

DEVELOPMENT OF VIABLE COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH WEST AFRICA ON AN AGRICULTURAL BASE

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1. Introduction

The concept, community development, implies a complicated network of interrelationships to be integrated into one comprehensive and meaningful whole. Very diverse elements are involved, such as inter alia national policies and socio economic circumstances, with some of them more critical than others but with man, the human factor, the most crucial of all these variables. Many development projects in the past have failed, not so much as a result of lack of funds, bad planning or wrong priorities, but merely because the population of the target area to be developed and towards whom the plans were directed, were themselves never convinced of the importance of the changes envisaged, and moreover never felt themselves to be an integral part of the entire development action. It is therefore of cardinal importance, that developmental goals should be brought to the people - they must know what is to be done, how it will be done and define their own role in the execution thereof. Consequently community participation and involvement, must be regarded as one of the principle points of departure in any national or regional community development plan.

In order to create a favourable climate for successful planning, it is furthermore important that internal forces be generated, within the target community to bring about a wish towards a common goal of meaningful change.

Furthermore, planning should start with and focus on the socio-economic mainstay of the region to be developed. In South West Africa therefore agriculture should be the focus point for development in the traditional communal areas.

2. Present scenario

Approximately 44 % of South West Africa's 82 million hectare and 40 % of available farmland are under a communal system of land tenure with more than 60 % of the total population involved.

In general whatever the system of land tenure, if land has an economic production value, there has been a tendency to move from subsistence to a market economy. However in the communities involved social considerations still predominate more than economic ones. The traditional system of land tenure, although detrimental in terms of optimal land use, plays an important role in the countries economy. From the social point of view, it seems that any system of communal land tenure, to the extent that it is a strong force knitting together the community which practises it, has great value.

Not only does it give the individual farmer a personal and family stake in the land, but it also gives him a recognised position in society, a possession of the greatest value at a time when so many old values are disintegrating. Furthermore, a communal society is accustomed to some

extent to combined action. Thus a coöperative form which has the advantage of conformity if a climate and motivation for improvement is created.

It is necessary, however, to emphasise that a community which owns its grazing rights in common does not own its herds or flocks in common. Consequently the greatest difficulty has been experienced where overgrazing has reached such serious proportions, that remedial action has had to be taken with individuals strongly resenting any reduction in his own stock. Thus although there is a strong social attachment to land, there is no such intimate economic connection between a livestock owner and the land where his animals graze. Thus there is no doubt that communal grazing as practised in most cases severely limits the application of scientific animal husbandry and grazing management. However in the long term it is not the land tenure system *per se*, but the way the land is used, that guarantees the farmer maximum income from his labour without necessarily despoiling the land.

Subsequently the scene is set for a dualistic approach towards community development, with the upgrading of traditional land tenure farming systems concomitant with the development of unoccupied virgin communal land, on which private ownership or leasehold farming on scientific principles could be practised.

3. Principles involved in regional planning

In order not to succumb to the temptation to formulate a detailed blueprint for development, which will have a more than even chance to fail, it behoves any adviser to realise that cut and dried strategies are dangerous and that the highlighting of principles and suggestions instead, which can be investigated, adapted and built into local strategies could be of greater value.

The choice of a development strategy depends on:

- (a) the objective to be achieved;
- (b) the time in which it must be achieved;
- (c) the situation within which it must be achieved;
- (d) the means at your disposal;
- (e) lessons learned from previous attempts and
- (f) its compatibility with governments political and economic policy.

Basically there are two approaches to take, namely the blueprint approach or a capacity building learning process approach. The blueprint approach needs drastic measures, a continuous government presence and a high level of government interference. The learning process approach on the other hand, would be the choice if increased production and overall change and development, is to increase at a rate with far less government, is to increase at a rate which with far less government interference and commitment, but with far more responsibility and own effort on the part of the people. The second

approach is preferable, and in the South West Africa context implies the upgrading, of communal farming systems through education and extension services, concomitant with scientific methods of farming applied on unoccupied virgin land.

The following guidelines are relevant in planning:

(a) A prerequisite for successful planning is a comprehensive inventory of resources. If the resource data are unproved it should be scientifically surveyed, collated and assessed. Furthermore, to attain optimal utilisation of these resources the following practical steps must be taken:

- * The classification of natural agricultural resources and the zoning thereof in relatively homogeneous farming areas.
- * The identification of adapted branches of farming for each area.
- * The revision of carrying capacity of extensive stock farming areas and the application of the principle of biomass per unit surface area.
- * Guidelines to combine different farming activities most effectively are imperative.
- * Promotional programmes with the object of advising farmers on all relevant aspects of optimal utilisation of agricultural resources are essential.
- * Legislation aimed at the protection of the soil and the natural resources is a prerequisite.
- * Within the framework of the policy of planning for optimal resource utilisation it is essential that the improvement of livestock as well as crop production be accorded attention.

