PD-AAR-858

ISN 41464

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

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THE RURAL DEMAND FOR URBAN SERVICE SYSTEMS PROJECT:

THE "DEMAND" APPROACH

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December 1983

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The Rural Demand for Urban Service Systems (RDUSS) Project was designed as a response to the need to include information on the perceived needs (demand) for urban functions and services with the information on the spatial distribution of these functions and services (supply) generated by Urban Functions in Rural Development (UFRD) Project. The project was also an attempt to explicitly program the involvement of target groups which was lacking from UFRD field projects.

The Need Perceived

In the 1976 front-end study for the UFRD project, Dennis Rondinelli and Kenneth Ruddle stated that:

> Building on existing resources, institutions and practices requires involving local people, who will be affected by transformation and change in development planning and implementation. The traditional wisdom, experience, and insights of local people are essential in identifying the scope and dimensions of local needs, the most effective channels of change, and the types of change that they will support. Only by incorporating local people in the process of planning and implementation can decisions be tailored to specific needs and can latent talents and skills be developed (Rondinelli and Ruddle 1976, 183-184).

The UFRD field projects, however, did not actively involve local participation in the planning process. Beginning with the pilot UFRD application in the Philippines, the Office of Urban Development recognized the need to involve target groups to the UFRD planning process. Eric Chetwynd of the Office of Urban Development notes that "even though the Bicol (Philippines) project did provide for participation of local and other government authorities, it did not have input from farmers, who are the intended beneficiaries of the project. The involvement of local rural or 'target' population in the decision process becomes especially important when the program calls for identification of specific projects." (Chetwynd 1980, 9) At the outset of the second field

application of the UFRD in Upper Volta, this need was articulated a second time. Aidan Southall, a consultant to the project, asserted that "wherever possible functions must be developed from the bottom rather than the top. Otherwise effective local participation will never be secured . . . from this perspective the importance of urban functions in rural development is that they must be controlled and implemented not for their own sake but always from the perspective of their potential impact on rural development at the grassroots." (Southall 1978, 7) By 1978 the Office had concluded that "although results from the field tests of this approach (UFRD) have been relatively successful, the approach lacks an important ingredient: information and input from the rural target population." (United States Agency for International Development 1978, 2).

The failure of the UFRD project to involve information and input from target groups was due in large part to the dearth of literature on how to involve local populations (the target group) especially within the framework of an integrated urban-rural development planning process like UFRD. A number of works had appeared in the literature which indicated that local involvement was a key to the success of rural development projects. Among these were USAID's "Strategies for Small Farmer Development," the World Bank's The design of rural development and Uphoff and Esman's Local organization for rural development: analysis of Asian experience. But these works were of little help in developing a strategy applicable to UFRD. Therefore, the Office of Urban Development sponsored a study designed to develop such a strategy.

The Front-End Study

The study was conducted by the Development Group for Alternative Policies. The D-GAP produced three reports based on its research. The final report was

entitled Public participation in regional development planning: A strategy for popular involvement and was submitted to the Office of Urban Development in December 1979. The report broke down the planning cycle conceptually into eight stages: (1) collect and analyze data, (2) formulate goals, (3) formulate objectives, (4) identify options, (5) assess options, (6) design and implementation plan, (7) implementation, and (8) evaluation. The authors postulated that the two most appropriate stages in which to introduce public participation are the formulation of goals and assessment of project options stages. The report also identified six categories of participatory approaches: (1) "one on one," (2) communication with community leaders, (3) interaction through community meetings, (4) interaction with representative community and multi-village organizations, (5) interaction with representative functional organizations, and (6) interaction with representative, regional-level organizations. The authors argued that the utility of any one approach should be assessed in terms of "(1) the dependability of the information which would result from the use of a given approach, (2) the practicality of the approach in regard to cost and efficiency; (3) the approach's integrability with the regional planning process; and (4) the amount of local support to the plan which the particular approach may generate." (Development Group for Alternative Policies 1979, v) The authors concluded that a combination of approaches would most likely be necessary, that "meaningful participation will best result from an ongoing dialogue between the planning entity and local populations, rather than from the elicitation of one-way, one-time public inputs . . . (and that) to assure the effectiveness and utility of public participation of planners. Public inputs must be made to conform in form and content to the different data needs of the various stages of the planning process." (Development Group for Alternative Policies 1979, iv)

The RDUSS Project

In April of 1978 the Office of Urban Development submitted a project paper for the RDUSS Project based on the D-GAP study which was subsequently approved and funded. According to the project paper, the goal of RDUSS was "to improve rural productivity and living conditions by planning and providing more effectively those urban based services which stimulate rural growth. The purpose of the project was "to develop improved methods of eliciting information on perceived needs and demands and to incorporate these into an improved planning process which leads to implementable plans for upgrading the provision of urban services for rural development." This goal and this purpose fit in very nicely with the UFRD project goal and purpose of developing a planning process for strengthening the contribution of urban centers to rural development.

