

EvSum400

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: A SYNTHESIS OF PROJECT EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

The synthesis reviews evaluation material from the World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and ODA sources on rural development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) during the 1970s. The focus is on large-scale integrated projects.

The study was conducted by P Balacs, ODA Economic Adviser.

Related evaluations are "Integrated Rural Development" (1981) by Mr M Morris (see EvSum438) and "An Evaluation of the Phalombe Rural Development Project, Malawi" (1986) by Mr H Rees-Jones (EvRpt387).

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in SSA in the 1970's averaged 3% a year; low income countries averaged only 1.8%. Sub-Saharan Africa's economic problems stem from a raft of problems, of which population growth is of considerable importance.

The Main Findings

The main finding is one of unrealised expectations.

Performance of Agricultural Projects

- Economic rates of return in SSA were disappointing compared with other regions.
- Performance has tended to deteriorate over time.
- Appraisal documents have been overly optimistic.
- Local area factors, not project mix, were probably the main determinants of project performance.
- There was no simple relationship between cost escalation and success.

Reasons for Success or Failure

- Good design (including appropriate content and institutional arrangements).
- Strong support by the borrower/recipient of project goals.
- Good project institutional performance.
- Successful execution of civil works.
- Favourable economic conditions and government policies.

- These factors are also the most critical in contributing to project failure.

Project Content

Technical inputs have in many instances been inadequate. If research can identify appropriate packages the evidence suggests that, given appropriate incentives, farmers will adopt them.

The World Bank has responded by:

- making greater use of pilot projects, followed by interim reviews, prior to full-scale implementation;
- giving greater attention to indirectly productive investments within agricultural institutions with emphasis on research, extension and credit.

This switch can be expected to lead a move by the World Bank away from multi-sectoral rural development projects. The natural resources sector paper reflects a similar movement towards more sharply focused projects in ODA.

Institutional Arrangements

Inappropriate institutional arrangements have been common, e.g. projects have been too large for local institutions; new organisations created for project implementation have weakened existing ones.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) by project authorities has been poor. There was some correlation between good M&E and project performance.

Lessons

- The main lesson is that projects should be less ambitious, more carefully prepared and focused on new technologies offering the best chance of success.