitment to the program. President Marco Vinicio Cerezo, the first democratically elected president in Guatemala since the early 1950s, modeled himself as an environmental president and supported the project. Mission staff worked with the Guatemalan legislature and had three major pieces of legislation approved: the Biosphere Reserve Law, which established the Maya Biosphere Reserve; the Protected Areas Law, which created our major counterpart, CONAP, a national system that established basic authorities and rules for protected areas; and a forestry law, which attempted for the first time to put forestry management and control into the hands of a licensing authority in the Ministry of Agriculture. The mission received significant support from Guatemalan and U.S. NGOs during this period.

Thus, when the project began, mission staff felt they had established a national mandate for the program with strong political leadership behind it. The project was going to change the way things were done in the Petén, but it would not be easy.

**Program Design and Development.** During project paper development, USAID held extensive discussions with the people in the communities about their interests and needs. In terms of project development, it was probably one of the most extensive dialogues that I had seen. My staff traveled widely in the Petén and knew it better than almost anyone else in Guatemala, including most of the folks living there. I am sure that my project manager could easily have been elected governor of the Petén.

Also, the leadership of the Guatemalan environmental and public sectors participated in project design. A number of U.S. PVOs were involved in those project design discussions, although they lacked counterparts in the Petén. Guatemalan NGOs had little or no presence there.

So we had supporters, but we also faced strong entrenched resistance. Loggers, both legal and illegal, and “informal” archaeologists, as I would call them, had no interest whatsoever in the government’s establishing control in the reserve area. It was an area without any sort of authority beyond the Guatemalan military.

**Initial Stages of the Project.** During the implementation phase, we carried out a competitive grant process to secure the participation of U.S. NGOs. We in the mission felt that since the project was basically focused on people, it should use mechanisms that would get to people. The public sector certainly was not a way to do that, and the Guatemalan NGO community was very small.

Eventually, three major NGOs participated: CARE, Conservation International, and the Nature Conservancy. They agreed to put up about one dollar for every two dollars of USAID funds. We required that each of them would establish a presence in the Petén, which was not easy. It’s a very difficult place to live and work. CARE and Conservation International particularly were focused on community-level activities, on getting communities to buy into the process, identify problems at the community level, and work together on solutions.

NGO involvement on the ground in the Petén was one way to decentralize management of the program. The major Guatemalan counterpart, CONAP, also decentralized its management. By December of 1992 CONAP had about 150 or 200 folks working in the area, mostly Peteneros, people from that area.

We felt we had strong political support. The governor certainly supported the program, along with a number of mayors. The military, at least in a leadership sense, also was supporting the program, or at least not putting up any major resistance.

We worked a lot on balancing

stakeholder interests—sawmill owners, loggers, the tourism industry, xate and chicle harvesters, and farmers and the people moving into the area—helping them to understand that we were in favor of the reasonable, sustainable use of the forest resource and did not plan to shut them out entirely.

The program, as initially designed and implemented, had a very strong participation focus because we were most concerned about change in the way people behaved, within a policy environment which had been set before the project was established.

**Taking a Second Look.** As implementation progressed we found that we had not achieved what we thought we had in the area of participation. Our most important lesson was realizing that the project was not a technically focused project. It really was a political project. It was not a project about trees, but about the distribution of political and economic power.

By December of 1992, some major issues threatened the very life of the project. In three days the legislature essentially legalized illegal logging. The Forestry Service of Ministry of Agriculture was using its licensing authority not to control lumbering, but to raise revenue. There was a direct relationship between the Forestry Service presence and deforestation. CONAP representatives in the Petén had been attacked and beaten in one instance, probably with participation by the military, and a number of the CONAP employees working in the area had not been paid. Mayors were protesting their perceived loss of control. And while the project was having significant micro-successes, particularly in working with communities, it appeared to be facing a macro-disaster. In other words, the project was not affecting the deforestation of the area.

At the national level, the problem with our approach was that the support we had developed was extremely narrow and largely confined to Guatemala City. The legislature was nonrepresentative. Votes were for sale. There was a lot of balancing of interests and trading off of favors.

So we in USAID were confusing

mandate with the appearance of mandate. While we had the support of a very small number of influential people—visionaries—we had no clear national mandate. Our political support was compromised.

We had consulted extensively with the people in the Petén, but it was all USAID. As I said, my staff and a few contractors had spent a great deal of time in the Petén. What was missing was the Guatemalan side of the equation. Although we developed a program that effectively took community concerns into account, the solutions we devised were based on our interpretations of their reality.

The planning process tended to be relatively isolated and leadership focused. We were very dependent on a very small number of people on the Guatemalan side who were subject to being swayed by competing visions of the project; some saw it as an environmental protection project, others as an economic resource project.

Another factor in the planning process was USAID's strong desire to do this project. AID-Washington wanted us to do it, the U.S. PVO community wanted us to do it, and the mission wanted to do it. Given the USAID project framework, certain decisions and time frames preclude greater participation, especially for projects viewed so favorably on the USAID side.

The year between the initial signing of the project and implementation led to a certain demoralization. It was too lengthy. The competitive grant process is lengthy, frustrating for all concerned. Add to that the time it takes to mobilize resources and put them in place once the grants are awarded. There was a long delay, and USAID had no clear counterparts working in the area. That led to the perception, especially in the Petén, that nothing was happening.

Unfortunately the Petén was only too familiar with a lot of planning and nothing ever happening.

Management decentralization was ineffective. CONAP leadership changed five times in the Petén and three times in Guatemala City. Decentralization of resources was also ineffective. It was difficult to force resources through the funnel from Guatemala City up into

the Petén. We could never persuade Guatemalan leadership in the capital city to focus on the Petén, to get out there themselves, to be part of the project. Again, USAID staff tended to be the ones who were engaged, to bridge the gap.

In terms of balancing stakeholder interests, there was a significant mobilization of opposition forces as the project began to look like it might be successful. For example, the passage of the Logging Extraction Law I mentioned earlier totally undermined our efforts. And in the absence of a Guatemalan political arena to play out these conflicts of interests, we in USAID found ourselves trying to balance stakeholder interests.

The basic question was, whose reform project was this? Was it really ours, or was it theirs? Did we care too much? Did we push the project farther and faster than we should have? In our haste to obligate funds and to get going on a project “everyone wanted,” did we fail to understand and identify the political dynamics of the situation? And were we too focused on micro successes and not focused enough on really achieving the broader elements of the program?

### **Discussion Session**

**Diane La Voy:** We count on all of you to provide the rest of the program. I would like the audience to consider the question: What could USAID have done differently?

Terry Brown has laid out very interestingly a case that looked good but wasn't quite as good as it looked initially. If that sounds familiar to you, we would like to hear your suggestions.

### **Working for a Consensus among Donors**

**Tobey Pierce:** From your presentation, I conclude that the community participation part seems to have gone well, but the public sector seems to be where the problem lies. In other countries where we've had success on the ground but have been hampered by lack of public policy will, we've worked on donor coordination. The idea is to develop a powerful consensus among government donors and NGOs. It would seem

that if the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the other bilaterals had all said the same thing, that approach might have had some promise.

### **Developing Broader-Based Constituencies**

**Terry Brown:** Although there were not many donors actively involved in Guatemala, the concept of developing broader-based constituencies and taking experience on the ground and applying it back to the political level is extremely important. Initially the project tended to be technically focused. We needed to understand the nature of the political issues in the Petén and to deal with the issue of the military. The United States had cut off military assistance to Guatemala, so it was difficult for us to get support for the program from the military. We might have attempted to mobilize political support in Guatemala City by increasing the visibility of certain issues and concerns. The president was trying to use an environmental cover: we might have been able to use the threat of his being embarrassed by public sector failures to make key changes.

### **Building Guatemalan Capacity to Press for Policy Change**

**Jeanne North:** I think that your ultimate objective in Guatemala was to promote a process in which not only the USAID people but also interested people in the country would learn about the province, a process in which the nongovernmental people would impact positively on the government and vice versa. It seems to me that looking for opportunities to start such a process would be one thing to do early on.

### **Pairing with Counterparts**

**Jim Nations:** As a representative of Conservation International, one of the PVOs involved in the project, I would make three recommendations for improving the process next time. First, during the initial planning, USAID brought in a team of 17 specialists from the United States. If each of those specialists had

had a Guatemalan counterpart, the planning team would have been a “duplicated” process. As it was, some Guatemalans felt as if the ultimate design was produced by USAID alone.

### **Seeking Consistency among Policies**

Second, the rest of U.S. policy and other institutions’ policies should be brought into sync with USAID’s policies. The same might be said for multilateral agencies. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is currently trying to relocate Guatemalan refugees from Mexico in the middle of the national parks of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. That’s not in the interest of the refugees, of Guatemala, or of Central America as a whole.

### **Countering Special Interests through Information Campaigns**

The third point is that the local people, the rural families most directly affected by natural resource use and by the project, are the project’s strongest supporters. The people who resist change are those whose livelihoods are threatened by the success of the project. That includes some in the military who are involved in illegal timber, wildlife, and archaeological trade and drug running and the loggers and large landowners, who are more interested in cattle ranching than in the conservation of tropical forests. One way to counter these special interests is to increase the spread of information among the local population. The analogy is that when the lights go on, the rats tend to scurry. In this case, information is the light that we need to spread among the rural population of the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

### **Involving All Concerned Sectors**

**Joan Gooden:** From what I knew about this project, three sectors seem not actively involved: municipal governments, the military, and the church. I was just in the area and conversations with mayors and auxiliary mayors confirmed that they were not engaged.

As for the military, I realize that finding a way for them to participate is a real challenge, not

just in Guatemala, but in many countries, and particularly in Latin America. When I got back from my field trip, the deputy director of the mission told me that the mission was working with the Strategic Studies Institute, where both military and civilians are taking a course that includes an environmental component. This might be a step towards helping the military figure out how to play another role in society.

The third sector is the church, and not just the Catholic Church. Clearly the evangelicals have been champion organizers in the Petén. It seems to me that their involvement would also be important. I would be interested in your reactions to these observations.

**Terry Brown:** Your comments are very interesting. I guess I would say that what the project lacked from the beginning was a good stakeholder analysis. For example, one of the things that we eventually did but could have done earlier was to shift \$100,000 of the \$200,000 small grants fund for communities from the highlands to the Petén. That gave the mayors some small resources (\$5,000 to \$10,000) to deal with. That was a very low-cost way to give the municipal governments some stake in the project. The military was a key target audience, but we focused on them very late.

Lack of counterparts or an indigenous presence in that area continued to haunt the project. One of the NGOs now is trying to establish a Guatemalan counterpart organization. But it is still too much us and not enough of them, except at the community level.

### **Being Open to Reformulation of the Problem**

**Frank Method:** What I found most telling about this case were your remarks about how much you and Washington and other influential people wanted this project. Two observations about this. One, the lesson that I heard in the discussion of the Malawi experience as recounted in the April Forum was that participation focused on defining the problem and led to a reformulation of the problem as originally defined by USAID.

Second, I liked what Larry Byrne said



about managing with a degree of tolerance for risk and learning from the process, but the analogies that he drew with 3M and others that work with an awareness that they don't know today what products they will be producing five years from now doesn't apply to what we're doing in USAID. In this Maya Biosphere project the mission did not really have the option of following the lead if participation had led to the formulation of a different problem or to some activity in the Petén that put some other priority ahead of deforestation abatement.

### **Allowing Time for Democratic Processes to Take Root**

**Brian Housefield:** I'm from the Nature Conservancy and, like Jim Nations, I have been with this project since the beginning. It is important to keep in mind that the Maya Biosphere Reserve is part of a much larger contiguous forest that spans three nations. Five years ago, when we began this process, throughout Central America and in much of Mexico, democracy was only a glimmer in some people's eyes. Today, thanks partly to USAID, the area is gradually democratizing. When Cerezo's government came in, USAID grasped an opportunity to set aside a large conservation area and perhaps moved a little bit too fast in terms of local community participation. However, with democracy just coming back in after 30 years of dictatorship, there weren't any social institutions that we could call democratic. Democracy is a learning process that has to occur at both the community level and at the highest levels in government. The Guatemalans working on this project are beginning to understand that they can actually stand up and voice an opinion at a public forum without fear.

The important lesson here for USAID is continuity of effort. Life of project and moving a lot of money fast and success in terms of dollars spent have very little to do with success on the ground.

**Terry Brown:** I agree that we tend to get trapped in project frameworks. One of the advantages of strategic planning is that we may be able to get

longer-term commitments around broader objectives and to shift resources as we learn from our successes and failures. The project in the Petén is not a six-year activity; it's a much longer process than that.

### **Assuring the Participation of Women**

**Jenna Luche:** It's unclear to me how gender roles or responsibilities are reflected in participation at the community level.

**Terry Brown:** Conservation International, in its work on economic issues, has adopted a family-based approach, with the emphasis on roles within families and economic opportunities for females. Thus the project clearly addresses gender issues. From that perspective the project is one of the most effective that I've seen in Guatemala.

### **Working with Local Governments**

**Mike Calavan:** I just want to address one of the dozens of interesting issues your presentation raised: the unreliability of bureaucratic counterparts. The obvious point is that they tend to come and go quite rapidly. Given the near universality of that phenomenon and the transition to democracy, I think we in USAID need to rethink what a counterpart is. Perhaps elected officials at the local level could be considered counterparts. By its nature, a project like the Maya Biosphere Reserve goes to a certain part of the country, and we could look for the most promising elected officials or local governments there to work with. These officials are in office for a longer period than most of our central bureaucratic counterparts are, and, because they usually live in the project area, they have a commitment to it that central bureaucrats, who come from the national capitals, seldom have.

**Terry Brown:** As a direct result of experience in two projects--this one as well as a 10-year activity in watershed management--we in USAID Guatemala gave up on the public sector. We looked at natural resources as an objective rather

than a project, for a year, trying to figure out bureaucratically how to avoid national structures and go to the community level, specifically mayors and community councils. We got ourselves so wrapped around accountability issues that, in frustration, we chose another model, which was using a U.S. PVO structure to get to the community level. I think USAID needs an instrument, or point of access, that will make it possible for us to engage fully, especially at the community level and especially through political structures.

### **Bringing Stakeholders Together To Resolve Issues**

**Ken Schofield:** Were there any organizations or people in the Petén that could have the power of convocation to bring the stakeholders together to talk about some of the political issues involved?

**Terry Brown:** Attempts were made, but the most difficult stakeholders either did not attend or were not interested. One of the most corrupt legislators in the Guatemalan Congress was from the Petén. He was the one who proposed the law that if a tree had been cut, it could be extracted from the forest without a license. So the chain saw sales in the Petén skyrocketed. The military and the logging interests were probably the two most serious stakeholders. It was difficult to get access to them, especially for a non-Guatemalan. Furthermore, participation has up until just recently been discouraged in Guatemala. In the early 1980s, especially in rural areas, assuming a leadership role was a death sentence. That mentality of repression still continued. The situation was even worse in the Petén, because until the Cerezo government, it had been a military reserve with no civilian institutions at all.

### **Getting Local Talent Involved**

**Diana Putman:** In some countries USAID has moved beyond reliance on the public sector by using local talent throughout the design, planning, and implementation process. In Tunisia, we discovered that even when the local talent didn't help very much in writing up a report or getting

paper work done, getting them interested and on board meant that a much broader batch of people heard about what was going on. Also, continuing to use these consultants built up local expertise. When USAID left Tunisia, it left behind a cadre of local consultants that continued to work with other donors and to spread the philosophy of participation and working on the social side of things. Does that kind of talent exist in Guatemala?

**Terry Brown:** Your point is very well taken in differentiating between local capacity to write our pieces of paper and local capacity to manage and carry out programs.

The (U.S.) NGOs have been relatively successful in identifying people in the Petén to work on the programs. But they were less successful in identifying counterparts that could bridge the resource gap between Guatemala City and the Petén.

### **Focusing More on the Demand Side in Natural Resources Policy**

\_\_\_\_\_ : Did you consider working on the demand side rather than the supply side in addressing the question of a national forestry policy? For example, West Africa is faced with Europe's year 2000 requirement that imported products be "green." In one instance USAID approached protection of the West African tropical forest by helping an association of sawmill operators to meet the requirements of the year 2000. Guatemala is very different, but it still may be possible to look downstream at who is using the forestry projects.

**Terry Brown:** At least one Guatemalan furniture manufacturer was basing his business on certifying that any wood used came from a cultivated rather than a natural forest. So I think more of a demand approach might be taken. On the other hand, based on earlier policies, USAID Guatemala financed a sawmill about four years ago, the biggest sawmill in the Petén, thus creating a problem for ourselves in the Maya Biosphere Reserve project.

## **Strengthening Social Science Analysis**

**Diane La Voy:** These comments and suggestions will give us all a lot to think about, but I notice that we may be coming up short when it comes to suggesting how to deal with the difficult issues of the military. We're faced with the question of how to promote policy change where the military, though not as actively repressive as they once were, are still feared.

**Christina Schoux:** I'm just struck by how many of the problems of the project were related to participation and stakeholder issues, and wonder if we have gotten away too far from what we used to call social soundness analysis. I worry that, as USAID looks at diminishing some of its project design requirements, we might be in danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water. As we look at projects in democracy, micro enterprise, health, environment, and so forth, sociopolitical analyses need to be rethought

and brought back into greater prominence.

**Terry Brown:** I went back to the project paper to look at the technical and social analysis and found that there wasn't a word about these kinds of issues--not that they weren't in the heads of the people who put this together.

Guatemala wasn't a small mission, but we had only one U.S. direct hire, a PASA, and a Guatemalan professional working on the project. They were so wrapped up in doing the kind of work that contractors can't do on the process side of the program and establishing the linkage between the community and Guatemala City, that they did not have time to conduct a sociopolitical analysis. They were frustrated by not having the time to be more effective in that area. USAID missions are not staffed to look at the behavioral dimensions of what we're doing. Our two direct hires found themselves totally stressed out because of the extensive traveling in the Petén and USAID bureaucratic requirements.

## E-Mail Communications

### Lessons from Policy Reforms in Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Cameroon

**Dick Brown:** Policy reforms are successful if they have clients within the Government who need and can use the policy analysis—and the recommendations serve their development objectives (and often their political needs) in a timely manner.

Failures are usually attributable to being “externally driven” policy changes (often by donor agencies), having insufficient support or will within the Government (“ownership”), lacking sufficient analysis to make the economic (and political) arguments, not being timely, or being presented inappropriately (using a two by four rather than a velvet glove).

Failures are also relative. We conducted in Sri Lanka a particularly difficult policy change relating to participatory management of irrigation systems. The exercise involved numerous studies and period workshops with the senior-most policy makers from the “competing” ministries. Through this gradual process we were able to successfully achieve a high degree of consensus amongst the participants. We had intended that this would lead to legislation in late 1991. The Government found it difficult to approve the “large pill” but most of the participants saw the value of the approach and without legislation began to move to implement many of the exercise’s recommendations. I just received word from the Mission and the primary Government policy makers that legislation will be approved by the cabinet next week. The policy reform effort has produced a change in irrigation management as well as in promulgation of new law.

Keep up the good work. You have successfully established “participation” as an important part of the Mission (and Agency) lexicon. And while I believe we were already doing quite a good job before intuitively, we now make it an explicit part of our design and implementation process.

**Frank Young:** What essential lessons have we learned from doing “policy reform” in Bangladesh?

1. It is a long-term process. Effective policy reform takes a decade, even longer to assure institutional commitment and sustainability. It takes this long because policy reform means building alliances with senior policy makers and bureaucrats at the operational level who share the same reform agenda. These alliances must evolve into networks which stretch outside of government into private interest groups so that policy change is transparent and accountable.
2. Policy reform and change are not linear. One has to expect recidivism and even failure for a while. This is because entrenched groups don’t give up easily. Donor coordination is important, but the strategy has to be how to strengthen the alliances and networks we are nurturing.
3. Policy reform FALLS if it doesn’t have a clear vision of who in society it is benefiting, and why. Unless the benefit stream of reform is identified and pursued, the reform program will lose power. Here risk-taking is important. Beneficiaries, however, must understand the risks they take as well.
4. Effective policy dialogue must be between equals (partnership). Both donors and host country organizations (public and private) must bring legitimate interests to the table and deal from respective positions of strength. The process is, after all, negotiation.

*(continued on next page)*

### E-Mail Communications (continued)

**David Eckerson:** Policy change that works depends on a lot of things going right at the right time, or a lot of things going wrong at the right time. We, as outsiders, can catalyze the process, but not lead or direct it.

In Cameroon, when the GOC integrated nutrition into their five-year development plan, the most critical element was the interpersonal dynamic of committed people (who were friends) guiding a process to make life better for others in need.

## **Aligning the Purposes of Multiple Donors and Partners: Madagascar's Second Environmental Plan**

Participation Forum 21: February 27, 1997

In this excerpt, Lisa Gaylord of the Madagascar mission and Phyllis Forbes, Deputy Assistant Administrator for PPC, speak about lessons they learned from the participatory process underlying Madagascar's second environmental plan. Participants were asked to consider how the Madagascar experience spoke to such fundamental questions as: Does a collaborative participatory process result in better planning and decision making; and can collaboration among international and national institutions help empower the people of the country?

### **What Participation Really Looks Like**

*Phyllis Forbes*

Madagascar always has held a place in the hearts of people who care about our environment because it has such unique flora and fauna, and people are so concerned about preserving it. When I went out as mission director, the World Bank was beginning what would become the precursor to an Africa-wide effort: to prepare a joint donor-government environmental action plan. The Africa Bureau was supportive of this experimental effort. In the beginning, we didn't know what a participatory environmental program would look like.

When I arrived in Madagascar, the government had just refused outright the Duke grant. This was a big problem because USAID/Washington expected us to obligate the money in the next few months. So I went to see the government official who had refused to approve the grant. I thought he was going to be terrible, but he said to me, "Well, madam, this is the first I have seen of this grant, and if we're

supposed to be working together, I want a chance to take a look at it." That seemed to make a lot of sense. Ultimately, the grant was strengthened.

I tell that story because at the time, everybody thought we *were* engaged in a participatory process. But now that we *are actually* engaged in it, we have discovered what participation really means. For example, in a mid-course meeting of the SAVEM Project (Sustainable Approaches to Viable Environmental Management), which has been one of USAID/Madagascar's flagship environmental projects, all of the Malagasies who were interested in the environment practically shouted us out of the room. That gave us an inkling that things were not on a good track. We went back and asked them, "What is this? What would you like to see?" These questions invited deeper involvement than just asking, "What trees do you want planted?" or "What way do you want to save the lemurs?" Participation is involving

people intimately in the development of a

program or action plan.

### **Planning for EP2: A Participatory Process**

*Lisa Gaylord*

I have been working with the National Environmental Action Plan for going on seven years. The participatory process of developing the plan was not just a one-shot effort, but a process that went on for two years.

**The Problem and the Response.** Madagascar is an economy largely based on renewable natural resources. A high level of environmental degradation due to soil erosion and deforestation is threatening the country's rich biodiversity. There are three primary causes: population increase, poverty, and the low level of agricultural technology, which results in extensive use of slash and burn methods—probably one of the primary pressures being put on the country's natural resource base.

In 1987, the Madagascar government prepared the first National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP), which resulted in the promulgation of an environmental charter in December of 1990. Since this was the first environmental action plan in Africa, it put Madagascar at the forefront. In 1991 the NEAP was launched.

The NEAP is divided into three five-year phases. EP1, which was just completed at the end of 1996, was the first five-year phase. The next five-year phase, EP2, will go to the year 2001. During this phase the experiences and lessons learned in EP1 will be consolidated and deepened. EP3 will mainstream environmental activities.

**Features of the Participatory Process.** In developing EP2, the government has been in the driver's seat, pushing the program forward. There were intensive national preparation efforts. In contrast, the SAVEM Project was designed by a USAID design team.

The key design feature of EP2 was that it moved from a project to a program approach. EP1 consisted of a conglomeration of projects, sponsored not only by USAID but also by other donors. In EP2 we were looking for coherence

and synergy in an overall program. The program approach was characterized by a common vision and consensus on priorities, a strong annual programming process, consolidated monitoring, and joint pre-appraisals and appraisals. However, there has been no attempt to consolidate disbursement and procurement.

EP2 was designed in an intensive, highly participatory national process, starting with a national workshop in the fall of 1994, and followed by a steering committee meeting of donors and all Malagasy counterparts to validate major options, and a beneficiary assessment to find out whether or not beneficiaries from all levels—farmers up through government agencies—felt that EP1 had met its overall objectives.

In April of 1995, an international scientific workshop, attended by over 120 scientists, both Malagasy and international, identified the conservation and research priorities. That was followed by a six-month PPDOP (participatory process for the definition of options and priorities) for biodiversity conservation. The PPDOP identified the problems and options for conserving biodiversity. Regional priority-setting workshops were also held.

### **Effect of USAID Re-engineering Process.**

While the PPDOP process was going on, USAID was in a reengineering mode. The participatory process in Madagascar was fully in line with the USAID reengineering principles: customer focus, teamwork, participation. While we were participating in bringing together the Malagasy agencies, international and national NGOs, and partners in planning EP2, we were at the same time pushing forward the reengineering process.

**Beneficiary Assessments.** One of the key activities of the participatory process was the beneficiary assessment. It was a four-month qualitative study carried out by five different local research firms. There were over 50 evaluators

and close to 2,000 in-depth interviews. These took place both at the field level and at the institutional level, because EP1 had looked at institution building.

As in any type of participatory process, there were problems of coordination and communication in the beneficiary assessment and lack of understanding of what the evaluators were looking for. It was difficult to get across the idea that the study was a constructive assessment, not an evaluation.

On the other hand, one of the benefits of the beneficiary assessment was that, for the first time, managers knew how the beneficiaries perceived the project. Sometimes these perceptions weren't very positive.

The draft beneficiary assessment reports were a mechanism for clarifying certain misunderstandings. They were used as planning tools as we moved into finalizing the EP2 design, which was finished just as we were going into a final multi-donor appraisal mission.

**Decentralization and Local Participation.** The government's decentralization plans were taken into account in the development of EP2. Over the two-year time period, various conventions took place to look at the issues of local participation. As a result of this process, local community management of natural renewable resources became an integral

underpinning of EP2. Local communities were empowered to take responsibility for the management of natural resources.

**Defining Options and Priorities.** Over a period of five to six months, a participatory process was carried out to define options and priorities. The international scientific workshop on biodiversity defined the conservation priorities, but several questions remained: What were the other key priorities? On what activities should EP2 focus? Answers to these questions were sought at different levels: the local level, the multi-local level, and the national level. A series of workshops were held in which local leaders discussed the problems they were having in the utilization of natural resources and set priorities for EP2.

The objectives of the priority-setting workshops were to inform the regions on the nature of the EP2 proposal, to foster debate with regional representatives, and to inform donors what the priorities were in the different regions.

At the national level, workshops were held to take the information coming out of the regional workshops and decide on overall priorities.

**Lessons from the Priority-Setting Workshops.** The priority-setting workshops revealed that NEAP was not widely known. Particularly at the local level, communication was needed. The participatory process in and by itself was a mechanism for making NEAP better known. It also enabled us to employ a program rather than a project approach. It made clear that we were moving forward as a national program. Also, it fostered a team spirit and active participation.

As a point of clarification, when I have used the word "we," I don't mean "we" as USAID or "we" as donors. I mean "we" collectively: all the partners working together in Madagascar.

**Implementation Arrangements.** EP1 was implemented as a conglomeration of projects. Now, as EP2 begins, we will try to make it more of a program. This will be difficult because it goes against both the Malagasy and the donors' established way of doing things.

The key feature of the program approach is the consolidation of the annual programming process and the monitoring system. This means that every donor that is funding an EP2 activity has an obligation to participate in the annual programming process as well as to make sure that the monitoring information will flow into a consolidated system. This is not a trivial requirement, but it can be met if all donors work together at all stages. In December 1995, a joint multi-donor appraisal mission of EP2, with 70 people representing over ten donors, worked closely with over 50 Malagasy counterparts interviewing and refining the EP2 program document. The donors then participated in the EP2 negotiations held in September 1996 in Paris, where all the conditionalities and key features were agreed with all the donors together. It was not the World Bank and Madagascar or USAID and Madagascar, but it was all the donors.

There will be no attempt to consolidate what is cast in iron in terms of disbursement and procurement procedures, which are the most difficult to change. But we can go a long way with consolidation without having to change them.

The key implementation arrangement is the multi-donor secretariat. Experience has shown that it's very important for NEAP to have an entity that can manage public relations and problem solving on a permanent basis. During EP1 a person from the World Bank functioned as the full time secretariat, and everybody agreed that it had been useful and that in EP2 the secretariat should not be just a World Bank activity, but everybody's activity. Five different donors have joined their resources to finance a team of two that we call the multi-donor secretariat.

**Work Plans and Budgets.** Workplans and budgets are also key to EP2 implementation. Each donor will continue to have its own financing agreement with the government. All the agreements will then be formalized as framework agreements at the level of all the agencies, with the annual work plan and budget as key elements. This means that every year there will be a work plan and a budget centered on every component or activity in the program, instead of on every donor in the program. This is not a compulsory process. It will work only as long as everybody plays the game.

### Discussion Session

#### Communications, Lessons, and Trust

**Andrew Watson (Development Alternatives):** For close to three years during EP1, I was with the KEPEM Project (Knowledge and Effective Policies for Environmental Management), the other USAID/Madagascar flagship environmental project. I'd be curious to know how you think the lessons learned in Madagascar can be extended to other countries. As Lisa pointed out, Madagascar's Environmental Action Plan was probably the first in Africa. Certain countries, Uzbekistan, for example, have jumped right into drawing up local environmental action plans and are at the same stage as Madagascar. Other countries, Cambodia, for example, are still at the stage Madagascar was about eight years ago. Cambodia's national environmental action plan is mostly boilerplate. Is there any way for lessons pertaining to the basic participatory approach to be extended to other countries?

**Lisa Gaylord:** Even within Madagascar, various integrated conservation development projects could learn lessons from one another. How do we know if they are pulling out the lessons learned from different experiences and ensuring that the same mistakes will not be made again?

Within USAID we don't communicate enough, to exchange lessons learned. For example, the parallels between the Madagascar



and Uganda programs are tremendous, yet there has been little dialogue between the two missions. That's just one donor. Beyond that, we must exchange lessons among all donors. USAID has to make more of an effort to increase communication among countries in the process of developing national environmental action plans.

**Michel Simeon:** To me the most important and the most difficult lesson from a donor's point of view is that we have to refrain from taking the lead too much, so that the countries can run their own programs. The more people are involved, the more likely it is that important things will not get forgotten or overlooked.

**Lisa Gaylord:** Two things to be learned from Madagascar are important. One is the personal relationships that were established among people working in the environment. It's a lot easier to communicate when you have good personal relationships. Some of the lessons learned in Madagascar would not be applicable in places where a high level of trust has not been developed. Because a level of trust between the Malagasy institutions and the donors has been established over the last five years, we have been able to apply a participatory process to develop a coherent program.

The second lesson is that we fool ourselves if we believe that we can coordinate without the strong involvement of the government that we're working with. If we don't have the cooperation and full participation of the government from the beginning, if they don't believe that NEAP is theirs—as it rightfully should be—then NEAP won't go anywhere.

**John Lewis:** We still have a dichotomy between USAID missions and other donors. Most donors do not empower their missions as USAID does. Missions need to add Washington people to their virtual teams and hold them accountable for bringing in the decision-making levels of the other donors who are not in the field (we need to stop pretending that they are) but are back in headquarters, where they will remain.

The lesson learned from West Africa is that for environmental management to kick in, the

right land-tenure policies and the right agroforestry technical packages must be in place. We must be transparent about the criteria on which local environmental management programs will be measured. Then if they don't perform, they get only half as much money the next time around. As long as every donor sticks with that deal, the message will be loud and clear. But there are a million ways around that and donors that don't like to be held to such conditions.

**Michel Simeon:** In Madagascar, there are about 10 different donors, including large NGOs like the World Wildlife Fund. The relationship among donors will work only if it's voluntary and if the donors feel that they have ownership in the joint product.

In Madagascar, once the agencies had produced the 16 reports, we came in for the appraisal. Seventy-five people participated. They were divided into groups. Each group was headed by somebody from a different donor. The appraisal process for the forestry part was led by the Germans; the appraisal process for the protected areas part was led by the U.S.A.; the appraisal process for the soil conservation part was led by the Swiss. Everybody had a stake in the ownership of the end product. Because trust developed, it could work that way. I don't know whether it would work the same way in another country with a different set of people.

**John McMahon:** I've been involved in a lot of different donor coordination activities, everything from ag research, to environment, to ag sector. My general reaction is that donor coordination is never as effective as one would like you to believe. However, it's absolutely critical.

The Madagascar experience has been positive. You're at the second phase of NEAP. You've weathered changes in government and different variations of the NEAP process: government-led versus donor-pushed. You've been able to get broad participation on the part of the country at all levels in the NEAP and perhaps, more important, to mobilize tremendous amounts of donor resources to deal with environmental management. In the end, that's what it's all about. It's not just how many people have been

involved along the way or what NEAP looks like, but whether or not money is flowing and an impact is being felt. I would strongly encourage you to document everything from participation to the importance of a sustained commitment on the part of the donors.

### **Participation Then and Now**

**Phyllis Forbes:** In 1991, when I was working in Madagascar, speaking to each other openly could be quite dangerous because we were not in a democratic society. Democracy may not be well-rooted in a lot of countries we work in, but at least the press is freer, people can speak more openly, and they can have more opinions. If we hold back information, it is impossible for donor coordination to work. When we share information openly, donor coordination works.

We should be thinking differently about how we do development now that we have both the political and technological capacity to share information much more freely. We don't have to tiptoe around and suggest that maybe we could discuss ideas openly. We can in fact foster open debate. That's revolutionary for us and it is going to be revolutionary for a lot of the other

donors we deal with. I'm sure the World Bank is used, as we are, to sitting down with the minister of X, and having a conversation about what program Y ought to be. However, a national convention on X could hold up, slow down, or in some way interrupt our appraisal missions, our timing, our rate of obligations, and all these other things that people get caught up in in their own organizations.

I leave here thinking that we've made tremendous advances, but we have a mind-set advance to get through next, which is that web sites on the Internet allow us to share information as rapidly between Amber Mountain and Antananarivo as it does now between Washington, D.C., and New York City. It's an amazing revolution.

Now we have elections in Madagascar, and soon politicians are going to care about what the populace thinks, because the populace will be electing them. And as people get more and more familiar with democracy and as political parties become more savvy, perhaps we, as developmental people, can actually put development issues on the political agenda so politicians would have to reveal where they stand on the environment.

There is also a move toward decentralization in Madagascar that we should strongly support. The people who are going to do the best job of preserving a protected area in Madagascar will be the people who live near that area.

**Lisa Gaylord:** While we have talked a lot today about working with people at the local level and trying to identify what their needs are, a lot of the participatory processes for designing the program still took place at the national level. Our big challenge in EP2 is how is participation going to happen effectively at the regional, the multi-local, and local level. And as we move toward multi-actors, how do we ensure that they talk to one another; how do we get the local government involved? That's the big challenge as we move this participatory process into EP2.

# **Providing Space for Women's Political Issues: Democratic/Civic Institution Development Project (DECIDE) Experience from Malawi**

## **Participatory Practices 1**

### **The Development Problem**

Women in Malawi are under-represented in the political arena with less than 2% representation in the cabinet; 6% in parliament; and 5% in local councils. Although women make up more than 52% of the country's total population, national statistics demonstrate that women are disadvantaged compared with men in virtually every social and economic sector.

After 30 years of autocratic rule, internal and external pressure on the Government of Malawi (GOM) mounted, and President Banda called for a referendum to determine whether the country would remain a one-party state or be replaced by a pluralist system. On June 14, 1993, Malawians voted overwhelmingly for a multi-party system of democracy.

The Mission's core project to support the transition from authoritarian rule to the first democratic government in Malawi is the Democratic and Civic Institution Development (DECIDE) Project, which is being implemented in part by the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

### **The Practice and Its Results: Providing Space for Women's Political Issues**

The National Democratic Institute sponsored the first "All Party Conference" in January, 1994, to assist all seven political parties contesting in the election to develop campaign strategies for the election. NDI sponsored a separate women's session as part of this conference. Each party was invited to send 20 delegates to the conference and NDI requested that at least five of those party delegates be women. This conference was the country's first opportunity for female political party representatives to meet and collaborate across political lines.

With USAID facilitating the women's session, the women identified the five most important issues affecting their lives and presented those issues at the closing plenary of the conference. The five key issues included: girls' primary and secondary education; women's roles in political participation; women's economic equality in the workplace; women's legal rights, labor and family law; and HIV/AIDS prevention programs for men and women. After the Malawian women finalized the list of key issues, USAID facilitators immediately printed their work in a "flyer" format. The women distributed the flyers to journalists reporting on the conference, members of Parliament, and representatives of the seven major political parties.

By the close of the plenary discussion, all seven political parties endorsed the issues, and agreed they should be addressed by all the parties, as well as in the new constitution.

One month after the "All Party Conference," a constitutional conference was convened to gather views from the nation for the drafting of the new constitution. At this conference, all segments of society (political parties, NGOs, church leaders, chiefs, women leaders, etc.) voiced their views as to what should and should not be included in the new constitution. The issue of one house versus two (in parliament) was a major

topic and the chiefs, women, and other groups that had been excluded during the one-party state lobbied hard for the second house.

The Chairperson of the National Commission on Women in Development (NCWID) presented a paper drawn extensively from the U.S.-funded book entitled "Women and the Law in Malawi." (The NCWID, a national coordinating body with representation from government, parastatals, and NGOs, is mandated to propose strategies to address the situation of women in all sectors of development.) The book outlined the laws that affect women in Malawi and recommends reforms to those laws which are discriminatory. The Chairperson took the book one step further by calling for a separate section for women's rights in the bill of rights and equal representation for men and women in the upper house of the parliament.

The constitution was approved in May, 1994 as a provisional document with a one-year period of review. That constitution contained the women's recommendations for the bill of rights and the senate. Towards the conclusion of the one-year review period, a second constitutional conference was convened to gather views from the public before final ratification in the house.

USAID, through NDI, financed the second constitutional conference in February, 1995 and again assisted the women, along with political parties and other interest groups, in defining their strategies in preparation for the conference.

At the second constitutional conference, the ruling party, the UDF, no longer supported a senate. Their justification was that a two-house parliament was too expensive. Defenders noted that the UDF was arguing for other things that cost significantly more than the senate. Despite this opposition, the women spoke out vigorously and formed coalitions with village chiefs and various parties. As a result of the women's determined lobbying and vocal conviction, the conference voted to retain the senate.

Weeks later when parliament convened to consider the recommendations of the constitutional conference, however, it appeared that the members were going to disregard many of the recommendations from the conference, including the retention of the senate.

Three weeks after the second constitutional conference, USAID/Malawi supported and facilitated a workshop given by the Society for Advancement, an indigenous NGO, on Women's Empowerment. Over 100 Malawian women, representing government, NGOs, and traditional authorities (chiefs) were invited to the workshop and discussed constraints to women's empowerment. They looked at ways to address those constraints, e.g., through lobbying parliament, increasing networking among NGOs and increasing women's participation in politics. The women drafted and signed a petition calling for the senate's retention. Six women were selected to go to Parliament to distribute the petition.

The timing was vital. The following day, the Parliament voted to retain the senate in the Constitution. Had the women not been able to mobilize their efforts at the Women's Empowerment Workshop and had the women not been present at parliament to petition and lobby the parliamentarians, there is no doubt the senate would have been abolished.

## Discussion Points

- 1) The essential point for participation was not whether Malawi should have a bicameral legislature, but rather whether the views of representatives of a previously voiceless majority—Malawian women—were “brought to the table.”
- 2) The approach USAID/NDI used to assist Malawi’s political parties to prepare for elections constituted a participatory practice because it created political space in which issues of concern to women might be considered.
- 3) Years of interaction between the NCWID and the mission increased the mission’s understanding of women’s needs and priorities. The NCWID benefitted from USAID funding, and a number of USAID projects benefitted from gender recommendations made by the NCWID. This solid relationship was the impetus for Malawian women to look to the mission for support in the political arena and for the mission to provide it within an appropriate context.
- 4) From the women’s session at the “All Party Conference” the primary lessons were that: 1) without special efforts to organize a separate women’s session, women’s issues would not have been included at political conferences; 2) efforts to include women can be as simple as requesting their attendance; 3) there are issues affecting women’s lives that cut across party lines for which women can put aside their political differences; and 4) simple, practical efforts to facilitate dialogue among women can have far-reaching impacts in achieving equitable development.
- 5) The media was used effectively. The mission worked with the local media in publicizing the results of the women’s session at the “All Party Conference,” and NDI worked with the radio stations in organizing a women’s roundtable in advance of the second constitutional conference. The roundtable was broadcast in three languages, allowing Malawian women to be heard throughout the country.
- 6) USAID/Malawi’s development approach consists of regularly initiating consultation and dialogue in the form of meetings, political debates, surveys, and collaborative research efforts with a broad spectrum of people including national government officials, host country counterparts, local government representatives, project participants, and other donors.
- 7) Working with women in any sector often involves a redistribution of power. In the political arena, this is more sensitive because of the potential appearance of taking a political stance. Aware of this issue, USAID/Malawi has emphasized a supportive—rather than a leading—role for the mission.

*Drafted by Wendy Kapustin after extensive consultation with Stephanie Funk, USAID/Malawi, and a thorough review of available project documentation.*

## Resources

Successful Approaches to Integrating Gender in U.S. Development Assistance: USAID/Malawi. (DOCID: PN-ABW-501)  
Women and the Constitution: An Agenda for Fair Representation and Equal Protection Project Identification Document (PID):  
Democratic/Civic Institution Development

## 2. Community Empowerment and Local Partnerships

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### **Promoting Village Participation in Disaster Mitigation: The USAID/Niger Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Project** Participatory Practices 7

#### **The Challenge**

Semi-arid, resource poor, and landlocked, the Sahelian country of Niger is extremely vulnerable to natural and manmade disasters and to medical emergencies. Recurring drought-related famines undermine the country's development efforts.

In the early 1990s there was a clear need both to improve the disaster and early warning response capabilities of the Government of Niger (GON) and to reinforce local capacities to undertake appropriate mitigation activities. To create a more flexible emergency response system, the Mission proposed and funded a Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Program (DPM). By engaging communities in locally driven mitigation activities, the DPM program strengthened the GON's disaster response capabilities while also laying the ground work for sustainable development at the local level.

#### **The Participatory Practice: Engaging Local Communities and Building Government Capacity**

SAP/GC (Système d'Alerte Précoce/Gestion de Crises), the vulnerability assessment and crisis management unit of the GON, was created in late 1989 to strengthen the disaster early warning and response capabilities of the GON and to reinforce local capacities to undertake appropriate mitigation activities. SAP produced a vulnerability analysis annually using information from various individuals and institutions. The analysis was based on a vulnerability index calculated for each arrondissement in Niger based on questionnaires completed by local technical staff. Once the data had been confirmed at the departmental level, the analysis was finalized at a yearly meeting that included donors, NGOs, individuals from each department, and SAP headquarters staff. The vulnerability analysis enabled the government to determine areas of the country that are most likely to suffer food shortages in a given year.

Under the auspices of SAP, the DPM program set up an Emergency Fund to support local-level disaster preparedness and mitigation activities. The activities were proposed by the village leaders or by government technical staff in response to locally perceived problems. The proposed ideas were then prioritized by a subregional technical committee comprised of staff from all the line ministries.

The technical committee then turned these ideas into formal, written proposals that were submitted to SAP, where they were scored based on probability of success. For those receiving high scores, contracts were then drawn up between SAP and the subregional technical committees. Subsequently, SAP transferred money from the Emergency Fund to a government financial comptroller at the county level. The comptroller disbursed funds as needed for purchases of materials or direct payments of salaries to the technical unit project officer. The food aid component was essentially a performance based contract with

the village management committee. SAP purchased a predetermined quantity of cereal which was delivered to the local management committee. Once the first few projects were undertaken, other villages heard about them and proposed projects of their own, or asked to be included in a neighboring village's activities.

The types of mitigation activities undertaken by the communities included the construction of micro-catchments to enhance the water retention capacity of agricultural grazing lands, wells for vegetable production, firebreaks, flood diversion dikes, situation dams, anti-erosion water diversion structures, and semi-lunes to expand rangeland vegetation. Most of the projects involved a food-for-work component. The village management committees decided how the food was managed and distributed, which individuals were eligible to participate in the project, and how much work needed to be completed on a daily basis in order to ensure that the project was finished according to schedule. The DPM program was able to meet the emergency food needs of people who were not able to find work, especially during the dry season, and at the same time improve rural infrastructure, agricultural production, economic production, and the local environment.

A military coup on January 27, 1996, and subsequent election fraud obligated the Mission to terminate all bilateral aid to Niger. While direct assistance from USAID to the GON has been terminated, locally initiated disaster mitigation activities continued through CARE.

## **Outcome**

Although only a relatively small number (68) of mitigation activities were completed before the closeout of the Mission and their long-term effects are not yet evident, each of the projects engaged civil participation and local initiative. The Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation program under the auspices of SAP/GC improved communication among national and sub-national structures, between government and village organizations, and between village organizations and individual villagers, thus strengthening the capacity of the GON to respond more effectively to vulnerable populations.

At the national level, the GON was able to incorporate community-driven initiatives to national food security strategies. National level officials developed practices to respond more effectively to constituents. The regional committee members learned how, when, and why to transfer information gained from the national level to the local level, and from the local level to the national level. At the village level, individuals gained the skills and experience necessary to take a more active role in problem identification, prioritization, and resolution. The villagers' active participation also enabled them to find channels to articulate and propose solutions to future problems.

