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**Valuing Diversity: Enhancing Its Contribution to
Sustainable Development**

by

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Introduction

In this essay, the authors explore a series of questions and thoughts that arose after examination of documents produced for USAID's recent "Stocktaking" effort. In this effort, we were surprised to learn that the Stocktaking Team mentioned "valuing diversity" only twice in four volumes of diagnosis and analysis; that the team's members referred only once to "valuing diversity" in the complete list of the Agency's core values in one volume; and that they used only one footnote in another of the multi-volumed report to indicate that the Agency added the concept to the list of core values two years after reengineering in the Agency began. The rest of the stocktaking exercise engaged in considerable detail on the contributions of other core values (i.e., empowered staff and teams accountable for results, results oriented decision-making) and program operations approaches (i.e., addressing development needs through customers and partners, responsive and flexible approaches for achieving) to the achievement of reforms in the Agency which would lead to "better, more sustainable results."

Our review of USAID's stocktaking documents leads us to pose several questions that reflect some expectations, assumptions, and behaviors that focus on:

1. Does "valuing diversity"--one of USAID's Core Values--actually have value for the Agency, and if it does, why isn't it more fully integrated in USAID's Core Values?
2. Why the issue of "valuing diversity" was not among those investigated specifically by the "Stocktaking Team?", and
3. How can "value diversity" contribute to achievement of USAID's mission--Sustainable Development?

Understanding the role of "valuing diversity" in USAID has proven to be a worthy but difficult challenge. The following provide some ways of thinking about the direct and indirect nature of the links between valuing diversity and achieving the Agency's very lofty mission. To us, the process of "valuing diversity" clearly is among the necessary, but not sufficient, results that need to be met in order to even come close to the achievement of sustainable development. It is our belief that "valuing diversity" needs further exploration and a focused dialogue between those inside and outside USAID who play key roles in working toward the Agency mission. We hope this brief essay contributes to that more focused dialogue.

Making the case

Annex 1 provides quotes from the Agency’s 1995 “Human Resources Business Area Analysis” which serve as a useful starting point for discussing the challenges that exist in linking “diversity” as a core value to achievement of Sustainable Development. We believe there is an absolute necessity to meet these challenges. Valuing diversity is essential to achieving the Agency’s ambitious mission because:

- Valuing diversity is fundamental to getting the Agency’s mission accomplished.
- Diversity will bring more creativity and new information to planning and management that will increase USAID operating units’ ability to be flexible in the complex, uncertain, and constantly changing conditions imposed by developing country contexts
- Over time, diversity will become a key to more efficient functioning of the Agency, and
- Valuing diversity will serve as the foundation to build on the existing “social capital” of the Agency.

Thus, we believe that valuing diversity must truly be a contributor to achievement of the Agency’s mission, not just on the margins where it reflects a value but does not clearly demonstrate how and why the consequence of valuing that diversity is among the necessary and sufficient requirements for achieving sustainable development.

We discuss each of the reasons listed above in more detail below.

Valuing diversity is fundamental to getting the Agency’s mission accomplished. It does so because by valuing diversity, USAID will acknowledge the diversity that is a pronounced and dynamic feature of American society. In so doing, USAID will bring together the particular “uniqueness” from people of different age groups, sexes, races, nationalities, geographical origins, socioeconomic classes, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and appearances. With them, the members of this more diversified workforce will bring different ideas; personal, interpersonal, and cultural patterns of thinking about the world; work ethics; of exchange or reciprocity; and behaviors about participation, responsibility, accountability, and results; styles and languages by which they express themselves; education and training; professional and life experiences; of colleagues, friends, family, and community; concepts of what it means to cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate; perspectives and resources for problem-solving; risktaking levels; etc. Valuing these differences and using them, the Agency will be served by people in different roles as liaisons in new partnership; positions on the front lines of customer service; participants in more integrated planning, decision-making, and management processes; thinkers and analysts of the past, present and future, since sustainable is not a result at a single point in time, but rather a process that requires building and applying capabilities for

continual problem identification, analysis (including differentiation between what a cause of a problem is as compared to what a symptom is), creation of alternative solutions (of ways to address both causes and symptoms), decision-making and action. By valuing diversity, USAID will be creating a richer learning environment for individuals and groups where the “synergistic power of a diverse group of thinkers is more likely to spark innovative solutions than the efforts of a lone expert or a homogeneous team” (Griggs, Lewis Brown and Lente-Louise Louw. 1995. Training and Development. October, Vol. 49, Issue 10: 1)

Encouraging, increasing and learning to work with diversity will bring more creativity and new information to planning and management that will increase the ability to be flexible in the complex, uncertain, and constantly changing conditions imposed by developing country contexts -- Some established practices are important to maintain because they assume, over time, a powerful focus for human interactions. If, however, some traditional operational and decision-making practices are no longer useful, they need to be reevaluated and perhaps removed. Changing conditions typically require changing ways of doing business. This includes meshing the diverse talents of USAID staff, partners, and customers for value added.

