

PD-AAV-257

49209

SECID



The South-East Consortium for International Development

Technical Support to Mission
AFR-0510-I-00-4007-00
Work Order No. 19
Niger

Evaluation of Operation Villageoise
Niger Rural Sector Human Resources Development Project
Project No. 683-0226
Work Order #19
July, 1986

Submitted by:

Dr. Martin Billings, Agricultural Economist

Contractor:

The South-East Consortium for International Development
1612 K Street, N.W.
Suite 704
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 429-1804

Contract No. AFR-0510-I-00-4007-00

The views expressed herein are the views of the Contractor and are not
necessarily the views of A.I.D.

Evaluation of Operation Villageoise

being a sub-activity of the Niger Rural Sector Human Resources
Development Project: Expansion and reform of IPDR/Kolo,
USAID Project 683-0226

prepared by

Martin H. Billings

for

USAID/ Niger

July 25, 1986

I. Background

USAID has been a major donor, together with UNDP/FAC, FAC, FED, Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands to the human resources development project (683-0226), a five year project, (beginning in 1979) whose overall purpose is to provide Niger with a training facility capable of producing a better trained development outreach agent in several technical areas including agronomy, animation, extension, cooperatives, forestry and rural engineering. The facility, IPDR, located at Koio, is designed to train persons who will ultimately rise to middle levels of public administration (this is an area of government which is commonly overlooked and is one of particular weakness in Niger [and Africa as a whole]). UN and AID evaluations (1983) found considerable progress had been made up to that date towards this objective.

An important dimension of the training reform has been 'operation villageoise', wholly funded by USAID, under which four year students are given an opportunity to do practical work for 3 1/2 months in one of ten villages as members of a 2 -5 person multidisciplinary team. The formal objective of the training is to provide students with an actual experience in rural development work, to learn how to gain farmers confidence and how to identify and implement realistic projects. The 'operation' has been functional for four years.

Although the 'operation' is viewed as an important component of IPDRs' four year training program the question has been raised whether the activity has been sufficiently successful to recommend that some donor or donors continue to support it after the official end of the overall project? This evaluation centers entirely upon the 'operation' phase of the human resources project. Success, however, is dependent in large measure upon the quality of training provided students before beginning their village experience and evaluation is inescapably drawn into areas not specifically identified with the 'operation'. This led to consideration of subject matter, training methods and materials and quality of teacher training at IPDR and the final conclusions are consequently colored by an appraisal of their quality to the extent to which they impact upon the 'operation' and recommendations consequently include changes in these otherwise external domains.

The question must be raised whether IPDR has become sufficiently sensitive to the widely recognized need to break down interdisciplinary barriers. This was the original intent when the socio-economic department was established. At present technical departments determine whether their students need such exposure and if so how much and of what sort. Given the schools' purpose,

which is to train outreach persons who are more sensitive to problems of rural people and the need to gain their confidence if they are to work effectively among them, it would appear reasonable for all students to be thoroughly exposed to socio-economic training during their first two years. A case in point is that of the foresters. This service is well known for its essentially law-enforcement approach to forest management. A persuasive case can be made that effective forest management can only come about when rural people are fully involved and convinced of its desirability of and when their needs are provided for. To be ultimately successful foresters are going to have to become much more socially sensitive. This sort of sensitization can begin at Kolo.

II. Purpose of the Project:

'Operation Villageoise' must be seen in its wider context as part of a long term program to strengthen IPDRs' ability to train outreach staff (here defined to include the whole gamut of specializations). The 'operation' is a training tool wherein teams of second year students are placed in villages for 3 1/2 months to provide them an opportunity to engage in various directed activities in a rural context. Prior to placement, however, students are supposed to be exposed to intensive socio-economic sensitization through highly focused course work. Similarly an effort has been made to reduce barriers traditionally found between specializations - foresters, engineers etc - such that they can work together with extension persons as an integrated team. The hope is that such an exposure will be a powerful and practical training experience for students who have largely lost their rural roots to re-expose them to the realities of village life, and who are expected to ultimately rise to positions in middle management within ministries with outreach responsibilities.

