SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING A SOCIALLY SOUND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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The focus of development planning in the past had been quantitative changes measured in terms of rates and levels of investment and gross national product. Individual welfare was understood in terms of per capita income, oftentimes without regard to how the increment in GNP has been divided among the populace. With the industrialization strategy of the first development decade, owners of capital benefited from such an approach. Thus, the increase in GNP accrued largely to the already rich classes, with very little trickle-down effect on the poor majority.

Lately, however, a growing concern over the plight of the masses and their grinding poverty has been observed among development agencies. For instance, the United States Congress has stipulated that projects/programs to be supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) should be "socially sound". Before this present focus on the poor majority as major beneficiaries of development programs, groups of students, social scientists, farmers, laborers and the like had voiced out the need to bring development to the people.

Criteria for Social Soundness

Because of the priority being (rightly) placed on the poor majority, development projects must be designed to have as little trickle-up effect as possible. The focus should not merely be the economic development of the beneficiaries, but their total development as thinking individuals with a hand in mapping their destiny. Cognizant of these ideals, we shall consider five points which must be taken into account in framing a socially sound (acceptable) development program. Briefly, they are as follows.

1. The development project is intended to benefit the poor majority, male and female, of the target area (it is, in other words, *for the poor);*
2. It responds to a need that is felt, and preferably expressed, by these men and women (the idea for the program comes, as it were, *from the poor);*
3. It will, in being implemented, enlist the participation of local men and women, delivering its benefits *through the poor;*
4. It is so designed that it is very likely, not only to "catch on," but also to affect favorably the disadvantaged for whom it was intended (it will in fact bring its benefits *to the poor);*
5. Should it fail literally to fulfill criterion 2 or 3, it nonetheless offers a benefit which experts agree is an essential prerequisite for some basic felt need of the poor majority.

Approaches to Development Planning

Development can be planned in different ways. We will consider several strategies of program planning, and evaluate each on the

light of the above-mentioned criteria.

The *first* approach may be termed "planning from above." Development planners, or the experts, design programs and projects with little, if any, consultation with the people. They approach the people with a prepared checklist of what they (the experts) think as problem areas. Then they ask the prospective beneficiaries to react to the specified problems. Other information are gathered about the beneficiary population, which are then compared with agreed-on norms to see whether the people's performance is adequate or not. Having identified the deficiences, the experts proceed to design measures to solve them. Because of the preconception as to existing problems, discussions and considerations are limited to the checklist, missing, in effect, any other areas which people might feel are problematic.

The *second* approach, "planning from below," begins with the people, not as object, but as subject. Moreover, its starting point is not the people in general, but above all the poor majority. The points of departure for this program-designed procedure are those concerns which ordinary people consider important in life, and the extent to which they are happy or unhappy about them. Moreover, projects to solve the poor majority's consciously recognized problems will be prime candidates for inclusion in the assistance program that is being planned.

Using the social soundness criteria mentioned earlier, the first approach fails to realize criteria 2 and 3, and offers little guarantee for criteria 1 and 4. Furthermore, not only are the problems identified using this approach limited to the prepared checklist, but an acceptable level of popular participation is not achieved. At its worst, the people's participation would be a form of manipulation; at its best, it could take the form of "tokenism" (i.e., informing, consulting, or placating the people). The second approach, for its part, fulfills the first two criteria. That is, the projects will surely be intended to benefit the poor, and they will be responding to the poor's felt (and expressed) concerns. How far (or well) criteria 3 and 4 will

be met will depend on the Implementation plan to be prepared. It is recognized however, that although ordinary people may suggest specific solutions, home-grown remedies for the particular ailments, they do not have an *overview* of the situation. The people, like the planners, have their limits.

Hence the third approach, which combines the strengths of the first two. Since the people know where it really hurts, and the experts know how to go about solving the perceived problems in a more systematic and coordinated manner, we suggest an alternative strategy: let the people lead and the experts follow, as their partners or helpers. Control is in the hands of those most affected by the decisions made—ordinary household heads and their representatives.

The Minimum Set of Information Needed

To design a socially sound assistance program for the target area, the following minimum background information should be considered: (a) the main physical features of the area; (b) the potentials, problems, and constraints which the *experts* see as conditioning the area's development; (c) relevant sociocultural characteristics of the area's population; and (d) the major problems of the area as the *ordinary people see them.*[1] With this fourfold knowledge in mind, together with the criteria for social soundness, the people-first approach can be attempted.

Information on the physical features of the area, and on the sociocultural characteristics of the population, will situate the target beneficiaries within a geographical and cultural context. Constraints and potentials for development will be identified as to the physical setting and as to the values, structures and network of social relationships predominant in the area.

The experts and the people will come together, each armed with their set of problems. With this technical expertise, the planners can start developing a program based on the felt needs of the people and what the experts feel will have to be settled before the

felt needs can be met, and within the constraints imposed by the geographical and socio-cultural environment.

