



## Chapter 6

# Lessons for Other Development Assistance Organizations

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# Lessons for Other Development Assistance Organizations

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## SUMMARY

- OTA'S findings regarding the African Development Foundation's (ADF) funding program are similar to those of the Foundation's 1987 internal evaluations of 10 projects as well as recent evaluations of Appropriate Technology International, the Inter-American Foundation, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the U.N. Development Fund for Women, and U.S. private voluntary organizations.
- ADF can serve as a model for other groups in certain aspects of its funding program, for example, maximizing local control of externally funded activities, using Africans to provide technical assistance and to conduct evaluations, and awarding grants for planning to local groups. Also, the Foundation's work with African intermediary organizations provides an example for other organizations wishing to contribute to grassroots development.
- The Foundation has established effective working relations with Congress, characterized by direct communication, that are instructive for other official or publicly funded groups.
- Many organizations face similar issues regarding the composition and roles of their Boards of Directors.
- This report contains lessons that could help others 'who seek to evaluate development assistance programs. For instance, conducting both program and project assessments creates complementary pictures of an organization's status while external evaluations are useful additions to internal ones.

## INTRODUCTION

In many ways, ADF and its funded projects share the problems faced by others; in some ways ADF can be an example for other development assistance organizations. The strengths and weaknesses of ADF-funded activities, analyzed in chapter 4, are common to similar efforts funded by others. Chapter 5 highlighted what OTA learned about ADF's funding program and suggested possible improvements regarding the role of African staff, pre-grant social, economic, technical, and environmental analysis, project monitoring, and other issues. The Foundation's deficiencies in these areas, too, are shared with other development assistance organizations and recent evaluations of similar organizations raise many of the same concerns (box 6-1).

Private voluntary organizations also often share common problems: limited replicability, lack of sustainability, isolated programming context, insufficient planning and management, and weak databases and evaluation (40). Because ADF in some ways resembles a private funder more than governmental development agencies such as AID (e.g., projects and grants are generally small and its operating style is flexible and participatory) it is not surprising that ADF shares some of the problems identified as common among PVOS, especially those that fund community groups in Africa. Governmental funders, PVOS, and others have much to learn from each other in tackling these shared problems and ADF can contribute to, as well as learn from, such a discussion.

### Box 6-1.—The Common Problems of Groups Similar to ADF

Chapter 2 notes four agencies that have programs in some respect similar to ADF's. Recent evaluations show that the groups share many common problems such as the need to work out relationships with other funders and the need to address project impact and replicability. These evaluations raised the following concerns:

Appropriate Technology International's (ATI) evaluation was conducted by AID. It noted ATI's need to: improve its technical and commercial appraisals of projects; give higher priority to "soft" technologies such as market analysis; improve the management of field operations, monitoring, and evaluation; strengthen attempts to replicate its work; increase efforts to disseminate lessons learned; consider making mid-course adjustments more often; and find ways to maximize its impact (16).

Inter-American Foundation. This internal evaluation highlighted concerns regarding: the lack of clear articulation of funding priorities within Latin American countries, economic sectors, and development objectives; ad hoc project selection; and the relationship of the Foundation to other organizations (50).

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). This evaluation, conducted by AID, raised concerns about: IFAD's relationships with other donors (e.g., finding its own niche and providing co-financing); the sustainability of its efforts; how well it is reaching women; problems with monitoring and evaluation; dissemination of its knowledge; and sponsoring a program potentially with too broad a focus (39).

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Important program issues arising from this internal evaluation include: links between UNIFEM'S activities and those of other development groups; fuller involvement of local experts and leaders; improved delivery systems; concentration on projects with the greatest potential impact; support for a variety of multi-faceted projects. Project-related concerns also were raised, including:

- the impacts of external factors on project success or failure,
- monitoring local and national activities,
- accounting for divisions of family labor in project design,
- assessing and building institutional viability, and
- providing technical training for extension workers (38).

