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Community Development in the Dominican Republic: Summary Reflections on Four Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

During 1969 a study of four communities in the Dominican Republic was undertaken by the authors. Each community was chosen because of its distinct approach to community development. Villarpando is a small, culturally backward, rural community in which repeated efforts at community change have failed on all levels. El Credo is again a small, rural village, but one in which a viable economic association has developed. Bajos de Haina is a mixed rural-urban area encompassing several communities. These communities have joined together in a development association which struggles with community-wide social and cultural problems. San Juan de la Maguana is a fast-growing small city. The San Juan Development Association is made up of businessmen and professionals, unlike the membership of the other organizations studied. This Association has dealt primarily with city-wide physical-project maintenance and construction. In all cases special emphasis is given to the role of the external "change-agent" (*promotor*), to problems of institution building, leadership training and the vital role of coordinating the above tasks.

The observations in the report are based on research conducted in four Dominican communities. The communities were chosen with the help of Agency for International Development (AID), Office of Community Development (OCD) for the Dominican Republic government, and Peace Corps officials. The communities represent cases in a variety of approaches to community development.

Each of the communities received assistance from national or international agencies. Villarpando was chosen for its traditional character. Repeated programs of project construction and organization building have failed there. The analysis of this village reveals some of the obstacles to effective development at the community level.

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¹A term or its equivalent used in a number of Latin American countries for community development worker.

El Cedro was chosen for its success in creating a strong, viable economic organization. The analysis of this village shows an approach to development carried out by national and international agencies and through a local, economic organization.

Bajos de Haina was chosen for its unique experiment in coordinating several broad-based community development associations. The analysis of this experiment reveals the potentials and dangers of broad-based local and regional *campesino*² development associations.

San Juan de la Maguana was chosen for its success in mobilizing members of the established social and economic structure into a regional development association. Analysis of the San Juan city development efforts shows a possible approach for making people in positions of social, economic, and political power more responsive to community problems.

It is a truism to state that community development is an extremely complex process. As the result of our study we have isolated five main areas which we feel are essential to the execution of an effective community development program: a. the need for an integrated approach; b. the need for a good *promoter*; c. the need for trained local leadership; d. the need for viable local organizations; and e. the need for external assistance on the local level. A discussion of these five areas follows.

A. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

A mere transfer of skills is not community development. In San Juan de la Maguana an agricultural technician did not confine himself to passing on his expertise on rice production to San Juaneros. Charity also is not community development. In Las Matas de Farfan surplus United States food has been distributed by CARITAS. But CARITAS is attempting to use food distribution to bring about profound changes in the rural communities.

Project construction also is not community development. In Villarpando, family outhouses were constructed, but the community was not altered in any way. The transfer of skills, charity, and project construction can be used as devices by the *promotor* to make himself more acceptable to the community and to motivate the community. But by themselves, these approaches to local-level change are not effective; they do not lead to the development of the community.

Effective community development deals with the education and the organization of the community. The mobilization and active participation by at least some members of the community seems essential. Local inhabitants have to be taught to anticipate, to expect change, to believe in progress, to tackle community and social problems, to be aware of and conscious of social, economic, and political problems. Potential leaders have to be identified, motivated, and mo-

²"Countryman."

bilized. This *concientization* is achieved through many means. Informal talks and discussion between *promotor* and leaders can be very effective, though slow. Group meetings which spur free-wheeling discussions, education on group processes, and the dynamics of group action can be very effective, especially if conducted by skilled personnel. Whatever the method, education in the socio-political sense of at least community leaders is essential for effective community and civic development.

The organization of the community is also important. It is through organizations that projects can be more effectively used for community development, that charity can be channeled into community development, and that the transfer of skills can be more effectively accepted and used.

Proposition 1: Community development is a complex process which requires fundamental and social education and organization-building and which may use charity, project construction, and/or the transfer of skills as approaches to reach the goal of development.

