

Haitian Peasants, Cash Flows, and Felt Needs:
Integrating "Process" and "Product" in Project Design

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Introduction

The following document is presented to Save the Children in fulfillment of a contract for consultation on the design of a project in rural Haiti. It will begin with an identification of the two competing approaches to project organization in the rural areas that have surfaced as controversial discussion points between SCF and the USAID mission in Haiti. This controversy should be seen in a positive light. It permits a rethinking of these issues in light of SCF objectives and philosophy, and the design of a compromise approach which permits effective work in rural Haiti. I will propose what I believe to be a conceptual vehicle for integrating the two approaches. I will then identify ten programmatic points which could be addressed in the proposal, and give brief statements of my own position on these matters in light of my familiarity with the literature and my personal field experiences.

Competing Approaches to Rural Development

The exchange of memos between SCF and USAID/Haiti was generated by less than enthusiastic comments on the part of one USAID employee to certain aspects of the proposal which SCF had submitted for activities in Maissade. Rather than focus on the specific comments and rejoinders, it might be productive to short-circuit the debate by pointing out that the disagreement was generated by what appears to be two different approaches to the organization of rural development projects.

Emphasis on Ecological Outputs

One approach to development emphasizes the allocation of resources to the pursuit of specific outputs predefined by the designers of the Project. In the case of the Project being proposed here, at least one Program Officer in the USAID/Haiti mission has predefined the Mission's objective as falling within the domain of environmental preservation and restoration. (By what authority this position was defined as the Mission's stance is not known.) Within this framework the Project would be committed to the a-priori pursuit of ecological objectives -- watershed management, soil conservation, soil restoration, and the like -- independently of the pre-existing preferences of the involved community groups.

Emphasis on Group Process

Another approach emphasizes rather the formation of autonomous, developmentally active local community groups. Within this framework the immediate objective of development is the creation of such groups, who will themselves subsequently decide on the specific content of the activities to be undertaken. This approach places great emphasis, not only on the formation of groups, but also on the centrality of the "felt need" as a determiner of the direction of resource allocation. Group formation, within this paradigm, leads to the identification and expression of locally felt needs. These local needs, rather than the interests of planners, define the goals to be pursued by a local Project.

Contrasting the Models

These two approaches embody two schools of thought which traditionally have advocated quite different types of projects. Advocates of a content focus tend to emphasize the urgency of problems such as deforestation and soil erosion, and to insist that such problems must be solved. They also recognize that local communities may not demonstrate spontaneous interest in solving the targeted problem. Community outreach, therefore, often takes the form of trying to convince local groups of the urgency of the problem, and of trying to motivate them to participate in the Project. In this vein a communication from the USAID/Haiti mission stated specifically that for the Project being proposed here, the local ^{Groupeement}~~groupman~~ were to be seen as a vehicle for achieving soil conservation activities. The achieving of the latter, rather than the formation of the former, is to be the touchstone of Project success. Proponents of this model tend to reject "group formation" per se as a valid measure of project success. No matter how many involved discussion groups or action groups are formed, the Project must be deemed a failure, within this paradigm, unless the pre-defined goals have been met.

Those who advocate group process, in contrast, tend to shy away from the pre-definition of specific content areas to be addressed by a Project. Their measure of Project success tends to be the number of local groups that are formed, and the degree to which these groups manifest autonomy in the identification of problems and the pursuit of solutions. Proponents of this model would generally be uncomfortable with the establishment of a

specific content goal, such as the planting of trees or the building of terraces. Such problem pre-definition smacks of the imposition of goals that may have little to do with the felt needs of the community, a behavior that is at odds with the non-directive philosophy underlying the approach.

It is important to be aboveboard concerning the strengths and the weaknesses of each position. An exaggerated content approach can generate projects which fail because of their inability to stimulate the interest of local communities, or whose success is momentary, because of the cessation of Project activities once the Project itself terminates. An exaggerated group process approach can degenerate into weekly discussion groups which have neither the resources nor the technological models to undertake the solution of identified problems, and which may in fact fail to identify problems which are genuinely serious.

Reexamining the Disparity

In reality the presumably irreconcilable differences between these two perspectives -- the "product" perspective and the "process" perspective -- disappear under closer scrutiny. The specific history of the USAID/Haiti mission itself serves as a testimony to the catastrophic programmatic consequences of designing projects with little thoughtful analysis of the need for anthropologically sound community based outreach mechanisms. The failure of the multi-million dollar "Integrated Agricultural Development Project" is a testimony to such a failure.