Over time, valuing diversity will become a key to more efficient functioning of the Agency -- Part of the challenge is the process of “translating” the valuing of diversity into behaviors that reflect that value. As valuing diversity increases, experience and understanding of how to blend and build on the comparative advantages of individuals and groups can decrease the amount of time to achieve solutions and increase the return on other investments because of the enhanced problem solving and decision making capabilities and processes of staff, partners and customers. When this happens, there will be measurable changes in behavior. Valuing diversity behaviors will become institutionalized and transparent --they will be used, but people will not always realize they are using them.

Valuing diversity will serve as the foundation to build on the existing “social capital” of the Agency -- “social capital” is not traditional capital (i.e., money and what it buys); it is not human capital (i.e., know how and skills); it is not an asset (e.g., infrastructure). Social capital is the resource of human relationships that usefully connects people in more trusting group and organizational relationships. “Social capital is the stuff we draw on all the time, through our connections to a system of human relationships, to accomplish things that matter to us and to solve . . . problems.social capital builders ought to pay as much attention to what they are building for (the discrete ends) as to the details of the building process.let us acknowledge that discrete, widely desired ends make social capital powerful...” (de Souza Briggs, Xavier. 1997. National Civic Review. Summer, Vol. 86, Issue 2:1). Some of these ends include a cleaner environment, economic growth, healthier and more educated populace, more transparent government.

Building social capital in USAID means developing a strong, viable and a sustainable source of consciousness, creativity, and community within the Agency to contribute to the achievement of its primary objective. Part of the challenge is “to provide structures and processes that can coalesce naturally occurring social interactions into social capital that can be used or invested in other situations.” (Potapchuk, William R. and others. 1997. “Building Community with Social Capital: Chits and Chuts or Chats with Change.” National Civic Review. Summer, Vol. 86, Issue 2:). By focusing its efforts on learning how to build and encourage internal social capital, perhaps USAID can better understand one of the primary aspects of sustainable development, for “[r]epeated successes (and even failures) play a central role in the ability a community has to mobilize its civic infrastructure to deal with a range of issues--public disputes, opportunities for economic and social growth; allocation of scarce resources, and the dozens of other potentially contentious decisions that have to made in civic life” (ibid) wherever people are. Successes with various kinds of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration can serve as a template (not a blueprint) for future interactions and perhaps as a role model for host country institutions for how they can develop broader and deeper social capital of their own to meet their objectives.

Other reasons for valuing diversity may fundamentally be empty political gestures.

Concluding thoughts

At this point, we believe that dialogue must continue. We have looked at USAID’s “Stocktaking” and found that it addressed many critical issues but perhaps missed at least one important opportunity. We articulated our expectation that since “valuing diversity” is one of the Agency’s five core values, it must be important. However, we wondered where “valuing diversity” really lies in the core of USAID. The attached Annex addresses some of that. And, finally we raised a question about valuing diversity and its contribution to achievement of sustainable development. Based on the assumption that contributions do exist, we articulated a set of ideas about the nature of the links between “valuing diversity” and “achieving sustainable development” and some ways of thinking about them.

In the vein of opening up dialogue, we offer the following questions as some of those that might strengthen the case for the contribution of valuing diversity to sustainable development and for digging into the core to find where its value does lie:

1. Does valuing diversity really make a difference?
2. In what ways?
3. To what degree?
4. Is it really among the necessary and sufficient to achieve sustainable development?
5. How do we measure the nature and magnitude of the difference that valuing diversity makes--internally and externally?
6. How does valuing diversity link to the other core values?

7. Are there potential conflicts with other core values that need to be addressed?
8. How much “cultural change” within USAID is required to assure that the contributions are appropriate and ongoing?
9. What do we need to know to be able to better capitalize on the values of diversity?
10. What do we need to know to prevent or resolve conflict that diversity often engenders? And, perhaps more important, how do we develop a process and way of thinking that uses conflict constructively?¹

¹ About the authors: Parker has a Ph.D. in Social Ecology. She has worked in 30 countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union. She has focused much of her career on a wide array of human dimensions of sustainable development and has worked as a reengineering specialist for USAID since 1995. McFadden has a Ph.D. in Entomology. He worked over 25 years with the USDA Forest Service as a research manager and as Assistant Director of the NE Forest Experiment Station. He worked for USAID from 1983-1985. He has international experience in countries of Asia and the Pacific, Central America, the Caribbean, Russia and several countries of Eastern Europe.

