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KNOWING YOUR BENEFICIARY LEADS TO INCREASED EFFECTIVENESS



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EACH LEARNING BRIEF IS BASED ON A SELECT SAMPLE OF STUDIES CONDUCTED BY THE EVALUATIONS PROJECT¹. The learning process begins with the design phase and continues throughout implementation for each evaluation or assessment. Learning briefs weave together this knowledge and complement with evaluation findings. Presented through cases, ***Knowing your beneficiary leads to increased effectiveness*** draws from two information sources: 1) a desk review of relevant activity² documentation, and 2) four activity evaluations that provided insights on how knowing and understanding the characteristics and interests of target beneficiaries can impact activity efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. The desk review of activity documents (quarterly and annual reports, performance monitoring and evaluation plans, and workplans) helped in understanding: 1) how activities identified target beneficiary needs and subsequent interventions/products; 2) schedule implementation; and 3) results as reported by the implementing partner (IP) and external evaluation.

An insufficient knowledge regarding target beneficiaries can impact activity efficiency: implementation time may be reduced as unanticipated beneficiary characteristics require activity adjustments, and **efficacy can be hampered by the limited uptake of knowledge, skills, and practices transferred.** This limited appropriation has a direct relationship with the sustainability of results. **Activity designs should reflect a robust knowledge of beneficiary characteristics and interests and how these will affect activity results. In the absence of this knowledge, the activity design phase should include an assessment of the beneficiaries.**

¹ Evaluations Project is a five-year USAID/Peru activity to foster evidence-based development programming through improved learning, monitoring and evaluations implemented by Partners for Global Research and Development.

² Activity² is used in accordance with the definitions provided in ADS 201, which is colloquially known as 'project'.



Photo: Daniela Magaña

Case I. Conflict management and mitigation activities in Peru: Sociocultural characteristics of indigenous women in the Amazon*

The objective of the two-year activity was to ensure that the members of an established, national indigenous women organization were able to voice their views and proposals in consultation and conflict management processes taking place in their communities. The IP worked with indigenous women from the Amazon, target beneficiaries, who were nominated by this organization. A prerequisite for these women to participate in conflict negotiation processes with local and regional authorities were completion of training on consultation and conflict management coupled with adequate communication skills.

While the IP had extensive experience working with indigenous communities in the highlands, it was the first time working in the Amazon area. The IP had scant knowledge of the sociocultural characteristics of indigenous women from the Amazon. Target beneficiaries lacked basic knowledge on human and collective rights, in addition to the communication skills required to apply and multiply the intended knowledge and skills transferred through the trainings. The activity had to invest significant and unforeseen time teaching about human rights and struggled to leverage training into dissemination and action by the target group. These challenges led to reduced efficiency given delays in the scheduled training coupled with poorer than expected activity results. **The lack of understanding of the participants' baseline knowledge resulted in first year training focusing predominantly on human rights rather than more advanced topics like communal land and resource management rights that had been programmed.** By the end of year one, the IP recognized the need for additional trainings to cover the material initially programmed. As a result, the activity did not meet its expected target of presenting one proposal to authorities in year one. Halfway through year two, indigenous women had yet to participate in consultation and conflict management processes and no submission had been made towards meeting the target of three proposals placed in the public agenda.

* Based on the final evaluation of Conflict Management and Mitigation Activities in Peru, specifically the activity “Indigenous Women Contributing to Conflict Management”.



Photo: Perú Bosques

Case 2. Peru Bosques: Differences among community members*

The objective of Case 2 was to maintain ecosystemic ‘services’ through improved forest governance.³ Case 2 had a specific mandate to assist indigenous communities, the targeted beneficiaries, with improved forest management practices through training and technical assistance. The IP identified an established indigenous organization that grouped various communities as a strategic partner and operationalized its existing community forestry oversight program. Conceptualized in 2008, this program had yet to be implemented. The main purpose of this forestry oversight program was to better manage the use of forest resources auditing extractive agreements between communities and interested parties. The forestry oversight program was strengthened while activity support was ongoing. Over 30 forest monitors were trained in sustainable forest management, conflict resolution, negotiations, and control and supervision of native community resources.

The evaluation found that the community forestry oversight program weakened even prior to the end of the five-year activity lifetime. The role of forest monitors within the oversight program was not shared sufficiently among members of the various communities. In addition, community selection of forest monitors was tainted by power struggles and personal interests of community leaders. These two factors limited the effectiveness of forest monitors in lessening illegal logging, deteriorating the communities’ perceived legitimacy of their role. **Had the IP been cognizant of the power strife among community leaders and dubious selection processes afflicting the credibility of forest monitors, program adjustments could have been possible before delivering support.**

* Based on the final evaluation of Peru Bosques, also called “Environmental Management and Forest Governance Support Activity”.

