

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
OF THE
URBAN FUNCTIONS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT IN UPPER VOLTA

Technical Note
May 14 - May 31, 1980

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The Concept of "Urban Functions in Rural Development" and its Application

- A technical note related to the Final Evaluation of the UFRD Project in Upper Volta (May 14 - May 31, 1980), prepared by Simon Fass, Consultant, Practical Concepts Incorporated.

A discussion of the theory and application of UFRD in Upper Volta lies outside the scope of the evaluation performed on the project there. It has, nevertheless, been deemed useful to provide a brief, separate note on the matter since the UFRD concept was not well understood during execution of the project, and because it was suggested in the evaluation report that the original outputs defined in the ProAg may have been overstated in terms of what the application of UFRD, by itself, could reasonably have been expected to provide.

From DS/UD's perspective, the concept traces its origins to a document published in 1976 by Messrs. Rondinelli and Ruddle and entitled "Urban Functions and Rural Development." The report, essentially an exposition of applied economic geography, explores inequities in the spatial distribution of public and private, social and economic services. To the extent that such services tend to be located at specific points on a map, and also tend to be more concentrated in certain points rather than others, the inequities may be a combination of gaps in the distribution of points and gaps in the concentration of services at the points. This is a partial reconstitution and application of something called "central place theory" dating from the earlier part of this century. The points are called villages, towns or cities; and if they are all homogenized as "urbs," the services become "urban functions."

Some of the services rendered at one town serves populations in others, usually smaller, towns where such services are absent. If agricultural populations are located in the smaller towns, then the services are inputs

to those populations. If agricultural populations are dispersed between towns, then the services still serve those populations and their economic activities. If those services are called "urban functions," then what we get is the relationship of "urban functions in rural development."

Logical constructions of this sort, however, are not entirely new and have to one extent or another been recognized as elements of rural development and regional planning theory for quite some time.^{1/} They have rarely been used as the exclusive constituent of regional and rural development efforts because, like UFRD, they tend to confuse the service with the point on a map where the service is rendered. But because space is one important dimension which ought to be looked at, components similar to UFRD have been integrated into more comprehensive planning efforts in recent years.

The business of suggesting that services or functions for rural development are "urban" may have been one of the primary causes of confusion in Upper Volta with respect to the UFRD project. The Project Description in Annex 1 of the ProAg, to begin with, caused some misunderstanding. It suggested that towns per se, as well as communications systems, roads, trails and transport modes were "urban functions." In addition, the ProAg also suggested that storage facilities, agricultural processing activities, credit, marketing services, extension services, health services, education facilities, administrative services and entertainment were "urban functions." The 1976 document, "Urban Functions in Rural Development," was also not understood by the project team; at least not insofar as the

^{1/} See for example: Isard: *Methods of Regional Analysis* (1960); Berry: *Geography of Towns and Retail Distribution* (1967); Voelkner: *Rural Growth Nodes in Micro-Regional Systems* (1974); and Southall: *Small Urban Centers in Rural Development in Africa* (1977).

argument was made that rural inputs are "urban functions." Also, the Bicol River Basin UFRD evaluation report, passed to the team in February 1980, did not appear to make sense; or at the very least the utility of the Philippines experience was not evident.

Another cause of concern was the ProAg's insistence that projects could be identified from the sequence of overlay and linkage tasks described in it. Since the tasks dealt only with the spatial organization of supply, "gaps" could as readily result from an absence of supply, an absence of demand, or one of several other determinants. It was not evident that the discovery of empty spaces on a map was sufficient information upon which to suggest the possibility of a program or project. These conceptual issues may have been an important factor in the early abandonment of the technical guidelines for the project set down in the ProAg.

