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ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS AND INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

William J. Siffin



PROGRAM OF ADVANCED STUDIES IN INSTITUTION
BUILDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE METHODOLOGY

A PASITAM Design Study

Administrative Problems and
Integrated Rural Development

by
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Administrative Problems and Integrated Rural Development

William J. Siffin

The administrative problems of integrated rural development include that sometimes fatal common cold of public administration—the sheer difficulty of doing ordinary things. In addition, there are administrative problems distinctive to this activity. “Integrated rural development” can refer to more than one kind of arrangement, all with certain common features that give rise to some interesting administrative problems.

The feasibility of integrated approaches to rural development turns on organizational and administrative factors as much as on anything else. When goal and resource issues have been settled, the key determinants of probable outcomes are organization and administration.

“Integrated rural development” is the label for one potential solution to a widespread problem. Potential solutions to complex problems must always be approached with caution: once the solution is accepted *it* defines the problem. For all practical purposes, the problem becomes whatever the solution solves. If you go to a chiropractor, you have a chiropractic problem. If instead you go to a psychiatrist, your problem—the set of conditions that impelled you to act in the first place—will be otherwise defined. If you go to a source that is committed to integrated rural development, *voilà!* that will be your problem.

We must therefore ask and answer: What are the environmental circumstances in which an integrated approach to rural development seems auspicious? What programmatic requirements will affect the probable success of the approach?

The technological part of the answers to these questions is generally available. Resource requirements can be projected with considerable assurance. It is the organizational and managerial necessities that are the hardest to address. They are not easy to stipulate, and they are less easy to

An earlier version of this paper, “Administrative Problems and Integrated Rural Development; or Can A Lion’s Den Be Made into a Happy Zoo,” was presented at a University of Arizona Conference on integrated rural development.

deliver. So one can argue that the applicability of the concept of integrated rural development—its suitability as a solution—usually turns on the issue of administrative feasibility.

DOING ORDINARY THINGS CAN BE DIFFICULT

People seldom try to display their confusions. We prefer to act as advocates and asserters, pointing out other people's confusions rather than our own. We speak and act from certitude—or hopeful faith. Even when we are less certain than we sound, we try to project a posture of assurance.

This is certainly true in the field of developmental technical assistance. The design processes of technical assistance involve a subtle and complex mixture of analysis and advocacy. The person who defines a problem, shapes a strategy, or creates a project must adopt a strong assertive stance: *these* are the goals; *these* are the proper purposes; they *will* be served by these outputs; and the outputs *will* be produced by these inputs within this time-frame and in this particular setting. There is only one saving proviso—the “assumptions” boxes in the Logical Framework to which the projects of the Agency for International Development (AID) are fitted, for example. In asserting a very complex means-ends chain, we get to admit that we are *assuming* certain things about the project environment. But if the project proposal is to stand much chance of approval, those contingencies, those assumptions, must not be too heroic or absurd.

Thus we act *as if* we know or can be quite certain in our predictions. We do this when proposing projects for integrated rural development and for many other things as well. All programmed interventions are based on predictions. As we try to get something done about the compelling problems of our world, we are impelled to act *as if* we can predict with high probability of success.

From one view, this makes a lot of sense. Why should anyone sanction costly action on the sheer basis of faith and intuition? The Procrustean formats of program and project planning are supposed to reduce the probability of error, if not to really guarantee success.

All the while that we are acting *as if* we are assured, we continue to know several things from undeniable experience: that our predictive abilities are mightily limited; that fortuity is often the most potent ingredient in our recipes of action; that outcomes frequently depend on the on-the-scene ability (and luck) to grasp and exploit fortuitous events; and that in sum our plans, proposals, and projected solutions are exercises in hopeful gaming more than anything else.

Is this an acceptable and appropriate view of “how things really work”? Should we deliberately adopt a rather schizoid stance toward our development efforts: to do the best we can by positing the future and acting as if our

predictions are reliable and knowing that they really aren't, and then getting on with the business before us? Is this the only way? Are there any reasonably promising ways to incrementally reduce uncertainty *before* we commit ourselves to action?