In order to realize the goal and to fulfill the purpose of RDUSS, DS/UD proposed both technical data and local perception information be incorporated into an integrated urban-rural planning process to be institutionalized in six countries. The technical data were to be generated through the UFRD technical planning framework and approach, while the collection of information on the perceived needs and demands of the local population for urban based functions was to be guided by the front end D-GAP study.

The specific field tasks identified for the sub-projects were:

a) construction of a regional profile utilizing secondary sources

b) collection of more detailed information on the region's agricultural and development potential

c) a survey of services and functions using methodologies refined by the UFRD project

d) field visits and informal interviews to identify appropriate approaches for collecting information on perceived needs for urban based rural services

e) visits to test out methods of eliciting information on perceived needs

f) collection of such information

g) integration of perceived needs data with service center hierarchy and agricultural potential data, and identification of urban based services which are both technically required to stimulate agricultural development and perceived as critical needs by the local rural population

h) development of a portfolio of investments

i) meetings and communication with local population to verify the acceptability of the identified subprojects and to elect local support for their implementation.

Tasks a through c are taken straight from the UFRD project while tasks d through i constituted the unique contributions which RDUSS was intended to make to it. Implicit in tasks h and i is the assumption that RDUSS field applications would lead to the design and implementation of specific project. The Office of Urban Development in its project paper stated quite clearly that: "It is particularly important that local population participate in the implementation of projects; without this participation by the target group, rural development cannot take place." (United States Agency for International Development 1978, 10, emphasis added) Unfortunately in neither of the two RDUSS projects which were eventually conducted was complementation achieved; and in the case of one, Guatemala, implementation of specific projects was never an objective of the project.

The Field Applications

Both of the field applications of RDUSS which have been completed, the Guatemala pilot project conducted between 1979 and 1981 and the Cameroon project conducted between 1980 and 1982, were unsuccessful in meeting the objectives of RDUSS.

The failure of RDUSS in Guatemala can be attributed to two kinds of problems: circumstantial (operational) problems and problems related to flaws in project design. Of the many circumstantial problems encountered in the field, the most significant one was the high degree of political violence and tension within the country at the time the project was conducted. Experimenting with methods for eliciting locally perceived needs and for involving local people in the planning process were obviously problematic under conditions of such extreme political risk. Violence was so great in the rural areas that interviewers frequently had to and did travel with armed escorts (Miller 1982, 2). According to the U.S. contractors to the project: "originally twenty local participation experiments were proposed . . . in the face of continued social and political struggle and violence, particularly in the rural areas of Guatemala, such experimentation was considered unrealistic . . . a much more modest effort was undertaken to simply survey local community officials and residents asking them to state their preference for different kinds of services and infrastructure, as well as answer questions about patterns of participation in recent community development projects." (Iowa State University 1983, 39)

Another problem which led to the failure of the Guatemala project to meet the objectives of RDUSS was the poor relations between the U.S. contractors and their Guatemalan counterparts (Karaska and Lombardo 1982). According to the U.S. contractors, the Guatemalans were ill-equipped to conduct the accessibility study, specified in the Project Agreement. This study was to incorporate information on how target groups utilized services and infrastructure in with information on the supply of these services and infrastructure. Due to their poor relations with the Guatemalans, however, the U.S. contractors were unable to persuade the Guatemalans to collect data on certain key variables and had

very little control over the design and implementation of the field survey." (Miller 1982; Belsky 1982). The data which were collected were not representative of the target region and were unreliable because the questionnaire was long and cumbersome to administer and "initial data analyses showed such internal inconsistencies as the cost of walking trips being equal to those taken by taxi." (Ludwig 1983, 8) As a result, the U.S. contractors were forced to discount the results of the accessibility survey and hence a principal source of target group information was lost from the project.

The failure of the RDUSS project in Guatemala can also be partially explained by a flaw in the design of the project. In the RDUSS project paper, the Office of Urban Development stated that: "the purpose of this project is to develop improved methods of eliciting information on perceived needs and demands <u>and to incorporate these into an improved planning process which leads to implementable plans</u>." (United States Agency for International Development 1976, 15, emphasis added) Because the project in Guatemala was never intended to formulate plans or implement them, it was impossible to conduct the local participation experiments which "were planned to be evaluation studies of participation <u>in actual development</u> projects." (Iowa State University 1983, 39, emphasis added)

In the Cameroon case, the project did almost nothing to involve local participation directly in the UFRD planning process and made only a minor effort to incorporate information on the perceived needs of target groups in with the technical information supplied by the UFRD methodology. The effort essentially took the form of a review of the literature on ethnic groups in the project area, though some questions were asked about development preferences at group

interviews. While the Cameroon project may have been successful from the standpoint of UFRD, it was unsuccessful from the standpoint of RDUSS.