³ Ecosystemic services are the economic, social, and environmental benefits, direct and indirect, that people receive as a result of well-functioning ecosystems (National Service for State Protected Areas (SERNANP Peru)).



Case 3. Healthy communities and municipalities: Knowledge of participant municipalities*

Case 3 stems from a grassroots community development model that incorporated an assessment process during which the participant community, rather than outside agents, identified its own needs and problems. Healthy Communities and Municipalities II (HCM II) sought to improve maternal and child health in poor communities with a model that contributed to improve a person's ability to increase healthy behaviors and lifestyles, working jointly with communities and local, regional, and national entities in the public and private sector. This objective requires two direct results i) Families with children younger than 2 years of age improve healthy practices; and ii) public and private entities institutionalize the methodology and model in a sustainable fashion. This case is specific to the transfer of the model, the second result.

Local governments (LGs) were sought as target beneficiaries to institutionalize the model, identifying them as the most proximate actor capable of increasing the model's sustainability. While the transfer package developed by the IP did not respond to a specific assessment of LG capacity, **extensive institutional knowledge of the beneficiaries derived from a previous activity coupled with technical assistance defined by the joint identification of priorities between LGs and IP, led to the successful transfer of the model.** Evaluation findings state all sampled LGs had written documentation expressing the commitment and political will of adopting the model. According to IP reports, 87% of LGs had established local technical teams (LTTs) - close to the target of 90%. Operational LTTs were critical to the implementation of the model as they led multisector committees that worked directly with community committees (JVC by its Spanish initials), essential actors in the model. On the latter, evaluation findings suggest 70% of LGs had established, operational LTTs with the required know how, skills and capacity to facilitate the model's implementation. Working closely with LGs based on practical knowledge of how they function and a joint agreement on their priorities increased the sustainability and effectiveness of the activity.

* Based on the evaluation of the transfer, expansion, and sustainability of the Healthy Communities and Municipalities Model in Peru.

Case 4. Pro Integridad: Beneficiary needs identified*

Case 4 also demonstrates the gains in activity effectiveness resulting from identifying target beneficiary needs prior to delivering TA. The activity specific objective was to increase the capacity of the justice system to resolve corruption cases. As beneficiaries, the activity targeted public sector employees responsible for processing corruption cases. In year 1, **the activity assessed, in detail, the capacity needs of a sample of over 130 target beneficiaries and developed a capacity-strengthening plan that responded to their needs.** Plans were also validated with the activity's future public entity counterparts that employ target beneficiaries.

Capacity-building efforts responded to individual target beneficiary needs, with a positive spillover of strengthening the institutional capacity of their public employers. The evaluation found that 90% of all interviewed training recipients regarded the content as highly relevant. Activity targets for trained beneficiaries were exceeded. The activity was deemed highly effective in terms of target beneficiaries appropriating the knowledge and skills transferred through TA. The detailed knowledge of beneficiary and partner needs allowed for the identification of training needs and the subsequent implementation of training modules on schedule in a tight 3-year timeframe. The success of the approach led to the institutionalization of training modules by the public school responsible for specialized education of targeted beneficiaries, which constitutes a significant step toward their sustainability.

* Based on the final evaluation of the activity "Promotion of Justice and Integrity in Public Administration".

IN SUM...

THIS LEARNING EXPERIENCE DEMONSTRATES INVESTING TIME TO UNDERSTAND TARGET BENEFICIARY NEEDS, including sociocultural dynamics, prior to activity implementation, contributes to achieving results. In fact, two of these evaluation studies recommend a thorough assessment of target beneficiaries prior to implementing the activity. Adequately choosing a strategic partner is not sufficient to guarantee legitimacy and sustainability of results. Assessing the relationship of this strategic partner with target population is also important. Heterogeneity among target beneficiaries exists even among families of the same community. For example, ethnographic studies found that differences among families in each community played an important role in determining whether they were successful in the USAID and Peruvian government sponsored program. Different family characteristics and the effects of family members' roles, values and expectations may predispose some families to succeed and others to fail, which has implications for how the program might differentiate interventions to make them successful for a higher percentage of participating families. **Activity design and implementation strategy should always evidence significant knowledge of beneficiary characteristics and interests that can affect results.**