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DESIGNING PROJECTS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Submitted to
Office of Rural and Administrative Development
Agency for International Development
Under Contract No. AID/ta-C-73-41

Development Alternatives, Inc.
1823 Jefferson Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

August 15, 1978

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By Peter F. Weisel

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PREFACE

This Handbook is the result of a series of contracts issued to Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), by the Office of Rural and Administrative Development and its immediate predecessors within the Agency for International Development. The original research contract culminated in the publication of the report *Strategies for Small Farmer Development*, submitted to AID in 1975. Subsequent DAI involvement in the design of rural development projects generated a report entitled, *The "New Directions" Mandate: Studies in Project Design, Approval and Implementation*, first submitted to AID in 1977. In a related contract, DAI prepared a state-of-the-art study on *Information for Decisionmaking in Rural Development* for the same office.

One issue that is addressed in all of these reports deals with the process of project design: the information requirements for design, how such requirements can be met, and how information can be transformed so that meaningful rural development projects result. It is with these issues that this Handbook deals.

A principal source of the materials used in this Handbook is a paper prepared in 1976 by Mr. Charles F. Sweet and Dr. Peter F. Weisel, entitled "Data Requirements for the Design of Area Development Projects." This paper was subsequently used by several DAI project design teams as a guide for data collection in project design. Other sources include the *Strategies* report, the *Information for Decisionmaking* report, and the *"New Directions" Mandate* report, as well as the DAI experience in project design over the last five years. The task of putting this material in the present Handbook form was undertaken mainly by Dr. Peter F. Weisel of the DAI staff.

The result, we hope, is a Handbook that will prove useful to project designers in the difficult task of designing meaningful rural development projects.

Donald R. Mickelwait
President

August 15, 1978

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A project has been identified and you have the responsibility to design it. The set of problems with which you are immediately faced is common to every person commencing such a task: the need to determine what data to collect; how much data to collect; when to collect it (e.g., prior to the commencement of project implementation, or as the project is carried out); how it should be collected; who should do the work; and how the data that are gathered can be effectively used in preparing the Project Paper.

Unfortunately there are few straightforward answers to any of these questions. We are all too familiar with the lengthy guides that attempt to spell out how it should be done. They often include endless lists of data that are suggested for collection, while neglecting to explain how the data can be used in project preparation.

This Handbook is developed to help answer these questions as they relate to the design of area development -- or rural development -- projects. It is intended for the use of those actually doing the design work: those in charge of design teams, those carrying out the field data collection, and those responsible for utilizing the data in tailoring the project to the local environment.

At the outset it is important to address four basic issues: the distinction between information needed for project design and that needed for project approval; the difference in level and type of data needed depending upon the approach taken to project development; the role of data collection and host country organizational involvement in project design, and the problem of blueprinting project designs.

INFORMATION FOR DESIGN AS DISTINCT FROM PROJECT APPROVAL

There is an important distinction between information needed for project design and that needed for approval. A project needs to be designed using information concerning the economic, social, cultural, political and organizational environment in which it will be implemented. The soundness of the resulting design should, ideally, be the principal basis upon which approval is given. To the extent that this is the case, information needs for design and approval overlap.

At the same time AID (as well as other donors) legitimately requests specific information that is not integral to the design itself, but which is sought to help determine whether the proposed project satisfies its funding criteria. In the case of AID Project Paper preparation, these information needs are not

insignificant: they are detailed in AID Handbook 3. This present handbook does not focus on these requirements; rather its intent is to specify data requirements and data use for project design.[1]

DATA REQUIREMENT DIFFERENCES AND PROJECT APPROACH

The level and type of data required for project design will vary significantly with the approach taken to project development. Because of the importance of this consideration for data specification, it deserves some elaboration.

Often two extreme approaches are contrasted: the so-called "blueprint" project designs, and the "process" approach to project development. The former is typified by certainty on the part of the project designers that the technology and intervention techniques previously identified are appropriate and, given good management, will work in a local environment. It assumes that

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[1] A factor complicating the determination of information needed for approval is the fact that adherence to the AID Handbook instructions does not guarantee smooth passage of a project through the review and approval process. In practice a considerable number of judgmental decisions (relating to approval, delay, redesign) are made by various individuals involved in the approval process. These decisions are made with varying degrees of discretionary latitude. This Handbook does not attempt to explain this decisionmaking process, particularly Section 611(a)(1) "Adequate Planning," or environmental requirements. Experience suggests that the approval process adds to but does not change the fundamental thrust of or need for a satisfactory project design.

Further discussion of this issue and an empirical review can be found in Development Alternatives, Inc., *The "New Directions" Mandate: Studies in Project Design, Approval and Implementation* (two volumes), submitted to the Office of Rural and Administrative Development, AID, January 23, 1978.

solutions to problems are known and that projects are merely vehicles for applying them. In such projects field-testing and the ongoing collection of data for purposes of assessing and adjusting project activities is seen as unnecessary. When blueprint projects fail, blame is generally placed on "poor management" or lack of cooperation" rather than poor selection of technology or intervention techniques.

Recent development experience has shown that rural development projects that are designed in this manner have a high incidence of failure precisely because of their inflexibility, their neglect of data-gathering and field-testing aimed at improving implementation, and their assumption that appropriate interventions are known.[1]

In contrast to this thrust is the process approach, which begins with the notion that, more often than not, we have little knowledge of which specific interventions are likely to work over the long run. In this case selected interventions are tried, data are collected, field tests are frequently conducted to assess their effects, and project activities are redesigned in

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[1] See E. R. Morss, J. K. Hatch, D. R. Mickelwait, and C. F. Sweet, *Strategies for Small Farmer Development* (two volumes), Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1976. This report raises serious questions about conventional -- essentially blueprint -- approaches and formulates an alternative strategy capable of both identifying appropriate strategies and applying them. The generalizations are drawn from those cases in the study where self-sustaining development did seem to be taking hold. The factors associated with this success were isolated and consideration was given to alternative methods of building those factors into future projects. This led to the specification of the process approach.

accordance with what is learned over time. Projects are, in effect, modified and adapted as knowledge is gained about their specific environments. In the extreme process approach case, all that is required for initiating project activity is a specification of project objectives, a determination of the area and target group, decisions on implementation arrangements to use, and a budget.

This dichotomy between the process and more conventional blueprint approaches is admittedly extreme. Though the conventional approach is still found, projects today are frequently designed with some mix of these approaches. For example, through adaptive research on farmers' lands we may be relatively certain of a particular small farm technology -- e.g., proper seeds, production practices -- and may wish to initiate this technology immediately. At the same time our certainty about the most appropriate intervention technique may be far less, requiring considerable ongoing testing and retesting. In both cases a certain level of data-gathering will be necessary to determine whether what we expected to work was, in fact, working.