Hence, the original good intentions and foresight of the Office of Urban Development to include target group information and participation in project implementation in the UFRD approach were left unimplemented after the two field projects of RDUSS. This is not to say that the office was incorrect in its intentions or that nothing was gained from the field experiences with the RDUSS approach. On the contrary, there is an inherent logic and good sense in attempting to involve information on participation of target groups in the UFRD planning process. In addition, at least two valuable lessons were learned from the field experiences with RDUSS.

Lessons Learned

The most salient lesson learned through the applications of RDUSS in Guatemala and Cameroon is the importance of linking local participation to an active planning function -- one which selects, designs <u>and</u> implements projects. In Guatemala, the aspirations of the RDUSS project were necessarily reduced to the status of a useful study of locally-perceived development needs. Because it was not in the project's mandate to use this study to select and design specific projects, Fred O'Regan and Steven Hellinger, two consultants who helped write the background study for the RDUSS project explained that "the now-linkage of project and implementational planning to data collection and analysis processes (in the Guatemala project) . . . (make it) difficult to elicit either significant public interest in, or valid responses to, broad information gathering exercises." (O'Regan and Hellinger 1979, 1) Similarly, because no actual projects were implemented in the Cameroon case, little could

be gained by involving local participants in the planning process accept to engender false and frustrating expectations in those whose needs and demands were elicited. This lesson reaffirms a similar lesson which was learned in field applicationf of UFRD that the design and implementation of specific projects is critical to the success of UFRD.

It is unfortunate that neither RDUSS projects did lead to the implementation of specific development interventions because the kinds of experiments in which target groups are directly involved in the provisioning of services and infrastructure are important and worthy of continued support. One example of the kinds of experiments of great value which RDUSS projects could have implemented can be evidenced in the UFRD project in Upper Volta. In this project, it was recommended (but this was never acted upon) that the government of Upper Volta experiment with pilot local self-taxation and administration projects as a method for providing and maintaining public services at the village level. Such a project, rooted in local participation, were the kinds of cost-effective and self-sustaining projects with which the RDUSS projects could have experimented.

Another lesson which was learned from the RDUSS experience concerned the methods by which locally perceived needs are elicited. The Guatemala project discovered a high correlation between responses of community leaders and responses of individual village residents to questions concerning service and infrastructure needs. This correlation suggests that interviews with a few select community leaders is an adequate substitute for interviews with a broader sample of individuals. Again, this is not to say that for certain kinds of information interviews with a broader group is not desirable and necessary. However, for the limited information objectives embodied in the

RDUSS approach, namely information on locally-perceived needs, interviews with community leaders are sufficient.

A Third Lesson?

Indeed, a case can be made that the RDUSS was too narrow in scope. While based on the slogan a "demand" side approach, it can be argued that the designers of the project failed to perceive the full meaning and potential of the concept of "demand" to enhance the UFRD approach.

The traditional economic definition of demand is the desire and ability to consume a certain good or service. By limiting this definition of demand to only the desire or need for a good or service, the Office of Urban Development failed to consider the important implications of the "ability" to consume a good or a service. Questions of what target groups are "able" to consume and why were never asked. Hence the question of at what price (including travel and social costs as well as the cost of the good or service) and why at that price (the dynamics of consumer choice) were never answered.

A third lesson may therefore be conjectured and that is that information on the desire and need for a good or service is not sufficient to adequately assess target group demand without considering the ability of the target group to consume that good or service.

Conclusions

It is regrettable that the field applications of RDUSS were not more successful in meeting the objectives of the project. In criticizing the operationalization of RDUSS it is easy to ignore the good sense of the idea behind

the project and the quality of work which went into developing it. Much of which is of great value in RDUSS can easily be lost.

Therefore, in these concluding remarks it is important to stress the positive aspects of RDUSS. RDUSS represents an important recognition by the Office of Urban Development that the UFRD approach was deficient in at least two critical respects: (1) involving local participation on the planning process, and (2) introducing social and demand-oriented information to the supply-side technical base of analysis for plan-making which the UFRD approach represented. The Office's efforts have provided a building block upon which a more refined "demand" approach to the provision of urban services and functions can be construed.

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