III. Purpose of the Evaluation:

The evaluation of the OV was one the core recommendations made during the 1983 mid-point evaluation of the Human Resources Development Project. The issue at stake in this evaluation is to determine whether to continue external support for operation villageoise, in whole or part, beyond the present project termination date (30 September 1986) is warranted. The question addressed is whether OV is a viable training vehicle which merits continued support (regardless of source)? (There are good grounds to expect that the government of Niger will not be able to, or is disinterested in, continuing to pay the necessary recurrent costs to support the activity). The matter is an important one; taken

in its entirety the 'operation' is a key part of the formation of persons whose long term career track lies within the middle levels of extension management. For a number of years following 1979 government was able to absorb the graduates of IPDR. More recently the costs of maintaining a large government service has limited the need along with governments ability to expand its services. The training centers' future role is likely to shift somewhat to focus more upon replacement and retraining. If this is the case and government continues in its attempt to upgrade the quality of its outreach service then over the next decade it is possible that the entire middle level rural outreach staff could be retrained at IPDR if that institution receives the necessary support. Given the central role of the 'operation' in this work, its continued existence can be viewed as vital.

If donors are persuaded that a strong rural outreach capacity is important to development, and if practical field experience supplemented by highly focused academic training is necessary in the creation of this capacity, then investment in a training tool which can reach the entire staff, upgrade and refresh it, over say a ten year period, is arguably a good strategic decision.

IV. Methodology:

The evaluation team met with the director of IPDR and senior staff, faculty and foreign consultants. A number of current and former students were contacted. All of the villages included in the project, and the resident student teams, were visited. Four of the villages were subsequently revisited and the students interviewed in depth. These were selected subject to the following criteria; (1) one student team comprised primarily of women, (2) one student team comprised of 'direct's [students who have come directly from primary education], (3) one student team comprised of 'professionals' [students already in government employment, often having only a very basic formal education, who are being given further training], and (4) a village which had withdrawn from the program. Finally, a wide range of documents were read including course and training materials, and student reports written at the end of their village sojourns.

V Findings:

The 'operation' has passed four cycles of students. In the meantime IPDR itself was not standing still; courses were brought into line with the new training formula to teach by objective, a socio-economics department was set up and a number of faculty dispatched for training abroad. Facilities as a whole were extended and upgraded. It is unclear the extent to which teaching by objective has been adopted (or understood) by all of the

faculty, and there are individual cases of courses having so many objectives as to lose the point. Other courses continue which have no apparent relationship to the schools training objective. The center has sustained an unfortunate level of turnover in staff (and foreign technicians) and in particular leadership which has certainly had some adverse impact upon the internalization of the program in fact as well as intent.

The basic findings are (1) that the 'operation' appears to be an effective training tool, but (2) IPDR has not decided in its own mind just what the primary purpose served by OV is to be. The second has grave and fundamental implications for the success of the first. The school is divided into two camps. One camp, and apparently the dominant, sees the OV as IPDRs' outreach arm, a means by which development of neighboring villages may be brought about. In this view, students are to engage in highly directed activities of an essentially extension nature. Creative application of lessons learnt in school seems to be distinctly subordinate. The contrary view, held by an apparent minority, is that OV is an important training tool which uses the village milieu; development of village is in their mind a secondary consideration.

The division of objective affects the type of training given students previous to OV, the expectations made of students while engaged in OV and sharply colors the relationship between IPDR and the villages. This last has direct impact on the sort of support the school wants from its donors.

At the present time OV makes use of students as if they were extension agents whose primary objective was to carry out the schools' development program. Student involvement is practically limited to the performance of demonstrations agreed before hand between the school and village. Indeed the evaluation was told by one department chief that what is taught in school is 'impractical' and students must do 'practical' work while in the village! Indeed the only clearly class related activity is the narrative report submitted at the end of the OV experience by each student which is in effect a very general description of what has been seen and experienced. Students are not expected to involve themselves in any analysis of the development problem of the village. This is reserved to the school staff and village elders. In fact students at the end of their second year are not expected to be able to engage in analysis. This lack of expectation seems to follow in part from the mingling of both the short and long term students into a single training program previous to OV. Two year students, we were instructed, are not

supposed to be taught how to make decisions and so no one is. The upshot is that whatever analytic methods are taught are introduced to the four year students after students have had their village exposure. A great opportunity to provide practical experience in information selection, collection and analysis (even of the most basic sort) is consequently lost.