Not only must the effective modernization of local community depend on the approach of promotion but it must also depend on the social, political, economic and psycho-cultural characteristics of the national society. In a political environment dominated by a reform-oriented government which has given priority to *campesino* organization or unionization, rural community development programs may be helped by the openness of the political elite. The attitudes and the predispositions of economic and social power holders in the nation and at the local level are very important. They help determine the response of elites to a *campesino* organization and the relationship between *campesinos* and the establishment.

The government of the Dominican Republic has approved project construction in rural areas within the framework of county development efforts. It would seem that the rationale for this project construction, undertaken through the Office of Community Development (OCD), is to maintain the political allegiance of *campesinos* and to enhance the prestige of the government. In this sense, the existing government is not a "reform" government in relation to community development. The following model applies for the Dominican Republic:

<u>U. S. Donor</u>	<u>Dominican Government</u>	<u>U. S. Input</u>	<u>Recipient Institution</u>	<u>Effect</u>
reform	non-reform	maximum	government	maximum control capability
			non-government	stability
				change

The model can be interpreted in the following manner: The donor for community development, the United States, is assumed a reform donor.³ It wants to see effective community development implemented. The government in the Dominican Republic is a non-reform government; it has not made urban or rural community development a priority. The amount of aid flowing from the U. S. to the Republic is "maximum;" it is given in large quantities for community development. The aid is given by the United States to government offices of community development (OCD) and to more private, non-government organizations.

The effect of the aid is dual. Massive aid given to OCD (government) leads to stability in the countryside and increased control capability by the government. Prestige gained from a completed project helps the total stability of the government. There is a feedback between the stability and control functions. This aid is used by the government not for the purposes of reform (community development) but for the purposes of stability.⁴

The goals of the reform donor are not fulfilled by OCD. However, aid given through non-government institutions in the Dominican Republic has been more effective in creating a true community development program. IPS, the *Comite*, some individual OCD *promotors*, have worked for effective and comprehensive changes at the local level. These groups have dealt not only with projects to enhance their prestige, but also with education, *concientizacion*, and organization-building. These efforts lead to change and local development. They also could have a negative effect on the goals of stability and control of the government. This is true since these organizations work to educate and organize marginal groups which can then formulate increased demands and exert increased pressure on the government. Tension may then be created between government and non-government sponsored and controlled programs. Tension may also arise between newly-created community organizations and the existing governmental structures. This has been the case in Bajos de Haina.

Understanding of the national political environment of the society is thus essential for effective community change. In the highly politicized environment of the Dominican Republic, it is impossible to discount politics from the local development process. It is also impos-

³It is assumed the U. S. goal is not merely the short-term stability of the Balaquer regime, but also the longer-term stability of the Republic, which we feel requires active and effective integrative community development programs.

⁴It must be considered that individual *promotors* of OCD may have accomplished more in rural villages than just project-construction. If this is the case, as in Bajos de Haina, then even OCD-supported community development can lead to negative results as far as the government's priority is concerned: stability might be well affected in an adverse fashion.

sible to discount national and local culture and attitudes. To develop a community, attitudes must be changed, patterns of behavior must be altered. People must be motivated to help themselves; they must be willing to trust their fellow citizens; fear and distrust must be eradicated. This is an especially difficult task in the Republic. *Personalismo* and paternalism are omnipresent hindrances.

Group action, democratic decision-making must be taught. People must be motivated and stimulated into a commitment to better their lives. This implies fundamental changes in attitudes: the infusion of new ideas, new behavior and new organization into a local community. These psycho-cultural changes take place within a definite social, economic, and political environment which helps to shape the format of these changes. For example, Villarpando with strong "Haitian" cultural influences, finds itself on the margin of Dominican culture and social perceptions. Its development is hindered by the sociocultural and psychological tension between national and local culture.