Grassroots development efforts in Africa have had some success in improving food production and conserving natural resources (20,37,48) and the Foundation is among the funders supporting creative approaches and achieving positive results. In particular, ADF is setting a good ex-

ample by relying on Africans to provide technical assistance and conduct evaluations, by providing planning grants to local groups, and by leaving control in the hands of funded organizations. These are the kinds of lessons that ADF can share with other organizations.

## LESSONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Many development assistance groups claim to support grassroots development, which entails the effective participation of beneficiaries in development. However, ADF often succeeds in maximizing the control of local groups and organizations over their projects, which enhances the results because people feel a sense

of ownership in the work. Larger donors, such as U.S. AID, differ from ADF in important ways—size of funded activities, pressure from various interest groups, government-to-government funding, legal framework, and other factors. Thus they cannot duplicate ADF's approach entirely. However, they could adapt

certain of ADF's methods, such as favoring African initiatives and ensuring that important project-related decisions are made by African participants. Other ADF approaches to local control—such as encouraging funded groups to select their own technical assistance—are more directly transferable to private grant-makers, including some PVOS and others working at the local level.

The Foundation's experience shows that supporting participatory development requires careful analysis of who participates, when and the various ways that people participate. Avoiding approaches that place expatriates in de *facto* charge of African projects is an important first step. Although giving funds directly to African organizations can reduce the problem of external control, participation by beneficiaries can still be lacking and additional efforts may be appropriate to foster broad participation. Participation in decisionmaking is key to effective overall participation but funders often fail to assess roles of all the people involved in enough detail to determine whether the beneficiaries really take part in this process. It is also important to measure progress in enhancing participation in terms of the local context. This re-

quires understanding the local context and sound baseline data on factors such as income, gender, social relations, ethnic groups, and the local political context, as well as information on project activities. Although ADF has much to improve in addressing these more difficult aspects of participation, its experience trying to balance different aspects of its mandate—supporting local control and stimulating expanding participation of the poor—will be relevant to other organizations.

Like participation, other key concepts in development assistance require redefinition and more effective implementation in the face of a history fraught with less-than-expected results. The Foundation and OTA agree that replicability, for example, depends less on replicating actual project activities than on the replicability of the processes that the projects had engendered. The Foundation, with its explicit mandate to learn from and share its experiences, its access to U.S. Government resources, and its opportunity to forge connections with private groups, is well-placed to take part in defining and implementing approaches with impacts beyond the projects themselves.

## LESSONS ABOUT THE ROLE OF AFRICAN STAFF AND AFRICAN ORGANIZATIONS

Encouraging Africans to take positions as staff members or consultants in development assistance groups has real benefits. Africans know the local situation, especially its cultural, political, and macroeconomic contexts; their support is more cost-effective because housing, overseas travel, and per diem costs are often less (not because they are paid less for their professional services but because other expenses can be less); and impacts beyond the immediate project results snowball as ever-greater numbers of Africans are given opportunities to use and enhance their skills and spread their knowledge. The Foundation has demonstrated that it is possible to find a wide variety of African experts for tasks many other funders assign to expatriates and that clear statements of their work increase the likelihood

that expectations will be met. ADF's ability to identify and contract with Africans deserves recognition; other groups could follow its example.

Many African non-governmental groups are attempting to forge new relationships with their American counterparts. African organizations seek to use their growing expertise to help American and European organizations plan, manage, and evaluate externally funded activities. Often, this requires that U.S. PVOS and private donors reconsider how they work in Africa: how should they shift more responsibility to African staff; how should they support African groups rather than or in addition to their own activities?



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Simultaneously, additional U.S. development assistance money is being used to help develop public and private African institutions. For example, larger amounts of official development assistance are being channeled via U.S. PVOS to assist in strengthening local organizations. Thus, questions like these will need to be answered within the official U.S. and private development assistance community. ADF has been in the vanguard of American funders which support private African organizations. Thus, ADF's experience is likely to become increasingly important to others given this ongoing evolution of African/U.S. PVO relationships.