It is probably most useful for the project designers to think of all these approaches as part of a continuum, with the blueprint model at the one extreme and the process approach at the other with a number of combinations in between. The level and type of data required for project design will differ a great deal depending upon where one is on the continuum. In projects designed to start with only a few resources, to build as time

passes, information for initial design will likely be modest. In contrast information needs will be substantiated if the project is intended to entail an immediate high level of activity and resource outlay, and comprise a number of discrete components.

The specification of data requirements, design implications and strategies for project design spelled out in this Handbook deal with only process approach projects, but include those ranging from the extreme to projects that make a substantial upfront resource commitment.

DATA COLLECTION AND HOST COUNTRY ORGANIZATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN PROJECT DESIGN

We wish to avoid project designs which, while perhaps tightly argued and logical, do not reflect the needs or realities of a local population that will be affected or a real commitment of the host country to implementation. Such designs are not difficult to find; often they are produced by donor agency staff in offices far removed from a proposed project area. They lack (a) relevant and reliable information related to the local, regional and/or national levels; and (b) the degree of involvement with both local residents and government officials that will evoke a level of commitment to the project that is necessary if it is to be implemented effectively. These dimensions of project design are dealt with here.

BLUEPRINTING PROJECT DESIGNS

Just as the concrete specification of implementation procedures prior to project initiation has proven faulty, any attempt to blueprint a particular set of instructions for project design will fail. This Handbook contains no such sequential checklist to be undertaken. Rather it is an attempt to help designers to integrate the requirements for project design into their own systematic approach to development, to be used in any particular environment as needed. Specifically, the suggestions herein must be general enough to deal with the complexity caused by:

- Different requirements for data collection and testing. While understanding the local social and cultural milieu may be the first priority in many African contexts, the operation of government mechanisms, project coordination and cooperation may be the priority focus in Latin America.
- Different levels of development of the human and economic infrastructure, which may call for a project to assume all functions of development in one instance, and assistance to a solitary constraining problem in a second.
- Different levels of incentive structures, economic determinism, risk acceptance and cultural priorities among the target population. Mechanized farming on irrigated land in Chile will have very different sets of problems to overcome than subsistence pastoralists in the Sudan.

Finally each project, government, AID mission and designer has access to a number of different development models. Those operating under the "trickle-down" theory of development will use a different set of strategies than those seeking direct aid

to the poorest of the poor, who will also differ from those seeking to assist small farmers under the hypothesis that secondary effects will aid the landless in rural areas.[1] "Basic needs" strategies may, and then again may not, be somewhat different from self-sustaining economic growth which allows the target population to become independent of outside subsidies. For most project designers, the basic development strategy is implicit, and can only be discerned by careful examination of the concepts underlying the project approach. Categorizing each theory, and applying the results to a different set of data requirements would quickly overwhelm the focus of this modest Handbook. Rather, the argument presented is that all designers, whatever their underlying philosophy, should operate on real-world data. It is the information necessary for design, and the implications of that information, which is the subject under study here.

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[1] "Strategy" is used in its largest, macro context here. In this instance it is contrasted with the "strategy for project development," a far more restrictive concept presented in the following pages.

CHAPTER TWO

INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PROJECT DESIGN

PREVENTING DATA OVERKILL

We have already pointed out that an area development project design must make sense in the political, economic, social, cultural and organizational milieu in which it is to operate. The design is, in essence, a plan of action for what is to be carried out. The plan of action can range from little more than locating a single technical advisor in an area, to creating a large integrated rural development project with several discrete components. Information needs for this latter type of project dwarf those of the former.

For project design work, information is needed both to specify a plan of action and to identify factors likely to impinge on that plan. In completing the actual design it is critical to determine what is relevant and when. In a short period of time, for instance, an experienced rural development specialist can accumulate a large body of data that will be invaluable during project implementation. However perhaps only a small portion of this will be immediately appropriate for inclusion in the design. Too often project designers succumb to writing lengthy narratives, based on the endless lists of generalized data requirements referred to earlier. From several standpoints

this approach is a costly one:

- Time and resources are expended in collecting, processing and packaging data for inclusion in a lengthy project design paper;
- In attempting to cover "everything" the designer may give insufficient attention or emphasis to the critical elements; and
- In attempting to read "everything" the reviewer may fail to grasp the critical elements of the project.

An informed designer will always know more about both the project environment and the strategy of development assistance than can or should be expressed in the pages of a Project Paper. An abundance of data can produce an overkill effect when used indiscriminately in the design; on the other hand it can be extremely valuable once project implementation is under way.

SPECIFYING CRITICAL DECISION CATEGORIES IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

To specify data requirements for project design satisfactorily involves narrowing the information collected to the most useful. Because different rural development projects have different data requirements for design, is it possible to narrow the data to be collected effectively without considering each project separately?

The answer to the question is "yes." The most effective approach is to define data requirements in the context of the decisions that planners must make in the process of project design. It is possible to define a set of decisions, referred to in what follows as decision categories, which are common to virtually every rural development project. We will break these categories into subcategories, define critical questions that must be asked about each for design decisions, and indicate the design implications. Only then will we look at specific data requirements for different projects.

What we are suggesting, then, are several discrete steps for the project designer to follow in defining data for collection:

- Step One: Identify the decision categories that must be considered in project design;
- Step Two: Address a set of critical questions that must be asked for design decisions;
- Step Three: Understand the design implications of the questions asked; and
- Step Four: Specify the data to be collected.

The decision categories that we will consider below are:

- Defining project goals, including indicators of success;
- Specifying a strategy for project development;
- Specifying project components;
- Determining project management arrangements; and
- Specifying project resource commitments.

Defining Project Goals

Figure 1 spells out in general terms the decisionmaking subcategories that you as a project designer must consider, critical questions for making design decisions, and design implications for the first decision category, defining project goals.[1]

In commencing a project design, you may begin with any of several different levels of goal specification. In some instances goals are specified by the host government, and in others they are left open and evolve only during the design and, in some cases, the implementation process. It frequently falls upon the project designer to be certain that project goals are well defined and understood. The need for detailed specification of both goals and purposes is straightforward and is reflected by columns (3) and (4) of Figure 1: a decision to initiate a project should be predicated upon the complementarity of the goals of the various "actors." The primary actors in a project commonly include the host country executing agencies, the host country implementing agencies, the external donor agencies, and the project target population. When goals are contradictory, or if formal agreement is reached but the interpretations of the goals vary significantly, confusion will reign with

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[1] The specific data needed for design are suggested, and the types of data significantly narrowed, by the critical questions for design decisions listed in Column 3 of Figures 1 through 5. Data requirements are spelled out in detail for two alternative projects in the following section of this chapter.

