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**Supporting Field  
Management:  
Implementation  
Assistance to  
the LCADP  
in Liberia**

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## PREFACE

This report presents the second time that Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), provided short-term management assistance to the Lofa County Agricultural Development Project (LCADP) in Liberia through the "Organization and Administration of Integrated Rural Development" contract. The first visit in August 1979 involved helping the vehicle workshop staff to improve transportation support through improvements in its maintenance and supply activities.\* The visit also included a management skills workshop exercise for middle-level LCADP personnel.\*\*

As a result of that first effort, it was decided by project personnel and AID advisers that senior management staff of LCADP could benefit from a similar exercise. To carry this out, a four-person team was assembled. Two members of the team were organization development specialists -- Drs. Thomas Armor and Marvin Loper. Dr. Armor had also been involved in the previous trip to Liberia through this contract. Additionally, two rural development specialists were included -- Dr. Robert af Klinteberg, an anthropologist with prior West African experience, and Dr. George Honadle, a development administration specialist with extensive prior experience in Liberia. Dr. Honadle also serves as co-director of the project funding the visit.

For two weeks in March 1980, Armor, Loper and Klinteberg stayed at the project site and worked with senior project staff to cope with management issues. During the second week, Honadle joined the team.

Numerous people provided support and encouragement during the field trip. They include Jack Cornelius, Sol Sherman, Charles Husick and Peter Weisel of USAID/Monrovia, as well as Jeremiah Tulay and Daniel Goh of LCADP. Their efforts are appreciated and acknowledged.

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\* For information about the first trip, see Davil W. Miller, Management Assistance to LCADP Transportation Logistics: Observations and Recommendations, Washington, D. C.: Development Alternatives, Inc., 1979.

\*\* See Thomas H. Armor, Addressing Problems of Middle Level Management: A Workshop Held at the Lofa County Agricultural Development Project, Washington, D. C.: Development Alternatives, Inc., 1979.

## BACKGROUND

Integrated Rural Development (IRD) programs are especially susceptible to organization and management shortcomings. This is so because IRD efforts tend to be large, complex and located in isolated places where administrative support is weak.

Since IRD strategies focus on multiple objectives such as cooperatives, roads, agricultural production, nutrition and health, the failure to achieve a single objective may negate the entire effort and may even cause damages that result in conditions worse than the original situation. For example, in Liberia's Lofa County Agricultural Development Project (LCADP) increased swamp rice production without health monitoring or preventative action could lead to increased schistosomiasis in the project area. This produces a need for high levels of coordination among project components. Thus, management capacity is severely taxed by the complexity of IRD.

To overcome these difficulties, it is necessary to develop ways for supporting field managers in their efforts to implement IRD projects. This report describes one activity that provided such support to the Lofa County Agricultural Development Project in Liberia. This background section presents

both an overview of the LCADP and an approach to the provision of management assistance for implementation.

The Lofa County Agricultural Development Project (LCADP)

The LCADP is designed to improve the welfare of some 8,000 farm families residing in Upper Lofa County in Liberia through a program of integrated rural development.<sup>1/</sup> The project attempts to increase agricultural production through the improvement of upland rice cultivation, rehabilitation of rice swamps, and development of coffee and cocoa farms. The LCADP also provides for infrastructure improvement, cooperative development, disease control, credit extension and the provision of farm inputs and marketing services.

The project is jointly financed by an AID loan (\$5 million), by a World Bank loan through an IDA credit (\$6 million), and by the Government of Liberia (\$5.9 million). Farmer contributions of labor and cash for input purchases raise the total project budget to \$18 million.

The administrative structure of LCADP consists of a project management unit (PMU) placed within the Ministry of Agriculture but with a high degree of financial and managerial autonomy. The PMU is located in Voinjama, a six-hour drive from Monrovia. The project manager is responsible to a

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<sup>1/</sup> For more details, see Liberia -- Upper Lofa County Rural Development, Capital Assistance Paper, Washington: Agency for International Development, June 1975.

steering committee at the national level headed by the Minister of Agriculture. A county-level coordinating committee provides project management with a liaison with governmental and traditional leaders within the project area. To assist with port clearance and ministry/project communication, a liaison office is located just outside Monrovia.

Cooperative development, especially the organization and training of village farmer groups, is a major mechanism for directly engaging small farmer participation. Credit is to be distributed to small farmers with an average holding of four hectares. By the end of the project, however, it is expected that credit management will devolve from the PMU to the cooperatives.

From 1976 to 1979, the LCADP project manager was an expatriate. At the time of the visit in March 1980, however, the position was occupied by a Liberian. Thus the work took place in an environment characterized by a transition in project leadership.