## **Discussion Points**

- 1) The bottom-up approach to identifying and implementing the food-for-work projects engaged the local populations and the technical ministries in a collaborative program. This appears to have contributed to local democratic governance: it strengthened officials' commitment and accountability to citizens by demonstrating to citizens that they can propose and receive useful assistance from government officials.
- 2) The fluid composition of the regional and subregional technical committees encouraged the formation of customer-focused teams tailored to the requirements of each type of intervention.

Thus, the ability to match team members' technical qualifications to activity type, such as design of micro-catchments or firebreaks, facilitated efficient use of institutional capacities.

- 3) Since villagers were responsible for both identifying and implementing the mitigation interventions, they were able to transcend their roles as recipients of food assistance. Instead they became active initiators of self-help efforts that were made possible by the provision of food assistance to participants.
- 4) In some highly vulnerable food-deficit areas, the numbers of people requesting food for work compromised the capacity of the site managers to maintain an efficient and controlled work program. This problem poses a dilemma in effectively carrying out food-for-work interventions.
- 5) In many of the sites, women appeared to be inadequately informed about the function and purpose of the DPM program, even though they worked with men as laborers. To more fully engage women's ideas and initiatives, USAID could have worked with DPM officials to develop a proactive approach to involve women in more decision-making and management roles at the subregional and village levels.

*Drafted by Marion Pratt and Tara Mitchell after extensive consultation with the USAID/Niger Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Assessment Team and a thorough review of available documentation. March 1997.*

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## Participation When There Is No Time

Participation Forum 9: January 19, 1995

The most persistent refrain during a year's worth of Participation Forums is that participation takes time. And yet, what do we do in a situation where there simply isn't time? Results are needed yesterday. Perhaps the usual institutions in the country are not functioning. What do you do? Addressing these tough questions at this forum was Rick Barton, Director of the Office of Transition Initiatives.

### OTI: Political Development Through Grassroots Initiatives

*Rick Barton*

**Mission.** When it was created, OTI was going to be turbocharged democracy. I'm not exactly sure that's what it has ended up being, but I think it's fair to say that OTI is the office that participation built. At the core of our mission is one fundamental truth about participation: if you're ever going to get to a system of the people, by the people, and for the people, then you'd better engage the people as early as you can.

Our job is to bring fast, direct political-development assistance to nations emerging from distress. We're supposed to operate in the period when systems have broken down, leadership is feeble, the economy is disrupted, there is violence and intimidation, and few freedoms. Our office is supposed to fill the gap until the larger-scale new justice systems, maybe formal elections, and other pieces of the governmental development take hold. It is a time when there is a real need to pay attention to the political development opportunities.

**The "Gersony Approach."** One of our key early influences was Bob Gersony, who told us about a project on the Atlantic Coast region of Nicaragua. The area had been overrun by two armies, and then a hurricane for good measure. People were hanging around wondering what to do with their lives. Bob went there for 60 days. He rented a boat, went up and down the rivers, and he met with anybody he could find who could talk about what was going on.

He came back with a straightforward conclusion that the people needed a certain kind of Colombian rice, a certain kind of machete,

and roads to take the rice to the markets. He arranged to provide all these elements—got people back to rice farming and set up work crews to build the roads. The farming cut back on the people who were kibitzing or worse. The road crews, small teams that included the entire spectrum of the political combatants, became a practical mechanism for reconciliation.

One strong point was that the approach mixed theory with reality, that there was a little bit of money to go with the civil education, and the other pieces. Another was that it drew heavily on the field for wisdom on how to proceed. Problems were that there's only one Bob Gersony and he's not that available and that the approach takes too long. We knew we had to move faster, and we knew we had to move beyond just one guru.

Our next experience was in Sarajevo. The NATO truce was holding, things seemed to be getting better, and we thought that Sarajevo might be the building block that we could use to create a real program in Bosnia, a beginning toward reconciliation. After three days of official meetings, we really didn't know much more. But we got lucky. The mayor offered us a guide—one of the rare breed of literal people, who when we'd say, "Gee, why would anybody want to have a baby during this kind of situation?" would say, "We will go to the maternity ward." We'd say, "What is life like at the front line?" and she would set up a meeting at the front line. Or we'd say, "Tell us about some of the young people and what dreams they have," and she set up a group of young gymnasts. Through interviews and focus groups

and community meetings, we suddenly got a good cross-section of what was going on in Sarajevo.

As a result, we concluded that there wasn't the political will to move on. What's more, the middle class, the lifeblood of the community, was being sucked out of the city. The only solution we saw was to stop the brain drain and even that had only about a 10 percent chance of working. Brian Atwood's conclusion was that our involvement there wouldn't have much chance of success. And subsequent events have confirmed this view.

**From Intimidation to Local Empowerment in Haiti.** Haiti became the next focus of our attention. We knew that the U.S. military intervention was taking care of security and that the USAID programs were feeding about a million people a day. We thought that success would depend on the military engagement being brief. To have a successful hand-off, you cannot have the military in a dominant role, so you must have a significant civilian presence all over the country. We began to think about a decentralized model. It would also have to be a real presence; after you've had 20,000 troops, you can't just have 15 USAID people. We also thought international aid would not be felt in the countryside for a long time, that most of it would be centered in Port-au-Prince even though 70 percent of the people live outside of the capital.

These were our assumptions, but we needed enlightenment from the field. So we built a core team here of people from all over USAID. In addition, our grantee, the International Organization of Migration (IOM), hired a half dozen people, now the nucleus of those permanently located all over Haiti. The two groups spent a couple of days in Port-au-Prince and then went out into the field for 12 critical days: the five days before Aristide arrived, the weekend that he returned to the country and five days after. They met with over 500 Haitians, including some 130 local elected officials who hadn't gotten together for several years, in virtually every conceivable setting. They got a pretty good assessment of

how fragile security was, how huge the Haitians' pent-up demand was to take some control of the situation, and how everything is a priority in Haiti. This information refocused our efforts and formed the basis for the program that we have now.

We think there are three central political development issues in Haiti: restoring legitimate government, not just President Aristide, but at every level; moving from a system of intimidation to one of broad public participation; and decentralizing control and empowering people at the local level. Everything we are doing with our program goes through those filters. If we're not addressing one of those three things, then we shouldn't be doing it.

Our program mixes the product, which is political development, with the byproduct, which is a series of quick-start, quick-impact, micro-cost projects, so that the real needs of people in the community become the focus of the political organizing. Each project includes a straight, political development component, some kind of civic education.

We have 13 teams covering 16 areas of the country. Every area of the country now has two internationals. We've also already hired about 50 Haitians and plan on hiring a total of 150. We go beyond people who speak our language and have formal education and seek out natural community leaders. In a sense we're running an on-site, on-the-job political development institute, which we hope will be one of the sustainable pieces. These teams have the decision-making authority to spend up to \$5,000 on any project. Each project must be run by a citizen board or community group. Many are extragovernmental, anything from a voodoo event to more traditional groups. We've tried to reach to include more women, more young people, groups that have not historically been involved.

**Examples of Projects.** Participation is inherent in all the little initiatives we're undertaking because we're in a facilitating, rather than in a dominant, role. For example, a certain dam had a silt problem but the central government wasn't providing the money to pay the silt cleaners to

make it operative—so the electricity was not getting to the people at the bottom of the hill. The people down the hill thought electricity should be free because God provides the water and why should you pay for the water that God provides. The silt cleaners who lived in the immediate area weren't getting any electricity either. It seemed to be an intractable situation. Our job was to figure out how to help the local people find a solution. The community came up with the idea that there should be some charge for the water rights from the dam and that the silt removers could be paid from that fund. They now have created such a fund, run by a local board.

One of my favorite examples had to do with water distribution. In this case, the water company and the electric company were known as being inept and corrupt, with long histories of favoritism. The only people with reliable water and electricity were the local army barracks and a few selected houses. Eleven community leaders spontaneously got together with some reinforcement from our operation and from the multinational forces, to address the problems of water distribution and illegal taps. The upshot was that the group voted on whether to create a new distribution pattern. The local Haitian army representative and the local manager of the water district all voted against it. But those for the new system won. The new system is completely extragovernmental. And one of the ironies was that our team lost their water because, unbeknownst to them, the residence had an illegal tap.

In other cases, we have supported initiatives to make accounting systems more transparent so that people know where their dollar or their gourde is going. In one town, people were wondering why they didn't get lights more than 8 to 14 hours every second or third day. We helped them understand that the problem was that revenues collected for electricity would pay for only about 40 hours of light per month. People now understand that something will have to be done about collection of revenues, that people are going to have to start paying.

We also made reporting about toll revenues more transparent. This time it had to

do with one of the three major highways in the country, which has so many potholes that you can only go about 5, 10 miles an hour. The toll is 5, 10, or 15 gourdes. Truck drivers, tap-tap drivers, and other people who use the road met to discuss the rates and how the money should be used. As a result, people now get a receipt when they pay their tolls, and the amounts collected are posted. Now, when the potholes get filled, people see that it's their gourdes at work. Again, it's a very basic system of local governance. But all politics is local, as you know.

In all these cases, we have helped to get these groups going. Sometimes, our local representative may even convene the first meeting, but thereafter, his/her role is just supportive, trying to find out what is needed. The groups are very much on their own. We are just providing a little bit of the juice to keep them functioning.

**Early Results.** It's too early to claim success, but I think participation has done a lot for us. First, it helps us refine our strategic plan right from the beginning because it involves real people rather than officialdom. Second, it adds to our confidence in our program, because it reflects what is happening on the ground. Third, it reduces the risk of paternalism, a worry for all of us. Fourth, it increases the likelihood of success because we're doing what's needed versus what we have projected. Next, it increases the long-term viability because people are involved in the solutions from the beginning. And most important, it creates the democratic foundation that sustains and will sustain long-term economic, political, and social development.

Whether people like our program or not, almost everybody likes the decentralization, the hands-on involvement, the flexibility, the ability to respond to what's there in the community rather than basing activities on a pre-designed plan. One of our competitive advantages should be that we are closer to the people than any other part of the U.S. foreign aid, foreign relations package. Sometimes we are, and in others, we know we could do better.

# **Partnership among Government Officials and Local Communities: Community Involvement in Management of Environmental Pollution (CIMEP) in Tunisia**

Participatory Practices 10

## **The Challenge**

In many cities, those living in poor urban or peri-urban neighborhoods are exposed to numerous environmental health threats. Most of the peri-urban poor live in crowded areas without basic sanitation or clean water. They are often ignored by central governments, given inadequate services, provided with ill-suited projects by local governments, and have minimal influence over public moneys.

In January 1995, USAID, through the Environmental Health Project (EHP), initiated an 18-month pilot project in Tunisia focusing on the peri-urban poor of two secondary cities: Sousse, a resort city on the coast, and Kasserine, an inland, industrial town. Titled “Community Involvement in the Management of Environmental Pollution” (CIMEP), this project was designed to develop partnerships among national decision-makers, municipalities and local communities so that together, these stakeholders could extend municipal services to peri-urban communities.

## **Participatory Practice: Partnering and Team-building**

CIMEP evolved out of lessons learned from USAID’s 14-year Water and Sanitation for Health (WASH) Project—the predecessor to EHP. The most important lesson was that infrastructure investment alone is insufficient for achieving long-term improvements in well being. The CIMEP methodology includes four main components: skill-building workshops, follow-up activities, policymaker roundtables, and micro-project interventions. In the CIMEP approach, 1) training happens over a long period; 2) it targets participation and behavior change of both municipal officers and local citizens; and 3) it includes buy-in of high-level decision-makers to overcome constraints and to scale up the approach.

## **Getting Started**

After the towns and communities were selected, a local Tunisian team conducted a four-week assessment of the environmental health, socio-economic conditions, and municipal context within each city. EHP then formed a CIMEP management and monitoring team with key in-country specialists that included an economist, a trainer in community participation, and a public health hygienist. Based on the results of the assessment, the CIMEP team developed a detailed workplan and designed three skill-building workshops. The team also facilitated the selection of members for the *équipe municipale élargie* (EME), “enlarged municipal team.” The actual selection was done by government officials based on clearly agreed-upon criteria. The EME included technical and municipal administrative staff from the chosen community sites as well as local community leaders and NGO representatives. There was one EME for each city. Seven people, ranging from municipal engineers to nurses and teachers, were chosen for each team.

## **Training Workshops and Microprojects**

The goal of the training was to establish cross-sectoral teams that could ensure that appropriate community-level environmental health interventions would be implemented and sustained. Topics covered in the workshops included understanding environmental health, data gathering skills, and communication skills. Teams also learned participatory assessment and problem-solving skills. Three five-day training workshops occurred between June and December 1995. At the end of each workshop, the teams developed a detailed plan of action for the following two months. These follow-up activities ensured that the newly acquired workshop skills were put into practice. A local trainer worked with the EME teams in the local communities to implement the newly learned methods and to make note of the findings and observations.

The last skill-building workshop focused on implementation of community-level interventions, or "microprojects." Various options for microprojects were discussed during focused dialogue between municipal staff and community residents. At community meetings, environmental health problems were identified and prioritized based on a consensus-building process that considered both the community and municipal technical staff viewpoints. Technicians and community representatives discussed environmental health problems and alternative solutions, and then chose interventions that best addressed their needs. Proposals were submitted to a committee of municipal technicians and community representatives, and microprojects were selected based on criteria developed by the EME, policymakers and community members. Local NGOs administered the funds for each project. The microprojects included rehabilitating houses, paving streets, widening wastewater pipes, building a bridge, and providing color-coded waste bins for separating organic and nonorganic waste.

## **Policymaker Roundtables**

Having the support of policymakers at all levels was critical to CIMEP's success. Before the project started, roundtables were sponsored in each city bringing together elected municipal officials, high-level administrative staff, and NGO representatives. The purpose of these meetings was to determine existing constraints to participatory efforts to improve the overall functioning of the municipality, to build the policy support needed to sustain the project, and to enlarge the circle of stakeholders. The roundtable meetings continued throughout the project, occurring before each EME skill building workshop. The roundtables kept the national-level officials aware of the CIMEP program and thinking about constraints and solutions for implementing this program as well as future environmental health programs. These day long meetings included staff from the Ministries of Health, Environment, Housing and Interior; the mayors and city managers of Sousse and Kasserine; and the EME team leaders. These meetings gave EME teams an opportunity to inform the ministries of the progress of the training sessions and follow-up activities as well as to discuss constraints to the CIMEP process, such as a need to modify municipal working hours to enable staff to meet when community members were available.

## **Outcomes**

As a result of the CIMEP process, government officials and the local population better understood the ways that environmental conditions impact physical and mental health. People began to corral animals, build latrines, use trash containers, and clean up neighborhood garbage. The behavior of municipal officials also changed. They came to see that poor communities have resources to offer and began to use participatory methods with community members to identify and develop activities dealing with the priority environmental health issues.

At the end of the training sessions, EME members and government officials attended a project finalization workshop to evaluate the CIMEP process. Participants discussed the lessons learned from CIMEP and developed a strategy for scaling up. A training of trainers' workshop was held to develop a cadre of CIMEP trainers. The government of Tunisia has now secured funding through the World Bank to scale up the CIMEP approach to other cities in Tunisia. In addition to Tunisia, EHP has implemented this approach in Belize, Ecuador, Zambia, Bolivia and Benin.

## Discussion Points

- 1) Differing concepts of participation can hinder the use of participatory techniques by stakeholders and the policy changes required to sustain them. Initially, Tunisian officials defined participation as the government choosing a project with the community "participating" by providing labor and money. In redefining the concept to one in which community members chose and directed their own projects, there was fundamental change in the way municipal actors interacted with their clients.

EME members found that, within the communities, environmental health issues were defined as more than just sanitation or solid waste and wastewater problems. For example, they discovered that in certain communities the women discarded waste on the streets not because they failed to notice newly installed bins, but because the waste was feed for their sheep and goats. In terms of municipal planning, defining the problems changed from "how do we bring sanitation to an entire neighborhood?" to "why do some neighborhoods dispose of their organic waste indiscriminately?" By focusing on behavior that could be changed, municipal teams began to address the root causes of environmental health problems.

- 2) Governments are not always comfortable in either acknowledging or publicizing data on environmental health. This is especially true in countries, such as Tunisia, where tourism is an important source of revenue. Thus, it is important to involve local officials in the data-gathering process so they will have "ownership" of the results. For example, although useful and informative, the assessment did not create support and consensus for CIMEP as it should have. Even though the team conducting the assessment was all Tunisian, local- and high-level officials did not accept the results as valid. The lesson learned here was that stakeholders must own the data if it is to be used by them. In response to this lesson, CIMEP in Benin involved government officials before the assessment.
- 3) The formal workshops helped provide orientation and team formation while the follow-up activities ensured that the newly acquired workshop skills were applied in a practical way. Follow-up visits, conducted by the trainer who, with help from the EME teams, made a list of findings and observations, had a much greater practical use than did the actual workshops. These follow-up activities and visits laid the groundwork for the EME to establish a formal process of self-analysis.

*Drafted by Chanya Charles after extensive consultation with Margo Kelly of EHP, staff from USAID/G, and a thorough review of available documentation. October 1997.*

## Resources:

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*Addressing Environmental Health Issues in the Peri-Urban Context: Lessons Learned from CIMEP Tunisia.* EHP Activity Report No. 24;  
September 1996. (PN-ABN-425)  
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### 3. Culture, Gender, and Conflict

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#### The Role of Participation in Conflict Resolution

Participation Forum 8: December 15, 1994

How can a participatory approach help to resolve conflicts among peoples with different ethnic and national identities, conflicts over resources, and challenges to the legitimacy of national governments and leaders? What can participation possibly mean in settings where people have been killing each other? Speakers examined these questions in relation to specific current cases. In the subsequent discussion, participants extracted issues of broad relevance to conflict situations.

#### Discussion Session

##### What Role for Central Government?

**John Eriksson:** As I heard some of the observations on Somalia, Rwanda, and southern Sudan, it struck me that these experiences may contain the seeds of a new paradigm. The conventional paradigm is working directly with the central government. The new paradigm is working directly with local communities, while not completely ignoring the central government. For official donors, that probably means having to go through NGOs.

In the case of Somalia, I have a vision of working to strengthen institutions and governance wherever one may find them geographically—notwithstanding whatever semblance remains, if anything, of central government. But how long can a situation like that go on? How meaningfully can we talk about sustainable development of local communities without any reference to the essential functions that we've been trained to believe are the responsibility of the central government, ranging from transportation networks to monetary and fiscal policy, to international trade, the whole gamut of those kinds of responsibilities and functions?

People have a tendency to underestimate what happens in societies like Somalia. The civil war was basically fought over the issue of a strong central government. Most Somalis

don't believe that they need a strong central government. They want a highly decentralized system.

What happened in Somalia? Everybody said that "everything" had collapsed. But about a year and a half ago, an economist working for REDSO looked at the banking system and was told, "There's no banking system." He went into the marketplace and found bankers with laptop computers doing their transactions. In the countryside, normal commerce has resumed. I think we tend to underestimate the resilience of traditional economic and political structures.

Somalia may never be anything more than a federation of states, but that federation of states will represent more of a consensus than what we've had in the past.

**Ken Kornher:** While the history of development shows us that the problems that we've encountered have more often arisen from the exercise of central power than the contrary, I don't think we should get caught up on the idea that only the exercise of decentralized power can be legitimate. In appropriate circumstances, both are legitimate. The exercise of power is made legitimate by a social compact, an agreement by the people that the use of power, whether it be central or local, is legitimate. That's the first thing. And the second is to reject the idea of sovereignty of the central state in favor of sovereignty of the people.



**Dick McCall:** There is a distinction between central power as a mechanism for control and as a mechanism to create rules of the game in a society where fairness and justice are accessible to the whole society. I come from the West, Nebraska and Wyoming. Why were programs that brought irrigation districts and soil conservation districts so successful in turning this country into a surplus food producer? They were successful basically because they were producer-controlled associations. The federal government had an important role to play, but farmers run local irrigation districts. They lay down the rules and regulations. They know they have local ownership.

**Gordon Wagner:** I would like to see the U.S. government articulate a set of principles as it reaches out to southern countries in emergency situations. One of these would have to do with participation. In Somalia, these principles are being accepted by the rebels as the substantive basis for a partnership. Ultimately, however, to resolve conflict at the grassroots level, the central government has to come in. The center has to be the adjudicator of last resort.

### **Merging Traditional and Modern Techniques of Conflict Resolution**

**Chuck Kleymeyer (Inter-American Foundation):** I would like to report on a series of workshops which have drawn together over a hundred grassroots leaders in the Andean countries. The purpose of these workshops is to design a dispute resolution and negotiation training manual. The manual will be used to train village-level and federation-level leaders.

One of the most interesting cases presented at the final workshop concerned a federation of about 140 communities in Amazonian Ecuador that sent two representatives to Plano, Texas, to carry out a 13-hour marathon negotiating meeting with ARCO. In that meeting, the federation succeeded in getting all five of its demands met. This is not only a marriage of Western and traditional techniques, but it's a marriage of participation and conflict resolution.

**Jerry Delli Priscoli:** I remember some time ago, the Asia Foundation funded some training in Sri Lanka in dispute resolution techniques. Participants discovered that there's a great tradition in mediation in Sri Lanka that had been suppressed under British rule. Similarly, in my field of water resources, there are all sorts of local traditions in the Islamic world for conflict resolution and participation.

### **The Danger of Paternalism in Applying Conflict Resolution Techniques**

**Jerry Delli Priscoli:** The Kettering Foundation and others have criticized the field of conflict resolution for falling back into the paternalistic paradigm: instead of the traditional substantive expert, a new "process" expert comes in and says, "I'm the mediator or the facilitator coming in to help with this situation." This criticism needs to be taken seriously and addressed.

### **Highlights of a Conference on Preventive Diplomacy**

**Jennifer Douglas:** I'd like to mention some of the findings of the recent two-day conference, "Honing the Tools of Preventive Diplomacy." It covered early warning and prevention, lessons learned from the Greater Horn, and the role of culture and religion in conflict and its resolution (A summary I prepared of this event is available through e-mail to members of the Participation Network).

Today there are 84 active internal wars, not only between states but also between peoples, and there are approximately 252 minorities at risk, with 52 considered to be severely at risk. To deal with so much conflict, we must learn to think strategically, and in preventive terms, look for the root causes of conflict, and muster the political will to address those causes. It was recommended that U.S. embassies include personnel that have expertise in the areas of religious affairs and conflict resolution. Also discussed at the conference was the role of media in conflict prevention and early warning. Media can contribute to conflict if they are used by one group to demonize

another, but if they are neutral and accessible, they can be used as a tool for early warning and as a channel to promote constructive communications between opposing sides.

Culture and language are important tools in conflict. They can be used as tools of war as well as tools for peace. Although traditional religions in Africa historically allowed people of different beliefs to live together, when Christianity and Islam were introduced, people began to proselytize, in turn, dividing people and contributing to conflict and to war.

Some of the participants at the USAID conference were also at an international conflict resolution conference in Addis Ababa in September. The Addis conference stressed participatory approaches both for identifying root causes of conflicts and developing strategies to address them. Another point made was that conflict resolution skills are value-free. Unless they are used with a code of ethics, they can be used to co-opt people. The final point was that although no African leader has promoted the use of pre-colonial traditions, we're now hearing people talk about elders and the role of traditional decision-making models in conflict resolution. Formal governmental leaders in countries that are challenged may not want us to work directly with people who make decisions in a more traditional and participatory manner. We need to attempt to forge constructive linkages between traditional leaders and government leaders.

#### E-Mail Communications

**John Anderson:** My comments are intended to highlight some "lower-key" points that need to be kept in mind by practitioners of conflict resolution.

- **Dispelling the mystique of technical/engineering expertise as the basis for solving political, interest-based problems.** Where problems are pre-eminently interest-based, engineering/technical systems and design approaches should be subordinated to an approach/process for resolution of the conflict.
- **Looking for generic formulas to guide and structure conflict resolution may be illusory.** We shouldn't "technify" the process of "conflict resolution services" as though adepts of a magical "process" will lead recalcitrants more quickly to resolution of deeply entrenched conflicts. Of course, a skilled mediator can assist results, when parties to a conflict are ready to move toward settlement. Assessing these moments is key. Participation is crucial. But USAID should not have large expectations it can "contract this out."

(continued on next page)

### E-Mail Communications (continued)

- **Sham versus real nongovernmental organizations.** In southern Sudan there were many sham NGOs for every real one. Where the need for jobs and revenue is so intense, it should not shock us that so many so-called NGOs are operating on little more than a good chat and a small investment in letterhead. USAID and other donors must know the terrain and players, particularly before management oversight is ceded in the interests of more equal “partnerships.”

#### Dayton Maxwell:

- **Traditional participatory structures.** I recently conducted some discussion groups on the conflict in Sarajevo and had the groups rank how decision-making was made in Yugoslavia prior to the war on an authoritarian-democratic scale. The results confirmed what I’ve learned in developing countries: traditional participatory structures usually provide very limited help when it comes to conflict situations. Yet there are often circumstances in these situations which provide opportunities to build on existing structures and introduce new techniques in conflict resolution. (Some new techniques I am recommending for use in Bosnia include: computerized planning models; learning participating management styles in developing and implementing reconstruction projects; employment of an important number of FSNs who are trained as effective facilitators and can maintain reconciliation communication among hostile factions; and engagement of leaders in using transparent accountability techniques in line with donor requirements for reconstruction projects.)
- **Participation and understanding root causes.** Facilitated participation, when agreed to or sought, helps to mitigate conflict when it provides the mechanism through which the conflicting parties understand better and work through the basic reasons for conflict. It can be argued that this is the style within which President Jimmy Carter works.

## Building Participatory Programs on Local Culture

Participation Forum 2: March 17, 1994

This Participation Forum examined the use of culture as an ally in participatory development. Two main speakers, Nagat El-Sanabary and Charles David Kleymeyer, drew from cases in Asia, the Near East, and Latin America to describe two different but complementary approaches to building upon culture. El-Sanabary, currently an advisor to the Bureau for Asia and the Near East, has lectured and written extensively on women's participation in education and employment in Arab and Islamic countries. She is originally from Egypt. Kleymeyer has been a field representative for the Inter-American Foundation since 1979. He recently edited a collection of articles on culture and development: *Cultural Expression and Grassroots Development*, a book that draws insights from 215 cases in thirty countries. The scene was set for these presentations by Richard McCall, Chief of Staff for the Administrator.

### The Glue That Holds Societies Together

*Dick McCall*

Oftentimes we have a tendency to emphasize cultural differences, rather than similarities. Thinking about the 23 years I spent in Congressional oversight in the field, the similarities among the value systems of different cultures always struck me. A sense of family and a sense of community should be looked at as an asset within the context of the work we do. Let me give you an example from my heavy involvement in Somali policy.

One of the biggest mistakes the United States and UNOSOM made was approaching Somalia within the traditional Western framework. The international community believed we could go into Somalia and rebuild the national institutions that had collapsed. It was our first post-Cold War test case in nation-building. What we didn't understand was that just because national institutions had collapsed did not mean there weren't institutions that could bring the Somalis together within the traditional clan system. And, quite frankly, despite some negative aspects of the clan system—mainly the use of violence for revenge or to get people's attention—an intensely democratic process goes on within the clan system and between clans to achieve consensus within society at the community level. We short-circuited that process by attempting to

reconstitute a transitional national government. What happened? All of a sudden we had enemies. Mohamed Farah Aidid became an enemy, and UNOSOM became another political faction in Somalia. That is what precipitated a lot of the violence.

When I was given the responsibility within USAID to come up with an alternative strategy on reconstruction, I brought in a number of Somali expatriates to get a sense of what the appropriate national institutions are for them. I also managed to get my hands on a wonderful analysis of the clan system and the personalities to help me understand all dimensions of the problem.

Sometimes we're intimidated by cultures and traditions or don't think they're important. But if we understand the traditional cultural framework within which people organize themselves to solve problems, we can help people and communities to solve their own problems. When you're given a problem to deal with, don't look at culture as an impediment, but focus on the traditions and customs that are the glue that holds societies together. Then you'll find an awful lot of similarities with the basic values we have in our own society.

I'll talk mostly about Islamic cultures, because that is where the greatest misunderstanding exists and where impediments and constraints to development are perceived.

My thesis is that culture is the foundation upon which people stand and that sustainable development cannot be achieved without cultural sensitivity and the participation of indigenous people. Development assistance must build on traditional knowledge and skills.

**Culture and Development.** Culture gives people a sense of identity, belonging, rootedness and direction. It can be a source of community and national cohesion, but it can also be divisive. I feel strongly that development assistance can build on the positive elements in the culture to minimize the negative ones. Cultures do change, and they change over time, but change does not mean transformation. Meaningful change is accomplished mainly from within. The development community can play a role in cultural change as well, if it subscribes to basic rules.

Any attempt to attack or undermine a people's culture is like pulling the rug out from under their feet, leading them to lose their balance and their sense of identity and community. Many people in the Third World live in a state of what I call cultural schizophrenia. They are confused and frustrated because of lack of access to resources and power. Their cultural heritage is what gives meaning to their lives. Development assistance should never attempt to accentuate this schizophrenia, because, if it does, it will only increase the ranks of extremists. In my belief, there is no viable alternative to cultural sensitivity or empathy if development assistance is serious about helping people help themselves to achieve long lasting, sustainable development. Improving the quality of life in these countries cannot happen at the cost of loss of their basic cultural values. Hence strategies must, and here I quote from the Administrator's "Statement of Principles on Participatory Development," be **Culture and Islam**. In the case of Islam, we

"consistent with the priorities and values of those who will have to sustain the effort after the donor has left."

**Stereotypes of the Muslim East and Judeo-Christian West.** In Islamic countries, where one-fifth of the world's population lives, development work has been hampered because of the stereotypes that the Muslim East and Judeo-Christian West have about each other. Western stereotypes of the Muslims, perpetrated by Western media and movies, present Muslims as backward, fatalistic, fanatic, anti-democratic, and even terrorist.

One would hope that development specialists are free of these stereotypes and that their training and development experience have helped them develop empathy with the people with whom they work, but this is not always the case. There is a tendency among many development specialists and researchers to view Muslims as monolithic and to disregard the vast differences based on nationality, class, ethnic background, rural-urban residence, etc.

Many Muslims have a distorted view of the West, which focuses on the negative aspects, like the West focuses on the negative aspects of the Muslim. Muslims point to family disintegration, crime, sexual harassment, and what they consider to be moral laxity in the West.

The two cultures also are suspicious of one another. The Islamists—and I'm afraid I have to say this—feel that the West wants to destroy Islam and dismantle the Muslim family. This suspicion results from these countries' bitter experience with European colonialism. In their effort to assert their cultural identity after independence, some Muslims see themselves in a culture war with the West, a war of ideologies. Some Muslims have replaced the word "development" with terms with negative connotations for Muslims such as "modernization" and "Westernization." We can avoid the notion of "forced development" or the imposition of Western values only by respecting the culture of other groups.

must realize that religion is very important to the

lives of most Muslims. Development assistance should not be confrontational regarding sensitive religious matters such as the issues of polygamy and inheritance. Anything that is mentioned specifically in the Koran is too sensitive and should be avoided as far as external development assistance is concerned. In any case, polygamy and inheritance don't really have much to do with development. We can focus on other issues and we can accomplish a lot in other areas. These matters take care of themselves with increased levels of education and employment options for women.

It true that there are many cultural constraints to development in Muslim countries, but we have to be careful not to blame all the ills of these countries on culture or religion. Other factors such as poverty, class, rural residence, and ethnic affinity are also important. In these countries as in other, it is the poor who lack access to education, gainful employment, and adequate legal and political representation.

**Culture and Gender.** As the previous speaker said, we often view culture, especially in Islamic countries, in a negative manner. And over many years, culture and religion—terms that have sometimes been used interchangeably—have been used to legitimize women's subordinate position. In my view, culture has been used as an easy excuse for people who want to keep women in their place.

Let me give a few brief examples, beginning with education. For many years, the Western world has viewed the education of women as against Islam and against Arab cultural traditions. This is wrong, and we have to understand that there is nothing in Islam against the education of girls. If we understand this, we can speak confidently with governments who are saying that the people don't want to educate their daughters, because they do.

But education of girls does not necessarily mean coeducation. Over twenty years ago, the U.N. Convention Against Discrimination in Education included the statement that signatories would agree to promote "coeducation."

**Using Tradition to Enable Change: The Feria Educativa**

And what do you think the result was? Many Islamic countries did not ratify the convention. They wanted to eliminate discrimination against girls, but they didn't want coeducation. It took the development community decades to realize that nothing is basically wrong with single-sex schools or girls' schools. A few days ago, an article in the *Washington Post* talked about how some schools in the United States are separating girls into their own classes in order to get them to do math and science. And I must say that I had never heard that math is not for girls, until I first came to this country.

Regarding education, let me describe a costly failure made by a donor agency in Pakistan that built a major housing project for teachers and teacher trainees. The buildings remained empty. Why? Because the donor did not realize that in most Islamic countries women of any age simply do not live alone. What would have been very acceptable is a dorm, a supervised facility. I asked the donor agency, "Did you talk with the people?" They said, "Yes, there were government representatives in among the design team." I said, "Well, they didn't tell you."

Another example: Family planning programs succeed when they take people's concerns into consideration, not when programs are based on the Western model in which the individual is the decision-making unit. The Tunisian family planning program began to achieve results only after it targeted all family members with a say in decisions on child bearing: the woman, her husband, the mother, the mother-in-law. Then the program took off.

It is much easier in Muslim countries, because of the traditional respect for professional women, to get women in cabinet positions and into parliament than to try to change the family.

To conclude, I believe that development assistance in Islamic countries should be based on trust and mutual respect between Muslim people and the West. This is the best way to achieve prosperity, peace, and democracy in the world.

*Chuck Kleymeyer*

My task today is to give you some case material that illustrates a methodology of culture-based participation. In fact, this method goes beyond participation. It's engagement, it's ownership of a process. The truth is, those of us dealing with this methodology rarely talk about participation. The concept of participation is almost a moot point because participation is the beginning, middle, and end of this methodology.

Technicians and planners, staff, government agencies, and private institutions in the development enterprise have long tended to overlook the positive linkage between culture and development, between tradition and change. Theorists have often blamed the lack of progress in development on "backward-looking traditional people," and this criticism is frequently internalized in the target populations. Cultural differences, as you all know, have often been thought of as obstacles to change rather than opportunities to be seized.

**Harnessing "Cultural Energy."** An alternative approach grounded in traditional culture has emerged from the grassroots in developing countries. The case I'll describe today is taken from the book that I just finished, which looks at projects in which people employ traditional cultural forms—music, dance, theater, puppets, artisan work, poster and mural art, oral tradition, and so on—to drive their development efforts. (*Cultural Expression and Grassroots Development*. Available in Spanish from the Inter-American Foundation, 901 North Stuart Street, Arlington, Virginia 22203, and in English from Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1800 30th Street, Suite 314, Boulder, Colorado 80301.) The approach encourages social and economic change by drawing upon and reinforcing the cultural traditions of ethnic minorities and the poor in general.

This approach has been developed and presented to us by people in the developing world. It is not something that was sketched out on flip charts in D.C. or Rosslyn. It seeks to retain people's special cultural strengths while enabling them to achieve the necessary changes in their social and economic conditions. In a nutshell, the argument is that people's own

cultural heritage comprises the foundation upon which equitable and sustainable development is built. The cultural energy that is thereby tapped into and directed is what drives development.

To avoid misunderstanding, let me state from the outset that in no way does this method propose the maintenance of traditional people in some static or pristine state, were that even possible. Cultural traditions have emerged and are maintained in a dynamic process of creative invention and re-invention as well as borrowing and adaptation from other subgroups and cultures. This dynamic process readily lends itself to a strategy of using culture to effect change. The issue is not whether a cultural tradition or form should change or be utilized for new ends, but who controls that change.

**The Power of "Sociodrama."** Let me take you to the highlands of Ecuador, to Chimborazo Province. Chimborazo is probably about the size of the greater Washington-Baltimore area. It contains one of the largest concentrations of poor Native Americans in this hemisphere: 1,000 indigenous communities and about a quarter of a million people, many of whom have just emerged from a semi-feudal hacienda system in the last ten or fifteen years. This system was so repressive that many of the adult leaders I have come to know had no access to schooling as children and were considered part of the hacienda property. One of the major leaders I worked with told of having a thorn put through his tongue every time he spoke Quichua in school.

From about 1970 on, national and international organizations streamed into Chimborazo Province to bring about development. Normally, the technicians who arrived were from a totally different background than the local indigenous people. They quite commonly met only with the men and explained to them what the project was going to be about. The technicians used Spanish, which is a foreign language to these people. Most of the programs failed. Today you can see very little evidence of their ever having been there.

Over the last ten to fifteen years, a local indigenous program has arisen. The first point

of contact that a community has with this program is a small group of young, indigenous people, men and women, musicians and dancers, called the FERIA Educativa, the Educational Fair. They go into the communities, perform music, get people dancing, and then move into sociodrama. They never go into a village without an invitation. They arrive speaking Quichua, dressed as the local people are dressed because they themselves are all from surrounding villages. And many times they're literally kept hostage until one or two in the morning, usually in the local school.

Generally what happens in the sociodrama is that a particular social problem is presented. It could be what happens to an indigenous man when he temporarily migrates to a city looking for day labor. It could have to do with illiteracy, with cholera—any broad number of problems. Sometimes there's so much audience participation that people in the crowd actually become part of the sociodrama itself.

The drama never provides an answer or solution. Usually, as soon as the problem is presented, the performers stop and open up the discussion to people in the crowd. Often someone, maybe someone way in the back, standing in the doorway, will step forward and say, "What I just saw here today happened to me" or "That happened to my uncle when he was in Quito." Such utterances reaffirm that the sociodrama is the truth. "What we've just seen is what we are living."

In a few cases, a decision is actually made to take action. At a performance about illiteracy that I attended, people from a neighboring village had gotten hold of a literacy trainer and would not let him leave until he promised to bring one of his supervisors on the next Sunday to their village to help them set up a literacy training center.

**Achievements of the FERIA.** The Educational Fair is attached to a broad development program which offers a variety of projects ranging from artisan workshops, to reforestation, to agricultural production. As I said, the Fair is the first contact with the village. The performers talk about what the possibilities are. No promises or offers are made. The village

leaders, if they ask, are told how to get in touch with various programs.

Over the past fifteen years the Educational Fair has visited over 750 of the 1,000 villages in Chimborazo. Over 1,000 literacy training centers have been set up; thirty community bakeries, forty-five artisan workshops, and 145 community centers have been built; 200,000 trees have been planted, and the Fair has helped train over 100 groups to do the same kind of thing that they're doing.

The interesting thing about these hundred groups is that over a dozen of the musical groups are made up entirely of women. Ten or fifteen years ago, you would never hear a woman speak in public, let alone play a musical instrument or sing. The development process which I've just described, has been accompanied by—and I emphasize "accompanied by"; I'm not talking about direct cause and effect—increased participation by women in meetings, in training programs, and in the leadership of their organizations.

**Open Questions.** Let me leave you with a set of questions (and partial answers) that we could discuss if we had more time.

- Can culture-based participation be transferred to other areas? (It exists all throughout Ecuador at this point, not only among indigenous Indian populations, but among the blacks in Esmeralda Province. There is even a deaf group in Quito using this methodology.)
- Can a culture-based approach be misused? (From my own cultural background, I can name two dramatic cases of the misuse of symbols and culture. One is the Nazi party and the other one is the Ku Klux Klan.)
- Can a culture-based methodology distort cultural traditions? (An example is selling Pepsi-Cola with break dancers on television. How does this affect African American kids on the street corner who've seen their culture being expropriated?)



- Can this methodology be used to exacerbate inter-ethnic strife? Of course it can, but in the 215 cases that I have looked at, I did not find a single case of reverse racism or any attempt to increase inter-ethnic tensions.

The key questions are who controls the use of culture, who controls changes in culture, and to what end.

## **Participation and Gender**

Participation Forum 7: November 17, 1994

At this Participation Forum, Margaret Lycette, Director of USAID's Office of Women in Development, drew from her field experience in Pakistan, Zaire, and Morocco to identify four factors that often result in women's exclusion from development efforts; and Ken Ellis, Director of the Office of Central American Affairs, shared observations of USAID programs that have performed poorly because women's perspectives were not adequately considered. Colin Bradford, Assistant Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, opened the program.

### **Multiculturalism, Institutional Bias, and Betting on Women**

*Colin Bradford*

Multiculturalism, it seems to me, is vital to thinking about development. It's not just an academic problem that has to do with what's taught in universities. Think about how important it is to have some reflection of your image in your own culture or to have some resonance of your cultural voice in your surrounding society. Think about the fact that values underlie institutions and that we know from our work in development that institutions systematically discriminate against the disadvantaged, whether they be disadvantaged by gender or by income or by race.

One way of thinking about our work in economic development is that we are about correcting the systematic bias of institutions against the disadvantaged. So we are in some sense, as we think about gender and

participation, really testing the openness of global society. We're seeing to what extent we're going to be able to correct this systematic bias against women in development. One of the reasons that we're trying to correct that bias is that women, I think, have been seen to be much more committed to family, to communities, and to the fabric of society than are men. When we have few development dollars to spend, we bet on women.

A question which I raise for you, feeling a certain amount of intimidation, given my own gender and race, is this: have we concluded that men in those disadvantaged communities are irresponsible and unwilling to pay attention to the fabric of family, community, and society? I don't know the answer, but it strikes me as a provocative question. I welcome this discussion.

### **Adjusting Projects to Overcome Constraints on Women**

*Margaret Lycette*

To respond to your question, Colin, we're not saying that men have abrogated responsibility. Rather, what the "women in development" community has focused on is the less-than-full participation of women. Sometimes we called

for equity in the distribution of benefits between women and men. Sometimes we proclaimed improvements in women's productivity as the key to increased project effectiveness. Now we speak much more boldly about the need to

support women's empowerment. In the end we're talking about participation and acknowledging the important roles that all members of society must play in achieving sustainable development.

#### **Four Factors that Constrain the Full Participation of Women.**

- Women have both productive roles in the home and outside the home, as well as reproductive roles. This dual burden, and women's limited control over their reproductive lives, constrains their time and their options for choosing to participate in activities that might interfere with their "double" day.
- Women are poorly educated relative to men. Low rates of female literacy and inequities in girls' access to education persist worldwide. Consequently, high proportions of women cannot obtain information about opportunities in business, employment, and participation in political life.
- Cultural constraints regarding the sexual division of labor and the extent to which women can appropriately interact with men can limit women's participation in virtually all arenas. Restrictions on women's mobility are sometimes cast in the guise of concerns for their safety.
- Women often face legal constraints, such as prohibitions against land ownership, or participation in education or family planning programs without the consent of their husbands or fathers.

The combination of these factors often results in women's exclusion from development efforts. For example, in a large USAID agricultural extension and credit program in Zaire, extension sessions were well attended and loans were being disbursed, but agricultural productivity was not rising. Why? In the region of Zaire where the project was being

implemented, women are the agriculturists. Because they are also responsible for the maintenance of the household and for child care, and they face cultural restrictions on their participation in male-dominated public life, they didn't attend the training sessions. In addition, women cannot legally hold title to land and therefore could not participate in the credit program.

Concerns about girls' security and reputations prevented parents in Pakistan's more conservative provinces from enrolling their daughters in new USAID-funded coeducational schools. In a national vocational education program in Morocco, female participation was confined to training in homemaking skills, which led to virtually no increase in employment or even income generation.

**Project Adjustments to Improve Women's Participation.** The good news is that there are approaches that can improve the extent to which women can contribute to and benefit from development, approaches that support women's participation by adjusting project design and implementation to take account of women's particular roles and constraints. In the Zaire project, for example, an extension program was eventually put in place to work with women farmers only. Training and demonstrations were scheduled to accommodate the women's needs, and their participation was enhanced because they did not feel constrained by the presence of men, to whom culturally they should defer. The result was an improvement in yields and a more effective mix of crops, as well as improved household incomes and nutritional status of children. Men eventually got involved in the program, and they benefited as well.

In Pakistan, the education program involved the local communities in an education needs assessment and secured their involvement in raising funds to support the training and salaries of locally hired female teachers. Where necessary, boundary walls were constructed to segregate girls and boys attending the same school. The result was a major increase in the number of girls enrolled in and attending school. In Morocco,

community outreach garnered the participation of parents and businesses and acceptance of the notion that girls should learn marketable skills. Girls learned drafting and electronics skills, got jobs, began to contribute to family income, and gained improved status within their families.

It might be interesting, as we listen to the presentations that follow, to think about which of the four factors that I've mentioned as constraints to women's participation come into play. I think we also want to listen for how solutions were crafted around these constraints to improve both women's participation and project success. We should consider the activities of both men and women and should recognize that addressing the constraints that women face will result in greater participation of both women and men.

After 20 years of experience working in Latin America and making a lot of mistakes, I think that I've learned some lessons along the way. In my opinion, participation is a lot more than sharing the benefits of a project. Women won't share the benefits until they participate at the project design level. One of the lessons I'd like to pass on is that our solutions, as development specialists coming from a different culture, are often not acceptable to the people that we're trying to work with.

**We Often Misread People's Values.** In Jamaica in the 1970s, USAID and the World Bank set about to reform the marketing sector. The marketing sector in Jamaica is almost the exclusive property of women, who are called higglers. These women sit on street corners, work in local markets, and sell the produce from small farms throughout the island. The idea was to streamline and decentralize the sector to make it a lot more efficient. By setting up modern facilities all over the country, the project would keep these women from having to make a long trip to Kingston every day. But because the idea was met with hostility by many of the women, especially in the countryside, we decided to look more deeply into the marketing system in Jamaica and we hired a local woman sociologist whose mother happened to be a higgler. Her study found that the Jamaican marketing system is more than just a marketing system, it's a social system, where people talk to one another, where information is exchanged, such as prices and how crops are doing all over the island. Based on this study, we downsized our plans considerably and concentrated on upgrading some of the facilities that already existed. I think it was, in USAID's terms, a successful project.

