



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOLUNTARY FOREIGN AID
PUBLIC MEETING
OCTOBER 25, 2006**

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE REFORMS DISCUSSION GROUP SUMMATION

Affirmative Remarks:

- There is potential for greater accountability and transparency in the new foreign assistance framework and review process;
- Overall initiative is viewed as a positive step forward, with the reform seen as “results driven”;
- Joint State and USAID planning and implementation is seen as a highly desirable approach for US foreign assistance programs;
- The new system should allow for better coordination, prevent duplication, improve partnerships, simplify and synchronize reporting, and offer more opportunities to build networks and hold dialogues;
- The process should eliminate redundancy and competition among agencies engaged in foreign aid;
- Applauds the framework for facilitating greater transparency, i.e. a “means to know” in advance, with US development assistance becoming more focused, coherent and effective;
- These reforms should lead to more cohesive efforts and strengthening USAID’s role in once again being able to direct the agenda in matters of development.

Constructive Criticism:

- Given the scope and speed of the reforms and the important role of USAID’s partners, USAID should consider rolling out a modified training program for its partners, aimed at facilitating partner’s ability to support the implementation of assistance programs;
- Greater State Department engagement could potentially lead to politicization, unless participants draw fully on PVOs’ technical expertise;
- USAID and its development programs have been seen to be losing their technical expertise, and there are concerns about what happens if the emphasis continues to be placed more on the effective management of big contracts rather than the knowledge of best practices;
- Lack of clarity on how the reform structure takes into account other countries’ views – coordination with other donors and partners is especially important in countries that lack an effective government;
- Indicators should be developed at the field level with the help of the PVO community, so that PVOs can offer their opinions at both the strategic and operational levels;

- The process has not adequately explored global or regional approaches to issues – further clarity is needed on the concept of investing by sector or objective: whether programs will be more important than others or linked across objectives;
- Voices from host countries and the field should also be better integrated into the process.

Future Role for the ACVFA and PVOs:

- ACVFA should offer PVOs a chance to visit USAID in small groups to find their proper roles in the new approach;
- Recommend the continued annual consultation and review of the process;
- There should be more forums to allow PVOs to comment on these and other crosscutting issues, such as the future of branding and requirements for partners on the ground;
- ACVFA meetings have been closer to briefings, so there should be more opportunity for consultation – PVOs could be of real help in developing indicators and consulting with partners on the ground;
- The fact that all decisions have been made in Washington has marginalized the views of local partners – there should be a genuinely consultative process that involves PVOs and NGOs in strategic decisions, and the ACVFA itself should be made more diverse;
- Participants request greater participation in the reform process and suggest that USAID consider hiring a full-time NGO coordinator to take PVO ideas into account;
- Uncertainty about future procurement/contracting should be addressed in a positive way so that they are compatible with the proposed reforms;
- There is a strong desire for more input, especially at indicator levels to ensure a good match between indicators and what really happens in implementation.