Changes in leadership can complicate management processes. When new leaders take charge, many of the informal understandings and procedures which regulated staff interactions are lost, misunderstood, questioned or consciously changed. Thus transition dynamics add to management problems. The LCADP, then, was at an important juncture in early 1980.

In 1981, a similar juncture is anticipated. At that time, LCADP is expected to enter a second phase which will approximately double its staff and area of coverage. This will be accomplished by the extension of project activities to lower Lofa County and the incorporation of Liberian Produce Marketing Corporation (LPMC) field staff into the project. Given the geographic isolation of lower Lofa County from Voinjama, it is likely that a semiindependent subproject PMU, responsible to the PMU in Voinjama, will be created. Guiding this expansion and establishing this new PMU will further tax LCADP management capacity.

Given the project's complexity, scale, isolation, and transitional characteristics, it was deemed appropriate to provide field staff with management assistance. The approach to this assistance, however, was not to analyze the situation and propose optimal solutions, but rather to refine the project staff's own ability to diagnose evolving situations and generate their own solutions. To implement this approach, methods of organization development were used to provide management assistance.

#### Providing Management Assistance

When projects are established to promote integrated rural development they generally have multiple objectives and complex designs. When such complexity is combined with the weak

infrastructure located in isolated rural areas, it invariably becomes necessary to provide project staff with management assistance. The challenge is to do it effectively.

Recent perspectives and experiences indicate that a two-fold strategy should be followed.<sup>2/</sup> That is, a formal technical focus on organizational structures, information systems and materials management should be complemented by a focus on decision processes and organizational self-awareness. This second focus is called "organization development."

The organization development (OD) approach can be contrasted with the "purchase model" of consultation, in which the client buys expert information or services. The key difference is that in the purchase method the consultant performs his service for the client, while in the OD method the consultant involves the client in a joint or collaborative diagnosis and resolution of the problem at hand.

Organization development also aims at helping project staff to learn about their own way of doing things. In most organizational contexts this perspective is not readily obvious to members of the organization. Few technically trained

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<sup>2/</sup> See Tom Armor, George Honadle, Craig Olson and Peter Weisel, "Organizing and Supporting Integrated Rural Development Projects: A Twofold Approach to Administrative Development," Journal of Administration Overseas, 18:4 (October 1979), pp. 276-286.

people have ever had the opportunity to learn and develop skills of seeing their own interpersonal process-s and behavior. Yet it is these processes that determine much staff behavior and hence project performance. However, once these processes are made more visible and available to project actors, they are better able to improve the performance of their organization.

OD methods include private coaching and counselling, as well as group activities such as:

- Team building;
- Role playing;
- Goal setting;
- Process observation and feedback; and
- Skill development.

For these methods to be effective, however, they must be used with a clear awareness of their limitations in different cultural or political contexts as well as an understanding of immediate historical occurrences which have affected the social atmosphere at the time of the intervention. Thus an important prelude to any OD activity is the collection of information about the present management environment.

The value of OD approaches to short-term technical assistance becomes apparent when problems of IRD implementation are noted. For example, a recent report on the state of the art

in the organization and administration of integrated rural development identified the following common problems:<sup>3/</sup>

- Built-in resistance to integration and coordination of IRD activities by participating agencies;
- Inability of project managers to effectively supervise and lead technical teams;
- Inadequate information to support project management decisions;
- Lack of incentives for project staff or cooperating organization personnel to act in ways that support IRD objectives;
- Delays due to procurement bottlenecks;
- Diversion of project resources to other uses;
- Inappropriate use of technical assistance;
- Lack of response to project initiatives by beneficiaries; and
- Activities which cannot be sustained after project resources are exhausted.

Solving many of these problems requires more than just the provision of expert advice. Without personal commitment and organizational capacity, the best advice is not likely to be used. Thus, improving IRD implementation requires a technical assistance strategy which builds local capabilities to identify and deal with emerging situations.

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<sup>3/</sup> George Honadle and others. Integrated Rural Development: Making it Work? Washington, D. C.: Development Alternatives, Inc., 1980.

In terms of short-term technical assistance, then, the use of OD represents a potentially useful resource. When it is combined with the experience and skills of the development administration specialist and a knowledge of technical issues, this approach provides an additional dimension of human, cultural, and organizational diagnosis that complements and enhances the effectiveness of the effort.

Such a combination was, in fact, used to provide assistance to LCADP in March 1980. A team of two OD consultants (Armor and Loper) and two rural development specialists (Honadle and af Klinteberg) worked with LCADP staff. The processes and products of that work are noted in the next section of this report.

