

IMPACT EVALUATION
of
MANAGEMENT OF AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATIONS COURSE

Conducted in Maseru, Lesotho: June 1982

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Submitted by:

Linda J. Lynch
International Training Division
Office of International Cooperation and Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture

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The views and interpretations expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be attributed to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is an assessment of the impact of a three-week course in management held for top level Ministry of Agriculture officers, May 31 to June 18, 1982. General findings and recommendations are followed by several specific sections in which the application of acquired management skills and the results are discussed in detail. Finally, both tangible and intangible effects on the Ministry are brought to life by comments from the participants themselves.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Key Ministry people, expatriate counterparts to participants, participants themselves, and subordinates were the subjects of unstructured individual interviews. (See interview list.) In addition, a standard questionnaire was administered to participants in groups at Mohale's Hoek and Leribe. The questionnaire solicited information on specific skill usage, changes and effects of implementation, and an examination of changes which have occurred, ranging from person to organizational impact. (See attached questionnaire.) More in-depth information on overall design issues and decisions as well as an analysis of their relative strengths, will be made available as potentially useful to similar evaluation projects.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The course had a stronger and more far-reaching impact than might reasonably be expected from a three-week management course. Changes have been made in personal management skills and attitudes, in the management within individual units (District Agriculture Offices and Division offices), and throughout the Ministry. That this course was highly successful was not happenstance, but a carefully planned and implemented design in which key people, including the participants, played important roles with decision and commitment. A discussion of these "Success Factors" follows later.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Development and implementation of Ministry-wide planning, reporting and monitoring systems. The annual workplan and quarterly reporting and monitoring plans are an adaptation of the logical framework and represent a changeover from a purely narrative plan to one which includes "facts and figures". Its advantages are praised by staff from all Ministry levels as being easier to complete, indicating targets against which progress can be measured, providing data which can be compared, and increasing the interaction between extension workers and farmers.

2. Clarification of roles and responsibilities in the context of the ongoing decentralization. Although District Agricultural Officers (DAO's) were placed out in the Districts at the end of 1980, their roles in relation to Division Heads, District Coordinators, and Subject Matter Specialists remained unclear with attendant problems of overlapping responsibilities and tension. The course provided a productive forum for airing the problems and reaching consensus between Division Heads and District Agriculture Officers, with the support of the Permanent Secretary. "This course was a good vehicle for getting the top people together to begin to consider decentralization and the new relationships."

3. The restructuring of the Ministry to provide organizational support for clear lines of responsibility for the DAO's. This proposal was put forward and supported by all participants to the Permanent Secretary at the end of the course. The status of the creation of a position to which DAO's will report has not been widely communicated to Ministry staff, and the final form this position will take is still somewhat uncertain.

4. Heightened awareness and increased use of specific management skills by Division Heads and DAO's. Such skills include long-range planning and reporting, planning and conducting effective meetings, delegation of authority and responsibility, and time management. About two-thirds of the participant group

who completed questionnaires indicated that they "always or almost always" used 17 of the 21 skill or knowledge areas presented in the course. While this seems high one year after course completion, participant comments and interviews with subordinates and expat team leaders are replete with examples which confirm the high implementation of skills.

5. Many managers have evolved from technical experts to effective managers. Participants are able to appropriately apply management skills, they have gained confidence in their managerial role, and they can inspire staff. This represents a significant change and a necessary one if responsibility and authority are to be delegated to the District level.

6. Increased cooperation and understanding between Ministry levels, i.e., the DAO's, Division Heads, and the Permanent Secretary and Director of Technical Services. The pre-existing situation was seen by some as stressful enough to tear the Ministry apart. The present situation represents a much stronger feeling that they are "all in this together." Interviews confirmed a greater level of trust among participants.

7. Increased commitment and dedication by Ministry staff at all levels, extending to District staff members who did not attend the training. The level of enthusiasm is high and this translates

into a willingness on the part of most participants to live with their frustration a little longer and grant the Ministry more time to resolve major issues.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

ADDITIONAL TRAINING

1. Train District Coordinators in the management areas covered for the MOA participants, in English. Their training would greatly facilitate district coordination and support the DAO's efforts.

