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AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Trends and key factors
in rural development
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TRENDS AND KEY FACTORS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to review current trends in rural development, as well as key factors which have been found to be important for successful rural development projects throughout the world. The aim is to provide guidelines for planning rural development strategies in Southern Africa. It appears that in the Independent and National States of Southern Africa, we are lagging behind many countries in rural development planning and implementation, which is a key factor in overcoming rural poverty.

This paper draws on data and documents of successful projects in some 55 countries scattered throughout the world (International Exposition of Rural Development, 1984).

2. RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Documents from rural development symposia and conferences around the world reveal sets of specific trends in rural development as seen through the eyes of those involved in rural projects. These trends are a series of practices that show a cumulative pattern of directions in rural development over the last ten to twenty years (International Exposition of Rural Development, 1984). These trends include the following:

- Renewed development emphasis
  There is a trend towards a renewed emphasis on rural development. Throughout the rural world of three billion people a shift in attitude has taken place. Villagers are deciding that decades or even centuries of habit patterns have to change. Coupled with this, national governments and development agencies are taking an interest in and a new look at the type of development involved. "Bottom-up" approaches, self-help

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groups and villagers developing their own communities are some of the key concepts being utilised for development planning. In addition, more and more planning is being implemented in large geographical areas in order to involve local leadership and the mass of human resources.

- **Greater local participation**

  There is a trend in rural development towards greater local participation in decision making. This is one of the most basic and fundamental of all the trends; i.e. local people participating in all aspects of determining their own development. It also includes building community organisations and structures, as well as developing local leadership.

- **Implementing industrial development**

  There is a trend in rural development towards locally implemented technological and industrial development. Technology is adapted and devised to meet the needs of local planning. Greater reliance on indigenous technology is becoming more prevalent.

- **Strengthening local financial institutions**

  The strengthening of local financial institutions and structures is taking place in many countries. This can be in many forms; such as savings schemes, revolving funds, self-help group funds, and cooperatives. Outside agencies and banks often assist in meeting the needs of local projects. Financial structures also include upgrading skills training, increasing self-employment, and improving the quality and efficiency of economic ventures.

- **Creating local infrastructure**

  Trends are towards organising the creation of local infrastructure based on growth centres. Growth centres provide opportunities and services to carry out programmes beyond the ability of a single community. Development is focused on physical infrastructure such as agricultural research and extension, improved transport, essential utilities, irrigation facilities and basic amenities such as electricity
clean drinking water. Social infrastructures such as secondary schools, clinics and community centres are also involved in this trend.

- Inter-agency cooperation

Various agencies, both public and private, corporate businesses and industries, and voluntary organisations are involved in rural development. "Bottom-up" development is making its impact on these groups at varying tempos. It has resulted in increased cooperation between the various sectors. Planning between local communities and other sectors has also been enhanced. There seems to be an increase in the incidence of people-helping-people, rather than organisations helping organisations.

- Emphasis on improved agriculture

Agriculture is considered an important aspect of rural development. Most rural communities today know there is no reason for their people not to have adequate food and nutrition. Agricultural development is now considered a first priority. Policies for increased agricultural production take many forms including subsidies, supporting services, advantageous prices and marketing.

- Improving environmental sanitation

Throughout the world rural people are becoming increasingly aware that any self-reliant community can begin preventative health care programmes to reduce adult and infant mortality. Immediate plans often include nutrition programmes such as vegetable gardens, and the implementation of sanitation, hygiene, home kitchen facilities, drainage, water collection and storage, and other environmental health improvements. Long-range programmes include forms of re-afforestation and other ecological programmes.

- Involving rural women

As part of the world-wide feminine revolution, women are assuming greater responsibility in regular rural development activities, as well as in women's group activities. Involvement includes agriculture, small
industrial, community preventative health care, family health, home development, literacy and other forms of education.

- **Utilising local resources**

Increasing attention is being given to exploring and utilising local available resources more appropriately. In almost every situation, most of the basic needs can be met by the use of local materials for economic as well as social and cultural activities.