#### SENIOR MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

Under the terms of the IRD contract, the team of DAI consultants visited the Lofa County Agricultural Development Project for two weeks in mid-March 1980. This visit focused on the management and organizational development needs of the project and was a direct outgrowth of a similar activity in August of 1979. The 1979 work had been a series of workshops with the middle level of the project's staff while the 1980 work was with the manager and deputy manager level. This second effort went beyond the workshop format to include individual consultation.

The following sections present the design, process and resulting issues associated with the 1980 visit.

### Initial Feedback

Upon completion of the August 1979 exercise, it was agreed that a questionnaire would be used to collect information prior to a second visit in 1980. This data collection effort had been suggested by correspondence with the project manager. Answers were requested to three questions:

- What management topics or issues would be most important for the workshop to cover from your point of view?
- Do you have any thoughts or ideas about how this workshop can build on the activities in August with the officer group?
- Are there any new and/or important management issues facing the project since the major changes in staff positions occurred in August?

In addition, the project manager added the following questions:

- What is it about other departments' functions and activities that gives you trouble? Note your feeling and attitudes about the other groups.
- What is it about your functions and activities that give other people trouble? In your honest opinion, what do you think the other group is writing about you?

The anonymous responses of the participants were reproduced and distributed at the first meeting. Not only did these data provide the basis for identifying the management topics

of greatest interest, they also began the problem-solving process itself.

### Capacity Building

The feedback data were used to help determine the nature and substance of the OD intervention to be used with the senior management of LCADP. For example, issues perceived as important by only a few people might be amenable to individual counselling or two-party meetings, while commonly shared concerns might be dealt with in a group exercise or workshop session.

The word "workshop" often describes a standardized package of lectures and exercises that is carried from place-to-place and performed time-after-time in approximately the same manner. However, this is not the approach used with the LCADP. The weaknesses of a "canned" approach include:

- An assumption that standard solutions are available and that knowledge of those solutions will solve problems;
- A belief that increasing organizational stock through classroom training is adequate to improve organizational behavior; and
- A willingness to accept the data provided by outsiders as more useful for resolving implementation difficulties than the data held<sup>4/</sup> by those directly involved in the process.

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<sup>4/</sup> See George Honadle, Thomas Armor, Jerry VanSant and Paul Crawford, Implementing Capacity-Building in Jamaica: Field Experience in Human Resource Development, Washington, D. C.: Development Alternatives, Inc., 1980.

Since the objective of the counselling and workshop was to develop the ability of staff to solve their own problems rather than to provide solutions to present situations, a standardized workshop approach was not used. Instead, an attempt was made to respond to staff definitions of issues and to structure an environment where mutual learning could occur. This was accomplished by using the conclusions of counselling sessions to choose analytical frameworks, exercises, and formats for workshop sessions. Thus, the ICADP senior management workshop followed a capacity-building approach, characterized by a flexible, evolving design rather than an imposed, standardized curriculum.

### Activities

The combination of questionnaire responses and capacity-building approach led to a set of activities which involved working with the project division managers, deputy managers, and other senior project staff (total of 23) as a single group in the afternoons, while the mornings were left open with time available to meet privately with the various divisions. The afternoon sessions dealt with general aspects of management, among them:

- Role of managers;
- Management principles and theory;
- Time management;

- Planning;
- Communications and coordination;
- Motivation;
- Decisionmaking;
- Delegation;
- Staff selection and development;
- Performance evaluation; and
- Professional and interpersonal relations.

In addressing these topics, the consultants sought to relate exercises and specific readings (hand-outs and a management textbook were provided) to the participants' own experience in the project. When appropriate, a link was forged between these topics and the issues being dealt with in the morning consulting work.

Each division was asked to meet separately and identify intra- and interdivisional issues they felt the consultants could help them to understand and to begin to resolve. Although the questionnaire data might provide the background for these divisionally identified issues, they were not shared beyond that particular division except as specifically agreed upon during the consultations.

Six of the seven divisions requested the consultants to work with them to address organizational and managerial concerns. These ranged from highly interpersonal issues to concerns about organization designs for future activities,

interdivisional problem solving meetings, substantive input regarding functional responsibilities, coaching and counseling with staff, and reviewing future action plans developed by each division as part of the overall two-week activity.

One request was for assistance in developing a format and process for reviewing job descriptions. The project manager had previously asked each division manager and deputy manager to prepare such a review of their jobs for discussion with him. Lack of clarity about how this was best done had effectively prevented any division from going forward with the assignment. This concern became an early issue in both the general sessions in the afternoons and in the specific divisional work in the mornings.

