Towards a participatory evaluation methodology: the Southern African pilot learning process

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TOWARDS A PARTICPATORY EVALUATION METHODOLOGY:

THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN PILOT LEARNING PROCESS

by AnnSeidman1

> "You only get really self-reliant development when
> the people themselves raise questions and examine the
> causes of the difficulties they face and look for new
> answers. You can't push projects down their
> throats."--A participant in the Gwebi Learning Process
> workshop, August, 1985

INTRODUCTION:

In the 1980s, despite extensive aid, independent African

states confronted a crisis. Food shortages, mounting debt,

rising prices and falling per capita incomes plagued the

continent. Members of grassroots projects in remote rural areas

experienced growing difficulties that hindered their attempts to

improve their incomes and living standards. Many aid agencies,

as well as social scientists, puzzled over the reasons why.

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1. This paper is drawn from a book, jointly edited by Denny
Kalyalya, Khethiwe Mhlanga, Ann Seidman and Joseph Semboja,
entitled, Does Aid Work? A Pilot Southern African Learning
Process (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, forthcoming)

In 1984, Oxfam America ititiated the Southern African Pilot
Learning Process to involve project members, themselves, in a

search for some answers2   For two years, researchers from three
southern African universities worked together with
representatives of intermediary agencies and members of 14 grass
roots projects in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania to evolve a
participatory methodology. They not only aimed to strengthen
project members' capacity to discover the causes of the
difficulties they confront.   They sought, too, to create a
participatory methodology which would empower the project
members, themselves, to devise better strategies to attain
self-reliant development.

    This paper aims to:

    *Outline the pilot Learning Process.

    *Explain the three theoretical foundations on which it rests:
participation by project members; a problem-solving methodology;

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2. Other agencies that participated in the learning process
included the Catholic Relief Services, the American Friends
Service   Committee,   the   Canadian   Universities   Service
Organization,   and the Community Development Trust Fund of
Tanzania. The Ford Foundation, as well as several individual
donors, contributed generously to making the pilot learning
process possible.

and use of national researchers.

   *Briefly describe the process and summarize the

findings3.

THE AIM OF THE PILOT LEARNING PROCESS

   The pilot learning process aimed to involve the project
members of the 14 sample projects, together with selected aid
agency staff members, in assessing their projects. It did not
focus on another critical aspect of aid, that of the
decision-making process within the international private
voluntary organizations or the intermediary agencies through
which they may transfer their aid. The process did not aim to
analyze how the staff of international organizations or their
intermediary implementing agencies decide which projects to
assist, and what kinds of resources to transfer to them. To
clarify the limited aim of the pilot process, Figure 1 pictures
the several actors in the aid process.

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3. The process and the findings are described at much greater
length in Does Aid Work? A Southern African Pilot Learning
Process, edited by Denny Kalyalya, Khethiwe Mhlanga, Ann Seidman,
and Joseph Semboja (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1987)

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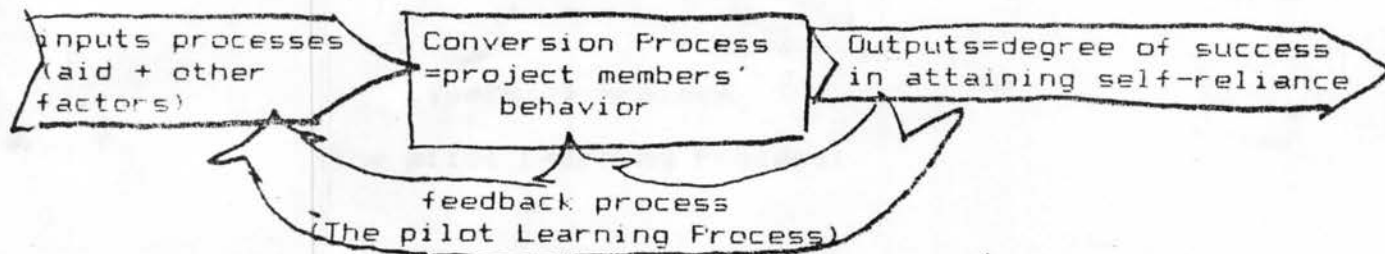FIGURE 1:   THE SEVERAL ACTORS IN THE TRANSFER OF AID
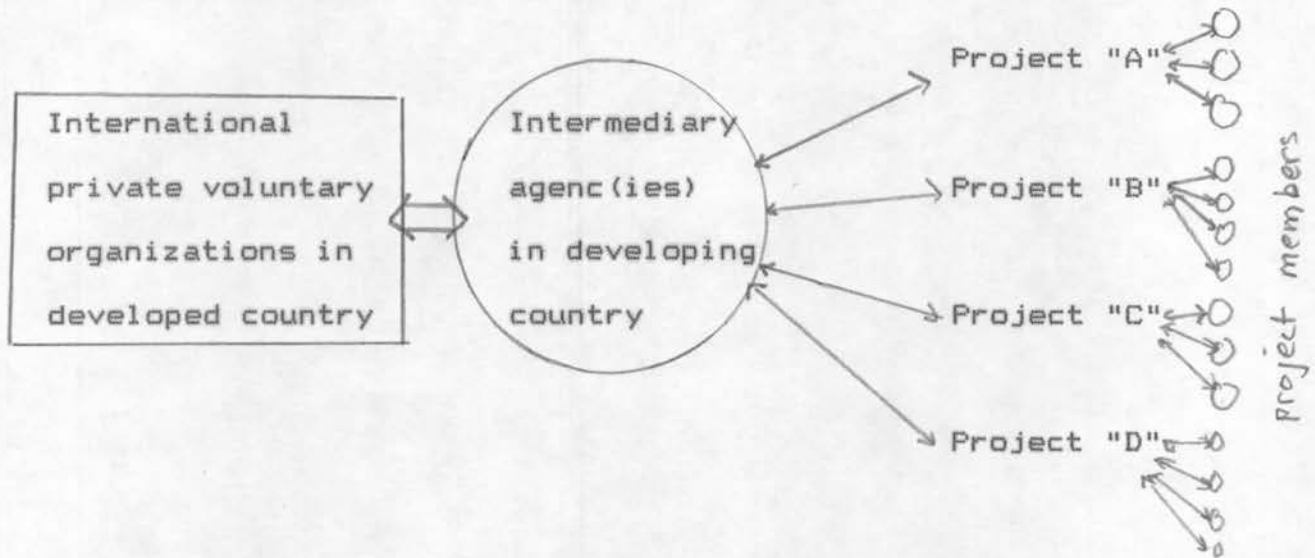
International private voluntary organizations, intermediary
agencies, and projects, all have their own perspectives and
goals.   These may not always coincide.   They also have their own
internal decision-making structures:

   *International private voluntary organizations, like
   other bureaucracies, may respond, not only to the
   concerns of third world rural inhabitants, but to the
   pressures of donors and internal structures shaped for

   centralized service delivery4.

   *International   private   voluntary   organizations
   frequently transfer resources through a variety of
   intermediary   organizations   in   the   differing

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4. Frances Korten discusses the obstacles to donor agency support
for   participatory   project   development   in   "Community
Participation: a management perspective on obstcles and options"
in David C. Korten and Felipe B. Alfonso, eds, Bureaucracy and
the Poor: Closing the Gap<New York: McGraw Hill International
Book Co, 1981>; the arguments are summarized in Chapter 1 above.

Figure 2.2:
A MODEL OF THE ROLE OF THE LEARNING PROCESS
IN THE THE TRANSFER OF AID

inputs processes (aid + other factors) → Conversion Process =project members' behavior → Outputs=degree of success in attaining self-reliance

feedback process (The pilot Learning Process)

The model depicts three sets of activities to produce outputs:
i) the input processes, that is, the transfer of aid along with other resources to the project; ii) the conversion processes, that is, the way project holders work together to utilize the resources; iii) the feedback process. If the outputs do not correspond to the goals stated in the initial project document -- and they almost never do -- the feedback process should help to explain why and lay the basis for decisions leading to improved future performance6.

The model focuses on the way project members respond to their range of choices in using the resources transferred to them by the aid agency. Although it provides no insight into the factors

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6. M. Baratz and P. Bachrach, in Power and Poverty <New York: Oxford University Press, 1970> criticized Dahl's model as static. This model attempts to introduce a dynamic character by emphasizing decsion-making activities or processes.

determining the donor agencies' decision-making processes,
improved information as to how the project members are likely to
behave in response to the new opportunities created by the
transfer of resources should enable them to devise aid strategies

which better meet the project members' needs7.

By systematically examining how project members function to
attain stated goals, the learning process also aimed to relate
theory to practice.   To illustrate: Most private voluntary organizat
ions generally hold

that their aid empowers project members to attain
self-reliant development. Admittedly, 'self-reliance', both as
concept and theory, remains poorly defined.   Systematic
evaluation of projects that receive aid, however, should help the
project members and aid agency staff to identify both the
patterns of behavior -- institutions -- and resource allocation
that affect attainment of self-reliance. By increasing their
understanding of the constraints and resources, the process
should empower the project members to deal more effectively with
their turbulent environment.

At the same time, the process should help   further define the

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7. The model may be easily adapted to consider the role of
feedback in aid agenies by substituting them (and their internal
staff structures) for the project members in the conversion
process: the input and feedback processes define the factors
likely to influence their decisions; and the outputs constitute
their transfer of particular resources to projects.

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concept of self-reliance and develop the theory explaining it.
Just as the collapse of a bridge raises questions not only about
its plan and construction, but also the underylying theory of
mechanics on which its design rested, so, by comparing the
activity that theory predicts as a result of the transfer of aid
with the actual consequences, evaluation research should test and
help to improve, not only specific plans, but the underlying
theory.

Thus, the pilot Learning Process sought to utilize an
approach to evaluation which would contribute to empowering
project-holders to attain self-reliant development.   Three
primary features constitute the theoretical foundations of the
learning process: participation by the project holders together
with donor and intermediary agencies; a problem-solving
methodology; and the role of qualified facilitators, preferably
nationals.

THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.   The participation of project members:

In recent years, more and more evaluators have emphasized the
advantages of involving those whose work is being assessed in the

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evaluation process8.   The Learning Process aimed to test

the proposition that through participation in an improved

evaluation process, project holders can learn to analyze and

overcome the obstacles thwarting their efforts to attain

self-reliance.

A considerable body of theory undergirds this

proposition9   The

southern African pilot project sought to adapt that theory to the

process of evaluating aid projects. To plan aid, donors must, of

course, anticipate how, within the constraints and resources of

their environment, project holders will behave.

The argument for project members' participation in the

Learning Process rests on two premises. First, common sense

argues that no one can better describe those constraints than the

8. E.g., see David C. Korten, "Community Organization and Rural
Development: A Learning Process Approach,in Public administration
Review, 40, 1980, pp. 480-503 for review of some case studies
illustrating the advantages of increased participation in project
design and evaluation; also see comments in Chapter 1.

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9. See Korten, "Community Organization and Rural Development,"
op. cit. An international participatory reseach network has
been established, with participants from Africa, Asia and Latin
America, which has been experimenting and developing the theory
and practice of participatory research. Its head office is in
Canada: (address)The African component started in Tanzania and
has spread into a number of African countries. In 1986, Deryk
Malenga of the University of Zambia became the President of the
African Participatory Research Network.

project members, themselves. By creating an environment in which the members participate in the evaluation process, the voluntary agencies can tap their special knowledge about the causes of their problems.

Second, by engaging in a systematic evaluation of the obstacles hindering their progress, the project members may acquire a better understanding of their own behavior as well as the constraints and resources within which they hope to attain their objectives. In the process, they should learn to formulate more self-reliant strategies for the future. Examination of the seven categories of factors likely to influence project members' behavior in their efforts to attain project goals supports this proposition   10.

> RULE: Like any law or norm, the project document typically prescribes the changed behavior required to achieve the stated goal: The members must work together in certain specified ways to sew uniforms, to plant, harvest and sell crops, etc.

> OPPORTUNITY: By transferring specified resources, aid aims to create the opportunity for the members to use

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10. These categories are adapted from an analysis of the factors likely to influence a role occupants' behavior in response to new norms embodied in law. The mnemonic, ROCCIPI, may help to remember them: Rule, Opportunity, Capacity, Communication, Interest, Process, Ideology. See Robert B. Seidman, Law and Development, <London: Croom-Helm, 1978>. See also W. J. Chambliss and R.B. Seidman, Law Order and Power<Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1971

it, together with other resources, to achieve their
goals.

CAPACITY: Unless they have the necessary skills,
however, members will likely miss their goals. In
addition to the ability to sew, or knowledge about the
ways to plant, harvest and sell crops, they must have
<or the transfer of resources must help them acquire>
bookkeeping and management skills. They must also have
internal institutions which enable them to make
appropriate decisions and settle disputes.

COMMUNICATION: For the project members to behave in
appropriate ways, they must have received and
understood information about the project goals and
processes. To ensure this, communications theory
underscores the advantages of engaging the members in a
two-way fact-to-face dialogue.

INTEREST: Members probably will not behave in
appropriate ways unless convinced that the project

serves their interests11.

Process: Members will more probably change their
behavior to carry out the project as planned if they
have participated in the decision-making process.
Since evaluation constitutes a crucial feature of the
decision-making process, project holders should
participate in evaluation as well as the initial
planning process.

IDEOLOGY: If project goals or process contradict the
community's values and attitudes -- what Alvin Gouldner
terms 'domain assumptions' -- project members will
probably not behave in appropriate ways to achieve the
goals unless, through participation in an evaluation
process, they consciously decide to adopt different
values and attitudes.

These seven categories provide an agenda, or a checklist for

evaluation research designed to explain the project members'

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11. Unlike mainstream economic theory, which focuses on interest
as the single most important influence affectting behavior, this
approach includes interest along with six other categories.

the close behavior in utilizing aid. The factors they encompass all lie within

environment of the project members, who therefore possess special

knowledge concerning them. For these reasons, the Learning

Process focused on creating the opportunity for grassroots

project members to participate in analyzing them. By involving

the project members in the design and implementation of the

process, it aimed to help them to understand and view evaluation

as essential to their own interests.

Furthermore, the final category, ideology, suggests that

project members' own values may impose a major constraint on

their development efforts; unless they change them, they may

behave in ways that impede attainment of their stated goals. For

example, many southern Africans, accepting the traditional belief

in women's inferiority, exclude them from project

decision-making. However, women grow 40 to 80 percent of the

food crops, depending on where they live in the region. Unless

women understand and participate in formulating plans for

projects to grow food crops, those projects may fail12. If, by

participating in the Learning Process, the project members,

themselves, discover their traditional exclusion of women from

decision-making blocks their progress, they will more likely

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12. The governments of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe have all
initiated programs to help ensure that women have the opportunity
to participate fully in development projects.

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seek ways to include them.