The Foundation's experience can highlight specific areas to address as these new relation-

ships form. For example, ADF has an opportunity to further learn about, then share, the results of its work with private African intermediary organizations. This assessment of ADF's work shows that projects of intermediary organizations require different approaches to pre-funding analysis and monitoring than those for local organizations, especially when participation is a goal of the donor. Moreover, intermediary organizations commonly have special technical assistance needs as they begin to work with local groups or poor farmers.

Also, intermediary groups, American and African staff of U.S. groups, and providers of technical assistance all need clear guidance regarding ways to relate to local groups that foster self-reliance. This has been a focus of the

ADF funding program from the beginning. Long-term institutional change can be facilitated as African government officials become aware of the successes of grassroots development efforts. ADF can use its special status as a U.S. Government-funded organization and good relations with many African governments

to help bring about that awareness. Also, ADF may be able to share its positive experiences working with African governments with outside development assistance organizations that have been cautious about entering into closer relationships with local officials.

## **A LESSON ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS WITH CAPITOL HILL**

The Foundation has nurtured its relationship with Members of Congress and staff on Capitol Hill. ADF's senior staff have a good working relationship with high-level officials both in Congress and the Administration and have an admirable and unusual directness in providing information. As a result, ADF has a reputation for cooperation and responsiveness similar to some PVOS that receive government

funds. The Foundation's small size and its history of congressional support may contribute to this situation, factors that larger organizations such as U.S. AID do not share. Whatever the reasons, however, ADF's work is not hampered by the quasi-adversarial attitude that sometimes shapes AID's congressional relations (46).

## **LESSONS ABOUT BOARDS OF DIRECTORS AND ADVISORY GROUPS**

Many organizations are reconsidering the roles played by their boards of directors and advisory groups. In some cases, they are finding that advisory functions can be filled more cost-effectively without official groups (e. g., by bringing in individuals to conduct seminars on state-of-the-art topics). In other cases, members' unavailability for frequent meetings may suggest giving more responsibility to staff. Staff planning retreats, for example, can sometimes substitute for the strategic planning that aboard" or advisory committee might provide.

The Foundation's experience with a new board and one shaped to a large degree by par-

tisan considerations suggests some important lessons. A politically balanced board, for example, can be an asset to publicly funded organizations and can help avoid program disruptions during changes of administrations. Appointing board members with an understanding of a group's mandate can reduce the time it takes to educate new board members. In addition, defining clear roles for the board that focus on policy oversight is a way to tap the strengths of members and help prevent inappropriate micromanagement.

## **LESSONS FOR OTHERS CONDUCTING ASSESSMENTS**

This assessment has shown how important it is to conduct program assessments in conjunction with project evaluations. The results of each highlight different aspects of an organization's work and suggest different ways to improve its effectiveness. By examining ADF's

broader program, many things were learned that might not have been evident by studying the project level alone. At the same time, the findings about the functioning of the funding program were obtained by a careful examination of specific projects.

Unfortunately, the costs of combined program and project assessments are high and grassroots groups and private funders often lack the resources to undertake such a comprehensive assessment. Therefore, every effort should be made to draw on previous work and to communicate with others before undertaking new assessments. Defining critical issues and selecting minimum data sets can be done on the basis of past and similar assessments at little expense.

Also, this effort illustrates ways for internally conducted assessments to complement those done by external groups. For instance, some issues identified by OTA'S work were raised in ADF's first project evaluations, thus providing partial confirmation of the Foundation's internal evaluations. Although internal efforts are always important, occasional external examinations can provide information that only outsiders, with fresh viewpoints, are likely to provide.

Certain of OTA'S methods, such as conducting a single brief visit to each project, are appropriate only for comparable outside evaluators. Alternately, self-evaluations conducted throughout an individual project's lifetime could be more participatory and provide more specific, helpful, and timely feedback to project managers, for example, and be a significant aspect of project management. Methodological lessons from this work that are applicable to most outside assessments include the need for: placing Africans and women on every field team to increase understanding of the local setting and to ensure access to the greatest number of project participants; allowing enough time to visit each project to accommodate the professional and social needs of the evaluators and the people being visited; interviewing participants, managers, and others independently of each other to get beyond the "official" view of project activities; and providing for review and feedback by the staff of the organization under examination.