A PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH TO PREPARING DONOR ASSISTED AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS IN ZAMBIAN

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Foreword

The World Bank's Africa Region is emphasizing the importance of involving local stakeholders in the preparation of Bank-supported development programs. Fostering commitment and ownership will not only improve implementation but also lead to greater impact and sustainability of programs.

This paper describes the process used to develop the agricultural sector investment program in Zambia. It shows how stakeholders from different areas of a sub-sector can work together in the preparation process. Local stakeholders led the program preparation for individual sub-sectors, while the Bank limited its role to that of facilitator. The commitment and enthusiasm these stakeholders showed in applying themselves augurs well for the implementation and subsequent impact and sustainability of the programs.

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A Participative Approach
to Preparing Donor Assisted Agriculture Programs
in Zambia

This paper* describes the development of the Zambian Agricultural Sector Investment Program (ASIP) and its sub-sectoral national programs. The process involved in this development uses the vast knowledge and experience which already exists in most countries, but is often overlooked because of the excessive use of foreign consultants. The ASIP experience demonstrates how local expertise can be used effectively, offering a model for use in other countries. Zambians selected by their peers from government and academia, as well as from parastatals and the private sector, formulated the national objectives and programs.

Applying this approach first requires that governments agree on the main areas which need intervention in a sub-sector. Donors may participate in the process as catalysts and facilitators, but should not interfere with the actual decision-making.

Description of the Process

The preparation of the sectoral programs follows two stages:

- The first stage focuses on explaining the approach and reaching an understanding with national policy-makers (e.g., Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Directors) about whether the process can be applied to national conditions. If applicable, a more detailed agreement on the substantive content of the process is reached with individuals active in the sub-sector. This agreement includes the policy areas to be covered and the nature of the final output (i.e., action program and related investment plan).

- In the second stage a team of nationals is formed to prepare the sub-sectoral action program. This team may be sub-divided into smaller groups, each focusing on one aspect of the sub-sector. The team must include individuals employed in the sub-sector. These individuals will not only have a stake in the outcome of the program, but will probably possess the most knowledge and experience about issues. (Some may even be among those implementing the action program after adoption.) Team members must be released from their regular duties during the preparation period.

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To foster a coordinated team effort and spirit, team members should meet outside the capital city. For the effectiveness of these "retreats" facilitators should participate and assist in team working sessions. Facilitators should ensure that decision-making processes are appropriate, without interfering in the substantive deliberations. Although they may be called upon to act as resource persons or explain methodologies, the facilitators are not expected to be experts in the areas concerned. Indeed, it is preferable that they not be experts so that their opinions are not influenced by preconceived ideas.

The ASIP Experience

This process has been applied in preparing Zambia's ASIP. Divided into seventeen sub-sectors or components, ASIP is a consolidated sector-wide approach to designing, financing, and implementing programs in the agricultural sector. The goal is to combine all available national and donor agricultural sector funds and use them to finance individual sub-sectors (or components). National priorities will determine funding distribution and program design for the sub-sectors. The process was first applied to agricultural research and then to livestock. Following its success, it was extended to the rest of ASIP. The rest of this paper describes the application of the process to the agricultural research and livestock sub-sectors in which the author was involved as a facilitator.

Agricultural Research

The process was initiated when a World Bank review mission concerned with ASIP preparation in general, and agricultural research in particular, visited Zambia for a week in mid-July 1993. The mission found that the preparation of ASIP, begun about seven months earlier, was progressing very slowly. This lagging pace was due to problems with funding release as well as an unwillingness to interfere in ASIP's preparation, thereby losing local ownership. Moreover, since the sector approach was a new concept, government officials and donors were wary of giving it full and immediate support. And, although individuals assigned to ASIP had worked intensively, their concept paper which appeared in December 1992 failed to provide a clear direction and required substantial improvements. A way had to be found to direct the teams preparing ASIP without violating local ownership. It was decided to focus on the agricultural research component in order to generate momentum.

Discussions were held with the senior officials of the Ministry of Agriculture including the Minister, the Permanent Secretary, and the Director of Agriculture. They responded positively to a suggestion that some effort be made to facilitate the preparation of the ASIP program for agricultural research.
Two days of discussions were held with the Director of Agricultural Research and his senior staff at Mt. Makulu, the main agricultural research station in Zambia, and the headquarters of the national agricultural research establishment. A consensus emerged on developing a comprehensive action program for agricultural research which contained the following elements: (i) an organizational structure for research that ensured regular decision-making, responsibility, and accountability at all levels; (ii) clear national priorities for deciding which research activities would be included in the action program, given the limited availability of financial and human resources; (iii) detailed budgets for the priority activities; and (iv) assured funding so that research could proceed without interruption. The Director of Research and his staff endorsed the facilitation, and two facilitators were assigned, one for research prioritization and the other for organization and management. A timetable was also drawn up for accomplishing specific tasks.

Preparation work for the second stage began in early August 1993 with the formation of two Working Groups (WG), one for Research Prioritization, and the other for Organization and Management. The Research Prioritization WG consisted of eight individuals: five belonged to the research establishment, two to the planning division of the Ministry of Agriculture, and one to the University of Zambia. The Organization and Management WG comprised two researchers and two university professors. Released from their normal duties for the required length of time, these individuals committed themselves full time to their tasks.

Because of the methodological issues involved, the facilitator and the Research Prioritization WG needed closer interaction. They initially worked together for about ten days at Mt. Makulu, during which time they agreed on a methodology as well as the criteria for prioritizing commodities and activities for research (specific impact points corresponding to individual commodities). They also applied the methodology to weighing these criteria and to ranking individual commodities and activities. The facilitator limited his role to explaining the methodology and ensuring its correct application.

