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DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS IN RURAL SOCIETIES

Resumé of a research project conducted by Michigan State University under contract with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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Research on methods of accelerating the diffusion and adoption of agricultural technology is badly needed if agricultural production is to keep pace with population expansion. While there is a considerable body of diffusion research results from developed countries (mainly the U.S.), it cannot be applied to traditional cultures without further testing to take into account the unique factors of such cultures.

Results of the present research study will be of use to such development programs such as the Agency for International Development, United Nations agencies, Alliance for Progress, the U.S. Peace Corps, private foundations and agencies, national community development, public health, and extension service programs. The investigation will contribute to our theoretical understanding of the process of national economic and social development.

The present study is designed to investigate the diffusion and adoption of innovations under a wide range of social and economic conditions in developing countries. The investigation seeks to accelerate the adoption of new ideas (especially in agriculture, but also in nutrition and other fields) by explaining why programs of change are relatively successful or unsuccessful in rural villages in developing societies. Knowing which communication channels and techniques are effective in different social environments and with different types of people should provide useful guidelines for change agents in developing a communication strategy for diffusing new ideas in developing nations. More specifically, the present study will focus on three kinds of objectives:

I. Knowledge Useful to Change Agents

1. Identifying village innovators and opinion leaders, and determining their distinctive social and economic characteristics, communication behavior, attitudes and values, so that change agents can more effectively introduce innovations through them.
2. Identifying the role and influence of various communication channels and techniques such as mass media, opinion leaders, personal contacts, and demonstration projects in the innovation process.
3. Introducing various communication and economic incentives (such as credit) through various communication channels, and determining the response to these incentives.
4. Identifying the influence of presently existing price incentives, credit, land tenure, marketing practices, and other economic factors on the adoption of new ideas.

II. Methods Useful to Further Research

5. Developing improved research methods for study of the diffusion and adoption of innovations in traditional societies, so that these methods of investigation may be utilized in future studies.

III. Strengthening Personnel and Host-Country Institutions

6. Training both U.S. and non-U.S. social researchers in methods of study design, data-gathering, and analysis for future investigation of the diffusion and adoption of innovations in developing societies.
7. Building an institutional structure for diffusion-adoption research and action programs in the participating countries so that self-stimulated research and action programs will continue after this research effort has been completed.

Although the present study is designed as a four-year effort, it is clear that the planning of a ten-year research effort would be more realistic in achieving the substantial goals set forth here. The total effort should include more than research. It should also emphasize developing the competence of two kinds of host-country institutions: change agencies and social research agencies. In both cases, training is involved in the host-country and in counterpart U.S. institutions. A four-year initial period was selected for two reasons: (1) it is the minimum amount of time in which enough research evidence can be obtained to develop a fairly meaningful picture of the diffusion process in developing countries; and (2) a re-evaluation of the nature and extent of further research efforts needed should be made after a tentative description of the diffusion process has been constructed from evidence obtained in this investigation.

The present research project will be conducted by the Department of Communication, Michigan State University, through contract with the U.S. Agency for International Development. M.S.U. will furnish a Project Director and a headquarters staff for general coordination and data-processing in the U.S. It will field three research teams, one each in a Latin American, an Asian, and an African country. Each will consist of a Country Project Leader and an Associate Project Leader for each of the country teams. M.S.U. will also employ a national Associate Project Leader and a number of research associates in each country. These country teams will maintain liaison not only with the local AID mission, but with those government agencies and action programs whose interests are related to the scope of the project. In each country of study, a Project Advisory Committee will be formed to represent

national and U.S. organizations. The entire research project is guided by a similar committee, composed of outstanding U.S. and international scholars in the diffusion research field.

Three major cultural areas of the world are included in the study design: Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The three main countries of study will be India, Nigeria, and Brazil.

The Brazil study will be headquartered at the University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, and through cooperation with Associação Brasileiro de Crédito e Assistência Rural (ABCAR) and the Rural University of the State of Minas Gerais (UREMG), Vicosa. Project Leader is Gordon C. Whiting, and Associate Project Leader is William Herzog. These investigators will initiate the project in Brazil about June 15, 1965.

The India study will be headquartered at the National Institute for Community Development (NICD), Hyderabad. Project Leader is Dr. Frederick Fliegel, and the National Project Co-Leader is Dr. Prodipto Roy. The India field operations will begin about December, 1965.

The Nigeria study will be headquartered at the Economic Development Institute, University of Nigeria, Enugu. Field operations will begin about October, 1965.

A shorter term and more specific diffusion study will also be conducted in Turkey, probably under subcontract with MIT. Other countries (such as Kenya and Pakistan) will be sites for partial replication of the present investigation, although none are directly sponsored as part of the present project.

The study design consists of three major data-gathering phases:

- I. The first phase will be an analysis of the relative success or failure of programs of change in agricultural production in about 80 villages in each country. The unit of analysis is the village, and the data will be secured from secondary sources and through interviews with village leaders and change agents.
- II. The second phase will be an analysis of data obtained mainly through personal interviews with villagers living in a selected number of villages (probably about 16) in each of the three countries. The unit of analysis in this phase will be the farm family. In addition to such farm innovations as fertilizer and new crop seed varieties, data will be collected on economic variables such as use of credit, marketing practices, and land tenure. In certain villages, these Phase II interviews will constitute a baseline for Phase III.
- III. Certain incentives for adoption of practices may be introduced in selected villages. The effectiveness of these incentives will be evaluated through observations and follow-up interviews as part of a controlled field experiment.

The project is envisioned as a four-year effort. It is anticipated that by the end of the second year, data-gathering for Phase II would be completed in most of the three major countries of study.

An important function of the headquarters staff will be the organization and maintenance of a Diffusion Documents Center. The approximately 700 diffusion studies completed to date are being classified and IBM-coded along various dimensions (such as the type of innovation studied, locale

and method of data-gathering, and nature of findings), and this information will be fed into a computerized data-retrieval system. As past studies are analyzed and future research findings are added, a set of generalizations about the adoption of innovations will be accumulated in a meaningful and consistent manner. Bibliographies will be published, as well as other analyses of materials in the Documents Center, at regular intervals as a service to social researchers and change agencies.

Attempts are being made at Michigan State University by the headquarters staff to simulate the diffusion of innovations with a CDC 3600 computer. To date, a computer program has been developed to simulate idea diffusion in a hypothetical village. Next steps will be to utilize improved versions of this simulation model to analyze data from the Phase I and II studies in the three countries.

Reports and papers from the project will include (in addition to interim progress statements): a final report from each country presenting the results of all phases of the country study; a final cross-comparison of the individual country studies, including conclusions and recommendations based on the entire research program; and a terminal report describing methodology for conduct of future diffusion-adoption research in traditional societies.