**Interventions Sometimes Do More Harm than Good.** Sometimes our interventions can actually do damage to the people that we're trying to assist, especially in the case of women. Throughout Central America, we have from time to time pursued the idea of small-farm irrigation, to give an opportunity to raise, market, and sell high-value crops. The problem

is that in these semi-nomadic agricultural societies the men plant the staple crops early in the year, and then they go off to pick or plant cotton, cut sugar cane, or harvest coffee. The women are left at home to take care of the children, collect wood, carry water, and, in this case, take care of another crop of high-value cabbage or tomatoes. Instead of assisting these women, we are adding to their already unbearable workloads.

### **Unforeseen Results Can Be Beneficial.**

Despite all of our planning efforts, sometimes the unforeseen results can be the most beneficial. In the Dominican Republic in the mid-1980s, we had some money in a project that the Ministry of Agriculture was not able to spend. We got all of the extension agents together and told them to go out and find good projects in the rural sector, and we would fund them. They zealously pursued bringing in project ideas, mostly in the water sector. When I visited the sites, I found that almost all the people associated with these projects were women. What was really important to them was not that they now had clean water, but that they didn't have to walk two kilometers to get to the water supply. It cut their workload down tremendously. This unplanned activity proved to be very beneficial to them.

Again, I'd like to leave you with what I think is the most important lesson—that real participation is more than just sharing the benefits of projects, it's sharing in the design of those projects as well.

### **Discussion Session**

#### **Managing for Participation and Program Integration**

**Elise Smith:** A lot of us on the NGO side see that rural women's NGOs have mechanisms to make the participatory process work well, but that donor agencies still haven't fully taken this experience into account. If there could be real dialogue between donors and women's NGO movements in the countries, cross-sectorally, I

think we could have much stronger development programs.

**Elise Storck:** Margaret, I appreciate your sense of how women's multiple roles can help in program integration across sectors. To what extent can more intentional emphasis on gender help us design more appropriately integrated programs? I'm thinking in particular of the so-called population and environment debate, where the gender impact on environment has typically been characterized by women's reproductive behavior.

**Margaret Lycette:** I think that's a very interesting question. It's very appealing to think that because women have such strong reproductive roles, household production roles, and productive roles outside the home, that a focus on women would be a way to integrate several issues. I think that we have to be cautious. We have to listen to what Ken said about how we may unintentionally add to women's burdens. There's a tendency to funnel through attention to women all the problems and issues that we should have faced all along in thinking about how programs affect people. There is room for synergy, but in the environment area, I think that we have to take a look at all of the agricultural and economic policies and market failures that actually have a much greater impact on environmental degradation than does the woman who is fetching wood each day.

#### **Prescriptions for the Participation of Men**

**Elise Smith:** I think we need to look for innovative ways to work for men's involvement. People are realizing now that if you do not engage men from the very beginning in whatever kind of program you're trying to support, you're not going to reach the maximum impact. Male focus groups is one approach I've seen that's worked in six African countries. Where males are brought in early, they can play a continuing, ongoing role. Perhaps what's needed is a task force to determine what's working and what's not working in terms of men's involvement.

**Mayra Buvinic:** I think today we have been

talking about two different things, which perhaps we can expand on in another forum. One is grassroots participatory approaches and the other is women's participation in development projects.

I'm going to disagree with Elise a bit on a prescription for the participation of men. I would encourage the participation of men in projects in those sectors where women have traditionally been included, namely population, health, and nutrition. By all means, give men information on family planning and include them in the family planning and health decisions within their families. In the productive sectors, including credit, enterprise, and agricultural extension, when you're benefiting women, I really see very little reason for, and even a difficulty with, including men. I hope we can discuss this further at a future forum.

**Charles Stephenson:** I would like to pass along a comment from Perdita Houston from the Peace Corps, who recently spoke at USAID. When asked whether men are one of the constraints to women's development and participation, she responded that in some situations they may be. How do you address that? First of all, she suggested, you pay attention to them. If you are having a difficulty, you pay attention.

#### **Avoiding Pitfalls—Lessons from Sierra Leone and Zaire**

**Ann Hudock:** There is a palm oil processing project in Sierra Leone in which the women seemed to be participating very well. I attended a meeting where there were a large number of very enthusiastic women. As I left, I remarked, "This is a great example of women's participation." "My boss at the NGO looked at me and said, "You just didn't understand any of that. The elderly woman in the back who said what a great project this is, was saying how wonderful it was to be working on a water project. But, of course, they were doing palm oil processing. The chief had gathered together a lot of the women in the community, had dictated that they be there, and quite a few of these women were his wives anyway." I think that this example underscores the ignorance of

outsiders. When we ask for the participation of women, we should be very careful about not using it as something which can actually exploit them in the end.

**Diane Russell:** I want to bring up the example of Zaire again because I was one of the people who worked on the extension project there that Margaret mentioned. One of the mistakes that was made was getting women involved in maize production projects where they weren't the initial maize producers. In fact, their labor on maize took them away from their labor on other crops that were essential to both good nutrition and their income. What we tried to do was to focus on women's crops, on the crops that women actually produce both for their families' consumption and to sell. I think that getting women involved in activities where they are going to be taken away from their primary sources of income and nutritional well-being for the family can be a big mistake. It is important to support them in their primary activities.

**Pat Martin:** A mid-term evaluation of an agricultural and environmental protection project in Honduras that had a large gender component found that it had actually reinforced gender segregation. They then redesigned the project to train both men and women extension agents to work with the entire family, and to get women extension agents not just as home economics type workers, but as agronomists, so they could work with the men too.

#### **Adding Women's Voices to Policy Dialogue**

**Carol Yost:** Fortunately, I think there is increasing attention being paid to the need to get women's voices into the policy-making process at all levels. Women often are the ones working in agriculture and microenterprise development, and yet there are inadequate channels for them to get their views heard about what changes need to be made. With the trend toward democracy and pluralism worldwide, I think there are a lot of opportunities now for women to share ideas and resources about how women

can have a voice in the policy-making processes.

**Pat Martin:** We need to focus not only on working around the constraints that women face, but also on actually removing them. In the Policy Reform Project in Honduras, one of the efforts underway was to change the agrarian reform law. The law was over 20 years old and had proved unworkable in numerous ways. The USAID Mission got the peasant women's organization in Honduras involved in this dialogue. The law precluded women from owning agrarian-reform land, because this law was passed during the conflict with El Salvador in the 1960s, when it was feared that Salvadorians would come over and marry Honduran women and take Honduran land. The peasant women's cooperative succeeded in getting the law changed to remove that provision, as well as breaking the logjam on a lot of other issues through this initial dialogue.

#### **Research and Resources**

**Gretchen Bloom:** I'd like to speak on behalf of Barbara Thomas-Slayter with the ECOGEN Project, which is funded through USAID's WID office. ECOGEN has produced three valuable documents:

1. "Tools of Gender Analysis; A Guide to Field Methods for Bringing Gender into Sustainable Management," uses a variety of different tools for doing gender analysis at the grassroots level.
2. "Managing Resources in a Nepalese Village: Changing Dynamics of Gender, Caste, and Ethnicity," examines an intervention at the village level from a gender perspective to understand who participates and what the outcomes are.
3. "Engendering Resource Management" is written by a Filipino student of the ECOGEN Project, who applied the tools of gender analysis in the Philippines through a technique called PRAGEN (Participatory Rural Appraisal and Gender). To order these resources, call 508-793-7201.



## *Part Two*

# Participation as a Means

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The following selections emphasize the influence of USAID's customers and partners on the Agency's decisionmaking. USAID defines *customers* as "those host country individuals, especially the socially and economically disadvantaged, who are beneficiaries of USAID assistance and whose participation is essential to achieving sustainable development results." *Partners* are local public and private organizations, U.S. private voluntary organizations and firms, universities, associations, international institutions, and other donors with which USAID collaborates in striving for those results.

Listening is key to a participatory approach to development assistance. The use of rapid appraisal on a national scale in Bangladesh is discussed from both a methodological and management perspective in a *Forum* and a *Participatory Practice*. Another *Forum* summary draws lessons from USAID's strategy development in three African countries in the early 1990s, in which consultation was conducted both through Agency-initiated exercises and by supporting the country's own consensus-building processes.

Other selections in this part explore a number of issues arising in the "how" of participatory development.

- In a conflict situation, engaging the wrong groups may worsen the conflict.
- A highly participatory design process does not automatically lead to effective partnerships or ensure that customers continue to be engaged in decisions throughout implementation.
- In some instances, closely held information has to be made public to enable citizens to participate in development decisions.
- Sometimes customers tell us what we do not want to hear.





## 4. Listening at a Country Level

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### What Can Change When We Listen Harder

Participation Forum 14: November 1, 1995

Karl Schwartz, the team leader of the Country Experimental Lab (CEL) effort in Bangladesh that rethought the mission's democracy program, described how mission personnel set out to listen harder and what changed as a result. Using rapid appraisal methods, the mission's "D Team" went directly to the poor of Bangladesh to explore their democracy needs. The findings of the appraisal led to a redefinition of the democracy program, while the CEL experience led to broader participation by USAID and partners in program development. Anne Sweetser, AAAS fellow with the Participation Initiative, added some observations based on the three weeks she spent with the mission training the "D Team" to listen with new ears, see with new eyes.

#### The Democracy Needs of USAID/Bangladesh's Customers

*Karl Schwartz*

The Bangladesh mission acquired its experience with participation as a Country Experimental Laboratory for program design and implementation. This meant we went back to ground zero in terms of our design practices and built an alternate approach based on the core values of customer focus, diversity, empowerment, teamwork, managing for results, and accountability. We then tested this alternative approach by designing a new democracy program. The model was tested on democracy because this was the next design activity out of our chute.

During the design process, we formed a partnership with two organizations that will carry through implementation, The Asia Foundation and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC).

The bottom-line result is that the alternate approach increased participation and reduced design time by about 75 percent. As many as 40 people participated directly in the design process, not counting the approximately 500 customers from whom we gathered information, yet we went from initial design concepts to implementation in about five and a half months.

**A Quick Walk through the Model.** The model comprises nine steps.

#### STRATEGIC PHASE

1. *Empower the core strategic team.* The team has delegated authority to approve and sign implementation orders necessary to achieve the desired results.
2. *Detect the needs of the ultimate customers.* The customers are contacted directly and asked about their needs.
3. *Select partners and incorporate them into the core strategic team.* The process includes establishing selection criteria, soliciting concept papers, and negotiating and signing a Development Agreement outlining operational relationships and working procedures for strategic planning.
4. *Develop strategic plan.* Using results of the rapid appraisal of customer needs, the core strategic team establishes strategic objectives, program outcomes, and performance

indicators and estimates resource requirements.

5. *Validate desired results and program outcomes.* The core strategic team goes back to the customers to validate the strategic plan.
6. *Obligate funds at the strategic objective level.*

#### TACTICAL PHASE

7. *Form a tactical team with partners to develop activities packages and customer service plans.* The customer service plans identify the customers and standards for serving them, describe the services to be provided, and explain how needs were identified and how customers will be involved in evaluation.
8. *Develop a customer service plan for interacting with partners.* (Plan is similar to plan in Step 7.)
9. *Negotiate an implementation amendment to the development agreement signed in Step 3.* The amendment incorporates specific activities and customer service plans.

The model is simple because it is carried out by an empowered multifunctional team; that is, a team which has all the skills it needs to complete its work without external reviews, clearances, or approvals. This is reflected in Step 1.

It's a customer-focused model in that it starts with our customers' perceptions and assessments of their relationship with the democratic institutions and practices of Bangladesh. That's reflected in Step 2.

The model also validates planned results with customers; that is, it asks them if the strategic objectives and program outcomes are desirable and feasible and involves them in monitoring results. This is reflected in Steps 5 and 9.

The model involves our partners in the definition of strategic objectives and program

outcomes, and USAID staff in the preparation of activities packages. In short, strategic and operational planning become shared rather than divisible tasks. This is reflected in Steps 3, 4, 7, and 8.

We found that the model can be further simplified. In practice, Steps 4, 5, 7, and 8 tended to merge, so that we actually ended up with a six-step model. There were three reasons for this. First, we began to worry that we would not finish on schedule if we dealt with these steps separately. Second, as we built team skills and confidence, we became more adept at using work groups and consultation. The team found it was able to work on several tasks simultaneously while keeping everyone fully informed and involved in decisions. Third, a natural dialectic developed between our strategic and tactical work. There is little value to be gained by separating what we wanted to accomplish from how we were going to accomplish it, because the two informed each other.

We believe this model is transferable to other sectors. We are using it now to develop new programs in family planning, health, and economic growth.

**Increasing USAID's Participation.** In this new model, participation by USAID staff increased because design decisions were shifted from management to the staff through the use of an empowered multifunctional team. Also, the use of rapid-appraisal techniques to gather customer information increased the mission's reliance on Bangladeshi staff, involved more of them in the design effort, and deepened their participation in its substantive and analytical aspects.

Mission management was able to step back from the review-approval process, because management set the team's membership, its mandate, the criteria for judging the team's work products, and the out-of-bounds conditions; that is, the issues over which management and the team would consult. In selecting the team's membership, management was careful to ensure that all the skills necessary for the team to complete its work without outside reviews were represented.

Management agreed to judge the team's work in terms of its fit with the agency's democracy strategy and implementation guidelines and the customer needs as identified by the team. For its part, the team agreed to consult with management over potential or actual violations of acquisition regulations, work delays and the reasons for them, substantial revisions to the experimental design model, breakdowns in the team process, including relationships with the partners, and results of the customer-needs identification-and-verification work. The team also agreed to document its decisions so that management could track the team's work on a timely basis. This was done by creating electronic documents accessible to all mission staff.

Public sessions were held at critical points in the process, at the detect-needs and validation stages, for example. Everybody in the embassy was invited to those sessions.

Mission management honored its commitment to empowerment and never attempted to judge the team's work on any but the agreed criteria. This increased the team members' level of involvement, ownership, and commitment, and made them willing to accept accountability. Team morale remained high throughout this process.

### **Customer Involvement and USAID**

**Participation.** In the new approach, customer involvement was linked to increased USAID participation. We accepted agency guidance and defined our customers as the socially and economically disadvantaged. We then began to think about how we might best establish and maintain direct links with our customers. At this point, Anne Sweetser gave us a quick course on rapid appraisal. We had never used rapid appraisal techniques in the mission and had to develop the active listening skills necessary to use it successfully. This we did with Anne's help.

Her training also helped us realize that our design should begin with our customers' perceptions and assessments of their relationship with democratic institutions and practices. To develop this information, we fielded a detect-needs troop of 20 Bangladeshi staffers, 11 men

and 9 women. Members of the troop were recruited from all mission offices, because the democracy team was not large enough to accomplish this task on its own.

The fieldwork was conducted in three rounds of one week each. During each round, four teams, each comprised of two men and two women, traveled to different areas of the country to conduct interviews. Both group and individual interviews were held. Men interviewed men and women interviewed women. We estimate our interviews covered 500 customers. Our sample was purposive in that we tried to capture gender, age, occupational, ethnic, religious, and regional differences among our customers.

The field teams used open-ended topic guidelines for their discussions rather than specific questions such as might be found in market research or public opinion polls. The topical guidelines were developed by the interviewers as they practiced their active-listening skills and thought about democracy in Bangladesh.

Our methodology explicitly called for the interviewers to record their interviews and distill significant findings at the end of each day in the field. At the end of each week, the findings of each field team were shared and discussed with other teams.

Based on these discussions and field notes, Rosalie Fanale, a member of the democracy team, prepared a weekly synopsis of our customers' views, which was reviewed and updated by the field teams following their return to Dhaka. This allowed us to complete our customer-needs report while the information and findings were still fresh in the minds of the interviewers.

We used the same basic approach at Step 5 to validate our strategic objectives and program outcomes. At that point, however, we focused on whether our customers thought the objectives and outcomes were desirable and feasible. We will use this approach again on an annual basis for program monitoring and assessment.

The combination of active listening to our customers and analyzing what we heard increased the number of USAID staff involved in the design effort and deepened their participation in its substantive aspects as well.

The detect-needs troop found that even though our customers are poor and most are illiterate, they have a fairly sophisticated understanding of how the democratic institutions and practices of Bangladesh can work against their economic interests. As a result, we have moved our new activities packages downstream, closer to the lives of our customers, to address the democracy needs important to them. Our program now emphasizes local elected bodies rather than the national parliament, and seeks to increase the number of women elected to local bodies and to expand the capacity of local associations to advocate on behalf of our customers. We have also given increased emphasis to enhancing alternate dispute resolution mechanisms at the local level.

The model's reliance on rapid appraisal raises a number of issues. First is cost. Each complete cycle costs an estimated \$25,000 for per diem and travel. We hope we will be able to continue to afford the costs of rapid appraisals.

The second is the difficulty of adhering to the rapid appraisal methodology. Public opinion polls or market research surveys and their quantifiable findings are more familiar. The iterative process whereby the interviewers build their understanding of our customers' relational world tends to be abbreviated because it is seen as too time consuming.

Finally, there is a tendency among the educated to restate or redefine the stated needs of the less educated. This tendency was the topic of many discussions as we struggled to stay as close as we could to the relational world of our customers. For example, one of the partners argued that it would not have undertaken a successful rural sanitation program if it had listened only to its customers, because none of them requested latrines. Further discussions made clear, however, that the customers had identified poor health as a problem.

The task of the team in such an instance is not to restate the customers' needs, but to identify activities which address the needs in the way that sanitary latrines contribute to improved health. The role of analysis in designing programs is to apply the partners' knowledge about such

things as germs and disease vectors to meeting our customers' stated needs.

**Establishing Effective Partnerships.** Our goal was to select and involve our partners as early and as extensively as possible but in a manner consistent with acquisition regulations and our desire to maintain direct contacts with our customers. We did not want to become dependent upon our partners for customer information, nor did we want them to become simple intermediaries implementing a program we designed.

At first we thought these conditions meant we had to define what we wanted to procure by establishing strategic objectives and program outcomes before we could involve our partners. This would have prevented them from getting involved until about Step 7. So we decided to build our model on *Handbook 13* guidance for assistance agreements, which allowed us to involve partners fully in the design process.

Although these actions converted what had always been a judging relationship into a partnership, we did nothing fancy; we simply issued a request for applications. And we selected our partners from those applications on a competitive basis. Because we were selecting partners rather than service providers, the evaluation criteria may have been a bit unique. They emphasized compatibility between the applicant's and USAID's core values, the applicant's ability to involve and support diverse partner organizations so that participation could be further extended, and the applicant's commitment to the proposed approach.

Our partnership experience taught us that effective partnerships can take many forms. Our partnership is a joint venture rather than a team. This mode was preferred because each partner was able to retain its institutional identity while working towards a common goal, whereas in a team the partners merge their identities. Defining the precise nature of the partnership must be left to the partners themselves, and USAID guidance on this issue should be as flexible as possible.

We also learned that, given the variable nature of partnerships, it is critically important that the partners clarify their expectations and

define the nature of their relationship early on. There is a tendency, however, to want to get on with the work at hand and to allow relationships to emerge as the work proceeds. While it's

possible to delay these clarifying discussions, the downstream risks are substantial: misunderstandings, a lack of mutual trust, and, eventually, collapse of the partnership.

We found out that our partners need to have a level of empowerment within their own organizations equivalent to that of USAID. This balances the relationship, makes it easier to reach consensus, and allows the partnership to complete its work without outside reviews and approvals.

Finally, the partners need to give attention early to sorting out roles within the partnership. Critical roles include leaders, facilitators, process monitors, members, recorders. These roles can be shared in a variety of ways, but they are critical to the efficiency of the partnership and to promoting its health.

### **To See and Hear with New Eyes and Ears**

*Anne Sweetser*

I am committed to an anthropological approach to research that fits with the notion of a learning organization, the heart of reengineering. The opportunity to work with the Bangladesh mission last spring meant that I could bring my experience in social anthropology into the changing USAID. I believe it was a good match.

**Discovering the Unexpected.** The greatest successes in research come not when researchers find what they expect, but when they find something that they *do not* expect. When they notice something that doesn't fit, something that is "wrong" or discordant, they begin to learn. This open, creative notion of research contrasts with research conceived as verification of pre-set hypotheses about relationships among dependent and independent variables structured into rigid questionnaires. It avoids predetermining which topics are relevant and avoids preselecting a sample of a particular size and constitution.

Customer surveying under reengineering is a way to seek definitions of issues or problems as perceived by USAID's ultimate customers. Researchers have to be willing to admit that they are not sure even what the right questions are. They have to ask themselves, "How can I go about finding out what I am now unaware that I

do not know?" This is the only honest starting point in a cross-cultural research endeavor. But it's not easy; it's a real skill. It requires a very special sort of courage, and also a particular sort of consciousness. It's extremely simple and extremely difficult at the same time.

People conducting this kind of research have to be conscious of the fact that their own culture both allows them to understand and gets in the way of their ability to understand. To the extent that their culture works for them in their own society, allowing them to send out and read signals, both nonverbal and verbal, it allows them to function as human beings and to be competent adults. And the more competent they are, the more pride they take in that competence, the more attached, both emotionally and intellectually, they are to viewing the world through that set of precepts. And this is especially true for people who have become experts in something. Professional training allows them to adopt a particular vocabulary and set of concepts, to develop competence using these, and be rewarded by others for their expertise. The more expert they are, as members of their own culture or of a profession, the more their skills may prejudice their ability to be truly open to other frameworks of understanding, experiencing, and expressing reality.

The courage that is required is the courage to recognize and acknowledge one's own cultural biases. This is what social anthropologists do when they conduct participant-observation research over an extended period of time. Such research involves a lot of stumbling, mistaken assumptions, embarrassment, and a growing tolerance for discomfort, because it facilitates learning in unanticipated ways.

Essentially what the observers/researchers need to cultivate is an ability to look and listen as if they have never looked and listened before; they need to shed the eyeglasses of their own culture. The ability to deliberately stop the natural tendency to jump to conclusions about what is heard and seen is the key to successful rapid-appraisal work. It allows one to notice what is unexpected or different.

**Training the Detect-Needs Troop.** I arrived in Bangladesh immediately after Camille Barnett of Research Triangle Institute (RTI) had worked with the democracy team and the detect-needs troop. Their strong motivation to work as a team facilitated what I wished to communicate.

In the rapid appraisal the troop worked on sample interviews in the morning and spent the remainder of the day discussing them, reinforcing the willingness of each person to see things differently, to discuss those differences, and to clarify the things that did not fit with what they expected. Thus the troop was able, in a matter of three weeks, to begin to see how the ultimate customers in Bangladesh understand democracy. The troop would not have been able to reach this understanding if they had relied upon their own cultural expertise at responding to what people say and putting what they heard into their own framework of interpretation as members of that culture.

Bangladesh is a very hierarchical society. Therefore, it was important to try to get the members of the troop past the idea that their special education meant that they could understand the issues better. I believe that the troop was successful in ferreting out ideas and frameworks of understanding that poor people in rural Bangladesh hold about democracy

because the members of the troop were willing to try to learn in a new way, to become a learning group, part of a learning organization.

## Discussion Session

### Gender Aspects of Rapid Appraisal

**Bill Alli (Management Planning):** Did the religious context in Bangladesh where women are treated as second-class citizens complicate the attempt to move towards participation in democracy?

**Schwartz:** I have spent half my adult life in Islamic cultures in various parts of the world. They're all very different. They also change. Through our democracy detect-needs work, we found that men in Bangladesh thought local elected bodies would be more responsive to the needs of the poor if there were more women elected to those bodies, and they would be happy to vote for women to sit on those bodies. The culture of Bangladesh is opening up to increased women's participation in the political system, certainly at the local level. The national level is a bit more difficult because of the constraints on women in terms of travel and campaigning.

I think USAID has a very good opportunity here to increase women's participation, because it's something men in the society see as helpful to them.

**Sweetser:** Were you to ask Muslims whom I know from several years of living in Pakistan about the position of women, they would say they're absolutely equal in Islam. They hear a question referring to a broad range of family, economic, and political issues exclusively in terms of religious ideology; they appear to be insensitive to a distinction between ideal and real. But Islam places responsibility for the treatment of women in society on men. Thus, where democracy refers to justice as well as to governance, there is in Islamic ideology—which, as I have just said, is the habitual frame through which Muslims think about social issues—the basis for an argument favoring men's active support of women's search for equal treatment under the law.

### The Use of Questions in Rapid Appraisals

**Elise Stork:** Your handouts list some of the questions which are used for the rapid appraisals. Could there be a dichotomy between the open-ended questions and the iterative processes? Does constantly massaging and reconsidering the findings on a weekly basis drive you into more specific questions? Might you begin to predetermine outcomes based on what you think you're getting?

**Schwartz:** We used the discussions to identify areas that required further exploration. When we saw or found something that we didn't expect to at all we had to go back and get more information on it. But we tried to go back with generic topics rather than a specific question to which people would say yes or no.

**Sweetser:** We developed a set of themes and sub-themes to which team members could refer while they were carrying on *conversations* with people in the field. These themes were generated through discussions among members of the team; this process simultaneously helped them clarify their own presuppositions or prejudices. Later they reviewed the themes and were free to revise them as a group if their learning to that point led them to recommend improvements. No attempt was made to ask each person a specific set of questions.

### **Procurement Issues**

**Adele Liskov:** With the increasing push to involve more partners in the design, what advice would you give on how to avoid running afoul of competition?

**Schwartz:** The reason we went to assistance instruments is that they don't have the same procurement restrictions as a contract does. We did everything very much like a contract procurement. So we issued an RFA, we established evaluation criteria in the RFA, we had a technical review of the applications as they came in and assigned points to the criteria, we held follow-up discussions with each of the applicants as we looked at their proposals, and so on and so forth.

So it all went fairly smoothly and we stayed very close to what people recognize as an open and fair competition.

### **Rapid Appraisal Process: An Aspect of Democracy**

**Jay Nussbaum:** Karl scared me by saying it took \$25,000 of scarce OE money for each three-week rapid appraisal cycle.

Why does it have to be OE? As you've talked, it's become apparent that the most valuable thing you've accomplished so far are these surveys.

What is democracy? It is very hard to define, but one of its attributes probably is communication between the governed and the governors. Information generated by a rapid appraisal can be valuable to the governors. Even in dictatorships, the governors still want to do good for the governed.

The rapid appraisals are not just analysis, not just part of finding out what the problem is. I'd try to find a way to make them part of the solution.

**Johnson:** What we do in USAID obviously is a small piece of the overall picture of what happens in development. In most countries the biggest part of that picture is what the country itself does with its development budget. Do you think, based on your experience to date, that the donor community should look into transferring some of these new ways of doing business to countries? The Canadians and now USAID and many other donors have tried to reinvent the way they do business, but I don't know to what extent there's been an attempt to transfer this new way of thinking to the countries themselves.

**Schwartz:** One of our program outcomes relates to trying to get local elected bodies to accept and follow best practices. At that level, we're doing what might be seen as a version of reengineering.

At the national level, the government and the donors have been talking about improving the efficiency and the effectiveness of civil service. The political situation is such that there has not been any progress on that since I've been in Bangladesh, and there probably will not be any in the immediate future, but the idea is always there.



BRAC has reengineered as much as USAID has, and The Asia Foundation was only a little bit behind BRAC and USAID on that issue.

### Validity of Rapid Appraisal Results

**Curt Grimm:** In a country the size of Bangladesh, 500 people—the number you say you reached—is statistically fairly unimportant. Also, concerning the selection of partners, there are lots of representative groups that could be interested. How did you get input from interest groups that exist in Bangladeshi society and how did you feed that input into the process of selecting partners?

**Sweetser:** On the issue of statistical significance, if you look in a statistics book, you'll find that statistical validity depends, first of all, on being sure that the answers that you're getting correspond with what you think you are asking. And until you have done the type of research that I'm suggesting, this very open, qualitative work in a rapid appraisal, I'm not sure that you can assert that a sample is or is not going to give you statistical validity, precisely because of that problem. I mean, you're not sure you're asking the right questions until you've done some much more open work.

**Schwartz:** We don't think there are a lot of other opinions out there among our customers that we did not encounter. We think we have an accurate sense of our customers' thoughts. We validated that in Step 5: after we had identified strategic objectives and program outcomes, we went back to our customers and asked them specifically if the plans were desirable and feasible. That is not a statistical check, but it is a validation.

Bangladesh is about 120 million people. A statistically valid sample of that population is about 1,000 to 1,100 people. However, our goal was not to reach a statistically valid sample of the entire population as in public opinion polling, but to talk to enough of our customers to ensure we understood their relational world; to develop an insider's perspective on our customers' understanding of their interactions with the country political institutions. The test, therefore,

is not one of statistical validity, but whether through the iterative process of rapid appraisal there are no more surprises or unexpected findings. We think our detect-needs and validation efforts meet this latter test.

To address the second part of your question, we're aware that other groups have an interest in democracy in Bangladesh. But we were focused on our customers, and we wanted to know what we could do to work with them and to help them. The stakeholders have a very different agenda than our customers, and to a great extent it is the stakeholders' behaviors that we're trying to change. One has to be careful not to allow intermediaries and interest groups to set the agenda of the program.

### Effect on the USAID Mission Staff

**John Grant:** As we know, consultation sometimes can be a little messy and time-consuming. Sometimes it can be a little unsettling and frustrating to change plans and strategies that were set. Was this process frustrating for the staff in the mission, or was it universally energizing and empowering? Did some people have difficulty taking off their cultural lenses to hear what people were saying?

**Schwartz:** The final reaction is very positive. In fact, the mission has made a decision to go ahead and reorganize itself on the concept of empowered multifunctional teams and move away from offices. But it is also true that some people had a hard time taking off their hats. Some never succeeded. As we did fieldwork, some people found it difficult to give up the fact that they had a degree and they were talking to people who didn't have degrees.

The biggest difference, though, was in the role that women and support staff played in Bangladesh. Some of our secretaries have bachelor's degrees and master's degrees in sociology, in psychology, in political science—skills that were kind of buried. On the detect-needs troop these people just blossomed. We figured out that we ought to be using these people in a more substantive way. So the democracy team now has two people who we thought of only as secretaries before but who had a lot of interesting things to say. In Bangladesh, women still need to talk to women.

Overall, the experience maintained mission morale through the difficulties of reengineering and what was happening to the agency as a whole. We didn't just hear about reengineering; we did it. We saw it made a difference. We discovered that it is possible to involve people in a very positive way.

**Arthur Silver:** Is there anything that you noted or observed about this experimental process that might have been due to the fact of its being an experiment and under observation?

**Schwartz:** We operated on a voluntary basis. We sought volunteers for two teams: one developed the design approach, and the other implemented it. We sought volunteers for the detect-needs work as well. Not everybody volunteered initially. In fact, some people thought it was a waste of time, that reengineering was a silly fad that would go away eventually or that it was different only in name from what we've always done.

As we moved forward and began giving out our reports, the morale in the exploration team, as we called the first group, stayed high, in fact, it soared well above other committees. More and more people volunteered and eventually we had to limit participation in the detect-needs troop.

I'm not sure anybody in Washington was really watching us very closely. But the enthusiasm the experience generated within the mission influenced people in the mission to think more positively. A lot of the concerns were whether teams could be effective and what individual /roles on the team would be. We discussed these questions extensively.

### **Possible Role for Intermediaries**

**John Anderson:** In the selection of partners to work with, is it possible, or even perhaps desirable, to completely avoid intermediaries — groups that represent some interest—in the selection of partners? Do we really want to bring in partners with no script, with no ideas, without an agenda? Don't we want to find partners that are very much advocates for an approach of one

kind or another, particularly when we're talking democracy?

**Schwartz:** A distinction must be maintained between interest groups in the political sense, who are trying to affect public policy, and stakeholders and other groups that might contribute to the program. I think you're using the term "interest groups" in the latter sense. We are going to involve more of those. What we have are prime partners, and we expect sub-partners to emerge from this relationship. Under the umbrella of the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh, we held an open workshop on the approach last month for all NGOs in Bangladesh that might be interested in working on one of our five program outcomes. That was followed up by separate meetings in greater detail on each program outcome. The NGOs who participated now should be in the process of deciding if they want to participate and preparing their proposals. After another month or so, we will have a number of sub-grants working on the five program outcomes.

### **Participation in Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Carpenter:** You said at one point that you wouldn't know for up to seven years whether or not you took the right path. I would certainly hope that we would find ways, and I assume you have thought about this, to integrate participatory methods all the way along, not just in the very beginning, so that there is an ongoing rolling assessment of effectiveness enabling us to make course corrections along the way. Could you comment on how your thinking about participatory project design has affected your thinking about monitoring and evaluation?

**Schwartz:** Our approach includes a monitoring and evaluation plan. We will use the same rapid appraisal approach to gathering qualitative information about people's thoughts on the indicators and benchmarks. We report to Washington on results, request more resources on the basis of those results, and adjust activities as we go along.

## E-Mail Communications

### Rapid Appraisal: Quick? Dirty?

**Timm Harris:** Use of rapid rural appraisal (RRA) is a quick and sometimes dirty method of getting people's views and opinions is extremely effective in certain cases. In the Bangladeshi case it was effective in saving calendar time in the design process and incorporated more people than normal. In that particular case it worked well. However, it is extremely dangerous to assume that this could be a universally applicable model, since design requirements can vary so greatly. There are many instances where RRA may not be an appropriate method for gathering information and perspectives, where too many voices may blur focus and actually lengthen design time, where 20 staffers are not available for three weeks each.

**Anne Sweetser:** Re: RA as quick and dirty. Alas, this is what is so often done under the name of this method—it ends up being a hybrid, sort of a short-cut (probably nonrepresentative?) Survey. In truth, the method, when properly executed, is anything but quick and dirty. It is a truly qualitative method, a variation on participant observation of social anthropology in which questions are clarified and new dimensions brought to the fore.

**Sharon Epstein:** Rapid Rural Appraisal is not new in USAID and it is one of a number of useful devices for gathering and testing information and opinions. However, in my experience, its utility can also be severely limited if people who participate don't have a solid grounding in the subject matter of the exercise and in the history of the program, as well as prior experience doing fieldwork. The wrong conclusions could easily be drawn from RRAs.

Second, I think it is premature to conclude that as a result of the exercise in Bangladesh, the program will be any more effective or have any greater impact than the program under the "old" programming system. The period of time to produce a program may indeed be shortened and I would like to say that this is an unqualified "good thing" in USAID, because it takes too long from program idea to implementation, but the quality of the product may be negatively affected by shortening the period too. In the case of the program in Bangladesh, that remains to be assessed over time.

Third, for some time I have been concerned that there is an inherent bias against knowledge and experience of technical staff (who, in USAID, also possess considerable project design/implementation skills and experience) in the discussions of empowering teams. It is fun to participate in some teams and to do RRA on some subjects, particularly at the mission/country level. In the process, a person can learn about development issues he or she has had little prior exposure to. However, it is also possible for people who know little or nothing about the subject to come back from team/RRA exercises with entirely facile, even goofy, notions of what should be designed and implemented.

I hope that in the enthusiasm for empowerment, we retain a healthy respect for the specialized knowledge of USAID technical staff. Everyone's opinion in a team, in my humble opinion, is not equal.

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## E-Mail Communications (continued)

**Diane LaVoy:** You raise good cautions all-around: we need to strengthen and make better use of our technical expertise, not appear to have found a quick-fix alternative to it. The mark of a real development professional, in my estimation, is someone who can BOTH set aside her expertise (in order to “listen with new ears, see with new eyes” the customers’ worlds), AS WELL AS apply that expertise effectively, engaging the customers, in solving problems and changing their circumstances.

**Bobby Herman:** I especially liked Anne’s use of the word “courage” to describe the process of asking what one doesn’t know. I also believe that becoming a better listener requires a capacity for empathy.

### **Listening Harder through Rapid Appraisals**

(Originally part of Participation Forum 15, November 30, 1995)

**Barry Burnett:** Cost of Rapid Appraisals: I would respectfully disagree with the participant who argued that \$25,000 was a “high cost,” particularly if OE-funded. We have typically spent multiples of \$25,000 for project and program design work, often carried out by consultants paid from program resources (PD&S). Leaving aside the funding source question, I think this level of funding is quite reasonable to gain an appreciation of the customer’s needs and perspectives.

### **Participation in USAID/Bangladesh**

(Originally part of Participation Forum 23, May 21, 1997)

**Dick Brown (Mission Director, USAID/Bangladesh):** Since beginning its CEL experience two years ago, USAID/Bangladesh has continued to explore and expand its participation activities on a number of fronts:

(1) *Customers.* In all three of the mission’s strategic sectors (population/health, food security, and responsive government), we have undertaken rapid appraisals with poor people throughout the country to

- gain a preliminary sense of how our customers perceive their problems and needs,
- validate planned activities and/or measure progress against targeted results, and
- find out from our customers how they themselves define and perceive poverty so that we can better identify synergies among our strategic objectives and better target our efforts toward our mission goal of poverty reduction.

(2) *Design and Implementation.* We now routinely design our new activities in full and active cooperation with our partners. We have sat side-by-side with our partners and jointly determined what a design should look like and how it should be implemented. Increasingly, USAID is working more actively and collaboratively with our partners in implementation (rather than our just signing a contract and waiting for results).

(3) *Internal Mission.* All strategic implementation is now done through multifunctional teams. Given our customer focus and our use of rapid appraisal methodology, we have involved

(continued on next page)

### E-Mail Communications (continued)

secretaries, agricultural officers, health experts, executive officers, etc. as field interviewers, asking our customers open-ended questions across all sectors, then discussing and reaching consensus on the responses with their colleagues from throughout the mission. Now most “support” staff in the mission (financial, legal, contracting, program, PDO, economics) serve directly on strategic objectives teams, participating actively and fully in decisions affecting design and implementation at a much earlier stage than under pre-reengineered circumstances.

(4) *Stakeholders.* Other donors and GOB entities that affect and may be affected by our strategy and program but which do not participate directly in our designs and implementation are now consulted and kept more actively informed at a much earlier date on our plans and activities than in the past.

## Engaging Customers in Activity Design: Democracy Partnership in Bangladesh Participatory Practices 6

### The Problem

In November 1994, as part of USAID’s reengineering effort, USAID/Bangladesh volunteered to be a “country experimental laboratory” (CEL) for the design and implementation of democracy activities. The Mission developed a new approach to program design based on the Agency’s core values of customer focus, teamwork and participation, empowerment and accountability, and managing for results. It then created the Democracy Team, which applied this approach to its first task—to design a democracy program responsive to ultimate customer needs.

**The Participatory Practice.** The Democracy Team developed its new strategic objectives, intermediate results and activities by listening to the views of ultimate customers, defined as the socially and economically disadvantaged. By visiting communities throughout the country and discussing the meaning of democracy with men and women, they were able to understand local perspectives on democracy and governance.

**The Detect Needs Troop.** The Democracy Team created a time-limited sub-team called the Detect Needs Troop. Twenty Bangladeshi staff were recruited from throughout the Mission to enlarge the number of native speakers available to the Democracy Team for customer appraisal work. Eleven men and nine women with diverse backgrounds volunteered to join the troop.

**Training of the Detect Needs Troop.** In April 1995, Anne Sweetser (AAAS Fellow in PPC) trained members of the Detect Needs Troop in rapid appraisal (RA), a rigorous, flexible method of qualitative social research based primarily on conversational interviewing. Classroom preparation consisted of a series of exercises and discussions, often in small groups. To understand their biases, trainees first explored their own presuppositions about democracy and the poor, and then reflected on how poor Bangladeshi women and men might view democracy and governance. Next they sketched ways of initiating conversations and probing attitudes about civil society, governance, rule of law, and elections. After generating many possibilities, they agreed upon a short list of topics—not specific questions—to cover in each interview.

Finally, trainees went into poor neighborhoods in groups of three to practice semi-structured interviewing, observation, and notetaking. Immediately afterward, they reviewed the conversations and compared what each person had noticed and learned as they prepared reports on each interview.

**The Customer Appraisal and Program Design.** The customer appraisal was conducted in three week-long iterations. During each, four teams of two men and two women traveled to different areas of the country to interview men and women, respectively. For three days each pair conducted two or three interviews daily with individuals or groups. Sampling was purposive: half of the interviewees were women and half men; two-thirds were rural and one-third urban; and proportionate numbers from different ethnic and age groups were included. All regions of the country were visited and approximately 500 customers were reached, including some members of major political and civil associations. Interviews often focused on recent local events as the Detect Needs Troop worked to understand customers experiences with democratic institutions.

At the end of each day in the field, interviewers reviewed their work, distilled significant findings, and prepared reports on their interviews. The entire Troop reconvened in the Mission at the end of the week. In a series of small group discussions on specific cross-cutting topics, individuals shared what they were learning about customer attitudes in different areas of the country. The full Troop then discussed the important observations that emerged from the small groups which enabled them to articulate their emerging understanding of customer perspectives.

While the next interviews were conducted in the field, a member of the Democracy Team prepared a synopsis of the work to date, including points from the interview reports and from the weekly discussions. The field teams reviewed and updated the summary when they again returned to the Mission. After the final field trip, they finalized the appraisal report together, which was then shared with all USAID/Bangladesh staff, the Ambassador and interested Embassy staff, interested government officials and political party leaders, academics, and NGOs.

Within three weeks of completion of the appraisal, the Democracy Team finished an RFA for additional design work—to be guided by the results of the customer appraisal—and implementation of the new activity. The Asia Foundation (TAF) and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) were selected to join USAID in the Democracy Partnership. Together with members of the core Democracy Team in the Mission they formed the extended team. The partners twice validated the suitability of their proposed design through additional rapid appraisals, once working independently, once working with people in the Mission.

## **The Results**

The strategic objective, intermediate results, a customer service plan, and monitoring plan were developed jointly by the partners—TAF, BRAC, and USAID—based on what they had learned from customers. After these documents were developed, they too were shared with interested individuals, both within and outside the Democracy Partnership.

USAID, TAF, and BRAC will monitor the work annually by eliciting customer feedback. They can thus be sure that the intended results framework and intermediate results continue to correspond with customers' perceived needs.

Having an empowered team significantly increased participation in the design process and reduced the time by more than 75 percent. From the time the Democracy Team was formed to the beginning of the implementation, only five and a half months elapsed.

Customers felt increased transparency and accountability of local government would contribute to more equitable allocation of public resources. Consequently, the democracy program now emphasizes local elected bodies rather than the National Parliament. In particular, it stresses participation by women in local associations and enhanced capacity of local groups to advocate on behalf of their customers.

In early 1996, the Mission reported: "It is not an understatement to say that these appraisals have transformed our thinking. As a mission, we are now far more keenly aware of and attuned to what poor Bangladeshis think; we are using this new awareness in the design of our new programs and in the modification of our existing programs.... The sensitivity to the problems of the poor that we have gained from this direct, face-to-face contact with the poor is of direct, daily utility in keeping our focus on our overall goal of poverty reduction."

The model was also used to develop new programs in family planning, health, and income generation.

## **Discussion Points**

- 1) The most radical departure from the old method of project design was the direct interaction of USAID staff and that of its partners with customers. This occurred twice. First, using rapid appraisal (individual interviews and focus groups), USAID/Bangladesh identified customers' democracy needs. Second, customers reviewed proposed activities to assess their acceptability.
- 2) Each complete appraisal cycle cost about \$25,000 for per diem and travel. Some consider this expensive; others anticipate long-term advantages of far greater value. If the sum were to be drawn only from the operating expense account, this might present significant budget implications.
- 3) Because the educated tend to redefine the stated needs of the less educated, development professionals must be sure to listen to customers to help them identify feasible activities.
- 4) This approach had a strikingly positive effect on staff morale, notably on the Bangladeshi support staff who made significant contributions to field teams. All staff are now more knowledgeable about USAID's democracy program and speak with more confidence about the program and their role in the Mission.
- 5) High-quality listening requires great sensitivity. Researchers who are aware of their own expectations or prejudices are more able to detect what is different or significant in respondents' or fellow team members' remarks. When team members are comfortable discussing at this level, they can arrive at a fuller understanding of customers' perspectives.
- 6) The USAID, TAF, and the BRAC partnership was conceived as a joint venture. This allowed each partner to retain its institutional identity while working towards a common goal. Given that there are various types of partnerships, it is critical that the partners clarify their expectations and define the nature of their relationships.

- 7) The design effort was successful because the Democracy Team and Mission Management delineated their respective responsibilities at the beginning. Among the issues the Democracy Team raised to management were: potential or actual violations of acquisition regulations or guidelines; work delays and the reasons for them; substantial revisions to the experimental design model; breakdowns in the team process, including relationships with partners; and results of the customer needs identification and verification work.

*Drafted by Wendy Kapustin and Anne Sweetser after extensive consultation with Karl Schwartz, USAID/Dhaka, and a thorough review of available project documentation.*

#### **Resources**

“What Can Change When We Listen Harder?” Participation Forum Summary # 14 (USAID, 1995).

“Bangladesh Results Review & Resource Request (R4) Report.” (USAID/Dhaka, 1996).

“Bangladesh Team Members Reflect on the Design Process,” *On Track* 1, no.6 (October 1995).

Sweetser, Anne. “Customer Surveying: Rapid Appraisal Methodology,” USAID Participation Initiative Trip Report (April 1995).

USAID Bangladesh Democracy Team. “Bangladesh Reengineering Report 4: Evaluation Findings,” USAID (October 1995).

## **Host Country Participation in USAID’s Country Strategy Development**

### **Participation Forum 1: February 17, 1994**

This session presented three different experiences in which USAID country strategies had been developed with considerable host country involvement: Chad, described by Mission Director Anne Williams; Togo, described by John Grant, former Deputy Mission Director and currently Deputy Director of the Program Office in the Bureau of Humanitarian Response; and Uganda, described by Mission Director Keith Sherper. Following the three presentations, Curt Grimm, AAAS Fellow in the Africa Bureau’s Office of Development Planning, discussed some results from on-going research on USAID African field mission efforts to broaden participation and foster local collaboration. A brief period of discussion concluded the session.