Proposition 2: Effective community development involves economic social, political, and psycho-cultural change. This change takes place at the local level but is conditioned by the national and local political, economic, social and cultural environment. A community development program must be able to handle such integral change at a local level and create links between local and national change.

B. A GOOD PROMOTOR

No matter what approach is used in community development the *promotor*, the outside catalyst, is the key man. From the case studies we can generalize the following characteristics as necessary for an effective *promotor*:

(a) He must be a full-time resident of the community in which he works. He cannot live in the city and visit the communities once every week.⁵

(b) The *promotor* must be able to gain the confidence and trust of the community. For this, the *promotor* will have to learn local customs, will have to live like the local inhabitants. In all three successful case studies, the *promotor* integrated himself as much as possible into the community.

(c) The *promotor* must have a good understanding of community development. He must be well trained. He must stress education, organization-building and self-help.

(d) To be effective, the *promotor* must be able to have a firm grasp of not only the local politics, and economics, but also of the

⁵As in Bajos de Haina a *promoter*, while living in one community, may be able to work in others close at hand which have an integral bond with the original community.

national political and economic system. This means that the *promotor* must know how "things get done" in the system. He must be willing to accept Dominican solutions to problems. For example, he must be capable of building on the personal relationships of leaders he has chosen.

(e) The *promotor* must be capable of effectively manipulating the system and of teaching the leaders of community organizations how to act in the arena of local politics. The successful *promotor* cannot steer his community away from political problems, or after utopian methods of solving problems.

(f) The successful *promotor* is trained to identify community leaders. The *promotor* must decide what leaders to work with. This decision may alienate other members of the community. A good choice of leaders is therefore essential.

(g) A successful *promotor* can be a Dominican or an outsider. We studied communities with U.S. citizens acting as *promotores*. The preliminary success of these efforts demonstrates the potential of good U.S. *promotores*. There can be no doubt that U.S. citizens have more problems, one being the waste of time involved in learning the language, the culture, and the politics. Yet U.S. *promotores* can be successful.

(h) A *promotor* must have patience. He must be willing to wait for decisions to flow from the group. He must not force his solutions on groups. For example, he must be willing to repeat and repeat basic ideas. He must be capable of not being a "benefactor," that is, of doing things exclusively for the community. He must be able to accept the results of elections, even though they may retard his planned progress.

(i) A *promotor* must be committed to the development of the community, and not of his own personal, political, economic, or social advancement.

When all the lessons are learned and when all the approaches of promotion studied, the *promotor* must take this academic baggage and use it in a real, concrete situation. Each community is different; each *promotor* is different. Though the nine general characteristics described above applied to all three *promotores* studied in the case studies, the three *promotores* were themselves very different. Each had his own personality, his own facility for close human relationships, his own methods of working within Dominican society.

Proposition 3: Promotores are essential in effective community development. Promotores must have solid training in approaches of promotion, in Dominican culture, in politics, in economics, and in social structure. They must be exposed to schemes for leadership selection and training. A promotor must understand the need for organization and place the interests of

the community before his personal economic, social or political objectives.

C. TRAINED LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Increased popular participation in local community affairs is essential to the success of community development. Our case studies reveal that effective community development in the Dominican Republic may not require the active participation of large numbers of people. In each successful community studied, there was a strong, committed leadership which worked closely with the *promotor*. In each community there were a majority of members in the organization who were not actively engaged in the workings of the organization. As a rule, the *director* made decisions and carried them out. Indeed, local leadership was the key to success. In each community, except Villarpando, there were approximately ten individuals who were motivated and who continuously worked for the development of the community. It is these men who made demands to national agencies; it is these men who arranged legal proceedings to buy land and set up markets for the community's products; it is these few men who pushed for the maintenance of community projects.

In general, participation by the masses was not required for success. In fact, a small cohesive leadership seemed more able to act and get things done for the community in this highly personalized and politicized Dominican setting. Total community participation was necessary only sporadically, to support leaders in times of crises. More total participation may be necessary after the initial stages of effective community development. Leadership selection and training is essential; good working relations between the promotor and local leaders are indispensable.

