

PD. ABM-108

AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE SUBPROJECTS
APPROVED UNDER USAID'S
BASIC NEEDS TRUST FUND (BNTF) PROJECT
IN
ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Prepared by: Darwin E. Clarke

July 1994

ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Brief Description of the Country:

Total area of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Bequia, Mustique, Canouan, Mayero, Union and a few very small ones) is 389 square kilometers. The main island of St. Vincent is formed of volcanic rock with its highest elevation the still active volcano of Soufriere (1,234 meters). The country's population was estimated in Mid 1991 to be 107,000 with 90 percent living in the coastal regions of the main island. The largest town is the capital, Kingstown, with a population of approximately 35,000.

The economy of St. Vincent and Grenadines is predominantly agricultural. Although the highly volcanic terrain makes farming difficult, the country's volcanic soil is extremely fertile. Agriculture accounts for 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings with tourism, although on the increase, ranking a poor second. The chief export is bananas.

According to the 1993 Annual Report of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the GDP per capital of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1992, was US\$2,078 which is the lowest among the BNTF beneficiary countries. Unemployment is estimated at 25%.

Sub-project Selection:

St. Vincent and the Grenadines received US\$3.0 million in USAID grant funds to finance 54 subprojects, 50 of which were roads/footpaths. Thus, the emphasis of the BNTF program in St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been on small scale infrastructure projects aimed at transforming short dirt tracks into paved roads or footpaths in villages populated by the poor in rural and semi-urban areas of a residential, light industrial or farm-to-market nature.

Rationale:

The Government's rationale for the concentration of the BNTF program on roads and footpaths is based on the imperative of providing access to basic human needs for the residents of the many villages in the hilly terrain around the country. Villages have developed out of squatters' communities on the steep slopes of both government and privately owned plantations. The unplanned nature of this development means that basic infrastructure was either non-existent or very inadequate for the meeting of basic needs of these communities. Both the Minister of Communications and Works and the Chief Engineer reaffirmed that although the Government took the lead in selecting the subprojects, the various communities identified the absence of proper roads and footpaths as the most pressing problem to be addressed. This was confirmed by all of the respondents in the interviews conducted by the evaluation team in 21 subproject communities.

Geographic Dispersion:

The fifty-four (54) BNTF subprojects are dispersed fairly evenly throughout the country in approximately one-fifth of the total number of rural communities. Thirty-nine (39) of these subprojects are located in communities around the main island of St. Vincent largely on the Leeward or Western side, the Windward or Eastern side, and the Southern side of the island closer to the capital, Kingstown. The remaining fifteen (15) subprojects are located in the sister islands of the Grenadines - Bequia, Canouan and Union.

Employment Generation:

Employment generation was one of the purposes of the BNTF project. It was estimated that cumulative person weeks of employment under BNTF activities would be 27,483 for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. However, data available up to the end of 1993 indicate that BNTF has enabled 29,518 person weeks of employment. It must be noted that this kind of employment is short term. For example, according to the Chief Engineer, a typical road project might create employment for between two and four petty contractors operating on a task order basis. The laborers hired under any single petty contractor for one stretch of a road, or one retaining wall, would not necessarily be hired for the next stretch or the next retaining wall. It follows from the foregoing that the employment benefits to any single individual were inevitably short-lived. Laborers employed were typically residents of the area in which the subproject was situated.

Some indirect employment of two types was generated by subprojects. First, labor was required to produce the local materials for the roads including builders, aggregate and concrete blocks. The Ministry of Communications estimates this kind of employment to be 100% of the direct labor. Second, labor on road maintenance, mainly performed by women, has continued throughout the life of each road.

Impact of BNTF

The preceding paragraph indicates that some employment benefits were derived from the BNTF program in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. However, in the evaluators' view, the program's impact on the lives of approximately 12,000 people, or 12% of the total population, in 45 communities dispersed throughout the country has been even more significant. Prior to the construction of the roads/footpaths, access to basic services by the beneficiary communities was either non-existent or limited and inadequate. In all 21 of the communities visited by the evaluators, responses were replete with stories about the difficulties experienced by residents before the existence of these subprojects. Basic needs such as health, water and sanitation services were either inaccessible or, if there was some access, it was quite hazardous. For example, during the rainy season, pregnant women have been

known to give birth to their babies while being carried in sheets along slippery tracks to reach ambulances on main roads located 400 to 800 yards away; the sick could not get medical attention because their houses were inaccessible to doctors or health workers; children found it impossible to attend school; and social interaction among residents and between neighborhoods was hampered. Even the acquisition of foodstuff from the market place was a difficult and dangerous exercise as residents, heavily laden with their bundles, treaded on the dirt tracks.

The construction of the roads/footpaths has eliminated all of the above mentioned obstacles to ready access to basic needs for the communities concerned. There is now passage for vehicular traffic which enables ambulances to reach the homes of the sick, doctors and health workers to attend to patients, residents to have food delivered at the doorsteps of their homes and children to attend school regularly. The roads and footpaths have also resulted in social interaction within and between communities.

In other ways, construction of the roads/footpaths has undoubtedly contributed to an improvement in the quality of life and in the standard of living of the communities concerned. For example, the existence of roads has enabled the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to provide transmission of water and electricity to homes in those districts. In addition, in those areas where residents have small land holdings, ready access to their farms and to the markets has encouraged some of them into becoming bona fide rather than part-time farmers.

Finally, improved accessibility through the roads/footpaths has engendered better living conditions under which women have to exist, given their leading roles in the households of rural St. Vincent. In the words of two young women interviewed "the roads/footpaths were basic needs in themselves as well as the means to basic needs. They have made women's lives more comfortable".