

ADAPTIVITY BAKED INTO THE CONTRACT:

Zimbabwe's Civil Society Strengthening Program

OVERVIEW

Both in the design of the mechanism and in the ways it was implemented, Zimbabwe's Civil Society Strengthening Program (CSSP) benefited from systematic and intentional incorporation of features that facilitated adaptive management. Working with an objectives-based, cost plus fixed fee (CPFF) contract, the Mission awarded Pact \$26.8 million in June 2012 for a five-year program (2012–2017) to assist USAID/Zimbabwe and its local implementing partners in achieving the overall democracy, human rights and governance (DRG) development objective of promoting democratic space in Zimbabwe.¹

HOW DID THE CONTRACT BUILD IN OPPORTUNITIES TO BE ADAPTIVE?

The following features, written into the contract, allowed for adaptive management:

- A Grants under Contract (GUC) mechanism for making rapid response grants was included to support civil society organizations explore innovative and catalytic processes for promoting accountability, good governance, participation and the observance of human rights. Most grants were limited to \$50,000 over a 3- to-6-month period and enabled the Mission to respond quickly to changing circumstances.

CSSP AT A GLANCE

- Grants Under Contract (GUC) component enabling rapid response grants to be awarded to civil society organizations
- Joint management team comprised Mission and Pact staff
- Objectives-based contract with services and deliverables to be specified in annual work plans
- Contract provides analytic support for entire democracy, human rights and governance (DRG) portfolio
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) used for learning
- Periodic re-examination of program objectives and priorities through strategy review sessions, weekly political economy analyses (PEAs), and regular meetings with external reference group

¹ CSSP's contract number was AID-613-C-12-00001.

Grants were awarded primarily on the merit of the idea. If needed, Pact provided capacity building to the awardee organization to achieve the grant's objectives.

- The contract called for the formation of a joint management team comprising Pact's chief of party and deputy chief of party, and USAID/Zimbabwe's DRG office director and senior democracy governance advisor (one of whom was the contracting officer's representative; COR). These individuals provided overall direction and leadership for the program and ensured collaborative programmatic, management and administrative decisions between the DRG office and Pact.
- The contract was objectives-based, with services and deliverables kept relatively open-ended to allow response to changing circumstances. Instead of taking a traditional statement of work (SOW) approach, then, the contract provided general guidance, leaving full specification to be articulated in annual work plans (or quarterly work plans for the GUC activities) rather than in the contract itself.
- The contract required strategy review sessions at least once per year to provide an opportunity to update the problem analysis, determine how best to adapt to evolving local dynamics, and use monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data for learning. In addition, the contract called for quarterly meetings with a reference group of scholars, practitioners and community members, who provided feedback on planned activities.
- One important component of the contract was the requirement for Pact to provide general analytical support for the entire DRG portfolio. To this end, Pact provided long-term research and analysis each year, enabling knowledge gaps identified by the Mission.

HOW DID PACT AND THE MISSION CAPITALIZE ON CSSP'S ADAPTIVE POTENTIAL?

In addition to the numerous provisions in CSSP's contract that facilitated flexibility, the Mission and Pact took steps to ensure that the program's implementation maximized the contract's adaptive potential. For example, a research and policy advisor (an innovative position approved by the COR) conducted informal weekly political economy analyses (PEAs) that fed into weekly context monitoring "horizon scanning" sessions. Therefore, it was not merely in the yearly strategy review sessions or quarterly reference group meetings that Pact and Mission staff took stock of events and considered whether any changes were warranted in CSSP's procedures, priorities or activities. Rather, there was an ongoing emphasis on learning from all available sources.

Another innovation of CSSP's implementation was the encouragement of staff members to exercise professional judgment and take advantage of opportunities to make novel, timely grants or improve the program in other ways. Additionally, rather than a disengaged fiscal supervisor, the COR was expected to be a deeply engaged development manager. In turn, Pact was expected to draw on multiple, diverse external experts through short-term technical assistance to bring the most qualified expertise to bear in seeking to achieve the program's objectives. Without supportive leadership — the Mission director was dynamic and creative; the DRG office staff members highly motivated — this would not have been possible.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Shifting from a traditional way of operating to an innovative set of practices that facilitates adaptive management can present challenges. For example, while the GUC mechanism allowed Pact to award small grants to civil society organizations in response to current events, the grants could be labor-intensive to manage. Additionally, the process was sometimes delayed as a result of the political sensitivity of some proposed grants. Furthermore, some of the grants did not deliver the desired results. Challenges such as these are inherent to programs that encourage pilots and innovation, yet open communication and a commitment across the board to work together for positive outcomes.

In sum, CSSP represents a program model that facilitates adaptation both in the language and implementation of the contract.