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SRDP IN KENYA: CAN EXPERIMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT SUCCEED?

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With the Assistance of the IDS SRDP Evaluation Team*

Introduction

In FY 1971/72 Kenya embarked upon a programme of rural development activities in six divisions. The program was called the Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP). Developers of the programme aspired to develop a comprehensive approach to rural transformation that would include measures to promote agricultural productivity, investments in intra-structure, and development of institutional structures and social organization to increase the well-being of families in rural Kenya. 1/

The SRDP was budgeted to expend approximately 2.5 million Kenya pounds in the five years from 1971-76. The programme in each area was to be devised by local initiative, approved by Nairobi, administered through the divisional officers of the pertinent Ministries, and coordinated by a new officer, the Area Coordinator. (AC). Estimates budgeted for 1974/75 give some idea of the scope and balance of projects undertaken. (See Table 1).

The mission of SRDP was determined by the realization that rural development on a national scale could not call for massive inputs of external resources. SRDP was directed to discover strategies that could be used to promote development all over Kenya using local resources. Thus the key concepts of SRDP were experimentation to discover successful strategies, and replicability. Only those strategies should be pursued that could be transferred to other areas using locally available resources, particularly human resources and existing development-oriented arms of the Kenya government. 2/

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1/ J. R. Nellis "The SRDP, September, 1966 - July 1970" Nairobi: Institute for Development Studies (mimeo).

2/ Heyer, J. Ireri, D. and Moris, J. Rural Development in Kenya (Nairobi: E. A. Publishing House 1971) detail the available resources in various parts of Kenya.

A third objective was implicit in the delegation of project development to the six AC's and a Project Committee composed of divisional officers of the Ministries and local public elites. The implicit concept was one of administrative devolution on local areas. The formulation of programs and, the critical review of alternatives was to be undertaken by those most directly involved. Moreover, it was hoped that local initiative from outside the government would enlist resources through self-help and make the execution of the programme less dependent on external government funding. This third objective may be termed local involvement.

In this paper four experiments conducted under SRDP are reviewed and appraised, to determine the value of these basic concepts and the fruits of the SRDP effort to experiment. The activities reported on here are only a small part of the entire SRDP program, selected because of their experimental element.

Four Major Experiments

Within SRDP four experiments were devised that will be described here: 1) group extension, 2) unsecured credit, 3) labor intensive roads, and 4) development administration. The major experimental dimensions, conclusions, and replicability of each are described below. The paper concludes with implications of these experiments for the next phase of Kenya's development that will shift the location of this type of activity to District Development Committees and District Development Officers.

Group Extension. As the result of thinking about new approaches to the delivery of extension services to farmers in the SRDP areas a number of experiments were undertaken. New procedures were devised for training extension agents, for involving field personnel in the programming of their activities, and for recording the activities of extension agents to monitor what was actually being accomplished. // In addition to experiments directed at the extension agents, a variety of new approaches were devised for involving the farmers. Extension was focused on average farmers, delivered via village groups, and organized according to schedules and sites selected by the village groups. Finally, work was concentrated on a limited number of innovations, rather than a broad program involving complex options. The experiment entailed extension conducted with clusters of farmers, each organized as a

// Chambers, R. Managing Rural Development (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974).

recognizable group with an elected leader. The leaders, in turn, were organized into village committees who took initiative in making requests for extension. The village committee could be involved in discussion of alternative crop development programs.

The programme of experiments demonstrated conclusively that extension through groups can reach far more people and reach them far more effectively than the existing methods directed at progressive farmers. Effectiveness of the training of farmers in the village was contrasted with poor results from farmer training centers. Effectiveness of in-service training for the field officers, and effectiveness of their participation in the programming of their activities were also demonstrated. The field staff management system (FSMS) was not proved a conclusive success or failure, but appeared sufficiently valuable to warrant further development.

All of the successful experiments are capable of being introduced directly into the Ministry of Agriculture's present extension program. The only aspect of the program with slightly less replicability was the concentration on hybrid maize and soya beans as specific innovations, which will not be appropriate for all ecological zones in Kenya.

Unsecured-Credit

The second series of experiments concern the use of credit as a device to promote the introduction of new farm techniques by small farmers. In Vihiga loans were extended to small farmers to promote purchases of hybrid maize and fertilizer as part of the strategy for encouraging the adoption of that crop. Loans were given without security. Expansion of the program was associated with a steadily declining rate of repayment and small increases in hybrid maize production. During 1974 and 1975 experimentation was being undertaken with a number of alternative techniques to improve-repayment rates.

