



CDD Voices: Interview with Francisco Obrique

Bo PICAR

The Community-Driven Development (CDD) Global Solutions Group (GSG) series “CDD Voices” highlights how CDD approaches are used throughout the world to benefit poor communities.



This month, we reached out to **Francisco Obrique**, Agricultural Specialist, who works on **Bolivia’s PICAR**. The [Community Investment in Rural Areas Project](#) (PICAR) has an overall goal to fight extreme rural poverty among small landholders, particularly indigenous populations. Starting in late 2011, the project has since transferred responsibility and resources to more than 150,000 rural inhabitants in 656 highly vulnerable communities (30 percent beyond the target of 500 communities), and supported 769 sub-projects to improve access to

basic and productive infrastructure for rural households. To date, the project has increased road access for more than 15,000 people, and expanded or improved irrigation for more than 17,000 beneficiaries. In 2015, the government received a \$60 million additional financing IDA credit to expand and deepen the success of the project to reach an additional 200,000 beneficiaries. Here’s what Francisco shared with us on this innovative CDD operation:

What value does the CDD approach add to partnering with Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia?

First, PICAR’s CDD approach helps to incorporate a rational planning and prioritization process into how a community operates, allowing them to identify and address their most important needs and constraints. To the best of my knowledge, PICAR has been a pioneer in testing a demand-driven approach in Bolivia, whereas other projects have been rather supply-driven. Generally, the several IP communities engaged in PICAR have embraced the inclusive planning approach; I am not aware of any case where the participatory approach caused disruption or internal conflicts.

Second, PICAR has allowed the communities to take control instead of being mere recipients of aid. I can testify from my multiple field visits that PICAR beneficiaries truly see themselves as the leaders of the investments. The CDD approach fits within the cultural context in Bolivia and it’s a tool to empower IP

communities, helping them exploit their potential and harness opportunities. People feel that the approach serves as a platform to achieve significant improvements in their quality of life.

Third, PICAR has ushered in mechanisms that ensure high levels of transparency in the management of financial resources. Other programs and projects have been very controversial because they either manage the funds directly (with little engagement of the communities) or transfer the money to community leaders. So having ensured a comfortable level of transparency in the project using the CDD approach is a major achievement for the Bolivian context.

Tell us about some of the work that PICAR does on gender in these communities.

PICAR's model is to provide block grants of up to \$40,000 for a subproject determined by the entire community, as well as a separate, smaller grant for a women-led project. Communities have an opportunity to merge these projects into a single one and benefit from a larger pool of funds. What we initially found was that male-dominated community assemblies would create social pressure on female community members to merge the projects, even if the broader community's priorities didn't line up with the priorities of women.

To fix this problem, we strengthened guidelines for project implementation. Women would meet first, in advance of the monthly community assembly, to create a list of their priorities for funding, such as fences for livestock, improvements to nutrition, rainwater collection, etc. The community and women-led projects were only allowed to merge if the top priority of the women's group aligned with the top priority of the community assembly.

This way, PICAR protects the opportunity for women to take center stage and engage in learning-by-doing. They decide, discuss, and lead the project – tasks that traditionally have been led by men. In fact, approximately 300 out of PICAR's 769 successful projects are led by women.

Women face many challenges in IP communities where we work, which are traditionally male-dominated. These communities are also poor and suffer from lack of access to education, and these problems are often more serious for women. Compared to men, fewer women can speak Spanish fluently, and they can find it challenging to speak out in public. So it's especially impressive to see a woman taking on a leadership role and presenting in a community assembly on project expenditures and purchases, despite the poverty and cultural constraints.



And these women-led, women-owned projects have a real impact on their lives. I visited a community, where a woman with disabilities and her family had to travel 2.5 km from her home to draw clean water from a spring. When PICAR helped her village build a rainwater catchment system, her life changed 180

degrees. She had access to water for several months out of the year, and was proud of her participation and the empowerment that came with the selection of this project.

What is your advice for TTLs adapting a CDD approach to meet the unique challenges affecting IPs and ethnic minorities?

When working with IP communities, the cultural aspect is especially important, and TTLs should use existing social structures as much as possible. In many IP communities, villagers already meet once a month to discuss community matters. So PICAR uses the community's regular meetings instead of organizing special meetings. The program also integrates traditional authorities at different stages of the intervention instead of bypassing them, and we use the local language in planning and implementing the subprojects. By using these structures, PICAR doesn't come across as disruptive or artificial — communities adapt more naturally to it.

Applying a sound strategy requires the Task Team to assess what works and what doesn't. For example, PICAR has included an ambitious gender strategy that came to fruition quickly. The extent to which women have engaged in the project is terrific. By empowering women, the project has reached out to some of the most vulnerable population groups in rural areas. However, not everything you find in gender-related literature works. I weigh in on what worked for us [in one of my blogs on implementing PICAR](#).

The project also has informal filters to assess the likelihood of success in a given IP community. From my experience, CDD works well in communities with at least some social fabric. Conversely, using a CDD approach is challenging if a given community has either complicated outstanding conflicts or no experience (or interest) in dealing with problems in a collective matter. So the project tries to assess if communities want to engage via the participatory approach. Some important ways PICAR does this is through having communities leaders identify among a list of communities where the greatest need is and then by gauging the level of engagement with the field personnel when they visit the villages with their plans.

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