Key project staff also expressed a desire to develop more participatory methods of contact with the project beneficiaries. Operational plans were discussed with the Training Division to emphasize participation and involvement of the farmers in both their own training and that of the Agricultural and Commercial Assistants.

Thus, results were generated by a process of individual, confidential consultations with division heads combined with group workshop sessions. These sessions also generated a list of issues.

## Project Issues

During the general sessions the discussion raised several management problems of particular concern. To focus attention more specifically the group developed the following lists. Once the lists were generated, specific recommendations or counselling could follow. The issues addressed were time, motivation, performance evaluation and discipline.

The following items were generated in response to the question of most and least productive use of time. The least productive uses of time were:

- Responding to accident cases;
- Settling subordinates disputes;
- Following up with other divisions' activity;
- Responding to interruptions by boss;
- Reexplaining standard procedures;
- Writing monthly reports and other people's reports;
- Attending lengthy meetings; and
- Explaining job duties to subordinates.

The most productive uses of time were:

- Reviewing assigned jobs;
- Performing field inspections;

- Working on weekends -- uninterrupted;
- Participating in technical discussions;
- Staffing;
- Designing or analyzing work programs;
- Solving unforeseen problems;
- Disbursing petty cash; and
- Innovating -- finding new, exciting ways to do job.

The participants generated the following list of factors they felt were motivators for them and for their staff: <sup>5/</sup>

- Recognition of efforts;
- Cooperation and confidence from superiors;
- Autonomy -- chance to be own boss;
- Challenge;
- Appreciation and admiration from community;
- Responsibility and authority are matched;
- Opportunity for training and learning;
- Productive performance of staff;
- Fringe benefits and privileges;
- Opinions respected and valued (above and below);

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<sup>5/</sup> It is interesting to note how consistent these factors are with those found in European and American management literatures. Given the fact that LCADP is staffed almost entirely by personal indigenous to Lofa County, this suggests that development management in this part of Liberia could benefit from the use of management practices found effective in other contexts.

- Competition among colleagues;
- Fairness of superior;
- Reward for achieving targets;
- Adequate logistic support;
- Two-way communication;
- Dignity protected;
- Job requirements and skills are matched;
- Dependability of superior; and
- Incentives.

The following items were developed as characteristic of a good performance evaluations system:

- Individuals are aware of the criteria upon which one will be evaluated;
- Performance criteria are measured in a manner that recognizes the cyclical nature of LCADP work;
- Rate of achievement is recognized as well as absolute achievement;
- Performance information is available and readily fed back to individuals;
- Exceptional circumstances are recognized when appropriate;
- Performance evaluations are done independently of an individual's previous evaluation(s); and
- Performance evaluations are conducted by people clearly qualified and familiar with the situation.

While no list was generated by the participants, the issue of discipline, its purpose and the procedure for its administration was discussed at length in general sessions as

well as during the consulting work within the divisions. The purpose of discipline as a control method and not as a motivation method was reviewed at length.

The administrative procedure for initiating, reviewing, and applying discipline (typically several days work without pay) was depicted as inconsistent and unreliable. The staff stressed the need for a reliable procedure that utilized the existing chain of command.

#### CONCLUSION

The senior management workshop held at Lofa County was a response to a basic development issue -- the need to develop human resources. Furthermore, it illustrates an approach to technical assistance which provides direct and immediate help to field managers. This final section places the LCADP experience in the wider perspectives of human resource development and the management of uncertainty.

#### Human Resource Development

Much attention has been given to educational alternatives in developing countries.<sup>6/</sup> The present consensus is that

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<sup>6/</sup> See Ronald Dore, The Diploma Disease, Berkely: University of California Press, 1976; Cole Brembeck and Timothy Thompson, New Strategies for Educational Development: The Cross-Cultural Search for Nonformal Alternatives, Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1973.

there is a need for nonformal educational strategies using settings and methods quite different from those of formal school systems.<sup>7/</sup>

Unfortunately, much of the discussion in the area of nonformal education stresses the training of the unemployed, the self-employed or the marginally employed and it neglects the needs of salaried civil servants. It is this latter category, however, which has been entrusted with the job of delivering goods and services, including nonformal educational services, to rural areas. Unless the capabilities of the civil service are raised, it is not realistic to expect rural development to work. This is especially true of IRD efforts such as LCADP.

The workshop and counselling activities at LCADP, then, should be viewed as one form of nonformal education targeted at civil servants. Activities such as these serve numerous purposes: they provide a break from daily routine; they mobilize staff energy; they build staff skills; they help solve problems; and they can be seen as rewards to staff.