Our limited ability to deal with organizational and managerial factors in our pseudo-equations for successful development is an important source of uncertainty. Other sources are ignorance and confusion, e.g., limited knowledge of the time requirements of success. Reliable knowledge of how long it takes to do something is limited. But the programming constraints of donor agencies and the demands of host country developers often reject such knowledge anyway. Then benign fraud is reinforced by hope and by the assumption that what really matters is to get something started in the right direction.

The troublesome thing is that the eventual effects of hopeful action are all too often cruel, not to mention wasteful. One elemental reason is that ordinary things are often exquisitely hard to do. Perhaps if we understand this a little better—if we sharpen our appreciation of *why* ordinary things are often so difficult—we may be better able to deal with such matters as the administrative problems of integrated rural development.

A recent American experience offers certain insights.¹ In April 1966, with fanfare the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration announced a project. Through grants and loans of \$23.3 million, efforts would be mounted to create minority employment, quiet racial stress, and produce economic development in Oakland, California.

Three years and \$3 million later an overpass had been built, considerable architectural fees had been paid, several projects had collapsed, and others were far off schedule, snarled in contention and other impediments. It was fortunate that Oakland's survival did not depend on the project whose inspiration was to keep the city from going up in smoke.²

The Oakland project failed for two sorts of reasons. First, because the solution was probably wrong. Putting technical and capital assistance into Oakland was inspired by experience in Appalachia, by a model for responding to the perceived problems of that benighted section of the country. It didn't really fit the Oakland situation, but it *was* the format fixed in law (the Public Works and Economic Development Act of August 26, 1965 [P.L. 89-136]). Second, the law plus the \$300 million appropriation that had to be obligated in five months of fiscal year 1966 were an impulse to rapid action. Oakland was a plausible target. It had high unemployment and had been designated a redevelopment area in 1964. It had an Overall

1. Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland . . .* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973). The following is drawn from this study.

2. See Amory Bradford, *Oakland's Not for Burning* (New York: McKay, 1968).

Economic Development Program document, and some potential projects had been identified. The city was described as “potentially explosive” because of racial tension. It also had a Republican administration, which made it an attractive target for the Democratic Assistant Secretary of Commerce in charge of the EDA: “If anything went wrong with an EDA program, if we were arguing with a mayor, I did *not* want some Democratic mayor—like Daley—to be able to pick up the phone and call President Johnson. With a Republican mayor, I thought the federal government would at least not be against us.”³

Even so, the Oakland project didn’t work. Part of what thwarted it was a set of organizational and managerial realities—drab commonplace realities that have their counterparts (and more) in the kinds of ventures we are interested in. Oakland offers lessons about administration and administrative problems. Here are two of them:

*First: ‘‘Chains of . . . decision points, requiring numerous clearances by different actors . . . provided the occasions for frustrating delays.’’*⁴

The task environment of the Oakland project contained a number of different organizations, federal and local, with jurisdiction over various activities related to the project. There was the Economic Development Administration in Washington, with a regional office and a local task force. There was the government of Oakland and a group of organized Oakland interests. There were private organizations, ranging from an airline to certain local businesses. There was an autonomous local public agency, the Port of Oakland. The U.S. Navy was on hand, interested in the effects of port development on harbor navigation. There was also the Small Business Administration, responsible for certain kinds of technical assistance. All had interests besides the Oakland project (except for a few people with direct project responsibilities).

Just one part of the project, the public works program, involved at least *thirty* important decision points, with more than twenty separate sets of participants.⁵ As this program proceeded, *seventy* sequential agreements had to be reached by various subsets of participants. So it is not surprising that six years elapsed between the joyous announcement in April 1966, and the letting of contracts for an airplane hangar in 1971. The hangar project included a plan for training airline mechanics. It required approval by nine federal, state, and local organizations.

We can find much that is familiar in the Oakland experience. But what does it mean? An interesting observation can be drawn from the study of those seventy clearances (see the following table).

3. Pressman and Wildavsky, *Implementation*, p. 14-15.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

5. Some of these participants were within the same hierarchical structure, the EDA. Others weren’t. Even *within* a single hierarchy, getting concurrence is not necessarily easy.