Is the OV itself an effective training tool, given the limitations imposed upon it? Measures are inescapably subjective. Students, present and past, uniformly praised it. Although critical in certain particulars, and these were constructive in nature, all of the interviewees found the experience a rich source of professional growth. The students in 'animation', extension and cooperatives, who deal with less tangible dimensions than the foresters and engineers, found reality more challenging than classroom theory suggested. Expressions of shock regarding this reality were found as well. Although almost all students derive from rural roots, many had been away from their origins for a sufficiently long time for the experience to be new. Villagers reciprocated in this and appear to look upon the students as 'cityboys' (the students are for the most part male, but a growing female contingent exists). It is just this experience, half way through their school room training which makes the 'operation' such an interesting training tool. A number of faculty as well vigorously promote practical application; a refreshing change from the more typical academic orientation of many training centers. In sum, 'the operation' is an unusual (for Africa) training opportunity, which requires students to dirty their hands while (in principle) practicing what they have learnt in class.

The following critical observations have been made by the evaluation regarding the 'operation' in the field.

(1) The quality and intensity of supervision in the field must be intensified [and it must be underscored that transportation remains a persisting problem]. Faculty do not always visit as a team but rather as representatives of a specialization which does nothing to reduce intramural barriers. Students reported that supervision was in many instances insufficient to their needs.

(2) An attempt has been made to put one student in each team who speaks the language of the host village. Nevertheless students do not appear to mingle with the host population, rather they stay by themselves, which is exactly the contrary to what is expected. They cannot question, inquire, assist, or otherwise do what

is expected of them. The apparent exceptions are the foresters and engineers whose individual programs are less dependent upon this sort of interaction.

(3) It is not at all clear that much socio-economic content has been put into preparation of students (through class work) before participation in the 'operation'. Mistakes which have been made by students appear to derive from the very social insensitivities the program was supposed to address (for example, a rather highhanded attitude towards village elders was detected, even among some faculty). It is also evident that little socio-economic content dribbles into the technical domains. Engineers seem especially unaware of what development involves. This is especially noteworthy in a general 'cost unawareness' on the part of students engaged in demonstrations (both of these points were noted up by supervisors of graduates).

An important part of the problem may derive from the consolidation of the two and four year students into a single training stream. In this process subject matter is not added which the two year students may find superfluous and much is lost in consequence in the formation of the four year group. An example of this is analytic methods, noted above.

(4) It is apparent that villages are beginning to suffer host-fatigue. The same group of villages have been used from the beginning. In principle students have supported a wide range of activities which include: food production, food preservation and processing, marketing, fire protection, reforestation, cooperative stores and selected construction. It is impossible to tell with the means at hand just how much impact or change in village mentality all of this has had. Villagers reported that what is done by the students appears repetitious and given the lack of language skills the effect of the team must be limited. The cooperative stores appear to be appreciated as are the free wells, trees and buildings (much of which is provided under the rubric of 'development'). It is not clear how sensitive students are to the distribution of benefits with respect to its potential for intravillage conflict. This appears to be a potential problem.

(5) The original project paper called for students to identify, design, perform and evaluate their own projects. Design was supposed to include cost/benefit analysis, other quantitative measures and both design and analysis were to demonstrate analytic capacity on the part of students. This would be a considerable

challenge for university students, and is probably an unrealistic goal for what are in effect vocational high school students. To the extent analytic training is provided it does not appear to be making much impact. It is evident from a reading of the students reports that their capacity for critical analysis is not nearly as strong as that of simple description. Facts are gathered but to no apparent purpose. One looks in vain for examples of arithmetic analysis, simple statistics (use of averages and variations, basic graphs etc), simple (partial) farm budgets, sensitivity to variations within and among families, farms or villages, participation or not in new technologies (for example why do farmers cease to irrigate?) and so on. A few tables do appear. Students, however, seem to have almost no feeling for farmers economic problems - and only one of the students interviewed in a village had attempted a partial budget with a farmer concerned about the profitability of fertilizer (a tool he had learnt elsewhere). There is little evidence that students have much understanding of the farmers decisions whether to market or store, borrow or not, save or spend, work on farm or in the city. They are unsystematically reported and rarely examined. On the other hand students appear to participate in actual farming and the introduction of new techniques. And the student supported boutiques appear to be working relatively well.