- **Expanding single focus development**

Where it is not possible or advisable to implement comprehensive rural development, single focus development is often initiated by a few people. This may be to meet the needs of a specific section of the community. Often single focus activities lead to others. In any event, it allows small groups of individuals to fulfil their specific needs, before the community as a whole is ready for change.

- **Increasing education inputs**

For rural development to be instigated and sustained education is a basic requirement. Most education inputs are carried out in the development process through non-formal on-the-job training, including functional literacy and numeracy.

- **Improving communication**

As development increases, part of the development plans call for improved road systems, as well as post and telephone communications throughout the rural areas. As a spin-off of development there is an increase in planning of groups, meetings and conferences by villagers. This is coupled with the development of media, both in relation to development itself, and renewed interest in broader information media. The continuous flow from rural to urban centres and vice versa provides new opportunities and enhances communication.

- **Rural information exchange**

The world wide information explosion is also affecting rural people, who are becoming increasingly aware of the need to exchange information with each other. People are finding that other local projects have
demonstrated effective responses to their own major constraints. In addition, descriptions of programme activities, new local technology, training manuals, and do-it-yourself manuals are increasingly in demand. More recently global data bases have been established so that development agencies, rural projects and other groups may be able to interchange information.

Cooperative international exchange

Across the globe, people concerned with rural development are beginning to see common issues and contradictions, plans, and their implications for development. Coupled with this is a world-wide concern for cooperation, an eagerness to learn of new activities and ventures in other cultures and lands. This has resulted in various forms of interchange ranging from letters, materials and publications, to conferences, group visits and long term assignments in other countries.

Training under-developed groups

Local communities and developers realise that local development cannot be fully implemented unless all sections of society effectively participate in the development process. Special training programmes for women and youth are being devised in agriculture, cottage industries, new business ventures, health programmes and nutrition. These are aimed at ensuring development of all sectors of the community.

Community financial management

There is a trend in rural development towards community financial management involving cooperatives, credit agencies and adequate markets as a basis of rural development. The need to move towards self-sustained development is crucial for rural communities. Obtaining funds and managing finance such as credit is fundamental to success, as is also improved marketing.

Comprehensive community development

Local communities and developing groups are becoming increasingly aware that satisfactory local community development cannot take place without a comprehensive approach. Such an approach involves a systems or holistic one taking into account all problems within the community.
and all types and groupings of human resources. Comprehensive
development also has to consider that projects can be repeated in
other rural communities.

3. SOME KEY FACTORS IN SUCCESSFUL RURAL DEVELOPMENT

An analysis of documents of numerous successful rural development projects
in 55 countries shows there are twelve key factors to effective rural
development (International Exposition of Rural Development, 1984). The
twelve factors are not exhaustive or exclusive, but serve as a guide
to critical factors of success which have recently emerged from evidence
around the world.

- Total community participation
  This refers to the bottom-up approach that involves the entire community
  in its own development. All age groups and levels of the community
  are involved in broad-based decision making, using a consensus-based
  approach and group cooperation in implementation. It has been found
  that communities move more effectively when the creativity of the
  whole community is mobilised.

- Comprehensive pilot demonstrations
  This key factor aims at re-creating every aspect of the life of a
  particular community as a living manifestation of what can be done.
  It is the opposite of segmented development and assumes that new
  programmes in one community will have a "ripple" effect on other
  communities and institutions. Concentrated in one village or cluster
  of villages as a demonstration, it uses an indirect action-orientated
  approach to introduce holistic-integrated programmes that uplift many
  facets of life in the demonstration village/s. "Actions speak louder
  than words" is the motto. Such demonstration villages have been
  organised at district, regional and even national level in countries
  such as Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Kenya and South Korea.
Committed grass roots planning

This is based on the understanding that the planning and implementation is done by the same set of people. In this approach the community analyses its own needs, identifies its problems and goals, commits itself to seeing the programmes through themselves, and regularly evaluates and monitors its own progress. Rural Development evaluation documents show the critical role of the community as the local experts in the planning and research process (Exposition of Rural Development, 1984).

Cohesive community identity

It is clear that the future of project communities must have continuity with their past, and take measures to maintain the identity of the community, and intensify community cohesion. One way this is done is by upholding community culture, values and norms. Related to this are various ways of maintaining local heritage and history through cultural festivals and regular celebrations. Celebrations are often used as a means of preserving group cohesiveness through overcoming misunderstandings and bridging divisions in the community.