PROGRAM COMPLETION DOUBTFUL UNLESS LEVEL OF AGREEMENT AMONG PARTICIPANTS IS TERRIBLY HIGH

Probability of Agreement on Each Clearance Point	Probability of Success after 70 Clearances	Number of Agreements that Reduce Probability below 50 Percent
80	.000000125	4
90	.000644	7
95	.00395	14
99	.489	68

SOURCE: Pressman and Wildavsky, *Implementation*, p. 107.

The import of this example is awesome and dismaying. If a project involves seventy important clearances and agreements, and the probability of getting agreement in each case is 90 percent, then there are less than seven chances in a thousand that the project will be brought to completion. After only seven moves there is less than a 50/50 chance of success!

We are dealing here with a statistical metaphor. It contains a rigid assumption about the requisites of success: there does exist a determinate set of necessary and interdependent decisions. Reality is usually more elusive and more flexible than this. But at the root of any organized reality there remains an intransigent fact: the course of ordinary events is highly vulnerable to delay and blockage when events must be seriatim blessed by a diverse group of actors who do not share a strong, stable consensus on means and ends.

Our normal expectation should be that new programs will fail to get off the ground and that, at best, they will take considerable time to get started. The cards in this world are stacked against things happening, as so much effort is required to make them move. The remarkable thing is that new programs work at all.⁶

Does this case-lesson offer us any insight into administrative problems and how to reduce them? We can discount the import of the statistical metaphor concerning cumulating probabilities. We can also complicate our sense of reality by conceiving of a project as a *set* of semi-separate sequences of action, each with its own participants and decisions. We can, in other words, think about ways to simplify the action—ways to break down the length of the means-ends chain so we don't have to depend on seventy sequential decisions in our own efforts.

If we can minimize the interdependence of a set of sequences, if we can organize the action into buffered parallel flows and reduce serial interdependence, this "decomposition" of the overall effort significantly increases the probability that at least some parts will succeed. Even so, if

6. Pressman and Wildavsky, *Implementation*, p. 109.

each parallel means-ends chain provides some essential ingredient of overall success *and* if there is no redundancy among those chains, we are back where we started with an astonishingly low probability of a successful outcome.

Second: The actual decision paths of a novel project cannot be predicted at the outset. This is so obvious that we seldom ask *why*. Nevertheless, in formal programming we continue to act *as if* there is a relatively clear path from where we are to where we would arrive. (When we PERT, for example.)

To predict the decision path of a project, it is necessary to know certain things. One must know what decisions will be necessary and who must make them. It is also necessary to know the outcomes of the decisions at points 1 n , in order to know the location and issue-content of decision $n + 1$. This, of course, is impossible.

We try to reduce the indeterminacy of prospective decision paths in several ways:

1. By mapping the environment of action to try to figure out what personal and insitutional factors are likely to be involved. When the institutional setting is fragmented and unstable, any moment's knowledge of this aspect of the future is bound to be fragile. So, in the euphemistic language of the organizational theorists, if we are wise we continuously monitor the be-Jesus out of the environment.

2. By using—and often misusing—technologies for mapping the prospective decisional terrain and for constructing critical paths and decision trees on the basis of *functional* views of the plan of action. Some of these tools are directly based on the premise that a decision path can't be fully known in advance. The idea of a decision tree, for example, is that of mapping directionality and probable options. It acknowledges at the outset that there is no single linear course (although it does assume that the "probable" map of options can be drawn before the trip begins).

3. By trying to match up our environmental maps and our functional maps, knowing that, if we are lucky, we will have not a clear path, but at least a relatively clear sense of the direction in which the action will go, of the key causal constraints, and of some of the focal points in the process of decision and action. If we are smart, we constantly maintain and develop a sense of the options and of the state of our "system." If we are lucky, we thereby build and adapt a mental network of the actual and potential linkages affecting a project. This may permit us to shape the content of a particular issue in a timely fashion, bring it to a decision point where the probabilities are favorable, and get what we need to continue.