(6) The team met with all of the technical divisions and gained some appreciation of their programs. Our principal criticism of areas beyond our technical knowledge is that all seem to function much as they do in other schools, which is to say they focus upon their specialty to the exclusion of all else. One does not get the impression that the technical divisions fully appreciate the need to add socio-economic training to their programs. The IPDR is attempting to institute a multidisciplinary aspect to the training; but the weakness of the socio-economic division affects all. This division was expected to provide the multidisciplinary glue holding the separate pieces together. Briefly, socio-economic training appears to lack the following: (a) There appears to be some confusion as to the nature and actual training needs of the students. They are not scholars, they are destined to become vocational journeymen and their needs in consequence are very job related. Nevertheless an examination of course material suggests that even under the strictures of training by objectives, too many remain in particular instances (say 15 rather than 5) to make it a fully persuasive attempt. And instances of

inclusion of historic and theoretical materials excessive to need can be found (our favorite example in this regard is the history of 19th century french photography, reported to us [but not actually seen]). The economics courses now in place are more suitable to college freshmen than students who are in a vocational high school. (b) in the case of economics, limited progress appears to have been made towards definition of an extension agents' needs which are likely to be little more than farm management. (c) little consideration has yet been given to which analytic tools are appropriate to student needs, and little analytic capacity is evidenced in the student reports. (d) the socio-economic training material does not appear to reflect the state of knowledge regarding Nigerien social and economic structures and the distinctions among various peoples, the social and economic differences between sedentary and nomadic life, access to and distribution of assets, etc.

(7) Agronomy apart, one does not get the impression that the body of knowledge gathered about the sahel and Niger over the past 15 years is reflected in the curriculum. The updating mechanism is weak, perhaps the 'cellule pedagogique' can provide some of the needed feedback. The upshot is that students are not taught, in many particular instances up-to-date information. The library seems especially weak as regards the supply of up to date literature and indeed seems to be expecially poorly supplied in almost every regard.

(8) Village support. USAID is presently supporting the 'operation' to the extent of CFA 20,000,000 (or \$57,000) annually (if 1US\$=350CFA). Only a small percentage (ten percent or less) of the money is used for the purchase of fuel and vehicle support. The rest is used for supplies to be provided to villages to sweeten their acceptance of students and, perhaps more important, as part of the schools development program. In essence AID is paying for gifts which masquerade as rural development. The practice can have pernicious implications. First, while village agreement is bought, true cooperation and acceptance of students remains a matter of their demeanor and what they have to offer as agents. When this is lacking village cooperation can become tepid. Second, gifts have limited development value. It is unclear whether items which are given could not be paid for, or are otherwise unavailable. But it is clear that the distribution of gifts has brought a train of problems; village head men may or may not be satisfied; important people in the village may or may not be included and of course many get no

advantage at all. Un-needed antagonisms arise which return to hurt the project. Third, the supply of gifts raises the expectation of more, and will make it yet more difficult to continue when the source runs dry. Finally, the school is missing out on using its most important skill, technical knowledge, and the opportunity to apply it, as a fungible asset. This is an inexhaustable resource, independent of external budgets; its creative use would go a long ways towards making the 'operation' a permanent activity.

VI. Recommendations:

The following is divided into two parts. The first includes changes within the province of IPDR management and which can be made with minimum external support. The second involves changes which will require external assistance.

The evaluation would endorse continued long term support, for reasons outlined under II above. But, the evaluation argues that renewed long term support should be made conditional upon improvement of the perceived problems (and not necessarily adoption of the particular recommended courses of action). The foremost problem which must be addressed is that of the purpose of 'operation villageoise'.