The Elements of a Program Outline

The blueprint of the development program must contain the following elements: (a) a list of the people's *concerns* and an inventory of *problems* identified by the people and/or the experts; (b) a list of hierarchically *arranged goals and related projects* to meet those needs; (c) a graphic means-ends framework showing how the projects are expected to achieve the chosen goals, thus filling the needs and responding to the manifest concerns of the people; and (d) an accompanying document in which projects and goals are briefly described and their inclusion justified, particularly in light of the criteria of social soundness.

Before proceeding further, permit us to define some concepts involved in the preparation of a program outline.

Concerns relate to the people's felt needs, the desirables they must have, and the undesirables they must avoid if they are to be satisfied with life;

Problems refer to some event or state of affairs which are an obstacle to their attaining, increasing, or recovering something they treasure (e.g., good health, satisfactory interpersonal relations, and others);

Goals are aims or achievements toward which effort will be directed. One can establish ultimate, intermediate, and immediate goals based on the concerns of the people. Usually the ultimate goals would be the improvement in the overall happiness of the people identified as the beneficiaries of the program.

Central to the program design is the recognition of the concern as felt and expressed by the people. This is premised on the belief that unless the people think that the project is answering their problems, there will be little effect on their perception of their life satisfaction and very little motivation to get them involved. To check whether the planned projects would really affect the people's happiness (or quality of life), a means-ends analysis

relating each of the projects to goals set (which is geared toward fulfillment of life concerns) is necessary. As well, a justification of the technical feasibility of the projects will have to be provided by the experts.

Apart from the means-ends analysis, the program should be subjected to a social-soundness test. This test is two-pronged, and touches on the *intended effects* and on the *intended means* of the project. The first test covers criteria 1 and 2 (and, if necessary, criterion 5). That is, the following questions would have to be answered: Is the program *for the poor?* And, does the idea of the program come *from the poor?* If the answers are affirmative, the goal or project will have met criteria 1, 2, and 5 and passed the test of intended effect.

These projects and goals, however, should also pass the intended-means test. For this, the following issues must be settled: is the project so designed that it is likely to reach its intended target and bring its benefits *to the poor?* And to what extent will the project involve the poor themselves in the delivery of those benefits? Depending on what answers are given to these questions a project may pass or not pass the test of intended means.

To help design programs which will pass the intended-means test, we suggest the following "defensive thinking" guidelines which are required to assure social soundness.

1. *No project shall be designed or in effect be exclusively or mainly for the upper class or for males.*

   Exceptions are admissible in the latter case, when the nature of the project demands it. But exceptions should be just that — exceptions.

2. *Where it is foreseen that the upper class will derive significantly greater benefit from a project than the poor, the project must be redesigned or the differential justified.*

   There are at least two ways in which a differential benefit might be justified: by the special contribution which the wealthy make to the project, furnishing

leadership, for example, or capital, providing security or incurring risk; or by reason of an existing tradition, honored by the poor, which allows this kind of larger share within limits. The tradition in turn may be based on the expectation that the wealthy will be liberal toward the poor in a great number of culturally defined circumstances.

We are implying here that a certain amount of trickle-up may be economically and socially sound, as well as locally acceptable to the poor themselves.

3. *It is prudent (if impolitic) to start project planning with the reversible assumption that the people's "representatives" are unrepresentative.*

Incumbents of appointive and even elective office, members of the elite — all should be presumed guilty of (conscious or unconscious) misrepresentation, until proven otherwise. This is an example of social soundness through defensive planning.

4. *It is also prudent to assume that no institution, association, or program works half as well as its official spokesmen say it does.*

Again the defensive tactic, this time to avoid premature acceptance of an existing organization as the chosen instrument of project-benefit delivery.

5. *The people's participation in a project will not be proportionate to the project's capacity to fill their needs, but to their perception of that capacity.*

This is a restatement of an earlier dictum: only if the people's needs are addressed will they themselves become involved in a project; and to the degree that their happiness — as they define it — is enhanced, to *that* degree will the project be considered a success. There is no such thing as a "good project" if the people don't accept it as such.

These five principles, with others implicit in earlier discussions, should serve to illustrate the combination of concern and cynicism which is required for the design and fielding of socially acceptable projects and programs. The proper mix is difficult to achieve, doubly difficult to maintain, because, frequently enough, one must be both concerned and cynical about the same people. However, if those responsible for the program or any one of its many facts will give this task the priority attention it deserves, they will assuredly strike the right balance most of the time. No one can ask more than that.

Notes

1. Relevant sociocultural information will be: (a) language and identity; (b) social structure, (c) relationships, and (d) value systems. The felt concerns/problems of the people can be derived by using perceived quality-of-life measures and identifying the life domains which are associated with the greatest unhappiness, and collecting problems identified by the people as such. The latter set of data can be gathered using social-survey techniques following this sequence: *first,* a relatively large number of in-depth, open-ended interviews with men and women residents of the area; these people should be purposively selected as representative of various sectors or segments of the population; their replies will help identify what the major concerns and problems of the area are; *second,* a standard social-survey inquiry of a random sample of residents, the questions on concerns and problems to be based on the findings of the first-phase interviews, and presented in a fixed-alternative format (with the usual "others" reply allocation). From the second phase one will learn the incidence of the various concerns and problems and, by crosstabulation with the background information of respondents, the kind of people who tend to express each of them.