#### **Consultation in Chad**

*Anne Williams*

The strategy-building process I will describe today was designed and implemented by Carole Sherrer-Palma, former Deputy Mission Director in Chad, who unfortunately was not able to participate in this forum today. I believe that despite the many difficulties of working in Chad—little available data, difficult transportation, hard living conditions—and the special problems during the 1990-1992 period during which the strategy was being designed—a coup d’état, two or three attempted coups d’état, two evacuations, and a bad food year—USAID and Chad were able to come up with a very workable strategy.

**Meetings and Retreats.** The process of building USAID’s country strategy in Chad began with a series of analytical studies that looked at Chad from various perspectives.

These were prepared by consultants who traveled around the country observing and talking to people. When the studies were complete, USAID held a series of meetings and retreats. We kicked off our own analytical process with a two-day retreat attended by USAID and contractor staff, representatives from PVOs, the World Bank, and UNDP, and Chadian government officials up to the director general (i.e., permanent secretary) level to discuss the studies. In small representative working



groups, participants looked at the overall goal statement and identified maternal/child health care and agricultural marketing as the main areas of concentration. In addition, food security was identified as a target of opportunity.

The parameters thus set, Management Systems International (MSI) came out and assisted the mission and contractor staff, plus PVO representatives, to hammer out the logframe. (MSI is the lead entity in the PPC/CDIE PRISM contract for providing technical support to the development of strategic frameworks and measurement plans for country assistance programs.) The mission virtually closed down for a week. After people had mulled this logframe over and begun writing text to follow it, a third retreat was held solely for mission staff to re-evaluate the strategy and to orient new personnel.

**Consulting with Chadian Partners.** After this final retreat, mission personnel felt they had to go back and speak with our Chadian partners, particularly the government, on specific decisions within the strategy. These talks sometimes led to considerable changes in the strategy. For example, USAID had been considering a national approach to health, but, based on the government's decentralization strategy and a debate within the mission, USAID decided to look at a regional approach. This represented a change in the mission's mindset.

**Proxies for Grassroots Consultation.** The mission did not consult directly with the grassroots during the strategy-building process because it would have added years to an already-long process. Instead the mission used a couple

of proxies for the grassroots. First, the PVOs. They had been working in Chad for a long time and were supposed to represent the voice of the people. (I am not sure this is always true; PVOs also have their own agendas.) Also, UNDP had organized a series of regional seminars with representatives of *groupements* (local associations of peasants) that allowed the voice of the people to be heard. Time limitations prevented USAID staff from participating in the process, but the mission did obtain reports of the meetings.

**Lessons Learned.** Overall, because lots of players were brought in, the credibility of the process was enhanced. Other lessons, included the following:

- Government participation helped us to make key decisions and created a sense of ownership for the strategy. However, frequent changes in government mean that we have to start all over again.
- USAID does not give the missions enough time to pay adequate attention to participation. Chadians view consensus as paramount, but building consensus can be a long process.
- Participation implies partnership. USAID missions have to learn to listen—something we are bad at doing.
- Country strategies should be developed mutually instead of unilaterally. This can create difficulties, however, because other cultures do not use the same processes for decision-making that we do. We must be culturally sensitive to these processes to get the kind of consensus and participation that we want.

## Consultation in Togo

*John Grant*

In Togo, the strategy-building process began during an exciting time. It was late 1991, and the country had just had a National Conference and had put aside its dictator of 27 years and was in a transition to democracy. USAID's budget had just been increased from \$4 to \$10 million. The new mission director and I arrived in country with a mandate to develop a strategy to build on this democratic process.

**The “Etats Généraux.”** The National Conference was like the second independence of Togo. Run by Togolese, the conference, attended by about 1,000 people, was televised. The country practically came to a standstill for six weeks while the entire population watched the proceedings. The conference declared that it was the sovereign body of Togo, put in motion the development of a new constitution, and decided to hold a series of Etats Generaux, or general assemblies, in each sector (health, agriculture, land reform, culture, sports, etc.) to reflect the will of the people.

USAID and other donors supported these assemblies which were not uniformly successful. For example, in the agriculture meeting, some farmers were represented among the 400 participants, but they were outvoted by the powerful parastatals and government bureaucrats. But in the health sector, more progress was made; USAID, the major donor in this area, became fully engaged in the process. Many constructive things came out—including the need for increased private sector participation, improved cost recovery, and increased access to low cost drugs—and were embodied in the USAID strategy. Unfortunately the whole process got turned back as the old president began to muscle his way back onto the political scene, and the country was shaken by strikes and violence. Also, the government did not make the budgetary allocations required to fund the reforms recommended.

**Extensive Consultation; Limited Involvement.** Togo is an interesting case with respect to participation. It is a small, easy-to-get-around-in

country where USAID has a big role. There is lots of PVO participation. Some USAID technical staff and their Togolese counterparts share offices. Also, the Togolese like Americans. We have been one of the largest donors, and we don't have the colonial baggage of the French and the British. Consequently, consulting with the Togolese was easy and we consulted throughout the strategy-building process. However, the turbulent political situation was a constraint; government and NGO offices were closed for long periods due to the strikes and violence.

The strategy-building process began with a macroeconomic analysis and a series of field-oriented sector assessments carried out by consultants who met with government officials and also visited rural areas. We found the Manual for Action in the Private Sector (MAPS) to be a very effective tool in developing strategy options for work with the private sector and business development, and it involved extensive surveys and focus group interviews with entrepreneurs. (MAPS is an analytical approach to assessing private sector activity and opportunities for assistance used by the Africa Bureau.) Later the MSI team came out to assist with the logframe.

Development of the mission strategy was an interesting process, but it was not perfect. We consulted with local people but did not involve them as much as we might have in deciding which strategy options to adopt. Final decisions were made more or less in-house and in consultation with Washington.

**Lessons Learned.** There are a number of obstacles or constraints to participation:

- Some African countries are very hierarchical. It is difficult for the poor to have a voice.
- Mission strategies do not begin with a tabula rasa. There are projects in the pipeline and inflexibility. Getting out of some sectors and into others is like turning a ship around.
- Participation should be built into all processes—project planning, evaluation, and so on—not just strategy-formulation.
- Deadlines are tight and staff time is short.

- USAID mission personnel are not as accessible as they should be; we need to make more of an effort to get out into the field and meet with local people.
- Some mission personnel have attitudinal problems with respect to NGOs whom they view as pushing their own agendas.
- Broad-based consultation raises expectations, yet funds are limited and we are able to focus on only one or two priority areas in mission strategies.
- Last-minute shifts in priorities in Washington can jeopardize strategies built with participation.

## Consultation in Uganda

*Keith Sherper*

Some sort of dialogue on community aspirations and priorities is needed, for if we are to measure impact, we have to know what is going on among the people we are trying to assist. We must seek a balance between USAID's strategies, host country development priorities, and the felt needs of the people. This requires an understanding of conditions on the ground.

This dialogue does not need to be comprehensive. We are not looking for 100% perfection. The breadth and depth of participation is a mission-level judgment.

**Three Participatory Exercises.** In Uganda, our approach in preparing the CPSP was to emphasize participation by seeking out the views of local USAID staff, people the mission worked with, and some segments of the general population. Local USAID staff were encouraged to give their views and question us on the strategy. This process gave us a broad perspective and wide range of views.

In Uganda we carried out three participatory exercises. The first was an off-site meeting for the entire mission. Second, the people that had been assigned to write sections of the CPSP gave presentations to all mission staff for feedback. And by "all," I mean all—drivers and warehouse workers included. Third, we used focus groups to collect information throughout the process.

**Focus Groups.** Three rounds of focus groups meetings were held. Groups were formed in five geographic areas of the country. (One of the groups in a remote rural area was formed by an indigenous NGO.) The first round was an open-

ended discussion in which people were encouraged to state their concerns and aspirations. There seemed to be a consensus that the country was still in the peace-making process and that some economic stability had been achieved. Education, health, and democratization were the biggest concerns. The process generated a great deal of enthusiasm; many said it was the first time they had been asked their opinions.

The second round examined and prioritized the four major areas: education (mainly primary), health (mainly AIDS), economic development, and democratization. Interestingly an ongoing strategic objective in environment/natural resources management was never raised by the Ugandians. On the other hand, in response to the high interest expressed in the focus groups in basic education, the mission proposed a strategic objective in that area, which was a new sector for USAID/Uganda. And the mission did launch a primary education program.

The third round concentrated on the top priority: education. The groups discussed how to go about education, what it takes to be a good teacher, how education is financed, etc. This helped us as we got into designing our activity in basic education. Based partly on the views expressed in the focus groups, we decided to stress quality of education, not numbers of students.

**Feedback and Follow-Up.** Once the CPSP was finalized, the mission made a point of giving copies to all the focus groups that we had worked with. We also made presentations about the whole process to the three focus groups with which we had worked most closely. This move was highly appreciated. We have tried to continue our relationship with the focus groups.

Through the participatory strategy-building

process we learned more about Ugandans, generated enthusiasm in drafting the documents, and improved the basis for project decisions. It

was not a scientific process, but we know we got closer to the customer.

### **The Africa Bureau's Best Practices**

*Curt Grimm*

The Africa Bureau surveyed its field missions as to the benefits of participation, the ways in which it might be improved, and the constraints to promoting participation. I will summarize some of the more generalized findings of this survey. (A report on some of the results of this survey is available from AFR/DP, Room 2495 NS: "Development Fund for Africa. Achieving Participation: A Collection of the Africa Bureau's 'Best Practices'").

#### **Beneficial aspects of participation:**

- Participation has a legitimizing effect on local institutions and organizations, which obtain information on donor agencies and their processes and which increase in stature as a result of the simple act of holding formal consultations with USAID.
- On the other side of the coin, USAID gains immeasurable respect and increases its own legitimacy by reaching out to diverse elements. Suspicion about it decreases and its credibility increases. However, participation should not be a single-shot gesture; transparency should be continual to maintain credibility.

#### **Room for improvement:**

- Many groups outside of USAID say that local participation in program strategy development seems to take place after key decisions about sector interventions have been made. The Uganda experience is an exception. Part of the problem is confusion about the process, not intentional lack of transparency.

#### **Constraints:**

- Shortage of staff time.
- Procedural rigidities within the Agency.
- Bad mutual perceptions between NGOs and donors.
- Lack of representative organizations and institutions in the host countries, especially in Africa. In some cases there is host government interference in USAID's attempt to foster participation.
- Distance, infrastructure, and language are barriers that are real and will continue to exist.

USAID is trying to address these constraints. By participation we can build a consensus around what USAID is doing and thus make it more effective and efficient.

#### **Issues Raised During the Discussion Period**

- Cultural differences between ourselves and host country nationals as a potential impediment to participation.
- Use of focus groups for assessing project performance.
- Effect of DFA legislation on the Africa Bureau's interest in participation.
- How USAID can encourage participation in developing-country decision-making processes.

## 5. Working with Local Knowledge, Initiatives, and Ideas

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### Improving Technical Rigor Through Participation

Participation Forum 6: July 21, 1994

How can participation improve the technical rigor of the work that we do as development professionals? What can the views of ordinary citizens bring to decisions and processes that require a lot of technical understanding? What happens when we ignore those views? Two presenters highly credentialed in the hard sciences addressed these questions. Keith Pittman, a water specialist at the World Bank, discussed massive flood control efforts in Bangladesh, where he was until recently the chief of party for the USAID-funded Irrigation Support Project for Asia and the Near East (ISPAN) in Bangladesh. Gene Brantly, Technical Director for Risk Assessment for the Environmental Health Project, described how a health risk assessment in Quito, Ecuador, employed participatory methods to get a more accurate picture of reality.

#### Striving for Participation in the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan

*Keith Pittman*

**Major Problems, Major Impacts.** Major water-sector investment started in East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh. About \$2 to \$4 billion has been invested to cover about 3.6 million hectares of land with flood-control and drainage projects and about 200,000 hectares with irrigation projects. Currently 1.6 million people are affected by major irrigation projects--basically dams that divert water from rivers onto the land rather like, say, the Salt River Project. And approximately 24 million people live within the boundaries of the flood-control and drainage projects. Planned expansion between 1990 and 1995 will probably increase that to about 30 million people.

**A Program Designed for Pakistan, Not Bangladesh.** Up to 1991, all public-sector water projects were driven by a master plan developed in 1964. It is very important to know that all of the technical expertise that directed planning in Bangladesh came from Pakistan. This approach to development was centrally driven and planned. All the administrators and technicians had been

trained primarily in Pakistan and were not able to adjust to the reality of Bangladesh.

Another problem arose from the military orientation of the Pakistani administration. Information was controlled in a military way. For example, maps were restricted. Field engineers had to go to Dacca, make a tracing of a map, and then go back to the project. They concentrated on the site where the structures were being built because they were design engineers. They didn't worry too much about the area of the project, nor did they ask the local people what they thought about the project. They went back to Dacca, perhaps even to Karachi in the early days, redesigned the projects, and then started building them.

When USAID, through the Irrigation Support Program for Asia and the Near East (ISPAN), began work in Bangladesh, we inherited a system in which there was no participation at all.

**Operational Problems Caused by Lack of Participation.** Lack of participation gave rise to conflicts between farmers, fisherman, and

tradesmen, all of whom have different interests in the project areas.

“Public cuts” are one operational problem. A project may consist of an embankment 10 to 15 feet high encompassing an area. The water on the outside rises quite quickly during the monsoon period, which is between June and October. When people perceive a local threat to the embankment and worry about its giving way, they sometimes cut it from the inside. They’d rather have the water come in in a controlled way than to wait for it to go over the top. Also, the people on the outside of the project mistakenly think that by cutting the project boundary, they can lower the floodwater on the outside, but, of course, this is impossible with such a huge river. The public needs education about the purpose of these projects.

Operation and maintenance are also affected by lack of participation. The projects are regarded as imposed upon the landscape by the central government. The structures quickly dry up, wash out, or silt up because there’s no local involvement in their maintenance. Thus the projects tend to run down and fail.

Out of the 3.6 million hectares of land covered with flood control and drainage projects that I mentioned earlier, only about 25 percent is effective. At a cost of between \$2 and \$4 billion, it’s mighty expensive in terms of cost per hectare of development. And, cost recovery is minimal. People don’t see themselves as beneficiaries of these projects and consequently are unwilling to pay any service fees. The collection rate is only 2 to 5 percent.

**Changing a Dismal Inherited System.** The Bangladesh Flood Action Plan, which started in 1990, is a \$160 million effort, with 265 projects. Fifteen donors are involved. It consisted of a new strategy for controlling floods in Bangladesh.

Many people, particularly in the government, felt that the Flood Action Plan was a new opportunity to revamp the 1964 master plan and build yet more mega public-sector projects so that the government could regain control from what they saw as the unfortunate effects of privatization of minor irrigation, which has proved to be very successful. However, the donors

realized that the only way that this plan was going to make any difference to the future of Bangladesh, given the history that you just heard, was to argue for people’s participation in project preparation and design. The 15 development partners voiced a long sustained argument for transparency at the macro level of planning in the central government directed at the government and the Flood-Plan Coordination Organization.

ISPAN was deeply involved in trying to get the government to account for what was going on. Projects with a potential price tag of \$5 to \$10 billion were being planned by the government, and many felt that these were being imposed upon the country by President Hussain Muhammad Ershad’s regime, which fell at the end of 1990. Many regarded this as an undemocratic plan that foisted upon the people of Bangladesh a huge debt to pay off over the next 40 years.

Others argued that the country needed some control over water so that it could maximize its development opportunities, and therefore it was necessary to work with the government. They wanted to make the plan democratic.

This was the line of argument adopted by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). As participants in this debate, they wrote several pamphlets that were circulated widely in Bangladesh and internationally. Using their incredible network, which is linked with the U.S. NGO network, they made the government listen, although the government regards them as very irritating. As a result of the debates, the plan has gradually changed from a structurally oriented plan in 1990 to a plan with more emphasis on the environment and people’s participation.

In reaction to many of the criticisms, special components for people’s participation were built into the Flood Action Plan. The FAB 20 Compartmentalization Pilot Project consists of 20 to 25 big structures to regulate the water through the area, taking into account the needs for fisheries, navigation, and also farming. It’s the first time a multidisciplinary approach has been adopted for a project in Bangladesh. Guidelines for people’s participation were produced and accepted by the government of Bangladesh.

Last week, during a consultation on the Flood Action Plan in London, ISPAN representatives asked some questions about people's participation. The government was talking about enacting a law to ensure people's participation. We almost fell off our chairs when the conference secretary responded to the idea of a participation law by saying, "We've decided that if participation is going to work, it has to be voluntary. We cannot mandate participation." So they've learned something, rather wonderfully.

**National Seminars.** Originally Flood Action Plan projects went through a review process assisted by an international panel of experts. Once approved, the projects went back to the Bangladesh Water Development Board for implementation. Now the process is more complex but also more effective. A process of consultation with field visits produces a preliminary plan, or blue line, that is processed by the Flood-Plan Coordination Organization. The plan is collated and pushed out as a series of pamphlets and briefing notes for regional presentations. Local conferences are held in regional centers with two levels of consultation. One is with the local members of Parliament and local officials, and the second level is with local people looking at the plans on the spot. This then feeds back into the review process. Another difference is that national seminars are held on the proposals coming out of this national planning process. In other words, the government doesn't say, "We are going to do it." It now says, "We wish to do it. What do you think about it?"

These seminars are not as participative as one would like, because the government of Bangladesh is not comfortable with democratic institutions. Three national conferences have been held on the Flood Action Plan. The first, in 1990, was attended by civil servants only behind closed doors. USAID and ISPAN worked very hard to make the second conference in 1992 more transparent. We argued very strongly that if they were serious about participation, they had to open the conference up to more people. In consequence, over 600 participants turned up from all walks of life--politicians, journalists,

academics. At our urging they also published the proceedings and made them widely available. The third conference, in 1993, was organized by the government itself with USAID financing much of the participation process. The government said, "Fine. You've shown us how to do it. We'll do it ourselves." The result was a bit disappointing. For example, they wouldn't allow questions from the floor. People had to write their questions down and hand them over to the chief engineer who simply ignored the questions he couldn't understand or couldn't answer. This was symbolic participation, but at least they made an attempt. In fact this new way of doing business in the country has set a precedent, we hope, for other sectors. The way is still not easy, but attitudes are changing.

Now, the debate is much more open, partly engendered by the World Bank's recent cancellation of credits and proposed loans to Bangladesh. The Asian Development Bank is beginning to think along the same lines, indicating that it may cancel 16 projects. The donors are saying, "Look, we're not going to support you in building unsustainable projects. You've got to face up to the fact you're in the twentieth century."

The donors' views have changed too. Out of 11 donors at the local consultative group meeting at the end of the third conference, public participation accountability was raised by 82 percent of them as the major problem, followed by environmental and social soundness. So, the whole of the donor agenda is focusing more on sustainable development because of the pressure exerted under the banner of the Flood Action Plan.

**Refusing to Give In on Participation.** The message for USAID is that it's a long and painful process to argue something consistently for five years. At times, there was a feeling in Bangladesh that USAID would give in.

The ISPAN project was single-minded about arguing for transparency and openness. In 1982 we decided that if we were arguing for transparency, we had to be transparent ourselves, if we had meetings, we would circulate minutes of those meetings, because that's what we were

telling others to do. So we published a newsletter containing minutes of meetings. This got us into trouble with the USAID mission. They felt that it wasn't "quite the normal or done thing." And, of course, the mission got flak from the government

of Bangladesh about sharing what they thought was confidential information publicly. The mission felt that some future projects might suffer but decided not to clamp down on us.

Fortunately for ISPAN, in the meantime, the local NGOs produced a newsletter, which meant we didn't really need to produce our newsletter anymore. Then the Flood-Plan Coordinating Organization in turn began producing a monthly newsletter describing what was happening in each of the 26 projects. Finally they gave in and became more transparent themselves.

## A Gradual Dawn

*Gene Brantly*

When Diane first contacted me about this presentation, she said that she was thinking of calling this session "Techies See the Light." Apparently she got a storm of e-mail saying, "Don't be pejorative about scientists or techies." Actually I thought the comment fit me, so I entitled my presentation "A Gradual Dawn." This techie did begin to see the light gradually over a period of time, and I'm now working hard to build a participatory approach to conducting health-risk assessments in developing countries.

**Risk Assessment As a Discipline.** Risk assessment attempts to predict the future health consequences of people's exposure to harmful environmental conditions. The method was developed primarily for use in the United States to predict the impact of exposure to environmental pollutants on cancer rates. To regulate pollutants intelligently, we need a way of estimating the long-term public-health consequences of exposure to those pollutants. All pollutants cannot be totally eliminated, but we can bring them down to a level of acceptable risk.

Within the last 20 years, health-risk assessment has come into its own as a discipline for environmental protection. As used in the United States, risk assessment is a data-intensive process, requiring a lot of information on ambient concentrations of pollutants, "transport-and-fate" models to predict ambient concentrations if we

don't have actual measurements, "dose-response" models to predict the health effect of a particular dose, and so on. The process was developed primarily by toxicologists, but epidemiologists, ecologists, and other specialists are also in the picture.

Risk assessment is used first to decide whether or not to control a particular pollutant and second to set standards for reducing the levels of pollutants we wish to control. In "comparative" risk assessment, the attempt is to estimate and compare the risks attributable to a number of pollutants and to set priorities about which should be targets for control.

**Setting the Scene.** USAID's Office of Health and Nutrition wants to use risk assessment in developing countries. But to do so lots of issues have to be addressed, one of which is the lack of data. USAID, through the Water and Sanitation for Health (WASH) Project, decided to carry out a risk assessment in Quito because a fairly substantial amount of information was available and USAID's partners in Ecuador were interested in doing a study.

A risk assessment team would typically consist of a toxicologist, a specialist in environmental monitoring to collect the data, and an epidemiologist. A colleague of mine on the WASH Project, May Yacoob, a medical anthropologist experienced in community



participation, kept telling me during our talks on how to structure this kind of investigation for a developing country, "You've got to put a social scientist on the team." I said, "What will a social scientist do? Just give me the environmental data, data on concentrations, and I will predict everything else. I don't need to talk to people, I just need to have the numbers." She told me that one of the things a social scientist could do would be to talk to people in the community about what they think is a risk or problem in the environment. I said, "I don't trust that information. What they think the problem is is not necessarily what it really is." I felt that getting people's impressions of their exposures and risks was not rigorous, and I did not want to be asked to estimate risks on the basis of somebody's opinion. That was professionally embarrassing to me.

May finally convinced me that the information that a social scientist could obtain might at least provide a context for the information that would be obtained using what I consider to be more rigorous methods. After thinking about that for a while, I came up with some other uses of interview information. For example, we have standard assumptions on people's dietary intake for populations in the United States, but we don't have such assumptions for other populations. Interviews could tell us what the composition of their diet is.

After about six months of arguing back and forth, finally I said, "Okay, May. As a matter of faith, I will do this. I'll take the step based primarily on professional faith in our status as colleagues." So we hired Linda Whiteford, a medical anthropologist from the University of South Florida, to participate on the risk assessment team.

**How It Worked Out.** Once in Ecuador, Linda collected a lot of original data, more than the rest of the team, who relied primarily on information that was already available. Linda organized a series of focus groups in the communities, she observed people's behavior and exposures directly, primarily around food and activities in the household, and she conducted a series of individual interviews. Her activities yielded

qualitative information on people's exposures and health impacts. The people that she interviewed could not necessarily draw a linkage between cause and effect, but they provided information that didn't show up in the public health records: high rates of upper respiratory infections and relatively high rates of diarrheal disease.

Some of the qualitative information that Linda brought back was used directly in the risk analysis. She and her local colleagues discovered that, because of poor sanitation in the markets, women who were working in the markets were suffering from very high rates of urinary infections. We weren't even looking for that information, and it wouldn't have shown up in public health records. Even if it had, it wouldn't have been attributed to the lack of sanitation. She also found that there was a very high rate of injuries in the construction trades. This was not a surprise, but it did not show up in official statistics. No information on occupational health was available from official sources.

The interview information also provided a context to help us interpret other information that we collected. We found, in part through official statistics, in part through this qualitative information, that there was a reasonably high rate of diarrheal disease. Yet water supply in Quito is in very good condition and sanitation is reasonable in most of the city. But the interviews revealed that poor sanitation in the markets and at home in food preparation looked like an explanation for the diarrheal disease rates. More epidemiological work is necessary to verify that link, but at least it is plausible.

The process was successful largely because of the individuals who were involved. Linda was experienced in working with people in "more technical" professions, particularly engineers. She was assertive and self-confident, articulate about the value of her discipline, unshaken by the fact that a lot of the other people on the team had never worked with an anthropologist, and persistent and patient. She kept putting the information out there until the other team members saw the value of it. At the same time, the other team members weren't ogres. They gradually recognized the value of the qualitative input. Also, during the team planning

meeting, we made sure that individuals on the team had a basis for collaboration and appreciated each other's disciplines. We had prepared the team to work together.

### **Community-Based Environmental**

**Management.** Looking forward, the next step in building a truly participatory risk assessment is getting the community to participate more actively than just being interviewed. Since the Quito assessment, May and I have put together a model for community-based environmental management. (The CIMEP approach is described above in Chapter 2, Participatory Practices 10.) It is a model for involving community organizations and community members in all phases of environmental management, starting with identifying and assessing the magnitude of

problems and continuing through setting priorities, developing and implementing solutions, and monitoring the results. The model includes training in technical subjects and group process work and involves working with an NGO to establish a repository for the skills that are necessary to continue the process. We're now in the process of finding opportunities to test this model.

When I started working with USAID two years ago, the notion that communities could participate in the risk assessment process was not on my screen. It moved onto my screen only because of the persistent efforts of a colleague. The baby step that we took in Quito worked out well and was enough to convince me to try to build a broader model for public participation in environmental management.

### **E-Mail Communications**

**Christopher Timura** described a system of indigenous mapping used in the Darien region of Panama and the Mosquitia region of Honduras. It is a low-tech cartographic technique that can be an alternative to a GIS system or used in conjunction with GIS. As its name suggests, indigenous mapping promotes participation; it was used to gain more understanding of the relationship of indigenous populations to the land than higher-tech methods might provide. The surveyors were selected for their knowledge of the area and were encouraged to use whatever mapping style made sense to them. Through a series of workshops, the information they collected was collated under the supervision of professional cartographers to form a composite map, which was judged by Panamanian cartographers to be the most accurate and detailed available. Timura's message ends with an assessment of this mapping methodology: "The mapping process...could act as a catalyst for local populations. With a solid base of cartographic and demographic information, and strengthened lines of communication between members of the local populations, government and NGOs, as well as members of the local populations themselves, each party will be better equipped to assess emerging issues and generate solutions to development problems."

# Participatory Approach to Design: Child Health Project in Zambia

## Participatory Practices 8

### The Challenge

In 1991, the newly elected democratic Zambian government began overhauling its health care system. Under the previous system, access to quality health care was severely limited. In general, health care in Zambia had deteriorated significantly, making it one of the few African countries with a rising infant mortality rate, and rates of child malnutrition and HIV infection among the highest on the continent.

In May 1994, USAID/Lusaka conducted a traditional three-week project identification mission. However, in November 1994, the Mission decided to introduce a participatory approach to project design. USAID recognized that as a relative newcomer to the health sector in Zambia, it would need to coordinate closely with the Ministry of Health (MOH), other donors, and key stakeholders to avoid duplication of effort. A highly inclusive process was needed, both to build upon the interests and work of these stakeholders and to ensure that the resulting program fully reflected the needs and perspectives of the intended end-users of services supporting child survival. (Following USAID's adoption of a reengineered operating system in October 1995, customer focus became more explicit in Agency terminology, and programming design focused on results through agreement on strategic objectives and results packages, rather than on projects.)

### Participatory Practice: Inclusive Program Design Process

The Zambia Child Health (ZCH) project design process consisted of three phases: 1) team building and stakeholder interviews; 2) field visits; and 3) strategic project design workshops and report writing. Participants in the design process included 14 core design team members, over 50 representatives from the MOH, bilateral and multilateral donors, international and local NGOs, and, to a lesser extent, community members. The core team members included staff from USAID/Washington, USAID/Zambia, UNICEF, and CARE Zambia.

A team of three professional facilitators/project design specialists worked together with the core design team to structure and carry out the project design process during a six-week period from January to March 1995.

**Team-Building Workshop.** In January, the ZCH project design process began with a full-day team-building workshop for core design team members in Washington, D.C. This was the first opportunity for many of them to meet one another. The workshop agenda included the following activities: defining expectations, identifying end users of services, examining the interests of key stakeholders, and reviewing team member roles and norms of interaction.

Following the team-building workshop, two facilitators flew to Zambia, a week in advance of the core team, in order to interview stakeholders in Lusaka. They met with USAID/Lusaka, MOH representatives, and other donors to review the design and the proposed agenda for the first strategic planning workshop.

**Stakeholder Interviews.** USAID/Zambia then conducted approximately 30 interviews with various MOH units involved with maternal and child health, the Health Reform Implementation Team members (senior health planners from the MOH charged with designing and implementing the national health reforms), the

Deputy Minister of Health, NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral donors. These interviews outlined USAID's participatory approach, demonstrated the Mission's willingness to listen, earned commitments to attend the workshop, and identified common issues and concerns to be addressed at the workshop.

**First Strategic Planning Workshop.** The two-day strategic planning workshop on January 17-19 involved approximately 35 to 40 participants from the MOH, USAID, bilateral and multilateral donors, local and international NGOs, local universities, and research groups. The workshop had three key objectives: 1) identification and agreement on priority gaps in practices to improve child survival in Zambia; 2) identification and agreement on USAID's comparative advantages and limitations in addressing these gaps; and 3) preliminary discussion of technical design issues.

On the first day, small working groups of five to eight participants identified, discussed, and defined nine primary problems relating to health services and capacities to improve child survival. After each group presented their findings, participants drafted a list of overlapping issues. During the second day of the workshop, the facilitators presented a consolidated list of major gaps to the plenary, and participants ranked them in terms of priorities through individual balloting. The three major stakeholder groups--USAID, the MOH, and local NGOs--reached a consensus on the top three problems affecting child survival.

Subsequently, the group divided into four teams to discuss perceptions of USAID's comparative advantages and disadvantages in addressing the priority gaps. Two MOH teams, other donors, local NGOs, and a USAID team agreed that the timing of USAID's intervention coincided well with the first phase of implementation of health reforms.

The workshop ended with a brief discussion of the next steps in the design process. USAID and the MOH agreed to conduct joint field visits to further explore issues and problems identified during the two-day workshop. In addition, the participants agreed to meet in three weeks for a second strategic planning workshop to synthesize the project design.

**Field Visits.** Following the first workshop, the core team members organized their field visit schedules with the MOH and developed simple survey and data collection instruments. During these meetings, the facilitator assisted in developing the necessary materials and tools.

The core team divided into two teams of four to five to visit four separate districts over a two-week period along with seven key representatives from the MOH, UNICEF, and a local umbrella NGO. The teams targeted all levels of MOH personnel for consultations and data collection and held meetings with community leaders and village representatives, women patients in the clinics, and, in some cases, mothers in the village. The teams gathered information about existing activities and services provided. After the field visits, the teams consolidated the findings and translated the issues into eight project objectives for design. USAID then met with the Health Reform Implementation Team at the MOH to elicit their reactions to the preliminary set of project objectives before presenting them to the wider forum of the second workshop. Team members presented data that explained the relationship between priority gaps and key activities.

**Synthesis Workshop.** The two-day synthesis workshop involved 35 to 40 participants, the majority of whom had attended the strategy workshop three weeks earlier. The workshop objectives were: to review the child survival planning process and core design elements to date; to further define the child survival project design including its activities, performance indicators, assumptions, and risks; and to identify next steps. A joint MOH/USAID presentation to the plenary outlined the preliminary project goal, purpose, outputs, and key activities.

The core team established eight “output galleries” around the room. At each station, flip charts listed the project activities on Post-It notes for discussion and mark-up. Participants roamed the galleries and joined discussions that interested them. The objective of this exercise was to increase understanding of the proposed design elements, and test proposed activities against identified gaps, feasibility questions, and potential overlap with activities already planned or underway. During the afternoon session, small groups reworked and strengthened each part of the design and presented revisions and recommendations.

On the second day, the plenary opened with a joint MOH/USAID presentation of the consolidated outputs. Facilitators first provided participants with brief instructions on how to develop performance indicators. During the remainder of the morning, small groups developed indicators for the project goal and purpose. At the end of the morning session, each group presented their recommendations to the plenary, followed by a brief discussion. The afternoon session used a similar process of small group break-out sessions to develop indicators for the outputs and to identify critical assumptions underlying the project. The workshop closed with a brief discussion of the next step in the design process. The core team then created a project logical framework, building on the inputs and recommendations that resulted from the workshop. The team discussed, debated, and selected indicators for the project goal, purpose, and outputs.

## **Outcome**

A month after the final workshop, USAID conducted a survey of participants to test the soundness of the ZCH project design. Twenty-three participants responded to questions about project design quality and the relationship of the process to the design. The survey findings showed that participants strongly believed that the project design responded to the priorities of key stakeholders. The respondents maintained that the participatory process, in comparison to a more traditional process, enabled the design team to collect more accurate information on the needs and capabilities of key stakeholder groups that ultimately led to a higher quality, more responsive design.

The core design team members reviewed the survey and, with substantive input from the MOH, drafted a project paper and jointly presented it to the MOH and USAID. After several weeks of project revision in Lusaka and in Washington, USAID approved the project in August 1995. In May 1996, BASICS was selected as the lead agency in support of the seven-year Zambia Child Health Project. In 1997, the objectives of the ZCH project were incorporated into USAID/Zambia’s Strategic Objective 3: Increased Use of Practices that Improve Child and Reproductive Health.

The participatory design process effectively forced the design team to work closely with the Zambian Health Reform Implementation Team to understand the vision and specific content of the reforms, including how power and implementation responsibilities for health delivery were being devolved to the districts. By understanding and supporting the reforms, the team was supporting a new and highly localized health delivery system.

The participatory process also allowed for a better understanding of the roles and capabilities of other actors involved in health delivery. The process put a number of different people together from various units of the MOH, local NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donors. The groups worked together to develop child health interventions that built on existing capabilities and prevented redundancies.

## Discussion Points

- 1) The external consultants brought a wide range of technical perspectives to the health issues identified in the planning workshops and field visits. The face-to-face exchange of ideas between external technical consultants and local stakeholders challenged them to adapt the technical perspectives to the Zambian context. This ultimately provided a rich resource base of technical know-how that addressed Zambian issues with interventions responsive to the Zambian context.
- 2) The stakeholders involved with the design process felt that their interests and ideas were being heard and acted upon. While this is a positive outcome, responsiveness to the interests of diverse stakeholders carries with it a risk that the resulting design may be very complex to implement.
- 3) Although the design process was inclusive at the stakeholder level, it was less so at the end-user level. The field-visits could have incorporated more open-ended interviewing techniques, such as participatory rapid appraisal. This would have created a foundation for understanding between the stakeholders and end-users, leading to a sense of greater ownership of the program by community residents.
- 4) Participation is an ongoing process. While the design phase provided the opportunity for inclusion of stakeholders and end-users, the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation also require mechanisms to encourage participation. Stakeholders' views were heard and acted upon during the design phase and need to continue to be heard.

*Drafted by Wendy Kapustin and Chanya Charles after extensive consultation with Rolf Sartorius (then of Team Technologies), members of USAID/Zambia, and a thorough review of available project documentation. March 1997.*

## Resources

Sartorius, Rolf. *The Zambia Child Health Project: Case Study of a Process-Oriented Approach to Project Design*. August, 1995.

## **Where Can a Broad Consultative Process Lead in a Global Program?**

Participation Forum 19: May 16, 1996

Redesign of the Global Bureau's HIV-AIDS strategic objective has involved participation of missions, international PVOs, HIV-AIDS advocacy groups, host-country governments and nongovernmental organizations, technical giants in the field of AIDS, and representatives of ultimate "customer" representatives. Jacob Gayle, Chief of the HIV-AIDS Division of the Global Bureau's Center for Population, Health and Nutrition (G/PHN); Holly Fluty, manager of the participation process for the HIV-AIDS strategic objectives; and Messaye Girma, participation consultant with Team Technologies and Health Technical Services, were the presenters in this session. Nils Daulaire, DAA of the Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination (PPC), kicked off the session.

### **Global Participation for Global Impact**

*Nils Daulaire*

Few development challenges are more pressing or more all-encompassing than the HIV-AIDS epidemic. Twenty million are infected today, and an expected 40 million will be infected by the end of the century. Projections run as high as 100 million infected by the second decade of the 21st century. The epidemic has gotten through just about every net we have put out for it. We don't have a good technical fix on it. It's a disease which impacts as much on the social network and social fabric of countries in the developing world as it does on individuals. Because of its complexity, both its viral complexity and its social complexity, it has posed development challenges that go beyond anything we at USAID have seen before.

The program which will be described today is trying to work on a global level to achieve a lowering of the trajectory of increased cases. We hope to be able to measure impacts which will have enormous meaning for the lives of millions of people.

With HIV-AIDS, more than with many

other health issues, we have to go well beyond simple medical models. We have to examine the network of social relationships and find out why people behave in certain ways and what can effect behavior change. That cannot be done by making a decision at the top level for a global program and applying it worldwide.

An effective program will be built on an understanding of its customers. This is doubly challenging because many of these customers don't know they are customers right now. Most of the 80 million people or so who will become infected in the next 20 to 40 years haven't the slightest idea that they're at risk. So we have to build our customer base.

Developing a global HIV-AIDS effort differs from many other participatory processes by the very fact that the program is trying to have global impact. The global HIV-AIDS effort deals with 20-30 countries, thousands of direct collaborators, and millions of potential beneficiaries.

## Listening for Meaning and Understanding the Context

*Jacob Gayle*

**A Culture of Inclusion.** Working in the area of HIV, we have inherited a culture and an expectation of inclusion in discussions, in deliberation, in the direction of programming efforts, and in the evaluation of the activities. This culture was born very early in the epidemic out of what many people might consider guerrilla warfare. Our offices were taken over by organizations like Act Up. That and other experiences taught me how important it is to bring all concerned people to the table for HIV planning.

To that end, we, as the U.S. government, not only took a leadership role in convening 41

other countries, but also committed ourselves at the December 1994 Paris AIDS Summit Declaration to be as participatory as possible in our activities and interventions and in planning and evaluating them. In the spirit of what I call the HIV culture, we felt that the participation of all involved was vital.

Messaye Girma and Holly Fluty will describe the joys and sorrows, pains and agonies, thoughts and second thoughts that were involved in trying to understand who our customers, stakeholders, and partners are and how we include them in and obtain their commitment to a global effort.

## Philosophy of the Design for Participation

*Messaye Girma*

The premise of the participation strategy was that stakeholder commitment and technical quality lead to the high performance of a portfolio--in this case, the HIV-AIDS portfolio. The vision for our strategy was for stakeholders not just to come to agreement, but to become committed. Our approach can be summed up in one sentence: People support what they help create. Our participation strategy was to transcend consultation and create meaningful involvement.

**Features of the Participatory Process.** Whose commitment do we want? To identify stakeholders, we used a service triangle, with suppliers, customers, and “critical affectors” of a product or service at the three corners. Critical affectors include partners and those that can influence, both positively and negatively, the relationship between suppliers and customers.

- In our case, the **development objective** was drawn from the mission statement of the PHN Center: the provision of quality field support, global leadership and research services;
- the **beneficiaries** (or “customers”) are USAID missions and bureaus; host country national HIV-AIDS control

program managers, and PVOs/NGOs working in HIV-AIDS;

- the **provider** of the services is PHN’s HIV-AIDS Division; and
- the division’s **partners** are multilateral and bilateral donor agencies working in HIV-AIDS, and, within USAID, PPC.

The participation process we wanted has four requirements: it must (1) generate commitment rather than agreement; (2) minimize risk by allowing periodic evaluation, correction, or improvement; (3) be transferrable for use by customers and partners for their own strategic planning; and (4) build on already existing experience and best practices within USAID.

According to organizational behavior and social psychology theory, six major factors engender commitment: a commonly valued objective, collaboration, stakeholder representation, shared decision-making (or “empowerment”), a quality product, and feedback to and from stakeholders on process outcomes.

When we designed the roadmap for our participation strategy, we incorporated all of those factors in a logical sequence.



**Phases of the Participatory Process.** The participation strategy was to be implemented in three phases.

The first phase—“Visioning”—was intended to describe the set of necessary and sufficient objectives in HIV-AIDS and produce a stakeholder-created Universal Framework of Objectives (UFO) for HIV-AIDS. This UFO was created by the collaborative effort of hundreds of stakeholders (representing the service triangle described above) at a series of town meetings and workshops in Beijing, Chiang Mai, Jerusalem, Kampala, Santiago and Washington. The creation of the UFO was a landmark achievement in that it reconciled previously competing perspectives such as biomedical versus behavioral approaches.

The second phase—“Focusing”—was intended to identify which of the UFO objectives should be pursued by G/PHN. In two workshops, stakeholder representatives selected a subset of objectives that G/PHN should include in its strategic objectives through the analyses of USAID’s comparative advantage and the application of multivoting strategies.

The third phase—“Planning”—was intended to decide how best to achieve the objectives selected in the previous phase. A core team of major institutional stakeholders and USAID refined the results framework and created the results packages that would constitute the PHN’s HIV-AIDS portfolio.

**The Outcomes of the Approach.** *Stakeholder Commitment.* There is no question that the participation process achieved customer and partner commitment to G/PHN’s strategic plan for HIV-AIDS. The main elements of the plan were presented at USAID Health Officers’ meeting in Nairobi, National Council for International Health in Washington, and XI International Conference on HIV-AIDS in Vancouver.

In each case, the stakeholders were able to identify their contributions to the design of the strategy; they evidenced a sense of co-ownership over the plan and reported their commitment to its success. In Vancouver, both the strategy and the participatory process by which it had been designed received a standing ovation from the

assembled international stakeholders and experts in HIV-AIDS. There was evident a “crescendo of commitments” by increasingly specific groups of stakeholders to increasingly specific outcomes throughout the participatory process: to the UFO in phase 1; to G/PHN’s share of that UFO in phase 2; and finally, to G/PHN’s strategic plan in phase 3.

*Demand-responsive Design.* The strategic objective plan is very responsive to the demands of G/PHN’s customers. Every major theme that arose through the participation process was incorporated as a result, or as a cross-cutting theme, in the strategic objective plan. All results or cross-cutting themes have performance indicators associated with them, thereby assuring the accountability of PHN for their achievement.

*High Technical Quality.* Several features of the design of G/PHN’s strategic objective plan for HIV-AIDS made it a quality product.

- The strategic objective plan, or results framework, describes a **holistic strategy** that is specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time-bound. Further, G/PHN has made a commitment to treating this results framework as a single strategy through improved programmatic coordination between itself and its customers and partners, and improved technical coordination among its implementing agencies.
- The strategic objective itself acknowledges the **pivotal role of field-level partners** in translating G/PHN’s services into greater and more sustainable impacts on the epidemic. HIV-AIDS is a development issue as well as a public health issue, and effective responses will include the provision of basic care services for the infected and affected, the protection of the rights and dignity of especially vulnerable communities, and the empowerment of local actors so that they may be better able to respond to a pandemic that is here to stay.

- The chosen results represent those **programmatic choices** that maximize both the impact on the epidemic, and PHN's comparative advantages.
- HIV-AIDS is here to stay, and **sustainability** is therefore emphasized as a result. Sustainability will be achieved to the extent that organizations working in other areas broaden their portfolios to include HIV and AIDS work; commercial firms provide information and services to their
- workers; and NGOs dedicated to HIV-AIDS are able to broaden their funding base and deepen their management skills. PHN, by virtue of USAID's experience and relationships with U.S. PVOs, the private sector, and the international networks of NGOs working in HIV and AIDS, is well-placed to take a leadership position.

Will G/PHN's HIV-AIDS portfolio be characterized by an expanded and more coordinated response to HIV-AIDS as a consequence of this participatory approach? It is too soon to tell. However, if the outcome-level achievements described above are supplemented by a participatory, flexible, and responsive management system during implementation, it is not unreasonable to expect that joint programming of the sort described above, mission buy-ins to the HIV-AIDS strategic objective, and aggressive donor coordination will increase over current levels.

## Best Practices and Remaining Questions

*Holly Fluty*

This huge effort has been built on best practices. Much of our approach to developing and implementing the participatory process wasn't necessarily brand new, although it may have been applied in a new way or revamped. When I think about what has been learned through the agricultural extension experience in community networks; the distance learning from the education sector; capacity building from the PVC Child Survival Grants Program; community mobilization from the environmental sector; social marketing, which USAID pioneered; policy and advocacy tools; as well as the huge issue of empowerment of women, we certainly do not need to reinvent those lessons.

Nevertheless, we did use some innovative techniques which I think are worth mentioning. In particular, in the Washington town meeting in phase 1 of our process, we used the "open space" technology in which a workshop agenda is determined by the participants rather than by the organizers or facilitator. As a result, a

wealth of topics that we had not considered appeared as foci for discussion, such as the role of kinship systems in prevention and care interventions. This was new for me. Not setting an agenda was rather risk-taking and difficult to explain. The common question was, "Well, what are you going to find out?" We knew the type of information we were going to find, but not exactly what the information was going to be.

**Listening and Asking for Feedback.** It was very interesting to listen to what other people were saying but sometimes difficult to respect the information. Active listening and respecting the information are a lot more difficult than one might think. However, we gained increasing respect for stakeholder input because the technical "giants in the field," as we called them, confirmed many of the themes that stakeholders were voicing. A skill that we had to develop was that of active listening.

While the participation plan was still being drawn up, I showed it to a fellow friend in the agency. Her comment was, “It’s too top-heavy. It’s still too Washington-based. You’re still in the driver’s seat.” While I obviously thought that we had produced a beautiful product, I realized I had to listen. As a result, to actively involve the missions, we developed a tool kit for them using the open-space technique. It was presented as an opportunity to learn a new technique and as a way of eliciting information about what we were doing as well as about what the missions were doing.