But the promoters of the "process" approach should also be

encouraged to soften their tone concerning the impropriety of introducing alien technologies. For the ^{groupman} ~~groupman~~ is itself an outside model. It may not be a new technology; but it is definitely a new organizational form. Promoters of the groupman are every bit as intent on "changing" the behavior of the Haitian peasant as are promoters of new soil conservation behaviors. They are simply intent on changing his "organizational" behavior -- from traditional individualism to a newer type of communal orientation -- rather than his technological behavior. The difference between the two approaches is not that one introduces "outsiders'" ideas whereas the other does not. Both idea sets -- new technologies and new organizational forms -- originate from without. Nor is the difference that one approach is authoritarian whereas the other approach is voluntaristic. Groupman advocates are occasionally as authoritarian in their ideas as are exaggerated promoters of a particular technology; and promoters of technologies can make the adoption of these new technologies totally voluntaristic. The difference, in short, is not between "content" vs. "process". The difference is between those outsiders whose messages are technical and those whose messages are organizational. But the underlying commonality is that both paradigms are initiated by outsiders who believe that they have something worth teaching the rural population.

Integrating the Approaches

We propose to integrate the valid aspects of these competing approaches by means of the following problem redefinition.

1. We begin with a recognition of the crippling effect on the rural Haitian economy of the widespread deforestation and soil erosion that has afflicted Haiti in recent

decades, and of the validity of the desire of a funding agency to allocate resources directly and explicitly to the solution of these problems.

2. But at the same time we are aware of the long history of failures in such projects, failures generated by the inability of Project planners either to convince rural communities of the seriousness of the bureaucratically targeted problem or, having convinced them intellectually, to structure project resources in a way that renders their participation personally worthwhile for them.
3. We repeat our earlier observations concerning the successes of groupman organization as a strategy for organizing rural development projects, successes which have been documented in several carefully executed USAID evaluations.
4. We insist that the meeting of locally felt needs continues to be a central element of project success, without which local participation may be unenthusiastic or totally withheld.

How then can these ostensibly competing perspectives be integrated into a coherent approach? The incompatibility between the two approaches is eliminated by the adoption of an anthropologically more penetrating definition of the "felt need." One of the major needs of the Haitian peasant, deeply "felt" and frequently expressed, is the need for an augmentation of his cash income. The project will endeavour to meet this genuine local felt need by making available to peasant groups a number of technical alternatives which increase their cash income and which simultaneously lead to a restoration of the environment. That is, from a lengthy menu of soil conservation and resource management strategies, the Project will emphasize those techniques whose implementation would produce a measurable increase in the cash income of the peasant. We predict that most of the peasants who adopt these new practices will be doing so for the economic (cash-generating) reasons rather than for the

ecological reasons.

But if successful, this approach will have integrated the two "competitive" philosophies. Soil conservation and environmental restoration will remain as central substantive outputs of the Project. But at the same time the ~~grassman~~ ^{grassman} will be the major organizational vehicle adopted to pursue these outputs. And, above all, the project will give central priority to what is one of the most widespread and best documented felt needs in rural Haiti: the need for cash income. It is this approach which SCF could adopt to integrate two approaches which heretofore have often been considered as competitive and incompatible.

Devising Program Compromises

The entire process should be seen as an attempt to negotiate a compromise between two somewhat different agendas -- a technical agenda and an organizational agenda.

Technical compromises

The first matter to be determined is whether the presumed USAID insistence on ecological content really represents the position of the Haiti mission, or is rather the position of one person in the mission who represented his own pet ideas as those of the entire USAID mission. It is safe to assume, however, that the mission does in fact wish to earmark funds specifically for environmentally relevant projects. Given the state of the rural Haitian landscape, such a concern is eminently reasonable.

Where the compromise has to come in concerns the nature of the solution adopted. Advocates of new technology must be

assisted to understand the absolutely central role of basing the project principally on those technologies which simultaneously generate reasonably rapid additional income for project participants. If the peasants reject the technology, the project will fail. But no matter how sound the technology may be from an ecological perspective, if the allocation of land and labor to a new technology does not show genuine promise of increasing the cash income of the peasant being asked to make the allocation, then he will not make the allocation.