There are two important conceptual lessons here, and both are often ignored. One concerns the difference between *goals* and *purposive action*. The other pertains to the *functions of management* in any human system of action.

The AID framework for project formating offers some means of gaining insight into the first lesson. An AID project is supposed to have *outputs* that contribute to *purposes*. The purposes need not be exclusive functions of the outputs; a project may be one of several efforts to contribute to a purpose. Purposes are themselves instrumental to larger social and economic *goals* and incompletely instrumental as well. In other words, the *label* of the project format speaks of goals, but the *content* of the project design refers to *purposive action*—movement in a certain direction, contributing to a generally improved state of affairs under very uncertain circumstances.

The Oakland project included some "goals" and some numbers: projected numbers of appropriate jobs to be created. It also included some criteria, such as the norm that not more than \$15,000 should be spent to create a particular job. But all this ostensible determinacy hid a highly contingent line of action whose *direction*, or intended direction, was much more assured than was the precise content of the actual goals (but not very assured at that).

When uncertainty is a prime characteristic of an enterprise, whether that enterprise be profit-making or something more elusive, it is imperative to know the direction and intent of purposive action. It may be useful, even necessary, to specify "determinate goals." It is just as important to know that those goals are contingent, intentional, hopeful, and not to be taken for more than that. In reality, goals are the surrogates and exemplars of intent. If we cannot know the clear path of our future actions, we cannot know with certitude our goals. A development project is not like a train trip to a ticketed destination. It is more like sailing on a ship, hopefully beyond the point where the internal rate of return becomes favorable, in the direction of a better and more generously endowed climate. Or, with reference to its decisional pattern, it might be compared to a game of chess (chess is simpler).

This brings us to *management*, a subject of considerable discussion and writing, much of it more lyrical than lucid. One might speak of management in terms of the Esau-Jacob syndrome. "The voice is the voice of management, but the hand is the hand of control." Much of what is labeled "management" in the literature is really discourse and technique of *control*.⁷ The implications of this confusion are important to the world of action, the world of administrative problems.

To control is to reduce or eliminate uncertainty. To manage is to deal with what is left, the residual uncertainty and the imperative of judging and deciding what cannot be computed. Once this is understood it becomes possible to understand and even to use certain administrative means of

7. See Martin Landau and Russell Stout, Jr., "To Manage Is Not to Control: Or, the Folly of Type II Errors," *Public Administration Review*, 39:2 (1979); and Russell Stout, Jr., *Management or Control: The Organizational Dilemma* (Bloomington, Ind.: PASITAM, 1979), forthcoming.

control—to use them as tools of management. It becomes possible, too, to recognize that some alluring techniques of control render more difficult the true tasks of management.

Thus: linear programming techniques of planning and scheduling can be avoided when action just isn't very linear and the main line of decisions can't be delineated in advance. Thus: the potential snare of Management by Objectives, which under uncertain conditions is an invitation to pernicious and meretricious suboptimizing, can be if not altogether avoided, then treated as a highly tentative and hopeful enterprise. Thus: techniques such as PERT or CPM can be used, not to establish checkpoints for control from above, but as heuristics for management, as alerting mechanisms, as contingent plots against which to check movement. Thus: management information systems can be devised more for information than for *a priori* control, and regarded as something less determinate than the computer systems that govern movement on Washington's subway.

Some of our administrative problems—the problems of making ordinary things work—stem directly from the ways in which systems of action are devised in the first place. The separation of design from implementation is one of the primordial sources of administrative problems in development efforts. Ideal objectives are formulated in high places, and fecund innovation is espoused by well-intended analytical eunuchs, whose paper babies are supposed to be spurred into constructive life by others, others whose acceptance of the mandate does not assure achievement of the intention (or even full commitment to the task).