Another aspect of listening is asking for feedback. I sent an e-mail out to all of the PHN missions about this Participation Forum and asked for comments. I only received one, and it was negative: Washington does not provide feedback on the results of the planning activities. I hate to admit it but this comment is right. We have relayed information on what we are doing and how we are doing it but have not been systematic about providing feedback on what happened and why. It’s a lesson about participation. Don’t ask people for information unless you get back to them on how you use that information. We all believe in this principle, but documenting outcomes takes a huge amount of time, and we haven’t been as systematic about it as we should have been. At 6:30 in the evening, when I really don’t want to put in an eleventh hour, it’s tough to go that extra mile.

**Working on a High Performance Team in a Learning Organization.** I have lived the thrill of being on a high-performance team: a team with esprit de corps, with a common purpose. The team is made up of specialists in different fields but all are committed to a common goal. Team members aren’t always trying to push their own agenda but are working together cooperatively. Once USAID staff have a taste of that, they always want it for everybody else and continually seek new opportunities for high-performance teamwork.

It’s no small task to achieve real cooperation in this agency. If there are six USAID people in a room, there are seven opinions. USAID people are strong, committed, and

passionate, but when they are able to set their own opinions aside and get to the seventh opinion—the team opinion—it helps make up for the difficulties of working in an agency that is being scaled down.

We made mistakes as we were implementing the participation strategy, but always made the effort to learn from them and to do things better the next time.

**Open Questions.** Some major questions are still unanswered. Number one concerns information: who needs to know what, when, and how much? The culture of USAID is that everybody wants to know everything. Deciding who needs to know what and when affects empowerment, teamwork, and results orientation. There are no guidelines to rely on here.

I have learned that it is difficult to put aside my biases and my “filters” and to accept information provided by others as valid and worthy of inclusion. It is easy to talk about or to conceptualize, but difficult to do.

Another problem is how to incorporate your “product line” into people’s lives when they may be interested in a completely different product line. USAID may be promoting a water system, but the community may be interested in jobs or roads, not water. We have been dealing with this dilemma as an agency forever and ever.

I have a real concern about the amount of time participatory planning takes. I can’t get it all done. We are spending a huge amount of time in meetings. From a professional as well as a personal perspective, I have a real question on the return on the investment in participation. Has this process been worth it? Has it been worth my coming home and taking a deep breath and realizing that my to-do list is the same list that I left the house with, only it has more things on it? I don’t know. It has certainly been worth it from a lot of different perspectives, but in terms of time and money, I’m not sure and won’t know for three to four years.

## **Discussion Session**

### **Feedback to Critical Partners**

**Carol Rice:** Participation is arduous. It takes a long, long time to achieve. We are all convinced that it does result in better programming and more opportunities for people. But it's a hard road getting there.

Feedback is critical. You have to cast a wide net and know when to reel it in. The important thing is feedback to those critical partners who put forth ideas and wondered why their ideas were not included.

**Jacob Gayle:** We have to grapple with the fact that we have turned to the world, literally, and asked for their comments. When we take our strategic objective framework to the Global International Conference in Vancouver, some will say, "I spoke loudly, I spoke clearly, but I don't see myself on the universal objectives tree." We have to explain that we may have heard and understood an idea quite well, but it was not reflected on the tree for some valid reason. Explaining that is the hard part.

#### **Carryover from Design to Implementation**

**Anna Quandt:** In a previous lifetime, I worked as a sociologist in an engineering firm. I was responsible for designing participation programs. During the design period, I could get a high level of commitment by getting the engineers involved in what I was doing and bringing them to meetings and introducing them to the actual villagers who were going to use the irrigation system. The problem was that then our design team went away, and it was very hard to see any carryover from what happened during the design team to the implementation team.

I tell this story because one of the concerns I've had about the Global Project on AIDS is that a number of years ago you put it all together into one big project. I don't know what your plans are. But having managers on board who have learned everything that you've just been through and who are committed to it, should make implementation more effective. Are you going to have to go through the same level of investment when you start up a project? Have we put too much of this investment at the front load and not enough later on?

**Jacob Gayle:** If I can speak candidly, we are confronted by the staffing issue. Not only is it difficult to carry on the participation process while we are still managing our ongoing portfolio, but, also, in actuality, most of this work has fallen on one division, the HIV-AIDS Division within the PHN Center. This division went from thirteen people on the full-time staff to about nine in a twelve-month period. In the next two months there will be two or three more leaving. Given reductions in force and freezes on hiring and bringing people in, we're dwindling away at the very time that we need more people. That makes it difficult to know who the future managers will be. I agree, however, that all of our planning can go for naught if the future managers and leaders do not invest in it at this point.

**Holly Fluty:** I certainly don't have any answers on the issue of inheriting a contract or a cooperative agreement or a program that was designed by somebody else. When I inherit something, I don't inherit a lot of the philosophy and the background and the critical thinking that went into it. Our hope is to document the whys and the why-nots and explain the way in which decisions were made.

## E-Mail Communications

### Regional Health Network in East and Southern Africa

**Dick Sturgis:** Where can a broad consultive process lead? No one knows!!

At REDSO/ESA we have been building the Regional Health network over three years of step by step, insight by insight, recognition of the obvious, hard work, and the continual development of relationships. The major players include the health ministries of 16 countries, a regional secretariat that represents 14 of those countries, two universities, a host of local NGOs, 10 USAID missions, approximately 12 Global projects, at least that many Global Bureau COTRs, the Africa Bureau (approximately 5 key players and one key project), and we are in the process of recruiting and incorporating major donors into the Network. Is it even remotely imaginable that one ministry, two COTRs, and the NGOs could conduct an easy consultive exercise among themselves and come up with SO1 and its IRS? Not a chance.

We believe the steps we have stumbled into and evolved are essential:

1) It is important to know where you want to go in the beginning. The broad consultive process does not discover the goal or objectives, but the pathways for getting there. The sooner that all players know the general ball game and the field on which they will have to play, the better. There are parameters. USAID does maternal and child health, reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS. It does not do emergency medical care, i.e., ambulances and emergency wards.

2) The consultive process is continuous, and this means—like it or not— there will be changes, useful and important changes. For example, the Network has added the focus area on adolescent reproductive health and quality of care. However, post-abortion care, as obvious in hindsight as it is, did not come to the forefront until regional partners demonstrated its importance for the health of women and children and the costs to regional health systems.

3) Relationships based on trust are essential. They allow the process to move, hurdles to be removed or leaped, shared resources to be marshaled, and collaborative implementation to take place. Relationships built in the process of “making it work,” i.e., in implementation, provide the glue that binds the continuing consultive and collaborative process.

## What Participation Means in Disasters and Conflicts

Participation Forum 15: November 30, 1995

Mary Anderson, the principal presenter at the fifteenth Participation Forum, argued that participation in the provision of disaster assistance may be a risky proposition—especially in conflict situations—but it is always possible. The well-known author and consultant on development strategies in emergency situations provided snapshots of what participation looks like in emergency assistance. When authentic participation seems impossible, she stated, it is usually because all possible options have not been considered. The flavor of the give and take is captured in the summary of the discussion and E-mail comments, many by persons with extensive experience in negotiating this tricky terrain. Doug Stafford, AA/Bureau for Humanitarian Response, kicked off the spirited session by contending that the “first wave” of a man-made disaster is not a time for participation.

**Role of Participation Varies by Type of Disaster**

*Doug Stafford*

The role of participation in conflicts and disasters depends upon the type of disaster. In natural disasters quite a lot can be done in terms of participation and training. USAID has been extraordinarily successful in this area. For example, in Bangladesh USAID developed an early-warning system for typhoons and built typhoon shelters that can be used on a regular basis for other purposes. These have saved thousands of lives. Information gathered from talking to Bangladeshis who have been through these storms helps USAID to improve its efforts.

Paul Bell, whom I have known since the Peace Corps in the 1960s, has devoted himself to training many countries in the handling of natural disasters. This summer, in dealing with a volcano eruption on Montserrat, within 48 hours Paul arrived on the scene and told me that everything was under control. What he meant was that he had trained this group of people before; they had been trained in volcanoes

specifically. USAID went in with a volcanologist and wired the volcano to see what it was going to do next, but all of the evacuation plans had been thought out several years before. The people in charge in Montserrat knew what to do.

The situation is different in the first few days of a man-made disaster. An example is Goma in Zaire. In the space of five or six days, a million refugees from Rwanda poured into a moonscape type of setting, where water, food, sanitation, and camp organization became problems almost immediately. In such a situation the task is to coordinate the international agencies that have come to help—to make sure that everything is covered. Once you're through that first wave, the way the camps are set up makes a whale of a difference in how they are going to be run. For example, it is preferable for the women to run food distribution. There's a time for participation, but not until the emergency has stabilized.

## The Lessons and Challenges of Participation in Disasters

*Mary Anderson*

Participation means different things to different people. As I reviewed "The Participation Forum" summaries before preparing this presentation, I was struck at the number of different uses to which the term "participation" is put. We may struggle to understand the concept of participation, but deep in our hearts and souls, we know it's a good idea and are committed to it. We know that people have a right to participate in decisions that make a difference in their lives. We also realize from a practical viewpoint that if people participate in projects and programs, they take ownership of them and accept responsibility for producing results. Yet in any given situation, it may be a struggle to understand the role that participation can play.

At the heart of the issue of participation is the outsider-insider relationship—donor-recipient, programmer-beneficiary. When people with resources—and that includes both physical things and managerial competence and so on—join with people who need resources—the

poor, the disadvantaged, the unempowered—to try to change the status and the prospects of the latter group, participation is the key to whether the effort succeeds or doesn't succeed at all. This is nowhere more obvious than in disasters, both natural and human.

### **Lesson One: Participation Is Always Possible.**

The first lesson I've learned about the role of participation in the difficult settings of disasters and conflicts is that it is possible always, everywhere, and under every circumstance, to provide emergency assistance in ways that rely on and promote the participation of the people receiving the aid. That's a flat-footed lesson.

You may wonder how I can claim this with such determination and insistence. I think I can claim it because of experiences I've been through. About 10 years ago, some of us working in disaster assistance asked ourselves how we could provide emergency assistance in disaster situations in a way that would promote rather

than undermine long-term development and that would leave people better off instead of more dependent. We found, through a study of 45 cases in different places in the world, that the prevalent disaster response focuses on the needs that people have in a disaster and emphasizes urgency, time, and efficiency to meet those needs and to save lives. The primary motivation is to be accountable to the people providing the resources. That's the dominant paradigm of disaster response.

Nonetheless, we also found that some agencies and individuals were able to do more, without sacrificing the sense of urgency and compassion for saving lives. From very early on in a situation, almost from day one, these agencies and individuals recognized the existing capacities of the people who were suffering from the dislocation or the problems of the disaster, the so-called victims, and relied on and supported those capacities as they developed the emergency-response system. Therefore, the people who received the aid participated in the decisions about their own relief assistance. This is not a theory. We observed it in practice in place after place.

**Five Snapshots of What Participation in Disasters Looks Like.** What does participation in disaster assistance look like? It does not look like a series of long meetings in which everyone explains and identifies their needs and in which they together, as a group, identify strategies for meeting those needs—those meetings that we all know about. Neither does it look like lengthy, involved, ethnographic studies: information-gathering enterprises in which donors try to get information about the environment in order to be sensitive to local culture and traditions and so on.

To describe what it does look like, I will give five examples and then step back and explain what I think they have in common.

- **Example One:** In the Philippines, after the Mt. Mayon volcano eruption, a small group of field staff people from an NGO moved into the shelters with the dislocated people and started holding public events each evening. Some of the events were simply fun; others were meetings where the people organized themselves and made collective plans for their return home that would enable them better to withstand future disasters as a community.
- **Example Two:** An international consultant was asked by a U.S. NGO to travel to Central America to assess housing needs after an earthquake. When he arrived, local people gathered around him to inquire what kind of housing the NGO was going to provide. Instead of making promises, he asked them to take him on a walking tour of the town and, as they walked together, he asked them why this building was damaged, why another fell, why another remained standing, etc. The people answered from their experience—because this one was built weakly, that one was not reinforced, this was built with solid materials, etc. At the end of this “tour,” the consultant told the people that they already had the knowledge of how to build well in their setting and, rather than supplying new houses, designed by some outside expert, he recommended that his NGO simply provide support to these people to rebuild their own houses.
- **Example Three:** A feeding program in an Ethiopia drought provided food to people near their homes rather than in a feeding center, in order to ensure that they carried on with “normal” life and were ready to replant as soon as rains came. A feeding program in Somalia

during the war hired a commercial enterprise to transport food through warring lines since this commercial firm was well-connected and able to ensure delivery without theft.

- **Example Four:** In southern Tajikistan, the international staff of an NGO that was involved in reconstruction of damaged housing relied on self-appointed village committees of older women who took it upon themselves to mediate housing disputes that came up when Garmi refugees returned to their homes to find they had been occupied, while they were absent, by Kulyabi people.
- **Example Five:** In a recent program arranged by UNHCR, Rwandan refugee women from one refugee camp were taken to a new camp to meet with the women there. Those from the first camp were able to share the experience they had in establishing a system for welcoming newcomers and for monitoring the impacts of aid (who was getting it and who was not) in their camp so that the women, in the new area, could set up a similar system.

**Common Themes.** These five examples show what participation looks like in a crisis situation. What common themes could be drawn from these examples that would help us get a handle on the issue of participation in disasters?

First, the promotion of participation depends on an attitude more than a set of events and facts. Participation grows out of a deep respect for the people who are already in the setting and a recognition that local people have capacities and are trying to cope. In fact, all who work in disasters know that the immediate response in a disaster is handled by local people. When outside relief arrives, a lot of good stuff is already happening in every disaster situation.

The second theme is that participation fits into what is happening. Disaster response workers with a participation bent look at who's in the situation and what's happening with them.

They do not come in with preconceptions about what is needed or with ideas for setting up new systems. They ask, "What's already going on here? Where are things happening now?"

The third common theme is future orientation. In each example, the approach linked what existed before the crisis and what would remain after the crisis. The interventions in the examples were not time-bound. In southern Tajikistan, disaster workers may have been there briefly reconstructing housing, but they understood that the residents were going to live there a long time, and tension between the Garmi and the Kulyabi was going to last a long time. That is why they chose to work with the village committees.

The fourth common theme is an increase in people's awareness of their own efficacy. Participating in local disaster response efforts gave local people a sense that they were doing something that was worth doing. The outside agency legitimized what they were doing, gave it some support, came in behind it. That, of course, made the people feel able to do more. When people find they can succeed at one thing, they know they can succeed at other things.

**Lesson Two: Participation Is Practical and Principled.** The second lesson is that it is inexcusable not to include participation in disaster assistance from both a practical and a principled perspective. Practically speaking, if participation is possible, why not do it? We know that a better, longer-term outcome ensures ownership and saves resources up front.

From the perspective of principle, if disaster assistance personnel know that omitting participation leaves people worse off than they were before aid was given them, then it is their moral obligation to be mindful of and sensitive about the role of participation.



**Participation in Conflict Settings: Pitfalls and Challenges.** When one enters into a conflict situation—in particular, civilian-based civil wars—a number of things change in the participation formula and present a challenge to all of us. I have spent the last year and a half trying to figure out how we can provide better international assistance in conflict. Is it possible to help local people take ownership of the processes even in a conflict situation?

The first stage of that work led me to write a paper called “The Negative Impacts of International Assistance in Conflict Situations.” The discouraging finding of the paper is that international assistance in conflict situations, even when it is effective on its mandated terms, often exacerbates and reinforces the conflict. The negative effect is brought about in two ways.

The first is through resource transfers. Stories about resources being taxed or stolen by warring parties or used to free up local resources to support warring parties are well known. In other words, the outside resources help pay for the war and reinforce inter-group competition to gain power and control over others. Resources represent power in conflict situations. When resources are introduced into a resource-scarce environment where people are in conflict with each other, those resources become a part of the conflict.

The second way is through the implicit messages carried by conditions under which aid must be provided in conflict situations. I call these the implicit ethical messages of aid. For example, if we hire armed guards to deliver humanitarian assistance or negotiate with warring parties for access to the people who are in need, in essence we are saying that it is legitimate for arms to decide who gets access to aid. While our explicit message is that all have the right to assistance, the implicit message is more troublesome.

In the effort that I’m engaged in we’re trying to find out if there is a way to provide aid in conflict situations without exacerbating the conflict. Are there examples where people have done something else? What can we learn?

**Looking Harder for Options.** We are finding that the choices about how to deliver assistance are loaded in conflict situations. They are loaded politically and in terms of balance of power.

We’re trying to develop a diagnostic tool that people can use in the field, which will help them find out who gains and who loses given certain choices. If we decide to do one thing to deliver aid in a specific conflict situation, who is going to gain and who is going to lose? Knowing this will help them make better choices. We find there are always options. One should think through options a, b, c, ... until an option is found that yields the best outcome.

It is difficult to admit, but in a conflict situation where warring parties are in control, it may be better not to have participation, because those who participate are legitimized or empowered in the process. In Goma, UNHCR people said to me, “But, Mary, we did what you always said. We worked with local leaders.” But the local leaders in Goma were the Hutu who had just committed the genocide. I had not said to UNHCR people that they should work with any local leader; the analysis that we use suggests ways of thinking through who any leaders are and who they represent. In conflict settings, one should be careful about reinforcing leadership that is engaged in war. The point is that, in such a setting, simple “participation” might make things worse.

In spite of the inherent dangers, there are opportunities for participation even in conflict situations. These exist because in all societies there are local capacities for peace, people who are trying to disengage from the conflict, who think that the conflict makes no sense, is not solving any problems, and is being perpetuated by opportunistic leaders or bandits. Those people often get silenced in conflict situations. But they are there.

International assistance can be provided in conflict situations in a way that provides space and opportunity for the peaceful people, that enables them to participate in creating new space for disengaging from the conflict and setting up alternative systems for solving the problems that the conflict is putatively there to solve.

These opportunities are probably not to be found among existing leadership in conflict situations because the leaders represent the warring factions. To see the opportunities, one must take a giant step back in the conflict situation and see who is going to gain, who is going to lose, and where the options are for participation.

## Discussion Session

### The Difficulty of Understanding Conflict Situations

**Nan Borton:** Ninety-five percent of OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance) resources go into conflict situations in which the persons with whom we are working are themselves hostages of the sides in the conflict. The more advice we can get about how to provide assistance in a way that does not endanger people the better.

There seems to be an assumption that those who provide the assistance understand the conflict situation, but I believe that in most conflict situations the relatively helpless and frequently uninformed include those who are providing assistance—and not just the PVOs, but the donors as well. The conflict situations we face are so complex and such a long time in the making that disaster assistance personnel may not appreciate the effects of their actions.

In thinking about our work, we should keep in mind that anarchy and peace (or development and disaster) are on a continuum. We need to recognize that disaster assistance is an event in a much larger process.

### Participation in Needs Assessment

**Mike Mahdesian:** I first got into disaster assistance during the Armenian earthquake in 1988. I noticed that a lot of people with good will tried to push assistance on people without knowing what was going on or what was needed. For example, many churches sent over donated shoes or clothes or cans of Campbell's soup that weren't needed and that clogged up the arteries of

the relief networks and prevented essential materials from reaching Armenia.

When I got into USAID, I was happy to see that OFDA had a long practice of doing assessment training. OFDA was constantly battling people in other departments that had ideas about what should be provided in a given disaster situation but that had not done their needs-assessment homework. The idea of participation in the sense of talking to people to find out what the needs are and what is culturally sensitive or likely to cause dependency is ingrained in practice.

### Alternatives to Working with Illegitimate Political Leadership

**Rick Barton:** How can we avoid working with illegitimate political leadership? In OTI (Office of Transition Initiatives), we'll work with any group that we think has some of the power of the people behind it. But it is a little bit like "the Force": such groups are hard to identify at times. How do you reach the captive majority?

**Mary Anderson:** My reaction is that we need to work harder to identify options. It is important to think of every possible way to work in the situation that might do less to legitimize the illegitimate government. For example, if you are making decisions about how to deliver food, you might try to think of the possible ways to deliver food. Doug Stafford mentioned an interesting way: delivering it through the systems in the society that food for consumption usually gets delivered through; that is, through women. In African society, women are responsible for household food, by and large, and men are responsible for cash crops. If you distribute food through women, at least the implicit message is that this food is for household consumption. If you deliver it through men, the implicit message is that the food is related to markets and power and income. Food can be delivered through commercial firms that may or may not be party to the illegitimate government.

The point is that we are far too quick to say that we don't have any options. If there is really no choice but an illegitimate group, then maybe the choice is to say we shouldn't work in that situation. If what we're doing is so bad, maybe we shouldn't do it.

**Diane La Voy:** What options have any of you considered that may move you away from a losing situation?

**Rick Barton:** In Liberia, the government has been illegitimate for so long that now the only way to get peace is to have the warlords be part of the government in waiting. We are trying to finesse that problem and see if there is some way to move into a community-based design that may get some of those resources that are now held captive in greater Monrovia. It's an interesting design, but we run up against the apolitical traditions of many disaster relief people: we are saving lives; we don't do politics. It's hard to push politics out, even though there is a great desire to do it on the part of the various NGOs on the ground. The public is perhaps ready to express itself, but still people are insecure. If they speak out now, they will probably die. So our offering them liberation may be a bit premature.

### **The Impossibility of Pure Humanitarian Assistance**

**Linda Howey:** I see a paradox or a conundrum in the notions that we should be providing disaster assistance apart from the political context and that participation therefore may not work in all instances. I cannot think of an instance where there isn't some sort of participation, where we are not sending some sort of ethical message. Can we actually deliver "pure" humanitarian assistance? Because there is no such thing as pure humanitarian assistance, we have to have options. We really have to think

about what we are doing in a different way. We are embodying participation to some degree or another, I would reckon, in every situation in which we're operating.

**Nan Barton:** I would disagree with Linda. There are areas—I'm thinking particularly of Rwandan refugees—where the programs are going forward in a totally nonparticipatory fashion or in a pseudo or semi or sort of superficially participatory fashion because the populations are not free. The populations are under military control in the refugee camps themselves.

**Diane La Voy:** I will ask Mary to have the last word briefly, and this is very much too bad, but we do have to be out of the room early today. And all additional comments, we will just troop down to our office, and you can talk further with Mary if you'd like to there.

**Mary Anderson:** I am thinking of "participation" more as a way that we're recognizing capacities and relying on those capacities to make things happen. Sometimes it may be preferable for the external agency to keep decision-making within its own control. That may help local people who want to disengage from the power struggle to find the space they need to develop new options and alternatives.

### **First: Do No Harm**

**Mary Anderson:** We cannot empower people. Outsiders never empower people, but they can certainly disempower them. Likewise, outsiders cannot liberate people or fix their governments or design their master plans, but they can certainly make things worse. In disaster assistance, we are stuck in a place where we can never get it all right. We can certainly get it all wrong. We are trying to minimize the damage that we do and support local people so that they can do the good stuff. In some sense it's not ours to do.

### E-Mail Communications

**Ruth Buckley:** Information and dialogue are critical from day one of our involvement because individuals are never only victims. Rather all people have their own perceptions and priorities to offer and everyone makes specific choices based on their own assessment of the situation.

In addition to ignoring the local context in our haste to 'save lives,' we too often attempt to establish committees to do our work (monitor commodities we deliver in a way that is acceptable to us) and then claim we have had local participation. We also get annoyed or cut off funding because our rules, priorities or standards are not adhered to. We rarely take the time to establish ground rules and benchmarks that are fully understood, let alone ones which have been developed in a participatory manner.

We are also now encouraging U.S.-based NGOs to develop partnerships with local NGOs. However, rather than true partnerships, local NGOs are again being asked to conform to our standards and are being assisted according to western models, to use western systems, and define problems and solutions in western terms. We end up with NGOs which can deliver emergency assistance according to our rules and regulations cheaper than U.S.-based NGOs but in a manner which is not necessarily appropriate or representative and may be little understood by the local population. Rather than promoting this type of partnership shouldn't we be looking at empowering local populations to participate with us on their own terms and in areas they deem important?

## **Bosnia: When Customers Tell Us What We Don't Want to Hear** Participation Forum 20: January 23, 1997

This session builds upon some themes of past forums: participation where there is no time, what participation means in crises and disasters, and what happens when you listen harder. Presenters Mike Mahdesian of the Humanitarian Response Bureau and Jerry Hyman, formerly of the Europe New Independent States (ENI) Bureau and now with the Democracy Center in the Global Bureau, recounted just one small part of the story of USAID assistance in Bosnia. The focus was not on U.S. Bosnia policy, but, rather, on the ways USAID has found to identify and support local priorities, even when this means revising firmly held beliefs and opinions and rethinking programs. The discussion offered practical advice on listening—even when we don't like what we hear. Barbara Turner, Deputy Assistant Administrator for the ENI Bureau, framed the issues for the session.

### **Listening More Than Just Once**

*Barbara Turner*

In my own work in the last few years, in Russia and the newly independent states (NIS), I learned that when there is no government to work with, USAID personnel are forced from day one to talk to a wide array of people. I don't mean to be suggesting that we don't have to work with the government. But we in USAID have a tendency to spend the limited hours that we have in the

minister's office. We never seem to get out beyond official-dom. That's an interesting opportunity, because unfortunately, more and more of our assistance programs in the future are going to be aimed at situations of disruption and transition.

In Bosnia, by starting out essentially without a government, we were forced to work with other

groups. Hopefully, we'll now try to institutionalize the process of bringing some of those groups in touch with their own government—easier said than done, but something we have to have as an objective. While it is not up to us to run the country, it is critical to try to get the government and nongovernmental groups talking to each other.

### **Turning Assumptions on Their Heads**

One of the key things that I got out of my experience in Bosnia over the last three years was how important it is to listen to as many people as possible, because, quite often, U.S. policy imperatives or assumptions will clash with the reality on the ground.

U.S. policy in Bosnia started off supporting the Federation and then the Dayton accords. From my point of view at the Bureau of Humanitarian Response, U.S. policy also supported repatriation, the right of return; freedom of movement; a unified Bosnia; building Bosnian institutions; and jump-starting the economy so that a sense of normalcy could be brought back to the people of Bosnia. We wanted Bosnians to feel that peace is more important and valuable to their lives than military gains. We found, though, when we listened to what was going on in Bosnia, that timing for the USAID programs sometimes is not in sync with U.S. policy imperatives and assumption. Bosnia was a case where many assumptions were turned on their heads.

**Knowing When To Pull Back.** My first experiences in Bosnia were in early 1994 when it was possible to believe in a separate peace within Sarajevo. My colleague Rick Barton went out to Sarajevo about a month or two after I had arrived to assess the situation. While he was there Gorazde was attacked by the Bosnian Serbs, and, within Sarajevo itself, there was increased sniper firing. In a meeting there with Barbara, myself, and Brian Atwood, Rick was describing the pinging sound of sniper bullets, which were hitting no more than a couple of hundred feet away. And at that point, Brian Atwood looked at Rick and

It's not good enough to listen once. To listen more than once may mean setting up a participation process so that participation will continue in some form. In Bosnia, some things we found out just six or eight months ago are probably already changing, not always for the better, in terms of what people want to do.

*Mike Mahdesian*

said, "Rick, I don't think this environment is ripe for a transition at the moment." We wisely shelved the idea of a separate peace in Sarajevo.

**Experimenting with Small Projects.** In 1994, one of the great achievements of U.S. policy was creating a Federation between Muslims and Croats in Bosnia. Even though it existed more on paper than in reality, it changed the dynamics on the ground. We tried to see how we could support federal institutions and reconciliation in communities that were divided between Muslims and Bosnian Croats.

A multidisciplinary USAID team went out to Bosnia to look at various options. A big, thick study was written, and then we started to implement some of its proposals. We started experimenting with what we called "venture capital," about a million dollars' worth of small projects to test out the theory that the time was ripe for reconciliation between the Croats and Muslims within the Federation.

We created four criteria for small projects. One was building Federation institutions; the second was multi-ethnic participation; the third was joint projects that would build physical bridges between communities, such as infrastructure projects; and the fourth was implementing projects in a way that builds on the democratic process. If two of the four were there, we approved a project.

Some 30 projects were begun in various parts of the Federation. As things began to change during the summer of 1995, such as the resurgence of Croatia and further gains made by the Federation army within Bosnia itself, suddenly the willingness of some of the

participants in these reconciliation programs began to taper off drastically. In particular, the Bosnian Croats pulled back because they began to think that they would one day be part of a greater Croatia, and they suddenly became very wary of doing anything with the Federation.

Of the 30 or so projects, only six or seven were actually coming to fruition. Some were stopped at the last minute, not by the local people who participated in the design of the projects, but by central authorities in Mostar or Sarajevo. Understanding that was very important for the future design of some of our projects.

### **The Gersonys' Iterative, In-Depth Listening.**

Before the Dayton negotiations started, Brian Atwood sent out two specialists, Bob and Cindy Gersony, to assess the feasibility of some quick-impact-type projects to help parts of a society recover immediately after a conflict. Brian wanted to explore how USAID could jump-start the economy in a post-Dayton environment in such a way that would further repatriation and normalcy inside of Bosnia.

Bob and Cindy Gersony spent three months going up and down Bosnia, talking to 400 or so people from all walks of life—government officials, intellectual elites, as well as people on the street.

In Washington the idea of using conditionality in our foreign assistance in the post-Dayton environment was being pushed. That is, U.S. foreign assistance would be a carrot or a stick, depending on how the localities behaved regarding cross-ethnic return, freedom of movement, and so on. I was supportive of using our assistance to achieve these purposes, but once I read the Gersony report and matched it with the reports we were getting back from our Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) projects, I learned that our assistance was not having an impact on the behavior of local officials. All politics in Bosnia were *not* local; all politics in Bosnia were central; and these were being controlled by the various entity capitals in Mostar, Sarajevo, and later in Celji.

We were thinking of supporting NGOs in projects with a reconciliation component. In other words, NGOs would have to go to the local

communities and tell them that if they got involved in some reconciliation-type activities, they might get some assistance. That situation would be tantamount to NGOs' trying to conduct diplomacy when diplomacy really needed to be conducted by officials in the U.S. State Department. This was one of many reasons that we began to turn against using conditionality on a local level.

We began to realize as well that the time might not be ripe for making reconciliation the total focus of our program. Perhaps we should further other U.S. government aims, such as repatriation. What was realistic and possible at the time was repatriation in majority ethnic areas, not in minority return areas.

When questioned by the Gersonys, people first would say, "Oh, we miss our Croat or Muslim neighbors, and we think fondly of them." But when the assessors asked more in-depth questions, people expressed resentment, if not outright hatred, for their neighbors for doing whatever it was that they had done. In fact, they did not want to live next door to their old neighbors at this time. They weren't ready for that. Passions were still much too raw. Again, that tracked with what we were getting back from some of the OTI experimental projects.

**A More Realistic Approach.** We began to craft a quick-impact program that would further repatriation, but do it in a way that was realistic.

We wanted a program that would build some physical space, and hopefully that would bring people home and have a chain reaction. We attempted to use local contractors to repair housing that was too damaged for a self-help type program. It would help jump-start the economy, and bring people who were staying in other people's residences in towns and cities back to the villages where they came from. That in turn would free up other space.

One of the six successful things that OTI projects had done was a shelter-repair project around the Kruševac area. The houses were built so well there that even attempts to burn them from the inside with phosphorus bombs did not succeed. Homes were repaired—both Bosnian and Croat homes—and the people came back.

But that was in the no-man's-land area, and it was in the interest of both sides that these people return. In other areas, it would probably backfire to try to push minority returns.

We tried to figure out the best way to repair these houses quickly because we had only a small window between the time the snows thawed in March and the time the snows came back in October. We had to be ready to go by mid-spring.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees had been pursuing a self-help program in which materials would be provided on the assumption that Bosnians are skilled and able to repair their own shelters. When the Gersonys asked people if they intended to rebuild or repair their own houses, everyone said, "Sure, that's what we plan to do." But if they were asked if

they actually were going to wield a hammer and start repairing the roof, they said, "Oh, no. We'll just hire a local contractor. We'll oversee it and supervise it, but we'll hire a local contractor." In other words, the self-help project was just not going to happen.

Another assumption was that the best people to do housing were large contractors, and NGOs weren't staffed up to deal with large contractors. But in Bosnia, again, this assumption was turned on its head. The NGOs *had* staffed up. They had people that could build housing and small infrastructure. They knew some of the contractors; they knew the process of weeding out the good ones from the bad. We began to use the NGO model. It became the quickest approach. We completed over 2,500 shelters in the time that we said we would.

**The Benefits of Listening.** If we had not listened to the people on the ground, if our assessors had not kept asking questions to get beyond superficial answers, if our reporting had not been honest—even from people who ended up having their programs pulled out from under them, I think we would have made many mistakes and probably wasted a lot of money.

*Diane La Voy: For the purposes of our discussion in a few minutes, let me pull out from your account two concrete methodologies for understanding people's views in a war-torn society. One is the "venture capital" idea: to offer to support people to do something they've identified—and to see what happens. The other is the iterative, in-depth interviewing approach used by the Gersonys.*

## Intellectual and Emotional Learning

*Jerry Hyman*

Bosnia is a place of dashed hopes, fairly large stakes, and assumptions overturned. A lot of things that we learned through participation—that OTI learned through the small projects and the Gersony trip and that we in ENI learned—were not new. It's that we learned them more in depth than before. We learned emotionally rather than just intellectually.

**Four Realities.** After the elections in September 1996, with the help of OTI, Susan Kazinski and I—Susan is with the USAID mission in

Sarajevo—went around to three or four cities and tried to figure out what the elections foretold about the future of Bosnia and how our program could be responsive to the realities on the ground.

Four realities struck us at the end of that trip. All of them were things that we knew intellectually but not emotionally.

*The first was that the election and the war leading up to it were about the shape of the state itself. In Bosnia, the issue at stake was the nature and shape of the state itself, not merely who was going to control the political or*

economic resources of a “Bosnian state.”

The point of the Dayton accords was to reconstruct a multi-ethnic, pluralistic Bosnia, but all three ethnic communities came to the same piece of paper with radically different visions of what that paper would hold for them in the future. Each party could find language in the accords for its own interpretation.

*The second reality was that fear—not hope, not commitment, not passion—drove the September elections. One question we asked people was why the opposition had done so much worse than expected? The same people who were there in 1990 had just been reelected—the same people who brought them the war were back in power. People responded that it was fear: the prisoner’s dilemma. People in one community were unwilling to vote for the opposition party because they were afraid that people in the other community would vote for their nationalist party, rather than for their opposition. The community that cast some votes for the opposition would be divided for the next four years and would be on the outs, while the other communities would be unified. That was the rationale in each one of the three communities: the Serbs, the Croats, and certainly the Bosniacs. Each community voted its fears in response to what it thought the other community was going to do rather than what it thought was best for itself.*

*The third reality was the economic depression and its effect on people’s visions of what they thought they could achieve politically and economically. They had an exaggerated notion of the value of their resources, especially their industrial resources, and each of the communities thought the others were trying to grab those resources away from them. The political life of Bosnia was dominated by the efforts of the three communities to create conditions in which they could keep those resources for themselves.*

*The fourth reality was the variation within subregions, or localities. We found out that there needed to be more latitude for local variations within the parameters of a general strategy than we had expected. There were differences within Republica Srpska and within each part of the Federation. We needed micro-*

strategies to respond to these variations.

**Policy Impact of the Four Realities.** The result of our trip was that after we’d listened to people, a number of our initial assumptions were changed. We assumed that we would be doing a lot of government institution-building after the elections. But the basic underlying political support for those institutions was not as strong as we presumed it would be. We concluded that this was not the right time to be emphasizing the institutions that were defined in Dayton and that were to be actualized by the elections. Rather, we needed to pay more attention to breaking the terror that people felt, breaking the fear, the isolation, and the control that the various central political authorities had over information. We needed to give people a stake in Bosnia itself by breaking down the isolation that had created so many misperceptions. So strengthening media became the number one priority in our strategy.

The second priority was to strengthen political parties as a vehicle for the expression of differing opinions. We wanted to make it possible for people to vote their hopes instead of their fears, and to have a more pluralistic political environment.

The third priority was civil society and the fourth was governance.

These priorities were actually a temporal sequence: what to do first and what second. After we had listened to people from all three groups expressing their hopes and fears, the sequence that we had assumed we would be pursuing after the elections needed to be turned on its head.

## **Discussion Session**

**Jerry Hyman:** Bosnia was particularly difficult because the issues challenged some fundamental beliefs of Americans. We believe that people should be treated as individuals in a pluralistic society. As an American, I was very reluctant to give up the idea that there could be a reunified Bosnia. To see the spirit of unity destroyed, not only on Sarajevo but all over Yugoslavia, was difficult, not merely because of our bureaucratic interests, but because of who we are and what we stand for.



**Mike Mahdesian:** It's important that we be ready for openings on reconciliation and other goals that the United States wants to pursue in Bosnia. There's a danger of not listening and of being too cynical and saying that reconciliation will never happen in Bosnia.

**Barbara Turner:** We have not given up on reconciliation in Bosnia. We are just taking different routes to it. One of the routes is the physical infrastructure route. For example, in building an integrated railroad system, you get railroad guys to begin to talk together, not about politics, but about the size of track. This kind of communication gets us a little bit closer to reconciliation.

**Howard Sumka:** I'd like to put a word in for how difficult it was to make physical improvements in Bosnia.

We started the process with reconciliation and ethnic collaboration objectives but quickly realized that nothing would ever get built if we didn't move in a more directed way. Getting things going laid the basis for reconciliation activities. To build democracy people had to have a sense that their communities were once again going to be intact, that they were going to have a place to live and were going to be able to resume their normal lives.

We have looked for legitimate authority at the closest level to the people to identify projects and oversee implementation. That has meant working with municipal governments, identifying community groups, and getting demobilized soldiers working on small reconstruction projects. When we have had the opportunity, we've gone as close as we can to the people—who are the beneficiaries of these projects.

## **Listening Broadly and Repeatedly through In-Depth Interviewing**

**Bobby Herman:** Listening is very difficult in war-torn, mobilized and highly politicized societies. How do you make sure that you are meeting with a representative cross-section? And how do you establish mechanisms for ongoing listening after you've done your initial assessments?

**Mike Mahdesian:** In the case of the Gersonys, I don't know how scientific their sample was, but it was voluminous. As I said, they talked to over 400 people. I don't think they got a balanced cross-section necessarily, but I think they talked to enough people to get a sense of public opinion.

Bob would never take a straight-up answer if he felt something was being held back. He would spend a couple hours with people and keep probing in a very friendly way. He doesn't try to put people on the spot, nor does he have a list of questions that he ticks off one after the other. The first thing he tries to do is create a sense of confidence and trust. Sometimes he would spend several days. He'd come back to a conversation, and find a way to dislodge what might be lying below the surface. I don't know if you can bottle that method.

**Diane La Voy:** Bob Gersony is an individual with the ability to pull off, alone or as a two-person team, something that we usually associate with a very rigorous methodology—rapid or participatory rapid appraisal. It is by definition an intense and iterative process, as opposed to a survey. Questions are not decided upon ahead of time, so one of the sources of bias is immediately removed. The appraisal is usually conducted by a team, and team members work to keep each other honest. They ensure that the professional biases that one person brings are neutralized by a rigorous process of discussing each point among themselves after an interview. That is nearly what we have in the “Gersony method.”

**Charles Santangelo:** Jerry, did you use the USIA polls to guide your efforts, and did you do your own polling?

**Jerry Hyman:** It was the USIA polls, which were excellent, that had led us to believe that the “nationalist” parties would do less well than they did and that the opposition parties would do better than they did. It was precisely the USIA polls that led us to ask people what had happened—why had the opposition done so poorly.

## *Part Three*

# Enabling Participation

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Discussion of participation inevitably leads to the “yes, but” issues—the real—world limitations on staff time and authority that often make it hard for development agencies to listen broadly, share decision making with partners, and respond flexibly to local initiatives.

In the following selections, USAID staff explore how participatory approaches might require that we organize ourselves and our work. For example, holding ourselves accountable for achieving results that our customers value (an idea undergirding USAID’s reforms) requires two-way communication linking Agency staff and implementing partners and end-users. Also, responsiveness to local initiatives may require innovative thinking about procurement processes.

Two quite different *Forum* sessions explore the idea that front-line staff who feel trusted by their management and accountable to their customers for the results they achieve can tailor their work better to the particular needs of customers. In the first session, research findings on the performance of public sector agencies in Northeast Brazil suggest this proposition. At the next *Forum*, comparable insights about the “reengineered” city management of Austin, Texas, spur USAID staff to draw connections between their own ability to work effectively in empowered, accountable teams, and the Agency’s ability to build opportunities for participation. An e-mail message commented, “USAID employees cannot commit ourselves to our partners to any greater extent than the Agency can commit itself to us.” The last two *Forums* in this part suggest that the relationship between USAID/Washington and the missions needs to be clear if the Agency is to work well with customers and partners.

The final selections set these discussions and experiences in a policy context. Former Administrator Atwood’s 1993 *Statement of Principles on Participatory Development* expresses the Agency’s renewed commitment to values of participation, partnership, and customer orientation. Commenting by e-mail on the *Forums* and other efforts that this Statement launched, staff in 1994 and 1995 sounded various notes of hope and “deja vu;” and participants in a *Forum* session provided candid praise, criticism, and suggestions for how to improve the Agency’s support for participation. Finally, in the 1998 paper, *Engaging Customer Participation*, staff chronicle the Agency’s organizational change efforts since 1993 and draw from an ambitious *stocktaking* exercise to discuss progress to

date. “Successful organizational change,” the paper concludes, “builds on the organization’s culture and best practices” and “takes time and requires clear and sustained leadership.”

## 6. Reorienting USAID's Operating and Management Systems

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### Customer Service Plans—What's New?

Participation Forum 11: March 23, 1995

“Customer surveying,” “customer service plans,” “customer outreach”: are these terms just “newspeak” for what we have been doing for years? This Forum session began by focusing briefly on several examples of innovative, energetic approaches to “customer outreach” and participation. Against this backdrop, the session focused on the question, “So why do we need ‘customer service plans’?”

Presenters and other participants emphasized the value of making customer outreach a regular part of operations, of focusing more on the ultimate consumer, and of recognizing the right of the customer to hold us (and the various partners between the customer and USAID) accountable for meeting standards to which we've committed ourselves. Following are summaries of presentations by Sher Plunkett of the Results Oriented Reengineering Office; Cynthia Rozell, Mission Director for Malawi; Jim Anderson, Mission Director for Niger; and Pamela Johnson, on loan from USAID to the National Performance Review. Phyllis Dichter-Forbes, who leads USAID's reengineering effort, challenged the group to consider how setting customer service standards empowers our customers to influence our performance.

#### Making Our Best Practices Part of the System

*Sher Plunkett*

“Customer focus,” a “core value” in USAID's reengineering, is probably the most exotic term used to date for describing the most familiar and the most prized value for all of us working with USAID.

Customer focus as a part of reengineering has essentially two roots: first, the mandate provided by Executive Order 12862, September 1993, in which the administration mandated all federal agencies to develop customer service plans; and second, the traditional USAID commitment to deliver development assistance to poor people while achieving foreign assistance goals. The new mandate and our traditional focus have twined together nicely as the agency attempts not only to reengineer internally, but also to convince the American people that what we do is meaningful and important to our overall foreign

policy objectives.

The reengineering task force examined the term “customers” and determined that, in the USAID context, it meant the end users of our program services: the people whom we exist to serve. A complication for USAID is that our “ultimate customers” are often linked through a chain of intermediate customers. Mission people often tend to think of intermediaries, like counterpart ministries, as their customers, because that's who they deal with most. In fact, USAID's links to its customers are like those of the manufacturer to wholesaler to retailer to consumer. A customer service plan looks at the relationship of customer X to customers Y and Z and tries to determine what USAID can do to help or encourage customer X to reach customers Y and Z. Further, the plan also looks at customer

Z—the end of the line—to find out if the services are wanted or being delivered or both. In other words, in customer service planning, each operating unit in the agency identifies its customers, traces customer linkages, defines the needs at each link, and analyzes service gaps between the promise and the performance,

### **Asking Ourselves Whom We Weren't Talking To**

When Diane La Voy talked about participation at the mission directors conference about a year ago, my reaction was that, in our plans for developing our country five-year plan, we had all the bases covered. I kept thinking, “Oh, of course we’re doing that.” Back in Malawi, our first reaction was again that we know what we’re doing; we talk to people; we know what our customers want.

In our ag sector programs, for instance, we have a series of beneficiary surveys. We spend three months each year with beneficiaries to see what happens with their lives, and we repeat the process each year in the same villages to look at any changes that have occurred. In our democracy/governance programs and in our health programs, we go out to villages regularly and do serious focus group work to get feedback on what’s working and what isn’t. In addition, we have the demographic and health surveys which are important in showing what’s happening in population and health. Finally, we have public and private sector committees that meet regularly, quarterly or twice a year, to track the objectives and the results under each of our program areas.

The new government of Malawi has set up another set of systematic consultations—a change after a 30-year history of little consultation. They’ve set up 11 poverty alleviation task forces, which mobilize just about every organized group in Malawi, including the donors, the government, the semi-government, and the private sector.

We were feeling pretty comfortable until we decided to look at the question differently and continued, now that the CPSP process is finished. Once every six months we will sit down and

through systematic feedback.

Other aspects of the executive order include developing and monitoring service standards and reporting both to USAID and to the customers, saying, “This is how we think we’re doing. How do you think we’re doing?”