FIGURE 1

PROJECT DESIGN -- DECISIONMAKING CATEGORIES, CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

(1) Decision Categories	(2) Decision Subcategories	(3) Critical Questions For Design Decisions	(4) Design Implications
1. Project goals, including indicators of success	Goals might be broadly specified, e.g., to improve the social and economic well-being of the poor. Alternatively they may be more narrowly defined, both with regard to their aim and to the target population. Indicators of success are suggested by the project goal and may include: • Increase in income; • Increase in productivity; • Increase in production; • Increase in employment; • Increase in social services; • Improvement in infrastructure; • More equitable distribution of income; • Increase in capabilities to solve development problems; • Increase in the capacity of the benefits of development to become self-sustaining.	What is the target population and the geographical coverage of the project? What is the project trying to achieve? Are the goals of the primary "actors" in the project mutually complementary? Contradictory? Can differences in goals be reconciled? Do major trade-offs arise when assessing each possible development intervention (activity) in the context of the success indicators?	Given alternative goal sets, should the development activity be initiated? If major trade-offs appear, they must be specified and monitored throughout the life of the project.

regard to what the project is attempting to achieve and what it is that should be measured or evaluated in terms of project impact.

Examples of this type of problem abound. In some instances development projects are designed with the implicit understanding between the donor and the host country executing agency that the overall goal falls under the general umbrella of improving the social and economic well-being of the poor, which is used in Column (2) of Figure 1. However this goal may be interpreted differently by the two. For example, to a host country plagued by balance-of-payments problems, such a goal might be interpreted and narrowed to mean improving that situation, with the consequent implications for the choice of project activities. If there is a significant divergence of goals, the design decision might be that the activity should be initiated or assisted by a different donor.

Indicators of project success in effect "fall out" of the goal that is chosen; they reflect the specific changes that the project is intended to effect. Such indicators are needed for several reasons. First, they are important in assessing the impact of development efforts over time. Second, they allow officials and project staff to identify possible development trade-offs for each intervention that is planned or that takes place in a particular area. Such trade-offs are legendary. Costly agricultural inputs may be introduced that result in

significant increases in production but are too expensive to be sustained by local farmers. Others include the construction of such economic infrastructure as irrigation and road systems and their possible effects on the agro-ecological system; or the expansion of cash crop production and its effects on family nutrition. A well specified set of success measures will allow project planners and staff to analyze and draw conclusions about the combination of development strategy, activities, and resources that is most appropriate for producing the desired developmental change.

Specifying a Strategy for Project Development

Figure 2 relates to the choice of a strategy for project development. Since this paper addresses data requirements and use for the process approach to project development, which can be applied to large integrated rural development projects or to more narrowly focused rural development efforts, there will be variation in the extent to which the approach is applied, or the strategy that is developed with regard to the level of upfront commitment of resources. This includes, by implication, the extent of adaptive testing and information gathering that is carried out to modify or develop the project components as the project is implemented. We have contrasted the strategy of beginning project implementation with a minimum level of resources -- as a single technician with a specified target population and budget -- with that of initially defining a number of project components and committing a large amount of resources. For

FIGURE 2

PROJECT DESIGN -- DECISIONMAKING CATEGORIES, CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

(1) Decision Categories	(2) Decision Subcategories	(3) Critical Questions For Design Decisions	(4) Design Implications
2. Strategy for project development	In pursuing the process approach to project development, strategies revolve around the level of resources initially committed and the adaptive testing as well as the information gathering carried out to develop project components.	What strategy is compatible with the government's philosophy and best suited to achieve the selected development goals and maximize the impact of development activity?	Selection of strategy to be built into project design.

all projects the choice of strategy will be made along this continuum.

It is important to stress that this decision category is distinct from, but not completely independent of, the decision concering appropriate project components to include in the design. The level of knowledge about what components might or might not work will influence the strategy choice, and the more relevant information that is available, the better. But data collection and analysis have significant attendant costs, which means that marginal costs and benefits have to be considered. The more ambitious and complex the project activities are, the more information is needed as a prerequisite. There will be cases when much of the information needed for design is already available; in those cases fairly detailed project components can be specified with little additional data-gathering. On the other hand, when that level of knowledge does not exist, a decision will be made about what strategy to follow in developing the project, which will influence the level of data that will be collected and therefore the detail in which project components are designed.

Specifying Project Components

A glance at Figure 3 reveals the design decisions and the type of questions that must be addressed in the specifications of project components. The questions focus on identifying potential project activities and possible constraints to their

FIGURE 3

PROJECT DESIGN -- DECISIONMAKING CATEGORIES, CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

(1) Decision Categories	(2) Decision Subcategories	(3) Critical Questions For Design Decisions	(4) Design Implications
3. Specification of components	Macro-level considerations, including possible financial constraints, government philosophy and priorities, and the national/regional level decisionmaking process.	Are these potential financial constraints that would inhibit the flow of resources to the project? How do government philosophy and priorities influence the scope of the project components? How are decisions made and by whom that affect a local-level project?	In general terms, the design implications in this category relate to decisions concerning the appropriate components to include in the design. What specific macro-level considerations affect the structure of the components?
	Agricultural production: • Ecological and demographic factors	What are the characteristics of the major ecological zones in the project area as related to development potential? What major demographic characteristics influence area development?	How do the ecology and the population structure dictate what can or should be grown?
	• Extending existing technologies	To what extent do differences exist in technologies used by the more productive and the less productive farmers in the area that the technologies can be tested and extended to the less productive?	Should the project be designed to initially exploit differences in existing technologies in the local area.
	• Research and extension	To what extent have new technologies been developed and tested on farmers' land and a two-way communication system developed to help in the introduction, modification and acceptance of new technologies? What has the pattern of diffusion of new ideas been in the project area?	Must the project design provide resources for research and extension -- as well as for improving the agricultural supply system, marketing and storage, and credit.
	• Agricultural supplies	Are agricultural supplies being provided on a correct and timely basis?	
	• Marketing and storage	Are marketing -- including the purchase of agricultural products as well as the provision of basic supplies and consumption items -- and storage needs being met?	
	• Credit	Are there credit needs for the development of the area that are not being effectively met?	
	Nonagricultural economic production, including decisions related to extending existing enterprises and initiating new ones.	What alternative economic activities can be initiated or expanded? What research has been/is being undertaken related to new enterprises?	Same as in the case of agricultural production above.

