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IDENTIFYING EXTENSION'S COMMUNITY RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT CLIENTELE AND ADAPTING ECONOMIC INFORMATION TO THE NEEDS OF EACH

Ray Cavender*

In recent times, few concepts have enjoyed as much exposure or suffered more abuse than Community Resource Development. Social scientists have dissected its components with the skill of the surgeon's hand and too frequently with the clarity and understanding associated with UFO's (unidentified flying objects).

The "novice expert" has contributed greatly to the "popular parade" of information on Community Resource Development. Among his more notable contributions have been complicated frameworks, models, approaches, strategies and processes - - all guaranteed to foster community growth and progress. The "novice expert" also has an assortment of long range programs which are open-ended and designed to re-establish "community confidence" damaged by the application of ill conceived community development efforts.

Professional practitioners have found in Community Resource Development a fertile field to display their mystifying arts and skills. The practitioner's treatment frequently has the trappings of oversimplification. His performance is the "Modern Moses," who with incomplete information, colorful charts and a sincere desire to help, stirs the community to new visionary heights.

But the unassuming community is, in fact, a sea of turbulent water, fraught with complex and interrelated problems which do not dissipate upon command.

These remarks are in no way intended to be critical. On the other hand, they are only suggestive of the process by which knowledge evolves and is tested in fields thrust into national and international prominence and where there is a poverty of information and general practice in that field.

This diversity of theory, approaches, etc. has also added to the Extension administrator's woes in

developing a significant program effort in Community Resource Development. The array of models, strategies and processes suggest and often prescribe specialized organizational arrangements, staffing procedures and competences necessary for implementing an effective community development program. Consequently, after over ten years of emphasis at the national level and after numerous statements of scope and responsibility from Extension's national policy making body, community resource development as a major program area remains in a highly fluid state within many state Extension Services.

The 1968 "ECOP Report - - Community Resource Development" presents a comprehensive assessment on the scope of community resource development and the role of the Cooperative Extension Service in it. The report suggests an increasing need for involvement of the economists in CRD work and the application of the integrative aspects of his discipline. I recommend this report as a source for further enlightenment on the subject.

A recent effort to examine Extension's mission is the report of the national USDA Land-Grant Study Committee, titled "Extension's Future - - A National Report." Two years in the making, the Report recommends substantial increases in certain program areas and increasing the efficiency of all existing programs.

Programs of economic and social development, public affairs education, and the use, development and conservation of natural resources were recommended as areas for significant expansion. On the basis of man years devoted to these programs in 1966 (18 percent of total), the study projects a needed increase of 154 percent in man years by 1975. By contrast only a 27.5 percent increase in man years was projected for agriculture, with marketing and management receiving highest priorities.

* Ray Cavender is chairman of research for the Alabama Agricultural Extension Service, Department of Agricultural Economics, Auburn University.

I cite these reports because they suggest that community resource development, as a national thrust, is only in its infancy and most certainly Extension's involvement in it.

The implication for the potential role of agricultural economists should be clear. Economists, who are basically trained not only to see the pieces of things as they relate to each other, but also how they relate to the whole, have much to contribute to improved public and private decision making and practical problem solving. In my opinion, this is the heart of community resource development.

DIFFERENT CLIENTELES

The program format for the extension session at the first annual meeting of the Southern Agricultural Economics Association might in itself generate an interesting discussion.¹ The special treatment afforded Extension's marketing, farm policy, and farm management clientele could lead one to conclude that Extension's resource development clientele is some group(s) other than these. Yet, in a program of total community development, the solution to a major adjustment problem might hinge on the establishment of an area marketing complex.

Essentially, Extension's clients in CRD are those having problems with which Extension can assist. Organizational structures, staffing patterns, staff resources, and administrative philosophy will influence the range of clientele. Extension's clientele in CRD can be typed into four principle categories:

- (1) citizens groups involved in making and implementing decisions that relate to community improvement and development;
- (2) key local citizens who influence or make decisions relevant to the community;
- (3) public officials who are responsible to the citizens for administering public policy and for programs of economic and social progress; and
- (4) groups such as development authorities, planning commissions, and private firms engaged in planning and community development activities.

One can readily observe that Extension's CRD clientele is considerably broader in composition than traditionally served farm-oriented clientele. A further breakdown of these categories, at this point, would be useless since the composition of specific community organizations, groups, etc. will vary from state to state and be conditioned by the existing local attitudes toward development and the nature of problems and opportunities in the predetermined geographic area(s).

A paramount principle for successful Extension involvement in CRD work presupposes the identification of clientele groups, their mission for being and the extent of their efforts in behalf of CRD.

PROBLEMS OF CLIENTELE

Problems of Extension's CRD clientele should be viewed in terms of the total community. To do otherwise is to perpetuate a fragmented problem solving process, which may provide relief for immediate economic and social ills but often fails to reconcile problems in their total implications.

To develop a list of specific problems and issues common to communities to which the economist could relate would be an impossible task. The dynamics of our system would greatly devalue its usefulness.

Perhaps as important as identifying specific problems of CRD clients is the approach used in clarification. As suggested, it should be one that exposes the total problem and fixes it within the context of the total community. Problems of CRD clients might be viewed, thusly:

(a) Imaginary or actual - A client's problem is no less real to the client because it may be partially or even completely imaginary.