In very concrete terms let us examine the issue of soil conservation. From a purely technical point of view, perhaps the best soil conservation device for hillsides is the reverse-incline bench terrace with a rock riser. The erosion control efficiency of this structural measure is far superior to that of vegetative measures of erosion control (such as planting grass strips or planting trees).

But despite this short-term ecological superiority of the bench terrace, its short-term economic utility to the peasant is less clear. In contrast, the use of fast-growing trees, though providing only modest erosion control functions, does provide the peasant with a type of arboreal vegetation from whose wood harvest he could generate impressive income, through sale either as charcoal or construction wood. Hence the peasant, for simple economic reasons, might opt for the tree as opposed to the bench terrace. Technicians must be willing to accept this adoption of technically less satisfactory measures. The peasant decision making process will emphasize the maximization, not of ecological energy flows, but of economic income flows. And given the

current marketing conditions in Haiti, environmental projects should probably begin with an emphasis on the tree rather than on the bench terrace, simply because of the greater income-generating capacity of the tree. This is a reverse of the order which would emerge from a purely technical consideration of the matter and is an example of the type of compromise that technicians and funding agencies must be willing to make if they expect their environmental projects to move on the ground.

Another concrete example concerns the matter of "watershed management." To prevent the silting in of downstream irrigation and hydroelectric systems, the best technical solution is to cover all hillsides in a watershed with soil conservation devices. This is feasible in circumstances where all the land in the watershed is owned by the government or by a single owner. What happens when, as is true in most regions of Haiti, the land in a watershed is composed of small plots owned by large numbers of peasants? What is to be done if only some of the peasants decide to employ erosion control measures on their plots? Barring the application of coercive force (with which SCF should in no way become involved) or the payment of substantial incentive sums, the interim solution must accept the partial nature of ecological coverage, at least in the beginning. Once again, though the technical and bureaucratic "instinct" might incline toward insisting on total coverage of a hillside, practical project managers will compromise. Participation in the project must remain voluntary, and technicians and funding agencies should not waste their time considering technologies

which, however ecologically sound they may be, could be implemented only through coercion or substantial cash payoffs.

To sum up, advocates of "product" focus in project design must, when it comes to the planning of projects, accept compromise solutions derived on the basis of microeconomic and motivational considerations. Specifically, SCF should insist that USAID program officers demonstrate the microeconomic and motivational feasibility of ecological goals. If they wish to pre-define these goals as necessary project outputs, they should give specific examples of what has worked in Haiti.

Organizational compromises

But compromises must also be made by those organizations, such as SCF, which traditionally are more interested in group process and the institutionalization of group decision-making, than in the achieving of specific content objectives. The proposal that was submitted to USAID does list several types of specific projects that may be undertaken (p. 23) but the prime interest of the formulators of the proposal was clearly the formation of groupman. The breadth of scope in the outputs presented in the log frame in part IV -- everything from reforestation to "sports/culture" -- gives readers a clear signal of conceptual diffuseness concerning exactly what specific outputs the project will commit itself to achieving. What emerges is the impression that, if the groupman wants to fund soccer fields rather than erosion control measures, then by gum the Project will help them.

Many funding agencies now reject this approach to funding projects -- and rightfully so. It is perilously easy to fall

into unwarranted devotional attachment to a belief in the power of local groups to deal with poverty from the "ground upwards," and to develop a cultic attachment to the principle of the "felt need." "Whatever the groupman wants, that's what we'll do....." If in fact the funding agency will earmark funds only for environmentally relevant projects, and if SCF has no philosophical or institutional objections to managing a project which has these objectives, then its proposal should focus on these matters and give them much more priority.

This might require a compromise analagous to the one which the technicians will have to make. It means abandoning an ultra-permissive notion that whatever the groupman wants, that's what the Project will pursue. The compromise can be achieved through the earlier-recommended red~~e~~finition of "felt need." SCF would commit itself to assisting the funding agency to meet its "felt need" -- the development of effective organizational strategies for achieving environmental protection and environmental restoration. It would assist the peasants to achieve their felt need for income generation. Both of these agendas would be pursued in the context of a project that selects, from the broad menu of available environmental control measures, that subset which stands the greatest chance of being accepted by the peasant because of its income generating potential.