FIGURE 3 (Continued)

(1) Decision Categories	(2) Decision Subcategories	(3) Critical Questions For Design Decisions	(4) Design Implications
3. Specification of components (continued)	Economic support infractructure	Is any part of the economic support infrastructure -- including the transport system, communications network, education/training facilities, power resources, physical infrastructure, and soil and water conservation activities -- acting as a constraint to potential project activities?	Should resources be provided in the design to improve this support infrastructure.
	Social support infrastructure	Is the social infrastructure -- including health and nutrition services, water supply and community services -- acting as a constraint to any of the project activities?	Same as in the case of economic support infrastructure.
	Local organizations	What are the actual and potential contributions to development that are being, or could be, made by the local population organized both formally and informally?	Should project resources be utilized to develop local organizations through which project activities can be carried out, and if so, how special a concern is that the activities should become self-sustaining.

implementation. For area development projects it is necessary to ask about agricultural and non-agricultural production potential and problems of the project area; how macro-level considerations (e.g., host government financial constraints, development objectives and priorities) might affect a potential project; whether any aspect of the economic and social support infrastructure presents any existing or potential constraints to development activity; and what are the local organizations or groupings within a given economic and social setting, and how are they structured, how do they function, and what are their potential development contributions?

For example a designer must look into the availability of agricultural supplies and the adequacy of markets for crops being grown in the area. Likewise, possible constraints to increased agricultural production need to be determined, such as the adequacy of the transport system, whether water resources are sufficient, etc.

The general design implications are straightforward. Given the project goal and the local and national environments, how can project resources be utilized to structure project components to ensure maximum development impact?

Determining Project Management Arrangements

Design decisions related to project management arrangements are summarized in Figure 4. This is a key decision set, which

FIGURE 4

PROJECT DESIGN -- DECISIONMAKING CATEGORIES, CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

(1) Decision Categories	(2) Decision Subcategories	(3) Critical Questions For Design Decisions	(4) Design Implications
4. Project management arrangements	Structure and capacity of alternative implementing arrangements to plan, manage and evaluate potential development activities.	Are changes/improvements necessary in existing administrative/management systems or is the adoption of alternative systems necessary for project activities to be effectively planned, implemented, and evaluated, including: • Planning structure and capacity to develop programs that are tailored to the potentials and needs of particular localities; • Implementation structure and capacity to mobilize project resources in a way that complements local resources to ensure effective implementation; • Data collection and analysis approach and capacity that allow for effective planning, implementation, evaluation, and modification of development activities; • Financial management structure and capability that adequately account for the expenditure of existing resources and that can accommodate an infusion of additional resources.	A determination of the organizational/management structure within which the project will be implemented. Whether resources (both technical and financial) aimed at improving the structure/capacity of local administrative and management systems need to be included in the project design. Whether alternative systems need to be adopted.

depends on the structure and capacity of alternative implementing arrangements for the project. Such arrangements can vary widely, from working within existing public or private sector institutions to setting up autonomous project implementation units.

The critical questions for design revolve around the capacity of the chosen implementation vehicle to plan activities that take the characteristics of a local area into account, to mobilize resources for implementation, to carry out a variety of necessary data collection and analysis activities, and to handle the often difficult task of project financial management. The design implication of this category is straightforward: How will project management arrangements be structured and how might project resources be distributed to ensure that the necessary management capability is developed?

Specifying Project Resource Commitment

Figure 5 spells out decisions necessary to specify both host country and donor resource commitments. The strategy for project development will have already defined, in general terms, the level of resources that will be initially committed. The four concerns here are the types, sources, and timing of resources, as well as the project budget. This information will allow you as a project designer to incorporate into the design the requirements for committing resources to project activities.

FIGURE 5

PROJECT DESIGN -- DECISIONMAKING CATEGORIES, CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

(1) Decision Categories	(2) Decision Subcategories	(3) Critical Questions For Design Decisions	(4) Design Implications
5. Specifying resource commitments	For both the donor and host government: • Types of resources -- resource mix. • Sources of resources. • Timing of resources. • Budgets.	What types/quantity of resources are necessary to carry out the potential project activities? What is the optimal relationship between external and domestic resource commitments to project activities? What is optimal timing of both interest and external resources? What are workable mechanisms whereby both AID and the host country can deliver on their resource commitments in a timely manner?	Determine the resource requirements for project activities. Determine the mechanisms for AID and the host country to meet their commitments. Develop a project budget.

This decision category is important for several reasons. The project must include appropriate incentives and mechanisms to ensure that "cooperating" agencies and departments fulfill on their commitments of staff, operating funds, transportation, specialists, etc. This is necessary since rural development almost always spans a number of functional areas and line ministry responsibilities. While it is relatively easy to agree on language concerning "coordination of activities" in a Project Paper, it is generally far more difficult to obtain the promised cooperation once the project is under way.

In a similar vein, it is necessary to define usefully the mechanisms through which AID will deliver resources in a timely way. Projects are far too often bogged down because of seemingly endless delays in AID procurement of both goods and people.

Finally it is important to obtain a commitment from the host country to implement the project as designed. In some instances the host government is less concerned with benefitting a particular target group than is the donor. The most tested method for obtaining such a commitment is through participatory involvement of host country officials at all levels.

SPECIFYING DATA REQUIREMENTS IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

Do not despair. Though there is considerable detail in the preceding section, it merely provides a decision framework from which a project designer can work. This framework can help determine the specific data to be collected, which will depend upon the extent to which project components will be detailed in the project design, or where the project lies on the continuum to which we have referred.

We have chosen to present two hypothetical examples of project data requirements, one in which few resources are initially committed to the project and project components are not spelled out in detail, and a second in which they are. Each of these cases must be considered in the context of decision categories, critical questions, and design implications.

Case I

Let us first examine the case of the "extreme" process approach project. The data requirements for each of the decision categories are detailed below.

I. Decision Category:

Defining project goals (Figure 1).

Data Requirements:

- Data related to choosing target population, including population and income distribution;
- Data related to choosing geographical coverage of project, including same data as above; and

- Detailed goals of the project, defined in collaboration with individuals/agencies within the host government most directly involved with the project.

Design Decisions:

Definition of target population, geographical area and goals.

II. Decision Category:

Specifying a strategy for project development (Figure 2).

Data Requirements:

- Government philosophy/position on rural development strategy;
- The level of information already available that is needed to specify project components; and
- Judgment relating to the attendant costs of gathering more data for project design.

Design Decisions:

Though we have, for the sake of illustration, chosen to specify that this project will follow the extreme process approach, in fact a decision on the strategy of project development will have to be made for each project undertaken, based on the data requirements listed. The selection of the particular strategy will be built into the project design.

III. Decision Category:

Specifying project components (Figure 3).

Data Requirements:

In the extreme case all data needed to structure the components would be gathered after implementation begins. More frequently a limited amount of data are collected, usually through reconnaissance survey techniques and secondary sources, on:

- Macro-level considerations affecting potential project activities;
- Existing farm technologies;
- Available agricultural research;
- Marketing and input supply structure;
- Storage availability;
- Potential for non-agricultural production activities; and
- Economic and social support infrastructure.

Design Decisions:

The data are not collected in sufficient detail to structure project components; rather they are intended to give the project designer a feel for the potential and problems of the project.