*Cynthia Rozell*

ask ourselves whom we weren’t talking to. It didn’t take us long to come up with a substantive, if not long, list of people who were important to the society of Malawi but were either not direct USAID beneficiaries or not people directly involved in our programs, people whom we had no systematic way of reaching. They were traditional leaders, tribal chiefs, village chiefs, religious leaders, retired people who might have been civil servants for 20 years or more. A problem was that none of the mission staff is fluent in Chichewa, the language spoken by most of them.

The solution—and this is probably not the right answer in every case—was to ask a Malawian, with whom we had a longstanding relationship, to help in drawing up a list of people across political party lines and traditional and modern sector lines. (He happened to be the newly elected vice president.) We called the list of about 20 people that he prepared for us the Senior Advisory Group and invited its members to participate during the Country Program Strategic Planning (CPSP) period.

For most of the mission people, this turned out to be one of their most rewarding experiences in Malawi. The group met three times during the CPSP. As concerned citizens, they were eager to participate, though there was nothing in it for any of them: no job, no funding. Their only concern was with what made development sense for their country. They contributed both a fresh view on priorities and a validation of what we’d been hearing from our other client groups. This group is being review progress on some of the strategies they helped us develop.

## **Niger Experiments with a Customer Survey Plan**

*Jim Anderson*

As a country experimental lab, Niger is developing a customer survey plan as part of our effort to incorporate the four core values—customer focus, results orientation, participation, and teamwork—into the strategic planning process. Our aim is to make this more than a plan with a list of targets that can be measured. We want it to become a state of mind. We want our officers to pick up on where a customer survey is needed to address an issue that has come up in the context of implementing a program. Our staff must be sensitive to what is happening with their programs from the standpoint of participation.

The participation plan and its customer survey aspects will require us to reconfigure our human resources. We need staff with the skills to understand what is going on, to ask the right questions in the surveys, and to implement what has been learned. Practically speaking, we can't get by with 3/3 in French in Niger if this is to be a true participatory mission. We need people who

know Africa, who know the Sahel, people with negotiating skills. I'm looking more closely at the criteria that we're using for selecting our U.S. direct-hire staff. I'm also using our Foreign Service national staff differently. They have more of the needed skills than do the Americans, and they will have to be permitted to do things that they are currently prohibited from doing.

We're moving from an ad hoc to a more systematic way of listening to customers. For example, we have a microenterprise project that provides investment funds to the rural areas, especially women, to finance modest activities like purchasing an oil press to enable them to make and sell peanut oil. If the money isn't forthcoming, these ladies—half the cooperative—will come into the capital city and sit on our doorstep telling us that we've got a problem. Now we've begun to use customer surveys to learn about these problems. And when the group feels we are being responsive, it creates a less confrontational operating style.

## **A Government-wide View of Customer Focus**

*Pam Johnson*

From my stint at the National Performance Review, I realize that USAID has been ahead of the rest of the government in the participatory area. Only a handful of government agencies have had a clue about the kinds of tools that USAID has been using for years—focus groups and social marketing, for example. Nobody in the federal government has an assessment tool as valuable as the demographic and health surveys. USAID has built a knowledge base unique in the federal government. We have a tremendous amount to be proud of.

What I didn't expect to hear was validation of some of the things I've been working on at the NPR: the implications of what happens when you really start talking and listening to your customers; the discussions about the importance of the front line, the importance of missions, front-line action officers, front-line employees; and the need to go out and ask customers what they want.

This is exactly the same kind of thing we're seeing domestically, and I could tell lots of wonderful stories about it. For example, the IRS surveyed its customers—which we all are—and found things that surprised them and that they didn't even like to hear. They thought that if they were just friendlier and nicer, people would like them more. "Well," people told them, "the less we hear from you, the happier we are." They have taken this into account in their business plan and said, "How can we minimize the impact of our interactions—not make them friendlier and not have everybody have smiley faces?"

**Challenges for USAID.** One particular challenge for USAID is how to relate participation in project design and strategic planning to implementation. For example, what can the director of a health clinic do if a vaccination campaign is planned and the vaccine hasn't shown up? Who can he call? How many steps

must he go through to get that vaccine delivered when and where it's needed? One of the reasons this customer image is so powerful is that we all interact as customers so often in our daily lives. For example, L. L. Bean wouldn't be selling too many plaid shirts if it told a customer trying to order a shirt in size M that he or she should call the Ministry, and the Ministry said to call the USAID office, and the USAID office had to send a cable, etc. Of course, L.L. Bean doesn't have 3,000 outlets; they have a centralized supply. The analogy suggests, however, that USAID must organize to be responsive to the needs of the front line.

Other countries are engaged in the same kind of effort we are. The United Kingdom has drawn up a citizens' charter for all of their government offices and has created *Charter News*, a service quality newsletter. Some 35

### **Service Standards: Committing Ourselves**

Though I've heard a lot of positive statements about involving non-USAID people in the work that we do, I've not heard anything about the standards of a customer service planning process.

We've defined the customer of this agency as the end user, the ultimate beneficiary, the reason for which we exist. We've identified the U.S. PVOs, the Congress, OMB, and the various development groups as the stakeholders who, like the shareholders of a corporation, care a lot about what we do. They give us money to service somebody at the other end. If children don't get better educated, if mothers don't have fewer babies, if their children don't survive longer, if people in the rural areas are not getting richer, then theoretically we have no reason for existing. The presentations have suggested that it is very difficult to reach the end users. That is exactly what customer service plans are about—reaching such people both by direct contact and by ensuring that our grantees, bilateral or NGOs, do so.

It is obvious from today's presentations that USAID is asking people for their opinions. But have we started to systematically look at and codify the opinions so that something can result

countries were represented at a conference in December 1994 on services to the citizen.

Yesterday, I received a paper from the OECD on service quality initiatives that examines worldwide what's going on. The interest is all coming from the same place: fundamental erosion of trust in government; fundamental problems in terms of resources; new management styles in the private sector.

The NPR has put together a book of standards for serving the American people. It's the government's first collection of customer service standards. USAID is included in the chapter entitled "States, Localities, and Other Partners" because it resembles the federal government in that it too depends on partners—states, localities, and grantees—to deliver services. We and our partners are delivering services to the end users that we share.

*Phyllis Dichter-Forbes*

from them? What can we say has changed as a result of talking to the customers? What did we commit to? What do the customers know about the changes? For example, using the story about the district health person and the vaccines, would that person know whom to contact for the vaccines? Or even that he could make such contacts? I doubt it.

Asking for opinions is important, but so is recognizing that the opinion you've asked for has validity and should be used in some manner. If it is worthwhile, it commits us to a change. In USAID, the Office of Procurement agreed to make noncompetitive awards within 90 days and competitive awards within 150 days. That's their customer standard. It's printed in a booklet. You can contact them if they're not doing it. That's a lot different than a procurement officer's simply saying to you, "I love you. I want to be a good procurement officer. I'm going to make your grants in 150 days."

What about the customers of our services overseas? Whether they are direct customers or CARE's customers or the Ministry of Health's customers, are there sets of standards for serving them that allow them to say, "You said I'm going



to have a health service within 10 kilometers. I'm 15 kilometers from a health service, and it's been two years"? If we're supposed to be increasing child survival and mothers are telling us that it's hard for them to get to clinics, that they're uncomfortable with the way the clinics are organized, that they don't feel their children are getting good services, this is valuable information. We can use it to provide the right kinds of services at the right times to make more people feel comfortable.

Finally, we ought to be working with our grantees to ensure that they recognize the value of customer standards and are prepared themselves to conduct their own surveys

## **Discussion Session**

### **Addenda to Developing Service Standards**

**Diane La Voy:** Phyllis has made clear that we haven't really emphasized standards. Now, I'd like to give the presenters a chance to come back a bit at her.

**Cynthia Rozell:** You need to involve the end users in defining results, the standards. Once the customers have been involved, everyone who has a role in achieving the result must be part of the process. If people haven't agreed themselves to perform, whether it's a project or a program design or a strategic-objective result, they're not going to be committed to it. Setting up a system that allows the U.S. to provide drugs at a health clinic in Malawi may respond to a specific problem at a specific time in the fastest way possible. But the real challenge is to involve all Malawians who deal in drug procurement and to get their commitment to an end result. That is time consuming. But it's systematic change.

**Phyllis Dichter-Forbes:** How many people in this room have taken the recent survey by our Office of Human Resources? Are you going to feel that you really participated in the change process if people ask you questions, but a year later nothing really has changed out of it?

**Gerry Britan:** I'm reminded of how Joe

Califano, when he was secretary of HHS, traveled around the country talking to people about the programs that the department funded. He had great information on how much money they'd sent to this district, how many people the program served. But he kept getting blindsided by his audiences, who would tell him about problems with service delivery or how the services weren't what he thought. He didn't know the answers. He needed to get into much closer touch with his customers. So he set up a series of what were called service delivery assessments to get a picture of what key programs were actually delivering across the country to people. He wanted to be able to show up in Chicago and have answers to people's questions.

Maybe that's the most basic thing we have to commit to knowing—at least to develop a standard for knowing what difference our programs are making among those at whom they are aimed. And when they're not making a difference, then feeding the information back into the decision-making process.

### **Identifying Truly Representative Advisory Committees**

**John Magistro:** I have a question about involving advisory committees, as was done in Malawi. How could you be sure that the group that was identified was representative of the groups you were trying to reach?

**Cynthia Rozell:** That was a concern. But we weren't using any one advisory group as the final say in the end result. The issue is how to systematically bring all the opinions together. In Malawi we were pleasantly surprised to see the degree of agreement at the beneficiary level on what the priorities should be.

### **Learning to Listen, Learning to Reach Women**

**Diane Russell:** Doing customer surveys may require learning to feel comfortable about asking questions, comfortable about being a little uncomfortable and not knowing what's going to happen—to take off the tie, throw away the

briefcase, and sit for a while just listening to what people say.

**Pat Martin:** A cautionary note: for 20 years we've been working in women in development,

and we're still not doing a good job of reaching women, of integrating them into the process. We're doing better. But we haven't approached this as systematically as we should.

## E-Mail Communications

### Credibility and Customer Expectations

**John Grayzel:** Is USAID ready and capable of responding to its customers' inputs? The credibility issue is number one: For example, we do various community sessions and repeatedly the community brings up a relatively small project, like a water system, that is their first priority. Usually the priority could be responded to at a relatively minimal cost but the "audit-correct" response is: "Oh sorry, that is not in our mandate." Or even worse, "We'll get back to you on that." Result: Our credibility in empowering them is dead at the start. Another example: Our customers want lower transaction costs, but we are still raising the costs. Our smaller and more disadvantaged customers find the Agency's new rule that we can give only 30-day instead of 90-day advances a killer of a requirement. Result: Credibility dead. Somehow we must be prepared to be rapidly responsive both procedurally and programmatically to reasonable customer desires.

**Kristin Loken:** How do we open up local participation, especially on needs and problem-definition, without creating expectations that USAID programs will follow through on the priorities identified? Some ideas: Make customer surveying at the macro level more of an ongoing activity; combine efforts with other donors and local universities so that it is not so directly a USAID endeavor; wait for operating year budget (OYB) levels and then focus customer surveys within approved sectors and funding levels; include USAID/W people whenever possible to keep everyone informed and on board.

**Diane La Voy:** I think we can get part of the way toward addressing the issues of heightened expectations. We should try to avoid setting up situations in which the basic question is, "What do you need?" Instead, aim to get people's perspectives on the situations they face (e.g., what are the reasons that their daughters don't attend school?), on their priorities (what are they already doing or trying to do to address a problem), and on their satisfaction with the services or support they receive through USAID-backed programs.

(continued on next page)

## E-Mail Communications (continued)

In doing this, it's important to be quite clear, among ourselves and with our various customers and partners, that we are not assuming that USAID (or any donor) can or should fill all the gaps that people identify. Rather, the idea is to ensure that all of us engaged in the development process—customers and partners—understand the situation well in order to make all of our efforts and investments as effective as possible. Doing some of this customer outreach (surveying) with and through host-country entities—including communities themselves—can sometimes help set up more realistic expectations.

### **Rewarding Results and Customer-Oriented Behavior**

**Lynellyn Long:** I like the customer service approach and consider the American taxpayer my boss. Having read a book on total quality management, I spent a lot of time during my last RFA (request for applications) ensuring that potential applicants had access to information and knowledge about the process. Given that a lot of nongovernmental organizations were not accustomed to working with us, the effort took hours. The payoff was a record number of exemplary applications.

My reward was seeing successful, innovative programs that have received lots of publicity and kudos. Unfortunately, from within, our system is not designed to reward either those grantees or those who take this initiative. Only a few months later, I have watched all this set aside for larger political priorities.

My comments/questions are: (1) How will incentives be structured in the current system to ensure that customer service-oriented behavior is rewarded? and (2) When will we as an organization be sufficiently empowered to set an agenda and move forward from start to finish?

**Sanath Reddy:** Accountability does not appear to be as simple as selling a product or maintenance contract to a customer. In development, success and lasting benefits depend on the customer's bringing to the table an input or behavioral change—his part of the bargain. Accountability is a two-way street. If we focus on impacts and results and we achieve them in large measure, I think the "accountability" test will be answered.

### **A Dissenting View: The "Customer" Is the American Taxpayer**

**James Hester:** We are making a fatal error in defining our beneficiaries as customers. To use the term "customer" and all that it implies for our beneficiaries, instead of the American taxpayers, misses the whole point of redesigning government. If USAID is to continue to exist, it has to be responsible to the American people because it is they whom we serve and it is their money for which we are being held accountable. Perhaps the term "customer" is not well-suited to our situation. The standard definition of customer in the dictionary is "one who buys goods or services." Our programs are grants so there is no buying from the developing countries or even their citizens. So long as we offer, they will accept because they do not have the power of a paying customer to take their business to another company that can provide superior goods and services.

(continued on next page)

### E-Mail Communications (continued)

The American taxpayers are buying increases in export markets, decreased threats to U.S. national security, and fulfillment of a personal sense of social responsibility to help those less well off. The crisis that USAID seems to be facing now is that these “customers” are questioning whether they want to buy this anymore, and if so how much of which parts do they want to buy?

I understand completely the need to work directly with our beneficiaries. Local participation is so basic it is amazing to me that USAID did not do it to an even greater extent in the past.

**La Voy:** The commercial paradigm has its limitations, no doubt. Our customers do not themselves pay. But they are the reason we’re in business. Levi Strauss would be out of business if it focused its energy primarily on preparing eloquent statements and reports for its investors. It’s successful only to the degree that it can focus on the people who will wear its jeans.

Feel free to replace customer with “beneficiary” in your own thinking, as long as it leads you to participation of host country players not just in the sense of consultation, but engagement built on mutual accountability.

**James Hester:** Participation from host country publics is essential to building quality international development widgets, which is a must if we are going to get American taxpayers to buy them, but if we don’t simultaneously get the taxpayers fully participating in telling us what kind and how many they want us to produce, then they won’t buy our widgets.

## **Procurement Alternative for Collaboration: USAID/Bolivia’s Chaco Initiative**

### Participatory Practices 11

#### **The Challenge**

The Chaco in Bolivia is a region of dry tropical forests rich in biological diversity. In 1993 the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Izocoño indigenous peoples organization (the Capitanía del Alto y Bajo Izozog, CABI) began working in the area to develop a new National Chaco Park to prevent forest and biodiversity degradation. The Government of Bolivia (with funding from the Swiss and the World Bank/GEF) supported the development of the park. USAID/Bolivia recognized that effective resource management involved social factors as much as biological ones. The conservation goals for the park could be met only if there were also a complementary wildlife management program built on the indigenous needs and capabilities of the Izocoño Guarani Indians who had lived in the area for generations.

Although USAID’s experience with biodiversity conservation worldwide suggested that local user involvement results in more effective programs, dealing directly with the Izocoño organization (CABI) posed a problem for the Mission. CABI did not have the institutional capacity needed to meet USAID’s requirements for prospective grantees. How could the Mission support a group that did not have the systems and procedures required by USAID regulations?

Side-stepping the onerous requirements for a grant, USAID initiated a formal relationship with CABI through a simple purchase order. USAID would buy from CABI a comprehensive and participatory outline

for a resource management and conservation plan for the area. This was followed by other measures to ensure that the Izoceño people might play a lead role in shaping development in the Bolivian Chaco.

### **Participatory Practice: Purchase Orders to Facilitate Collaboration**

Through in-depth conversations between leaders of the Izoceño Federation (CABI) and USAID Mission staff over roughly one year, USAID/Bolivia staff learned much from the Izoceños. First, the Izoceños had a long tradition of conservation awareness and action, and had used their traditional social organization effectively to control their hunting and fishing in the Izozog Wetlands. They explained that their traditional healers also played a key role in teaching respect for the environment.

Second, Izoceño leaders acted more as intermediaries for their communities than as decision-makers. Thus, leaders emphasized the need to share the emerging ideas for a collaborative wildlife management program with all 21 Izoceño communities before the program design went any further. Finally, the Izoceños argued persuasively that they should be in charge of the proposed National Park and of the possible wildlife management program in the area. They did not want donors to work through another independent organization, but rather to have direct contact with the Izoceños themselves, or with partners that they identified. In the past, resources were typically channeled through intermediaries picked by the donors, and never quite addressed the priorities of the Izoceño people.

While the Mission staff respected the strengths and capabilities of the Izoceños, and while CABI was already managing more than \$300,000 in Bolivian public funds, there was still the problem of meeting USAID's requirements for financial and technical accountability. Logistically, it would be much easier for USAID/Bolivia to run the activity through a respected NGO with prior USAID experience, rather than deal directly with the Izoceños. An alternative was needed. The idea of using purchase orders was developed by USAID staff during a trip to the Chaco.

The purchase orders offered several advantages. First, because purchase orders are generally issued on a fixed price basis, the requirements of demonstrated institutional capability are much less onerous. Although the technical office, in this case the environment SO Team, needed to make sure that the recipient had met all requirements, the Controller's office did not need to certify the recipient's financial capability as it would for a grant. Second, USAID's purchase of a proposal demonstrated to the Izoceños its serious intent to work with them to design an activity based on their priorities and capabilities, and not only on those of USAID. Third, purchase orders allow for payment in installments, and in this case could provide the Izoceños with the resources they needed to carry out their ambitious consultation process with the 21 communities and then prepare a document that reflected broad public participation and support. Fourth, starting with a relatively simple purchase order could give the Izoceños some of the institutional experience they lacked with respect to working with donor agencies, making it easier for them to work directly with USAID (and other donors) in the future. This would also give both CABI and USAID an opportunity to identify key areas for institutional strengthening through a future cooperative agreement or grant.

Although the Izoceños had a good understanding of the habits of wildlife, they did not have the experience needed, such as assessing population health and nutritional requirements for wildlife, to develop sound wildlife management plans. The Mission took the Izoceños up on their suggestion for a purchase order to be granted to their US NGO partner, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The terms of reference for the second purchase order specified that WCS "should coordinate closely with CABI at all stages of analysis and report preparation, and USAID will actively seek CABI's input in reviewing the outline, draft, and final reports." The Mission returned to the Izoceños to obtain their approval of these terms of reference, and then proceeded to contact WCS. The NGO, which had worked with the Izoceños since 1991, was

enthusiastic to expand its existing ties to CABI and to issues of wildlife management in the Chaco. WCS agreed that they would prepare a parallel assessment and provide technical assistance as needed. It was also established that nothing would be done by WCS without the concurrence of the Izoceños.

After the purchase orders, which made the USAID-CABI relationship official, CABI and WCS jointly drew up a proposal to develop a strategic plan for the management of the area's biodiversity and to initiate field activities such as baseline inventories of biological diversity. At CABI's request it was agreed that WCS would be the grantee for the purpose of USAID funding, and would be responsible for managing all external expenses. Although WCS would continue to be responsible to USAID for the total grant funds, it would delegate to CABI responsibility for managing all local operating expenses. All activities would be carried out within the framework of a joint CABI/WCS agreement, prepared and signed by both organizations. This arrangement was favored by CABI, because it would have had problems complying with USAID's institutional capability requirements on its own, yet could retain adequate control of the activity.

## Outcome

The joint (CABI-WCS) project proposal described a combination rolling design and implementation. This approach allowed the activity to evolve on the basis of improved information, and to direct USAID's scarce development assistance resources to only the most promising opportunities. The approach was highly customer-focused and tailored to accommodate the changing needs and capabilities of the Izoceños. In particular, it allowed them to build their technical and administrative capabilities while creating the wildlife plan, and in this way helped ensure their effective participation in all phases of the process. WCS's role was to strengthen CABI's administrative capacity, carry out scientifically sound inventories of biological diversity, teach the Izoceños to monitor the health of that diversity and related conservation activities, and assist teacher training schools for environmental education.

The consultative process conducted by the Izoceños provided information about the ecology and how the Izoceños traditionally used the resource base. All 21 communities collaborated on a mapping exercise to discover what resources existed, and how both women and men managed them. The process unified the communities around the land and emphasized a need to protect natural resources. The mapping exercise also dealt with issues of territory and land titles, and provided the Izoceños with another tool to defend their territorial rights against non-indigenous groups. Another important activity was carrying out baseline inventories of the Chaco's biological diversity, with WCS scientists and Izoceño "parabiologists." Each kind of specialist learned from the other.

The collaborative process, whose initial steps were facilitated by the use of purchase orders, provided the basis for a joint CABI/WCS proposal for a much larger phase of activities. As part of their proposal development process, they shared the draft with each of the 21 Izoceño communities. This was done to ensure that the final proposal carefully took into account local needs and capabilities, and maintained the Izoceños' strong sense of ownership of this activity. The final proposal included some innovative provisions to insure continued community participation, such as requiring the WCS scientists to present their findings to community leaders every six months for feedback and comment. A grant was awarded in May 1997.

The Izoceños saw a number of positive outcomes from this program. Most importantly, they felt empowered by the confidence that USAID had in them to participate directly in the management of the program, as well as USAID's careful efforts to insure that no activities were undertaken without their full and informed participation and consent. They recognized that USAID helped them establish their own priorities for long-term management of the resource base, and knew that they would play the lead role in shaping the fate of the Bolivian Chaco. Finally, they believed that other donors in the country would

respond, thereby enhancing the positions of other indigenous groups in Bolivia. USAID further assisted the Izoceños in this regard by facilitating a series of well-attended donor coordination meetings on the Chaco. In addition, CABI is now providing technical assistance to other indigenous groups in Bolivia, as well as in the neighboring countries of Argentina and Brazil.

In September 1995, the Government of Bolivia formally decreed the Kaa-Iya Chaco National Park, with a total land area roughly the size of Costa Rica. It also ratified CABI's leading role in the Park's administration. This is the first time an indigenous group will manage a park in Bolivia, and offers a powerful model for community-based biodiversity conservation.

Under Bolivia's new Popular Participation Law, CABI is now recognized as the civil, as well as the traditional, authority. They are seeking ways to increase their access to municipal-level decision-making processes, and national revenue-sharing funds to better address their own development priorities.

Finally, a representative of the Izoceños is an active member of USAID's expanded Strategic Objective Team for the Environment. An Izoceño presence on the Team provides valued real customer "ground-truthing" of program and policy activities across the portfolio, and expands USAID's perspectives with other ideas and visions for sustainable development.

## **Discussion Points**

1) The purchase order was a tool used in the context of USAID/Bolivia's reengineered operations. Reengineering allowed for the rolling design and implementation, and encouraged a serious and steady customer focus. In contrast, preparation of a detailed project paper prior to initiation of field activities (as would have been the case before reengineering) would almost certainly have increased the role of WCS (or other players) in the program, and decreased the role of CABI. The Izoceños' strong sense of "ownership" of and commitment to the program is expected to pay high dividends in the years ahead.

Reengineering also allowed for the increased involvement of Strategic Objective Team staff in the design of this activity. For example, three members of the core SOT from different Mission offices visited the Chaco to work with the Izoceños, and two other core SOT members from two additional offices met several times with the Izoceños at USAID headquarters. This high level and early involvement from five different USAID offices represented on the SOT would have been almost unheard of before reengineering.

2) USAID's ability to work with local organizations is still constrained by very demanding requirements for grants. The utility of the purchase order mechanism is limited since additional competition and contract clauses are required for procurements over \$25,000. In this case, the problem is less acute because of the excellent working relations between CABI and WCS, which allowed the Izoceños substantial control even though the grant was given to a U.S. NGO.

*Drafted by Chanya Charles after extensive consultation with Mike Yates (USAID/Bolivia), Wendy Kapustin (formerly USAID/PPC), and Kitty O'Hara (USAID/M/OP), and a thorough review of available documentation. December 1997.*

## **Resources**

*Izoceño Fish and Wildlife Management in the Bolivian Gran Chaco.* (June 1996). Prepared for USAID by Wildlife Conservation Society and the Capitanía del alto y Bajo Izoceño.

## From Clientelism to a “Customer-Service” Orientation: Features of Good Public Sector Programs

Participation Forum 12: April 20, 1995

Research on successful programs in Northeast Brazil has challenged the current thinking on public-sector reform, which calls for downsizing, stringently controlling, and otherwise diminishing the powers of government. MIT development economist Judith Tendler found that government workers are more likely to be effective if they are allowed to exercise discretion and feel accountable to the community in which they work. Empowering workers this way requires transformation at two levels: a change in the structure of the government agency and a change in the relationship between the worker and the customer that increases the ability of the customer to hold the worker accountable. In emphasizing the oft-forgotten frontline or field-level worker, Tendler drew parallels with the corporate reengineering literature, which emphasizes the importance of worker commitment; of defining workers' jobs broadly and permitting worker discretion in implementation; of customizing services to customer needs; and of building relationships of trust between workers and clients.

### Switching from the Negative to the Positive

*Judith Tendler*

I've always been perplexed as to why performance in the public sector is good in some situations and not good in others. My first focus, 20 years ago here at USAID, was on the failures, on looking for what didn't work. This became depressing and at a certain point, I became more interested in trying to understand why and how things that government did that worked were different from those that didn't. In my most recent research project, I focused on Ceará state in the northeast part of Brazil because it had had a lot of good press for being innovative and having good programs that received a lot of international attention.

**Four Success Stories from Ceará.** In looking at the successes, I wanted an explanation, but one that was not specific to any particular sector or related to the political leadership. Although there had been two reformist governors during the period, I believed that the successes had earlier roots.

I looked at programs that had sustained a generally good performance over a six-year period.

**Reasons for Successes in Ceará.** Turning to the

patterns that emerged from the cases in question, it's striking that some of the programs were successful in agencies that had other programs that were not successful. Others were parts of programs that were successful in certain municipalities but not in other municipalities. Four points stood out in the successful cases.

- **Worker Commitment/Community Respect.** Workers in successful programs were incredibly committed to their jobs. Their commitment and dedication were much higher than in the other programs or than when the same workers were working in the other programs. They felt appreciated, they felt trusted, and they felt respected, not only by their supervisors, but by the communities in which they worked and the citizens and consumers to whom they were providing services. They talked more about the respect they felt from the citizens than about respect from their supervisors.
- **Customized Services: Worker Discretion and Trust.** Surprisingly, these workers were working in a much



more customized way with beneficiaries or groups of beneficiaries than that usually associated with the public sector. Agricultural extension agents, for example, instead of giving a standard-ized message of how to improve productivity, of how far apart rows of beans should be planted, were working in the opposite way. Individual groups of farmers were telling agents where they needed help: “We have a problem with a fungus in the beans and we want you to help us with that.” The extension agent would do the research and return with an answer. The same thing happened in small enterprise areas. Instead of giving courses, the business extension agent was working on the shop floor with the individual firms, focusing, for example, on a public procurement for 1,000 desks with 12 firms all located near each other. It was very customized work, different from the usual perceptions of how the public sector works. Customized work involves discretion. Workers have more discretion than usual and need a wider range of skills.

- **Trust: Community Pressure to Perform.** Did increasing worker discretion mean more bribery, corruption, and graft or “rent-seeking”? Did it introduce greater problems of monitoring and supervision? In fact, the pressures on government agents to perform were greater than usual, but not through improved formal supervision and monitoring. What happened was an interesting combination of monitoring and trust. The pressures came from outside, from the citizens and the clients of these agencies. In some instances, one agency would watch another. This customized approach fostered trusting relationships between the workers and the citizens. Workers performed, not just because they were being watched by the citizens who were monitoring their performance, but because they wanted to please the people they were working for. In sum,

the result is a combination of watchfulness and monitoring, in which people who already trust officials make sure they don’t do anything wrong.

- **Publicity Improves Morale, Raises Consciousness, and Provides Constraints.** One of the most important pieces of the puzzle relates to something the state government was doing, perhaps without understanding the positive impact it was having. The government started making public relations gestures: giving prizes for good performance and advertising it in the paper, inviting delegations of congressmen to visit the projects. The motive was to boast about their successes, pure PR. The effect was that the workers felt tremendously recognized, ennobled. They felt that they were working in very important programs. They were helping to save babies from dying; to give employment to the unemployed; to move their state out of backwardness. In the health area, the state gave prizes for the municipality with the biggest drop in infant mortality, the biggest gain in immunization rates. In part, this was for a different reason: it was an effort to entice these municipalities to collect data. Meanwhile, the prizes again made these workers feel tremendously recognized and appreciated.

Another action, which had the same effect as the publicity, was that at the outset the state advertised the programs, particularly through radio, which is the most widely used medium in the interior. This served both to raise the consciousness of local people and to clarify the programs, informing the community of what it should expect from the workers. In terms of liberation theology—coming not from the liberation church, mind you, but from the state—the message was: “You have the right to demand things from your government. You have the right not to be underdeveloped. You have a right not to have your babies die. You have to stand up for your rights. You are equal as

citizens, and you have a right to demand these things from your government.”

In terms of spelling out the purpose of the program, they said, “This is your health program now. These are the workers who are working in it, and this is what they should be doing. They should be at work from 9 to 5. They should be living in the communities where they work. They will be walking around with a uniform of blue jeans and a white T-shirt with the name of the health program on it. They will be wearing a blue backpack, because they’ll be coming into your households, where they will carry the health supplies. And, most important, they are not allowed to distribute campaign literature. They are not allowed to distribute campaign literature when they come to your house.”

It’s common knowledge that field agents of government services often distribute campaign literature and campaign for local officials. This is clientelism; this is the problem. In this case, the government made clear that if any agent had come from another community, or was distributing literature, he or she was to be reported to a supervisor, or the government directly. The message was repeated during training of the workers, and even to job applicants. In short, this was a combination of consciousness raising, inspiration, promising better lives, and teaching how to monitor.

Finally, the government exercised a certain power over the mayors by explaining publicly what their role should be, including what positions they should fill and what percentage of municipal funds should be spent on the program. Citizens were urged to complain directly to the mayor if these stipulations weren’t met, and if that didn’t work, not to vote for him in the next election. This was extremely effective.

**Overturing Conventional Wisdom on the Public Sector.** These programs were not participatory in the usual sense. They were not designed in a bottom-up way; they were top-down. They had participatory effects, however, because once people know they have a right to make demands of their government in health or public procurement, they start to do so in other areas as well.

Finally, to compare these findings with the current wisdom on public sector reform: it must be fairly obvious by now that the interest in reducing the size of the public sector has tended to crowd out concerns with how to work with the public sector that’s left. Moreover, the focus here was giving greater discretion to the remaining government workers, not less. Third, the focus in these cases was on customization, not the usual resort to standardization to deliver services to large numbers of people. Fourth, these programs were not strictly customer driven. Rather, they were a complex combination of top-down and listening to the people or doing what the people wanted. Suggestions for improvements in programs were based primarily on listening to the workers and managers.

**Lessons from the Private Sector.** To conclude, though these findings are a little surprising in terms of how we think about public sector reform in developing countries, they are in certain ways obvious to anybody who has been reading or thinking about the reform of large corporations in the private sector in the industrialized world. Particularly in the last 10 years, research has come up with similar findings about what leads to high productivity or increased productivity in firms that are restructuring. The keys are the centrality of worker commitment to the job; multi-skilled, multi-tasked jobs, or people doing several things instead of just a few standardized things; customization to achieve what the consumer wants; the centrality of trusting relations between either firms and their clients or workers and their clients or firms and their customer firms. Various terms are used: flexible specialization, worker participation, quality circles, loose coupling between units in large firms. But the findings are familiar.

## Discussion Session

### Lessons on Accountability from Nepal, Thailand, and Bangladesh

**Mike Calavan:** Some case studies in Nepal, Thailand, and Bangladesh raise certain points that weren’t underlined in the presentation but which strike me as important. One is that in the

centralized public sector programs discussed, the people who were doing the work on the ground, face-to-face with customers, were locals. Using locals explains, I think, why a lot of public sector programs have worked in many parts of Thailand and haven't worked so well in the mountains of Nepal. In Thailand, most of the school teachers, the extension agent for the local traditional irrigation systems, the person from the agricultural bank, are all locals, they speak the same language, they understand the local traditions, they know from the bottom up how to interact with people. This means better accountability than if a person comes from another part of the country.

Another point: in the health program, the people from the center, from the state level, began with the most receptive local areas. We very seldom do this in our programs. Particularly when we're sensitive to poverty alleviation, we often work with areas, localities, and local leaders who are the least promising. Beginning with those who are most enthused means better prospects for some success. The neighboring municipalities will see those successes and want to get on board eventually.

Finally, you stressed the importance of people understanding what the program is supposed to do. This adds an important extra-bureaucratic accountability to those internal accountability mechanisms like computers and management information systems that receive so much attention. Without external accountability, even for central public sector programs, there is very little accountability at all.

**Judith Tendler:** On the subject of using local people, it is true that using locals can be advantageous, but at the same time, the concern remains that people from a given area may be more vulnerable to corruption and bribery. It's a complex issue.

#### **"Sharing Information is Power"**

**Eric Chetwynd:** In the Municipal Finance and Management (MFM) project in the Newly Independent States, we work with city leaders: the finance director, the mayors, vice mayors, and so forth, in an effort to improve municipal management, make it more open, more accountable. When we bring these leaders to the United States on study tours, they are very, very surprised at the degree of openness and participation in this country, at the degree of neighborhood participation. Where they come from, over the past 70 years, the code has been to retain information as a way of retaining power and minimizing risk.

When these leaders go back and work on specific programs sponsored by MFM, they actually do get a sense that sharing information is power. In some instances, mayors have held news conferences in which they've talked about their budget process. Or they publish details about the budget in the newspaper and they'll answer questions. There have been call-in shows. It's heartening, in an area of the world where information has been so tightly controlled, to see people beginning to exercise the power of sharing information.

#### **E-Mail Communications**

**James Hester:** Successful programs require government employees to be appreciated and respected by their governments. Failure to give them their due is a serious problem both in our client countries and here at home.

## **Do We Need to Practice What We Preach?**

Participation Forum 13: May 18, 1995

Long-time participation practitioners at USAID argue that to be able to engage host-country people in development processes that affect them, we need to build participation more into the internal workings of the Agency. The thirteenth session of the Participation Forum tries to get a handle on this reasonable sounding proposition by examining the linkages between “internal” and “external” participation.

Such linkages do appear to exist for people implementing development activities on the front lines. In Forum twelve, Judith Tandler discussed her findings about “good” public sector programs in northeast Brazil. She found that when workers felt empowered and were given some latitude by their own agencies, they were able to develop relationships of trust and mutual accountability with their clients.

In this forum, Camille Cates Barnett of Research Triangle Institute described her experience as city manager of Austin, Texas, leading that city through a customer-oriented reinvention. Following is a summary of her opening remarks, along with email that followed this stimulating session.

### **What Has Become Clear about Participation**

*Camille Cates Barnett*

I would like to share with you my experience with government organizations that walk their talk on participation—that say they believe in participation and teamwork and practice what they preach. Things work differently in these organizations. They have more fun. Politicians like them better. They work better, cost less, and are better for the people who work for them.

Having watched the change process take

place in many settings over the years reminds me of something Ralph Waldo Emerson used to say. When he'd meet friends he hadn't seen in a while, he wouldn't greet them the way you or I would: “How are you?” “How's it going?” or these days, “You still here?” Emerson would greet them with this question: “What has become clear to you since we last met?”

1. What has become clear to me is that **participation is a value, not just a skill.**
  - Working to build values is different from working to build skills. Enhancing participation must be approached as a culture change, not a training program.
  - Values are shared. Not everyone shares the values. Practicing skills can encourage changes in values.
  - Values are transmitted. People watch what you do, not just what you say. Renaming a “committee” a “team” doesn’t make it one. Jargon doesn’t build credibility; action does.
  - Values are powerful. Complex organizations are run by systems of values. Employee relations are a mirror image of customer relations. How we treat workers is how they treat customers. People who experience participation can better promote participation to others.
2. What has become clear to me is that **participation needs a purpose.**
  - Is participation an end or a means? If participation is a value, is it always a good? Should we have participation for participation’s sake? Is there supposed to be only one right way to do our work—by endlessly participating? What’s the role of leadership if everyone is participating?
  - One of the most important and effective ways to use participation is to clarify your participation mode, the purpose of participation. Frustration occurs when
3. What has become clear to me is that

participants are in different modes. For example, here are some shorthand labels for different modes of participation: **tell, sell, test, consult, join.** The “tell” mode is giving information or giving direction. The “sell” mode is giving information and wanting the participant to agree with it. The “test” mode is being fairly certain you know what direction to go in or which decision to make, but you want to test ideas with the participants to see if something is missing. The “consult” mode is where you are not sure of the definition or solution and you want the participants’ ideas on what they would do. The “join” mode is where you delegate tasks to participants or forge partnerships with the participants to solve problems.

Each of the modes involves a different level of participation and each is appropriate to different situations. Problems arise when there is confusion about what mode you are in. For example, if I’m in the “tell” mode and you’re in the “consult” mode, we are both going to be frustrated. I’ll think you are overstepping your bounds and you’ll tell me I’m not walking the talk.

My department director and I used this shorthand on modes of participation to be sure we were communicating well. At department head meetings, for example, I would say, “Here’s the issue. Here’s what I think we should do about it. What do you think?” This sounds like either the test or consult mode. As the participants gave me their ideas, if I did not accept them, they would say, “Are you really in the consult mode or have you already decided what to do? Are you in the sell mode?” This helped me realize that indeed sometimes I was closer to a decision than I realized. **participation is both fast and slow.**

- Participation takes time. Cultural change takes years. A lot of participation focuses on incremental change, a steady series of improvements. It also never really stops.
  - Expect disconnects. The questions you are raising now and the inconsistencies you are seeing now are typical. Discouraging, yes, but typical.
  - Participation can also be fast. To use the language of learning organizations, it can be a leverage point for lasting systemic change. Participation can produce breakthrough change.
  - You can't change an organization without changing yourself. It is not "their" fault. I first realized the importance of my role-modeling in changing an organization when I worked in Dallas. That is where I got the nickname "Dragon Lady." I realized that I had to behave in a more open and participatory way if I was going to encourage those values in the organization.
4. What has become clear to me is that **participation changes power.**
- Expect resistance. Some people don't want to give up their power.

### E-Mail Communications

#### **Making the Connection**

The following E-mail was received in response to Diane La Voy's questions: "*What is the connection between the way we work together—our ability to work effectively in teams and to be empowered and accountable within USAID—and our ability as an Agency to build opportunities for our customers to participate in decisions and processes that affect them? Is there really a connection between the way we work together and our ability to engender customer participation? If so, where do you see the connection? Why might it matter?*"

**Karl Schwartz:** There is a natural and good tendency within USAID to see the socially and economically deprived as clients, beneficiaries of our largesse, rather than as decision-makers. This is reinforced by an organizational structure in which decisions tend to be made at the top of the management unit so that those who interact most with our clients do not see themselves as decision-makers either.

Empowered and accountable teams flatten out the internal decision-making structure, thereby making it easier for us to see others as decision-makers, as people who make choices. But we have to strengthen this perception of our customers among ourselves. This is the bottom line of what is coming out of our customer-needs detection work. The staff who have participated have

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### E-Mail Communications (continued)

all come back from the field impressed with how much our 'clients' know about these topics and with a new respect for them as choice-makers and customers.

Hence, while I can trace a connection between the way we might be organized and participation, the more fundamental question is related to whether we perceive the socially and economically deprived and ourselves (to a lesser extent) as decision-makers. If we organize in ways which make us decision-makers, then, probably, it will be easier for us to recognize the poor as decision-makers and, hence, as customers whose participation in our planning and judging is important.

**Anne Sweetser:** Two factors predispose to difficulty in treating the recipients of aid as decision-makers or customers, rather than clients. First, there is a tremendous conviction that we have The Knowledge. We have such faith in our rationalism and the science which is based in it that we have great difficulty seeing and responding to others' "myths or beliefs" as knowledge also. We overlook, or deny, the fact that our knowledge is one among many systems of culturally constructed symbolic meaning. Second, it requires a special sort of courage to give up the prerogative of being the one who makes the decisions.

**John Grayzel:** Perhaps the single most troublesome aspect of practicing what we preach is that we as USAID employees cannot commit ourselves to our partners to any extent greater than the Agency can commit itself to us. One of the first things a child learns is to manipulate the concept of "promise." Keeping one's word is fundamental to working together. On a much more sophisticated level is the judicial doctrine of "stare decisis" ("to stand by decided matters") whereby once a matter has been reasonably determined, it rests unless there are truly compelling reasons for reconsideration. The capricious way USAID constantly changes decisions makes it almost impossible for us to make any commitment to our partners (though we increasingly ask them to commit themselves to us).

**Jose Garzon:** My sentiment is that we are not yet practicing what we preach. Budget reductions and a generally hostile environment are driving people to be more protectionist of their turf, more centralist in their management style, and sometimes more cynical in their outlook. There is also a disturbing tendency to create programmatic "boxes" to protect the integrity of one's program. Different technical offices push for separate Strategic Objectives to protect their areas of interest. To fail to do so in today's climate can prove disastrous. Deferring to other colleagues who are better equipped to solve a problem; listening to the field, subordinates, and customers; risk taking; innovation—these are the behaviors which suffer under the current climate

What is needed to create a customer-oriented agency with a global vision is not simply a change in structures and procedures, but a thorough change in organizational culture. It will not, repeat will NOT, come about through training courses. A change in organizational culture will come about when the Agency rewards the right kinds of behavior and punishes the wrong kinds of

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### E-Mail Communications (continued)

behavior. We seem to be on the right track with the new employee evaluation procedures, but all the same budgets and other rewards are more likely to go to the most aggressive, not the best team players or the most service-oriented.

The process of organizational change will take years. All we can do now is to begin, not only with new systems, but with a conscious effort to reward the right kind of behaviors and people—and separate out those who cannot mend their ways.

**Vic Duarte:** USAID cannot get the participatory approach to work outside before it shows its belief in the approach, and learns its strengths and limitations, by trying it internally. The absence of a supportive environment for a participatory approach can lead to the isolation of those who do not share the views of the leadership at the starting line. In such instances, decisions are made without a reasonable amount of information or scrutiny, while staff members who object are ostracized. The absence of a culture of participation means that some staff just go along with the power structure, and give the power structure a false sense of the correctness of its decisions. Those who would present a different view that might lead to better decisions are marginalized.

**Dayton Maxwell:** The private sector has developed analysis techniques for providing objective results of customer surveys on employee performance. Xerox, widely recognized as the industry leader in reengineering, IS ROUTINELY USING this tool as one element in evaluating employee performance. Thus, in addition to customer surveys on program satisfaction, customer surveys on USAID employee performance are possible.

These employee performance customer surveys include FSNs and partners, who carry out most of the work for us in the field. The effectiveness of our FSNs and partners depends both on how effectively we acquaint them with reengineering behaviors and methods and on how effectively we work with them in a participative manner to achieve customer goals once teamwork practices are understood and applied. The importance of U.S. and indigenous NGOs, universities, and other partners is growing, thus the importance of how well we as employees can work effectively with them is growing. Direct feedback on our performance has a way of attracting our attention and making “the connection” very clear.

**Leroy Jackson:** In today’s private sector, old adages like “Know your customer” still are being used. My sense is some USAID people may be confused about a focus on participation and customer focus. I hear things like “it’s like the Holy Grail.” Perhaps we need a “hook” or more succinct message to our people rooted in how a dynamic and successful private sector functions. I suggest an emphasis on the critical need to 1) know more directly the people we want to help and 2) have them tell us what it is they will “buy,” i.e., identify as their own priorities, and what they will gladly perpetuate once USAID has come and gone.

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### E-Mail Communications (continued)

**Michael Farbman (excerpt from USAID/Morocco response to the Administrator's request for comments on reforms):** In November 1994, USAID/Morocco restructured its program management around a concept of strategic objective teams, each composed of officers from throughout the mission, and possessing a mandate to oversee performance in the S.O. area, liaison with outside stakeholders in the S.O. area, and cooperation with the Global Bureau and PPC counterparts. Design, performance monitoring, quality control, and similar responsibilities all were delegated to the teams.

Notwithstanding mission-wide commitment to the principles and benefits of this type of participation, the question was raised whether mission executive management could, or ought to, delegate to S.O. teams the right of ultimate approval, *without executive review*, of such actions as work plan review, strategy or performance indicator revisions that affect the mission's contract with the AID/W Bureau, waivers, etc., concerning which S.O. teams are charged with primary oversight.

The question here was whether, even under the most liberal interpretations of reengineering, the minimum hierarchical requirements and responsibilities which cannot be redelegated by mission directors does not *ipso facto* make a mockery of the empowerment principle that lay at the heart of what mission management was trying to achieve through its restructuring. Not surprisingly, we were unable to come up with a concrete resolution to this issue.

## Engaging Civil Society and Governments on the Greater Horn of Africa

Participation Forum 18: April 25, 1996

The following excerpt from the forum on the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative highlights some of the issues and frustrations in overcoming bureaucratic habits in order to encourage local ownership for regional development efforts. Pat Rader, Director of the Greater Horn of Africa Task Force, and Dick McCall, the Administrator's Chief of Staff, who has played a key leadership role on behalf of the Administrator in this initiative, provided this perspective from USAID/Washington.