The approaches to control that are innate in the American foreign aid program, with their requirement, for example, of prior Congressional approval of visions that are not only incomplete, but also in many ways obsolete before being blessed, are a factor in this separation. The persistence—and the creativity that sometimes rises to sheer brilliance—of foreign aid personnel in struggling with this design process, with its built-in assurance of administrative problems, is one invitation to humility on the part of critics. AID's efforts to better confront the administrative problems of implementation can only be commended. But the innate characteristics of foreign aid programming include an awesome propensity for administrative problems. In the last analysis, these problems are rooted in the fact that it is exquisitely difficult to make ordinary things work well. It is exponentially more difficult to make innovative things work at all in unstable environments, when the content and compass of the action cannot be reduced to technological means and consensually valued ends. It is cosmicly difficult to make things work well when the visions are vastly separated from the ventures by time, perspective, and understanding.

These generic problems of implementation—the enormous difficulties of making ordinary things happen—are among the administrative problems of integrated rural development. To some extent these problems can be managed, eased, treated—especially if they are understood and acknowledged.

In the usual course of action, certain key problems of implementation are almost systematically ignored. Even when these problems are acknowledged, it may be necessary to address them by acting, in part, *as if* they didn't exist and weren't so confounding. If we engage in willful encounters with uncertainty, we must somewhat simplify that uncertainty to reduce it to potential mastery. Our tools are not as powerful as we would like, but they are all we have—and more than we usually use in the way of understandings, insights, and instruments of better strategies.

THE UNORDINARY BUSINESS OF INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Along with the general problems of making things work, integrated rural development presents certain distinctive administrative problems. They stem from the properties of this particular kind of action. They too are somewhat manageable. They are important: go/no go decisions about potential integrated rural development efforts should often turn on the assessment of these two classes of administrative problems.

Vernon Ruttan has expressed doubts about the soundness of integrated rural development as an approach to the rural problems of the poor countries of the world.⁸ His skepticism is indicated in this statement:

A basic weakness of the integrated rural development approach is that policy or program objectives are adopted for which no readily available closed-system technology or program methodologies are available. Integrated rural development can be described, perhaps not too inaccurately, as an ideology in search of a methodology or a technology.⁹

Ruttan sees administrative problems as a key weakness: “. . . the resources devoted to integrating the development and management of physical and institutional infrastructures are likely to have a relatively low return.”¹⁰ Note, however, that he argues the importance of development strategies that are intersectoral in their compass and that include the elimination of social and political as well as economic constraints. He does not reject the *content* of integrated rural development schemes. He is concerned with workability, holding that “rural development program

8. Vernon Ruttan, “Integrated Rural Development Programs: A Skeptical Perspective,” *International Development Review* 4 (1975).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

activities must be organized around . . . well-defined technologies or methodologies and objectives. It is important to rural communities that such activities and services be simultaneously available, *but not necessarily administrative integrated.*"¹¹ And he is not sanguine about the future.

John Fischer indicates that one need not regard integrated rural development as an ideology in search of a methodology.¹² In his view, it is possible to argue for a degree of administrative integration without insisting on comprehensive health-education-credit-marketing-extension-communications programs guided by efficient, responsive bureaucracies.

Fischer sees integrated rural development as an alternative to single-focused efforts that concentrate on food production as an end. In integrated rural development, production is a means. A well-conceived production package approach is an important instrument. Credit is the crucial level. And a share of management must be decentralized to the level of the producers. Fischer does not argue that a holistic approach is inherently good. But an integrated effort that attacks several interactive key constraints is essential, because no single dominant variable impedes rural development. What are the key administrative problems of an integrated approach?

Institutional Problems

At any given time, a country's, a society's, or a community's institutions determine the scope of the situational capacity to set goals and act. An institution is a set of arrangements, a combination of norms and patterns, for doing things that matter. Institutions are grounded in some sorts of fundamental principles or views about the good, the true, and the proper.¹³ The most basic administrative problems of integrated rural development are institutional.

One of these problems is common to many types of activity: there is too much distance between the vision and the implementation of ventures. Basic goals and policies are not set in the countryside. The bureaucratic institutions of the poor countries generally are more remote from the countryside than the Washington headquarters of the Bureau of Indian

11. *Ibid.*, p. 16, emphasis added.

12. John Fischer, "Integrated Rural Development Projects in a World Facing Food and Rural Poverty Crises" (paper based on a presentation to the CENTO Seminar on Integrated Rural Development Programs and Projects, Islamabad, 1975).