IV. Decision Category:

Determining management arrangements (Figure 4).

Data Requirements:

- Existing administrative/management structure and capacity for planning, implementation, data collection and analysis, and financial management; and
- Staffing patterns and lines of authority of potential organizational structures for the project.

Design Decisions:

An optimal project management structure is nearly always a complex synthesis of what exists and what might work. This issue tends to get short shrift in most project designs, producing unfortunate results when implementation begins.

This design decision involves a judgment about whether the design should include

technical and/or financial resources to strengthen the capability of local administrative and management systems.

V. Decision Category:

Specifying resource commitments (Figure 5).

Data Requirements:

Because few resources will be initially committed, little information is needed. A budget will be required, as well as specification of the type, sources and timing of both host country and foreign resources.

Design Decisions:

Determination of resource commitments for project start-up. The concerns relating to fulfilling on resource commitments and adhering to the project plan will be worked out as the project develops.

Case II

The data requirements defined in the preceding case are minimal. For a process approach project that spells out project components in more detail, data to be collected include the following:

I. Decision Category:

Defining project goals (Figure 1).

Data Requirements:

- Data related to choosing target population, including population and income distribution;
- Data related to choosing geographical coverage of project, including same data as above; and

- Detailed goals of the project, defined in collaboration with individuals/agencies within the host government most directly involved with the project.

Design Decisions:

Definition of target population, geographical area and goals.

II. Decision Category:

Specifying a strategy for project development (Figure 2).

Data Requirements:

- Government philosophy/position on rural development strategy;
- The level of information already available that is needed to specify project components; and
- Judgment relating to the attendant costs of gathering more data for project design.

Design Decisions:

Though we have, for the sake of illustration, chosen to specify that this project will follow the extreme process approach, in fact a decision on the strategy of project development will have to be made for each project undertaken, based on the data requirements listed. The selection of the particular strategy will be built into the project design.

III. Decision Category:

Specifying project components (Figure 3).

Data Requirements:

It is in this decision category, as well as in the specification of resource commitments, that data requirements differ greatly from the first case.

- Macro level:

  - Financial constraints to possible project activities, including foreign exchange and budget constraints;

  - Government development philosophy and priorities; and

  - Government decisionmaking process, including flow of information from one level to another, who makes what decisions, and who is accountable for implementing local-level activities.

- Ecological and demographic factors, e.g., climate, soil type, rainfall, soil depletion and distribution of population.

- Farming systems and differences in technology used, by ecological zone. Include farm outputs, use of farm production, sequence of farming operations, system of land utilization, and range of technology used by crop.

- Research and extension, including new technologies developed on research stations and tested on farmers' lands and effective approaches to extension.

- Systems of agricultural input supply and markets, including availability, timeliness and adequacy of sources.

- Credit sources and an estimate of needs by type of credit.

- Non-agricultural economic production by type, level of output, capacity and profitability. Potential for initiating new and/or expanding existing enterprises. Research being undertaken on market and production potential.

- Economic support infrastructure, including possible constraints to productive activity resulting from an adequate transport system, communication system, and education/training infrastructure.

- Social support infrastructure, including possible constraints to development activity resulting from inadequate health care, water supply system, nutrition levels.

- Local organizations, including organizations by type, function, size, geographical coverage, process of decisionmaking, level of managerial/technical skills, and systems of accountability.

Design Decisions:

This array of information is necessary to structure project components. It consists of static information, for instance, agricultural cropping systems, marketing, storage, levels of health and nutrition, education, etc. This information is most useful in telling us what is not being done and so provides an initial guide to what might be tried. It also provides insights into what research is being undertaken and introduced, what extension approaches are being tried, etc., dynamic information needed to determine what is working and what is not, and what might be attempted.

IV. Decision Category:

Determining management arrangements (Figure 4).

Data Requirements:

- Existing administrative/management structure and capacity for planning, implementation, data collection and analysis, and financial management.

- Staffing patterns and lines of authority of potential organizational structures for the project.

Design Decisions:

An optimal project management structure is nearly always a complex synthesis of what exists and what might work. This issue tends to get short shrift in most project

designs, producing unfortunate results when implementation begins.

This design decision involves a judgment about whether the design should include technical and/or financial resources to strengthen the capability of local administrative and management systems.

V. Decision Category:

Specifying resource commitments (Figure 5).

Data Requirements:

- Types of resources, domestic and external;
- Quantity of resources, domestic and external;
- Timing of resources;
- Budgets;
- The optimal balance between external and domestic resources to carry out project activities; and
- Definition of how cooperation between and among government agencies will take place.

Design Decisions:

A prime concern in project implementation is that resources be committed where needed and in the quantities required. In project preparation it is necessary to obtain commitments for fulfilling on resource requirements and adhering to the project plan as well as to develop a plan for AID procurement and delivery of project resources on a timely basis.

CHAPTER THREE

INFORMATION STRATEGIES FOR PROJECT DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

With data requirements having been specified, a series of additional issues remains that the project designer must address:

- The data collection techniques to use;
- The composition of a design team:
- The role of collaboration in project design; and
- The emergence of a project design.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Data collection techniques can be classified and grouped in a variety of ways. It is probably most useful for our purposes to view them in relation to the degree of formal structure involved. In doing so one analytical contrast stands out, with "statistical surveys" at one extreme and "reconnaissance surveys" at the other. The characteristics of these two approaches are considered in turn.[1]

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[1] The intention here is to identify and summarize these approaches. For greater detail, as well as a discussion of such technical questions as sample design for statistical surveys and sample size, see Development Alternatives, Inc., *Information for Decisionmaking in Rural Development*, Volume Two, submitted to the Office of Rural and Administrative Development, AID, May 22, 1978.

Statistical Surveys

Statistical surveys refer to techniques that utilize data from a sample to make inferences, i.e., to generalize about the characteristics of a larger population from which the sample has been drawn. Statistical surveys depend most commonly on enumerators who have been trained to administer a questionnaire or comparable collection instrument, with predetermined categories of data. For rural development there are two principal alternatives that may be used in drawing a sample:

- The area frame sample utilizes a specified geographical area, usually a small segment or "block" in the total land area of a region or country, as the unit from which desired data are to be collected. Generalizations about agriculture and/or other economic activities within the total land area are derived by compiling data gathered within the selected segments.

- Population Sampling is used when the focus of the survey is on a particular target population or on specific categories within the population inhabiting an area. Here the basis of the sample is not territorial units but, rather, a given number of reporting units (e.g., households, individuals, farms) selected from the total number of such units. There are a variety of techniques for drawing a population sample: randomization, stratification, clustering, etc.

Normally such surveys generate reams of raw data. The results are then coded, aggregated and analyzed by tabulation or computer, and statistical conclusions are drawn regarding particular characteristics of the population under study.