In sum, the pilot Learning Process aimed to enable project
members to strengthen their capacity to plan and improve their
own efforts to achieve self-reliance. At the same time, the
process sought to create a mechanism for channelling their
findings to the private voluntary agency community to enable it

to improve its contribution to their efforts13.

This analysis may help to explain, not only the
disillusionment with outsiders' evaluations, but also why many
projects fail to attain their goals. First, without the members'
participation, evaluators can only with difficulty discover the
causes of the difficulties encountered. Second, unless they
participate, the members, themselves, may never understand the
causes. Wtihout that knowledge, self-sustaining development
becomes a will-o'-the-wisp.

As Mandani put it:

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13. Cf. Sherry Arnstein, "Eight Rungs on the Ladder of Citizen
Participation", in Edgar S. Calne and Barry A. Passelt, eds.,
Citizens Participation: Effecting Community Change <New York:
Praeger, 1971>; and Robert K. Yin and Douglas Yates, Street-level
Governments <Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books/D.C. Heath, 1975.
pp. 26-27; see Lisa Peattie, "Participation" in Developing
Countries: A peruvian Case <Atlanta: unpublished paper presented
at Collegiate Schools of Planning conference, Nov. 2, 1985> for
criticism of the ladder concept as simplistic.

<A>ny strategy that claims to be a solution must seek
to revive the creativity and initiative of the people.
Central to this must be educating people about the
relations that make them disaster-prone. This
education must be based on investigation, concrete and
independent. And it must lead to organization, both

popular and around concrete issues14.

2. A problem-solving methodology:

To achieve meaningful project member participation in the

evaluation process requires an appropriate methodology that

fosters learning through doing; that is, a methodology which

empowers the project members, themselves, to take part in the

process of examining the constraints and resources affecting

their attainment of self-reliant development, thus

strengthening their capacity to formulate more effective

development strategies. For this purpose, the Southern

African Pilot Project adopted a problem-solving approach.

The problem-solving methodology differs qualitativey from the

ends-means approach employed by many evaluators to assess aid

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14. Mahmood Mamdani, "Disaster Preveniton: Defining the Problem",
Monthly Review (New York: October, 1985.

15. Edward C. Banfield, "Ends and Means in Planning," in Andreas
Faludi, Planning Theory (New York: Pergamon Press, 1973

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projects15. The ends-means approach typically takes the goals of the

project as given. Frequently, this implies stating the goals in

quantitative terms: In a given period, for example, the plowing

of so many acres and the production and sale of so many bags of

maize-cotton-beans or other crops; the sewing and sale of a

stated number of school uniforms; the digging of a specified

number of boreholes. The evaluators then assess the means which

led to success or failure as measured by the extent to which the

project achieved those quantitatively formulated goals16.

The ends-means approach stems from the widely-used but seldom

explicitly stated theoretical framework which pervades

conventional decision-making17. By

its very nature, the ends-means approach cannot serve voluntary

agencies' requirements. It identifies ends with values, about

which people may debate, but which publicly available data cannot

serve to validate. At the end of the day, this approach tends to

take values and even institutional structures as reflecting

"society's" goals.   As a corollary, ends-means proponents argue

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16. E.g.: The World Bank evaluation of an El Salvador
site-and-service housing project established indicators of
housing standards, family satisfaction, and economic value,
measured against a pre-determined scale. <See Michael Bamberger,
Edgardo Gonzalez-Polio, and Umnuay Sae-Han, Evaluation of Sites
and Service Projects: The Evidence from El Salvador, World Bank
Staff Working Papers #549, Washington, D.C., 1982>.

17. Essentially positivism.

that,except by surveying opinions, evaluators cannot even conduct empirical research concerning values and therefore goals. This frequently implies that a project can only encompass incremental change, leaving intact the basic institutional behaviors and attitudes of society often interwoven into and sustaining the

fabric of underdevelopment18.

As a logical consequence of its underlying premises, the ends-means approach limits decision-making to the mobilization of bias: Those with the power to make decisions -- whether on a national, a village or a project level -- may impose their values on the less powerful. For example, with the best will in the world, a private voluntary organization may simply adopt conventional wisdom as to what project members should do to achieve self-reliant development. Since it has the power to give or withhold aid, it may thus shape the project's goals.

At the level of the project, members may accept the leaders' decisions because, for whatever reasons, the community institutions give them the power. But the members who disagree

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18. This view of ends-means capsizes the conventional argument that problem-solving -- usually equated with pragmatism -- encompasses only incremental change; whereas ends-means alone permits radical change. Introduction of a problem-solving approach within the context of an broader analysis of the causes of underdevelopment, however <see Chapter 3, below>, fosters consciousness-raising concerning the need for more basic change.

may implement the decisions made only woodenly. As ROCCIPI's
agenda suggests, and the swath of failed aid projects in the
development field attests, an ends-means approach that neglects
the role of members' values and institutions cannot fulfil the
aid givers' dreams.