Proposition 4: At least in the first stages of community development, participation by large numbers in community organizations is not required and may even hinder organizational and community change. Leaders are the key to effective development.

D. A VIABLE ORGANIZATION

Each community studied, except Villarpando, had created an organization. El Cedro boasted an economic organization which was helping *campesinos* produce and market rice as well as obtain their own land. Bajos de Haina and San Juan boasted general development associations which were undertaking either the construction of social projects or the maintenance of community projects. All three organizations did not confine themselves to their primary objective, but rather acted on a whole range of economic, social and political problems.

An organization concerned with economic problems, as, for example, a production or marketing association or a consumer cooperative, may be the most effective type of organization for community development. People are quick to see economic benefits that are seen

day by day. This is especially true if an organization is concerned with land-buying or land reform. However, these types of organizations require trained accountants and administrators. And, more importantly, these types of organizations, in the Dominican Republic, can expect immediate confrontations with the economic and political power elite. These confrontations may help to form group cohesion and group identity, as it happened in El Cedro. On the other hand, such confrontations may also help destroy the organization.

The land characteristics of El Cedro which aided the success of that community organization, are not found elsewhere. In Bajos de Haina, for example, land is controlled by the State and to seek land-ownership would involve a direct, and futile, confrontation with the government. If the inhabitants in Bajos de Haina decided to organize to ensure their employment in city factories or in other job opportunities, the organization could be ignored because unemployment is so high that non-organization members would be plentiful to recruit. The organization could have been exposed to strong pressure from government and business.

In this setting—applicable to many *campesino* communities and city slums—the marginal inhabitant can easily organize into “theoretically-political” social and cultural clubs and broad-based development associations. These organizations could build prestige, power, and confidence among their members. Eventually, these organizations too would become enmeshed in the political and economic problems of utmost importance to the communities. Such political, and economic action might lead to repression or repercussion from the established elite. Or it might lead, if elites were educated and prepared, to more participation by these groups in decision-making on resource and allocation.

A MODEL OF COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Local communities must be organized. These organizations will have to gain prestige in their local communities. They must educate and be able to mobilize participants periodically.

2. These local organizations must channel demands, needs, and ideas to the national level. More information at the national level should increase chances for effective national planning.

3. The national and local establishments must be receptive to local demands. These demands must be considered and acted on, according to merit and the availability of resources.

4. Benefits must be passed down from national agencies to local communities, *through local organizations*.

It takes two to make this model work: *los que mandan* (“those whole rule”), and *los de abajo* (“the underprivileged”). The case studies of El Cedro and Bajos de Haina show the organization, education, and mobilization of leaders of *los de abajo*. They also re-

flect little education and change among *los que mandan*. Such a situation could make community development lead to instability, and repression, instead of its ultimate political goal: the providing of links between rulers, and ruled.

The San Juan de la Maguana case study shows one way through which the elite can organize to help educate and develop the "established" communities. However, even the San Juan Development Association has been primarily concerned with improvement of citywide facilities and not in education, or in providing a link between the marginal sectors and the San Juan political and economic elite.

Another type of elite organization which may be successful is an informal organization which would act as a pressure group. This could be, for example, an organization of concerned citizens who would meet to discuss problems, and their alternate solutions, and then make their decisions known to government, business, or other groups. This *consejo* established in San Juan approximates this type of organization.

Proposition 5: Community development requires viable organizations. Effective community development requires the education and organization of marginal as well as "established" groups. Meaningful links between los que mandan and los de abajo are necessary to ensure change and to prevent repression or attempts at revolutionary violence. Organizations created in the Dominican Republic must be as apolitical as possible. All successful organizations studied claimed to be apolitical. All had members from divergent political parties. None, however, was able to stay totally out of politics.