Reconnaissance Surveys

In contrast to statistical surveys, this approach is much less structured: it depends on an open-ended process of questioning and observations, conducted by one or more qualified rural development specialists who concentrate the collection effort on key informants (as opposed to "representative" respondents). The reliance placed on such specialized individual skills of the collector/analyst contrasts sharply with the utilization of trained enumerators whose tasks are intended to be straightforward and "mechanical." The rationale underlying the reconnaissance survey assumes that it provides a way of synthesizing data rapidly into information, drawing on the analytical skills of the rural development specialist.[1] In the statistical survey, on the other hand, the linkages between data and information are only implicit, and are often difficult to operationalize. Utilizing this approach for project design, the specialists carry out two discrete functions: (1) the collection of data on a local area, including data on the prospects for modernized change; and (2) the specification of a proposed development strategy and interventions.

Comparing Alternative Approaches

The distinction between these two approaches helps to isolate the strengths and weaknesses of the techniques available

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[1] "Data" refers here to specific data points, such as those used to complete entries on a questionnaire, e.g., age, residence, occupation. "Information" is data analyzed in a form that can be used in decisionmaking.

to decisionmakers. When rigor and precision are highly valued, the appeal of statistical surveys is likely to be strong; where a premium is placed on timely, qualitative analysis (which also indicates orders of magnitude for quantifiable features of a rural environment), the reconnaissance survey offers obvious advantages.

In normal practice projects are designed using some combination of these techniques, in conjunction with reference to secondary sources. As might be expected, statistical surveys that are carried out during the design period are the least useful: they consume far more time than is normally available (resulting in data becoming available only after its potential use has passed) and result in piles of tapes and pages of tables, but seldom a project design. Such surveys can be useful as secondary sources, when information previously collected and analyzed can be drawn upon during the development of the design.

It may be useful to compare certain characteristics of the data collection techniques discussed above in terms of their ability to meet the data requirements for the various decision categories for project design.

Defining Project Goals

This effort involves primarily a process of collaboration with host government officials concerning goals, the target population, and geographical coverage. In most cases detailed data will not be used for these decisions. In some instances

information related to population and income distribution will be required. Sufficiently reliable information may be available from secondary sources. If not, rough estimates can be made from a reconnaissance survey.

Statistical surveys may be required to generate certain "baseline" indicators that can be followed over time to measure the progress of the project toward achieving its goals.

Specifying a Strategy for Project Development

The project designer must decide the extent to which project activities will be specified. He must collaborate with government officials concerning their views and determine, from available secondary sources and preliminary discussions (reconnaissance) with key informants, how much information already exists that can be used to structure project activities. Then he must make a judgment, after assessing the time and resources available, about how much additional information collection makes sense. This process involves a combination of informal interviewing and drawing on secondary, possibly survey, sources.

Specifying Project Components

The information needs for this category involve understanding the dynamics of the political, social, cultural and economic systems in the project area, as well as specified macro-level considerations. Statistical surveys can provide considerable information on specific magnitude variables such as age, education, employment, and income levels. An understanding of the

local dynamics can be gained far more readily through reconnaissance work. If, prior to the initiation of the project design, there are little or no survey data available, then reconnaissance is by far the most effective tool.

Determining Management Arrangements

This is a complex design component based upon what exists, which is not determined by a representative sample of the rural population, and what might work best in the given environment. Knowledge of the decisionmaking processes and institutional capabilities of the host government at the district, provincial, and national levels is critical, and can best be gained through observation and discussion.

Specifying Resource Commitments

Designers need a great deal of information on the cooperation between and among government agencies, resources to be committed, and the ability of the line ministries to supply assistance as promised. These substance decisions are made by project designers based on the best information available and, as in the case of management arrangements, will be obtained not from a sample survey but through discussions with the relevant government and private sector representatives.

Conclusions Regarding Data Collection Techniques

A reconnaissance design team of, for example, four members (see following discussion of design team composition) working for eight weeks will cost the U.S. Government approximately $75,000.

In that time, if the team's parameters have been well specified, if interaction with the USAID mission is positive, and if the team's personnel are experienced and capable, a completed project design will emerge that has been negotiated with the host government and written in the format required for presentation for project approval. With the same amount of money a statistical survey can be completed in six months if the work is efficiently generated. When the work is completed there will be a great quantity of data but no project design. However these data may eventually prove useful in project design, as part of the basic knowledge of existing conditions in the project area.

Whichever data collection model is used, a better project will generally emerge if project designers have learned for themselves the complexities of relationships among the project beneficiaries, between target population and government, and among the government agencies responsible for development. This generally means that a reconnaissance survey should be used in virtually every project design, even if a statistical survey has already been completed. Reconnaissance surveys are cost-effective and fast, going from contract to completed design documents in two months. The understanding gained during design can be continued, should it be important, into the implementation phase. And finally, host country officials who have been part of the process are more likely to commit their time and resources to making the project work.

COMPOSITION OF A DESIGN TEAM

We have emphasized a reconnaissance approach to data collection for project design, based on experience that has been gained in the optimal organization and deployment of a team to get the work done. Several dimensions of this question need to be mentioned.[1]

One dimension concerns the source of members for such a team. It has proven to be both necessary and desirable to have representatives from AID and the host country participate, regardless of the source of the "core" team. In the case of AID it has been important to have a participant from the mission itself, or from REDSO, rather than from AID/Washington; it is also helpful if the participant is scheduled to play some role in the implementation of the project. Normally the most useful sort of host country participant is a responsible member of the organization tapped to implement the project. When the AID participant is from the mission, and when the host country representative is from the implementing agency, the individuals in question frequently have a greater incentive to make the project design a living, workable document that can be implemented, rather than simply a mechanism for transferring funds from Washington to the host country.

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[1] These comments result from DAI experience in 21 project designs over the past several years. Interested readers are referred to *The "New Directions" Mandate,* op. cit., and Development Alternatives, Inc., *Personnel Requirements for Project Development in East and Southern Africa,* submitted to REDSO/EA, Agency for International Development, October 17, 1977.

When outside consultants are used it is invariably preferable to put together a team that shares a common approach to development and has a common institutional base, or has at least worked together in the past, instead of assembling individuals whose paper qualifications rate them as experts but whose ability to work together as a team is not proven.

A second dimension of the issue involves the specialties that are needed on a design team. One approach is to assemble a team composed of individuals with a series of technical specialties (e.g., range agronomists, water development specialists) that seem to fit the demands of the development problem at hand. In the past this approach has not produced the best designs. At least one member of a design team should have sufficient technical background to judge the appropriateness of different technological packages, but the critical skills needed on a team tend to be not so much technical in nature as those that contribute to a sensible project in a particular political, economic, social and cultural milieu. This requires individuals with a certain breadth of experience in a variety of development situations, and with the personal skills needed to collaborate and negotiate with host country officials.