1) Changes which only require internal action:

a) Within Operation Villageoise:

i). IPDR must determine what its objectives are with respect to OV. The evaluation recommends as a condition precedent to further support to OV, that the school accept the activity as primarily a training mechanism. Development, which may be a by-product should be a distinctly subordinate objective. Practically speaking such a reorientation, which would not be accomplished without considerable emotional wrenching at IPDR, should be reflected in the nature of the relationship with villages (and the sorts of commodities required), the sort of specialized training given four year students prior to engaging in OV and finally the schools expectations of the students once in place.

ii). The pool of supporting villages must in some manner be widened. Ideally no village should be selected for more than two years in a row unless the particular activity undertaken in the village requires it. It is granted that practical problems

of supervision limit the radius within which villages may be selected, which suggests that alternative means of supervision may be required. One possibility may be to link the 'operation' with ongoing assistance projects within a reasonable radius from Kolo, such as the Niamey Department Development Project, also funded by USAID.

iii). In the interests of multidisciplinary unity, faculty should make their rounds as a group reflecting the needs of particular teams. And supervision should be made much more with the group as a whole than by singeling out one specialization. Team unity has been adversely affected by this practice which seriously undermines the holistic approach officially followed.

iv). During the first two years greater emphasis should be placed in the common curriculum upon the multidisciplinary nature of rural development. This is especially important as regards the foresters and engineers who have a traditional tendency to go their own way. To the extent possible curriculum should stress how a particular piece of work supplements and complements that of other disciplines and what feedback of a social or economic nature is likely to occur from particular initiatives.

v). The language problem will remain a serious impediment to students who do not speak the local language and greatly reduces the effectiveness of the 'operation' as a tool. There is no easy answer. Greater stress should be placed upon team selection to ensure that one speaker is always included. Also additional basic training in local language might be attempted. The evaluation strongly recommends that IPDR submit the students to an intensive introductory course immediately prior to going out to the village if possible.

vi). At present student work in a village is a mix of faculty directed work on previously agreed activities - construction, tree planting, demonstration etc - supplemented by some written appraisal of what has been done. This pattern is a direct consequence of IPDRs commitment to development rather than training as a first priority. By design this program includes little application of what is learnt in school (which was

described to the team by one senior faculty member as 'impractical' as opposed to directed field work which is apparently 'practical'). If this view is widespread, and dissent was found to be partisan along school priority lines, then it suggests an alarming lapse in effective curriculum planning.

The evaluation takes the position that in-village work should be made more problem oriented, and less descriptive. It is probably unrealistic to expect students to have much input into project selection. Teams should be given a problem which will require an input from all disciplines, the generation of numbers and analysis which produces a quantitative answer. The problem should be one jointly worked out among all departments and in agreement with the villages. Furthermore, the problem should be attempted in as many villages as possible for sake of comparison. The problem could include marketing, storage, use of food, abandonment of irrigation, sedentarization, the effect of scarcity of land upon access to land etc. Possibly a problem could be worked out with the cooperation of the technical line services.

viii). The schools stress upon feedback should be strengthened. Experiences of former years should be made use of. The impression gained by the evaluation was that many critical problems in the implementation of OV were not discussed as a matter of routine. Similarly greater sensitivity could be shown to the growing knowledge about Niger and introduced into the teaching materials.

2. Opportunities for change requiring external support.

a). Strengthening student preparedness:

Assuming that the technical courses are fully converted to the new format, teaching by objective, and assuming the IPDR makes OV a primary training tool, and further assuming that IPDR shifts its teaching emphasis more to recyclage (which seems to be likely), the evaluations' major recommendation lies in the domain of socio-economics. Outreach agents are going to be change agents representing various government agencies. They will be effective to the degree they can work persuasively with villagers, and win their confidence. In considerable measure this sort of effectiveness follows from sensitivity to the social and economic entity with which they are working. For this reason, the evaluation argues that a strong socio-economic

department is vital and that an important measure of its capacity is to be found in the success with which OV is implemented.

Although important steps have been taken to strengthen the department a further action is proposed. It is recommended that core courses in socio-economics, which lie at the heart of rural development efforts, should be made as relevant to student (and professional) needs as possible and that they reflect the current state of knowledge. The full student body should be exposed to them prior to their participation in the 'operation'. The courses should stress identification of problems and their analysis, to the extent possible by quantitative methods supplemented by narrative. Given the level at which these graduates will work - with farmers, villagers, rural families, rural organizations such as cooperatives, lower and middle levels of government - problems should be kept at a modest level of sophistication. The orientation should be one of service to the farmer and the village.