It is possible to distinguish three types of feedback: goal
seeking or negative; goal-changing or learning; and consciousness

and self-awareness feedback19. Analogizing to a navigator's
use of a compass to check whether a ship is on course, in the
first type, the compass tells the navigator she is off course so
she shifts her rudder to return to it. This negative feedback
simply tells the decision-maker what action to take to return
to the initial course.   In the second type, the navigator looks
up from her compass to see that, following her charted course,
she will collide with an iceberg, so she charts a new course,
changing her goal, to get around it.

These two types of feedback characterize the likely
consequences of the ends-means approach to evaluation for the aid
process. The decision-makers have selected the goal; they seek
feedback only to learn if the course they have charted is being

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19.   Karl   Deutsch,   "Social   Mobilization   and   Political
Development", American Political Science Review, Vol. 55, p.
493:

followed or, much more rarely, whether new circumstances require them to change the goal.

The third type of feedback probes to reveal less obvious obstacles which may nevertheless pose as serious dangers. For example, the navigator may discover that local magnetic factors have affected the needle of her compass, so she must obtain a new gyro-compass to avoid being thrown on numerous rocks hidden beneath the waves. Decision-makers need this third type of feedback to expose the way existing institutions (not merely poor decision-making within those structures) block attainment of planned goals. This type of feedback "consciousness" or "awareness", since it may reveal the necessity of changing the institutions governing the project members' responses.

To obtain this third type of feedback, the pilot Learning Process adopted a problem-solving methodology.20

Unlike the ends-means approach, the problem-solving methodology provides a framework for engaging the decision-makers in systematically analyzing the causes of the difficulties they

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20. Many who emphasize learning-by-doing, or praxis -- ranging from John Dewey, through Paulo Freire to Karl Popper, Sartre and Karl Marx -- have contributed to developing this approach. <See R.L. Bernstein, Praxis and Action. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania PRess, 1971.>

confront. It seeks to identify the resources on which they may
rely, and the obstacles -- including institutions and values --
which may constrain their efforts. Thus it lays a basis on which
they may identify strategies to overcome the institutional and
resource constraints which might otherwise obstruct
their implementation of self-reliant development strategies.

Adapting the problem-solving methodology to evaluating the
impact of aid requires a recognition that aid, itself,
constitutes a proposed partial solution to the problem of
underdevelopment as perceived by its designers -- whether they
constitute the aid agency, its intermediary, or the project
members, or all of them together. For example,
food-for-development aid aims to overcome the problem of
malnutrition and, in the process, spur food production. A credit
project seeks to overcome the difficulty posed by the peasants'
inability to raise capital to buy oxen, tractors, fencing, or
improved seeds and fertilizers which hamper increased
agricultural production. A small rural industry manufacturing
hoes aims to provide rural industrial employment, as well as end
peasants' dependence on imported equipment that requires scarce
foreign exchange.

Like all human enterprise, development -- whether on the
national or a grassroots level -- is an on-going process. No
planned strategy ever succeeds perfectly. Both internal factors

and changing external circumstances inevitably impede its progress. Underdevelopment persists because of these circumstances. To conclude that projects have failed because they encounter difficulties in achieving their initially stated goals reflects an inadequate understanding of the development process. Instead, the project members, together with those who assist them, must continually monitor the results of implementing aid strategies. In this process, they will inevitably discover new difficulties. They must then analyze the causes of these new difficulties as the basis for revising their old strategies or formulating new ones. Gradually, thus, the project holders themselves will improve their capacity to use their own resources to achieve self-reliant development. To put it another way, they will learn, in the process, how to surmount the difficulty which led to the pilot project.

The pilot Learning Process, therefore, sought to adapt the five basic steps that comprise the problem-solving methodology to its proposed participatory process for evaluating aid. It aimed to engage the project holders together with donor and intermediary agency representatives to:

    1. IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM: Define the nature and scope of the difficulties or problems that hinder project members' efforts to attain their goal. The Learning Process involved the project holders, themselves, since, as the ones most affected, they know the most about the problems they confront.

    2. CONSIDER THE FULL RANGE OF EXPLANATIONS: Formulate

all possible explanations of the problems into
logically consistent sets of propositions capable of
being tested in light of objective information
available from the project. All too often donor
agencies and project holders assume they 'know' what
causes the difficulties. As in the ends-means
approach, their conventional wisdom tends to take
society's values and institutions as given. In
contrast, systematic consideration of all possible
explanations will more likely discover unsuspected
causal factors. The attempt to formulate the candidate
explanations as a set of logically consistent
propositions, capable of being tested against the
facts, facilitates determination as to which ones
deserve further analysis. Involvement of the project
members in this exercise will enable them to learn how
in the future to analyze better the causes of their
problems.

3. TEST THE EXPLANATIONS AGAINST THE FACTS: Involve
the project members in gathering evidence to test which
of the alternative possible explanation coincides most
closely with the evidence as to the causes of the
difficulties the project confronts. Social science
cannot "prove" the truth of a proposition, but it can
determine which candidate explanation seems most
consistent with the available evidence. The formation
of explanations as testable propositions simultaneously
suggests which relevant facts project holders should
gather to test them. By emphasizing project holder
understanding as critical to project success, ROCCIPI
underscores the necessity of engaging project holders
in gathering relevant information to evaluate the
validity of the alternative explanations. In the
process, they will acquire more knowledge of the
resources available to them, as well as the constraints
likely to thwart their efforts.