In a number of instances a core group consisting of a rural development specialist, an anthropologist or rural sociologist, an economist (usually an agricultural economist), and an agriculturalist has proven to be effective. It is preferable if at

least one member of the core group also has experience and expertise in project management arrangements and another in information requirements for rural development projects. A design team can generally find much of the technical knowledge needed to develop project components available in the host country. Where more detailed study or work is required, this can be built into the project design.

Finally, one approach that has proven successful in the past has been to contract with local social scientists to do preliminary studies prior to the arrival of a core team. Utilizing a set of data requirements similar to those detailed in Chapter Two, they can collect considerable data in a short time on, for instance, local farming systems or production practices. With these data, and with these same individuals also participating throughout the design process, the team will have available a knowledge base of the local area that will be invaluable in the design work.

THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION IN PROJECT DESIGN

The need for close collaboration between project designers and those involved with a project in the host country has been alluded to several times. The overriding concern is to develop a commitment to the project, its goals, its approach, and its implementation. Early in the design process it is necessary to

reach agreement with key national agencies regarding goals and approach. The next step, if field data collection is involved, is to share in the shaping of project ideas through the collaborative involvement of both local officials and potential beneficiaries. Project ideas need to be developed and refined, starting at the bottom of the structure, up through each administrative level, to the key national decisionmakers. This process can build an effective commitment to the project.

There has also been much learned about the nature of collaboration and its effects, both positive and negative, on the commitment to a development effort. Meaningful collaboration, especially at the local level, cannot be accomplished in rapid, one- or two-day excursions to the field. Such fleeting visits frequently miss important information. Relatively intensive exposure to a project area is needed (perhaps three or four weeks, depending on the size of the area) so that initial suspicions are overcome and data can be checked and rechecked.

The fact that collaboration tends to generate enthusiasm for a project has been found to have both positive and negative dimensions. There is a very real possibility that a project will get stalled in the approval process; this results in an erosion of popular support and official commitment to the project, and an apparent vindication of the view that outsiders cannot possibly be trusted.

A closely related point is that local collaboration may result in a strong commitment to a project by future staff members and by the local population, but this work will be in vain if national-level decisionmakers have different ideas about how the project should operate. Thus the strength of the link between local and national officials has to be assessed in determining the strategy for collaboration.

Finally national officials with decisionmaking responsibilities rarely have the time to become deeply involved in the design process. The principal avenues for collaboration are periodic formal meetings and (often more important) informal discussions away from government offices. When a lower-level official has direct access to the key decisionmaker, that person can be a useful intermediary. Otherwise the chances are almost nil that a fully agreed-upon project will emerge. Whatever the opportunity for collaboration, it is necessary for key decisionmakers to be involved at each stage of the design process. One mechanism for ensuring this is to furnish them with outlines, each including critical decisions and options and developing in more detail the project design.

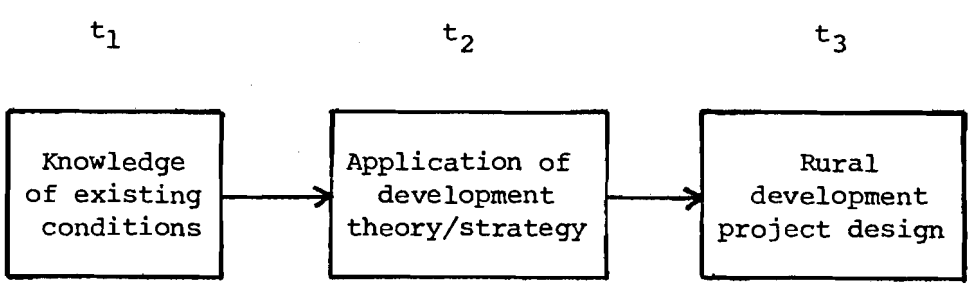
THE EMERGENCE OF A PROJECT DESIGN

We have identified decision categories for designing projects, as well as data to be collected and their design implica-

tions. We have discussed techniques to use in collecting data, the composition of design teams, and the role of collaboration in the design process. But how, with all of this, does a design actually emerge?

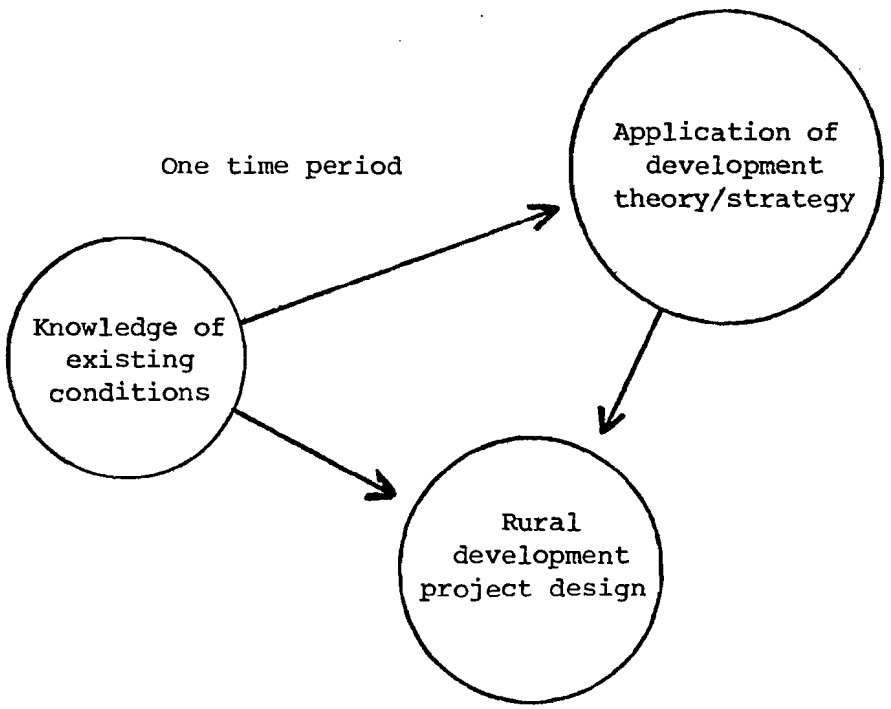
There is no magic to this process. The information collected during the design work, with its design implications, must be combined with information held by project designers on development theory, or with a development approach. This latter dimension of the design process we have not yet touched upon. There are any number of development theories; one that appears to be having a substantial impact on rural development focuses on local farmer involvement in decisionmaking, a high level of local resource commitment to development activities, and economically viable increases in agricultural production and productivity by smallholders.