Given the complexity of IRD, such methods provide ways for promoting smoother implementation while increasing people's

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<sup>7/</sup> Philip Coombs and Manzour Ahmed, Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

capacity to manage complex processes. This applies to project staff, beneficiaries and the members of support organizations.

The organization development approach used at LCADP, therefore, is a useful addition to the inventory of nonformal strategies for human resource development. Moreover, it provides a management mechanism for dealing with real problems that arise during project implementation.

### Managing Uncertainty

Integrated rural development projects such as LCADP operate in social and physical environments which are constantly changing and often harsh. Furthermore, the technologies available for delivering goods and services, supporting beneficiary response and promoting self-sustaining development are not clear cut, certain, or routine. Development management, in fact, is as much an art as a science.

When this situation is combined with the fact that most project managers were trained in technical skills but not in management methods, it is readily apparent that most -- and probably all -- managers will need outside management assistance during their tenure. Such assistance, however, does not always lead in the right direction. For example, an overemphasis on management systems and rigid procedures can make it more difficult for managers to deal effectively with new and unexpected situations.

To counteract this tendency, it has been recommended that development projects adopt a "process" as opposed to a "blueprint" design.<sup>8/</sup> When the uncertainty of social technologies and rural environments is combined with a capacity-building view of rural development, a flexible, adaptive, learning-oriented approach is needed. This is called a process model.

The elements of a process model vary among individual programs -- some are more process-oriented than others. Nevertheless, general characteristics of a process orientation include the following:

- A design broken into discrete phases;
- A large amount of short-term technical assistance;
- An emphasis on action-oriented training among both staff and beneficiaries;
- A use of temporary task forces;
- A reward system consistent with a learning orientation;
- An applied research component;
- A learning component, such as a "rolling" regional plan; and
- A redesign orientation, such as periodic revisions of project organization, project objectives and job descriptions of project personnel.

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<sup>8/</sup> Charles F. Sweet and Peter F. Weisel, "Process Versus Blueprint Models for Designing Rural Development Projects," in George Honadle and Rudi Klaus (eds.) International Development Administration: Implementation Analysis for Development Projects, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979

The organization development activities reported in this paper illustrate a flexible approach to problem-solving and capacity-building. They are consistent with a process approach and they provide IRD project managers with techniques for guiding the activities of multidisciplinary staff, for building the capabilities of beneficiary groups such as cooperatives, and for dealing with crucial management issues as they arise.

Thus, they must be seen not only as an approach to non-formal education, but also as practical methods for managing the complex and uncertain process of integrated rural development.<sup>10/</sup>

### Recommendations

It is not easy to effectively manage an integrated rural development project. The project manager's role and situation are typically characterized by complex designs, little control over the many actors involved in implementation, high

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<sup>9/</sup> See Honadle and others, p. 44-45.

<sup>10/</sup> Some aspects of their practicality are the facts that they deal with real problems rather than theoretical exercises, they can be interspersed with ongoing daily work, and they do not rely entirely on workshops which require a large staff presence. This last item is especially important because the value of managerial time is often quite high in terms of project performance. Consultants often do not appreciate this fact. See Robert Chambers, Managing Rural Development, Uppsala: Institute of African Studies, 1974.

expectations among beneficiaries, uncertain technologies, highly variable sociopolitical climates and, to cap it all off, the IRD project is usually in the spotlight -- a constant flow of national and international visitors focus on every project dimension. This is certainly a formula for difficulty.

Nevertheless, the organization development approach specified in this report offers some promise. In fact, the staff of LCADP has been particularly receptive to the uses of OD and, as the project expands its area coverage in Phase II, OD would be a logical tool to use to help management during the expansion period and the initial establishment of a management team in Lower Lofa County.

Additionally, organization development consultants could be used to build the capacity of farmer cooperatives to perform project-related functions. For this to happen, however, it is necessary to budget Phase II funds for short-term, management-focused technical assistance.

In summary, then, four actions are recommended:

- Phase II funds for short-term management should be budgeted;
- During the beginning of Phase II, consultants should be used to assist the management of the transition to a wider project area;
- The use of OD consultants should be extended to the beneficiary organization level of the project; and

- Periodic (semiannual) use of short-term OD consultants should become a routine management practice. Moreover, the capacity to engage in OD activities should be built into the training division of the project.

This will not erase all of the difficulties of implementation, but it should help management to guide project activities in ways which contribute more effectively to improving the welfare of rural Liberians.