A key issue, as far as rural development planners are concerned, is the equitable and efficient distribution of a particular sectoral good or service which is recognized as being essential to rural populations and their activities, as expressed by the demand for it. The key factor in determining whether the distribution of the service is equitable or not is the price or other costs the rural population has to pay to get it. The spatial location on a map is usually not a very good indicator of what that cost or price might be, and even if it were, there are other means of reducing the cost besides shifting the point on a map where the service is provided. To be more accurate, the issue is the service or function (not the "urb") in rural development.

Thus the concept of "Urban Functions" can tend to camouflage the underlying economic principles, and it is these underlying principles which rural planners are very concerned with. They would necessarily be confused with a project in which heretofore agriculture or rural inputs suddenly

show up as "urban functions." The confusion surrounding the project in Upper Volta may stem largely from this attempt to change the name of what is already a reasonably well-understood relationship.

Where "urban functions" may make more sense as a concept and as an exercise worth pursuing in both sectoral and spatial terms is at much higher levels of services which do not usually appear to have much to do with rural development and agricultural production directly. At such a higher level one begins to deal with decentralization of public and private socio-economic services which tend to be concentrated in one or a very few places. To decentralize it may, for example, be necessary to endow smaller places with electricity, piped water systems, hotels, movies, swimming pools, post offices, and all other manner of enticements to "urban"-type people whose activities can be brought closer to the rural populace eventually. This is not the only way of thinking about "urban functions," but at least it is one way of not confusing UFRD with "Rural Functions in Rural Development."

To understand how UFRD might have worked better in Upper Volta, one does not have to look too far. It is, for example, an integral component of the MSU planning effort in the Fada ORD.^{1/} However, it only represents one of 23 different activities defined as essential for the purposes of regional planning and rural development; and the focus with respect to "urban," as opposed to services rendered in villages, is the town of Fada N'Gourma only.

^{1/} At the time the UFRD strictly was identified in July 1977 the MSU team was engaged only in agricultural research. In May 1978 it was requested to do a regional plan for the ORD. The Urban Functions component of that plan was expected to come from the UFRD effort, but since it deviated from what was anticipated by MSU, the latter has initiated its own socio-economic study covering the same territory, part of which will be extracted as the Urban Functions component of the plan.

Similarly, the UNDP is assisting the Ministry of Planning in setting up decentralized planning units at the Departmental level -- more or less identical with ORD boundaries. They too will look at town hierarchies with a view to decentralized investment which would lead to creation of more dynamic centers outside Ouagadougou. To the extent that almost all of Upper Volta is agricultural, these efforts will also have some bearing on Urban Functions in Rural Development. Again, however, this will represent only one component of a much larger planning effort.

The point may be that while UFRD is a concept with considerable contributions to make to the process of rural development it may have been introduced in a manner which limited the ability of many individuals to appreciate its value, and this perhaps led to its being received with mixed emotions; being misunderstood, and being misapplied by the UFRD project team. Proof that this has indeed been the case is not possible to provide. It is a strong possibility though, and is something DS/UD should be careful about in the future.

A potential lesson to be drawn from this speculation is that UFRD, as a concept, is still somewhat elusive in the sense that it is difficult to define the point at which it is no longer synonymous with other conventionally used concepts of rural input distributions (e.g. what is the difference between an "urban" town and a "rural" town?). Therefore, it is important

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that the design of future UFRD projects include an initial period in which such matters are discussed at length in order to isolate the particular principles and potential contributions of the UFRD concept. At the same time, it may be wise to consider whether the intent of DS/UD in Upper Volta was not in fact "Urban Functions Analysis in Regional and Rural Development Planning." This would have implied adding the urban dimension to existing planning efforts (assuming such latter efforts were indeed operative) in order to identify projects which might otherwise have been overlooked; or, in the case that such planning efforts were not operative (as was the situation in the two ORD's when the project was initiated), providing a useful method of description and analysis without necessarily expecting projects to be identified in the end. Either way, the introduction of UFRD into places like Upper Volta needs substantial technical guidance at the outset to avoid misunderstandings later on.