After completing the priority-setting process, the working group presented the results to some thirty researchers at a seminar at Mt. Makulu. It became apparent that, to be widely acceptable, the final determination of research priorities had to be based on a wider consensus than just the eight people in the working group. Consequently, the importance of individual perceptions comes from the participatory nature of the method used to determine priorities. This method consisted of "scoring." For each criterion, individual members of the priority-setting team were required to assign values to commodities/activities according to a given scale. These values were averaged and totaled across all the criteria to reach a final score for a commodity/activity. For a review of methodologies used in the literature to establish agricultural research priorities, see Vernon W. Ruttan, *Agricultural Research Policy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.
the priority-setting process was repeated with a team of about fifty people at a workshop (August 16-20, 1993) in Siavonga, a small town about 200 kilometers from Lusaka. This team included senior and mid-level Zambian research personnel, farmers, extension workers, staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, officials from the Zambian seed company (ZAMSEED), and academics (University of Zambia).

Adopted as the basis for national research priorities, the workshop results were compiled into a report written by individuals from the original eight member working group. The Director of Research presented the results to the Minister and senior officials of the Ministry of Agriculture at a meeting on September 3, 1993, and again to some 60 people from the donor and agricultural communities, including farmers, at a seminar in Lusaka on September 7, 1993. Some lively discussion ensued, about these results and the research sub-sector in general, and praise was offered for the task accomplished. Participants from both public and private sector noted that this task was accomplished entirely by Zambians through a democratic, participatory process.

In comparison, the Working Group for Organization and Management and its facilitator did not require as much interaction. The facilitator participated in the initial discussions to ensure that the process was appropriate, and then visited Zambia, twice in a matter of about six weeks, to check on the group’s progress. The members of the group worked together at a hotel located on the outskirts of Lusaka and completed their report in mid-September.

Through this process, Zambia has prepared a comprehensive agricultural research program, designed entirely by its nationals. This program embodies national priorities, and defines the roles and responsibilities of the research staff at all levels. It appears to meet national needs to the extent that, when the Director of Research presented it to the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), this body adopted the methodology as the basis of its own approach to agricultural research.

Livestock

As work on the research program was nearing completion, it was proposed that a similar process be applied to another complex component of ASIP—the livestock sub-sector. Following the endorsement by the Minister and the Permanent Secretary, discussions were held with the Director of Livestock Services and other members of the ASIP committee responsible for formulating the program for livestock. The parties then agreed upon a timetable for the program.

The program had four areas of concentration: (i) the organization and management of the government structure for livestock, in both production and veterinary services; (ii) the priorities for livestock research and extension; (iii) livestock services and input supplies; and (iv) the marketing of livestock products. For each of the areas, three to four individuals, around whom a working group could be
formed, were identified. These individuals, mostly from the government and parastatal sectors but including a few from the private sector, were the most qualified in Zambia in their specialties. A Zambian would also support the facilitator from the World Bank. This Zambian was familiar with the approach since he had been a member of the agricultural research Organization and Management Working Group and had participated in the research prioritization workshop.

In accordance with the agreed timetable, the team working on the livestock program assembled at Siavonga on October 4, 1993. Most of the original members of the working groups participated, with suitable representatives for those unable to participate. The team members worked together through October 7, 1993 before dispersing to collect the information they needed to complete their tasks. The team subsequently returned to Siavonga on October 14 and remained there until October 29. The World Bank facilitator stayed with the team for the entire October 4-7 period, and then visited Siavonga twice during October 14-29, 1993 to spend more time with the team members. The Zambian facilitator stayed with the team for the entire period.

During the October 4-7 period the team broke into four working groups. The groups discussed the issues affecting the livestock sub-sector, and defined each group's tasks according to its area of concentration. To better understand producer problems, team members conducted small surveys of livestock producers. Each group then turned to identifying the strategies needed to accomplish its tasks. They were expected to define detailed activities (actions to be taken "on the ground") for each identified strategy and show how these activities could be implemented and what resources (financial and personnel) would be needed.

Before dispersing, the entire team reconvened to discuss the individual group strategies. It was agreed that, before leaving Siavonga on October 29, 1993, each working group would produce a written report proposing an action plan for its area of concentration.

All four groups succeeded in this and met as a team to review the reports prior to leaving Siavonga. Some team members were selected to synthesize the group reports and prepare the overall action program for livestock. The outcome is a national program for livestock covering the priority areas and based on the needs of farmers.
Conclusion

The process discussed in this paper was applied to all the important sub-sectors of Zambia's ASIP. It generated strong ownership which in turn resulted in a highly enthusiastic response from nationals assigned to the task. These individuals worked hard to produce the required results, relying on their own knowledge and experience to develop a national program without the imposition of international consultants.

From the perspective of other donors (besides the Bank), this approach ensures better results, promoting confidence, commitment, and sustainability. Moreover, it is relatively fast and cheap. It costs only a fraction of the normal cost of preparing a small project in a limited area. Providing a few facilitators, expenses and small honoraria to the nationals ensures a concentrated effort and a quick preparation. This approach also offers a model for other countries, although application should conform to specific country conditions. The greatest difficulty, however, may be to identify a sufficient number of suitable initiators (those who initially approach senior government staff to seek their endorsement). The ASIP in Zambia was fortunate enough to be initiated by one of the World Bank's top experts on agricultural operations.