Project leadership

Experience has shown that the process of development will not be sustained without the drive, motivation and accountability factor that local leadership provides. This kind of leadership is not necessarily the "official" leadership (elected officials) of the community and it cannot be outside experts. Such leadership is made up of those who consistently motivate the community to the necessary action, to carry out the next stage of the plan when people are weary or dis-illusioned; it uses broad-based community task forces and contexts and motivates them. The women of the community are a vital element of this leadership core. The leadership needs constant training to bring out its effectiveness.

Motivation in implementation

It is not sufficient to plan enthusiastically; it is not enough to carry out the first steps of project implementation with excitement and energy. The art of implementing project plans demands that motivation be built into the process of implementation. It has been found that
projects with clearly focused objectives on a week to week or month to month basis, allow the marking off and celebration of a series of short-term successes which trigger group motivation for the next bracket of clearly scheduled tasks. Implementing short-term successes through the assignment of a specific series of actions to particular groups of people has been found critical to motivation in the development process.

The six key factors above relate to local grass roots participation.
The next four key factors relate to critical aspects of rural development programmes.

- **Resource management**
  The use of resources is fundamental to the future of a community, as well as a viable economy. Communities tend to look outside for development resources, before they recognise those in their own community. It has been found with successful projects that maximising local resources is a pre-requisite, whether it be arable land, grazing land or minerals.

The introduction of technology and the use of outside adapted expertise have often unlocked area resources. Developing local resources is the key to utilising all others.

- **Viable local economy**
  Allied to the management of resources and production from them, is the viability of the local economic system. An important element of viability is access to capital through co-operatives, savings clubs, banks and other external and internal sources of funds, to enable the community to become self sufficient. In addition, it has been found that assured marketing outlets for locally produced goods are a necessary pre-requisite to successful development.

- **Community structure approach**
  It has been found in successful projects that a structural approach is the most effective way of dealing with many individuals and problems.
Where possible full use is made of existing organisational structures. The structural approach builds new organisations and leadership where necessary, makes use of existing organisations, calls on the resources of existing institutions and works through them. It also sets up structures such as leadership committees in the project involved.

- **Education and skills training**

This key factor is concerned with image education, general education, and with specific skills training. Image education builds up local confidence in project success and allows the impossible to be turned into the possible. General education is continuing adult education: literacy, numeracy, academic, vocational, artistic for all the population. In the case of specific skills training, there is a need for the transfer of ideas, technology and management skills. The emphasis is just as much on improving the quality of life as in equipping people for economic intensification.

The last two key factors are related to the broader interface with the outside world that a project or community requires for successful development.

- **Institutional support and co-operation**

This important key factor refers to enlisting the support and cooperation of the public and private sectors, and voluntary organisations, with the local project community. It seeks the commitment and support of the political and economic power structures in implementing a project.

It has been found with successful projects that the involvement and resources of the public and private sectors are an important ingredient for success. Resource inputs may be in the form of capital funding, technology, resources or expertise. Furthermore, it has been found that in cases where the public, private and voluntary sectors co-operate in supporting local projects, extremely successful, team effort rural development projects have been launched.
### Improved communication

Information is both a resource and a motivating factor. It has been found that regular interchange and communication is a key factor in rural development. This may be informal communication, sharing ideas on what is happening on the project, or regular briefs that keep the community informed on what is being achieved. Holding of regular meetings to confirm common objectives and report on activities are vital. Mass communication programmes through radio, television and local newspapers ensure an open system of interchange between the project and the outside world.

### 4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from evidence on successful rural development approaches in various parts of the world, that these programmes can successfully alleviate rural poverty, provided proven and accepted guidelines are taken into account by planners and development agencies. Of prime importance is the will and commitment of politicians, bureaucrats, the private sector and the rural people themselves.

The prospects for rural development in Southern Africa are bright, provided that planners take cognisance of, and adopt the experiences from other parts of the world.

### REFERENCE

This paper draws widely on rural development project reports and other information obtained from the International Exposition on Rural Development held in New Delhi, India, during February 1984.