Specific Recommendations

Request information on funding priorities

The first step to be taken is a determination of whether USAID rural development funds are truly to be earmarked only for

environmentally relevant projects, or whether this was merely a vehicle for a particular commentator to make his own comments on the proposal. If environmental issues are at the core of current funding priorities, and if these issues are within the gamut of issues with which SCF is mandated to deal, then the proposal should give center-stage to these issues.

Reformulate Objectives

If an environmental focus is to be adopted, then the "Statement of Objectives" needs to be reformulated. The inclusion of the overall goals of SCF (p. 15) is not inappropriate, but it must be followed immediately by a statement of the priority of environmental objectives in this particular Project. The special character of this proposal, it should then be stated, is that the environmental objectives will be approached through a project which achieves community involvement by linking up the environmental concerns of the funding agency to the income generating concerns of the peasants, and which uses the vehicle of groupman as the organizational mechanism for introducing, experimenting with, adapting, modifying, and diffusing the new techniques. If phrased in this manner, the impression is not created that the groupman is an end in itself. It is being adopted because it is the most effective organizational form for achieving these other ends.

Do a literature review

The next section should contain a thorough, professional discussion of:

1. what has been done in Haiti in the area of environmental protection and restoration, identifying what has worked and what has demonstrably not worked.

2. what is the evidence that groupman are the best organizational units to use.
3. what are the differences among the different groupman strategies that have been tried; what are the lessons that have been learned; what modifications SCF intends to make in its own modus operandi and why.

I was frankly surprised by the absence of any attempt to discuss the now abundant documentary literature on different project approaches that have been tried in Haiti. Given the generally high quality of the analysis and prose in the proposal, this absence can only stem from time constraints. The literature on the Haitian groupman itself is now abundant. Analyses have been done of the Gros Morne Project, the Chambellan Project, the Bayonnais Project, and the Plateau Central Project. Some things have worked, others have not. There are other groupman projects as well -- Laborde (Aux Cayes), Jeremie, the Sceuth fathers in the Plateau Central -- on which documentation is not available but whose leaders can at least be interviewed and questioned.

This recommendation is being made, not in an effort to turn the proposal into an academic proposal (such as would be submitted to NSF, for example) in which a literature review is absolutely required. But in its current form the proposal does not demonstrate that it has a handle on what has been tried. The general acknowledgment of the advice given by the "directors of active groupement programs" in Haiti is not an adequate substitute for consultation of documents or for a statement about what the advice given was. Nor should assertions of fervent belief in the power of local groups be used as a substitute for the analysis of what problems certain of these groupman have

encountered, or a substitute for a specific statement about how groupman methods will be used in a new way for the solving of the specific environmental problems that are presumably the focus of this proposal.

To be more specific in these matters I will quickly list ten issues as examples of project design options that a thorough literature review would deal with. I will briefly formulate what in my opinion is a defensible position on each issue, but must warn that a genuine literature search would give much more strength to these assertions.

1. Government Involvement. The government of Haiti has to approve the project. But to what degree should it become operationally involved in the implementation? The one groupman project that had government involvement (Chambellan) ran into serious problems because of this involvement. The less ministerial involvement in Project management, the better. Those arguing for government involvement inevitably do so on the basis of philosophy, not of practical experience in the realities of Haiti.
2. Location of the Project Center. There are three options for locating the Project Center: Port-au-Prince, the town of Maissade, and one of the Rural Sections of Maissade. Town based centers have led to a domination of the early stages of Projects by influential townspeople. Pressure is placed on project managers to hire townspeople to fill project positions. Pressure is exerted to divert project funds to the building of visible structures. This latter pressure has also existed in hamlet based centers as well.
3. Use of locally hired people vs. outsiders. The question arises as to whether to employ local people or outsiders as project personnel. Outsiders may have superior technical training. But their ability to contact people, motivate involvement, and do regular follow-up on the course of project events is much less than locally hired animateurs. The best strategy is to institute a division of labor in which truly technical tasks are handled by well-trained people even if they are outsiders, but in which motivational and follow-up tasks are handled by people residing in the villages themselves.
4. Role of expatriate personnel. To what degree should expatriates be involved in the implementation of the

project? Here also there may be a confusion between philosophical and managerial issues. Expatriates are generally poorly equipped -- linguistically and otherwise -- to do the grass-roots motivational work necessary to involve people in the project. However expatriates are able to resist certain pressures surrounding hiring, firing, and central fund management more easily than Haitians. It has also been said -- to the chagrin of many people -- that visits by expatriates to a project site enhances the credibility of the local Haitians involved in the grass-roots management of the Project. This is a hotly debated issue in which a careful middle ground must be found between excessive expatriate involvement and forfeiting of the advantages of some expatriate presence at least in the early stages of the project. This entire issue is a can of philosophical worms.