4. PROPOSE SOLUTIONS: Discovery of the explanation
most consistent with the available data, helps to
empower project members to devise better strategies for
solving their problems. It exposes the causes of the
difficulties which they must address. Having
participated in the first three steps, the members
should have acquired the new understanding needed to
devise more suitable strategies to overcome them.

5. MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW STRATEGY:
Since the new or revised strategy will inevitably
encounter new or further difficulties, the
problem-solving approach emphasizes the necessity of
institutionalizing an on-going participatory feedback

mechanism. Having taken part in the first phase, the members will have acquired the skills for this exercise. In other words, participation in the problem-solving evaluation process will help to empower them to conduct an on-going evaluation of their next steps, a vital foundation for building self reliance.

In short, the problem-solving methodology provides an agenda for integrating on-going evaluation into the design of every grassroots project, each of which constitutes a part of the overall complex, contradictory process of development. The problem-solving methodology provides all those engaged in transferring aid to grassroots projects with an opportunity to understand the factors hindering its role in empowering the rural population to achieve self-reliant development; and gives them concrete tools for improving its impact. In this sense, the methodology provides a systematic framework for involving all the actors in the transfer of aid in an on-going 'learning

process'21.

3.   The use of national researchers:

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21. By incorporating the problem-solving methodology, this approach attempts to further systematize the first of the three basic steps identified by David Korten as central to a participatory approach to development: i) embracing (not rejecting) error; ii) planning with the people; and iii) linking knowledge building with action.<"Community Organizing", op. cit.>

Conducting a participatory evaluation of aid projects does not imply simply bringing the project holders together in a workshop, explaining the process and leaving them to implement it. That approach would assume that bringing people together in a kind of quilting bee to discuss their mutual problems would create a group dynamic, enabling the participants to work together to find more effective solutions to their problems. It would ignore the need for a scientific methodology and knowledge of the full range of possible causes that may block formulation of more effective development strategies.

An experiment with self-evaluation in Zimbabwe illustrated the difficulties of simply encouraging project members to undertake a self-evaluation. Prior to the introduction of the pilot Learning Process, one intermediary agency sought to encourage the members of the same group of projects to conduct a self-evaluation. A staff member met with the leaders of the projects, explained the purpose of the exercise, and left them with a questionnaire to fill out with the information they gathered. Examination of the "answers" provided revealed that few, if any, of the project leaders had really understood the aims of the exercise, far less learned anything from it. They merely listed some incomplete facts about the background of the participants of the

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22. Briean H. Smith found similar results <see his U.S. and Canadian Nonprofit Organizations (PVO's) as Transnational Development Institutions. New Haven, Conn.: Program on Non-Profit

projects22.

A brief review of ROCCIPI helps to explain why, without
on-going participation by a facilitator skilled in a problem
-solving methodology, a participatory evaluation will likely
fail:

RULE: The pilot project proposed that those engaged
generate statements of difficulties, explanations, and
proposals for solution;

OPPORTUNITY: The Learning Process provided the
opportunity for implementing the project;

CAPACITY: The problem-solving methodology requires
the ability to formulate and test the full range of
possible explanations of the causes of rural poverty
and underdevelopment which aid aims to empower the
project members to overcome. The causes of problems
affecting projects may exist at several levels: i> the
lack of management capacity, with all the technical
skills that aid may help to provide; ii> factors
hindering the democratic participation of all the
project members in project decision-making; and iii>
externally imposed constraints, ranging from government
policies to the consequences of the international
recession. An understanding of the multiple causes of
underdevelopment calls for a fairly high level of
social science education denied to most rural dwellers
around the world.

COMMUNICATION: A workshop involving the project
members would not suffice to communicate to them all
the necessary understandings and skills required to
produce meaningful explanations and proposals for
solution; that would require an on-going,
learning-by-doing kind of process throughout a
prolonged period facilitated by someone capable of
assisting them to tease the relevant explanations out
of their complex environment.

INTEREST: Some donor and intermediate agency staff
Organizations, Institute for Social and Policy Studies, PONPO
Working Paper, 70, and ISPS Working Paper, 2070, 1983>.

members, not to mention some project leaders, might not find it in their interest to explore all the relevant explanations. It might turn out that their own negative role causes the difficulties. To leave the evaluation process to those who may seek to utilize aid for their own ends in these circumstances would likely

prove counterproductive23.

PROCESS: Under the best of circumstances, bringing donor staff and project members together in a participatory process is difficult. Each has unconscious attitudes and patterns of behavior that may constitute blocks to effective participation. Without an outside facilitator, these may remain as obstacles to implementation of a truly participatory process,

IDEOLOGY: The attitudes and values of the project holders themselves, as well as donor and intermediary staff members, may thwart needed behavior changes to implement the proposed learning process. For example, if project holders' traditional attitudes exclude women from participation in decision-making concerning a food crop project, that same bounded rationality may hinder them from recognizing their exclusion as a major cause of failure. A sympathetic outside facilitator might help them to discover and perhaps overcome this constrain on their efforts.

