

## **Discussion Session A: Potential PVO Contributions to Research on NGOs and Organizational Development**

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This interactive discussion provided an overview of the PVC research agenda and explored participant interest in the topics outlined in the draft Annual Program Statement (APS). The goal of the discussion was to determine whether NGOs would be interested in pursuing the topics identified by PVC and whether they could submit a research proposal based on the APS.

### **Overview**

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- PVC's current focus is to serve as a center of learning in organizational development to promote sustainable, effective, and accountable local NGOs. PVC is in the process of reviewing and analyzing documents and evaluations from past grant and technical assistance programs to cull lessons learned about organizational development. It has also funded preliminary studies on PVO/NGO mechanisms and networks. The draft APS identified a number of key topics for further research:
  - PVO/NGO Mechanisms
  - Networks
  - Organizational best practices
  - Success and sustainability of local NGOs
  - NGO's role in sustainability
  - NGOs in transition
  - NGOs in other currently widespread circumstances (e.g., HIV/AIDS, sudden change in economic conditions)
  - NGOs in a democratic transition
  - NGOs and ethnicity
- The objective of the proposed research is to gather information on best practices and lessons learned that could help USAID, PVOs and the donor community work more effectively at the local level. It is not known how much money will be available to fund such research.

### **Discussion**

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A participant asked how PVC would use the information provided by NGOs. The facilitators replied that it would depend on what was submitted. Information pertaining to lessons learned or organizational development tools developed by NGOs would be included in the Knowledge Inventory and disseminated to the larger community.

Information gathered through this research will be disseminated widely through publications and other outreach mechanisms. The Knowledge Inventory was created to make lessons learned through USAID and PVC initiatives easily accessible to NGOs. The database can be searched online by topic, geographic region, and specific text.

Search results provide links to documents, including order forms for documents that are not available online. Users can e-mail search results to themselves or others. The Knowledge Inventory is not intended to duplicate other online tools, such as [NGOConnect.NET](#). PVC would welcome feedback on this new tool.

The facilitators were asked to clarify whether information submitted to PVC must be drawn from USAID-funded programs and whether new topics were equally valuable as those on the list. They replied that PVC is seeking lessons learned from any source; it is primarily interested in the topics on the list, but will consider additional ones.

One participant noted that many of the organizational development issues that affect NGOs are not new, but they still impact effectiveness. At the local level, it often seems as if no one is listening. He asked what the implications of this research would be for NGOs and stakeholders. The facilitators replied that, for the immediate future, the information obtained through this research would be used to inform USAID-funded initiatives. In the long run, PVC hopes that the information will be disseminated widely to other donors and NGOs. The facilitators also stated that PVC believes that NGOs have organizational issues in common across sectors and that NGOs could become more sustainable if there was a common language to talk about organizational development. PVC hopes to raise the profile of these issues—and perhaps obtain more funding to address them—by developing a more systematic body of knowledge in this area.

PVC-ASHA Director Judith Gilmore noted that when talking about research, it is important to talk about outreach and dissemination. PVC needs to communicate effectively with missions and other donors so that the information gained through this research will be used appropriately. To that end, PVC seeks the help of PVOs and local NGOs to ensure that this research is of value to them.

A participant who had attended the session on NGOs in conflict-affected areas asked whether the issue of NGOs in areas of instability would be included in other topics and suggested that this issue might deserve its own category. The facilitators replied that PVC is trying to understand how NGOs function in all settings. The purpose of the proposed research is to encourage broader thinking across the spectrum, and to avoid thinking in terms of categories such as “stability” and “instability.”

A representative of the Academy for Educational Development noted that PVC’s Capable Partners program recently conducted a pilot workshop on how to integrate monitoring and evaluation to enhance programming in conflict-affected areas. A report on this workshop will be posted on [NGOConnect.NET](#) in the near future.

A participant wondered if funding to implement organizational development would be available in the next three to five years. The facilitators stated that since USAID considers organizational development as a means to an end, funds for that purpose would probably not be available. PVC would like to see organizational development included in the overall budget for every program. The facilitators added that USAID funding often comes with earmarks regarding how the funds may be used. In the near future, funds are

likely to be more constrained. NGOs need to think creatively about how to leverage available funds to achieve program goals, including organizational development.

One participant stated that, in his experience, most indigenous organizations are informal and relationship-oriented, with cultural and religious issues often playing a significant role. As a result, local NGOs often defy prevalent models of organizational development and make traditional tools irrelevant. The facilitators replied that the literature seems to show that most approaches have been top-down and Western-oriented, which is not necessarily sustainable. PVC is interested in learning how to encourage local organizations to be “local” and thus relevant, while still being comprehensible to donors so they can invest their funds with confidence.

A question was raised regarding the extent to which NGOs on the ground could be expected to make the case for organizational development needs. The facilitators acknowledged that while there was often a conflict between demands in the field and policy directives at the agency level, most missions recognize that local NGOs are interested in organizational development. PVC is moving toward a more demand-driven approach that enables missions to make resources available in the field. The facilitators noted that the objective of organizational development is improved service delivery, which in turn helps to maintain the results that missions want to achieve. Most missions recognize this benefit.

The facilitators were asked if PVC would conduct an impact assessment of NGO capacity-building efforts. They responded that “capacity building” is a very broad term. At present, there is no systematic way of assessing it, and little understanding of what the term means. One of the purposes of the proposed research is to encourage NGOs to share their ideas and experiences—and their definition of “capacity building” if they have one—in an effort to generate more discussion on this issue.

Many participants expressed their support for the proposed research program, and several noted that it could be very relevant to other donors. One participant suggested that the research should be capacity building in itself and should not be conducted solely by American contractors.