2. Train Subject Matter Specialists at regional sites if feasible in groups of no more than 20 by keeping working groups intact. This training could also be in English. Emphasis on training skills since they train/teach the Extension staff, coordinating function, scheduling, planning and monitoring. Two weeks.

3. Train Area Extension Specialists. Best done in Sesotho by Basotho trainers (see below). One week course in interacting with farmers, assessing farmer needs, planning, and monitoring.

4. Train the DAO's and DEO's in financial management, a brief three-day course concurrent with the disbursement of funds to districts for their management and control. Or alternatively, as their budgeting responsibilities increase.

5. Train for involvement in development, the 21 principle Basotho Chiefs as soon as the Basotho training capability exists. The Chiefs are critical to development efforts and can facilitate Ministry efforts. A careful needs assessment should be done focusing on their potential role and contribution and the kind of skills -- administrative, interactive -- from which they would benefit.

6. Train staff in other ministries which have similar goals, heavy district involvement, or a keen interest. In prioritizing, emphasis should be first the MOA so that there is clarity and cooperation at all levels. However, one course for top managers of a related ministry should not significantly delay MOA progress.

7. Develop a Basotho training capacity for training in selected management skills to MOA levels where Sesotho is more appropriate. That good training reach all levels of the Ministry is important if the quality of the planning, reporting, and monitoring is to steadily improve. A Training of Trainers course should be provided in-country which concentrates on enhancing participatory training methods in the selected management skill areas. Duration about five weeks to allow time for practice and feedback and re-presentation. Ideal staffing would include both previous USDA trainers, and a third trainer who does exclusively training of trainers. Participant should come from MOA, LIPA,

LDFC and other institutions which have a training capability. Criteria for participating should include their availability to train after the course.

For each of these training segments, it is assumed that a Needs Assessment would be done to target the course closely to participant needs. Such surveys might be handled for more than one proposed course during a single visit.

OTHER TYPES OF SUPPORT TO THE MANAGEMENT TRAINING EFFORT

1. Efforts should be continued to formally establish the DAO position and bring about the salary increase, to establish the Director position to whom the DAO's would report, and to bring about district-level control of funds. It is recognized that the last issue is complex and tied to other Ministries.

2. A clear and agreed-upon plan for communicating Ministry guidelines and district-level needs should be developed. USDA trainer Spears briefed the MOA Planning Unit on one possible model. This process was begun with the distribution of the draft policy guidelines to DAO's recently. In addition, there should be some agreement on the allocation of resources to the district. Districts need to be kept informed of overall constraints and have a sense that the allocations are generally fair.

3. DAO's and Division Heads need access to their supervisors on an individual basis from time to time to discuss sensitive issues and to maintain a feeling of personal support from supervisors.

4. Top Ministry officials need to continue and increase their personal support for Division Heads, and especially for DAO's. Regular feedback should be provided regarding the quality of work and the status of major Ministry issues, even if there is no apparent progress. Personal visits, an "open door" policy at times, and other creative methods need to be implemented to improve communication if DAO's are to maintain their present high level of commitment.

5. The creation of incentives and rewards to increase the prestige of in-country training should be continued. In many cases, in-country training can better serve Lesotho needs -- it can be more relevant, more wide-spread, and cause less disruption to ongoing programs since less time is lost.

IV. FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO COURSE SUCCESS

There are several factors which appear to have been critical to the success of this course:

1. The meshing of the intent of this course with the GOL decentralization plans and the placement of District Agriculture Officers on-site in the Districts.
2. The commitment of the Chief Planning Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture to the training of Ministry staff and her initiating actions and continuing interest.
3. The Needs Assessment conducted by USDA trainer which accurately and perceptively assessed the organizational needs in relation to decentralization by working with the top levels of the ministry and intended participants, Division Heads and District Agriculture Officers.
4. The commitment and teamwork evidenced by USAID Assistant Agriculture Officer, Jim Dunn; MOA Management Advisor, Bob Sparks; and USDA trainers through their clear and direct communication with each other and with appropriate officials in the Ministry throughout the various course phases.