13. The general subject of institutional change is discussed in "Institution Building: Feasibility and Techniques," Program of Advanced Studies in Institution Building and Technical Assistance Methodology, Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities, c/o International Development Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405, U.S.A.

Affairs is from an Arizona reservation. The authority structures, the incentive arrangements, the very information content of these bureaucracies all militate against effective commitments to integrated rural development. The power and the leadership required to modify or override these institutional constraints are the greatest single challenge—much more important than the availability of resources. Some of the necessary power must come from the clients. Once it emerges it tends to swell in the force and in the scope of its demands. Then a major institutional problem becomes the capacity to respond. This is often a relatively—but only relatively—manageable problem, compared with the initial needs for gaining insight and commitment within the established institutional structures.

A closely related institutional problem is that of organizing effective collective action among clients. Occasionally, there are local institutions waiting to be tapped. Normally, the local institutions are effectively dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo. Techniques for intervention do exist, can be learned, and have been applied with success in various places, given time enough and resources. (The messy, uneven, but interesting impact of American poverty programs on some relations between Indian tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs might be instructive.) In overseas integrated rural development efforts, the production package-plus-credit approach may offer entree and leverage on the existing institutional situation. But the tasks of organizing, mobilizing, monitoring, adapting, and guiding effective local collective action on any sizable scale are awesome. Doing so within the constraint of a sound benefit/cost ratio adds to the challenge. Yet the economic constraints may help maintain a clear purposive thrust in the effort and protect it from being twiddled away into vapid do-goodism.

Strategic Problems

The greatest strategic problem of any integrated rural development scheme is not to determine the best collection of component activities. Nor is it to coordinate various specialized agencies and jurisdictions. It is the problem of *incentive*—of devising and applying an incentive strategy for those who must shape and conduct the activities that will, if successful, produce desired kinds of results.

The incentive problem of the clients is relatively simple compared with the problem of providing sufficient incentives—and avoiding perverse incentives—for the administrative and technical personnel and the organizations necessary to make the program work. One is tempted to fantasize about a bonus scheme, in which the personnel of supporting agencies share in the success of their clients. (The administrative complexities might be Byzantine.) Unless this strategic problem of incentives can be solved with

some reasonable degree of adequacy, necessary inputs from the public sector will not be forthcoming, or will not persist beyond the first flush of enthusiasm or the impulse of external donors. Suggestions are invited.

Another important strategic problem is *time-phasing*. In other fields, there are some suggestive rules of thumb: as much time is normally spent planning a building, designing a ship, and getting ready to build a dam as is taken to implement the plans. The same ratio of preparation to effort cannot be applied here, but the time-phasing of efforts at integrated rural development needs to be addressed with uncommon care and insight. As Fischer notes, inadequate crank-up time is a highly probable problem of organization and administration in the field.

Related to timing is *inadequate investment in infrastructure*. The goal orientation of integrated rural development is not toward a leap but a process. Bankable internal rates of return cannot be laid on all phases of what is involved: the establishment or development of institutions for producing social and technical capital to produce flows of "practical packages," flows of information about what is going on and what might be, skills for disseminating and applying techniques, must keep pace with, even run ahead of, action in the field. They must be integrated with the operational facets of the effort and, if possible, managed so as to be germane.

There are other strategic problems of organization and management. Perhaps the greatest is simply acquiring a sufficient supply of *competent personnel*. One impediment to solving that problem is the use of ascriptive norms to denote supposed competence. Conventional education and training tend to be self-justifying and, except at the lowest end of the scale, not subject to much evaluation in terms of effects.¹⁴ Offsite management training tends to be unduly sterile; and much of our effort to transmit knowledge, skills, and the dispositions to use them in the service of intents falls short of what it might achieve.¹⁵ The manpower production problem, which is closely related to the problem of incentives, may seem remote from the growing of crops in the fields. It is neither remote nor easy to resolve.

Decentralization is one of the essential requirements of integrated rural development approaches. In Fischer's view, and in the studies of John D.