### Making the Initiative Work in Washington

*Pat Rader*

The Greater Horn of Africa Initiative pushes the limits on all USAID's concepts of reengineering. It's very exciting, but at the same time, it really points out how difficult it is to change a corporate culture. When I get frustrated, I think, "Well, the good news is that you're pushing the envelope. The bad news is that the envelope's made out of steel."

When we think about participation, we are thinking about servicing the customer. But those of us in Washington are a long way from Asmara—a long way from the customer. The

question for USAID/Washington is how to stay excited about doing things differently, letting Africans take the leadership, and so on when you are sitting in Washington and there's no money for travel.

One of the key issues we're dealing with in USAID/Washington is communication among ourselves—among bureaus, among agencies, even within offices—especially communication about how we do what we're doing better. Probably 80 percent of the issues that we have among our offices and agencies, and even with our field missions, arises from a lack of communication, not knowing what people are doing and why. We are trying, in a reengineered USAID, to open up electronic communication among all partners, including PVOs.

**Major Issues.** A major issue is tension between decentralization and empowerment in the field. It is a corporate tendency, particularly right now, when USAID is under fire, to centralize and not to be transparent. To implement an initiative like the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative means having Africans take leadership and working with them slowly over time. This is difficult to do through a centralized agency under the gun on earmarks from the Congress, where two-thirds of the resources are managed from Washington. This tension inhibits our ability to do what we want to do and have the impacts we want to have and creates credibility issues with the Africans.

Another issue is just straight turf. People have spent years in agencies that are built along office lines where the funding comes from and where employees are evaluated. It is difficult to break down the tendency to protect one's turf.

**Transition Teams.** The most exciting thing that's happening in Washington is what we call our transition teams. Six teams have been set up to deal with different substantive and process issues. These teams are testing reengineering in the sense that they cross bureaus, they cross offices, and they cross agencies. Our PVO partners are

involved on many of them. When the transition team on linking relief and development first met, it was several people sitting around the table from the Department of Defense, the U.S. Information Agency, different bureaus in USAID, the State Department—all with their bureaucratic hats on fighting over this issue. Over the course of about a year, the people who really were concerned about linking relief and development and making it work in the field stayed, and the rest disappeared. That left us with a core of people who took their bureaucratic hats off and now are transition team members. A couple of these members have said that, as things get a little tough in USAID, the reason that they get up in the morning and go to work is that it's so exciting to be sitting across the table from people that they had a conflict with in the past and really working towards a joint product that is right, that is good.

This transition team has produced an excellent draft document on the principles linking relief and development. It explains what the constraints are (most are bureaucratic; only a few are legal) and then offers concrete recommendations on what the USAID Administrator could do in terms of policies to address the constraints.

Now the team is thinking about implementation. All of a sudden the brakes have been put on. People are realizing that the evaluations and incentives of the personnel system will have to change and that pots of money will have to be mixed. Just in the past month or so people have begun to say, "Oh, this isn't a theoretical exercise, this is really going to affect where we work and how we work and how we're trained and how we're evaluated." The period of brainstorming is exciting. Then the organization suddenly realizes that to be better, it will have to change.

As we try to keep our eye on the customer and think about African leadership we must believe that the Africans have looked at their problems in the Horn and said, "If we don't stop our conflicts, we're not going to make it."

Sudanese are talking to Kenyans, Ugandans, and Eritreans. These people, virtually at war with each other, are saying, “If we don’t pull up our socks we’re not going to make it.” Part of the process of helping Africans to go where they want to go is for us to pull up our own socks.

Another excellent transition team that is struggling with difficult issues is the so-called “Radars Team.” It’s the team that deals with conflict prevention. Headed by the State Department, it has members from the Defense Department, the U.S. Information Agency, the intelligence communities, the PVO community, and the Africa and Global Bureaus. It’s probably the most diverse team of the six.

**The Donor Rule.** What can donors do to help Africans to prevent conflict? Africans are asking themselves that, and we’re asking ourselves that. But if USAID’s goal is to push for African leadership and field-based programs, what can Washington bureaucrats do to help the process, rather than getting in the way of it?

The concept is that the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative will move out to the field and that REDSO/East Africa will coordinate the activities and the programs in the ten field missions involved. The role of Washington will be backstopping and policy advice. But strategy development, implementation, and communication will take place among USAID and other government entities out in the field with African counterparts. To the extent that the initiative stays here in Washington, we will have failed.

This is a very bad time for USAID. We’re all overworked, and morale is suffering. While the good news is that the initiative can raise our morale, the bad news is that it is often perceived as yet another political layer on people who are just barely coping. When people break through and understand that USAID could do things differently and make a difference, it is encouraging but until then it feels like, “If I have

another weight on my chest, I won’t be able to get up.”

**The Difficulty of Doing Things Differently.** An example how hard it is to do things differently concerns a line item in the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative budget to facilitate implementation. USAID missions and different private organizations smelled that money, and unsolicited proposals, from both in- and outside USAID, multiplied. We set up a number of criteria which must be met before we fund something. One criterion is that the activity must be African-led and African-owned. This is an issue, because there are U.S. entities that would really like to be first in line for this money. But we have to be clear that if we are doing things differently, it means that we are doing things differently. So missions aren’t being encouraged to put old projects in new bottles and then come running in and say, “Look, we’ve met your principles.” We are trying to say, “Is this a new bottle, or is this really restructuring the program that you have out in your country to look at regional impacts, to think about conflict prevention, to link relief and development?”

If we really had time to think about a results framework on the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative, we would have to be sophisticated about measuring results. We are not there yet as an agency. We need help from people who have thought through this process. It’s a dilemma. The countries in the initiative are “good performers,” and they’re sending in great R2s. For example, the Rwanda program was seen as an excellent development partner with excellent results, but absolutely all results were destroyed because we were watching the wrong ball.

On the other side, some relief programs measure only keeping people alive, which is quite understandable. But are they always to be dependent, or at some point are we moving toward some kind of sustainable mode where they can keep themselves alive? If we take the principles of this initiative seriously and worry

about impacts, we have to think about results. What are the results if short-term economic gains are destroyed by civil war? What are the results

of keeping children alive with no education systems, no way of self-sufficiency, and total dependence on free food aid?

### **Breaking Down Barriers That Inhibit Teamwork**

*Dick McCall*

When I first started working on the Hill, the senator I worked for was chairman of the African Affairs Subcommittee, so my first voyages overseas were to Africa. Since those days I have seen a marked change in the region, particularly Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, and Rwanda. The quality of the leadership and the intellectual capacity is unbelievable. I am struck time and time again about the seriousness with which they are looking at their problems and their understanding of the nature of what has precipitated a continual cycle of crisis in that region. These are extraordinarily capable and bright people with exciting visions. I am also struck by the tremendous quality and dedication of the people we have on the ground. People from the various organizational units—OFDA, Food for Peace, and so on—work as teams with an integrated sense of purpose and mission.

However, it is frustrating that, despite the crises in the region, USAID is not giving the people on the ground the tools to do the job. Fundamental to crisis prevention and management is food security. Right now our

missions are getting directives from Washington to increase child survival and family planning programs. There are no food security resources. We have not empowered the missions to encourage the creativity in any way, shape, or form. As a matter of fact, the whole contracting and procurement process is more cumbersome than it has ever been.

Many donors are going through the same problems: cutbacks and lack of support from key constituencies. We seem to be unable or unwilling to look at crisis prevention, management, and mitigation in an integrated framework and to bring people together to look at what is required to deal with these problems more effectively. If we can't do that, I think it will eventually be the death knell for USAID.

If development professionals can't figure out some way to break down the barriers that separate us and to look at resources as not owned by one particular bureau or one particular donor agency, then ultimately we're all going to suffer the consequences.

## **Participation in a Non-Participatory World: Lessons from USAID/Senegal's Outreach to Customers and Stakeholders**

Participation Forum 23: May 21, 1997

The joint appearance in this forum of Administrator Brian Atwood and representatives of the Senegal mission coincided with a watershed moment for USAID and its reform processes. Much of the agency had made the transition to planning, implementation, and reporting based on results—a remarkable achievement—but the practice of USAID's other core values—customer focus, teamwork/participation, and empowerment/accountability—was lagging. Nowhere did these seem more distant than in Washington, where for a couple of years management attention had been absorbed by external crises, including the consolidation of the foreign affairs agencies. With these battles behind USAID, Mr. Atwood assured Forum participants in his introductory remarks that USAID/W would move the reforms forward: “I want to repair the (USAID field) mission-Washington disconnect.... We need to be prepared to listen to our field missions and, in particular, to the strategic objective teams.” Senegal Mission Director, Anne Williams, and a group of colleagues reviewed their experience in reaching out to customers and laid out the issues and choices that arise when a mission actively implements new agency policy on participation. Their presentation began with a “Masterpiece Theater” in six short acts and ended with a lively discussion.

### **The Importance of Listening**

*Brian Atwood*

**Advice from Bill Cosby.** The essence of today's forum is listening. I was struck by a statement that Bill Cosby recently made in a commencement speech. He said, “You know, you're all very fortunate to have received such a wonderful education. But don't leave here believing that the person who sweeps the floor is not as smart as you.”

Think about it. Many of the people that we work with in the developing world haven't received even a basic education. Does that mean that they don't understand the way they want their village or even their country to run? Does that mean that they don't have the ingenuity to survive in very poor circumstances? Does that mean that they don't have a culture that has been passed on from one generation to another? Of course it doesn't. But, nevertheless, it may well be that we in USAID fail to be sensitive enough to listen to people in the countries where we

work. If we do, we miss an awful lot. We may send people who have Ph.D. degrees in a particular specialty out to a village and feel that from them we can find out everything there is to know, never even stopping to think that the people we're talking to in the village may well be as smart as we are. The whole concept of grassroots listening is something that every one of us needs to think about a great deal.

I certainly haven't undertaken the job of USAID Administrator with the impression that I'm smarter than the people who work in this agency. I've tried to reach out, especially during some of the worst times that we've been through, to bring in small groups of people and to get their perspective on what's happening. A lot of the changes of direction that we've taken have been the result of really good feedback from people who are experiencing the reforms of USAID and have their own perspective on them.

One of my concerns about our reforms is that we have a rational system, but that doesn't mean that irrational things can't happen in that process. That doesn't mean that bureaucratic behavior, or simply dysfunctional behavior, can't throw us off the tracks.

When I first joined USAID, risk aversion was widespread. People thought that a very aggressive Inspector General would get us all into trouble if we weren't careful. But I have been encouraging people to take risks. We are trying to create a hospitable environment for risk-taking in USAID.

**Washington-Field Disconnect.** The other aspect of bureaucratic behavior that could pervert the reforms is the disconnect between Washington and the field in the process for building budgets. It's extremely important that when mission personnel come to Washington for reviews of their strategy that they be encouraged by Washington. In this regard, we have a long way to go. Now that the battle over consolidation is behind us, I want to try to repair the mission-Washington disconnect. We need to break down, to the extent we can, the bureaucratic sort of barriers here. We need to be prepared to listen to our own field missions and, in particular, to the strategic objective teams. They have listened and made certain judgments about the way they can achieve results. If we, for whatever reason,

thwart their desire to move in a certain direction after they have listened to the people of the country, the people who are their partners in getting the job done, then Washington isn't performing its role.

Despite the crisis that we've been through in this agency and the need to centralize things for a while to get through the 1996 fiscal year, we believe very strongly in decentralization and in giving as much support to the field as possible. We believe that it is the most effective way to get the job done.

**Developing a New Paradigm in Senegal.** One of USAID's real innovators, Anne Williams, is going to show the way. I've been to Senegal many times, starting from the time I served in Africa in the 1960s. But when President Diouf spoke to me in French and used the word "reengineering," then I knew that we had crossed a certain line. My good friend, the minister of health, Ousmane N'Gom, was delighted that we had actually asked him and his ministry how we should proceed, how we could be partners.

Our actions have prompted other donors to look at the way they do business. It's often top-down; it's often "we know best what's right for you." The change we have brought about in this mission and in many more around the world is an important contribution to development. We are leading the way toward a new approach altogether.

## MASTERPIECE THEATER

### Participation and Partnership in Senegal: A New Paradigm

*Cast of characters:* Anne Williams, Mission Director; Woody Navin, Coach of the Program Core; Fatimata Sy Diallo, Coach of SO Team 1; Sadou Cisse, Coach of the Cross-Cutting Team, in the role of government official; Molly Melching, Director of the NGO TOSTAN; and Steve Wisecarver, USAID/Washington Desk Officer.

*Setting:* The year is 1996. The Senegal mission has started to work on a strategy that will cover the next eight years. They've already held three workshops to gauge the views of the U.S. and Senegalese governments and Senegalese NGOs and associations and the private sector. And they've assembled a dream team of Senegalese advisors. As Act I opens, the mission director wants to go even farther...

#### ACT I: THE MISSION DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

Fatimata: Hi, Anne. How are you doing?

Anne: I'm fine. Please, sit down. What can I do for you today?

Fatimata: I'm here to tell you where we are in developing our new strategy for the next eight years. These last two months the staff has worked very well. We've come up with some great ideas, and now we are ready to write our paper. We contacted Washington, and they may send out someone to help us. Also we may organize some meetings with our Senegalese partners just to present our ideas to them. What do you think?

Anne: Well, Fatimata, I'm a little bit surprised that you haven't taken more into account the "P" words. You know what I mean by "P" words?

Fatimata: Participation?

Anne: Yes, I'm a little surprised that we haven't thought about fostering **participation** ahead of time and changing our **paradigm**. What you've described to me is sort of the old way we did business. If you recall, we used to call in the consultants, write our strategy, and present it to government people, basically saying, "Take it or leave it." That's not quite what I mean by **partnership and participation**.

We've got to go out and listen to our customers and to our partners, not just the government. I know it's difficult, I know it takes more time, and I know we don't have that time, but I think we really have to do it.

I'd like to remind you of a Senegalese proverb that you once told me that says that it's useless to prepare a meal with sauce and couscous if no one likes couscous. Maybe we've got to find out whether the people want couscous or something else. Why don't you talk with your other colleagues. I've got to go talk to the Prime Minister about our new strategy now. Let's see where we can go.

Fatimata: Okay. I will think about it.

## ACT II: THE CORRIDORS OF THE MISSION

Woody: Hello, Fati.  
Fatimata: Hi, Woody.  
Woody: You look concerned.  
Fatimata: I am. I don't know what's going on with our new director. You remember her ideas about partnership? I think she's going too far. You know what she wants us to do? To go around the country and to talk to all sectors of Senegalese people. What do you think?  
Woody: You know, Fati, being just down the hall from Anne, I've learned to agree that these are very good ideas. Unfortunately, I've not stopped using on occasion the three-letter word "but." So, between you and me, it's our job to figure out how get them implemented.  
The fact is that we are working on the congressional presentation, but we'll get beyond that. We're not quite sure how we're going to fund the effort because the NMS is only on version .13 and the money doesn't come in until .27, but we'll get beyond that. Our Administrative Office must provide logistics support, but their motto is "Just say no." We'll get beyond this too. And how many regions do we have to go into? All ten?  
Fatimata: Ten regions.  
Woody: Ten regions.  
Fatimata: Ten regions.  
Woody: And probably in each region, we will want to do more than just go in and come out. Okay, so, all right. All ten regions. Well, do we even know our methodology?  
Fatimata: She hasn't talked about methodology yet. Let's talk to our government people and see what they think.

## ACT III: THE OFFICE OF A SENEGALESE GOVERNMENT MINISTER

Mr. Minister: I have something to tell you. I understand you're trying to do something called a customer survey.  
Fatimata: Exactly.  
Mr. Minister: Let me tell you what I think. Listen, this whole idea is really silly. You don't have to go beating about in the bush. We in the government can tell you everything you need to know. We know what the people's needs are and have been, ...er, exploring them for years. You do not need to waste any resources on this, I guarantee you. Anyway, let me know if there is anything I can do.  
Fatimata: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'll report that to Madame la Directrice.



## ACT IV: THE MISSION DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

*Scene: A few days later.*

Anne: I understand what you're saying, Fati. I understand that there are logistics problems, and I understand that the survey will fall during Ramadan. You know, I've been out in the bush during Ramadan. People still talk to you.

We really need to change our paradigm. We need to get out. We need to listen to our customers. I will tell you that I strongly believe that if we don't go out and listen, we really won't understand. In other words, we **have** to do this.

Let me check with Washington to find out whether or not we're going to get the money, but I'm hoping we can do it outside the NMS. That's what we've asked for.

*She picks up the phone.*

Anne: Hello, Steve?

Steve: Yes, this is Steve. Anne, listen. I just got this e-mail from you on additional PD&S funding for this crazy customer survey you want to do. We just don't have that kind of money for this, you know. And you want to talk to the Senegalese before you set your strategic objectives? Listen, listen, listen. No, no. Stop. Don't talk to them, please. It's the best advice I can give you. Let me check with DP. I've got to see what our sector controls are, what our earmark information is. You just can't go out and set your strategic objectives. We've got some priorities back here you've got to take into account first. Okay?

*He hangs up.* [Aside: That Senegalese sun must be really baking her brain. She's talking about real participation out there.]

## ACT V: MOLLY'S OFFICE

*October 1996*

Molly: Sure, we can do it. I'm convinced we can do it. We did this type of exercise with the PADLOS (Project to Support Local Development in the Sahel) Education Project with the Club de Sahel. We went out to many villages and just listened to what people thought about their past and their vision of the future.

But I think it's a two-step process. For the customer survey, first we need to prepare the 120 surveyors who will go out, that is, the USAID people, the government of Senegal partners, and the other partners like the NGOs. We could have a two-day seminar and get a consensus on the questionnaire so that people feel like it's their questionnaire and that these are important questions to be asking. And then, some people need listening techniques and some cross-cultural skills, because they're not quite sure how to approach villagers. Some have never even been to the field.

The second step would be pre-customer survey discussions with the customers. They may have never really thought about the issues we'll want to raise in quite this way. The pre-survey discussions would allow them to reflect upon the issues before the national teams came in and asked them questions. So in order to do that, we could hold a two-day workshop for the facilitators, who would go out to the villages first, so that they would know what questions to ask, followed by two-day discussions with the facilitators and the village groups in preparation for the national teams. What do you think, Anne?

Anne: I'll tell you, Molly, it sounds good to me. What do you think, Fati? Can we do it?

Fatimata: So, let's do it!

Molly: Let's do it! We can do it!

#### ACT VI: THE MISSION DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

*A few weeks later.*

Anne: What do you think, guys? How did it go? What did you see and what did you learn?

Fatimata: It went very, very well. Most of the people in the mission really appreciated the chance to be involved in the survey, especially people from the Office of Finance and the Executive Office and many of the support staff. They had the opportunity to talk to people, and now they realize how the work they are doing affects customers.

Woody: I'll comment on the other donors and how they all interacted, and perhaps a bit on the ministries. The other donors really think that USAID has something. They're worried that they might have to do the same thing, but they realize that this is important stuff. And on the ministry side, they found out all kinds of things.

Mr. Minister: Well, you know, maybe soon we will be considering changing a little bit the way we do business. We were amazed at the things we heard. This time we did not go out on our own. We went out with the donor. The people really know what they want. This is not what they tell us when we come alone. But I was surprised to hear that they were very unhappy with the government. They never told us that before.

Anne: Molly, what do you think the villagers felt about this experience?

Molly: We got lots of feedback from the villagers on this. The first thing that surprised them was that people were coming just to ask their opinion, and they really appreciated that. They said that was one of the first times that people had come just to get their thoughts on, for example, strategic objectives for the next ten years.

According to our facilitators, the villagers first assumed that the survey was for a project or to get money from some agency. They wanted to know what they should say. And the facilitators said, "No, no, no. You really think about what's been going on in your country, in your region,

don't have to say anything. To the contrary. We want to know what you and what you see as a better way of doing things in the years to come." That really astonished them. And they said, "You mean, we can be honest?"

That preparation helped the villagers to get thinking. And when the national survey teams came, they got some well-thought-out answers from the people.

## CURTAIN

### What Happened After the Survey

*Anne Williams*

**The Strategic Objectives Workshop.** After the survey we took all the questionnaires and responses, translated them into French (in each region, we had had facilitators who spoke the local language), correlated the information, and called in a sociologist to help us interpret it.

Next, I wanted to bring together representatives of all our partners and customers to help us set the outlines of our strategic objectives. I proposed that we do this in a three-day workshop, or "*atelier*," with about 200 people. We decided we couldn't handle more than 200 because we wanted ten groups of 20 each—eight to work on strategic objectives and two to work on the subject of "whither goest USAID/Senegal."

There was an enormous amount of work and not a lot of time to do it, because this was during the period of R4 preparation and Hillary Clinton's visit. It also came at a time when we were completing annual evaluations. So we were a rather busy mission.

We selected 200 people in their own capacity. For example, we invited members of the press, not as press, but as people who were journalists who knew the country.

We carefully structured the *atelier* so that there was a strict agenda. The small groups

had to come out with a product: one strategic objective. We forced people into a paradigm change so that they couldn't come out with everything but the kitchen sink. They actually had to prioritize and choose one objective. We structured the *atelier* so that on the third day, if we ended up with eight totally different strategic objectives, we would have had to vote.

We made the decision that we would do this totally in-house in terms of Senegal; we would not bring in outside consultants. We had the capacity within Senegal to run an *atelier* like this. We hired a firm to organize and facilitate the *atelier* just a week before it was to start. They did a fabulous job—everything from hotel arrangements to facilitating discussions: we had facilitators in every group and a main facilitator.

The *atelier* took place the last week of April. About 240 people attended the opening sessions; about 150 participated actively during all three days. The meeting ended with an amazing consensus and two strategic objectives, which we have been back here this week discussing.

It was a complete paradigm change. It took a lot of time and effort. And one of the questions that we will raise as we go on is, is it worth it?

### Discussion Session

### The Customer Survey Team

**Diane La Voy:** Woody, could you lay out who actually went out and did the survey? I know some donors and people from different ministries were involved. Maybe you could discuss the issues associated with selecting surveyors.

**Woody Navin:** The participants in the customer survey included about 45 USAID staff. As mentioned, it was a real occasion for some people on our staff who had never stepped off the peninsula of Dakar to enter Senegal. There's a big difference. So it was an eye-opener for financial management staff, for our librarians, and for others.

A number of NGOs participated, as well as ministry people. We didn't get all six ministries, but many from health, education, and women's affairs were involved. We also had representatives from Peace Corps, UNDP, and the Canadian International Development Agency, but not from the World Bank.

**Diane La Voy:** I know that there are some folks in Senegal, including even the sociologist who analyzed the survey findings, who had problems with the lack of scientific sampling methods. There wasn't, for instance, a random choice of villages. What was involved in selecting the villages for the survey?

**Anne Williams:** I never looked on this as a scientific survey. For me, what was important was the process of going out and listening in all of the different regions. We went to urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. I knew we would get a lot of feedback, because I myself go out once a quarter, sometimes for a week, sometimes for two weeks if I can. I knew there would be a lot of coherence in what people would be saying and that the experience of going out and listening would change our paradigm and get us into a new habit. We would be able to use the information we obtained even though we couldn't claim that it had scientific validity. Sometimes we get so tied up in being scientific about surveys that we end

up not doing anything. We say, "We can't do it ourselves. It's too difficult." There's a benefit to listening to people directly.

**Molly Melching:** We selected the sites with the help of many people throughout the country. We had only about two weeks to select all 90 sites and do some training in each of them. But we were determined to get the job done.

### **Preparation of the Surveyors**

**Diane La Voy:** Molly, your NGO specializes in training: literacy training and other forms of capacity-building for villagers. How did you prepare the surveyors to go out? What did you put them through that helped transform them from program administrators to listeners?

**Molly Melching:** One of the main things we did during the two days of preparation was to elicit their participation in writing up the questionnaire, so that they felt like the questions were their questions.

We also talked about cross-cultural sensitivity. For example, we took some participants aside before one of the sessions and asked them to pretend they were villagers who had just met with a terrible national survey team. They were to imagine the worst scenario possible. What would they say to each other after the team left? At first they hesitated, saying they couldn't do skits, but they were extraordinary. They came up with just the type of things a surveyor shouldn't do in a village.

Playing the part of villagers, they said, "Did you see those people come in? My gosh! All they cared about were per diems. They didn't care about what we think. Did you see? One person was even reading his newspaper. They didn't even bother to greet us. And all they wanted to talk about was this questionnaire they had, and they didn't even ask how our families were."

In this way the survey teams identified pitfalls of cross-cultural understanding. Eventually, they wrote down how to approach villagers in the right way so that they would enjoy the exchange and be able to say what they really thought.

### Survey Questions

**Sharon Pauling:** How consistent were the customer surveys from village to village?

**Molly Melching:** The questions to be used by facilitators were prepared in advance with the participation of the national survey teams. The questions were very open and general. For each of six areas—the environment, politics, social services, demography, culture and values, and the economy—two sets of questions were asked. The first set was about the past and present: describe the situation existing in 1960 at Independence and the evolution between 1960 and 1996—major problems, efforts to resolve problems, and tendencies noted. The second set was about the future: describe the society in which you would like to live in 2006; what actions are necessary in each area to achieve this society?

We couldn't get to all communities in advance to train facilitators to prepare the villagers. But we did the best we could. Facilitators were selected from NGO personnel familiar with the villages and conversant in the local languages. The process didn't always happen as anticipated because there was not always enough time to prepare the villagers.

**Woody Navin:** One of the interesting/surprising things learned from the customer surveys was that most Senegalese people don't like or trust their government. For example, only 25% of the people voted in the last election. Villagers would like to have the money sent to them directly without the "middlemen costs" associated with going through the government or even NGOs. People know they are getting the short end of the

stick. USAID realizes that it is not practical to do this and that the current government will probably be in power for the next ten years. It was very useful for USAID to get feedback directly from local people and not filtered through government officials.

### Setting Parameters for the Consultation

**Brian Atwood:** How did you establish parameters for the consultation? We have five agency goals. We also have, as Anne knows all too well, certain earmarks, like the one for child survival. How did you establish the parameters so that you didn't get feedback from villagers who said, "We need you to build a bridge," when USAID is not in that business any more?

**Anne Williams:** First, the customer survey was mainly to get people's feeling for where they are and where they want to go. It wasn't even in the context of the USAID program. The villagers' vision for what they want for their country was one of the pieces of information we used in the three-day *atelier*.

**Brian Atwood:** After you had the survey results, you talked about creating two new strategic objectives. Very few of our missions are starting up from scratch. We have what we call "mortgages," ongoing programs in areas that won't be recommended by the consultation. I suppose that's what you're struggling with now in Washington as you try to defend the two new SOs.

**Anne Williams:** At the *atelier*, we tried to give everybody there the same information. We presented what our studies had shown. We gave the "RAPID" presentation on the health/population situation. We made a Powerpoint presentation on the environment. The government presented its Ninth Development Plan. As mission director, I outlined the constraints USAID has to work within. I

emphasized that all partnerships have their limits. USAID's money comes from the American people, through Congress, and we have a number of constraints. Anything we do has to be within all of the constraints.

In other words, there were three overlapping templates: What our customers were saying; what the government of Senegal was saying; and the USAID constraints.

We wrestled with a dilemma: Should the mission talk to Washington first and then go talk to its partners or should the partners be consulted first? I maintain both should be done together.

We have two new strategic objectives but we also recognize that we can still continue ongoing programs. We're taking what we believe is the next step in the dynamic process of development. It's not USAID's strategy for Senegal, but the U.S.-Senegal strategy. Both sides have to agree to buy into the process.

**Brian Atwood:** What worries me is that our emphasis on results packages and strategic objectives will keep us too narrowly focused and that we will become too focused on the numbers, on numerical results, and we will miss some broader results.

**Woody Navin:** We are fully aware of earmarks and trying to work within constraints. We are juggling the need to report on results on an annual basis; yet, as development professionals, we know that many of the problems that we are tackling take a long time to solve and involve changing policies and institutions and deeply ingrained habits.

### **The New Strategic Objectives**

**Pirie Gall:** You have been talking for about 45 minutes, and it has all been on process. What was the outcome?

**Anne Williams:** The two strategic objectives that we came up with were, first, an SO on job

creation. People felt it was very important to reduce the 45% under-employment rate, especially for young people and women. There is a great need for income generation. Five of the eight groups had this as their most important SO. The second SO was on decentralization. In Senegal, decentralization laws are on the books, but actual decentralization is being implemented slowly. This SO is causing us some trouble in Washington because it is unclear how it relates to various agency SOs using earmarked funds. For example, does it fall under democratization or health? While Washington gave us the signal to go ahead with considerable Washington input, there remains lots of reservations about the decentralization strategic objective.

### **Group Process in the *Atelier***

**Elise Storck:** Could you discuss the process used in the eight groups during the *atelier*?

**Anne Williams:** Participants were given the same background material, but they did not select their own groups. Membership in the various working groups of the *atelier* was assigned so that people would not band together in subject matter groups. The idea was to get a good mix. Senegalese facilitators were used. They kept people in bounds and limited the discussion to one strategic objective.

**Diane La Voy:** I was a "voyeur" during the *atelier*. It was a struggle for many groups, especially at the beginning. The process was very democratic with people from various socioeconomic groups and different social classes, sitting down together and contributing on an equal basis. I saw some nice interactions develop. It took people a time to realize that there wasn't a "right" answer, that they weren't supposed to "discover" what USAID wanted to do. It took time for it to sink in that they were to do the planning.

## Response of Other Donors

**Alex Ross:** USAID is definitely a leader in the area of customer participation. How did other NGOs and donors view the process? Do you think they will try to emulate USAID?

**Anne Williams:** I went to a cocktail party shortly after the *atelier* and my French counterpart and others mentioned the process to me. It was clear that people had been discussing it. I also found out that the process was mentioned at a World Bank meeting and held up as a model to be emulated, as heads nodded around the table.

## The Role of Washington

**Cathryn Thorup:** What can we in Washington do to help processes like this to go on?

**Anne Williams:** Listen. Be better partners. Participate more fully. We had money for people to come out for the *atelier* and only Diane La Voy and Phil Jones (AFR/SD) came out. Be more flexible. The reporting system fosters rigidity.

## More on the Customer Survey

**Larry Salmen, World Bank:** Listening isn't new. We began at the Bank in 1981, but the participatory processes haven't really caught on in institutional terms. Now there is reason to think that it will. Did you find that use of a questionnaire, rather than open-ended questions and focus groups and observations, restricted the information you were able to obtain?

**Molly Melching:** Actually it wasn't a questionnaire. The questions were open-ended and elicited a lot of give and take. For example, one of the domains was demography. In one village we were talking about how the village had increased 30% in population over the last ten years. When asked if they thought this process

would continue, they agreed it would. When asked what they thought of that, they at first said it would be wonderful. When reminded that they had talked about the lack of jobs and land, they at first were stunned and then began talking about family planning. The women said that they had been talking about the need for family planning for a long time. One man said that now he knew why. I mention this, not because we planned to get into the area of family planning, but to show how open-ended the questions were and how they elicited discussion. The small group process enabled local people to come up with their own solutions. For example, family planning and monogamy ended up being suggested by one man as solutions for problems caused by over-population.

**Margaret Guell:** I understand that during Ramadan there are certain things one wouldn't do. How did you deal with that?

**Woody Navin:** With the advice of my Senegalese colleagues, I made the decision that we could do the survey then. Ramadan, Islam, does not prohibit it. It's just rarely done. Actually, it turned out to be very good because the villagers don't have to prepare lunch.

## Next Steps

**Noreen O'Meara:** Do you plan to go back to the customer as the process continues?

**Anne Williams:** Here is how I see the process evolving. We moved from the survey to the workshop. Now we are back in Washington for consultation. When we return to Senegal we will discuss what we learned from Washington and find out what the government thinks and get suggestions about how we should implement the new objectives. We will then form multidimensional focus groups to discuss the evolving plans. At the end of October, the process will culminate in another workshop,

about the same size as the first one, in which we will present our results framework. We're hoping

to get a lot of Washington people out in Senegal working with us and our partners and customers.

The problem is that this is a very resource-intensive process, and our resources—both time and money—are limited. I could go on and on about how many conflicting priorities there were, but I don't need to. Everybody says we don't have enough time. It would be nice if this was all we were doing, but we are implementing our current program, we are implementing reengineering, and we are trying to develop a new strategy all at the same time.

Is it worth it? Yes, because it's about time we started looking at sustainability. If we don't, we're spending a lot of money for nothing. I believe that sustainability comes from ownership and that what we're trying to do. By broadening and deepening ownership for what we're doing, we are laying a foundation for better implementation and sustainable results.



## 7. Organizational Change and Iterative Learning

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### Statement of Principles on Participatory Development The Honorable J. Brian Atwood, Administrator, USAID

Tuesday, November 16, 1993

There is nothing more basic to the development process than **participation**. That is a lesson we have learned over the years, but it is one that we have not fully appreciated in all of its implications.

First, **broad access by people to their country's economy and participation in their society's decisionmaking processes are results we seek to support**; they are fundamental to sustained development; and

Second, our support is more likely to lead to these results if the development programs are relevant to people's needs, and for this there needs to be **broad participation by people in defining development priorities and approaches**.

**Participation, therefore, describes both the end and the means**; both the kind of results we seek, and the way that we, as providers of development and humanitarian assistance, must nurture those results.

**The ends and the means are closely related.** For our scarce funds to contribute meaningfully to the goal of sustainable development—to development that broadens economic, social, and political access and enables a society to keep improving the quality of life for its people—the **development approaches themselves must be sustainable**. They must be consistent with the priorities and values of those who will have to sustain the effort after the donor has left. This is true for a village-level project, and it is true for a national-level program. It applies to policy reforms as well. The policy changes that may be needed to open up economies to innovation and local investment must be supported by sufficient social consensus and a sense of shared sacrifice, or they will not be sustained.

Development assistance works best when it contributes to efforts that people in the recipient society are already attempting to carry out, and when it fully takes into account the priorities and values of affected groups.

The efficiency of this approach has been shown repeatedly, whether we look at the local level of a water-user association, or consider the degree of social consensus that a national government must count on to carry out and sustain changes in policy or social and economic programs.

Studies have shown this. Our experience at USAID has demonstrated it, through both the successes and failures of our efforts. Private foundations, the Inter-American and African Development Foundations, and private development assistance organizations around the world have learned it. Other bilateral and multilateral donors are learning it.

How are we to know whether such consensus exists, or can perhaps be brought about, or whether a given program truly matches local priorities and values? The answer is, **we must build opportunities for participation into the development processes in which we are involved.**

We sometimes do this very well, particularly at the community level, for example by using participative planning techniques in rural development programs. We will do this more consistently.

We will now build opportunities for participation into development processes at **all** levels—from community-level projects to the design of USAID's country strategies.

In short, **democratizing the development process will be the cornerstone of our approach.**

The fact is, unless development assistance is informed by local realities and the people who experience them daily, it will very rarely succeed. Unless policy reforms and other major national commitments are perceived as serving a broad national interest, they will be difficult to sustain.

The reason for this is quite simple. **It is their country, not ours.** It is their community, not ours. We can advise, we can assist, and we can choose not to assist, but the decisions about development priorities and policies must be reached by that society at large, not by us. It is they who bear the risk; they must make the commitment. Providers of development assistance—whether a well-meaning private voluntary group inadvertently imposing an inappropriate cultural style, or whether a panel of prestigious international experts prescribing policy changes from a vantage point far removed from the particular political and social environment—**fail** if we forget that **it is their country, not ours.**

Let us start with that basic truth, therefore, as we construct a development approach based on participation—one that democratizes the development process. Our approach will be oriented by these guiding principles:

**One. We will listen to the voices of ordinary people—especially to people whose voices tend to be stifled by more powerful groups in their societies—as we try to discern national and local priorities.** This will mean encouraging governments to consult affected populations and to provide them “seats at the table” so that these groups might represent local reality and their own interests during the course of a development program. It will also mean developing and maintaining direct channels of communication between USAID and groups representing a wide range of views and interests in the society.

**Two. In defining our strategies at a country level and in pursuit of our global objectives, we will aim to support the initiatives of indigenous communities and organizations.** We will seek to understand what is already happening, what particular opportunities exist for USAID to contribute to development processes for which there is well-rooted local support. Our assistance—whether directed in support of national programs or channeled to specific local projects—will aim to complement the “social energies” and commitments shown by the recipient society.

That does not mean our aid cannot support **new ideas**, or ideas that are new to a given society. It does mean that we must first strive to ensure that the new idea is fully “owned” by legitimate indigenous institutions and that people who will be affected have a voice in how it is applied.

Nor does it mean that USAID should not have its **own priorities**. We must and we do: our priorities are set forth in the strategy documents for our four areas of concentration, and our severely limited resources will prevent us from supporting many worthy endeavors. It does mean, however, that we will seek to understand local priorities independently of our own priorities, capabilities, and resources.

**Three. We will cast widely for expertise.** The technical expertise available to USAID in many areas is world-class, and our technical assistance is often of greater value to recipient countries than the material resources we can offer. However, we will not be satisfied with our technical analysis until we have **opened it to debate** by a range of experts in the universities and research institutions of the recipient country and by other qualified experts in donor agencies.

Moreover, we will routinely and systematically test our expert analysis **against the reality experienced by affected populations**. To this end, we will develop appropriate ways in each country context to consult with organizations representing the interests of small-scale farmers and businesspeople, slum dwellers, fishing communities, tribal groups, poor women, professional associations, environmental, charitable, and development PVOs, and other people whose experience provides a needed reality check on the assumptions and prescriptions of outside experts.

This does not mean that we will expect to find harmony among the views of local experts. We will sometimes find more conflict than consensus among the perspectives of indigenous communities and interest groups. We will, however, recognize that competition among a plethora of interests lies at the heart of the democratic process. To the extent appropriate to our role as an outsider, **we will strive to make that competition more open and fair**, and thereby create as broad a view of the national interest as possible.

**Four. We will assure that USAID projects and programs are accountable to the end user.** That will mean, for example, that a health sector project under which municipal governments receive training materials, family planning services, and other support from U.S. private agencies will have some mechanism to permit the “clients”—in this case, the municipal governments—to tell USAID whether the services received from these PVOs meet their needs. It will also mean

that the woman receiving the family planning service has some say over the way those services are delivered in her community.

**Five. We will ensure that projects we support strengthen the capacity of the poor to take the next steps in their own and their community's development.** That is, in all our efforts— not just those aimed explicitly to promote our “democracy” objective—we will seek to **empower** the poor to sustain the development process. Sometimes this will be as simple as, for example, in a project aimed at training village health workers, providing opportunities for these health workers to meet, get to know each other, and thereby begin to identify common concerns and, perhaps, to initiate further efforts to improve local sanitation and health conditions.

**Six. To overcome the tendency of projects to benefit only local elites, we will use gender analysis and techniques for data collection and consensus building such as participative rural appraisal (PRA).** PRA is a development planning methodology that helps the different groups and institutions in a given community to agree on a common course of action and to take an active role in organizing the inputs of the various outside agencies.

**Seven. We will find ways to streamline our procedures for approving and amending projects so as to allow the local reality to drive our programs, rather than to have our procedures drive our definition of local reality.** Too often in the past, we in the development business have acquired a stake in a project we have designed and our procedures make it difficult to modify. Sustainable development means that the local recipients have the only stake that counts.

**Eight. We will keep our focus on results—on the results experienced by real people in the recipient societies—rather than merely on tracking the material inputs to projects and our adherence to our own procedures.** We will not lessen our commitment to accountability for the taxpayers' dollars nor our adherence to legal requirements. However, we must satisfy our need for accountability in ways that do not prevent us from achieving the results that will affect people.

**Nine. We will practice a respectful partnership with indigenous and American or international private organizations, ranging from non-profit development institutions to professional associations and businesses, that collaborate with us in providing development and humanitarian assistance.** We will work with those that are committed to strengthening institutions and empowering people in the recipient society. Our partnership means that we will listen to our partners' views and will work together in ways that reflect our complementary strengths. We recognize the uniquely American values and experience that U.S. PVOs offer, as well as their considerable range of skills and expertise. At the same time, we will not lose sight of the objective of strengthening indigenous institutions and capabilities, and will seek ways to expand our support to indigenous organizations and to facilitate the sharing of experience and expertise among them.

**Ten. We will take the measures necessary to equip ourselves to make good on these principles.** This will not be easy. We will need, for example, to find ways for **Mission staff to spend more time** out of the capital cities, and more time in meaningful dialogue with a wide range

of local groups. This will mean streamlining our procedures so as to relieve already overburdened staff of some of the work they currently do.

We will seek ways to **empower USAID's own personnel**, in the Missions as well as at AID/W, unleashing their innovation and creativity in finding better ways to serve our "clients" in the recipient societies.

We will **strengthen relevant skills and aptitudes** in our staff and contractors—stronger language and cultural skills, skills in discerning social processes, gender analysis and other techniques to enhance participation, skills in dealing with conflicting interests and, where possible, in enhancing awareness by local groups of a broader national interest. We will find ways to address this need in our personnel policies and practices.

We will consider realistically **the costs** of applying a participatory approach to our work. Many measures will involve little or no cost, and some may save money and mobilize larger amounts of local resources. Nevertheless, it takes time and resources to consult broadly, and the consultative process can sometimes be slow. We will ensure that these costs are outweighed by the benefits of focusing our development resources more securely on the priorities of the recipient society.

I have asked the Bureau of Policy and Program Coordination to make these principles central to their work in defining the Agency's priorities and procedures. We will enlist the help of many interested staff from all Bureaus, as well as from the Missions, in helping to develop guidelines for the implementation of these principles. Your assistance will be needed in finding ways to overcome the obstacles to participation, both in the field and in USAID's own procedures.

**The principles I have outlined will place USAID squarely on the cutting edge of change.** This is where I and, I believe, the American people want us to be. We will have learned the lessons that development professionals around the world are learning: development is a people process, and our efforts must aim to support the efforts of local people. That way we will show real, lasting results.

## **Participation Deja Vu?**

### **Staff Perspectives on USAID's "Participation Initiative"**

Following each of the 23 Participation Forums, USAID staff and partners e-mailed their comments to the convenor of the series, Diane La Voy. Following are three such messages received in 1994 and 1995. They provide some historical perspective on the Agency's current commitment to participation, suggesting similarities and differences in the understanding of the term "participation" and in the challenges facing USAID staff in pursuing participatory approaches.

The hope, frustrations, and concerns expressed in these e-mails and in the excerpt from a highly participatory Forum in May 1995 anticipate some of the findings of the 1998 *Stocktaking of Reforms in Agency Program Operations*, conducted in 1998. The *Stocktaking* is described in the paper, *Engaging Customer Participation*, the final piece in the anthology.

#### **Participation for Sustainability Advocated in 1990 (e-mail, July 1994)**

**Stuart Callison** expressed great pleasure that "USAID/W management is finally coming around" to view development as a participatory process. He cited the recommendations of a "Sustainability Working Group" that he co-chaired in 1990. The group recommended that missions should:

- work closely with host-country leaders on Country Development Strategy Statements,
- include key host-country actors in mission project and program planning at very early stages,
- actively strengthen host-country capacity to do its own strategic planning,
- strengthen and use local management systems wherever possible in project design and implementation, and
- monitor and report on the success of collaborative strategic planning, institutional reform, and host-country provision of recurrent costs.

#### **Learning As We Repeat Ourselves (e-mail, April 1995)**

**Dirk Dijkerman:** A lot of this talk smacks of a repeat of the "community development" literature of the 1950s and the "basic human needs/ integrated rural development" literature of the 1970s. In both of those previous "cycles" of USAID's endless swings to improving its people-level impact, there is a lot that could be learned as we repeat ourselves. This current customer focus is in many ways little different. The farming systems research literature of the 1970s is—a little bit of a simplification here—an attempt to get researchers to interact as equals and listen to farmers' needs, e.g., deal directly with the customer.

### **What's Familiar and What Has Changed (e-mail, April 1995)**

**Jerry Van Sant:** Most of what I read in the Forum meeting summaries sounds familiar to those of us who were involved in development in the 80s, especially the early 80s. The ample participation literature of the 70s and 80s addressed such issues as

- participation throughout the project cycle (implementation and assessment, not just design);
- participation in policy dialogue and policy determination;
- blending local knowledge with external technical knowledge;
- the role of NGOs and community organizations as intermediaries;
- the importance of the culture of organizations and agencies employing staff who have interaction with beneficiaries;
- empowering people; and
- decentralization (which became a dirty word in the late 80s).

What has changed is the application of these ideas to additional areas of USAID involvement, for example, community participation in environmental risk assessment and the link of participation to local governance. Here there is a body of knowledge from U.S. domestic experience that is genuinely new to the international development discussion. But a lot of this is not new. We struggle simply to get back to where we left off.

### **A Participatory Approach to Analyzing USAID's Participation Initiative (Excerpt from Forum 13, "Do We Need to Practice What We Preach?")**

The following describes a participatory exercise and summarizes the views it elicited.

The presenter, Camille Cates Barnett, engaged the 54 attendees in a two-part exercise, aimed at eliciting their views on the Agency's renewed emphasis on participation. It involved them in a new kind of participatory dialogue that would enable them to reflect on how their own analytic processes could be sharpened by teamwork.

The first part of the exercise consisted of participants' offering their views on the successes and failures of USAID's participation effort by answering three key questions in writing on 4x6 index cards.

For the second part, participants worked in pairs to get "beneath the surface" of their responses to the third question. Then the partner would probe the proposition by asking "Why?", listening to the answer, and asking again, "Why?" This would be repeated through five "whys." The pair then would reverse roles, with the questioner making the statement and the partner digging

into the assertion with a series of “whys?” Then each person wrote down his or her own answer, now probably rethought and improved, on the 4x6 card.

The cards were collected and the results summarized immediately following the Forum. These were e-mailed to all participants and provided to USAID Administrator Atwood. Below is an abbreviated version of that summary.