5. The opportunity to train all of the DAO's and Division Heads together for the duration of the course.

6. Confrontation of the tough management issues of decentralization by the trainers, DAO's and Division Heads. A willingness to address the rifts which existed between the Ministry levels.

7. Course methods based on experiential learning. Participants appreciated the problem solving approach where they used practical skills that were relevant to their specific needs. Overall success was enhanced by a participatory approach which respected the participants' knowledge of their working situations and demonstrated a belief in participants' ability to develop viable solutions to their problems, given trainer resources.

8. The support of the Permanent Secretary, his Deputy, and the Director of Technical Services for the major proposals regarding the definition of roles and responsibilities and the shifting of organizational structure put forth by course participants.

9. Follow-up activities including the visit of Division Heads and the Chief Planning Officer to Districts and the Training Retreat held by USDA Trainers.

V. FACTORS WHICH WERE CONSTRAINTS TO COURSE SUCCESS

There are four major constraints which limit to some degree the extent to which DAO's especially and Division Heads to a lesser extent can implement the management skills they learned.

1. The lack of clear lines of responsibility and reporting for the DAO's. A proposal was made to the Permanent Secretary at the end of the course for the establishment of a position of equal rank with the Director of Technical Services (DTS), to whom the Division Heads and DAO's both report in theory now. The proposal provided for DAO's to report to the new Director. At present, different perceptions exist in the Ministry on the status of this proposal.

While the current status of uncertainty causes some frustration among DAO's, most of them seem to be handling the situation fairly well.

2. Establishment of DAO position with appropriate grade level. Although the DAO's have been located in District offices, they are still being paid their previous (lower) salaries by their parent Divisions. This is perhaps the most significant constraint since the upgrading has been delayed two and a half years and represents cause for concern over management commitment to a workable decentralization process.

3. Lack of control of funds at the District level. This was another recurring cause for complaint at the District level and is seen by the Ministry as a goal toward which they are making progress, albeit slowly. Funds from a basic tax may be available to the districts this year and DAO's were involved in making financial estimates. However, control of the funds will ultimately be decided by the Ministry of Finance but not until all Ministries are agreed that they will decentralize the funding. This may take some time. Again, some DAO's find this more restrictive than others.

4. Personnel issues. The current performance appraisal system offers little support to supervisors with problem employees. While rewards can sometimes be obtained for outstanding performance, disciplinary action is not a very viable option because such action is lengthy at best and at worst may damage the supervisor's career. Many people expressed frustration at not being able to exert sufficient authority over their staff because of the present disciplinary system.

Interestingly enough, many "new" managers are finding positive feedback to employees to be helpful even in motivating problem employees.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF MANAGEMENT SKILLS

OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Participants were asked to rate their usage of 21 individual skill and information areas included in the 1982 management course. Seventeen of the areas were checked by 9 or more of the 15 participants as skill/information areas which they "always or almost always" use. Many of them fall into the first four categories indicated below:

Implemented Skills

1. Long range planning and reporting.
 - Clarification of Relationships between Various Levels of Objectives (goals, purposes, outputs) (9)
 - Writing Objectively Verifiable Indicators (13)
 - Reporting and Monitoring Tools (14)
2. Planning and Conducting Effective Meetings
 - Preparing an Agenda (14)
 - Notifying people in advance (10)
 - Sticking to the agenda (9)
 - Making meetings action-oriented (12)
 - Using new criteria for who to include in meetings (13)

3. Good Delegation (12)
4. Time Management (10)
5. Decision Making (11) and Systematic Problem-Solving (9)
6. Analysis of Organizational Structure (11) and Defining Job Roles and Responsibilities (9)
7. Self-Assessment Techniques (10)
8. Effective Listening (13) and Rules for Feedback (10)

The results and changes of implementing the first four areas were strongly supported by comments and examples both on the written questionnaire and in oral interviews with participants, subordinates and expat counterparts.

The last four areas, while still used by most participants "always or almost always", appeared to have a less dramatic effect on their work as managers.

Less Implemented Skills

Skills and knowledge which participants had difficulty applying or "mixed success" were:

1. Situational Leadership
2. Performance Appraisal
3. Scheduling Activities
4. Managing under Conditions of Uncertainty and Partial Control.