(b) General or specific - Many problems will embrace the total community; others will be more localized in nature or concern a few citizens or specific groups.

(c) Short or long run - Problems have both time and geographic dimensions. Consequently, the nature of the problem (short or long run) has implications for planning and action.

(d) Apathetic or concerned clientele - Solutions to broad community problems call for an informed and aroused citizenry, even though only a representative few may participate in the problem solving process.

(e) Fragmented or whole - Frequently client groups see only a part of a larger problem and work on that part. Failure at the outset to perceive the whole may undermine the client's expectation should the same problem arise at some future date.

(f) Urgency - The relative urgency of the problem will influence its priority for action and its claim on the client's and community resources.

(g) Information and research available for application or basic research needed - Extension's assistance to CRD clients in solving problems is conditioned by availability of information, techniques and staff resources that relate to the problem. Additional research is frequently suggested when the total problem is confronted.

¹ Annual Meeting of Southern Agricultural Economics Association, Mobile, Alabama, Feb. 3-5, 1969.

Community resource development is a response to problems confronting people in communities. Perhaps there is no one best approach to helping client groups identify and analyze problems. Nevertheless, the economist has an important contribution to make to the interdisciplinary team in CRD efforts.

APPLICATION OF ECONOMIC INFORMATION TO CRD PROBLEMS

Basically two types of educational needs are experienced in community resource development: (1) those having to do with social engineering processes associated with group organization, group maintenance, group decision making, etc. and (2) those needs which must be satisfied from technical disciplines and the application of integrative and analytical skills. The latter will depend upon the situation under consideration.

In total, community development decisions are aimed at developing all human, economic, natural, institutional resources and community facilities and services. The focus is on the interrelatedness of the overall resource base, community needs, citizen wants and Extension's educational responsibilities in building community concern, community organization, inventorying resources, identifying specific problems, planning for action, implementing plans and appraising results.

The orientation of this approach is both economic and social. Inherent throughout is the application of public affairs education and the development of specific projects to meet community goals.

The need for economic information, and its adaptation to community problems, intensifies in a program of total development. Also apparent is the present and future opportunity for involvement of a larger spectrum of intellectual activity within the total university.

With respect to the matter of where the economist and his information can greatly contribute to CRD, three areas should be emphasized.

Building Community Concern

This function embodies the development of a positive community attitude and spirit, and the necessary vision and willingness on the part of the people to work cooperatively toward common goals. Economic information can be used effectively to make people aware of the internal and external forces that are positively or adversely affecting the community. These may be of an economic, social or political nature, such as, increase or decline in the population, loss of productive labor force, expanding and/or declining product and labor markets, urban expansion,

government programs, changing tax revenues, etc. These forces have an impact upon the decline and/or need for community development programs and activities. Informing and stimulating the interest of community leaders and client groups about changing conditions and their influence on special situations in the community can be an effective means of generating concern for improvement.

Extension also has a definite responsibility in making clientele groups aware of public programs available to assist in their development efforts. At the same time, Extension must continually interpret economic, social and technological changes and relate their meaning to people experiencing the impact of these forces on their community.

Data Assimilation, Analysis and Problem Identification

Community concern must eventually be focused on something specific - some tangible situation or problem. That is to say, facts and information are needed to point up changes affecting the quality and adequacy of community economic and social life. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, was no doubt thinking of the individual when he said, "Know thyself." His advice is equally pertinent for the community. A major obstacle in helping CRD clients is the belief that we "know our situation or community" when in reality that is not the case.

Economists can make a valuable contribution by working with individuals and community groups in fact finding projects, analyzing these facts and helping to isolate specific problems and potentials in relation to the existing community situation.

In Alabama, we have achieved a modest degree of success in cooperating with individuals and groups in fact finding projects that shed light on anticipated development of such services and facilities as recreation facilities, water and sewage systems, manufacturing and processing industries, markets for farm and forest products, and businesses supplying services to farmers and other members of the community.

Helping Communities Decide Appropriate Role and Action

A major problem confronting communities, in light of our changing social, economic and political structure, is determining what economic and social institutions it needs and can support. At this point, past history is not necessarily an adequate guide for the future. The community needs to be studied in light of facts that reflect changes and trends influencing present and future needs. Decisions must be made. People want to know what will happen if they choose

a certain course of action rather than another. Here again the economist with his analytical techniques can help reduce the trial and error method which is frequently costly in terms of both economic and human values and relationships.

The multi-community or regional planning approach to problems of resource development is much in evidence. The implications are that small communities and those in urban fringe areas must pay closer attention to their relationships with neighboring communities. Hence, the need for regional economic analyses and projections.

CONCLUSION

Although at times tottering on the brink of nebelous, community resource development has been sufficiently charted in theory and practice to provide a base on which to build future success.

The agricultural economist is noted for this flexibility and adaptability to the demands of new clientele and new problem situations. Now, the agricultural economist and his subject content are being swept into CRD situations that are strangely different yet wholly within his capabilities.

While some may not be able to make the transfer (based on the experience with our staff at Auburn), I feel that the majority will and, in turn, find new challenges and growing satisfactions.

The area of conjecture is whether or not adjustments will be forthcoming in Colleges of Agriculture and Extension Services in organizational arrangements and staffing procedure to provide the Agricultural Economist greater opportunities to contribute to the team effort in CRD and to become a full fledged participant in the process.