**1. What three things are going well in USAID’s renewed emphasis on participation?**

The participants gave high marks for the initiative’s success in increasing awareness throughout the Agency of effective ways to improve participation in USAID programs. The Administrator and some other senior management staff were applauded in particular for strong leadership. Employees throughout the Agency, including foreign service nationals, have been widely and consistently involved in dialogue on the subject. More outside organizations (nongovernmental organizations, small businesses, etc.) are taking part in program decisions. The net result has been a growth in individual esteem, pride in work, and staff enthusiasm.

**2. What three things are not going well in USAID’s renewed emphasis on participation?**

Participants were critical of senior management who were perceived as not practicing what they preached—of clinging to control and centralization rather than seeking to empower employees. USAID processes and practices were also viewed as remaining too bureaucratic, quashing initiative and experimentation. In addition, some participants noted confusion about the participation initiative: the need for it, the relationship between internal and external participation, its relationship to macroeconomic policy, its benefits. Some believed that the initiative is just a new buzzword for an old approach; others dismissed it as a luxury during a time of straitened circumstances.

**3. If, with the stroke of a pen, you could change one thing about USAID’s renewed emphasis on participation, what would it be?**

Many participants proposed greater commitment to participation on the part of some senior management. Specific suggestions included the following: Senior management should operate in a more participatory fashion, for example by meeting regularly with rank-and-file employees; they should understand and be committed to empowerment and teamwork; they should give credit to staff for being participatory and reduce liabilities associated with speaking out. Other proposals included having staff at all levels actively embrace participation and share information better; ensuring more client (grassroot-level) feedback; decentralizing authority over budgets, programs, and staffing; and expanding agency training on participation.



# Engaging Customer Participation: USAID's Organizational Change Experience

Prepared for the International Conference on Upscaling and Mainstreaming Participation of Primary Stakeholders: Lessons Learned and Ways Forward, November 19-20, 1998, by Diane La Voy, Senior Policy Advisor for Participatory Development, USAID/PPC; Chanya Charles, Senior Research Analyst for Participatory Development, USAID/PPC/R&RS; with contributions from USAID colleagues including Olivier Carduner, Cathryn L. Thorup, Norm Nicholson, Dan Friedheim and Liz Baltimore of PPC; John Grant of BHR/PVC; and Tony Pryor of AFR/SD

## I. Introduction

This paper discusses institutional changes that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has undertaken over the past five years. To be more effective in achieving its purposes as a development agency and better able to identify the results of its efforts, it began in 1993 to adapt certain management concepts first developed in the private sector and then promoted by the U.S. Government-wide “reinvention” effort. One of the central ideas is that an organization identifies (and listens to) its customers and holds itself accountable for results that the customers value.

USAID identified as its “customers”—that is, the primary stakeholders<sup>1</sup>—the people of developing and transitional countries who are end-users or beneficiaries of USAID programs, typically poor people. The Agency began to reorient all its operating and management systems away from the imperatives of a traditional bureaucracy and base them on participatory planning, consensus among partners on a development hypothesis, greater transparency and flexibility, and increased teamwork and decentralization of authority.

The Agency also renewed its commitment to participatory practices and to the values underlying them. Open seminars, publications, and an electronic forum drew staff attention to the many ways

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper, the term “customer,” or “ultimate customer,” is roughly synonymous with the World Bank’s use of the term “primary stakeholder.” USAID defines customers as “those host country individuals, especially the socially and economically disadvantaged, who are beneficiaries of USAID assistance and whose participation is essential to achieving sustainable development results.”

The term “partner” is equivalent to “secondary stakeholder.” USAID defines a partner as “an organization or customer representative with which/whom USAID works cooperatively to achieve mutually agreed upon objectives and intermediate results, and to secure customer participation.”

USAID uses the term “stakeholder” to refer to “those individuals and/or groups who exercise some type of authority over USAID resources such as Congress, OMB, Department of State, and those who influence the political process, e.g., interest groups and taxpayers.” USAID also recognizes that “stakeholders” in the field include a full range of actors, including customers and partners and those who may be adversely affected by, or represent opposition to, development efforts.

USAID definitions can be found in the Automated Directives System (ADS) Glossary <[www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/ads/glossary.htm](http://www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/ads/glossary.htm)>.

in which USAID and others had been using participatory practices, from Bosnia to the Sahel, as well as to the practical impediments to their use. Also, jointly with many of its partners, the Agency articulated, tested, and actively promoted concepts of cross-sectoral partnering through which development programs better enable local public and private-sector organizations to lead their own development processes.

As a whole, these changes were, and remain, a very ambitious undertaking. In his closing remarks to the USAID Mission Directors' Conference in November 1998, Administrator Brian Atwood noted that participatory approaches are the way to achieve sustainable development, but that bureaucracy, red tape, and complacency can sometimes get in the way.

This paper, prepared by staff who have been actively engaged in the change process at a policy level and in the field, describes, in Section II, USAID's systemic changes as follows:

- A. The need for change
- B. Reengineering of USAID's operating and management systems
- C. Participation Initiative: building on what's best
- D. New Partnerships Initiative: programmatic commitment to local empowerment
- E. Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation: building partnerships with PVOs
- F. Participatory development policy work with other donors

Section III discusses the results so far of these changes and reflects on a number of challenges that might face any organization undertaking such changes.

Section IV briefly presents seven lessons from USAID experience. They all illustrate one point: *our values, organizational structures, and processes profoundly affect our ability to promote primary stakeholder participation.* The lessons are:

1. For our development efforts to yield real participation by primary stakeholders, the organizational system needs to reinforce a value shift.
2. Partnership built into an operating system can facilitate primary stakeholder influence and empowerment.
3. Primary stakeholder participation requires that program authority be decentralized sufficiently to respond to changing circumstances.
4. Organizational change takes time and requires clear and sustained leadership.
5. Successful organizational change builds on the organization's culture and best practices.
6. Serious change requires major investment in training of both staff and partners.
7. Major change in operating systems may create new needs for "governance" of the organization.

Section V outlines ways in which USAID is currently addressing the challenges of building customer participation more fully into its work.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the conference’s discussion of “upscaling and mainstreaming participation of primary stakeholders.” By “mainstreaming,” we mean principally to make more routine those practices by donor institutions and development implementing organizations, whose effect is the fuller engagement of people in their society’s decision-making processes. We prefer not to circumscribe the discussion to people’s participation within a development project; therefore, we welcome the attention focused on engaging primary stakeholders’ participation in development strategies and policies. We note that the strategic plan developed by Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, and recently endorsed by the G-8 Heads of State, *Shaping the 21st Century* (OECD 1996), identifies full participation by both civil society and democratically accountable governments in the process of developing donor assistance strategies as critical to effective partnership between donors and recipient countries.

Perhaps more fundamentally, it is sound to remember that participation is essentially a matter of citizenship—a matter of people having access to opportunity and to the full range of their society’s decision-making processes. USAID views participation not only as an essential feature of effective development work, but as a purpose of development itself. One of the Agency’s goals is “democracy and good governance strengthened”; and USAID’s Strategic Plan recognizes that “(b)road-based participation and democratic processes are integral elements of sustainable development.” This is further reflected in USAID’s mission statement, which states that it supports “the people of developing and transitional countries in their efforts to achieve enduring economic and social progress and to participate more fully in resolving the problems of their countries and the world” (USAID 1997).

## **II. USAID’s Systemic Approach to Change**

The Agency has undertaken a process of management reforms that, where fully implemented, significantly reduce the practical impediments to participatory, “customer-focused” behavior by USAID staff and partners. These reforms represent a systemic approach to change—one based on rethinking all of the processes and procedures that make up our operating and management systems. The idea is to ensure that the staff have the necessary information, authority, and incentives to work responsively to the perspectives of people in developing or transition countries who are the end-users of our efforts. Systemic changes—particularly the implementation of teams empowered to make decisions—permit genuine partnership in USAID’s working relations with host country institutions, other donors, and implementing organizations.

### ***A. The Need For Change***

When Administrator Brian Atwood came to USAID in 1993, major reforms were required. Cumbersome procedures kept the Agency from being very responsive to host country initiatives, and staff were often more preoccupied with meeting internal requirements than with addressing

concerns raised by host-country partners. Procedures that ensured that the Agency met legal and ethical requirements with regard to procurement promoted insular habits and attitudes, and these tended to shield staff from views they needed to listen to. Timetables resulting from management decisions in Washington presented obstacles for efforts in the field to engage broader ranges of people in decision-making. In sum, many of USAID's procedures made it difficult to support dynamic processes in a society, particularly those involving the priorities and ingenuity of poor people.

The Agency's projects, laboriously designed in terms of input and outputs and managed throughout by experts, sometimes led to staff being able honestly to say that they had met all the projected implementation targets—but unable to say what if any impact USAID had on people's lives. Nor could they count on the impact to be sustained after project resources ended.

The Agency had for years been heavily criticized by Congress for a variety of reasons, a situation made worse by the fact that its financial systems did not permit it to show adequately where the resources were. Although progress had been made in results reporting, the Agency could not systematically discuss the results of its programs.

Earlier that year, the Clinton Administration's task force, headed by Deputy Secretary of State Clifton Wharton, had distilled the disparate claims on the foreign assistance program into a more focused mission centered on "sustainable development," but USAID's programs still responded to scores of different Congressional mandates and country-level developmental and diplomatic purposes. The 1993 Government Performance Reporting Act (GPRA) required strategic planning and management systems well beyond what USAID had in place. The Administration, through the Vice President's National Performance Review (NPR), had embraced this legislation as a basis to "reinvent government," streamlining its processes and more clearly articulating the value of government to the general public.

In the field, development professionals, including many of USAID's staff and partners, criticized the rigidities of the Agency's long project design processes. They faulted the emphasis on accounting for inputs and outputs at the expense of interacting with local people and called on the Agency to respond more fluidly to host-country development opportunities and to adjust programs as necessary to achieve results.

## ***B. Reengineering of USAID's Operating and Management Systems***

### ***Responding to GPRA, NPR, and best practices***

In response to the Vice President, Administrator Atwood in 1993 declared USAID to be a "reinvention lab" to pioneer the approach set forth by the NPR. The Agency's mission and development approaches were defined, building the basis for the Agency's Strategic Plan as required by GPRA. The Agency worked with Congress to develop legislation to replace the cumbersome Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, although this did not pass before elections brought a new Congress and new challenges.

In transforming the way it planned, implemented, and monitored its development efforts, the Agency built on its own best practices. Many USAID missions had successfully adopted strategic planning and performance measurement, and many staff and partners had for years used innovative, customer-focused approaches as well as collegial teamwork. USAID programs, therefore, already illustrated a rich array of participatory approaches.

The democracy program in the Dominican Republic, for example, was designed and managed by a broad-based group of Dominicans; in Malawi's agricultural sector, USAID had enabled the views of small farmers to challenge assumptions that it and other donors had held about the type of policies needing change; and the Agency's support to Bangladesh's Flood Action Plan empowered primary stakeholders by creating public access to information. In addition, the Agency had funded the development of important tools for participation such as manuals on participatory rapid appraisal, *The Green Book* (a citizen's guide to environmental policy analysis), and a shelf-full of materials by the Implementing Policy Change Project providing insights on engaging stakeholders and strengthening local consistencies for economic policy reforms (Brinkerhoff 1996).

### ***New organizational model based on Agency's core values***

The reengineering of the Agency's operating, management, and information systems aimed, like the reforms that had taken hold in some corporations and government entities, to transform the organization from the traditional fragmented hierarchy model to a more seamless structure that focused on desired outcomes and allowed greater flexibility in achieving them. The transformation process relied on the creative energies of several teams of USAID staff, and was premised on the core values that they defined. In a traditional structure, they recognized, it is assumed that employees do not share the same goals as the organization and must be controlled through elaborate handbooks, diffusion of responsibility, and a multi-layered supervisory structure. This engenders "values" such as:

"It's not my job"

"I'm in charge of this process, so do it my way"

"Accumulating turf is the key to promotions"

"Decisions made up the hierarchy are more correct than those made below"

"We know what's best"(view of specialized units with limited perspective)

To serve as a broad statement on the behaviors sought in a wide range of situations (and thereby to reduce the need for USAID's voluminous handbooks and much of the controlling work), the reengineering teams identified the following four core values:

- Customer focus (rather than letting internal procedures define purposes and constrain performance)
- Management for results (rather than by inputs)
- Participation and teamwork (with partners, customers, and also within USAID)
- Empowerment and accountability (giving teams the necessary authority and holding them accountable for results, rather than micro-managing their actions)

A fifth core value, diversity<sup>2</sup>, was added during the subsequent Business Area Analysis of the Agency's personnel policies and procedures.

### ***Streamlined rules and experimental labs***

After outlining new approaches to the Agency's work based on these values, between June and November 1994 the reengineering teams translated the broad design into operational rules and information system requirements. They then drafted the Agency's core directives covering planning, implementation, and performance monitoring/evaluation, which replaced much of the material previously spelled out in the Agency's handbooks of regulations. These core directives were completed by October 1, 1995, the date mandated for implementation of reengineering. The directives outline a new system for conducting Agency operations—one that clearly mandates participation.

The central feature of the new system is the strategic objective (SO). Decisions, resources, and activities are all organized around accomplishing a given SO, or significant development result. These are part of a strategy, developed collaboratively by USAID staff and partners in a given country and approved by USAID in Washington. Decisions about specific activities—how a given objective is to be accomplished—are made by the mission. The focus of supervision and leadership, therefore, is much less on how a set of approved activities (a project) is being implemented, but on whether the agreed-upon objectives and intermediate results are being achieved, and, if not, what changes might be required.

While the new operating system was being developed, Country Experimental Labs (CELs) were undertaken voluntarily in 10 missions. In each, staff sought to apply the new approach to some or all of the Mission's operations. Although an acceleration of the timetable for Agency-wide implementation of the new system meant that the CELs' experience did not (as originally intended) inform the development of the new directives, most of these experiences were remarkably effective in demonstrating some of the benefits of the "reengineered" approach, and continued to serve as seedbeds of innovation and learning.

### ***Results valued by customers***

The use of objectives, rather than sets of planned activities, permits flexibility that was not possible under USAID's previous operating system, which was defined by projects. Not only is the field empowered to make changes as necessary without seeking Washington approval—and thereby respond more fluidly to customer priorities—but the focus is more consciously on learning. Achieving results is intended to be a learning process in which Agency staff take risks and learn from their mistakes. They use information about results to make modifications in what they are doing, and they share lessons learned with others inside and outside the organization.

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<sup>2</sup>USAID's Diversity Plan defines this as valuing and appreciating the differences all employees bring to the workplace, while ensuring inclusion for all employees at all levels within the Agency.

Challenges inherent in this approach (discussed more below) include choosing objectives that are developmentally meaningful while within the capacity of USAID and its partners to affect; coping with rapidly changing situations; defining indicators that are clear and objective but also measurable at reasonable cost; and using results effectively for management decisions.

For some, using the term “customer” to mean the intended beneficiaries (or primary stakeholders) of USAID’s programs has been confusing. However, the term has also proved helpful in understanding and internalizing the implications for an organization that is aiming to streamline itself to focus on results that matter to people. In the business world, customers drive what the firm produces. USAID’s new directives now require that its ultimate customers (end-users or beneficiaries of USAID programs) must be “actively consulted” in developing, updating, and monitoring strategic plans, and involved in monitoring performance (USAID, ADS). They also require that each unit “shall develop a customer service plan which informs its planning and operations.” The plan should indicate how customer feedback will inform needs analysis and serve as a management tool to provide reality checks on whether the intended results are achieved.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, in the business world, activities or processes that do not add value to the product, or that get in the way of producing the product, are to be questioned and perhaps eliminated. USAID recognizes as customers (“internal” or “intermediate” customers) any person or organization, internal or external to USAID, who uses USAID services, products, or resources to serve the needs of other intermediate or ultimate customers. Therefore, customer-focus in this context requires that USAID units work with each other and with its grantees, contractors, and host-country partners in ways that make serving the interests of the customer paramount. This is clearly a tall order for any organization where functions have traditionally been divided into separate, rather self-referential units with their own procedures and timetables.

### *Partnerships toward agreed-upon objectives*

USAID has always conducted its work in collaboration with many other organizations. As budget limitations and other factors have reduced the size of many of USAID’s missions in countries around the world, it is common for a small number of USAID employees (the majority of whom are host-country nationals) to manage programs conducted by a wide range of grantees and contractors in collaboration with other partner institutions.

With some partners, the relationship involves USAID funding to implement programs; with others, such as fellow donor agencies, USAID collaborates toward common objectives through separate or jointly funded programs. Partners include: U.S. private voluntary organizations, indigenous and international non-governmental organizations, universities, other U.S. government agencies, UN and other multilateral organizations, professional and business associations, private businesses, and host country governments at all levels. Over the years, USAID has increased the percentage of

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<sup>3</sup>The use of customer service plans is also required throughout the U.S. Government by Executive Order 12862 "Setting Customer Service Standards," September 11, 1993.

its programs implemented through non-governmental organizations, so that 34 percent of its development assistance in 1997 was obligated through them. USAID has often engaged in quite reciprocal relationships with partners, just as it has often conducted itself in more directive ways.

The reengineered operating system is radically reframing USAID's relationship with partners, and hence with customers. To accomplish a given SO, a mission typically establishes a strategic objective team for each objective. The team is to include all those who are necessary to achieve the objective: the various players within USAID (e.g., technical specialist, program planner, contract officer, and legal advisor from the mission and perhaps Washington); the implementing partners; key host-country stakeholders; and sometimes collaborating donors. The idea is to engage the collaboration of all these as early as possible around a common vision of the objective and strategy as well as the program approaches.

Through SO teams (often called "expanded SO teams" in this form), partners are actively involved in defining both the objectives and the means of USAID's programs. An increasing number of USAID missions have adopted the use of expanded SO teams or some variant that involves active partner participation, often with rewarding results. Nevertheless, the Agency has a long way to go to engage partners and customers as fully as set forth in its directives.

Recognizing that the SO team must carry out some important "inherently governmental" functions that cannot, under laws governing procurement and government ethics, be conducted with partners, the new system provides also for core SO teams to consist of only USAID employees. Many USAID missions and some units in Washington have adopted this form of organization, typically reporting improvements in efficiency as officials with previously separate responsibilities engage in greater teamwork. Lack of clear guidelines about how to engage partners in the work of SO teams without violating provisions regarding conflict of interest has contributed to many staff members reluctance to engage partners more fully in expanded SO teams. It has proven challenging to provide consistent guidance and clarity on rules, while also reducing regulations and encouraging innovation.

USAID partner organizations bridge the logistical, linguistic, and cultural gaps that often separate USAID from its ultimate customers. Partners often play the role of customer representative in the planning process and can ensure that customer needs are being effectively addressed by designing appropriate activities and monitoring customer feedback.

Other features of the Agency's reengineering transition process include measures to make USAID's personnel fully consonant with the values and methods of the new system. In 1996, for example, "360 degree" personnel evaluations were instituted—meaning that an employee's ratings are informed by how well he meets the expectations of his peers, customers, and supervisees, as well as his supervisor. Efforts have been undertaken to make job classifications and precepts for promotion fully supportive of high performance teamwork, rather than only individual achievement.

Streamlining procurement processes and encouraging effective teamwork between program and procurement personnel has long been recognized as important, and efforts continue in this arena, as



well as in improving the efficiency of budget and financial management systems. Also, measures are being taken to reduce delays and time demands caused by these systems which can reduce the ability of small overseas staffs to devote the necessary time to engage with customers and partners. Finally, the reforms include the design and gradual implementation of an ambitious new information management systems.

### ***C. Participation Initiative: Build on What's Best***

At the same time that the Agency began to reengineer its systems, Administrator Brian Atwood launched an Agencywide effort to strengthen staff commitment and capacity to use participatory approaches. Beginning with a day-long seminar in November 1993 at which Atwood presented his "Statement of Principles on Participatory Development" (Atwood 1993), the Participation Initiative has enabled USAID staff and partners to become more aware of the Agency's own best practices and to discuss frankly the practical issues of implementing them. Through its open discussions (seminars, workshops, and electronic fora), many staff readily identified their own best professional work with processes that "actively engage partners and customers in sharing ideas, committing time and resources, making decisions, and taking action to bring about a desired development objective" (USAID, ADS).

From early 1994 through mid-1997, twenty-three Participation Forum sessions were held. These noon-hour open meetings served to raise awareness of how principles of participation have contributed to effective programs addressing widely different development challenges.

The sessions attracted between 50 and 150 staff, and were enhanced by e-mail contributions, before and following the sessions, from overseas staff. Summaries were distributed electronically to a self-selected participation network numbering nearly 900 staff, and made available electronically and in hard copy to others inside and outside of USAID. These summaries, as well as other participation resources cited in this paper, are available on USAID's Participation web site (USAID, Participatory Development).

Another Participation Initiative activity consists of an ongoing series of brief case studies or Participatory Practices.

An Internet-based conversation group—Global Participation Network or GP-NET—enables over 500 USAID staff and development practitioners around the world to exchange insights, resources, and tools for participation.<sup>4</sup>

The Participation Initiative has also sponsored occasional day-long workshops and several training sessions in missions and Washington on using Rapid and Participatory Appraisal to "listen with new ears and see with new eyes."

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<sup>4</sup> All development practitioners are invited to subscribe to GP-NET by e-mailing [ccharles@aed.org](mailto:ccharles@aed.org).

During the first year and a half, the Participation Initiative was guided by an Agency-wide Participation Working Group (PWG). This reference group kept the initiative attuned to the concerns of staff and provided two-way, candid communication on management issues that affected participation. It provided timely input to the reengineering teams. The PWG also granted “ownership” of the Agency’s Participation Initiative to the many staff throughout the Agency who had for years used participatory approaches, often struggling against the prevailing management practices to do so.

As the reform process moved forward, the various fora of the Participation Initiative shifted focus. Initially the goal was to sharpen people’s awareness of participation; broaden their knowledge of what can be achieved; reinforce people’s best instincts; and ensure that the value was integrated into the reforms of our operating systems.

Then, as contradictions, unintended consequences, and setbacks in USAID’s reform process—some of them rooted in management practices adopted in the Agency’s struggle for survival—appeared and aroused staff fears that the Agency lacked the will or capacity to persevere in the reforms, the initiative provided needed channels for two-way communications. These enabled management more clearly to hear and address some problems encumbering the process of mainstreaming participation, customer-focus, and teamwork. In turn, staff have gained encouragement and practical advice from the experience of Country Experimental Lab (CEL) and other missions that have substantially implemented the reforms.

#### ***D. New Partnerships Initiative (NPI): Programmatic Commitment to Local Empowerment***

Whereas much of USAID’s reform effort has been centered on changing “the way we do business,” one reform process has been focused particularly on building local capacity and a policy environment conducive to participatory development. The New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) has fostered strategic approaches that empower local public- and private-sector actors to work effectively together.

NPI was announced by Vice President Gore at the UN World Summit for Social Development on March 12, 1995, and developed through a highly participatory process involving many of USAID’s non-governmental partners, including both U.S. private voluntary organizations (PVOs) and indigenous NGOs, cooperatives, business, foundations, universities, and other donors, as well as USAID staff in both Washington and the field. It defined USAID’s commitment to promote local development partnerships among civil society, institutions of democratic local governance, and business, and to support such efforts through partnerships between local groups and their counterparts in the United States. It articulated the Agency’s commitment to a vision of sustainable development premised on a robust civil society and multiple society-to-society linkages.

NPI highlighted the concept that the capacity of citizens at the local level to work together across public and private sectors is a fundamental building block of development. This focuses attention on the local-level significance of the concept of “sustainable development” as set forth at the

beginning of the Clinton Administration in USAID's initial strategic document, *Strategies for Sustainable Development*. Because sustainable development is a "lasting increase in the capacity of a society" to improve the quality of life of people, and because development occurs locally (whether or not particular development efforts are conducted at a national or regional level), it requires that different parts of local society collaborate effectively.

The NPI framework identified two complementary building blocks: strengthening the capacities of local-level institutions (governmental, civil society, and business) to engage in partnership with one another, and improving the environment for local-level innovation, initiative, and strategic partnering by addressing national-level policy constraints and improving advocacy.

NPI also documented the experience of 15 USAID missions that chose to apply the NPI concepts in their strategic and programming decisions and to report on their experience. This body of practice, analyzed and reported by the NPI Learning Team in January 1997,<sup>5</sup> dealt with issues such as how best to foster the national policy, regulatory, and resource environments in which private and community action can flourish; how best to increase the effectiveness and transparency of NGOs, small business groups, and local governments; and how to assess and promote collaboration across different sectors in a society. A succinct summary of lessons learned and a step-by-step guide is now available in *Partnering for Results: A User's Guide to Intersectoral Partnering* (Charles, McNulty, and Pennell 1998).

NPI encouraged missions to identify and reflect on the value of activities promoting partnerships, and offered an alternative to quantitative, sectorally-focused results. It challenged missions to strengthen their strategic plans by including more activities premised on the initiatives and collaboration at the local level of public sector, non-governmental, and business groups. It urged missions to aim for the sometimes intangible but developmentally important results such as increased capacity of different sectors to work together.

### ***E. Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation (PVC): Building Partnerships with PVOs***

The mission of the Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation in the Bureau for Humanitarian Response is to strengthen the capacity of USAID's PVO and cooperative development organization (CDO) partners to carry out development programs. Increasingly, PVC has directed its support for U.S. PVOs and CDOs to building the capacity of host-country non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups to deliver sustainable services, particularly to underserved communities.

PVC administers two grant programs that strengthen the technical and organizational capacity of U.S. PVOs. Participating PVOs are required to mentor local NGO partners and to help them strengthen their capacities. PVC has played a leadership role in launching the current International

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<sup>5</sup> NPI Resource Guide, available on USAID'S web site [www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/npi/npiresrc.htm](http://www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/npi/npiresrc.htm).

Forum for Capacity Building of Southern NGOs (IFCB), which provides a platform for southern and northern NGOs to come together and identify capacity building priorities, plan future strategies, and create pilot programs to test new approaches. PVC also has taken an active role in the development of the Global Excellence in Management (GEM) Initiative, which offers innovative training programs, workshops, and consultant services to support institutional strengthening, partnership development, and cross-sectoral alliances for both PVOs and local NGOs.

In addition to capacity-building activities, PVC promotes networking and partnering activities. These engage USAID and U.S. PVOs, U.S. PVOs and local NGOs, and build intersectoral partnerships among civil society, businesses and governments.

## ***F. Participatory Development Policy Work With Other Donors***

Participation is best facilitated when there is a common commitment among donors to listen to primary stakeholders and, where necessary, when there is collaboration among them to encourage the host government to do likewise. USAID values the opportunities that it has had in recent years to work on these issues with other development institutions.

The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) vision for development assistance, *Shaping the 21st Century*, to which USAID actively contributed, provides a valuable, practical basis for collaboration in the field. As noted in the introduction to this paper, the DAC strategy sets forth in unequivocal terms the importance of citizens' ability to shape development priorities and to hold their governments accountable. It proposes a model of government, donor, and civil society consultation to assure full local ownership, and has led to eight pilot efforts in Africa and Latin America to implement this approach in democracy and governance programs, plus a more general pilot in Mali. Under the joint auspices of the Global Coalition for Africa and the DAC, the U.S., U.K., and France have recently supported a workshop in Bamako to advance these pilots, which secured enthusiastic endorsement from a broad range of partners. It was also specifically endorsed by the G-8 Heads of State at their summit in Birmingham, England, earlier this year.

Staff welcome occasions, such as were afforded in 1996 and 1997 by the meetings of the Inter-Agency Group on Participation, to exchange insights with counterparts from other organizations about the process of institutional change.

As a result of the Agency's growing awareness of participation and that of other institutions, it is finding more opportunities in the field to collaborate with other donor agencies in customer consultation and participation. The nation-wide "customer survey" in Senegal, cited above in the description of Participation Forum No.23, involved staff from USAID and other donors going out together with government officials, NGOs, and other Senegalese stakeholders to villages and towns in all 10 regions of the country. This gave donor agencies a common basis upon which to collaborate in designing USAID's strategy and, perhaps, reviewing their own. In Bolivia, the resident representative of the World Bank and a leader of the Izoceno indigenous people's organization both participate as members of the SO Team working for natural resource management in the Chaco. In Zambia, USAID's health program was designed in active collaboration with other donors. The process involved joint team-building and stakeholder interviews, field visits to assess needs and opportunities, and strategic program design workshops (USAID, Participatory Practices).

### III. Evaluating the Progress of USAID's Systemic Approach to Change

#### *A. Stocktaking of Reforms in Agency Operations*

Though not systematically collected or analyzed, the flow of information about the implementation of the reforms was sufficient in 1997 to cause staff from various units to coalesce around some common concerns and proposed remedies. Clearly, the reform effort had stalled. Although some units had undertaken major reforms and reported significant improvements in performance and morale, in many others, and in much of USAID/Washington, the reforms appeared to have focused almost exclusively on planning and reporting results. Many units had implemented innovative and sometimes quite ambitious ways to engage customers and partners, but little had changed at an institutional level to further encourage these innovations. For example, teamwork was not well understood, and teams that tried to incorporate all the necessary USAID players and make decisions with extensive customer or partner engagement were, like any units in a traditional organization, subject to bureaucratic second-guessing, delays, and reversals.

It was also apparent that the reform effort had encountered some daunting obstacles. These included changes in Congress, drastic budgetary reductions, and a morale-devastating "reduction in force." Perhaps costliest of all was that senior staff were so immersed in these other issues that they were unable to coalesce around an Agencywide management plan to implement the reforms. The lack of attention to leading the reform effort, in turn, left those units and individuals that had most fully adopted the new approaches unsupported when their innovations collided with the "business as usual" of their bureaus or supervisors.

In November 1997, USAID undertook an assessment of the implementation and impact of the reforms in Agency operations. Sponsored on behalf of the Administrator by the Assistant Administrators (AAs) for Policy and Program Coordination (PPC) and Management (M), the effort was proposed and guided by a team of about a dozen persons from several bureaus and the field. This stocktaking was undertaken to identify where course corrections were needed. In the first of two stages, a team of staff and contractors assessed progress in achieving the intended results of the reforms by reviewing documents and reports, convening several focus groups, and conducting an Agencywide survey of staff attitudes, perceptions, and experience with respect to reengineering policies and practices. Over 600 USAID staff provided input, either through focus groups or survey responses. In the second stage, the team obtained the perspective of some 300 USAID partners, through several focus group discussions, individual interviews, and a survey that was generally comparable to the staff stocktaking survey.

Both staff and partners expressed frustration, disappointment, and sometimes anger at the perceived lack of commitment to the reforms by leaders—ranging from some mission directors up to the Agency's senior staff.

Staff and partners expressed strong support for the core values and the Agency's resulting new approaches. However, both expressed dismay that the unintended consequence of the Agency's focus on results had been, in many cases, new and time-consuming bureaucratic demands. Many

pointed out that these demands were preventing them from “real development work” involving site visits and greater engagement with customers and partners. In particular, partners criticized the use of indicators that tracked short-term, quantifiable changes rather than developmentally more meaningful progress such as institutional capacity building. They complained that such indicators sometimes distorted their work with customers and trivialized their interactions with USAID staff.

Staff expressed some satisfaction that the Agency was now consulting partners and customers more. By contrast, partners faulted the Agency for merely consulting them and often not—as USAID’s directives called for—engaging partners meaningfully as members of SO teams.

The stocktaking survey showed that at the SO team level, host-country employees of USAID, and contractors reported considerably more use of customer and partner input in making decisions than did their U.S. direct hire colleagues. The staff survey showed that common sources of customer information were regular meetings with partners and site visits, while partners reported that they regularly consulted with USAID’s customers through site visits, meetings, and telephone or e-mail interactions. The survey also revealed that partners’ views and practices are far from homogenous.

Through the partner survey, as well as through retreats and other meetings conducted in each of the missions in preparation for a conference of all mission directors early this month, partners aired many frustrations about working with USAID. Through the survey, some partners called for better human relations, and emphasized the importance of such basic elements of partnership as mutual respect, courtesy, and consistently-defined roles and procedures. The partner retreats as well as the partner survey drove home the need to continue to streamline USAID’s procurement practices, make them consistent with the Agency’s core values, and train USAID personnel in their use.

### ***B. Challenges of Change***

The stocktaking exercises and other recent efforts to align and reenergize USAID’s reform process highlight a number of challenges that might face any organization that is orienting its work toward results that customers value.

**Having customers drive development strategies or programs requires knowledge, skills, staff time, and encouragement.** People who will be affected by development activities, even those whom the effort is clearly intended to benefit, often hold divergent views. While USAID’s experience suggests that “just go out and ask them” is a necessary and very good first step, different techniques for consultation and active engagement of customers are often needed. Appropriate methods vary from one context to another. For example, Participation Forum discussions about disaster and emergency situations suggest that sometimes the best participatory approach is to observe the choices that people make and to respond flexibly.

Contexts change, as well. For example, in recent decades civil society organizations have grown dramatically around the world, and this has changed the roles that these societies need northern implementing organizations to play. And the explosion of electronic communications in recent years provides new opportunities and challenges for primary stakeholder participation.

Participation also requires innovations in management. Ways need to be developed to make customer consultation and engagement part of the ongoing business of the unit. When time and resources are in short supply, efforts to achieve participation will be sustained only if they contribute meaningfully to accomplishing the organization's work.

These challenges call for staff and partners to use knowledge and skills that may be new to them. Severe shortage of operating expense resources for training and resources for skilled facilitators—such as USAID has experienced in recent years—poses a serious obstacle to more rapid expansion in the use of participatory methods.

Achieving fuller “compliance” with the institution's commitment to participation is challenging at USAID because, under the new operating system, the mission—not USAID in Washington—determines how to go about the design, implementation, or monitoring activities. This arrangement, as previous examples have shown, can provide needed freedom to innovate, but, where senior field staff persist with “business as usual,” change will be slow.

Another complication of responding to customers' priorities is that it may require a change of partners (as illustrated by the radical change in the Bangladesh democracy program cited earlier in the description of Participatory Practice No.6). Complicating this further is that as USAID reduces the size of its presence or withdraws from countries, it relies more heavily on partners to maintain its programs, and it distances itself further from customers. Finally, Congressional earmarks also constrain the effective influence of customers when they direct strategic priorities.

**System overload is a danger.** Designing and implementing changes while simultaneously pursuing development goals and downsizing staff is difficult. This is particularly true with regard to building customer participation more fully into Agency work. Resource constraints require that USAID pace its efforts enough to ensure that staff understand what is being required and why. There is the danger that unraveling old systems will create the impression that chaos reigns, especially when information and training lags and guidance is incomplete. Against this backdrop, communication about expectations and progress becomes vital to fend off cynicism and continue to build genuine support for fuller measures of primary stakeholder participation. Two-way communications are important, and repeated communication from senior managers is critical to impart a sense of urgency and focus to this agenda.

**There are unexpected sources of change and there are constraints on our changes.** For USAID, these have included externally imposed downsizing and government shutdowns. A current example is the Y2K problem, which requires significant resources and efforts to address. In the countries where USAID works, natural and man-made disasters and rapid political or economic change all can require partially or totally changing the direction of our efforts.

There are constraints on the Agency's ability to change. USAID, as part of a broader government structure, lacks the authority to change systems such as procurement and personnel regulations, budget earmarks, and certain delegations of authority. Evolving thinking in the U.S. government



about performance standards (how the GPRA is to be interpreted) also poses a special challenge for USAID.

**Reforms require monitoring, management, and correction.** Until 1998, when USAID’s Management and Policy Bureaus joined to carry out the stocktaking and subsequently established an ongoing collaborative mechanism to ensure the timely resolution of operations-related issues, “a thousand flowers bloomed”—but no one was there systematically to assess their relative merit or to provide needed clarifications on Agency practice. One outcome was that an aspect of the reforms intended to increase the Agency’s flexibility and ability to respond to customers—the focus on results—in practice led to cumbersome, overly elaborate reporting systems and time taken away from listening to customers. Major corrections are currently being undertaken to realign the results management system.

As described in Section V, this correction is one of many underway to strengthen the clarity and usefulness of the Agency’s rules and internal governance, to build staff and partner skills, and to align systems such as procurement and personnel systems with the Agency’s core values of customer focus and participation.

#### **IV. Lessons Learned About How to Make Customer-Focus a Reality**

USAID’s experience since 1993 in more consciously and deliberately using participatory approaches, and in reinventing its systems to permit a customer focus, has enabled staff to deepen their awareness of important, if quite fundamental, lessons. For example, many USAID staff and partners have more fully internalized the belief that program effectiveness depends on customers driving the development process. Development organizations can advise, catalyze, assist, or choose not to assist, but the decisions about development priorities and policies must be reached by the host society. The sustainability of results depends on local ownership—on the commitment of primary and secondary stakeholders. Moreover, experience with customer surveying of various sorts has convinced many staff that it is feasible, at reasonable cost, to involve large numbers of primary stakeholders in setting strategic objectives or defining approaches.

The most useful lessons learned that USAID can now share lie in considering how its organizational structures and processes, as a donor, affect customer participation.

**LESSON ONE. For development efforts to yield real participation by primary stakeholders, the organizational system needs to reinforce a value shift.**

USAID missions that have “listened” to customers on a large scale—as in Bangladesh and Senegal (detailed in Participatory Practice No.6 and Participation Forum No.23, cited earlier)—have broken out of a “business as usual” mindset. In Bangladesh, a large number of the entire mission’s workforce—including secretaries and drivers—were mobilized to undergo training in rapid appraisal and to fan out across the country to conduct attentive, iterative interviews with some 500 women and men to gain a preliminary sense of how they perceive their problems and needs and

subsequently to validate planned activities for a new democracy program. The same Bangladeshi employees used their skills subsequently to assess needs and validate activities in the health and economic growth sectors. This mobilization of Mission resources was possible only because listening to customers was recognized as a paramount value by the Mission's leadership; because the separate programmatic boxes of a traditional organization had been permeated by teamwork; and because innovation and experimentation were deliberately invited by the Agency's use of Country Experimental Labs.

**LESSON TWO. Partnership built into an operating system can facilitate primary stakeholder influence and empowerment.**

In Senegal, many Senegalese government officials, representatives of donor agencies, and local NGOs engaging with USAID in planning and carrying out an ambitious survey of peoples' perspectives on development priorities in villages and towns throughout the country—and thereby honing a common vision of the country's needs and aspirations—enabled all these partners, and many additional Senegalese stakeholders, jointly to develop a new strategy for USAID's work in Senegal. They did so through a three-day atelier that engaged some 200 participants in concurrent small-group strategy-planning workshops. Paramount in all these sessions were the priorities expressed by Senegalese primary stakeholders.

In Bolivia, the leader of the Izoceno Guarani Indians actively participated on an expanded SO team that helped accord the Izocenos a leading role in shaping the fate of the Bolivian Chaco region. The Izoceno organization, which now provides technical assistance to other indigenous groups in Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil, has been in charge of managing the Kaa-Iya Chaco National Park since 1995. The collaborative relationship forged with USAID and others through the SO team empowered the Izocenos, later, to negotiate effectively with the international oil consortium that was building an oil pipeline through the park. As a result, the Izoceno organization is in charge of setting the environmental impact mitigation measures that must be taken.

**LESSON THREE. Primary stakeholder participation requires that program authority be decentralized sufficiently to respond to changing circumstances.**

USAID/Bolivia helped create PROSALUD, an NGO that delivered health services throughout two large municipalities. PROSALUD would establish a community-based board in each neighborhood where it worked, and this board decided what services would be provided and what fees charged. When the government embarked on a major decentralization process that put local governments in charge of local health programs, there was a huge increase in demand for PROSALUD services. Had USAID not reengineered its systems, enabling PROSALUD to expand its reach to additional municipalities would have involved a delay of a year or more to permit Washington approval of an amendment to the project. As it was, the SO team was already empowered to shift resources and redesign its support for PROSALUD as necessary to achieve the general objective. It could therefore immediately turn its attention to assisting PROSALUD to meet this much larger opportunity.

**LESSON FOUR. Organizational change takes time and requires clear and sustained leadership.**

Many USAID employees, including the Administrator and senior staff, have found relevant a book by John Kotter of The Harvard Business School, *Leading Change*. This short book, as well as observations of other “reinvention” efforts, helped USAID recognize and take measures to correct the small degree of engagement by Agency senior leaders below the Administrator in leading the reform process. Staff have also learned that the use of teamwork at the bottom of an administrative hierarchy (USAID’s SO teams) is problematic when supervisors and leaders lack the experience of teamwork and underestimate the consequences of overturning team decisions or withholding authority. This can seriously damage morale and undercut the credibility of the reform effort. The Agency is now taking measures to encourage the use of teams at higher levels in the organization both to improve efficiency and to broaden experience with and support for teamwork values.

**LESSON FIVE. Successful organizational change builds on the organization’s culture and best practices.**

USAID deliberately sought to do this in the way it went about designing the new operating system. It was developed by teams of USAID staff, based on Agency practices that they identified as best practices. This approach was continued in the CEL experiences and later in the experimentation and learning encouraged by the New Partnership Initiative. The Participation Forum and other Participation Initiative activities focused attention on the ways that USAID staff overcame practical problems, while also bringing the experiences of other development practitioners to bear on issues of current concern to staff. The Participation Working Group, the Agencywide reference group that guided the Participation Initiative, helped ensure that the increased emphasis on participation at USAID has been welcomed by most staff, as reflected in the recent stocktaking. It has not been viewed as externally imposed.

**LESSON SIX. Serious change requires major investment in training of both staff and partners.**

Change of the sort that USAID has set out for itself requires that employees and partners internalize the core values and how they apply to Agency operations. Effective teamwork requires that team members—as well as senior managers—understand their new roles in getting work done efficiently in a team setting. New ways of thinking must be learned that focus on strategies and tactics for achieving results that matter to customers, rather than on elaborate project planning. New operating procedures need to be learned, with new (and streamlined) documentation requirements. Presenting development hypotheses to relate intended intermediate results and strategic objectives involves new skills, as does defining measurable indicators and engaging customers and partners in the monitoring. Engaging partners and customers in strategy development or program decisions requires not only a mastery of teamwork skills, but an understanding of the limitations on their participation necessitated by procurement law and other regulations.

## **LESSON SEVEN. Major change in operating systems may create new needs for governance of the organization.**

The replacement of USAID's old regulations with streamlined directives that had not been fleshed out adequately through training and supplementary guidance left many staff unclear about required procedures. In turn, interpreting Agency policy with regard to new operating processes tended to fall in between and outside of the established arenas of governance of existing bureaus and offices. As current measures to correct course have confirmed, in a situation of rapid organizational change employees and partners must know where to turn for authoritative answers on policy as well as for guidance and suggestions for how to approach unfamiliar new processes.

### **V. USAID as a Learning Organization: Where We Go From Here**

Systemic changes remain necessary to make it possible for USAID's efforts to contribute more fully to enabling the needs, visions, and initiatives of primary stakeholders to drive development. Thanks to current efforts to "correct course" to pursue the reforms vigorously, these changes are likely to become integral to the Agency's culture and structure. This was confirmed in many of the discussions by mission directors at their worldwide conference held in November 1998. In addressing the conference, the Administrator expressed the desire and the expectation that these reforms in the way we do business constitute a lasting heritage that will enable USAID to respond more effectively to customers and work more effectively with our partners.

Using the stocktaking findings to inform their actions, Agency leaders have generated new momentum for the Agency's commitment to participation. Recent actions include:

**Clarifying rules of the game.** Since April 1998, the Bureaus for Policy and Program Coordination and for Management have worked together through a joint M-PPC Operations Governance Team to ensure that issues that require clarification or resolution in the way the Agency conducts its work are fully addressed.

- One such issue that is being resolved is the confusion and uncertainty over how partners and customers may participate in the work of SO teams while avoiding violations of Federal regulations and sound procurement practices. Lack of clarity on this has contributed to widely inconsistent practice and sometimes to tensions and mistrust between USAID and partners. A revised, detailed, and much clearer guidance document is currently being circulated to staff and partners for comment.
- Another action by the Operations Governance Team has been to make the Agency's directive system more accessible to staff and partners.
- Addressing a major source of distress for staff and partners, the Agency has just revised the performance and reporting system. A working group tasked by the Administrator has

recommended measures to greatly simplify the reporting and review process and to eliminate performance measures that are not useful for program management in the field.

**Building staff and partner skills.** The Agency recognizes that it has vastly under-invested in staff and partner training, partly as a result of severe budget reductions. Within the limitations of a very tight budget, and making innovative use of the expertise of its staff to serve as trainers, the Agency has instituted major new training programs.

- For the first time since the reengineering of the Agency’s program operations, training in the specifics of Agency operational approaches, policies, and procedures—including the engagement of customers—is being provided. The week-long Reaching 4 Results workshops, taught by Agency staff subject matter experts, are providing instruction to some 500 staff and partners in 10 countries by next spring. Meanwhile, contracts have recently been awarded for a new leadership and program operations course, and for a new course on procurement for technical officers.
- In addition, there is renewed Agency commitment to share and further develop lessons learned about intersectoral partnering at the local level—the approach developed through the New Partnerships Initiative. Plans are underway for mission to mission mentoring, regional conferences, Internet-based networking for exchanging experience, and technical assistance.

**“Walking the talk” through personnel actions.** New precepts for promotion and revisions in Agency awards and incentives are being developed, which will bring these all-important instruments for Agency leadership more fully in line with Agency values and policies.

As these examples illustrate, over the past year the Agency has made major strides to address specific issues of intense concern to staff and partners and to reenergize the reform process as a whole.

Equally important, the Agency has substantially grown in its capacity to be a “learning organization,” that is, to continually evaluate its experience and to make changes in direction, approach, and procedures as necessary. USAID is committed to hold itself accountable, through the annual reporting process mandated by GPRA, for Agency progress toward the intended outcomes of the systemic reforms. Prime among these is that USAID’s strategies and programs should be shaped by the priorities, vision, and initiatives of primary stakeholders—Agency customers.

The Agency welcomes continuing collaboration with and learning from the experiences of other development agencies and partners, as well as from those of other U.S. government agencies undertaking customer-focused systemic change.

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