Added together, these suggest compelling reasons for including a facilitator to assist project members to develop a participatory learning process.

Widespread criticism of aid agencies' employment of expatriate evaluators constitutes an important factor leading to

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23. Brian Smith argues that trust is an important element in institutions and network building which thorough evaluations, especially by North Americans, can undermine <Smith, U.S. and Canadian Nonprofit Organizations, op. cit.>

the design of the pilot Learning Process.   In part, this

criticism may reflect as much those evaluators' non-participatory

style of evaluation as the fact that they were expatriates.   In

part, however, it reflects a two-fold concern: First, expatriate

evaluators frequently lacked sufficient familiarity with the

culture of the region.   Second, exclusion of national researchers

from the evaluation process denied them the opportunity to learn

from, as well as contribute to, grassroots rural development.   As

the Nigerian Ambassador to the United States observed, if aid

agencies do not include African researchers in finding solutions

to underdevelopment, they may become part of the

problems24.

In the early years of independence, because of colonial

neglect of education, donor agencies could argue with some

justification that not many Africans had acquired the needed

skills to conduct the kinds of evaluation they sought.   However,

by the 1980s, over a quarter of a century after the first African

states had achieved independence and begun build up their own

educational institutions (including universities) that argument

no longer had validity.   Africans constituted a high proportion

of the social science staff in most southern African

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24. Key-note speaker at the Northeast Regional Meeting,   National
Council for International Health, Pak Plaza Hotel, Boston, Oct.
18, 1985

universities25

Given that development of a participatory evaluation process,

at least at the outset, requires a perspective and facilitation

from outside the project, engaging African nationals as

facilitators, rather than bringing in foreign 'experts', has

significant potential benefits. First, African researchers more

likely speak the project members' language and have greater

knowledge of their cultures and traditions. They can work

closely in a participatory process with the members, helping them

to strengthen their capacity to analyze and find solutions to

their problems26.

Second, as staff members of national research or teaching

institutions, national facilitators can integrate the results of

the information gathered in the course of the evaluation process

into the expanding national body of critical thought needed to

ensure more effective planning, not only at the grassroots but

also at the national and even the regional levels.   Over time,

through participation by their staff in the Learning Process,
25. Except Mozambique and Angola, which inherited illiteracy
rates of 90 to 95% from prolonged rule by the Portuguese -- one
of the most underdeveloped European countries.

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26. The Bagamoyo project in Tanzania supports this proposition;
see Marja-Liisa Swantz and Helena Jerman, Bagomoyo Research
Project 'Jipemoyo; Introduction to its general aims and approach
<Dar es Salaam: Ministry of National Culture and Youth, 1977>.

national research and teaching institutions may obtain valuable

grassroots evidence to test the broad range of development

theories. This should contribute to improving these theories as

possible guides for the formulation and implementation of

national plan strategies, helping to reduce national as well as

small rural projects' dependency on outside aid.

For example, peasant cultivation and sale of export crops like

cotton may fail to generate anticipated increased cash incomes

because of an oversupply of fibers (including synthetics) on

world markets, or a world recession may reduce their prices.

Recognition of this reality may spur the project members to

cultivate crops less dependent on the vagaries of external

markets. However, expanded markets do make possible the

specialization and exchange necessary to increase productivity

and raise living standards. National research and teaching

institutions may draw on the grassroots projects' experience to

design more effective plans for specialization and exchange in

the context of more balanced development.27

In other words, the participation of national researchers as

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27. See Ann Seidman, Planning for Development in SubSaharan
Africa <New York: Praeger and Tanzania: Tanzanian Publishing
House, 1972>, for a further analysis of alternative possible
national development strategies. The 1980s crisis that engulfed
African and other third world rural populations bears witness to
the importance of these issues.

socio-economic contexts of particular third world countries. These intermediaries may include the international organizations' field offices, or the field offices of other international agencies with similar perspectives. Local personnel, expatriates, or both may run these offices. International organizations not infrequently transfer aid through non-government groups of nationals <sometimes with religious affiliations, sometimes secular> who seek to stimulate rural development. Occasionally, they work through local development agencies with fairly close ties to government, as long as these share similar development perspectives. Each of these intermediaries has its own priorities and methods of work.

*The projects receiving aid may each have their own goals which implicitly, if not explicitly, may differ from those of the intermediaries and donors. Their individual members, too, many have conflicting needs and demands which the projects' internal decision-making structures may or may not adequately

mediate5

The pilot Learning Process focused on how projects affected the way members utilized aid in their efforts to achieve the projects' stated goals. Figure 2 adapts a decision-making model to illustrate the way the Learning Process sought to provide feedback to the project members and aid agency staff. The model depicts the way the decision-makers behave in a particular institution or conversion process, using inputs, conversion and feedback processes produce a given range of outputs. Continuous feedback should provide information influencing the decision-makers' behavior, suggesting how they may improve it to achieve the desired goals.

double space

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5. Frances Korten examines several obstacles which may hinder participatory organization of community structures. ibid.