In combining the information acquired during the design activity (knowledge of existing conditions) with a theory of development, the process of generating a project design may be viewed as sequential:

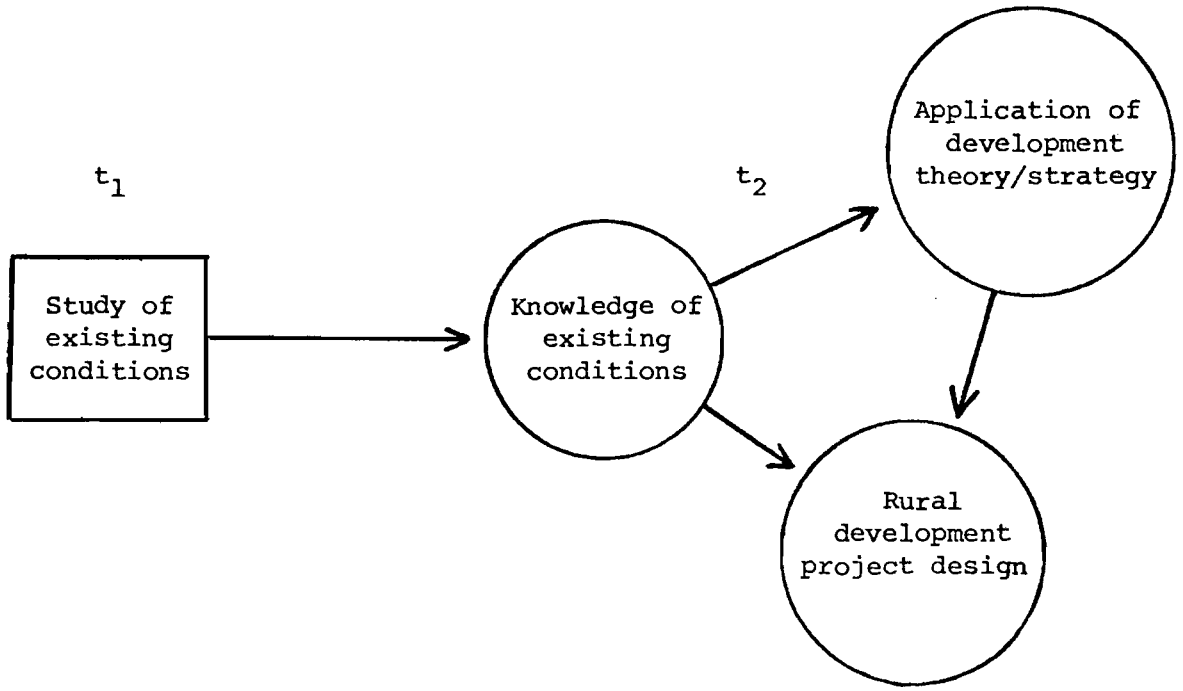


In this model the knowledge of "what exists" may be provided by either of the two data collection models (statistical surveys or rapid reconnaissance), but each step will be performed in a different time period and conceivably by different people.

Alternatively, the process may be simultaneous:



In this situation, only one information technique -- reconnaissance surveys -- may be used, and the entire reiterative process must be carried out by the same team of development professionals. A useful variant on these two models, mentioned earlier, has been to define data requirements that can be fulfilled by social scientists prior to the arrival of a design team, and then include the data collectors as part of the team. In this instance the sequencing would be:



In any of these models the ingredients are the same: the need to collect information relevant for design purposes, understand its implications for design, and combine it with a theory of development to produce a project appropriate to a given local environment.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROCESS OF PROJECT DESIGN: A SUMMARY

The previous chapters have set forth certain requirements for designing rural development projects. They have addressed a set of issues with which any project designer will have to deal. Depending upon the type of project, the knowledge base with which a designer begins a design, the development model applied, the particular environment in which the project is being undertaken, and the strategy chosen for project development, these issues will be of greater or lesser concern. It would be well to summarize these issues and put them in perspective.

ISSUE ONE: INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PROJECT DESIGN AS DISTINCT FROM THAT FOR APPROVAL

Some of the information necessary for the development of sound project design will be parallel to that needed for approval. However some will be different. AID has its own requirements that must be met for the approval process, which is compounded by the fact that decisions relating to approval or delay are frequently made with considerable discretionary latitude. While this Handbook does not address the approval process, project designers must be cognizant of the differences in requirements between design and approval.

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ISSUE TWO: DATA REQUIREMENT DIFFERENCES DEPENDING UPON THE APPROACH TO PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Data requirements for project design will be considerably less to the extent that projects are designed around a process approach. In its extreme, this approach does not specify in detail the project activities to be undertaken over the long run. As a project is implemented and adaptive testing is undertaken, knowledge is gained about the problems and potentials of the project area and specific project interventions are defined.

ISSUE THREE: THE PROBLEM OF "BLUEPRINTING" THE PROCESS OF PROJECT DESIGN

Any attempt to systematically blueprint a single set of instructions for project design will be disappointing. What is possible, and what this Handbook attempts to do, is to identify a set of requirements for project design that must be integrated by the project designer into a chosen approach or model of development. This integration, in turn, must be applied to each particular situation as needed.

ISSUE FOUR: NARROWING DATA REQUIREMENTS FOR PROJECT DESIGN

Many fall into the trap of collecting far more data than is needed for project design, which constitutes a costly exercise. It is important that the data collected be narrowed to only those that are of direct use.

The approach suggested in this Handbook is to identify the decision categories that must be considered in project design, address a set of critical questions that must be asked about each for design decisions, and understand the design implications of the questions asked. Through this process the designer can identify a set of data needed for collection.

ISSUE FIVE: DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

There are a number of data collection techniques that have been used in design work. For rural development projects, reconnaissance surveys have proven to be most useful. This approach involves an informal, open-ended process of questioning and observation by development professionals. Structured statistical surveys have been less useful, particularly if they were carried out during the time the design was being prepared. If they were concluded during a previous period, however, they can be of value as secondary source data.

ISSUE SIX: ORGANIZING DESIGN TEAMS

Experience points to several important considerations when organizing a project design team. First, it is important that representatives from both AID (preferably the mission) and the host country participate. Ideally, these individuals would be scheduled to have some responsibility for project implementation as well.

Second, it is useful if the individuals comprising the team share a common approach to development and have worked together in the past. It is important to avoid assembling diverse individuals who might not be able to work well as a team.

Finally, teams whose members have a wide background in rural development problems tend to be more effective than groups comprised solely of technical experts. A core group consisting of a rural development specialist, an anthropologist or rural sociologist, an economist and an agriculturalist has proven to be effective.

ISSUE SEVEN: COLLABORATION IN PROJECT DESIGN

In order to ensure host country commitment to a project, close collaboration with representatives in the host country is essential. Agreement needs to be reached with key national

officials regarding project goals and approach. Where field-work is done it is important that local officials and residents share in shaping ideas into a coherent design.