Annex 1 Valuing Diversity: One of USAID's Core Values

USAID's 1995 "Human Resources Business Area Analysis" (HRBAA) provides insights into ways that the Agency thinks about its human resources and the reasons it believes that a diversified workforce should be valued. We take the following directly from that document to provide a flavor of the Agency's thinking:

"USAID's human resources are the foundation for successful achievement of program results." (Chapter 1: pg. 3)

"Valuing Diversity -- it is a business imperative that USAID achieve a workplace environment unencumbered by traditional barriers. The Agency has a global responsibility in which diversity and equal employment opportunity must be defined in broader terms. Team members must be able to accept human differences and work in problem solving teams to serve our customers. As a business necessity, we must work together and make every effort to get the most out of our human resources. We must value the differences and seek to understand the synergy and the benefits of bringing together people of differing backgrounds and skills to accomplish our Agency goals." (Chapter 1: pg. 5)

"USAID's affirmative action goal for its American employees is to have a workforce representative of the American people. But beyond equal employment opportunity and affirmative action, USAID's goal is to attain a workplace environment where all employees **value the diversity** that exists in its workers and that of the countries in which USAID works. It is an environment where professional collaboration is encouraged and includes centers of technical excellence and development training opportunities for all employees." (Chapter 1: pg. 6)

"When the HRBAA team benchmarked human resources functions with Xerox Corporation, it participated in a workshop session where Xerox described diversity as a competitive strategy. The corporation executives view diversity as more than a moral imperative or business opportunity. Xerox' view is that diversity '*goes beyond numbers and targets: it is the acceptance of people of all ages with globally diverse backgrounds whose fresh new ideas, opinions, perspectives and borderless creativity enrich the lives of others.*' It includes both an acceptance and utilization of human differences to work in heterogeneous teams who collectively serve the customer. Proctor and Gamble Company has adopted a similar diversity principle, stating that diversity goes beyond physical differences such as race, sex and age, which normally have been considered under the EEO and Affirmative Action legal requirements, to touching on the less visible differences such as nationality, culture heritage, personal background, education, socio-economic status, position in an organization, etc." (Chapter VI-A: pg. 2)

“There is both urgency and a compelling Agency need for all levels of the workforce -- from management to employees -- to understand and value diversity as we progress towards a reengineered organization. The framework of the Operations BAA moves the Agency beyond teamwork to accomplishing its major activities in and through teams made up of USAID employees, partners, stakeholders and customers. This requires a major paradigm shift in our thinking and understanding of diversity in the normal context. Rather than defining it within the confines of the American workforce, we must think about it in an expanded context of international working teams possessing global multicultural dimensions.

Core teams of USAID personnel consisting of U.S. direct hires, USPSCs and Foreign Service Nationals, and extended teams of USAID staff, external partners and stakeholders, represent a mosaic of multicultural individuals who must arrive at a common work goal to achieve a result. It is a business imperative that we create a workplace environment unencumbered by traditional barriers. Team members must have a common understanding of diversity to be able to accept human differences and work in problem solving teams to serve our customers. Ours is a global responsibility in which diversity and equal employment opportunity must be defined in broader terms.

Valuing diversity involves a mutual respect and understanding between work groups and team members who are free from stereotyping. It speaks to how we treat each other. It involves doing what is right and just and fair in all our personal interactions within the working environment. Diversity does not just happen. ... It is a business necessity that we understand the synergy and benefits of bringing together people of differing backgrounds and skills to accomplish our Agency goals. We must work together and make every effort to get the most out of our human resources.” (Chapter VI-A: pp. 2-3)

“...it is business necessity that all employees work together to achieve our Agency’s goals. As such, we need to appreciate the global multicultural dimensions and contributions that each person brings to the work place. We must have a common understanding of diversity issues and accept the human differences in others. Only then can we effectively work in problem solving teams to serve our customers and achieve our desired results.” (Chapter VI-B: pg. 15)

“USAID adopted four core values to guide future agency program operations and related aspects of its mission. The four values -- customer focus, managing for results, empowerment and accountability, and teamwork -- are interdependent. Each can benefit significantly from teams for its effective expression. The HRBAA recommends the addition of a fifth core value --valuing diversity. Valuing diversity, in the HRBAA team’s judgment, is increasingly a business imperative for USAID. That is, for the Agency to succeed in achieving its

strategic objectives through teams, it needs the diverse perspectives and experiences that give powerful teams the creative basis for action. Moreover, diversity applies to the entire core workforce, not just certain segments of it. The effectiveness of teams in USAID will depend upon a diverse core workforce. ...”
(Chapter VI-C: pg. 2)