The development of an extensive series of trials, with alternative formulae for payment of loans for collection, and for combining loans with other agricultural activity appears to have demonstrated that a) it is difficult to extend credit to those most in need and b) it is likely that the real effects of credit will not warrant the real costs of administration, unless there are automatic mechanisms for repayment (as through marketing cooperatives that have a monopsony in purchasing the crop in question.) These findings confirm the results of earlier experience elsewhere. They also support the hypothesis that effective extension activity is more cost effective in improving agricultural productivity than a program of credit to provide working capital for inputs.

The failure of the credit experiments should be a danger signal to foreign donors, international agencies, and the Government of Kenya. Replication is likely to produce unwanted effects, inequities in development and a waste of resources. If further abortive unsecured credit schemes can be avoided because of these lessons, it will have been a valuable experiment for Kenya.

Labor-intensive road construction. The program, executed in three of the divisions under SRDP, was to establish principles for deploying labor for the construction of roads by labor-intensive methods. The program experimentally used local leadership to adjust siting of roads.

The programme resulted in the collection of basic cost data on labor-intensive construction methods, planning systems for such construction, and a strategy for recruiting, training, and organizing the necessary managerial and supervisory inputs. It was established that feeder, or rural access, roads could be constructed to a standard comparable to those of machine methods and that quantity of work was limited only by the number of supervisors and independent units available.

The experiment established both the limits and the advantages of labor-intensive methods. Gravelling is best done by more capital-intensive methods; other operations can be accomplished with unskilled local labor under trained supervision. The SRDP experience is highly replicable and is being replicated through the Kenya Government's Rural Access Road Programme that will eventually lead to 88 labor-intensive construction units in the Ministry of Works. The method also appears promising as a technique to promote the building of water and soil conservation facilities.

The experiment in local participation in siting was successful, and demonstrated that the real value of local participation lies in the mobilization of self-help for ancillary work and donation of right-of-way.

Development Administration. One of the most significant experiments in SRDP arises from the administrative machinery employed. The administrative system was an uncontrolled experiment and can only be roughly evaluated by comparison with the division-level administration outside SRDP. Six features evolved that appeared desirable in comparison to the more conventional administrative structure. The following conclusions appear to be supported:

1. The Project Committee

Project Committees proved themselves a useful tool for generating and reviewing development activities under certain circumstances. Meaningful local involvement and a measure of real decision-making power must be given to the committee if it is to be successful. Where such involvement and decision-making developed, the programming of SRDP activities appeared somewhat better integrated and more effectively adapted to local needs than in areas where project committees were coopted to "rubber stamp" plans laid on from above.

2. The Area Coordinator AC

The Committee requires back-up of an effective executive to assist in project formulation by project committee members, to follow up on the coordination of projects, and to supply the committee with data necessary for planning. Where the AC was given time to devote to SRDP matters and remained in office long enough to establish good communication with locals and division officers, the AC post proved extremely useful in expediting and integrating SRDP activities.

3. Grants

The use of a grant to the Project Committee, with the AC as executor, was successful in achieving project quick and useful project completion under the roads schemes in two divisions. The built-in incentives for local participation make a matching grant system a useful concept in development.

4. Programming Implementation and Management System and FSMS

The head office of SRDP designed a management information and planning system (PIM) to generate early warning of bottlenecks and provide regular review of the program of SRDP. The associated reports and charts served to communicate priorities and needs from the division to Provincial Officers and Nairobi headquarters. The paper system was closely tied to the preparation of agenda and decision-making by the project committee.

While a paper system cannot replace appropriate effort, initiative and coordination, the revised PIM system shows great utility as a device to locate bottlenecks and identify difficulties before they cripple a program. The field staff management system for extension work appears to be a promising information system and should be tested further by MOA.

5. Integration Between Ministries and Programs

Integration depends on effective work by the project committee and an attempt by local officers to ascertain community-wide repercussion of programs, or failure of programs. Some success was achieved in SRDP, but effective development under each of the previous headings is really required for constructive solutions to development problems.

6. Local Involvement

Where the local people could be effectively involved, manpower, land and other resources were mobilized by people in the division to achieve agreed upon targets. This can be achieved where the program can be formulated at a local level and a concensus exists that the program is valuable. The product of the program must be broadly available to the group. Cooptation of local groups and specification of programs from above will not elicit resources or continuing interest in local participation.