Any formal link by an organization to a political party would seriously hinder the expansion of the organization. First, there is strong mistrust and fear of political parties. Political parties in the Republic are considered machines for the advancement of particular people, not the carriers of differing conceptions of policy. Parties are connected with *personalismo*. Second, by joining a party, an organization limits its maneuverability. An apolitical group can retain members affiliated with opposition as well as the government party and receive funds from the national government as well as from organizations and agencies staffed by opposition-party affiliates.

Proposition 6: An organization concerned with the development of a community needs to be as apolitical as possible in present-day Dominican Republic. (This also follows from the model used in the argument leading to Proposition 2.)

5. External inputs: A community cannot develop effectively if it is not organized. A community cannot develop by itself; it needs

E. EXTERNAL INPUTS

A community cannot develop effectively if it is not organized. A community cannot develop by itself; it needs outside assistance. This outside assistance can come from national or international agencies. The inputs can be of materials, money, expertise (a *promoter*), or training. Money and materials can be granted or loaned. We feel that experiments in soft loans to communities have been very successful. Such soft loans given to a community organization help to insure that these organizations will become viable and successful ones. The loans increase the prestige and the cohesion of the group. A debt will also possibly enhance group work. A soft loan will also reinforce efforts at self-help and efforts to break paternalism and total dependence on the national government. But ODC-type grants can also be effective. By requiring at least half of the cost of construction to come from the community, this approach also helps reinforce local group action and cohesion.

An external agency also can provide training for leaders and members of community organizations. Motivational courses can be given in the communities. This type of course was given in El Cedro and in Bajos de Haina. In this approach, a team of educators (they can be *promotores*, professors, priests, etc.) visit a community for one or two weeks. They give talks, hold discussions, engage in group dynamics exercises. These courses are held in the evening or are so scheduled as to fit with the community's daily routine. This type of course can be given to *campesinos* in their villages, to *barrio-dwellers* in slums, or to local "elites" in their cities. Training courses can also be held at a designated special training center. Leaders are invited to spend one or two weeks in an intensive educational experience. We stress that full-time professionals should be in charge of this training. This type of training can be very effective if the training personnel is qualified.

Timing is important for the external agency. Massive inputs of machinery and money before the community has been organized and leaders have been educated can lead to widespread waste. Patience by the *promotor* is an absolute necessity. The supporting institutions must also be willing to wait and not dump large quantities of materials and money into a community. The supporting institutions should also not demand immediate project construction. *Promotores* should not be judged by the number of projects constructed, but by their skill in leadership training and group formation.

Once a community organization is functioning and preliminary training has been given to the leaders, the outside agency should attempt to deal with the organization's demands as quickly as possible. National agencies in the Dominican Republic are in general

unresponsive to legally-channeled and persistent demands by marginal groups. Examples in Bajos de Haina support this contention. Local demands flounder in a bureaucratic structure which makes speed in approving demands and petitions impossible. This lack of speed causes frustration, bitterness, and despair. It can lead to the disintegration of weak community groups.

Proper timing of external inputs into a community is thus essential. Also important is that these inputs be made through development-oriented community organizations. For example, the shifting of responsibility from the Ministry of Education to the San Juan Development Association on the matter of school maintenance and repair, is a clear example of the proper method of channeling funds. Such a scheme can be applied to other areas, even to *campesino* organizations such as the *consejo de Pobladores Rurales de Haina*.

International aid for social change, and particularly community development, has had positive effects in the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately the effects have not been as great as possible due to skillful manipulations of United States aid funds away from comprehensive community reform programs into programs with more limited objectives. International agencies have lobbied for comprehensive change; they have been successful in maintaining the survival of several promising community development programs.

Proposition 7: International aid is essential in present-day Dominican Republic, for effective community development. Inputs by national and international agencies directly into the local communities are also essential for effective community development. Such inputs can range from materials, to funds, to training. Inputs need to be timed correctly and need to be channeled through local community organizations.