5. Avoiding the gro-neg. Even in the rural areas there are individuals who are wealthier and more influential than others. People experienced in rural Haiti know well that this sector will invariably maneuver to make themselves the prime beneficiaries of local project resources. Project strategies must be devised to predict and forestall this process from taking place. For this reason, tree-planting is usually a safer opening gambit than irrigation. The latter generally gets channeled to the plots of the better off. The project must specifically address the issue of benefit flow.
6. Remuneration and Food for Work. Many projects have resorted to a disguised type of payment of project participants. They will be paid in U.S. donated food. This also is a hotly debated issue. The tendency of the most active groupman leaders is to resist vehemently the intrusion of a "Food-for-Work" mentality into project operations. The project benefit flows should be structured in such a way that project outputs themselves constitute the major reward for participation in the Project. On the other hand, if community members are assigned special tasks, such as visiting project participants to monitor what is happening to different project inputs (e.g. tree counts), these community members could be paid at least a small amount for their time and energy. This is also a hotly debated issue -- "voluntarism" vs. remuneration.
7. Training mechanisms. Different groupman projects have experimented with different training strategies -- long distance travel to centralized training centers, the establishing of local training centers, training right in the hamlets themselves. The Project should review the effectiveness of the different options and make its choice on the basis of this review.

8. ubsidies and Capital Raising. Another hotly debated issue is the question of whether project participants should receive project inputs for free, or should be made to pay for every single item. Philosophers of development generally argue for at least some form of symbolic payment in the beginning. Practical project managers, in contrast, may be well aware that the rapidity of acceptance of the project may be geometrically more rapid if participation in the project does not constitute an economic burden for the potential participants. There are creative ways of structuring in other types of contributions by would-be participants without imposing on them heavy financial prerequisites for participation in the project.
9. Communal vs. Individual Property Modes. Another area in which projects differ from each other concerns the communal/individual dichotomy. Some projects attempt to coax peasants to plant communal gardens, for example. Other project assume that the basic operational unit of the project is the individual peasant proprietor. The groupman model is compatible with a reasonable variant of both positions. The most successful groupman learn to share labor and perhaps market crops in common. In some cases they will rent land and experiment with some communal gardens. But the bulk of their economic activities continues to be on their own private plots of ground and with their own privately owned livestock. In virtually no cases do they literally "pool" their land. Communal gardens are generally done on rented land, and these gardens generally constitute economic sidelines to the individualized activities that are still at the heart of the rural Haitian economy.
10. Institutionalization of the project benefits. What happens when the funding runs out and the salaried animateurs have to find other jobs? Some projects were organized in such a way as to generate eventual autonomy and self-sufficiency. The task is to design a phase-out schedule that does not prematurely leave the groupman to their own resources, but that does not encourage lingering patterns of dependency.

Conclusion

The preceding items are issues that might be explicitly addressed in the rewriting of the proposal. A competent discussion of the pro's and con's of different options on these matters would constitute proof of SCF's thorough familiarity with the grass-roots situation in Haiti. Time constraints have

permitted only a brief inventorizing of these matters.

The central recommendation of this consultancy, nonetheless, remains as formulated earlier in this document. SCF should assess the degree to which it is willing to apply for funds specifically earmarked for environmental purposes. If the assessment is positive, then a modification will be needed in current commitment to the "community felt need" as the determinant of project content. This modification is possible through an anthropologically more penetrating definition of the felt need. In Haiti, environmental projects will work if -- and perhaps only if -- their implementation simultaneously opens the way for an increase in the income of the peasant participants. An acceptance of this perspective constitutes no violation of SCF principles. It is merely an adaptive modification of an underlying "grass-roots" philosophy designed to permit SCF to carry out truly significant projects among the peasants of Haiti.