- 5 -

theory and practice,

teaching and research community.

The pilot learning process involved an effort to work closely

with the national research and teaching institutions to select as

facilitators researchers who not only possessed relevant academic
qualifications, but who empathized with and understoodd the
villagers and their problems.

THE PILOT PROCESS

An outline of the pilot process may clarify the way it
introduced a participatory, problem-solving methodology.   In
July, 1983, representatives of the 14 projects, selected
intermediary agency staff members, and three national university
researchers from Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe met in Lusaka,
Zambia for a week-long workshop to design the learning process.
During the week, the workshop participants discussed the nature
of the problems confronting the projects; possible explanations
as to their causes; and how to involve the project members in
collecting information to assess which explanation most
effectively coincided with the evidence.   This workshop not only
laid the foundation for carrying out the process; it constituted
an important learning experience for the participants about their
respective roles in it.

On their return to their home countries, the researchers
together with the intermediary staff members, arranged national
workshops.   These involved project representatives together with
carefully-selected university students in analyzing how the
participatory problem-solving methodology might best be used in

the projects in each country. The students, coming from the
project areas, understood the language and the culture of the
project members. In fact, in Tanzania, the participants
conducted the workshop in Swahili. During the workshop, the
students learned how to work together with the project members to
gather evidence to assess candidate explanations as to the causes
and possible solutions for the difficulties they confronted.

The students then went with the project representatives back
to the projects during their long vacations (six to eight weeks).
There, they lived and worked with the project members, helping
them to gather, record, and systematize relevant information for
identifying the constraints and resources encountered in their
efforts to build self-reliant projects. The students' primary
responsibility lay in working with and assisting the project
members' own efforts to analyze their situations. The university
researchers supervised the students' work, where possible
visiting them and meeting at least once in the long vacation to
discuss and improve the methodology. Once again, all the
participants learned in the course of carrying out the process.

Following the prolonged period of work on the projects
members, the students wrote up the project members' findings.
Then, the project representatives and the students met for a
final national workshop with the university researchers and the
intermediary staff members to compare and analyze their findings,

and to discuss the strategies the members proposed for overcoming the obstacles they faced. The workshop participants discussed how, in the future, both national and international private voluntary agencies and universities staff members might assist in implementing more self-reliant project strategies.

Finally, in August, 1985,the original Lusaka workshop participants reconvened in a final regional workshop in Gwebi, Zimbabwe, to assess the overall findings and their implications for increased self-reliant grassroots project activities. It is impossible, in this brief paper, to do more than summarize the main hypotheses emerging from their findings as to some of the seemingly systemic tendencies towards difficulties experienced by most grassroots project members. By acquiring a greater understanding of these tendencies in the learning process, the participants found themselves able to devise more effective strategies to overcome them.

The systemic tendencies the pilot learning process identified include:

   *1. Unless community members participate in designing and implementing them, aid projects may, at best, have a peripheral impact on surrounding communities.

   *2. Unless the project design includes programs to ensure that all members acquire the skills and knowledge required to implement the project (including book-keeping and managerial skills

, tendencies towards elitism and stratification may thwart
effective community participation in and benefit from it.

*3. Unless project members engage in formulating strategies
appropriate for dealing with government officials, they may find
themselves unable to gain access to resources necessary to
increasing community self-reliance.

*4. Unless community members participate in formulating the
project design in terms of their own needs, donor agency rules
and policies may foster increased, rather than decreased, project
dependence on donor agency staff.

*5. Unless national and international agencies implement
policies that strengthen national self-reliance, grassroots
projects may find themselves vulnerable to external forces over
which they have no control, but which foster chronic difficulties
in obtaining essential inputs and marketing outputs.

*6. Unless both women and men in the community realize the
importance of overcoming attitudes and customs that thwart
women's effective participation, projects will suffer and may
fail as a result of not benefitting from women's essential
contribution. Community attitudes and practices render efforts
to organize and implement women's projects particularly

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vulnerable to tendencies #1-529.)

At the end of the Gwebe workshop, the participants underscored
their belief that holding a series of workshops and working with
national researchers, first to design and then to assess the
results, constituted an important feature of the learning
process. They declared their intention of attempting to
institutionalize the learning process as a way of strengthening
grassroots, national and regional cooperation for formulating and
implementing more self-reliant development strategies.

SUMMARY

The Southern African Pilot Learning Process Project aimed to
design a participatory, problem-solving methodology. It created
a framework within which members of rural projects, together
with national researchers and donor agency representatives, could
evaluate the consequences of aid for the project members' efforts
to understand and improve their use of available resources to
achieve sustained on-going improvements in their incomes and
living conditions.

Viewed this way, the Learning Process constitutes more than an

29. The workshops debated but did not finally agree on whether it
was preferable to organize women into projects separately from or
as part of larger community projects involving both men and
women.

insightful 'window on the project' for the donor agency.   It
contributes to the creation of new decision-making structures
which empower project members to deal more effectively with their
environment to attain self-reliant development.   Supposedly,
after all, that is what aid is all about.