(b) All the necessary ingredients for successful planning - the skills, the enthusiasm and the motivation, should preferably be created within the areas concerned. This is important because the people who are actually living in an area and developing a programme are invariably the most committed.

Assuming therefor that an area of potential for development has been identified, and a concept for development formulated, the next step is to approach the community occupying the land in question. The traditional procedures should at all times be adhered to and arrangements made through the local accepted government, as well as chiefs and tribal authorities. The principle involved must always be to plan, with the people and not for the people. Self help must be the keynote.

(c) Irrigable soil and water are valuable assets which must be exploited to the best advantage and in national interest.

(d) Not everyone is interested in agriculture. This means that not everyone in a rural environment can become a successful farmer and any settlement scheme should therefore cater for a selection programme. A tenure system that will allow the removal of non-performers or poor performers is called for. Leasehold tenure with tenure subjects to performance is a possible system to satisfy this requirement.

(e) It is important to see livestock production in traditional areas, as part of the total development strategy and to integrate it fully into a rural development programme.

Because livestock and in particular cattle are so important in traditional areas, one tends to treat livestock and crop production strategies as separate entities whereas they are in fact complementary. Livestock production in traditional areas will never really get off the ground, until fodder production and other by-products become part and parcel of livestock production programmes.

(f) Government has an essential role to play in community development. The provision of an agricultural extension service, animal health service, the supply of basic infrastructure such as roads, marketing facilities, water supplies etc. are the responsibility of the government.

(g) Motivation is the lever of change with economic motivation probably the most powerful single force for change. Planning therefore should be simultaneous in a number of spheres. The introduction of innovations into agricultural practice and the raising of standards cannot be accomplished without general social services. Far reaching changes in the organisation of rural society are essential and at least the basic requirements cannot lag behind waiting for "a plan" to realise its ultimate aim of a viable and prosperous community.

(h) Significant and meaningful development is possible without reverting to ambitious high capital projects. Overstocking and the resultant bush encroachment, caused by the reluctance to reduce stock numbers could for example be mitigated by reducing predominantly grass eaters (sheep and cattle) and increasing shrub-eaters (goats).

The concept of leap-frogging rural farmers, from subsistence into modern intensive market-orientated agriculture, has not been very successful in third world countries and generally falls apart at the seams when expert management is removed. Where capital funds are in short supply, a greater return on investments in terms of meaningful development may be achieved by progressively upgrading the agriculture of a specific area, on a broad front in accordance with a predetermined strategy and at the same time progressively educating the people. Production of red meat for instance, could be greatly increased if prolonged breeding seasons, late breeding of heifers and small-stock, general lack of reproduction records and failure to adopt sound culling procedures, often resulting from poor nutrition all acting as constraints to efficiency, are recognised and put right.

In the dryland crop areas production could be increased five or tenfold by a simple programme of planting timeously, controlling cutworms - thus ensuring a reasonable plant population and applying a little fertiliser.

(i) There is great need for agriculturalists at farmer, technical and professional levels, preferably from the areas to be developed, to act as extension officers cum demonstrators who could appoint local above average farmers, as contact extension workers in an effort to raise production on a broad front.

(j) The philosophy of creating energy centres which act as service centres to supply farmers with credit, production inputs, mechanisation, training and management, as well as marketing of produce should be put into practice.

- (k) When farmers move from a subsistence to a market economy they need a supporting system that can in fact support. Therefore there must be an intermediate organisational structure, between the individual farmer and the service system, (centre) that will enable the small producer to utilize the services. This can best be achieved by united action of producers, through coöperative associations. The individual farmer must know the people presenting him and have confidence in them. Frequently the institutional framework is too formal and too distant and the arrangements too complex to grasp.
- (l) Marketing services must be catered for and be efficient both as to price and quality.
- (m) The various services should be centred in a well defined location.

4. Conclusion

On the whole, it would appear that the lack of satisfactory progress in the past, could have been as a result of the fact that in development aid, too much emphasis was placed on the physical and economic components of agricultural production, while the development of man as producer was often disregarded.

Man should be recognised as the most important link in the ecological chain and it is imperative, that in any community development plan the ultimate object should be a balance, between natural resources and numbers of people involved, so as to ensure an ecosystem which will ensure a future for posterity. This in turn implies that artificial means of help to sustain communities, should be in concomitance with mechanisms to ensure family planning.