14. William J. Siffin, "Factors Involved in the Evaluation of Management Training Institutions," in *Management Training for Development: The Asian Experience*, ed. Inayatulla (Kuala Lumpur: Asian Centre for Development Administration, 1975), pp. 251-83.

15. Burton E. Swanson, *Organizing Agricultural Technology Transfer* (Bloomington, Ind.: Program of Advanced Studies in Institution Building and Technical Assistance Methodology, 1975).

Montgomery, a compelling case is made.¹⁶ Decision-making authority must be located closer to the sources of action than any ministry headquarters can ever be. And local-level participation in some of the substantive decisions is essential to effectiveness.

This problem is both institutional and strategic. The authority structures and reward systems of typical poor country bureaucracies are simply, or not so simply, unsuited to effective decentralization of substantive decision-making power and responsibility. In more than one African country, the *forms* of decentralization in agricultural and rural development have been effectively falsified by the substance of bureaucratic decision-making and control.

One approach to this problem, by no means universally feasible, is to bypass the bureaucracy in distributing certain resources to the local level and give jurisdiction to small-farmer groups who may then have some leverage in dealing with the bureaucracy, at least on money matters. The late government of Kukrit Pramoj in Thailand followed such a strategy on an ad hoc basis in some parts of the country, apparently with some interesting short-run results. Under high-ideal institutional conditions, such as those that existed in Taiwan in the springtime of the JCRR, it was possible to design an arrangement in which local farmer associations could hire and, if need be, fire their own local extension agents and collectively operate other key elements of an impressively integrated rural development program.

There are no general recipes for solving the problem of decentralization. But we can identify some of the important factors that bear upon the feasibility of decentralizing authority, and we can find some alternative models of decentralization. Through such approaches we might make some reasonable matches between what is probably feasible in one situation and what has worked elsewhere. There is an important and largely unmet need for garnering and assessing experience-based models of ways to promote and achieve decentralization for rural development. Such models, buttressed by knowledge of the circumstances in which they are likely to work, would help fill an important need for information about a major administrative problem.

Coordination

Coordination, a venerable prayerword of administration, stands for another major administrative problem that is frequently institutional, al-

16. See, for example, John D. Montgomery, "Allocation of Authority in Land Reform Programs, a Comparative Study of Administrative Process and Outputs," R/T/N Reprint Series (New York: Agricultural Development Council, 1974).

ways strategic with regard to *integrated* rural development, and inevitably operational as well.¹⁷

Policies should coincide. Conflict should be minimized. People and their organizations should be inspired by a higher common purpose, and a shared sense of ways and means. Wouldn't it be lovely?

When people call for coordination, they usually mean that they need support that they cannot command. This typically leads to bargaining, and bargaining usually bends policy in some way. "Coordination means getting what you do not have."¹⁸ How to get it is the problem, and there is no set of simple solutions. Again there are many interesting models—and more knowledge of how they do and don't work than is usually noted in practice.

A common pool of knowledge may promote coordination by providing a shared viewpoint. But not necessarily. The same information may mean different things to different people and agencies. Bureaucratic authority may produce coordination. It sometimes does:

If one wishes to assure a reasonable prospect of program implementation, he had better begin with a high probability that each and every actor will cooperate. The purpose of bureaucracy is precisely to secure this degree of predictability. Many of its most criticized features, such as . . . clearances and standard operating procedures, serve to increase the ability of each participant to predict what the others will do and to smooth over differences. . . . The price may be too high, but the cost of accomplishing little or nothing otherwise must be placed against it.¹⁹

But the problem of coordination may be precisely to change the existing, predictable patterns of bureaucratic behavior. Which brings us back to such matters as purposes and incentives.

Operational Problems

This listing of problems has become a singularly unsatisfying exercise. The problems do not necessarily contain the seeds of their solutions. The list could be vastly extended, but the operational problems always boil down to two related categories: designing workable operations, and then "working" them.

A number of design problems aptly fit under one label, *the need for simplicity*. The scale of a program should be manageable. Whatever this means, it implies that the scope should not be country-wide if there are only resources for two-thirds of the country. It should not have a two-year time horizon if eight years is more appropriate.

