

NGO Audit Program: *Social Working Group Report*
BP General Response

BP is pleased to take this opportunity to thank the Social Group for their participation in the BP/BTC/SCP – OSI NGO Audit Program. We would like to congratulate the group for their report, an outcome with value for BP, IRC and (we hope) the NGO participants alike. While we provide more specific, technical and audit-oriented responses in the results table, this general response is intended to provide BP and IRC reaction to the overall conclusions and key issues raised in the report.

In examining how SCP, IRC and national NGO partners have attempted to implement microprojects in project-affected communities, the Audit Group has provided us with a great service. Given our commitment to working with these communities, independent input concerning the effective implementation of these sustainable development efforts is extremely valuable. Such an input (and the Social Group's audit) rightly begins with an assessment of how well we are following our own procedures and guidelines. Thus we are pleased that the Audit Group positively characterizes overall performance, and we welcome the constructive suggestions that the group provides.

The Social Group has audited a complicated set of relationships and actors. The specific community micro projects under review represent an attempt to engage national NGOs (NNGOs) in the implementation of our community investment program (CIP), through hands-on capacity building. These NGOs undertook to follow guidelines provided by IRC. This program was a first for IRC as coach and mentor to the NNGOs; it was a first for the NNGOs and the communities as well. Given the above, we are pleased with the outcomes. Commitment identification and performance evaluation is difficult in these circumstances; ultimately we do not agree with a number of the report's findings. Nonetheless, we readily acknowledge that the group has made a number of valuable observations, and in so doing, consider its efforts successful.

We were pleased to note in the Social Audit report a number of positive findings. These ranged from procedural verification (regarding community mobilization, involvement of women, project selection and planning) to commendation for solid financial and budgeting processes. It was especially gratifying to learn of the Audit Group's conclusion that "microprojects were implemented in accordance with...the guidelines," and that "microproject implementation positively affected and played (a) significant role in development of communities and solution of social problems."

We read with interest the Audit Group's finding regarding poor documentation processes in all three communities. In essence the group observes that, perhaps due to a lack of training and oversight, minutes are rarely produced during or after the numerous community mobilizations, trainings and other meetings. Interestingly, the guideline document in question (Community Participatory Assessment) calls for community *volunteers* to document meetings and list participants. Indeed, the training delivered to NGOs and communities concerned mobilization for community problem solving, rather than instructions on note-taking. We are not convinced that this represents a *commitment* ignored or unfulfilled. Nonetheless, we must agree with the Audit Group that there is indeed value in encouraging the growth of capacity amongst national NGOs and communities to professionally document meetings and outcomes. In fact, more explicit attention to this matter might have avoided the

documentation issue identified by the Group's as a *non-conformance*. Opinion may differ as to the overall audit significance of this discovery (incorrect reflection in community documents of which project was ultimately selected for implementation). But it is clear that this suggestion for greater care as regards community documentation represents valuable input for our further consideration.

The most insightful of the Social Group's observations, in our estimation, concerns long-term community development strategy. As noted in the report, IRC's Integrated Community Based Development (ICBD) approach includes micro project implementation as a component of sustainable development. The group finds that this component "has been sustainable *just in some cases*, but *after* the project implementation community capacity building was not *ensured*." We disagree with the group's suggestion that this implies a broken commitment.

We believe that sustainability is supported by systematically encouraging community participation in their development, from needs assessment thru implementation of micro-projects to post-implementation evaluation. But can we claim success in all cases? Unfortunately, we cannot. Each community receives the same training in pursuit of this long-term goal. Community sustainable development is a process, rather than an event, and one that relies on the character, energy, and focus of the communities themselves.

We submit that BP/BTC/SCP and IRC can no more *ensure* capacity building than we can *guarantee* sustainability. The only party that can ensure a community's sustainable development is the community itself. For the purposes of this audit, and in general, BP/BTC/SCP and IRC are responsible to follow their own principles in support of enabling community development. We believe our performance in support of sustainability is exemplary, but admit that it is a continuous process of learning and, hopefully, improvement.

In conclusion, we would again like to thank the Social Group for their efforts, insights and recommendations. We congratulate the group, and hope that their participation in the NGO Audit Program has been rewarding and useful.