The administrative experiment can be credited with success in devolution of decision-making to the local project committee in one division out of six. In some of the remaining divisions the public was not effectively involved and the system worked to deconcentrate program-planning from Nairobi ministries to divisional officers.

Some negative findings of the administrative experiment are clear: cooptation of local leaders to support externally-imposed programs will not work; financial resources should be controlled locally to some extent to permit needed flexibility in expenditures; local involvement is undoubtedly easier in areas that have already achieved some measure of development than in traditional societies (such as the pastoralists who do not accept the norms of a modern economy.) Lastly, local involvement is not established by a single, isolated action--it must be effectively supported by the entire government machinery and it must be used to develop real local leadership.

Experience with the farmer committees in extension and with the village committees involved in siting of roads indicates that many mechanisms can be used to generate initiatives from local people and that these initiatives can mobilize enthusiasm and resources that cannot be tapped in any other way.

Implications of SRDP for Rural Development

Experimentation. The experience of SRDP has proved without a doubt the value of inculcating a drive towards experimentation by these involved in local development programmes. If the concepts of measuring performance, of proceeding with several alternative strategies, and of attention to local resource availability that were stressed under SRDP can be used by the local levels to adapt ideas and techniques to their needs, the ratio of costs to development benefits can be much lower than it has been on externally-aided area development schemes.

SRDP has not demonstrated that it is easy to develop experimentation. Most programs executed under SRDP had little experimental content. Even those, such as labor-intensive roads, which had measured performance data, were missing important information. (The change in patterns of transport in response to road construction were not documented.) Even well-defined experiments often failed because of difficulties in execution. Nonetheless, a small percentage of real experimental data can prove a great reward in assisting the allocation of funds to high-priority needs.

A secondary conclusion from the roads, the credit, and the extension experiments is that technical assistance can be of great assistance in assuring that necessary measurements are made and analyzed for their policy implications.

Replicability. SRDP has shown that advance discussion of how to proceed within the framework of existing institutional and economic resources can make it possible to move from pilot efforts to national programmes in a very short time. The concepts of labor-intensive road construction were translated into a national programme within the last year. The concepts of group extension can be translated into a national effort, although it may take longer to overcome a traditional bureaucratic orientation.

Replicability implies that limited programs can be thoroughly devised, then quickly translated into large programs. The disorganization consequent upon the failure of a large program can be avoided.

Local involvement. The third objective of SRDP, devolution and local involvement, was least generally achieved. In some divisions the area coordinators and their project committees were able to engage in "creative problem solving," despite the generally hostile bureaucratic heirarchy and the total inadequacy of fiscal power delegated to the area coordinator. (In Nyanza Province, where the Provincial Commissioner has strongly supported initiative from district development committees,

the Project Committee was particularly active and constructive. This may be causation; it may be accident.) The few successes suggest, however, that far more of permanent value can be achieved when local publics are effectively involved.

District Development Planning and SRDP

The sequel to SRDP in Kenya is a program of district - level development planning (DDP). The DDP is to be a mechanism for obtaining local inputs into the national planning process and for executing an integrated district-level plan. The DDP process is controlled by a District Development Committee and staffed by a District Development Officer. These institutions are analogous to the Project Committee and the AC.

One might ask whether the five years of SRDP has produced guidance for the DDP exercise. Certainly one would hope that the merits of experimentation and replicability would continue to be emphasized so that districts can learn from each other. One would also hope that the value of local involvement in the formulation of priorities would be emphasized in the operation of the District Development Committees.

The delegation of control over a part of the Kenyan development budget to the District Development Committee suggests a real interest in Nairobi in decentralization of planning and development programming. If this interest can be coupled with the experimental thrust and local involvement that was partially achieved in SRDP, I would predict a major gain in the effectiveness of Kenya's development budget.

These comments suggest an affirmative answer to the question: Can experiments in development succeed? Let us hope that both the successes and the failures signal a need to continue small scale experiments aimed at effective development for the small farmer.

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Table 1

Recurrent and Development Estimates K£ 000 'S

Ministry	FY 1974/75	
	Amount	Percent
Agriculture	273	45
Works	144	24
Health	57	9
Social Services	44	7
Office of President*	27	4
Commerce and Industry	26	4
Cooperatives	18	3
Tourism and Wildlife (Fisheries)	6	1
Natural Resources (Forestry)	5	1
	602 §	100

* General administration

§ Total exceeds detail because of rounding.