17. There is a most perceptive discussion in Pressman and Wildavsky, *Implementation*, pp. 132-35.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.

“Region-bounded” program components are attractive when the region is defined by a coherence of an agricultural system or factor endowments *and* when a regional approach is not impossibly incompatible with the existing bureaucratic structure.

Simplicity also means low overhead, as Fischer has noted. And low overhead means production packages plus considerable reliance on borrower-managed credit arrangements.

Simplicity means careful attention to baseline data needs and to well-designed monitoring arrangements. But even the simplest integrated rural development scheme will have its share of subtleties and complexities, for the scheme must work at once in several directions: toward and with the clients, with input suppliers and product marketers, with credit sources, public authorities, and other vested interests.

Simplicity at least offers the hope of replicability and outreach. The alternative is the ubiquitous pilot project that can almost always be made to succeed, but only at the cost of non-replicability.

True *management* (as opposed to control) is also essential. If it is basically an operational problem, it is one whose solution must begin in the course of design, with sufficient resources and discretionary authority, for example. Management implies continuous monitoring of what is going on, continuous interpretation of why, and discretionary authority to act on the basis of what is learned. The problem of getting competent management is great, but not nearly so great as getting well-motivated management. We grievously need more knowledge from experience about ways to address the problems of motivation and incentives, and about the circumstances under which those ways seem to work.

The problem of incentives is a recurrent theme in the study with which this paper opened, the Oakland project analysis. In that project, seven of the greatest operational problems seemed to be:²⁰

1. Incompatibility of project aims and methods with other commitments of some of the participants. (Bureaucratic advancement?)
2. When incompatibility was absent, then there often was a preference on the part of important participants for other programs. (An urban assignment?)
3. Simultaneous commitments to other projects were common among the participants. (A rural development program will not be the only enterprise of a department or a ministry, and ministries of finance always have many other commitments—most of them preferred to rural development, and some of them incompatible with it.)
4. Dependence on others who lacked a sense of urgency concerning the project was common. (For clearances, supplies, resources, et al., under typical conditions of bureaucratic and market monopsony.)

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-102.

5. There were considerable differences of opinion about leadership and jurisdiction. (Jurisdictional agreements are always problematical when there are new resources at hand.)

6. Legal and procedural disagreements were frequent—especially about technical issues. (Such disagreements are often masks or vehicles for more basic issues.)

7. Agreement was sometimes unbacked by power. (At one point in time the tenant farmers of CADU in Ethiopia offered a good example of this.)

CONCLUSIONS

What can we possibly conclude from this discussion of administrative problems that bear upon integrated rural development?

The Oakland study offered its conclusion at the beginning of its report:

People now appear to think that implementation should be easy; they are, therefore, upset when expected events do not occur or turn out badly. We would consider our own effort a success if more people began with the understanding that implementation, under the best of circumstances, is exceedingly difficult. They would, therefore, be pleasantly surprised when a few good things really happened.²¹

One might argue that all the really difficult problems of integrated rural development are administrative. But such argument is ultimately inconsequential; the nature, not the label, of the problems is what matters, along with an ability to do something about them.

The focus of our concerns sharpens somewhat when we say that the crucial problems are the institutional, strategic, and operational problems of implementation—of moving from visions and concerns towards action. It is neither pleasant nor reassuring to contemplate these problems. If many of them are not unique to integrated rural development schemes, those that are distinctive are also distinctively difficult. These problems are only partly responsive to the applications of technology, only partly subject to formal authority, and only partly amenable to anticipation. Yet they are paramount problems whose solutions can affect a large part of the world.

One wonders: does hard and unconventional scrutiny do disservice by dampening enthusiasm and eroding hope? Or may enhanced insight lead to more auspicious action? This statement certainly offers more questions than answers. Perhaps it will help stimulate the development of practical knowledge about the ways and means of better implementation.

In the final analysis, none of these problems can be solved on paper or through reflection. We can—and should—address the administrative problems of integrated rural development by laying out the issues and tendering possible answers. But the palpable problems can only be truly confronted, and sometimes resolved, in concrete and particular actions.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii.