

Lessons Learned:

Strengthening USAID/Peru's Engagement with Indigenous Peoples¹

Context

USAID/Peru recognized that Indigenous Peoples are vital partners in advancing sustainable development, defending biodiversity, and safeguarding human rights in the Amazon. Over the last several years, the Mission made concerted efforts to engage Indigenous Peoples more meaningfully, guided by the USAID Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (PRO-IP), approved in 2020.

As a result of these experiences, USAID/Peru identified key lessons and emerging best practices that can inform future programming and engagement strategies both within Peru and across development agencies.

Lesson 1: Engagement Must Be Institutionalized to Be Sustained

What We Did:

- Hired an **Indigenous Peoples Advisor** in November 2023 to lead internal coordination, represent Indigenous concerns, and guide the implementation of PRO-IP.
- Developed and implemented an annual **Indigenous Peoples Engagement Plan**, ensuring structured participation across the program cycle.

What We Learned:

- Sustainable engagement depends on dedicated staff and planning.
- Institutionalizing Indigenous perspectives strengthens both internal accountability and program impact.

Lesson 2: Representation Must Be Embedded in Strategic Dialogue

What We Did:

- Included key Indigenous organizations (FENAMAD, ORAU, ORPIO, AIDSESEP) in Regional Partners Meetings (RPMs) and Democracy, Rights, and Governance (DRG)

¹ This document was prepared by former members of the USAID/Peru technical teams as a reflection of their professional experience. The views expressed in this text belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of USAID or the United States Government.

events.

- Ensured Indigenous representatives were featured in sessions led by the Mission Director in priority Amazonian regions.

What We Learned:

- Representation in high-level dialogue builds trust and ensures Indigenous priorities are considered in policy and program design.
- Joint spaces with state and civil society actors foster alignment and open communication.

Lesson 3: Independent Feedback Improves Program Orientation

What We Did:

- Convened **annual feedback sessions** with NGOs that work with Indigenous Peoples but are not USAID implementing partners (Lima: 2022, 2024; Washington DC: 2023, 2024).

What We Learned:

- External, non-partner organizations offer candid perspectives and valuable insights.
- Regular consultation improves USAID's responsiveness and strengthens its role as a trusted development partner.

Lesson 4: Programs Must Reflect Indigenous Priorities

What We Did:

- Shared updates on key USAID initiatives (e.g., Prevenir, EITI, AIRR, Probosques, CINCIA, Oro Verde) during engagement meetings.
- Solicited input from Indigenous organizations on USAID's performance and focus areas.

What We Learned:

Engagement helped surface key Indigenous priorities:

1. **Land Tenure Security** – as the foundation for rights, governance, and livelihoods.

2. **Protection of Indigenous Rights Defenders** – through coordination between Indigenous and state-led systems.
3. **Support for Indigenous Economies** – especially in alignment with cultural and environmental values.
4. **Organizational Strengthening** – to enable Indigenous Peoples to access and manage cooperation resources directly.

Lesson 5: Engagement Is a Process, Not a One-Time Event

What We Did:

- Launched a rolling, **multi-year Plan of Action** to align PRO-IP implementation with evolving Indigenous priorities.
- Committed to annual Indigenous and civil society consultations to assess progress and adjust direction.

What We Learned:

- Engagement must be continuous, not transactional.
- Flexibility and active listening are essential to meaningful partnerships.

Conclusion and Way Forward

USAID/Peru learned that meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples requires more than consultation—it demands shared ownership, structural inclusion, and long-term investment in Indigenous leadership. By strengthening these partnerships, USAID/Peru aimed to advance inclusive, sustainable development that protects both people and the environment in the Peruvian Amazon.

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