It is recommended that the department supply students with problem oriented instruction which stresses analysis and simple decision making. The objective should be to introduce the student to quantitative tools of analysis used to make decisions in a problem context (for, example partial budgets, use of ratios, use of averages and variations etc). The stress should be on farm management [crops, animals, storage, decisions involving crop mix, levels of inputs etc], marketing management [to store or sell, selling strategies etc], basic cooperative management, household management [distribution of food among family members, allocation of labor, use of hired labor etc] and the relationship of these to public policy (prices, supply of subsidized inputs etc).

Ideally, technical assistance at IPDR should produce workbooks for each course which reflect the guidelines outlined above. These might contain selected short readings, homework problems and illustrated analysis and case studies. Ideally the book would be retained by the student as a comprehensive reference. The IPDR might choose to ask for donor support in this connection to fund materials preparation. The most likely source of appropriate technical assistance could be from Nigeria where there is a cadre of rural development specialists trained in the United States in farm management and vocational agriculture who have worked with farm extension, farm research and as teachers for a number of years. This is the sort of

background which is most likely to produce the kind of training material appropriate to Nigers' needs.

b). The nature of village involvement;

If 'operation villageoise' is in fact dependent upon a steady stream of donor-provided largess used in effect to support the IPDR village development outreach program and to pay for village cooperation, then the scheme is unlikely to long survive. No donor is likely prepared to fund this sort of thing indefinitely and in particular when it does not appear to be primarily in support of student training (which is the principal donor objective), or productive of good relations in the village or, at root, necessary. The evaluation recommends that any donor-supplied recurrent cost support be limited to (i) the key item of transportation, and in particular fuel and perhaps spare parts and (ii) only materials clearly supportive of the training activity. Requests for new vehicles should be reviewed on a case by case basis. Request for a mill, however, might be supported in that this could be the vehicle for an important demonstration in cooperative management which lends itself to training related research for which IPDR is well suited.

It recommends also that IPDR authorities find alternative ways to engage village support. Technical assistance from Kolo might be an acceptable alternative. Farm management counselling is a possibility (but only after the school develops the needed skills). Assistance in their relationships with authority, always a problem for a population of essential illiterates, is another. Help in arranging credit is a third.

VII. Summary Course of Action:

The evaluation recommends that donors view favorably a request(s) from IPDR for continued support for 'OV' if the following conditions are satisfied:

(1). IPDR makes the determination that the primary purpose to be served by 'OV' is training of future outreach persons. Village development may well occur, but as the indirect consequence of IPDRs presence in the village and as a subordinate activity. This change will have two direct impacts upon IPDR: the sort of external support it needs and its training program. The composition of externally supplied inputs will change. The shift should be away from commodities which were formerly viewed as

primarily development goods towards commodities which support the field work, support training and support development of practical demonstrations (the mill could be used in this way). There will be continued dependence upon external sources for support of transportation - fuel, spare parts, perhaps vehicles. Also IPDR would have to place more emphasis on pre-OV preparation of students and in particular their social sensitization. Finally the in-village program would change from one of pure directed extension to a problem oriented one.

(2) IPDR makes changes along the lines recommended above to improve the quality of management of the village program while making both inclass training and the village program as work related as possible. This may lead to requests for donor support in the creation of language training facilities, upgraded library (with particular reference to contemporary materials of Sahelian technology and development), and improving training materials. This last might include the sending of IPDR staff to, say Nigeria, or bringing experts from there to IPDR.

(3) IPDR staff does the preliminary design for whatever donor support they feel (or agree) they need. The identification of problem(s) and solution(s) should be done by the staff to the extent possible. (Assistance may be provided in the preparation of support request documentation by the donor and requests may be made as the consequence of joint discussion, but doing the job for them should be avoided as a matter of policy).

and,

(4) Donors should be persuaded that: (a) strengthening of the GON outreach capacity and upgrading its management is an important priority in the context of competing programmatic claims and (b) practical field training is a useful way to improve the quality of outreach staff. Support of IPDR should not be done as an act in isolation but as part of an overall strategy. Donors should be fully aware that support, especially for ongoing operations, is likely to be very long term. (GON is unlikely to have the necessary recurrent costs budget at least until mineral prices recover (and uranium prices are linked to world energy prices)).

Only if these above are satisfied will the evaluation recommend further donor support for 'OV'.